

U.S. SAYS PLANES HIT HANOI REGION TO COVER MISSION

**Pentagon Concedes Attack
After Days of Denials—
Shrike Missiles Used**

19TH PARALLEL CROSSED

**Nixon Reportedly Told of
Strike at Thanksgiving
Dinner With Veterans**

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 27 —

The Defense Department acknowledged today that United States aircraft struck military targets near Hanoi last Saturday during the landing of commandos who sought to liberate American prisoners of war.

Daniel Z. Henkin, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, said that the American planes, covering the helicopter raiders flying from Thailand along the Red River valley, used "appropriate ordnance" on North Vietnamese anti-aircraft, missile and artillery positions and troop units in the vicinity of the prisoner of war camp at Sontay, 23 miles west of Hanoi.

Mr. Henkin refused to describe this "ordnance," but he said under questioning that "I would not say flatly that no bombs were dropped in the area."

Shrikes Launched

Later in the day, however, the Defense Department announced that "about a dozen" Shrike missiles, designed to neutralize the radar of surface-to-air SAM-2 batteries, had been launched near Sontay during the "protective" mission.

When Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird announced on Monday the unsuccessful effort to rescue the prisoners, he denied the use of any "ordnance."

The next day, he told a Congressional committee that the only "diversionary" activity during the commando raid were flares dropped from carrier-based Navy aircraft to deflect the enemy radar.

But President Nixon was quoted as having told a group of disabled Vietnam Veterans at the White House Thanksgiving dinner yesterday that an air raid was carried out on a military installation next to Sontay to keep North Vietnamese troops pinned down before the helicopters landed.

Until today, the Administration had steadfastly denied any air attacks north of the 19th

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parallel, which runs 150 miles below the Hanoi-Haiphong region, and kept secret for more than two days the fact that the helicopter raiders had gone into Sontay.

In conceding for the first time that the Hanoi area had been attacked from the air during last weekend's raids on North Vietnam, Mr. Henkin attempted to draw a clear distinction between the "protective" operations surrounding the Sontay raid and the wider bombings of a variety of Communist targets.

The large-scale bombings by more than 200 American planes were officially described here last Saturday as "protective reaction" to the downing a week earlier of an unarmed United States reconnaissance aircraft over North Vietnam.

But it was only on Monday that Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird announced the prisoner-rescue attempt, disclosing two days later that the Nixon Administration had belatedly decided to make it known publicly to avoid a "credibility gap." The commandos found the camp empty of prisoners.

The credibility problem, as Mr. Laird told a Congressional Committee, resulted from the North Vietnamese charges that in bombing North Vietnam the American aircraft had attacked the Hanoi and Haiphong area in "waves."

Charges by Hanoi

North Vietnam had insisted from the outset, however, that American planes had bombed the Hanoi area during the larger attacks last Saturday and Sunday, and had killed 49 civilians and wounded some United States prisoners of war at an undisclosed but nearby location.

Hanoi itself acknowledged only on Wednesday that United States raiders had attempted to rescue prisoners. It did so in a general way, still relating the Sontay incident to the overall weekend bombings.

Prior to Mr. Henkin's disclosure this noon of the air "protective action" for the raiders, the Defense Department spoke only of "diversionary" action during the commando raid.

Testifying last Tuesday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Mr. Laird said only that "we had some flares dropped by Navy diversionary planes and they were flares to illuminate and divert the radar system, the anti-aircraft system, to that side."

Although it was not known what had prompted the Defense Department to confirm that there had been offensive air action near Hanoi the night of the commando raid, Mr. Henkin's comments today served to clarify some of the contradictions around the operation.

Thus, his reference to "appropriate ordnance" fired by the planes coupled with the mention of anti-aircraft missile positions attacked by the escort aircraft appeared to explain the North Vietnamese charges that parts of Shrike rockets were found near Hanoi.

Shrikes are air-to-ground missiles that ride down the radar beams of enemy SAM missile batteries. They have been extensively used over Vietnam and the presumption is that they were used to neutralize the SAM emplacements during the Sontay foray.

Later in the day, the Defense Department formally confirmed that "about a dozen" Shrikes had been fired during the prisoner-rescue attempt.

Mr. Henkin said that the accompanying air attacks had been designed to "draw fire away from the central operations" in what he called "the immediately adjacent area" of the camp.

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