

Foe's Ground Attacks Rise But U.S. Calls Them Minor

By JOSEPH B. TREASTER
Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Saturday Jan. 6—Attacks by Communist troops in South Vietnam have risen to an unusually high level, but American intelligence officials say they have been "small in scale and significance."

A South Vietnamese military spokesman reported that there were 97 separate communist attacks throughout the country yesterday and 116 on Thursday.

An American intelligence official said that this was "a significant upsurge" from last month, when there were about 50 attacks a day. But, he added, "It's modest effort—nothing to panic about."

Bombing Goes On

Meanwhile, American planes continued their bombing campaign in the southern part of North Vietnam, aimed at checking Communist military traffic bound for the battlefronts of South Vietnam.

The United States command reported that 15 missions of B-52's—each presumably consisting of three planes—were flown over the area in the 24 hours ended at 8 A.M. It also reported 116 strikes by fighter-bombers.

United States spokesmen said that six missions struck at highway and river supply complexes five miles east of Bai Thuong and five miles below the 20th Parallel, The Associated Press reported. The other missions were said to have been directed at storage areas and supply routes farther south.]

Fourteen B-52 missions were flown south of the demilitarized zone, the United States command reported, and there were also 229 strikes by American fighter bombers in South Vietnam. The rapidly expanding South Vietnamese Air Force flew 176 sorties, a spokesman said.

Shellings in the South

Of the enemy ground attacks in South Vietnam yesterday and Thursday, two-thirds were shellings, and often the Communists fired fewer than half a dozen rockets or mortar rounds.

The heaviest ground fighting has been in the far northern province of Quang Tri — combat has been continuing there since the beginning of the North Vietnamese offensive last March 30 — and in the Central Highlands in the vicinity of the cities of Kontum and Pleiku

However, the scope of these actions has been such that, on most days in the bloody history of the Vietnam war, they would have gone unmentioned in the world press. They were noted yesterday because they constituted a part of the over-all increase in Communist activity across South Vietnam.

In one incident in the foothills of southern Quang Tri, South Vietnamese paratroopers said they killed 24 of the enemy and took one prisoner at a cost to themselves of two killed and three wounded. In another incident in the highlands west of Route 14 between Plaiku and Kontum, Government rangers and militiamen reported that they killed 39 Communists, and put their own casualties at six wounded.

American intelligence officials said they had expected the attacks to start when they did and added that they believed that the attacks would taper off well before Tet, the lunar new year, which begins this year on Feb. 3.

The officials said that some reports from the field had characterized the current rash of attacks as a "test offensive" presaging a more concentrated winter-spring campaign.

Some high-ranking American military officers have said that they have had indications that the Communists have been busy preparing for another offensive since the end of October when, under the impression that a cease-fire was about to be achieved, they made their last energetic effort to grab territory. But these officers say now that they expect no major enemy moves before Tet and probably not for a month or so after the holiday.

"We just don't think they've got the resources for anything big right now," an officer said.

Puzzlement Over Bombing

Military and civilian intelligence officials alike were quite surprised by the military reason the White House gave on Dec. 18 for the intensive bombing of North Vietnam's heartland, then newly under way.

While the White House tied

the raids to the deadlock in the peace talks, saying the attacks would "continue until such time as a settlement is arrived at," it also linked them to what it described as the threat of another North Vietnamese offensive.

To date, none of the military and civilian intelligence officials have suggested that they have seen any evidence of a Communist build-up that would have warranted the intensive bombing north of the 20th Parallel.

An intelligence official said last night that he saw no connection between the current ground attacks and the heavy American bombing. But he speculated that the attacks might be related to the new round of private peace talks that Henry A. Kissinger of the United States and Le Duc Tho of North Vietnam are scheduled to begin on Monday. "They want to show everybody that they're still around and still to be reckoned with," the official said, referring to the Communist forces in the South.

The United States command here refused again today to disclose what targets were bombed and how much damage was done in raids in the Hanoi-Haiphong area between Dec. 26 and 30. The command did release an incomplete summary of damage inflicted in the first seven days of heavy bombing, starting on Dec. 18, but it has not updated that initial report.

Some Western diplomats believe that the United States is withholding the information to avoid giving the impression that it is gloating about the damage — in whatever form military spokesmen here may make it public — as the new peace talks commence.

Cambodians Report Setback

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, Jan. 5 (Reuters)—A Cambodian Government force was reported to have been thrown back with heavy casualties today when it tried to relieve the beleaguered southern provincial capital of Tram Khnar, where two battalions of Government troops were said to be trapped.

Military sources said that more than 1,000 Government soldiers tried to reach the town, 24 miles southwest of here, but were blocked by Communist forces on both flanks and forced to withdraw with heavy casualties.

Raid Beyond 20th Reported

HANOI, North Vietnam, Jan. 5 (Agence France-Presse)—The Foreign Ministry asserted today that American bombs fell yesterday on an area north of the 20th Parallel.

A statement handed to newsmen by a Foreign Ministry spokesman said the bombs were dropped on Dong Lai parish in Hoa Binh Province, about 50 miles southwest of Hanoi. The area is about halfway between the 20th and 21st Parallels.

The ministry statement said: "The Nixon Administration, which undertook to put an end to bombing and to the mining of ports north of the 20th Parallel and to reduce other bombing below the 20th Parallel to allow a resumption of negotiations, immediately broke its promises."

Denied by Pentagon

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 5—The Pentagon spokesman today denied a report from Hanoi that United States planes bombed targets north of the 20th Parallel yesterday.

"I don't know what they're talking about," said Jerry W. Friedheim when apprised of the report, transmitted by Agence France-Presse.

"The policy, established by the President, is a very firm policy. We are not to bomb north of the 20th Parallel," Mr. Friedman said. "There certainly hasn't been a policy change."