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Viet Attacks Cut by Navy

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SAIGON (AP) — The U.S. 7th Fleet has drastically curtailed its naval operations against North Vietnam and withdrawn its cruisers and destroyers well below the 20th parallel in a further de-escalation to improve the climate for cease-fire negotiations, informants said today.

All Naval bombardment of the coast above the 20th parallel has been ended, and cruiser and destroyer strikes against the rest of the North Vietnamese coast have been limited, it was learned.

Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird confirmed last week that all air attacks on North Vietnam had been halted above the 20th parallel, including the areas of Hanoi and Haiphong, but he made no mention of any curtailment of naval bombardment.

OFFICIALS declined to comment today when asked if any action had been taken to deactivate the U.S. mines dropped in Haiphong Harbor. But other sources indicated no such action had been taken yet.

The 20th parallel is just above the port of Thanh Hoa, 85 miles south of

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war continued in anticipation of a cease fire.

The Saigon Command claimed government forces had recaptured 15 of 21 hamlets in the Saigon region seized by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces.

Lt. Col. Le Trung Hien, the chief spokesman for the command, also reported that an air borne government force had recaptured the district town of Dak To, 25 miles northwest of Kon-tum in the central highlands, but he

Hanoi and 210 miles north of the demilitarized zone, but the farthest north U.S. ships are reported actively operating now is about 65 miles north of the DMZ.

The Navy refused to disclose the makeup of its force now operating off Vietnam or to say whether some ships had been pulled out of the war zone altogether. The Navy did report that the cruiser Newport News had returned to the gun line after nearly a month's repairs in the Philippines. An explosion in one of the ship's gun turrets on Oct. 1 killed 20 men and wounded 37.

The U.S. Command reported 120 fighter-bomber strikes in the southern panhandle of North Vietnam below the 20th parallel Sunday and said a Navy A7 was shot down 26 miles northwest of Vinh. The pilot was listed as missing. It was the 117th American plane downed over North Vietnam since the resumption of full scale U.S. bombing last April, according to U.S. Command records. A total of 126 airmen have been reported lost in these crashes.

IN SOUTH VIETNAM, the landgrab

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indicated the occupation might be only temporary.

HIEN SAID helicopters landed the force near Dak To and after light, scattered fighting the troops entered the district headquarters and raised the government flag Monday afternoon.

There was no word of casualties. The base was manned by about 400 rangers, most of them Montagnard tribesmen.