

U.S. Confirms Air Watch Over Vietnam

By LESLIE H. GELB

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 12 — A Pentagon spokesman confirmed today that United States aircraft were carrying out unarmed reconnaissance flights over South Vietnam and Cambodia. He stressed that this was nothing new or secret.

But the spokesman, William Beecher, would say only "no comment" when asked about similar flights over North Vietnam.

Another authoritative Pentagon official, however, stated flatly that unarmed United States aircraft had been flying over North Vietnam "for some time." But this could not be confirmed from others.

This official also acknowledged that such flights were in violation of a secret understanding between Washington and Hanoi made at the time the Vietnam cease-fire accords were signed in Paris in January, 1973.

"We only started the reconnaissance in North Vietnam," he explained, "after we repeatedly warned them about their violations of the 1973 cease-fire accords, particularly in bringing down new men and supplies into South Vietnam."

The published version of the Paris accords merely states that the United States will stop "all military activities" against North Vietnam. Until the end of the negotiations that led to the accords, the United States insisted that unarmed reconnaissance flights should not be precluded by this clause, the official said.

Will Cease Completely

But in the final stages of the talks, he said, "we agreed that all reconnaissance over North Vietnam will cease completely and definitively."

A number of other officials questioned by The New York Times would not comment on that issue. One did say, "I'd be careful about the difference between flying over North Vietnam and flying just off the borders of North Vietnam."

Several administration officials confirmed that the United States shared with the South Vietnamese and Cambodian Governments intelligence information derived from reconnaissance flights. They said the flights also were used to check on violations of the cease-fire accords and to protect American military supply programs in South Vietnam and Cambodia.

The question of American aerial surveillance arose in the last few days when Hanoi began charging that United States reconnaissance pilots were directing South Vietnamese air strikes against communist forces in the South.

When asked about this, several Administration officials said that it was highly unlikely and would be totally contrary to instructions from Washington. They said however, that neither the Pentagon nor the State Department had tried to check the allegation.

American reconnaissance flights over South Vietnam are considered a "gray" area under the Paris accords. The ban "all acts of force" in South Vietnam by the United States. Hanoi insists that this includes all types of reconnaissance, while Washington maintains that unarmed reconnaissance is permitted.

The United States operates manned and unmanned reconnaissance flights—all unarmed—from bases in Thailand, officials said.

Gains by Saigon Reported

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Jan. 12 (Reuters) — Government troops, supported by air and artillery strikes, have imposed heavy losses on insurgent forces around the district seat of Hoai Duc, 55 miles east-

northeast of here, Government military sources said today.

The sources estimated that 280 Communist-led troops had been killed in fighting in the last two days as Government forces moved to relieve pressure on the town.

Government planes flew 30 sorties yesterday and knocked out a number of insurgent mortar positions that had been shelling Government units defending the town, the sources said.

In other developments, about 600 Government soldiers, policemen and civilians from the province of Phuoc Long, taken by the insurgents, were re-

ported to have made their way to neighboring Quang Duc Province to the northeast.

It could not immediately be learned how many of the survivors were from the provincial capital of Phuoc Binh, which the insurgents took last week. About 26,000 civilians and more than 2,000 Government troops were reported to have been trapped in Phuoc Binh.

Military sources reported that a Government fighter-bomber supporting Government troops had been shot down yesterday in the Mekong Delta by a SAM-7 missile.