

The Secret U.S. Losses In Laos

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Saigon

U.S. Special Forces troops leading clandestine operations in Laos have suffered many casualties in recent months which never have been made public, highly placed sources said yesterday.

These informants also confirmed that American helicopters from bases in South Vietnam are participating in ground operations in Laos.

The U.S. Command said an Army UH-1 helicopter was shot down in the lower panhandle of Laos Saturday but declined to disclose the aircraft's mission. There were no casualties in the crash.

It was learned that about 150 irregulars and ten U.S. Special Forces soldiers were used as bait in southern Laos last month to flush out two enemy battalions for American bombers. Informants said a North Vietnamese force estimated at more than 500 men was destroyed. A dozen irregulars were reported killed and 40 to 50 irregulars and two Americans wounded in the operation, they added.

FIGURES

The military command in Saigon and the U.S. Embassy in Laos, under orders from Washington, said last March 10 they would publicize all casualty figures from Laos.

The embassy in Vientiane is supposed to release all information on military personnel stationed in Laos who become casualties.

The U.S. headquarters in Saigon is responsible for reporting casualties suffered by American forces operating in Laos from bases in South Vietnam.

But command casualty summaries dating back to last March 10 list no ground combat casualties for Laos, although a highly placed source said: "American Special Forces troopers operat-

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ing out of South Vietnam are losing one or two killed in Laos every month and anywhere from three to ten wounded."

The source said the casualties are being incorporated into weekly casualty summaries under a broad heading of "cumulative figures for Southeast Asia," which includes mostly casualties in South Vietnam and those in Cambodia during incursions there last May and June.

Informants disclosed that the 160-man operation into Laos last month was one of the biggest across-the-border incursions of the war and was supported by troop-carrying U.S. Marine CH-53 helicopters. Two helicopters were shot down.

Headquarters said there have been 71 American helicopters and fixed-wing airplanes lost in Laos since March. It said 19 Americans have been killed and 71

wounded over the same period in air operations.

Meanwhile, on the battlefields of Indochina, South Vietnamese forces launched the first in a series of dry-season offensives into Cambodia aimed at forestalling North Vietnamese and Viet Cong attacks across the border.

Headquarters claimed 67 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong soldiers were killed with the help of bombers and artillery, but no weapons were reported captured.

The operation was begun Saturday in the Parrot's Beak section of Cambodia along the Phnom Penh-Saigon highway about 50 miles west of Saigon.

A communique from Cambodian military headquarters in Phnom Penh said Cambodian troops attempting to keep open the only land route to the Siem Reap-Angkor Wat area came under an 11½-hour attack that did not end until daylight yesterday.