

American Counters Shot Up

SAIGON, South Viet Nam (AP) — Communist guerrillas shot up a fleet of United States helicopters carrying South Vietnamese troops into battle Wednesday, and there were fears two of the helicopters were cut off in enemy territory.

Casualties were heavy on both sides. South Vietnamese government forces suffered an estimated 50 dead and wounded. Three Americans—one an army captain—were killed and four others wounded.

Springing a trap, the Communist Viet Cong held their fire as the first wave of helicopters landed in rice field country near the banks of the Mekong River 50 miles southwest of Saigon.

"Then all hell broke loose," returning crew members said. With automatic small arms and cannon fire, the Communists dealt the costliest defeat yet suffered by U.S. helicopters supporting President Ngo Dinh Diem's pro-Western government.

Officials here said the three U.S. deaths Wednesday—a captain serving as a military adviser, a helicopter crew chief and a gunner—brought to 26 the number of Americans killed in action in the South Viet Nam civil war.

LIST U.S. CASUALTIES
Pentagon figures up to Wednesday list 11 of 21 Americans killed in action and 31 deaths from other causes.)

The Communist groundfire hit 14 American helicopters taking part in an operation that began at dawn—and brought down at least eight. Five were destroyed.

A battle was reported raging at dusk.

South Vietnamese air force fighter bombers struck with rockets and shells at Viet Cong positions near the river town of Vinh Long but the guerrilla force held and fought back instead of breaking away as the guerrillas usually do after attack.

Sources here said the Communists—estimated to be at least a battalion strength of 400 men or more—were heavily armed.

The battle southwest of Saigon developed as government forces launched a big operation near the Cambodian border northwest of Saigon. U.S. helicopters airlifted 500 troops and more than 1,200 paratroopers were dropped in the province of Tay Ninh but there was no immediate contact with the enemy.

British Group Seeks Facts On Skybolt

LONDON (Reuters) — A British parliamentary delegation flew to the United States Wednesday to learn the facts from Douglas Aircraft Corporation executives about the Skybolt air-to-ground missile, abandoned by the U.S. government.

Sir Arthur Vere Harvey, chairman of the governing Conservative party's defence committee, told reporters at London Airport there appeared to be a conflict between what the corporation said about Skybolt and what the Pentagon said.

Harvey said the trip to Los Angeles was arranged "before all this fiasco blew up." He said he would visit Canada on his way home.

Harvey led a delegation of critical Conservatives Tuesday to discuss with Defence Minister Thorneycroft the developments that will result from Prime Minister Macmillan's agreement with President Kennedy last month in Nassau, giving Britain the underwater Polaris missile instead of the Douglas-built Skybolt.

MEETING "TRICKY"
Harvey described his meeting with Thorneycroft as "pretty tricky" and added he had arranged to meet with Douglas executives because "it surprises me that what the corporation says about Skybolt and its potentialities seems to be in conflict with what the Pentagon says."

Critical Conservative party members say Britain must maintain independent power of nuclear retaliation within the Atlantic alliance. They want Britain to produce her own nuclear deterrent to fill the gap until Polaris is ready.

A joint statement issued after Harvey's meeting with Thorneycroft said the defence minister recognized that action would be necessary to strengthen the British strategic bomber force, which was to have the Skybolt, until Polaris-armed submarines were in operation.

There was wide expectation in London that the government might produce a longer-range version of the British Blue Steel air-to-ground missile, which is the present armament of the strategic bomber force.

FEW TRAFFIC DEATHS
CHICAGO (AP)—The Citizens Traffic Safety Board said Tuesday that Chicago had 244 traffic deaths in 1962—the fewest since 1914, when the toll was 143. Fatalities numbered 297 in 1961.



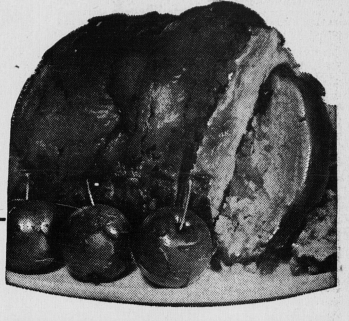
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