

Guam: Most Strike Power in

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GUAM—A year ago, there were no B-52s on this island. The 50 or so that were here earlier in the war had been sent back to their U.S. bases.

But since February, shortly before the North Vietnamese launched their new offensive into South Vietnam, this lush, humid island has been transformed into perhaps the most awesome, and in some respects one of the most bizarre sights, associated with the war in Vietnam.

Along picturesque Tumon Bay at one end of the island, Japanese investors are putting up new resort hotels as fast as they can be built to house the Japanese honeymooners who flock here by the thousands.

On the other end, some 30 miles away, there are now about 150 B-52 bombers, the most massive congregation of military striking power ever collected on a single base — including missile bases — in history.

Three rows of the big planes stretch for miles alongside Andersen Air Base's roller-coaster runways. Seven days a week, around the clock, the planes take off.

To fill the requirements that continue to spill in from the U.S. Military Command in Saigon, 33 planes a day from here are in the air at all times on their 12-hour missions. Another six are always in the air from the other B-52 base at Utapao, Thailand, where some 50 B-52s are based and where the missions are shorter. The cost of a single

B-52 flight from Guam is \$40,000.

More than half the Strategic Air Command's 397 combat-ready B-52s are at these two bases, a fact which bothers some air force officers since it has cut the command's nuclear alert force in half.

About 90 flights a day are being mounted out of these two airfields—2,700 flights and 135 million pounds of bombs a month, the highest levels of the long air war.

The B-52s use a combination of fuses on their bombs. Some, called "diggers," are designed to go off after penetrating the ground but most are set to go off at the surface.

A 500-Foot Radius

A 500-pound bomb, fused for a surface explosion, will generally kill and level anything within a radius of 400 to 500 feet. The 750-pound bombs generally are lethal in an area twice that size.

The bombs leave craters from 150 to 300 feet wide, according to the officers here. The concussion from these bombs, however, can put troops out of action considerably beyond these ranges—depending upon how well they are dug in. Some 1,000-pound bombs are also used.

The raids in the south are carried out by "electronic bombing." Ground controllers bring in the planes on a set course, speed and altitude, and tell them precisely when to drop their bombs. But most of the bombing by B-52s in North Vietnam's heartland is done by so-called offset-bombing.

In offset-bombing, the B-

52 uses its own radar to pick out a known object like a mountain or a bend in a river and will drop its bombs "offset" from that point by a certain number of miles. Offset-bombing is less accurate than the ground controlled variety.

The 'Clean War'

SAC crews here point out, however, that the big bombers have not been involved in instances where bombing errors were noted in civilian areas.

It's another aspect of the "clean" war that they believe can be fought with these planes, which are virtually never threatened by enemy fire and thus do not have to let go of their bombs as a matter of survival in order to evade an anti-aircraft barrage or missile.

For the future, Lt. Gen. Gerald Johnson, 8th Air Force commander here, hints that SAC may now be running some tests to use the new "smart bombs" guided by laser beams of light to their targets. It may very well be the ultimate in accuracy for the big planes," Johnson said.

Interviews with scores of pilots and air crewmen here over several days reveal a widespread feeling of satisfaction among SAC crews that they are hurting the enemy, and helping the South Vietnamese with their massive saturation bombing.

Mixed in with that is also the widespread view that the war has become "tiresome" and "interminable." But any anti-war feeling here also involves the suggestion that even more

crushing blows would hasten the end.

"It's really an impersonal thing," said a young major with more than 100 B-52 missions as a radar-navigator. "There is very little concern, from the morality point of view, about what we are doing. I think you will find that many of us don't give a damn about the war anymore. We all just would like to go home. But anyone who finds it insufferable ought to get out of the Air Force."

"The war is ridiculous," said an electronic warfare officer with more than 200 missions. "It's torn the United States apart. We should go home unless we really hit them. We thought nothing of fire-bombing Dresden and other places in World War II and nuking Japan. Why the hell are we so worried about the dikes and Hanoi now?"

Johnson insists, however, that the B-52 bombing campaign has effectively blunted the current North Vietnamese offensive.

Johnson and his subordinates claim that a B-52, which carries a load equal to that of about 10 smaller fighter-bombers, can carry out saturation bombing better than any other aircraft.

Around Quangtri, Anloc and Kontum, they say, the South Vietnamese ground commanders developed "tremendous respect" for the plane's bomb load and for its accuracy and timing.

Unseen, Unheard

Officers here say South Vietnamese ground troops pull back a few hundred yards just before the B-52s are scheduled to make their

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unseen and unheard high-altitude arrival, and thus are able to call in strikes virtually on top of their own positions.

Johnson claims a three-fold role for the B-52s under his command here and at Utapao. "We clobbered them badly in the close air support role where the fighting was taking place in South Vietnam. Concurrently we were destroying back-up supplies that they had accumulated in preparation for this thing. Still further back, we were interdicting the re-supply."

A Sense of Danger

There is unquestionably a well-oiled military machine here, able to keep a massive air fleet operating around the clock over huge distances.

The SAC crews are skilled and well disciplined, and voice few doubts about their role in the war or the massive tonnage of bombs they unload.

It would not be hard, however, to feel a sense of automated danger here, of too much remoteness from the battlefield, of too easy an explanation for the use of massive air power, of a clean way to fight a war with no casualties—at least none in the air.