

Chinese MiGs Fight U. S. Jets;

First Clash With China Since Korea

DOGFIGHT

From Cable Dispatches
SAIGON.

Red Chinese and American planes clashed over the Chinese Communist island of Hainan early yesterday. Peking Radio reported. It marked the first Sino-U. S. aerial combat engagement since the end of the Korean War in 1953.

The Chinese claimed the U. S. planes fled in such a panic that one American plane shot down another American craft.

Denying the clash took place over Hainan, U. S. officials said that four U. S. Navy F-4B Phantom jets—flying cover for a 340-plane force which wrecked a railway bridge in North Viet Nam—battled four Communist MIG-17 jet fighters 35 miles from Hainan over the Gulf of Tonkin.

Besides the strike by Navy planes, 80 Air Force fighter-bombers roamed over North Viet Nam for two hours, partly destroying two other bridges. The 220 planes was the largest pumber to hit North Viet Nam in the 30 raids since Feb. 7.

U. S. officials denied any U. S. planes were missing in action off Hainan and said that one of the Red MIGs fled in flames into the clouds. One Navy Skyhawk was downed by ground fire and the pilot bailed out over the sea. He was rescued half an hour later.

In Washington, Assistant Defense Secretary Arthur Sylvester declared that Jap-
anese planes did not intrude over Hainan island either before or during yesterday's brief clash. He emphasized to newsmen, however, that "our forces are always authorized to defend themselves."

Mr. Sylvester said the Pentagon was unable to say whether the attacking planes were North Vietnamese or Chinese. But the fact the clash took place about 150 miles east of the North Viet Nam coast.

More on DOGFIGHT—P. 4

U. S. Jets in Dogfight

(Continued from page one)

coupled with the Peking broadcast that its planes were involved in a battle with American planes, made it almost certain the planes were Communist Chinese.

Mr. Sylvester noted that the Navy Phantom had "very firm instructions on this particular mission to avoid Chinese air space." He defined this as three miles offshore, but said the Red Chinese claim it extends 12 miles offshore.

Mr. Sylvester said the U. S. F-4s chose to break off the engagement with the MIGs rather than pursue them, but explained he did not know whether this was because of low fuel supplies, poor weather or for some other reason.

The Communist Chinese broadcast said two flights of eight U. S. warplanes "intruded" into Chinese air space over Yaluhoi Peninsula and Chang Kan, on Hainan between 8:30 and 9:30 a. m. "to conduct provocative activities."

"Our planes immediately took off to meet the U. S. planes," the broadcast continued.

"In the face of the unfavorable situation, the U. S. planes suddenly fired two guided missiles and fled in a great hurry. In their panic, one U. S. plane was hit by the guided missile launched by one of its own planes and dropped on our Hainan area."

The battle between the 1,500 mile-an-hour Phantom and the 440-mile-an-hour MIGs was the third within a week. Last Saturday three MIGs, apparently North Vietnamese, took to the air to challenge U. S. raiders, but fled without a fight. Last Sunday North Vietnamese MIGs shot down two F105 Thunderchiefs.

It was not known to the U. S. whether North Vietnamese or Chinese Commu-

nist pilots flew the North Vietnamese MIGs last Sunday.

The four Navy Phantom yesterday were flying what is termed combat air patrol (CAP) while the 140 jets from the carriers Ranger and Coral Sea twice plastered the Tam Da railroad bridge 120 miles south of Hanoi.

The planes dropped more than 160 tons of bombs on the span in the morning and afternoon attacks and the Navy said the bridge was destroyed. It was considered a vital north-south link to Hanoi regime.

What the Navy planes smashed Tam Da, about 50 twin-jet F-105s bombed the major railway bridge at Qui Vinh, 110 miles south of Hanoi, and then struck a highway bridge at Khe Kien on Highway 7 about 10 miles from the Laotian border. Both were reported knocked out.

Highway 7 is believed to be a key route by which munitions and other supplies are moved to the Communist Pathet Lao forces on the Plain of Jars in Laos.

Throughout the Air Force strikes about 20 Sidewinder missile-equipped F-100 and F-101 jet interceptors wheeled overhead to oppose any MIGs which might attempt to interfere. But no Air Force planes were reported lost.

However, Communist China declared eight planes were shot down, boosting to 163 the number of planes the Communists claim they have downed since last August. By American count the Skyhawk also down yesterday was the 27th—U. S. and South Vietnamese—lost in raids on the north.

Radio Hanoi also announced yesterday that North Viet Nam protested to the International Control Mission that the raiders bombed and strafed populated areas in the north of Nghe An Province and on Hon Matt Island, 20 miles offshore.

The downing of the two 1,500 mile an hour F-105s last

Sunday and the failure of the Navy Phantom yesterday to inflict heavy damage on their outdated MIG opposition has resulted in some speculation about American performance against the enemy.

However, Defense Department officials in Washington noted that the defending MIGs have the advantage of ground control radar, which tips them off to approaching aircraft sooner than radar on attacking planes.

U. S. jets are equipped with radar, but it is limited compared to ground radar systems.

However, it was reported in Washington that the carrier Ranger, about 100 miles from Hainan, spotted the attacking MIGs on its radar yesterday and warned the Navy F-4s that the enemy was within 30 miles.

The fighter pilots radioed report said, and told the carrier the MIGs had jettisoned their external fuel tanks and were pressing their attack.

The importance of the North Vietnamese ground radar has been noted by American officials, and radar stations in the north have been a prime target of U. S. and South Vietnamese raiders in the past several weeks. The U. S. also is reported beefing up its interceptor fleets with speedy, maneuverable F-104 supersonic jets.

Shortly after yesterday's strikes, a U. S. Air Force officer at Da Nang disclosed that the North Vietnamese apparently have received ground-to-air missiles and used them last Sunday during a raid on Thanh Hoa, 65 miles south of Hanoi.

The officer, Maj. James A. Minish, commander of the 81st Tactical Fighter Squadron, said the missiles apparently were an old-type model dating back to World War II with a maximum effective ceiling of 3,000 feet. He said they apparently had no homing device and were



Herald Tribune Map

BATTLEFRONTS—Locating area off Hainan, designated by burst, where U. S. and Red Chinese jets fought, and Tam Da and Qui Vinh, where American planes bombed bridges. Additional Marine contingents will be stationed around Hue and Da Nang.

fired on a ballistic trajectory.

Maj. Minish, of Yellowstone National Park, Wyo., said there long have been indications the Russians have been supplying this type of missile to North Viet Nam.

Although yesterday's battle off Hainan was the first combat clash since the Korean War, American and Communist Chinese planes have duelled before.

The last reported incident was on July 16, 1959 when Chinese planes fired at a Navy T-4 patrol plane off the Chinese Communist coast and wounded one American.

Red China entered the Korean War on Oct. 26, 1950, four months after North Korea invaded the South. The Chinese drove United Nations forces south but were forced to retreat and the war entered a relative stalemate. An armistice was signed at Panmunjom July 27, 1953.