

U.S. Marines I Near Laos Border

Bolster Belief That America Is Preparing to Intervene

BY KEYES BEECH

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VIENTIANE, Laos—U.S. Marine helicopter units were landing at Udorn in northeast Thailand Thursday, strengthening the belief that the United States is about to intervene directly in the Laotian civil war.

The first Marines to land were reported to be members of a helicopter maintenance unit.

(The Associated Press said the helicopters were en route to the American aid mission supporting the pro-Western forces of Gen. Phoumi Nosavan.

(The helicopters are expected to be flown by American civilian pilots working for Air America, subsidiary of Civil Air Transport in Formosa, which is handling 'copters and transports now here. Helicopters are useful in troop movements and ferrying wounded.)

Udorn is the big Thai air base used as a supply base for

the Laotian war by American and Thai planes. It lies across the border from Vientiane, about 50 miles below Vientiane, administrative capital of Laos.

ANOTHER factor supporting the possibility of American intervention was the presence in Vientiane of Lt. Gen. Thomas J. Trapnell, commander of the U.S. Army Strategic Command, better known as STRAC.

STRAC is a 115,000-man ready force, prepared to move to any part of the world on short notice.

Trapnell has been in Laos for the last week on Pentagon orders. Turn to Page 4, Column 8

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Trappnell is expected to be in Udorn Thursday, getting a first-hand picture of the military situation.

His presence was a closely guarded secret.

TRAPNELL has made several flights to combat areas.

Thursday he flew close to the Communist-held Plain of Jars, which is an enemy stronghold in Laos.

Trappnell was specially qualified for his mission since he served as chief of the American military advisory group in Saigon during the Indochina war.

THE FEELING in American military circles was that the Royal Laotian Army has proved itself incapable of resisting the Communist Pathet Lao drive that has taken over most of northern Laos.

Thoroughly reliable sources said Pathet Lao forces have been bolstered by the integration of Communist Vietnamese cadres numbering five men per Pathet Lao company and 15 men per battalion.

These sources said the Vietnamese Reds, many of them tough combat veterans of the war against the French, were the driving force behind recent enemy successes.