

Attack Simultaneous With the Bombings

WASHINGTON, Nov. 23 (AP).—Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird disclosed today that a small force of U.S. troops landed 20 miles west of Hanoi in an attempt to rescue American prisoners of war while U.S. fighter planes bombed enemy gun and missile sites in North Vietnam over the weekend.

Mr. Laird said the task force, made up of Army and Air Force volunteers, landed in a helicopter at a prisoner of war camp which was found to be abandoned.

The mission, Mr. Laird said, had been planned for months and was carried out with the approval of President Nixon. The operation took place north of the 19th parallel last weekend, Mr. Laird told a news conference.

He said the search and rescue team returned safely without serious casualties, but that one helicopter that made a "controlled crash landing" in the POW compound was intentionally destroyed.

The raid was ordered after U.S.

● U.S. sends aircraft on reconnaissance missions over North Vietnam. Story on Page 3.

authorities received information that led them to believe that American prisoners were suffering unnecessarily.

"If there had been prisoners in the compound, they would have been free men today," he said.

He told the news conference the explosions reported around Hanoi came from North Vietnamese surface-to-air missiles which detonated at low altitude.

The raid on the POW camp occurred about 2 p.m. EST (1900 GMT) Friday—about 2 a.m. Hanoi time.

The rescue team, Mr. Laird said, broke into the compound and thoroughly searched it, but found that the POWs had been "recently vacated."

"I had prepared with approval of President Nixon a search and rescue mission," said Mr. Laird. "... after some of our men were reported to be dying in North Vietnam."

He said the rescue team had undergone intensive training before leaving on what he called the "hazardous" mission near the North Vietnamese capital.

He said that according to a well-rehearsed plan, every building in the prisoner compound was searched.

Locks on doors of rooms which had been used as detention cells were removed.

Mr. Laird said this was not the first time such missions had been conducted in North Vietnam.

Earlier, the Defense Department refused to rule out the possibility that U.S. planes struck the Hanoi-Haiphong area during weekend raids against North Vietnamese missile and anti-aircraft sites.

Pentagon spokesman Jerry W. Friedheim said the attacks by 250 fighter-bombers and support air-



Melvin R. Laird

craft were limited to targets below the 19th parallel, but he refused to comment when asked if other planes fired on targets north of the parallel as charged by the Hanoi government.

No Comment

Mr. Friedheim had no comment when asked by newsmen to state flatly whether any planes flew above the 19th parallel, which is about 175 miles north of the demilitarized zone separating North and South Vietnam.

In a statement, he repeated the secretary of defense's announcement Saturday that the "protective reaction missions" were in retaliation for attacks on unarmed U.S. reconnaissance planes over North Vietnam and to protect American pilots flying strikes against North Vietnamese military supplies moving through Laos toward South Vietnam.

Mr. Friedheim said the raids were carried out over a seven-hour period and announced that no U.S. planes were lost. Hanoi has claim-

(Continued on Page 3, Col. 2)