

U. S. CASUALTIES IN LAOS REPORTED IN SECRET ACTIONS

Special Forces Said to Have Suffered Losses That Were Never Disclosed

By The Associated Press

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Oct. 25—Highly placed sources said today that United States Special Forces troops leading clandestine operations in Laos had suffered casualties in recent months that never had been made public.

The informants also said that American helicopters from bases in South Vietnam were participating in ground operations in Laos. The United States command said that an Army UH-1 helicopter was shot down in the lower panhandle of Laos yesterday but declined to disclose the aircraft's mission. The command said that there had been no casualties in the crash.

It was learned that about 150 mercenaries and 10 United States Special Forces troopers were used in an operation in southern Laos last month to force out two enemy battalions for American bombers. Informants said a North Vietnamese force estimated at more than 500 men had been destroyed. A dozen mercenaries were reported killed and 40 to 50 mercenaries and two Americans were wounded in the operation, they added.

The military command in Saigon and the United States Embassy in Laos, under orders from Washington, said in March that they would make public all casualty figures from Laos.

[In Washington, the Defense Department denied that United States Special Forces troops had suffered casualties in Laos in recent months that had not been reported. "All casualties for all of Southeast Asia have been reported on a regular basis," a Pentagon spokesman said.]
The United States Embassy in

Continued on Page 4, Column 4

Continued From Page 1, Col. 5

Vientiane, the Laotian capital, has responsibility to release all information on American military personnel stationed in Laos who become casualties. The United States command in Saigon is responsible for disclosing casualties suffered by American forces operating in Laos from bases in South Vietnam.

But command casualty summaries dating from March 10 have listed no ground combat casualties for Laos, although a highly placed source said: "American Special Forces troopers operating out of South Vietnam are losing one or two killed in Laos every month and anywhere from three to 10 wounded."

The source said that the casualties in Laos were 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 the United States incursions there last May and June.

Troops' Presence Denied

Asked about this, a spokesman for the command said: "There are no United States ground combat troops in Laos." This statement is repeated often by the command, but it does not take into account Special Forces troops leading reconnaissance patrols.

Informants said that the 160-man operation into Laos last month was one of the biggest across-the-border actions of the war and was supported by United States Marine CH-53 troop-carrying helicopters. Two helicopters were said to have been shot down.

"It was a company-sized operation," said one informant, "with the mission of interdicting a road and forcing out a couple of enemy battalions."

The sources also said that squad-sized patrols consisting of a dozen mercenaries led by United States Special Forces men were now operating in Laos, watching the Ho Chi Minh infiltration trail and trying to capture enemy soldiers for intelligence purposes.

37 of Foe Reported Killed

SAIGON, Oct. 25 (UPI) — Military spokesmen said today that allied troops killed 37 enemy soldiers without suffering any casualties in a series of battles yesterday in the northeastern sector of South Vietnam.

The operation involves 13,000 South Vietnamese soldiers, accompanied by militiamen. It is taking place in Quangtin Province, about 335 miles northeast of Saigon.

Allied sources said that the 37 enemy soldiers killed yesterday

raised to more than 300 the number of Vietcong and North Vietnamese who have died since the operation began.

United States military spokesmen said today that 14 Americans had been killed in mine and booby-trap explosions in Quangtin and neighboring Quangnam Provinces.

In Danang, South Vietnam's second largest city, a United States Army ammunition barge exploded today in the harbor. Military spokesmen said that the cause of the explosion, which caused no casualties, was undetermined. The barge had been buffeted by a typhoon that was dissipated along the South Vietnamese coast early today, and a fire was reported aboard the craft shortly before it exploded.

Casualties Reported, U. S. Says

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 25—The Defense Department denied today that United States Special Forces troops had suffered casualties in Laos in recent months that had not been reported.

"All casualties for all of Southeast Asia have been reported on a regular basis," a Pentagon spokesman declared.

The spokesman said that casualties connected with aircraft losses had all been reported. In response to questions about ground combat operations, officials at both the State Department and the Defense Department referred to President Nixon's statement in March that there were no United States combat troops in Laos, only training and logistical support troops.

Defense Department sources that Special Forces personnel were included in these two categories, and it has been reported that the Central Intelligence Agency employs former Special Forces men as advisers to privately operated armies made up of Asian personnel.

Defense sources said that American casualties incurred by units operating from South Vietnam would be included as part of the weekly casualty reports for the South Vietnam theater of operations. However, they expressed doubt that more than a handful of Americans had died in these missions and characterized the report that many casualties had gone unreported as "erroneous."