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Description

On June 8, 1972, South Vietnamese planes accidentally drop napalm on civilians in the village of Trang Bang. Among the injured is a young girl named Phan Thi Kim Phuc. Associated Press photographer Nick Ut photographs the naked and severely burned girl as she runs past him, an image that would be awarded the Pulitzer Prize and become one of the most haunting images of the Vietnam War. This report about the accidental bombing includes NBC footage of Kim Phuc fleeing the village after being injured.

Keywords

Transcript

Napalm Accident Kills Vietnamese Civilians

JOHN CHANCELLOR, anchor:
The United States military command in Saigon said today that yesterday’s air attacks over North Vietnam were the heaviest in three weeks. American pilots flew more than three hundred missions. B-52s bombed for the first time over North Vietnam since late April. The planes struck truck depots, oil storage tanks, and bridges near Hanoi, Hai Phong, and Vinh.
The children seen in this photograph were victims today of the South Vietnamese Air Force. They are running from Trang Bang, a district capital near Saigon. The Viet Cong seized the marketplace of Trang Bang. South Vietnamese planes were called in and they dropped napalm in the wrong place, burning South Vietnamese civilians. Arthur Lord has a report on this incident.

ARTHUR LORD reporting:
The Viet Cong had held Phu Cuong village for two days. By holding the village, they had blocked traffic on Highway 1, the main route between Saigon and the Cambodian border. Local militiamen had tried unsuccessfully to retake the town. The district chief called for some help for his troops from the regular armed forces. After two days of fighting, they finally got some. Tactical airstrikes were also called in to hit communist positions just outside the village.
It required an old-fashioned ground assault by the militiamen to break the communist hold on the village. Once inside the village, they began the difficult and dangerous process of searching every house. But they received no hostile fire, the enemy had pulled out. Phu Cuong was declared secure and the people who had fled from the fighting began coming back home. Although most of the villagers were glad that the
Viet Cong had been driven out, they were not happy with what they saw was left of their homes. Some of the peasants, who had never had much to begin with, lost everything.

The communist defense line on Highway 1 had fallen back to the village of Trang Bang, thirty miles north of Saigon. Here the road from Saigon was cut. People waited for South Vietnamese soldiers to clear the Viet Cong out of town. Small groups of civilians were still trying to get out of Trang Bang. Communist snipers shot at them as they ran up the highway toward the roadblock.

The South Vietnamese called in airstrikes on communist positions inside the city. The A-1 Skyraiders from the South Vietnamese Air Force dropped their bombs in the middle of a South Vietnamese company of soldiers. The napalm hit a group of civilians trying to flee from the fighting. These children had just gone through hell. It was impossible to determine the casualties accurately. This man, whose legs had been severely burned, said more than fifty men had been wiped out. What happened here was an accident of war. Somebody made a mistake. Arthur Lord, NBC News, on Highway 1.

CHANCELLOR: The weekly military casualty figures were released today in Saigon. Eleven Americans were killed in combat, twenty were wounded. More than 900 North Vietnamese—South Vietnamese soldiers were killed and more than 3,200 South Vietnamese wounded. Vice Admiral William Mack said today that the mining of North Vietnamese ports has radically cut down that country’s ability to make war. Admiral Mack is the officer who directed the mining of the ports and at a Pentagon news conference, he said “Things are getting much better and the reason they’re getting much better is because of the decision to mine.”