

Communists Believed to Be Turning Southern Laos Into Big Supply Base

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

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VIENTIANE, Laos, June 19— Communist forces are said to have stepped up troop movements in southern Laos amid indications that they are stocking the region as an expanded supply base for the far in Vietnam.

This was reported by official sources, who quoted Col. Etam Singvongsa, head of the Laotian military intelligence, as having expressed the fear that the provinces of Champassak and Sedone astride the Mekong River were in danger of falling under enemy control. Western diplomatic extended to the neighboring Sithandone Province in the southwest corner of Laos as well.

The three provinces control access to the Mekong River, which American commanders believe has been selected as the most important Communist supply route from Laos to Cambodia. The Communists control the River in Cambodia nearly as far south as Kampong Cham, east of Phnompenh.

American intelligence sources are said to have discovered that while enemy supplies have been flowing down the Ho Chi Minh trail through Laos into the southern regions, they apparently have not been moving to South Vietnam or Cambodia.

This and other indications have led to the conclusion that

the North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao forces are building the mountainous and heavily jungled southern regions of Laos into a supply and staging area to replace those lost following the American and South Vietnamese attacks on the Cambodian sanctuaries. However, informed sources said that the flow of enemy supplies from North Vietnam into Laos was no greater than normal for the onset of the rainy season—500 trucks a month. During the dry season the flow is as high as 1,000 trucks a month.

Communist forces that seized Attopeu on the Se Kong in April—the river flows into the Mekong—are said to have told Laotian villagers that their mission involves the eventual seizure of Pakse, the Government stronghold on the river west of Attopeu, and Khong, a strategic island in the Mekong where the river flows into Cambodia.

In the last week, increased enemy activity was reported in only one of the five military regions of Laos—the southernmost. In one still unconfirmed incident in the region, enemy troops were reported to have overrun a Government hilltop garrison guarding a tactical air navigation beacon beamed to guide United States planes and ships.

Laotian headquarters report-

ed losing contact with the garrison, about ten miles southeast of Saravane, this morning.

Meanwhile, an authoritative account was made available of the failure of Government forces to recapture Saravane, also in the southernmost region, which was seized by Communist forces on June 9. According to the account, a Government counterattack was foiled when two Government battalions—about 1,000 men—ran into unexpected enemy opposition a few miles from the town.

The Government troops changed their course and moved on the town from a different direction, but this attack also failed. They abandoned the effort, and Government sources now concede there is no immediate prospect of recovering Saravane.

Efforts in Stalemate

Special to The New York Times

HONG KONG, June 19 — A continued stalemate in efforts to settle the war in Laos by negotiation is indicated by a new message from Prince Souphanouvong, the head of the Communist-led Pathet Lao, to his half-brother, Prince Souvanna Phouma, Premier of the Laotian Government in Vientiane.

The message, relayed here today by a Pathet Lao radio station, repeated the demand that all United States bombing in Laos must end before Pathet Lao representatives could meet with Vientiane Government officials to talk peace.

Cessation of American bombing was one of the conditions advanced in April by Prince Souphanouvong as a basis for peace in Laos. Prince Souvanna Phouma rejected the condition, but proposed that Pathet Lao and Vientiane delegates convene to discuss their respective views and explore peace possibilities.

The latest message is in reply to Prince Souvanna Phouma's letter rejecting an end to American bombing. Prince Souvanna Phouma's communication insisted that Vietnamese Communist forces in Laos also must leave the country if there was to be a termination of American bombing and an end to American military assistance to Laos.