

B-52 Raid Is Biggest Since '45

By Beverly Deepe
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SAIGON.

The gigantic B-52 bomber raid dropping 625 tons of bombs over North Viet Nam yesterday was the biggest, most powerful combat raid since the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki 21 years ago, United States Air Force officials said here.

"We had nothing to match this in a single raid in the Korean War, in terms of tonnage—and nothing thus far in Viet Nam," one American Air Force official explained.

The B-52 bombers were recently modified to take an increased payload of 30 tons. Each plane can carry 84 500-pound bombs inside and 24 750-pound bombs under the wings. During World War II a B-17 Flying Fortress, flying on a 1,000-mile round trip, could carry eight 500-pound bombs, or a payload of two tons.

ESCALATION

The raid by the giant Stratofortress jets was immediately regarded here as the first move in a continuing escalation of military pressure on North Viet Nam.

"This raid was south of Vinh," one informed political source said. "Next you'll see the SAM (surface-to-air missiles) sites taken out further north and then you'll see the bigger bombing runs moving further north."

[Hanoi protested today against the B-52 raid, the Associated Press reported. The North Viet Nam News Agency, in a broadcast monitored in Tokyo, said the protest, made in a note to the International Control Commission in Viet Nam, called the raid "a new step in the escalation of the war.]

American officials, speaking privately, attempted to play down the significance of the air strike by arguing that it

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was simply a means to close permanently a mountain pass in which five raids by F-105 Thunderchiefs had virtually failed.

But sources close to the Vietnamese high command regarded yesterday's raid as an attempt to increase in one lightning blow the military pressure as a means to drive North Viet Nam to the negotiating table.

Other political sources regarded the massive raid as a counterbalance to the growing political vacuum in South Viet Nam.

"The big bombing raid is only rationale for an American policy," one Vietnamese politician explained. "The Americans hit the North when they were losing in the South. And they slam on the military pressure when they are losing politically in Saigon.

The political vacuum was considered to have increased yesterday in Saigon on at least two counts. They are:

☐The realization—long suspected—that the American government was slowly withdrawing its support from Premier Nguyen Cao Ky, who was embraced by President Johnson at the Honolulu conference less than two months ago.

"The American position is quite clear," one Western diplomat explained. "Their policy is not to become so involved with one individual (namely Ky) that they go down the drain with him."

☐Premier Ky's opening of a political conference of various political and religious factions was regarded here as "disappointing," if not a failure. The militant Buddhists, considered to be Communist infiltrated, who have been attempting to topple his government, boycotted the meeting.

Of the 170 expected members, only 92 showed up at the opening. Later in the day, one prominent politician moved that the conference be dissolved—and the attendance dropped to 70.

The official American announcements that the Johnson administration would support a government elected soon by the people also drew critical comments.

"The Americans are deluding themselves into thinking that a popularly elected government will help out in the South," one American source explained.

"Democracy has never been established in wartime. Even America and Britain diminished democracy during World War II, with price rationing and drafting, because one must have control. You can't develop democracy

during a war—it runs counter to the face of history.

"The Americans are moving toward the brink," he continued, "yet they say it's not dangerous to go to the brink. This is a very strange situation—we can have a collapse of the government and the whole anti-Communist war effort."

The American source, who has seen many crises come and go in Viet Nam, continued: "This is the worst crisis here in 10 years.

"This whole crisis is a very weird thing—like a perverse death-wish."

Thant Confirms Huu Meeting

By Darius S. Jhabvala

Of The Herald Tribune Staff

UNITED NATIONS.

UN Secretary General U

Thant yesterday confirmed a report published in the Herald Tribune that he had held a private meeting with Tran Van Huu, a former Premier of South Viet Nam.

The report quoted Mr. Thant's spokesman as saying "no comment" to questions on the meeting. But yesterday, the spokesman, in answering queries about the Herald Tribune story, said: "Mr. Thant had seen Mr. Tran Van Huu at the latter's request on April 7. They discussed Viet Nam."

The spokesman refused to reveal any details about the conversation, or even whether Mr. Thant had scheduled another meeting with Mr. Huu.

The former Vietnamese leader, who was exiled to Paris by the late Premier Ngo Dinh Diem, slipped into New York on April 5 without the knowledge of U. S. or South Vietnamese Mission officials.