

US Emb. Saigon

Communist AAA Increasingly Effective

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Communist antiaircraft fire has been increasingly effective and has been instrumental in their ability to make recent offensive gains. It prevented resupply of the government's beleaguered and isolated positions at Phuoc Binh and atop Nui Ba Den. This new tactic is expected to be utilized in future operations against isolated government targets, such as the Kien Tuong provincial capital of Moc Hoa near the Cambodian border.

In addition to the normal 12.7-mm. machine guns, the commander of the South Vietnamese 3rd Air Division claims that 23-mm., 37-mm., and even 57-mm. weapons have been used by the Communists since their campaign began in early December. These larger weapons force the South Vietnamese to bomb from altitudes of 6,000 to 8,000 feet, greatly reducing their effectiveness. Air dropping of supplies from high altitudes to surrounded troops has also been almost completely ineffective.

The Communists have also been very effective with their highly mobile heat-seeking, hand-held SA-7 missile system. During the past 30 days, their kill ratio has been one aircraft downed for every three missiles fired (compared to one for five in 1974). Some losses may be attributed to an increase in the number of lower altitude government air missions during the recent fighting. The South Vietnamese, however, can ill afford additional losses of their attack and support aircraft and probably will continue to restrict sharply the number of missions flown within the 9,000-foot range of the SA-7.