

HANOI IS WARNED BY LAIRD AS JET IS DOWNED BY FOE

Defense Aide Hints at U.S. Step if Strikes Continue on Unarmed Planes
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WASHINGTON, Nov. 13—Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird warned North Vietnam today that the United States stood ready to retaliate against any continued firing at American reconnaissance aircraft.

Mr. Laird made what appeared to be a threat to resume strikes against air defense sites in the North hours after the American military command in Saigon announced that an RF-4 reconnaissance jet had been downed by enemy ground fire 42 miles south of Vinh in North Vietnam. [Page 8.]

Last May, American fighter-bombers staged a series of four large-scale air strikes against air defense facilities and related targets in North Vietnam. At the time, it was explained that the raids were in response to missile and antiaircraft attacks upon American surveillance aircraft.

'Appropriate Action'

Addressing a meeting of the National Council of Community World Affairs Organizations at the Pentagon this afternoon, Mr. Laird raised the matter of the downed aircraft.

"We remain ready," he declared, "to take appropriate action in response to attacks on our unarmed aircraft."

Pentagon officials said that some reconnaissance planes had been fired at since the raids of May, but that none had been shot down prior to today's reported incident.

Pentagon sources said they knew of no immediate plan to strike at the antiaircraft batteries believed responsible for the latest shooting.

Laird Raises Issue

Mr. Laird recalled that there had been a recent rocket attack on Saigon, and he said that such action, together with firing at reconnaissance planes over the North, or military incursions across the demilitarized zone separating the two Vietnams, were barred by the understanding under which the United States agreed to stop bombing North Vietnam starting Nov. 1, 1968.

North Vietnam has consistently maintained that it was not party to any such agreement.

Secretary Laird's comments on the newest incident in Vietnam came during a question-and-answer period following a prepared speech. When he was

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not directly asked about the downing of the plane, Mr. Laird brought up the subject himself.

"We are deeply concerned," he said, "about the loss of the two pilots who were flying on an unarmed reconnaissance mission."

The Saigon report of the incident noted that accompanying fighter escorts saw the plane crash and explode. They saw no parachutes.

"The bombing halt," Mr. Laird said, "was predicated on the fact that the North Vietnamese would negotiate in good faith as far as Paris is concerned."

Paris Talks Cited

"To date," he went on, "the North Vietnamese have chosen not to negotiate in any substantive way."

The Defense Secretary said that a number of air and ground actions had been taken by the United States to protect American military personnel in Vietnam.

"We will continue to take those actions necessary to protect the lives of our servicemen," he said.

U.S. Plane Is Downed in North Vietnam

Nov. 13 (AP)—North Vietnamese gunners shot down an unarmed American reconnaissance plane today about 100 miles north of the demilitarized zone, the United States command reported.

Fighter pilots escorting the aircraft saw no parachutes as it went down, a spokesman said, and the two Air Force crewmen "are presumed dead."

The plane, an RF-4 equipped with photographic and electronic gear, was believed to have been checking on a reported build-up of supplies to be sent to Communist forces in Cambodia and South Vietnam during the dry season.

United States forces say the North Vietnamese have moved more than 120 tons a day into the panhandle area of North Vietnam above the buffer zone in recent months, nearly double the amount during the same period last year. Although United States bombers are forbidden to interfere with the resupply effort in North Vietnam, reconnaissance planes have been crisscrossing the country checking the preparations.

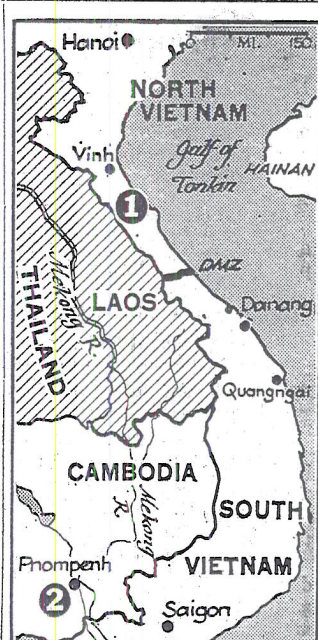
The plane downed today was reported to have crashed 42 miles south of Vinh. That would place it about 100 miles north of the demilitarized zone and 200 miles or more south of Hanoi.

The American spokesman said he did not know whether the accompanying jet fighters attacked the North Vietnamese firing positions or whether retaliatory air strikes had been ordered.

The last time a United States plane was down in North Vietnam—in the first week of May—several hundred warplanes were sent to attack North Vietnamese antiaircraft positions in the heaviest raids north of the buffer zone since regular bombing missions were halted Nov. 1, 1968.

Pentagon officials stressed at that time that further strikes might be flown against North Vietnamese antiaircraft positions if American reconnaissance planes were attacked in the future.

At least 13 fighter-bombers and reconnaissance planes have been downed in North Vietnam



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Plane was downed south of Vinh (1). Cambodians and South Vietnamese ended a sweep near Phnompenh (2).

since the bombing halt, and the United States has flown more than 60 "protective reaction" raids to prevent or silence enemy fire."

The United States command has reported 927 planes and 10 helicopters shot down over North Vietnam since Aug. 15, 1964, when the first American raids were launched on the north.

Ground action today was reported light and scattered across Indochina. But mine and booby-trap incidents and small skirmishes took the lives of nine Americans after two successive days in which no American servicemen were killed in action, United States spokesmen said.

Six soldiers were killed and nine were wounded when their American Division truck was blown up by a mine in a Quangngai Province, spokesmen said. A few miles away, in the same northern coastal province, two Americans were reported killed and two were reported wounded by a booby trap.

One American was killed and 15 were wounded in scattered ground contacts, the United States command said. Two enemy soldiers were reported killed.