

VC HIT SAIGON AB, 7 KILLED, 155 HURT

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SAIGON (AP)—The Viet Cong attacked Saigon's Tan Son Nhut AB with mortars early Wednesday, killing 7 Americans and wounding 155 other persons.

The American dead included six soldiers and one sailor.

Among the wounded were 20 Air Force men, 77 other U.S. servicemen, and 58 Vietnamese. It was the first mortar attack on the

base, where 10,000 U.S. servicemen are stationed and which houses the residence of Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky. The base is about four miles from the heart of Saigon.

Five U.S. aircraft were damaged. They included F-100 fighter-bombers and one TVC121. The latter is the craft that provides television relay to Saigon. The television plane was described as badly damaged.

Two Vietnamese C-47 cargo planes also were damaged and a fuel storage installation was set ablaze.

The huge fuel tanks set ablaze
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Mortars—

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are located near the civilian side of the air base. There is a large air cargo depot in the area.

Armed helicopters were in the sky almost immediately after the first mortar rounds began falling shortly before 1 a.m. They reported hitting the area where it was believed the mortar fire originated, and a second contact was reported about 30 minutes later. There was no estimate of Viet Cong casualties.

Two U.S. Air Force men were on duty at the 8th Aerial Port passenger terminal at the time of the attack.

A1C Jerry R. Roush said, "We were talking to two officers and heard two explosions. The first one hit right behind our building. It was so close that it made my teeth rattle."

A2C David B. Smith said: "We turned out the lights and hit the ground. I heard more than 30 explosions. Shrapnel bounced off the roof of the building and one of our buses got hit."

The two Vietnamese cargo planes that were hit were about 100 yards from the passenger terminal where Roush and Smith were working.

The mortar attack was laid on in an arc, starting at the north end of the base and winding up in the south end with the fuel dump and the motor pool as the obvious targets.

A2C James D. Roy, who was driving a passenger truck-bus near the fuel dump, said American helicopters went into the air as soon as the attack started and were pouring tracers into the southern area where the mortar attack was detected.

Roy said he was ordered to take shelter in a ditch and his passengers did so, for about 90 minutes.

Two or three ambulances went by him, he said, carrying dead or wounded out.

"I knew they'd get this place before I left," he said.

Roy has 20 days left before returning to the United States.

Although the mortars slammed into the two Vietnamese planes and the fuel dump, they missed large numbers of U.S. Air Force and other transport planes parked in the area.

The two Vietnamese aircraft burned for about 1½ hours and the fuel storage still was burning furiously two hours after the attack.

There was no immediate comment on the attack from the Defense Department in Washington.