

U.S. Lets Jets Make 'Protective' Strikes

From News Dispatches

SAIGON, Jan. 9—President Nixon has authorized U.S. fighter escorts to attack North Vietnamese Migs or missile sites above the 20th parallel if they threaten American B-52s below the northern limit Mr. Nixon has placed on the bombing of North Vietnam, reliable sources reported Tuesday.

Military sources in Saigon said American warplanes have authority to take "protective reaction" against enemy planes or sites north of the parallel.

"It is not a new policy, it is simply a continuation of an old policy," a military source said. "That policy has always been in effect, is now in effect and always will be in effect."

During the time that bombing of North Vietnam was halted—Nov. 1, 1968, to April 6, 1972—there were more than 300 such "protective reaction" air strikes into North Vietnam, including a massive strike in May, 1970, after which the U.S. command began reporting them. Military sources said about 60 such strikes had been made before that time.

The U.S. command announced that an Air Force F-4 Phantom shot down a Mig-21 along the 20th parallel Sunday

when it threatened a flight of B-52s.

The command said that the Mig was downed "northwest of Thanhhoa," which is only 10 miles below the 20th parallel, and spokesman refused to say just how far northwest of the city. This was interpreted as a tacit acknowledgement that the dogfight extended above the parallel.

U.S. sources outside the command indicated Tuesday that Hanoi Radio was correct when it reported last week that U.S. fighters escorting reconnaissance planes attacked anti-aircraft defenses in Hoabinh Province south of Hanoi. The U.S. command denied at the time that American planes had bombed pre-selected targets above the 20th parallel, but it refused to comment on reconnaissance operations and what action fighter escorts might have taken.

The Mig 21 downed Sunday was the fifth reported downed by U.S. crews since Dec. 18. The U.S. command said a total of 183 North Vietnamese jets have been downed during the war.

Thirty-nine B52s dropped about 2.2 million pounds of bombs in the North Vietnamese panhandle during the 24

hours ending at 8 a.m. today, U.S. sources said. The command said the targets included supply caches and supply routes 25 to 45 miles south of Thanhhoa and 10 to 30 miles northwest of Donghoi, another

port 45 miles above the Demilitarized Zone.

During the same period, the command said, U.S. fighter-bombers made 128 strikes in the panhandle, destroying supply trucks and setting fuel depots afire.

Hanoi claimed that two B52s were downed Monday and Tuesday below the 20th Parallel, and an unmanned reconnaissance plane was shot down north of Hanoi on Monday, but the U.S. command said it had no plane losses to report.