

Many Bodies Seen at Laos Town Seized by Reds

JUN 11 1970

Special to The New York Times

VIENTIANE, Laos, June 10—

A reconnaissance pilot who flew over Saravane yesterday after the important southern Laotian town fell to Communist forces said he saw many bodies on the airfield.

According to informed military sources, three North Vietnamese companies occupied the town of 5,000, which is in the area of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, after the small Laotian Government force withdrew. The Government ordered the evacuation of the population April 30, leaving about 300 soldiers and 500 others to defend it.

The latest reports from Pakse, on the Mekong River 60 miles southwest of Saravane, said that General Phasouk, Laotian military commander in the region, was trying to decide whether efforts should be made to retake the town. Other sources said he was reluctant to launch a large-scale operation because of "the very heavy enemy presence" there.

Possible Use As Sanctuary

The loss of Saravane may have far-reaching consequences for the Government. For weeks the neutralist Premier, Prince Souvanna Phouma, has been resisting pressure from rightists urging him to break with North Vietnam and to outlaw the

Pathet Lao, which, with Hanoi's assistance, has been carrying on a protracted struggle to win control of all of Laos.

The Communist forces, apparently in an effort to take the Boloven Plateau, beside which Saravane lies, had been increasing pressure against the town for five weeks. Their objective seems to be to widen the complex of roads and paths that carry supplies from North Vietnam to the South and possibly to establish a new sanctuary to replace those lost in Cambodia.

General Phasouk has about 11 battalions, or some 12,000 men, for the defense of an area that is about a fourth of the kingdom. It is believed that he cannot afford to lose men in an operation like that required to retake Saravane because the Government is having a problem with recruiting.

Sources close to the Premier say he has refused to act against the Pathet Lao and Hanoi on the ground that such drastic moves would undoubtedly wreck the already-fragile foundation of the 1962 Geneva agreement on Laos, to which the present Government owes its legal but precarious existence.

The fall of Saravane is likely to increase pressure from those right-wing politicians who do not expect an early peace in Vietnam and who advocate a

break with the restrictions imposed by the Geneva agreement, particularly the prohibition on joining military alliances.

Coup Seems Unlikely

The occupation of Saravane will no doubt reduce Prince Souvanna Phouma's room for maneuver, and when the right-wing politicians fail to get what they want by political pressure, they may consider a military move.

Despite the uneasy political atmosphere in Vientiane, a military coup seems unlikely, at least for the time being, because the right wing is divided and without early prospect of organizing a strong faction and because the United States Embassy has made it clear that it will deal only with Prince Souvanna Phouma.

On the other hand, Prince Souvanna Phouma, though resilient and almost indispensable at this juncture, cannot be expected to last forever. The 69-year-old Premier has been running things almost singlehandedly for over eight years.

Further, the Communists' tactics appear to support his view that "the sobering, Russian influence" is quickly fading and that new Chinese Communist influence over North Vietnamese policy in Laos has begun to make itself felt.