

# Why Latest Bomb Error Is Highly Embarrassing

## Saigon

The latest accidental bombing of the Vietnam war is causing particular embarrassment here among American officers who have been defending the Navy and Air Force against Hanoi's charges of United States attacks on civilians.

The incident occurred yesterday morning, when 34 500-pound bombs were dropped by five American planes on the giant American and South Vietnamese air base at Da Nang.

Nine Americans and one Vietnamese on the base were wounded, the U.S. command said. One fuel tank for American and Vietnamese planes on the base was hit and another burned. An American Army helicopter was damaged, as was a Vietnamese C-119 cargo plane. The runways were not damaged.

The base, one of the first military installations built and used by American troops in the early 1960s, is a sprawling installation with two 10,000-foot runways, radar navigation devices, and scores of American planes and several thousand American airmen.

No fighter-bombers have been based there since last summer, when the last Air Force tactical fighter wing in Vietnam moved to Takhli Air Base in Thailand, but Navy and Air Force jets still use it as a forward operating location.

Navy pilots, who occasionally land at the base instead of on their carriers when they are short of fuel or have mechanical problems, call Da Nang "rocket city." They do not like to stay long in the comfortable barracks of the Fleet Air Support Unit there because of frequent rocket attacks by the Communists.

Yesterday two Navy A-7 Corsair jet bombers, two Marine Corps F-4 Phantom jets and an Air Force Phantom flew in over heavy clouds and dropped their bombs in unison, blind, in one of those electronic advances of the Vietnam war designed to permit pilots to bomb targets they cannot see.

Along with the Pentagon, the military command here has cited such aids when denying Hanoi's charges that civilian hospitals, houses and schools were bombed in the intense B-52 raids on North Vietnam.

Somehow yesterday, the electronics—a system involving matching radar signals from widely separated transmitters to determine the geographical position of an airplane at night or in bad weather—failed, and when the bombs dropped out of the clouds they hit Da Nang Air Base.

The U.S. Command, which announced the bombing only five hours after it had occurred at 8:20 a.m., said it did not know why the error had been committed or what

the intended target of the mission was, and that an investigation was under way.

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