

Loss of F-111 Revealed

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Ground War Heats Up

Saigon

Communist forces made more than 100 attacks across South Vietnam yesterday and today, and the U.S. command belatedly announced the loss of another \$15 million F-111 fighter-bomber over North Vietnam nearly two weeks ago.

It was the second of the swing-wing F-111s the command has admitted losing in the two-week attack on the Hanoi and Haiphong areas and the 29th aircraft acknowledged lost in operations against North Vietnam since December 18. A total of 97 American airmen are missing, killed or captured in these crashes.

The command said the F-111 was downed west of Hanoi on December 22, and the two crewmen are missing. Other sources said they are believed to have been captured. These sources reported that they were alive and evading capture as late as December 27, when a helicopter was hit while attempting a rescue.

The Saigon command reported 116 enemy attacks during the 24-hour period ended at dawn today, the highest number in two months.

Eighty-two of the attacks were by rockets and mortars, many concentrated in the Saigon region and in the Mekong delta to the south.

Communist gunners shelled the big allied air base at Bien Hoa, 15 miles northeast of Saigon, before dawn. Initial reports said three civilians were killed and ten wounded.

Three persons were killed and about 30 wounded in a refugee camp near Phnom Penh airport in Cambodia.

The attack on the airport came as the Cambodian military command reported that the military situation south and west of the capital

had deteriorated, with three positions in serious danger of capture by the Communists.

U.S. B-52s and fighter-bombers flew more than 120 raids Tuesday and yesterday in South Vietnam and the southern section North Vietnam, below the 20th parallel, the U.S. command reported.

Announcement of a new plane loss brought to 95 the number of airmen killed, captured or missing, and to 28 the number of airplanes acknowledged lost in less than three weeks.

The latest loss acknowledged by the U.S. command was a Marine Corps A-6 Intruder fighter-bomber,

which crashed as the result of "unknown causes" while on a mission over North Vietnam last Thursday.

Sources said it crashed somewhere below the 20th parallel and the two crewmen were missing.

For the first time since the massive air campaign was launched over the North on December 18, the U.S. command reported the number of raids on a daily basis.

A command spokesman said fighter-bombers flew 84 raids in North Vietnam's Southern panhandle during the 19-hour period ended at daybreak yesterday. B-52 bombers flew 40 raids dur-

ing the same period, he reported.

The B-52s penetrated as far north as Vinh, the command said, just above the city's port area about 145 miles north of the demilitarized zone. *Associated Press*