

CIA Said To Provide Thais' Pay

Associated Press

The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency has deposited nearly \$3 million in Thai banks to cover full back pay of Thai "volunteer" soldiers soon to be released from captivity in Laos, a government source reported in Bangkok yesterday.

The Pathet Lao is reported ready to release 640 Thai mercenaries and one American civilian in an exchange for North Vietnamese prisoners scheduled for Sept. 19. Nearly 20,000 Thai mercenaries—recruited, supported and paid by the CIA—fought on the side of the royal Lao government before the Laos truce agreement in February 1973.

A U.S. embassy spokesman in Bangkok refused to comment on the reported compensation plan. He referred questions to the Thai government because it was a matter involving Thai prisoners.

In the South Vietnam, government troops launched counterattacks southeast of Hue to drive off Communist-led forces threatening the area along Highway 1, the Saigon command said.

The command said North Vietnamese gunners had shelled a dozen government outposts along the main north-south highway 13 to 15 miles southeast of Hue on Wednesday and overrun three small posts.

Lt. Col. Do Vet, a command spokesman, said the attacks appeared to be a probe of government defenses in preparation for an attack on the Lason infantry base overlooking the highway.

Viet had the Communist forces had fired more than 2,000 artillery rounds.

It was the heaviest fighting in the region south of Hue in several months. The North Vietnamese have been waging a hard campaign in the northern part of the country, but it is taking place south of Danang, which is 50 miles south of Hue.

In Cambodia, a government force of 1,000 soldiers and 40 armored vehicles was reported to be trying to drive the Khmer Rouge from rocket-launching sites southeast of Phnom Penh. But the Cambodian command said the drive had been slowed by well-entrenched Khmer Rouge in the swamps on the eastern bank of the Bassac River 15 miles from the capital.