

U.S. Copter Called to Carry Shells 200 Yards for Laotians

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MUONG SOUI, Laos, Jan. 22 —It took an American helicopter two hours the other day to haul ammunition 200 yards uphill to an artillery emplacement after idle neutralist troops had left the shells exposed on the airstrip here for two days.

The cost to the American taxpayer was about \$700 for the helicopter and its crew.

The neutralist troops, who support the Laotian Government headed by Prince Souvanna Phouma, were doing no other work: yet they made no effort to haul the ammunition from the airstrip to their guns. Instead they called the helicopter.

The neutralist soldiers loaded the helicopter with the shells and the craft flew them the 200 yards to the artillery emplacement.

The ammunition had been delivered to the dusty, rocket-battered airstrip two days earlier by United States transport planes supplying this base on the southern edge of the Plaine des Jarres, some 75 miles north of Vientiane.

Muong Soui is surrounded by Communist troops, and even the rice that its neutralist defenders eat must be flown in by American planes.

But this rice, too, had to be brought to the troops rather than be carried by them about 300 yards. After the planes

landed with rice, they were ordered to take off again and to drop the rice 300 yards away.

Asked about this use of United States helicopters and planes, the neutralist commander, Maj. Kenekeo, laughed in apparent embarrassment.

The United States Requirements Office is responsible for transporting ammunition and supplies to Laotian neutralist and Government forces. The Requirements Office budget has risen from an \$80-million a year to \$208-million in two years.

Not only the United States taxpayer loses, but the troops themselves. The neutralists could have come under heavy attack while the ammunition lay on the airstrip. During the attack the ammunition would have been inaccessible.

The Requirements Office is essential if the United States position in Laos is to be maintained.

For three days, United States aircraft dispatched by the Requirements Office have flown troops from the northern Plaine des Jarres to the southern edge, transporting them safely above the Communist troops.

This ability to move troops swiftly from one threatened area to another part of the front has been a major factor in outwitting the Communist troops in Laos.