

U.S. Planes Protected N. Viet Raid

WASHINGTON — (AP) — U.S. warplanes struck North Vietnamese anti-aircraft and troop positions near the Son Tay prison camp during the unsuccessful effort to free American war prisoners, the Pentagon disclosed today.

This was the first time the U.S. government made known there were any such air strikes close to the camp in North Vietnam during the dramatic landing by a small force of U.S. Army and Air Force men who found the camp empty of prisoners late last week.

Nothing Said

Asst. Secretary of Defense Daniel Z. Henkin acknowledged the nearby air actions under questioning at a news briefing, portraying the strikes as part of the rescue operation.

In disclosing the Son Tay raid last Monday, Secretary of Defense Laird mentioned only diversionary dropping of flares by Navy planes along the North Vietnamese coast, but said nothing about any

—Turn to Page 10, Col. 1

—From Page 1
associated air-to-ground attacks.

Henkin told newsmen that "protective actions were taken" to safeguard the rescue party. He said they occurred "in the immediately adjacent area" of the camp, which is 23 miles west of the North Vietnamese capital of Hanoi.

The Pentagon's top spokesman said some fixed-wing aircraft were involved and indicated there was strafing and bombing of enemy troops and anti-aircraft positions.

"There are some anti-aircraft installations in the area which we knew about and there were some troops in the area which we knew about," Henkin said.

He would not be specific about the type of weapons used by the American warplanes and would say only that it was "appropriate ordinance to assure" that the rescue party "could get in, conduct their search and get out safely."

He said the air attack could be classified "as diversionary to draw fire away from the central operation."

He was vague on whether both Air Force and Navy planes were involved, but indicated that Marine aircraft may have taken part.

Asked whether there were any other prisoner-of-war camps near Son Tay, Henkin said, "Not to my knowledge."

Hanoi has claimed that American warplanes struck prisoner-of-war camps in the Hanoi-Haiphong area and

that some U.S. prisoners were wounded.

Henkin implied that the U.S. protective air operations involved strafing as well as bombing.

He also indicated that the rescue raid at Son Tay was accompanied by an effort to divert the North Vietnamese by shooting off noise devices in a different area. He refused to talk about what kind of devices may have been used, but said, "One could think of throwing firecrackers to divert people in a different area."

According to Henkin, the North Vietnamese engaged in "the indiscriminate and

erratic firing" of at least 30 surface-to-air missiles, some of them in the Son Tay area.

"Many of them were fired at low trajectory leading us to believe that because of this indiscriminate and erratic firing, population areas might well have been hit," Henkin said.

The North Vietnamese have claimed that U.S. warplanes inflicted civilian casualties in the Hanoi-Haiphong area during the weekend attacks.

Henkin said the ground raiding party was in the camp area about 30 to 40 minutes.