

Hanoi Claims Bombing Hit POW Camp

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Radio Hanoi, in a broadcast monitored in Washington yesterday, claimed that U.S. air raids Wednesday and Thursday, Hanoi time, had "caused damage to the prison camp for U.S. pilots in this city."

The broadcast claimed "a number of residents of Hilton-Hanoi (the main camp for U.S. POWs in North Vietnam has been dubbed the 'Hanoi Hilton' by U.S. airmen) were injured" in the attacks.

The broadcast, however, did not define whether the "residents" were actually U.S. airmen, and it gave no names of persons allegedly injured.

The broadcast came as the heaviest bombardment of the Vietnam war continued into its fourth day yesterday, the acknowledged toll of U.S. B-52 heavy bombers shot down rose to six and the list of American airmen missing in the first three days of the renewed bombing rose to 27.

Radio Hanoi put the total of B-52s shot down thus far at nine, plus 12 smaller fighter-bombers.

Pentagon spokesman Jerry W. Friedheim, asked about the Hanoi claim on the POW camp attack, said, "We have not targeted any vicinity where we think prisoners might be held."

Friedheim, however, appeared to leave room for the possibility that some POWs could have been hurt in the air raids.

He said, "We also continue to hold Hanoi responsible for proper treatment of prisoners of war under the provisions of the Geneva Convention, including the responsibility of not detaining prisoners in or near military target areas."

"If the North Vietnamese allegations are correct," the Pentagon spokesman added, "and we have no information that these allegations are in fact correct, then Hanoi is admitting that it is violating the Geneva conventions."

"Chapter 2 of that convention," Friedheim said, "states that prisoners are not to be interned in areas particularly exposed to the dangers of war." Friedheim added that the United States wanted the International Red Cross to inspect all camps.

The Hanoi POW camp, which is reported to house many of the more than 440 known U.S. prisoners, is in downtown Hanoi, and military sources have indicated in the past that its main location was generally known, though

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POWs are scattered through several areas.

The camp—or at least a part of it — is supposedly right next to Hanoi's Ministry of Defense and about a mile from a thermal power generating plant which Pentagon sources confirmed yesterday was the target of U.S. air attacks on the second day of resumed bombings on Tuesday.

The power plant — which had been off-limits before because of its location in the downtown area — was reportedly hit by F-4 fighter-bombers carrying so-called "smart bombs," which are guided electronically to their targets and are much more precise than conventional bombs.

The Radio Hanoi broadcast claimed that the bombs had "made the walls and ceiling to crack at many places" in the camp and reported that four American peace activists toured the facility and "were shown round the damaged bathroom and library."

Polish freighter, the Joseph Conrad, had been sunk in Haiphong harbor and three seamen killed.

Pentagon sources confirm that the ship "probably" was hit "accidentally." The White House yesterday said it was drawing up a response to a Polish protest over the incident and that it would express regret if there had been damage.

Both Radio Hanoi and the Soviet news agency Tass reported that the Egyptian and Cuban embassies in Hanoi had been damaged in raids on Wednesday and Thursday.

At the Pentagon, where a virtual news blackout exists on specific targets hit and damage done on the grounds that such discussion might endanger U.S. air crews, Friedheim said yesterday that he had "no information" on the alleged embassy damage.

An Agency France-Press report from Hanoi also claimed that the U.S. air raids had knocked out a 700-yard stretch of the main runway at Hanoi's Gialam airport, but that the airfield was still operating.

The French correspondent, who says he visited the airfield, also reported "most of the main airport buildings no longer exist" and that "the main waiting room has been reduced to a mass of rubble."

Gialam, which is Hanoi's main commercial airfield and which occasionally serves as an emergency landing strip for MiG fighters, has also been off limits in the past. Pentagon sources say the field was not targeted, but concede that some bombs may have fallen on it.

In Saigon yesterday, an official radio broadcast praised the resumption of the heavy U.S. bombing. "The U.S. determination has smashed North Vietnam's dream of annexing South Vietnam," it said. "Now the Communists must make a choice: either to accept total destruction or to negotiate seriously."

"The North Vietnamese," the broadcast said, "have considered the private and overt talks in Paris as mere opportunities for propaganda and to sully their adversaries."

The loss of three six-man B-52s in a single day Thursday, Vietnam time, makes it one of the heaviest single-day losses in the eight-year history of the air war.

Two of the planes crashed near Hanoi and the 12 crewmen are listed as missing. The third craft limped back over the Thailand border, where its crew bailed out and was rescued.

In addition to six B-52s confirmed as lost by the U.S. command thus far, an F-111 and an A-7 fighter-bomber are also reported lost.

Though the North Vietnamese have knocked down at least six of the eight-engine B-52 jets in three days, about 100 of the bombers have been used each day to pound the North. While the loss figures are high in terms of crewmen, because the planes carry six men each, the loss percentage in terms of the number of planes getting in and out safely is viewed as small by Pentagon specialists.