

DRIVE NEAR LAOS IS SAID TO MEET LIGHT RESISTANCE

U.S. Aides Also Say Nixon
Has Not Yet Decided on
Incursion by Saigon

EMBARGO MAY END SOON

Senators Criticize Blackout
—Aiken Says People 'Fear
and Expect the Worst'

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By **TERENCE SMITH**
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 3—The joint South Vietnamese-American force sweeping along the Laotian border in northwestern South Vietnam has encountered only light and scattered enemy opposition, according to informed Administration sources. The sources said the decision on whether the 20,000 South Vietnamese troops engaged in the operation would strike across the border into Laos still had not been made by President Nixon.

As of tonight, the sources said, no allied troops have crossed the border.

[North Vietnamese troops overran several Laotian positions on the northwestern fringes of the Plaine des Jarres and near the royal capital of Luang Prabang, the Laotian Defense Ministry reported in Vientiane.]

The operation in Vietnam, one of the largest of the war, reportedly began over the weekend. The South Vietnamese units, backed up by about 9,000 Americans, pushed westward from the old Marine base at Khesanh to the Laotian frontier. Reliable sources said some fighting had taken place, but significantly less than had been expected.

The official embargo on news reports from Saigon about the operation at the Laotian border continued for the sixth day, but officials at the White House and State Department indicated that the blackout would be lifted relatively soon.

They said that American correspondents in Vietnam had been thoroughly briefed on the details of the operation and would be permitted to file dispatches shortly.

Embargo Is Criticized

The embargo was severely criticized today by several leading Democratic and Republican Senators.

Expressing the frustration that is being felt by many on Capitol Hill, the Senate Democratic leader, Mike Mansfield of Montana, charged that the continuing secrecy surrounding the operation "is creating a very difficult situation and a certain amount of apprehension as to what is in the offing."

Senator George D. Aiken, the senior Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told reporters that his office was receiving a heavy flow of mail from constituents alarmed by the continuing reports of an allied attack into Laos.

"So long as the blackout continues," he said, "they fear and expect the worst."

Even Senator Robert C. Byrd, the assistant Democratic leader, who has been a steady supporter of the administration's

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Vietnam policy, described the embargo as "inexcusable bungling."

Acknowledging that embargoes frequently were necessary for security, he added: "But in this instance it seems likely that the enemy may know more about what we are doing than our own people know."

This view was echoed by most of the Senators who spoke out today against the embargo. Senator Aiken expressed the fear that the American people "will be the last to discover what it is their Government is doing."

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union charged for the third consecutive day that United States and South Vietnamese troops had invaded southern Laos.

Denunciation by Tass

Tass, the Soviet press agency, said, "The Soviet Union strongly denounces the armed intrusion of the United States and their Saigon puppets into Laos." It went on to charge that the situation in Indochina had become "greatly aggravated in recent days," a result of the "invasion."

The radio of the Communist-led Laotian rebels, the Pathet Lao, declared that United States and South Vietnamese troops were preparing an assault on southern Laos that would be carried out in conjunction with Thai troops that had been airlifted into the Baoven Plateau.

This appeared to be a reference to a recent report—never officially confirmed or denied by the Administration—that about 1,000 Thai soldiers were airlifted by American helicopters into southern Laos.

Finally, the Chinese Communists joined in the criticism, accusing the United States of intensifying the war in Indochina, and pledging Peking support for the Laotian people. An editorial in Jenmin Jih Pao, the official party paper, was the first direct Chinese comment on the allied operation.

"The Chinese people and Government are resolved to give strong support to the Laotian people and smash the U.S. military adventures in Laos," the editorial said.

Laotian Positions Overrun

By **TILLMAN DURDIN**
Special to The New York Times

VIENTIANE, Laos, Feb. 3—Striking during the night, northern Laos, North Vietnamese troops overran several Laotian positions on the western fringes of the Plaine des Jarres and near the royal capital of Luang Prabang, the Laotian Defense Ministry here reported.

Two North Vietnamese positions—the 312th and the 313th—were said to be in the Plaine des Jarres area. The 312th was said to be in the area of the 313th, near the village of Sisouk na C. The 312th was believed to be in the area of the 313th after regrouping. The 313th was next at the village of Sam Th. The 312th was on the scene of the plaid. The 313th was by