

SF Examiner

OCT 12 1972

Escalation of Attacks Told

By Larry Green

SAIGON — (CDN) — Yesterday's controversial U.S. air raid on Hanoi was the result of a top secret order allowing the U.S. Command to bomb previously off-limit targets.

The order, which originated with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was quickly modified today — two weeks after it was approved — and new restrictions were imposed on the Hanoi region.

Permission to escalate the bombing was passed on to the U.S. commander in Vietnam, Gen. Frederick C. Weyand, and his deputy, Air Force Gen. John Vogt.

Informants said such a move must have had the approval of President Nixon.

The two commanders were authorized to select targets from an enlarged list and to send B-52s deeper into North Vietnam than at any time since last April, sources said.

The rail yard that planes were attacking yesterday when the French diplomatic mission was hit was one of the newly approved targets. It had been off limits to U.S. pilots since the bombing was resumed last April 6.

Sources refused to speculate whether the expanded bombing was designed to increase pressure on the North Vietnamese at the Paris peace talks or because new intelligence disclosed that abundant supplies are still getting into Hanoi's logistics system despite the six-month bombing campaign and naval blockade of North Vietnamese ports.

The Gia Lam railroad yard on the outskirts of Hanoi was one of the first new targets. It was attacked by 18 Navy jets from the carrier Midway.

The French diplomatic mission in downtown Hanoi — about three miles from Gia Lam — was destroyed and the French delegate general was seriously injured. Up to seven persons

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were reported killed, including at least two Vietnamese employees of the mission.

Several other buildings within four blocks of the French mission were damaged, including the Algerian embassy and the Indian mission.

Although U.S. officials have apologized, they do not acknowledge that U.S. bombs were definitely the cause. They said the damage might have been the result of North Vietnamese surface to air missiles impacting on downtown Hanoi after missing American jets.

Informants said six SAMs were fired during the raids. All missed their targets and the Navy said no planes were lost.

Russ-Built

The Navy also said in a statement today, that it had "no reports of bombs being off the target."

Russian-built SAMs have devices to explode them in flight after they miss their targets. However U.S. pilots have reported in the past seeing the telephone-pole size missiles impacting on the ground after missing.

The Navy said its planes hitting the rail yard and rail repair depot dropped 500 and 1000 pound bombs, touching off 16 large and numerous medium-sized explosions. They also reported three large sustained fires.

The flames and explosions generally indicate the planes hit ammunition and fuel supplies.

The raiding planes, according to the Navy, had to dodge heavy anti-aircraft fire including SAMs.

Because of its size and military importance, U.S. commanders here have been recommending hitting the rail yard for several months but until recently never got the approval of the Joint Chiefs and the White House, informants said.

The first of the isolated attacks apparently began last

weekend when B-52 bombers made their deepest attacks in North Vietnamese territory in six months, to hit supply depots and storage yards in Vinh.

Located on the coast midway between the Demilitarized Zone and Hanoi, Vinh is the key city in North Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh trail supply network. Virtually all supplies for North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam and Cambodia funnel through there.

Dong Hoi

In an effort to conceal the expanded raids the U.S. command initially reported the targets as being between 90 and 110 miles from Dong Hoi, just above the DM. However, a few days ago they acknowledged the raids were in the Vinh area.

Informants refused to say what other previously off limit targets the U.S. Command is now authorized to hit or has already bombed.

Generally, the city of Hanoi and most of its outskirts

were no-bomb zones as was a 25-mile wide buffer along the Chinese-North Vietnam border, which has been used to stockpile war supplies since the bombing campaign began April 6.

Meanwhile other sources reported that all or most of the pilots who took part in the raid were grounded today to undergo intensive questioning by Navy intelligence teams.

Frustrated

Informants also said the U.S. Command was being "frustrated" in its own investigation of the incident by the Navy's Pacific Command based in Hawaii.

"There has been considerable delay in getting information we feel is vital," one source said. Another said "frustrated" was "too mild a word."

The jets were under the Pacific Command, and as a result the Navy has had first access to all reports and recon photos.