

U.S. Aerial Blitz Takes High Toll; 2 B-52s Downed

Part of Hanoi Wiped Out, Tass Says

From News Dispatches

SAIGON, Dec. 28 — American warplanes kept up their aerial blitz against the Hanoi-Haiphong area Thursday and the saturation bombing took a heavy toll in lives and aircraft losses.

The U.S. command announced that two more B-52 heavy bombers and a huge rescue helicopter were shot down. Six crewmen were reported missing and 11 rescued in the three crashes.

The command also announced the heaviest American casualties in Indochina last week in nearly two years as a result of the renewed bombing campaign: 7 killed, 73 missing and 21 wounded in the Dec. 17-23 period.

Tass, the Soviet news agency, reported from Hanoi Thursday that parts of the North Vietnamese capital "have been erased from the face of the earth" by the U.S. attacks.

Tass said the Khamthien district of Hanoi, once "a densely populated area famous for its markets and shops" is now "a maze of bomb craters."

A report by Sweden's consul in Hanoi, Eskil Lundberg, to Stockholm said the Hanoi area was hit Thursday by the heaviest American bombardment yet. Lundberg did not mention casualties but said that daytime U.S. raids were increasing in intensity.

The Agence France-Presse correspondent in Hanoi, Jean Leclerc du Sablon, said one of the capital's most animated and colorful streets, Khamthien, was "A mass of ruins

and a scene of desolation and mourning" Thursday.

According to Du Sablon, Khamthien and adjacent streets were "carpet bombed by planes including B-52s which ploughed up a strip about a mile long and several hundred yards wide from one end of the street to the other."

Another Soviet news agency, Novosti, said in a statement Thursday that American bombs have destroyed its two-story office building in Hanoi. It made no mention of casualties in the attack Wednesday but it "emphatically denounced" what it termed "the barbarous bombardments" and "the outrages of the American military."

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Thursday's U.S. announcement of aircraft losses brought to 23 the number of downed American aircraft acknowledged by the U.S. command since bombing resumed above the 20th Parallel Dec. 18 following the breakdown in the secret Paris peace talks. Hanoi claims 72 planes shot down, including 31 B-52 bombers.

The pro-Communist Nihon Denpa News Agency of Japan said in a dispatch from Hanoi that North Vietnamese newspapers reported MIG interceptors shot down a B-52 bomber Wednesday. If true, it would be the first confirmed downing of a B-52 by a Mig.

A spokesman for the U.S. command said Thursday night he could not confirm the report. It is believed that most if not all of the B-52s acknowledged downed have been hit by surface-to-air missiles. More than 600 SAMs were fired at U.S. aircraft during the first week of the raids.

U.S. military sources have reported at least one and perhaps two Migs shot down by tail gunners aboard B-52 bombers, this indicates that Mig

interceptors are rising to challenge the B-52 bombers, which fly at an altitude of more than six miles, although the U.S. command has reported only one Mig 21 shot down and that by a fighter escort.

Hanoi Radio reported Thursday night that two more captured U.S. airmen were shown to newsmen in Hanoi. Since Dec. 19, North Vietnam has paraded 31 captured U.S. airmen before press conferences.

After a week of silence, the U.S. command released a bomb damage report Wednesday with more than a dozen different types of targets. Nearly all the bombing was clustered in the Hanoi-Haiphong area.

The North Vietnamese foreign ministry issued a statement saying: "The carpet bombing by B-52s has killed and wounded very many civilian

mostly old persons, women and children. It has destroyed several economic and cultural structures, many houses and properties of the Vietnamese people."

The U.S. command has refused to comment on civilian losses, stating that only military installations are being targeted. Many military targets are near civilian establishments and U.S. officials have acknowledged the possibility of error.

Of the new losses, the command reported that one B-52 crashed early Thursday in northeast Thailand near the U.S. air base at Nakon Phanom. It limped out of North Vietnam after sustaining damage during a raid and all six crewmen were rescued after bailing out.

The second B-52 was shot down in the Hanoi area Tuesday, shortly after bombing resumed above the 20th parallel following a 36-hour Christmas cease-fire. The six crewmen were reported missing in the delayed report.