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aircraft--page 1

october²⁶~~14~~, 1965

PLEIKU, SOUTH VIETNAM--The longest battle in the Vietnam conflict--
the ~~week-long~~ ^{DAY} battle for Plei Me--dramatically introduced the
Communists' lethal anti-aircraft war.

Despite the most impressive display of devastating American
airpower yet seen on one small battlefield, the North Vietnamese
units, organized into regular battalions and regiments,
continued for ~~one week~~ ^{days} (Note to Editor: since October 19--~~update~~
^{According to WIRES} if necessary please) to return withering sheets of fire at American
aircraft and at the besieged Special Forces camp. The Communists
used counter-offensive mobile warfare tactics of their ~~III~~ Third
and final Phase of guerrilla warfare.

~~Within the first eight days of the battle, more than 600~~
Within the first eight ^(more) days of the battle, more than 600
airstrikes were conducted against the entrenched Communists, "and
we can't begin to calculate the cost--but it will run in the thousands
of dollars--or to calculate the tonnage or ordinance expended, but
it will run into the hundreds of thousands of tons," one American
source explained.

(more)

deeps

aircraft--page 2

october 26, 1965

One American pilot lamented that as American Navy, Marine and Air Force planes, raked piece by piece the battle area where the Communists were entrenched, shaving off hilltops, and uprooting trees, a handful of Communist fighters ^{jumped} jumped into the bomb craters and continued to fire at the incoming fighters.

"This is the greatest concentration of ~~anti-aircraft equipment~~ .50 calibre machineguns the Communists have yet amassed," one American pilot explained. "Sometimes they ~~don't~~ don't bother to aim at the planes, they simply put up a screen of fire and the American fighters fly into it." Several Chinese Communist machineguns were captured, along with other Chinese Communist equipment, such as aircraft spotting devices.

During the week-long battle, one ~~UH-1B~~ "Huey" turbojet UH-1B turbojet/helicopter was shot down at the edge of the small red-dirt landing strip immediately outside the Plei Me camp, 25 miles south of this corps headquarters town of Pleiku. The four-man crew was lost despite valiant attempts of the ~~Mountain~~ a Montagnard-American ~~sp~~ patrol to rescue them. A second "Huey" crashed into a mountain when its "eggbeater" rotors collapsed; it is unknown ~~whether~~ whether this was caused by enemy groundfire. The four-man crew was ~~also~~ lost.

(More)

deepe

aircraft—page 3

Three American airplanes were also shot down; two Skyraiders fighters in which the pilots of both miraculously escaped and a RB-66~~er~~ photo reconnaissance plane which was dropping flash charges ~~for~~ for night photographs. The three-man crew was lost.

In addition, on B-57 Canberra jet fighter-bomber was badly ~~shot up~~ shot up and crash-landed; the next day ~~it's~~ ^{is} two man crew was back flying missions at Plei Me. Many of the other ~~aircraft~~ aircraft were hit but managed to land safely, such as eight transport aircraft which had airdropped supplies into Plei Me and were damaged badly enough to be grounded for extensive ~~main~~ maintenance.

More significant than the damage to American ~~jet fighters and~~ ^{aircraft} however, the major introduction of such lethal Communist anti-aircraft ~~firepower~~ ^{fire} ~~is~~ ^{was} considered to put even more serious crimp into the operational plans for the elite American First Air Cavalry Division, the 15,000-man strong helicopter-bound division ~~which~~ tailored by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara for Vietnam. Situated at An Khe, only 50 miles from Plei Me, the "The ~~1st~~ Flying Horsemen" evolved the ~~un~~ unique concept of helicoptering in massive numbers of infantry troops and mobile artillery in ~~stead~~ ^{stead} using ~~trucks~~ ^{trucks} being road-bound by the use of trucks. ^{However,} Many of the small jungled landing zones and ~~base~~ ^{base} besieged camps ^{like} as Plei Me, ~~ring~~ ^{ring} ringed by .50 ~~calib~~ ^{calib} calibres are considered to be helicopter traps that are tactically off-limits to the First Cavalry Division.

(More)

deepe

aircraft—page 3 4

"If the Communists can shoot down American fighters, it's ~~first~~ frightening to think what they can do to the First Cav," one American source explained.

American pilots were astonished at the "fanaticism" of the Communist fighters.

"The first day, I saw the ~~Communist~~ Communists jumping from ~~one~~ ^{one} ~~one~~ ^{one} of our bomb craters to the next with their light submachineguns. We kept working in the fighters," ~~if we hit them~~ one American pilot explained. "We would hit the ~~northern~~ section north of the camp and they would fire from the south. We would hit from the west and they would fire from the east, catching us on our passes out. They weren't keeping their heads down and this is the first time they've done that.

"Whenever you would see one of our bomb craters, you would see a Communist in it. There were about 12 Communists I saw in our bomb craters. Then later, you'd see a dozen more of them, crawling and dancing around like ants. Maybe, it was the same dozen that kept rotating; I don't know." This went on for three and a half hours the first day; other pilots saw it the second day. But all the first morning, I saw them jumping from bomb crater to bomb crater."

deepe

aircraft--page 5

Another American pilot explained the "nose-to-nose, muzzle-to-muzzle" fight between two American F-100 jet Supersabres and two Communist .50-calibre machineguns along the road to Plei Me as an armored-truck-infantry column was attacked in a meeting engagement on last Saturday.

"It was just a hazy grey dusk as the F-100 raced towards the blazing convoy and the American pilots could see the tracers from the two .50 calibre machineguns shooting up at them," the pilot explained. These two Communists were firing their .50's up at the F-100's and the F-100's were firing down at them. You could say they were fighting nose-to-nose, ~~an~~ muzzle-to-muzzle. It was just amazing. These two Communist gunners could look at the 20 mm. explosive warheads pouring in on them and they could return fire. After two ~~pass~~ passes, the Communists were still firing at the planes. The (American) flight leader ~~saw~~ said over the radio 'These are mean ones.' And his wing-man said 'They are really firing ~~at~~ at us.'

"The ~~two~~ Communists were really insistent. This time they ~~it~~ did not withdraw. After two passes, they still kept firing at the planes and as the last F-100 finished his ~~pass~~ spray of ~~2~~ .20 mm. sprinkles, he pulled out of ~~it~~ his pass ~~very~~ very fighting directly and the Communists kept firing at him as he ~~came~~ ^{went} up. They were firing at the individual aircraft, in this case, any not putting up a screen of fire."

deeps

aircraft--page 6

Another pilot interjected: "The ~~V~~ Viet Cong (Communists) were pretty shrewd. They sat on the hill and were ~~shooting~~ shooting at the ~~F-100~~ F-100s and the F-100 pilots were looking straight into their barrels and shooting back. This was nose-to-nose fighting. If two people were several feet apart with water hoses, spraying each other--that's what it looked like. Except the V. C. were using white phosphorous tracers ^(Soviet-Design) that looked like shooting stars; and the F-100's were using high explosive .20 mm. ammo."

Another pilot, coming back to base after a late night mission, explained to his colleague: "A transport aircraft got hit from that .30 calibre machinegun position south of the camp. There were five ~~Navy~~ Skyraider fighters stacked overhead and they came down and ~~systema~~ systematically hit that .30 calibre position. They dumped ~~30~~ thirty 500-pound bombs ~~20~~ (i. e. 7½ tons of ordinance) on that position. Then another transport aircraft ~~left over~~ ^{fell} and the ~~Viet~~ Viet Cong (Communists) ~~it~~ shot at and hit him. But tomorrow we'll get that ~~250~~ ²⁵⁰ position."

One experience pilot, a ~~Viet~~ ^{DATA} veteran of World War II and Korea, explained, "This is almost like the Korean War bugle-blowing system, but without the human waves. The Communists are staying and fighting alot longer than they should stay; they are not acting like guerrillas."