

U.S. PLANES STRIKE NEAR SAIGON BASE IN A REPRISAL RAID

Ground Pursuit of Vietcong
Unit Also Reported After
Rockets Hit Tansonnhut

FOE SAID TO WARN THIEU

DEC 7 1972

9 Are Dead and 54 Injured
in Heaviest Assault on the
Airfield in Four Years

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Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Thursday, Dec. 7—American planes flew tactical air strikes within 10 miles of Tansonnhut Airport last evening in an attempt to hit back at Vietcong forces that fired rockets into the huge Saigon air base earlier in the day.

For an hour between about 5:30 and 6:30 P.M. the boom of the exploding bombs could be heard in downtown Saigon, only four miles from the airport.

An American military spokesman said that the air strikes had been flown northeast of the sprawling air base and less than 10 miles from it, in the area where yesterday morning's rocket attack was believed to have originated.

There were reports of ground fighting in the same area, but both the American and the South Vietnamese military authorities said they could not confirm this.

The Vietcong rocket attack on Tansonnhut was the worst in four years.

Nine Reported Killed

Eight Vietnamese were reported killed and 52 wounded in the attack. One American was killed and two were wounded, according to United States military authorities.

On Feb. 18, 1968, an American military spokesman noted, Tansonnhut was hit by 68 rockets and 18 rounds of recoilless-rifle fire.

South Vietnamese and American military spokesmen said that a total of 53 rounds of 122-mm. rocket fire hit the airport and nearby areas in yesterday's attack.

The casualty figures, announced at the daily afternoon military briefing here, were a revision of earlier figures issued soon after the attack.

The Vietnamese said that one child was killed and four children and a teacher were wounded when one of the rockets struck a school outside the airport.

Five of the Vietnamese dead were civilians, the military spokesman said, and three were soldiers. The Vietnamese wounded included 33 civilians and 19 soldiers. All of the American victims were servicemen, it was reported. They were not im-

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mediately identified.

The airport, which houses about 8,000 Americans and many thousands of Vietnamese, is South Vietnam's major international air terminal as well as a military air base. Blasts from the exploding rockets rattled windows yesterday morning in downtown Saigon.

"The VC are telling Thieu to sign," a Vietnamese journalist said after the rocket attack. He was referring to reports that South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Thieu, was balking at signing the peace agreement expected to emerge from the current Paris talks.

The clandestine Vietcong radio broadcast an appeal to its supporters yesterday to "fight on."

"We have chosen the hard long way to fight the war, and we will win it," the broadcast said. "We have fought a quarter of a century, so it means nothing if we go on fighting another two or three years."

The last time that Tansonnhut was attacked by rocket fire was on April 14 of this year, when it was hit by four Vietcong rockets.

Yesterday's attack began at 7:45 A.M. and continued for 45 minutes, severely damaging two United States helicopters parked on the flight line and slightly damaging two Vietnamese helicopters. Eight houses nearby were also damaged.

The military briefing officers declined to say how many of the 122-mm rockets fell on the air base itself and how many landed outside, but American military spokesmen had said earlier that 25 to 30 struck within the confines of Tansonnhut.

Rockets of the type used in the attack have a range of about seven and a half miles. At the briefing, military spokesmen declined to pinpoint the origin of the rocket fire but earlier in the day United States sources said the rockets came from two locations northeast and west of the base.

Within the last week, there have been two rocket attacks on the Bienhoa air base about 25 miles north of Saigon. Shortly after yesterday's attack on Tansonnhut, an American officer at Bienhoa called there and said: "Welcome to the club."

In other combat action reported yesterday, United States B-52 bombers flew nine missions against supply caches in North Vietnam and 24 against enemy troop concentrations and staging areas in South Vietnam.

Fourteen of the missions were reported flown in the area around Quangtri near the demilitarized zone. Four were flown in the Central Highlands—three around Pleiku and one near Kontum. Three were flown near Tayninh, 55 miles northwest of Saigon. A normal B-52 mission consists of three planes.

United States pilots flew 90 tactical air strikes against military targets north of the demilitarized zone.

Ground fighting was said to continue around Quangtri, where a South Vietnamese paratrooper unit engaged North Vietnamese troops Tuesday and were pounded with 200 rounds of artillery and mortar fire. The South Vietnamese asserted that they killed 21 North Vietnamese soldiers and lost three dead and five wounded in the engagement.

In another battle Tuesday, Government troops clashed with North Vietnamese forces in southwestern Pleiku province in the Central Highlands. South Vietnamese Army reports said yesterday that 33 North Vietnamese were killed in the clash. They listed six Government soldiers as dead and 38 wounded.

South Vietnamese military authorities also reported that "an unidentified person" tossed a grenade into the French consulate in Saigon at 7:45 P.M. Tuesday. The Authorities said that a watchman was injured in the blast.

Probe for Rocketers Reported

SAIGON, Thursday, Dec. 7 (AP)—The area from which Communist rockets struck Tansonnhut air base yesterday was reported attacked soon afterward by about 1,500 Government troops supported by armored vehicles and air strikes.

Ground fighting was reported seven miles north of the capital in an area just west of the Saigon River, with South Vietnamese infantry and militiamen advancing toward the village of Tambinh from the northwest and southeast.

Military sources said that the enemy soldiers who had fired the rockets at Tansonnhut were attached to a demolition battalion of the North Vietnamese Seventh Division. According to villagers who had fled the area, 200 to 300 North Vietnamese had moved into Tambinh Tuesday night only hours before the rocket attacks.