

B-52 Crashes -- 1st Shot Down by North Vietnam

Associated Press

Saigon

The United States lost its first B-52 of the war to enemy fire yesterday, military sources reported.

While the U.S. command declined to say what caused the loss, it confirmed that the eight-engine bomber crashed near Nakorn Phanom in eastern Thailand while trying to return to base at Utapao. It said all six crewmen were res-

B-52 SHOT DOWN

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ed that a Marine F-4 fighter-bomber was shot down by antiaircraft artillery fire in southern Laos. One crewman was rescued. The second was missing.

A series of structural problems in the late 1960s prompted the Air Force to put the F-111 swing-wing jet through a long series of tests. The Air Force certified its confidence in the plane at that time — and reaffirmed its faith again only this month after the third F-111 was lost.

After the first F-111 vanished September 28 — the first day the planes returned to Vietnam combat since 1968 — the \$15-million aircraft were withdrawn for six days of further tests and evaluation. The Air Force gave a go-ahead and they have been flying ever since.

The loss of the F-111 and the F-4 brought to 125 the number of American planes downed in the air war over

North Vietnam since the resumption of bombing last April. The U.S. Command said 133 airmen have been killed or captured.

The U.S. Command said the B-52s flew 15 missions in North Vietnam below the 20th Parallel against war stockpiles awaiting shipment to northern Laos and just below the demilitarized zone separating the Vietnams.

"That's the most B-52 strikes we've ever run up there," a command spokesman said. The previous high was 13 missions over the north during one 24-hour period.

United States military sources said the latest B-52 attacks were unusually heavy to offset a drop in tactical fighter-bomber raids caused by monsoon weather. For the fifth successive day, the U.S. command reported 60 or less tactical strikes by fighter-bombers.

In other action, Associated Press correspondent Dennis Neeld reported from Da Nang that heavy North Vietnamese resistance and torrential rains have stalled South Vietnamese marines trying to push northward from Quang Tri on the northern front.

Neeld said the marines were hit with 1500 shells, mostly from mortars, during a 24-hour period ending at dawn yesterday. They suffered 17 killed and 34 wounded.

The marines have advanced about five miles during the past week.

In another hotspot, the Saigon Command said 300 North Vietnamese had been killed during three days of fighting in the Central Highlands 15 to 20 miles southwest of Pleiku. The command listed 15 South Vietnamese troops killed and 62 wounded during the same period but they are believed to be higher.

cued, none of them seriously injured.

Military sources here and in Washington said the bomber was hit, apparently by an antiaircraft missile, on a bombing run near Vinh during the heaviest raid of the war on North Vietnam. Vinh is about 110 miles inside North Vietnam.

The crippled B-52 was able to fly about 100 miles before the crew was forced to abandon the plane.

CLAIMS

Since the B-52s began raiding North Vietnam in large numbers last April North Vietnam has claimed periodically to have shot one down. At least ten of the bombers have crashed due to operational failures. U.S. sources said none has been lost to enemy fire previously.

The B-52s fly in threes on bombing missions, each carrying up to 30 tons of bombs and dropping them from altitudes of 30,000 feet and higher. The planes carry a variety of defensive gear to protect themselves against attacking fighters and antiaircraft missiles.

The bomber, an \$8-million plane, has a speed of 650 miles an hour. It weighs more than 488,000 pounds and is 157 feet long, about half the length of a football field.

F-111

The U.S. Command also announced the loss of the fourth F-111 swing-wing fighter-bomber in less than two months.

The F-111, like three others of the controversial planes lost since September 28, vanished on a night mission. It was flying alone on a computerized course just above the demilitarized zone in the southern panhandle of North Vietnam. Its crewmen were reported missing.

The command also report-

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