

KEY LAOTIAN TOWN SEIZED BY ENEMY

Government's Troops Quit
Saravane, on Reds' Supply
Trails in the Southeast

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By Agence France-Presse

VIENTIANE, Laos, June 9—
Premier Souvanna Phouma announced today the fall of the major southeast Laotian town of Saravane to Communist-led Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese troops.

He told the National Assembly that the single Laotian Government battalion defending the town had withdrawn toward the east but was no longer in communication with the military command.

The news has brought a wave of pessimism in Vientiane.

According to a well-informed source here, the garrison at Saravane included 500 Royal Laotian soldiers, 300 armed officials and about 100 policemen. They were said to have been deployed in six advance posts about two miles north of the town. At 5 A.M., the source reported, the command post was attacked by a force of about 300 men.

The garrison's withdrawal came so quickly that there had been no time to call for aircraft to fly to its assistance. The town's occupiers are reported to have set fire to several buildings, including the police station and Government

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offices.

Saravane, which had been encircled by Communist troops for several years, was a forward post of anti-Communist forces facing the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the route along which North Vietnam sends supplies and men to South Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia. But now the town is just about on the trail, whose importance has increased considerably since the United States and South Vietnamese incursion into the former sanctuary areas of Cambodia.

The trail, which formerly ran only east of Saravane, has a duplicate a few miles west of the city, leading to Cambodia through the Boloven highlands.

The Laotian Government still has a number of positions occupied by special forces in the Saravane region, but the Communists are expected to turn their efforts toward these bases, one of which, Nongpoua, has an airfield used by the Americans.

Town Supplied by Copters

As the Communist forces increased their pressure in the area following their capture of the southern town of Attopeu April 30, Saravane was supplied in the last three weeks only by helicopter. Last month, 3,000 of the town's 8,000 inhabitants were evacuated by American planes. Most of the remaining population sought refuge in neighboring villages.