

KY PREDICTS STAY IN LAOS TILL MAY AND FUTURE DRIVE

Expects Pullback at End of
Dry Season—Asks Steady
Attacks on Supply Trail

ACTION NEXT YEAR SEEN

Strength of Vietnamese Put
at 10,000—They Take Over
Tchepone Supply Center

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Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Feb. 10 — Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky said today that South Vietnamese forces would probably remain in Laos until the dry season ends in May and predicted that they would go in again next year.

In an interview in his office here, Mr. Ky provided the first amplification of the intentions of the South Vietnamese in southern Laos since President Nguyen Van Thieu announced the assault on Communist supply lines Monday. He had said it would be "limited in time as well as in space."

Mr. Ky said that the South Vietnamese would have to undertake "continuous actions" against the Ho Chi Minh Trail network in Laos to insure their safety. He said the objectives were to destroy Communist sanctuaries, blow up supply depots and "cut the trail," a network that passes through Laos on its way from North Vietnam to the South.

Permanent Effort Doubled

The Vice President, a former head of the South Vietnamese Air Force, said that it would be difficult for the troops to remain on the trail network after the rainy season began and that he did not foresee the need to keep men or bases in the neutral kingdom permanently.

Much of the course of the operation depends on the enemy's reaction, he said. In any event, he added, "we will do it again at the next dry season."

Later, a military spokesman for the Saigon Government disclosed that so far more than 10,000 soldiers had crossed into Laos since the American-supported operation against Communist infiltration and supply routes was launched from the northwestern corner of South Vietnam. He said the paratroopers and infantrymen had moved about six miles from the border; reports from the field indicated deeper penetrations.

[Apparently encountering little resistance, South Vietnamese troops occupied Tchepone, which had been a major enemy supply center on the Ho Chi Minh Trail 25 miles from the South Vietnamese border, The Associated Press reported. According to Agence France-Presse, the South Vietnamese were joined in cutting the Communist supply trail by 2,000 soldiers of the Laotian Special Forces.]

The report by the Saigon command was its first on the

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Ky Predicts Force's Stay in Laos Till May

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extent of the incursion. The figure of 10,000 represents half the South Vietnamese troops moved into the northernmost province, Quangtri, where 9,000 Americans cleared the way to the border and provided highway security.

The United States has also been giving intense air support and supplying troop transport, helicopter gunships and matériel. The helicopters flew more South Vietnamese into Laos today.

Heavy Fire on Planes

Both American and South Vietnamese pilots flying over enemy strongpoints in Laos reported heavy antiaircraft fire.

South Vietnamese troops fought four brief engagements in Laos yesterday and this morning, the Saigon spokesman said. He reported 41 of the enemy killed; South Vietnamese losses were put at 7 killed and 21 wounded.

The spokesman declined to give the exact locations of the clashes, saying only that they had been at points northwest, west-northwest and southwest of Langvei, the most forward allied command post in South Vietnam.

American military spokesmen, who during the early stages of the operation provided some statistics on American air power, declined to disclose new figures on the extent of United States participation. American

casualties in the support role, a spokesman said, will now be included in weekly figures instead of being given separately to show the cost in American lives. He said that after the operation the command would supply cumulative figures on the use of American planes.

'Failure Would Be Disaster'

Mr. Ky, in the interview, said in fluent English that he had long urged the current operation, in part to try to "force North Vietnam to reconsider its policy" and begin meaningful negotiations.

"We must force the enemy to reconsider their position," he said. "Since the goal is so important, we have to achieve it by any means. Failure would be a big disaster for us."

The Vice President, who wore a blue double-breasted suit with a military cut, declined to say whether he would challenge Mr. Thieu in the presidential election next October.

He suggested that it might be necessary to bomb North Vietnam. He said that the Communist troops were close to their home bases and to insure success "we have to strike not only those bases in Laos but also their rear bases in North Vietnam."

He also acknowledged that American help was vital to the success of the new operation because his country was now fighting on three fronts. It is easier for Saigon's forces to fight in Cambodia, he explained,

because they are closer to home bases.

Airstrip Being Rebuilt

SAIGON, Feb. 10 (AP) — South Vietnamese sources reported that after the task force reached Tchepone today engineers began rebuilding the town's abandoned dirt airstrip, which will enable the South Vietnamese to fly in supplies and reinforcements.

Tchepone, the first main objective of the South Vietnamese incursion, had been heavily bombed and was reported earlier to be almost deserted.

Lieut. Gen. Hoang Xuan Lam, commander of the operation in Laos, told newsmen that South Vietnamese forces destroyed two large ammunition depots in Laos today, as well as a North Vietnamese tank and a truck.

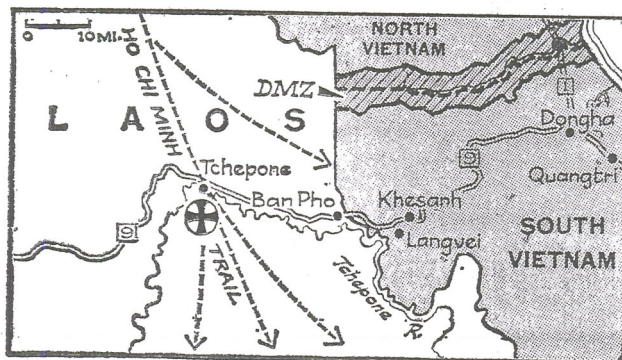
Saigon headquarters disclosed that 3,000 to 5,000 of the South Vietnamese remaining in the northern part of South Vietnam were sent eastward to the coastal area just south of the demilitarized zone. The troops were deployed around Dongha on the coast to guard against a North Vietnamese drive across the frontier in retaliation for the thrust into Laos.

G.I.'s Report Fighting

KHESANH, South Vietnam, Feb. 10 (UPI) — Some United States soldiers belonging to Troop D, Seventh Battalion, 17th Air Cavalry, said here today that 100 or more American ground troops had been in Laos during the last three days and had fought the Communists, but United States spokesmen denied that any American ground forces were in Laos.

These Americans, the soldiers said, are members of a unit that is rushed by helicopter into areas where ground forces are needed on short notice.

United States spokesmen in Saigon, in issuing the denial, allude on steps that might be taken to rescue downed American helicopter crews.



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Tchepone (cross) was reported occupied by Saigon units