

Brief Forays

'A Limited Role' For GIs in Laos

Defense Chief's Testimony

New York Times

Washington

Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird acknowledged yesterday that United States advisers have gone into Laos briefly with South Vietnamese troops.

But he assured a Senate subcommittee Americans are prohibited from large-scale combat operations in Laos.

Laird told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's disarmament subcommittee that the border crossings have been made only "in connection with the running battle in South Vietnam," or for rescue missions or some other purpose directly "tied to the protection . . . of the friendly forces . . . in that area" of South Vietnam bordering Laos.



LPI Telephoto

LAIRD BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE
He said the border crossings are rare and brief

RULES

He said the administration has not changed its rules prohibiting American ground combat forces from attacking Communist sanctuaries or supplies in Laos.

Laird testified shortly after the White House said there are no American ground forces in Laos and "no change in our activities in Laos."

That statement followed the disclosure by South Vietnam Foreign Minister Tran Van Lam at a Southeast Asia conference in Jakarta that his country's forces have pursued Communist troops into Laos from time to time.

PROHIBITION

Laird said that if South Vietnamese forces having American advisers went beyond the present limited scale of forays into Laos,

See Back Page

Prom Page 1

that would "not be in accord" with a prohibition passed by Congress last year against use of U.S. ground combat forces in Laos and Thailand. But he indicated that had not occurred.

The present crossings are rare and last only a few hours, Laird said.

Earlier in the day, Defense Department spokesman Jerry W. Friedheim acknowledged that U.S. advisers may accompany South Vietnamese troops who enter Laos to "take protective reaction."

Chairman J. William Fulbright of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee said the use of South Vietnamese troops in Laos "violates of spirit" of a congressional ban on use of U.S. ground forces in Laos and Thailand.

"We are going in there by

proxy," he said. "The purpose of the amendment was to avoid further involvement in Laos or Thailand, but now our clients are going in there." He said it was clear that South Vietnamese troops could not mount attacks in Laos "without our assistance and our backing."

The White House statement did not touch on the question of possible use of American advisers in Laos. Deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren told newsmen at Key Biscayne, Fla., where President Nixon spent the weekend, that he did not know the extent of South Vietnamese operations in Laos and said: "We do not have American ground troops in Laos and there is no chance in our activities in Laos."

In Jakarta, a spokesman for the South Vietnamese foreign minister said South Vietnam troops have not penetrated farther than one to two miles inside Laos in "hot pursuit" of fleeing enemy forces.

He denied that the South Vietnamese troops ever had entered Laos to carry out attacks against the Ho Chi Minh trail.

In a March 6 statement on Laos, President Nixon said U.S. warplanes were flying combat support for royal Laotian groups troops. But he did not discuss raids across the Laos-South Vietnam border at that time.