

South Vietnamese Forces Reported to Prepare for

By ALVIN SHUSTER
Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Feb. 5—Preparations were reported under way today in the northwestern corner of South Vietnam for a South Vietnamese attack on enemy supply routes in Laos.

The assault, which was said by informed sources to be imminent, would be aimed at crippling North Vietnam's system of infiltration and supply trails for its forces in the Indochina war. Some American military sources contend that it could set back Hanoi's war effort at least two years.

It appeared that the drive into Laos, the first such assault against the trail in the long history of the war, would probably come within a maximum of 10 days. The obstacles to going ahead with the project have now been cleared, the informants said, although a shift in plans could not be ruled out.

Crossings by Patrols

South Vietnamese reconnaissance patrols have long been reported crossing into Laos in an effort to pinpoint enemy stockpiles and estimate the strength of enemy defenses. The Associated Press reported today that its correspondents at the border had seen reinforced patrols fly by helicopters across the border for a fresh look, apparently in preparation for an assault.

A few South Vietnamese officers were said to have inspected Route 9, the newly cleared road to the border.

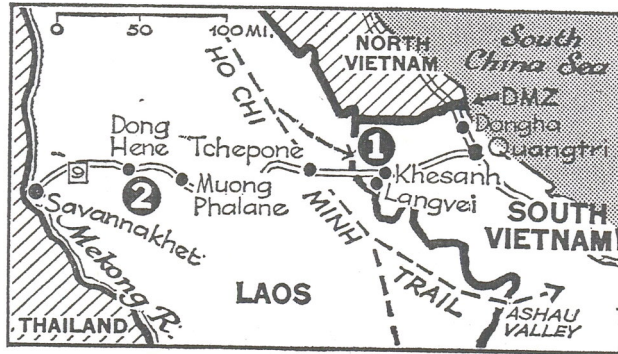
Meanwhile, 20,000 South Vietnamese soldiers and 9,000 Americans continued to move into position along the border in South Vietnam's northernmost province of Quangtri.

In any operation into Laos, however, the United States forces would remain behind, as American ground combat troops are forbidden by law from crossing the border.

Unlimited Planes Available

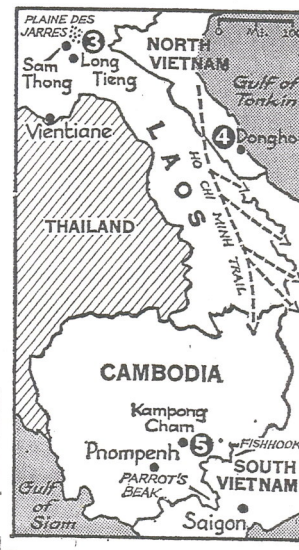
But unlimited American air power would be used to provide support for the South Vietnamese forces, which include marines, rangers, airborne units and infantrymen. American helicopter gunships, B-52's and smaller fighter-bombers would join in the drive to disrupt the enemy supply system.

B-52's continued their concentrated raids on the enemy



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Saigon units reportedly were preparing for push from Khesanh area (1) into Laos. Laotians at Dong Hene (2) were under enemy pressure, and in north foe harassed the Sam Thong area (3). In North Vietnam, a missile site near Donghoi (4) was struck by U.S. jet. Allied drive continued near Kompong Cham (5).



trail network in Laos. The United States command also announced that the giant bombers had attacked North Vietnamese positions in Quangtri Province in support of the American and South Vietnamese operating there. Targets in Cambodia were also attacked by B-52's, the command said.

At the same time, it disclosed that a United States Air Force F-105 fighter-bomber, flying missions over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, had crossed the border into North Vietnam to fire two Shrike missiles at enemy radar-controlled antiaircraft positions 31 miles west of Donghoi.

Tracking Reported

This, the command said, was a "protective reaction" strike. A spokesman said the pilot had made the attack after electronic devices indicated that his plane was being tracked by radar by the enemy installation preparatory to opening fire. It was the first announced attack on North Vietnamese missile sites since a series of five such strikes was reported in a three-day period three weeks ago.

There is some concern here that the publicity surrounding the allied operation in South Vietnam's northwestern corner may have enabled the enemy forces to bolster their defenses and perhaps move many of their stockpiles. But South Vietnamese officers express confidence that they could still cause severe damage to the enemy with an assault across the border.

Since the operation has been under way for seven days, what has appeared to be delay in sending the South Vietnamese into Laos has been attributed in some quarters here to hesitation in Washington arising

'Imminent' Drive Into Laos

from apprehension over the possible domestic political reaction. But informed sources contended that the decision now has been made.

American officials supporting the plan are said to feel that any short-term political drawbacks would be offset by the long-term military benefits as well as by an announcement of substantial troop reductions expected from President Nixon in April.

Thieu Favors Plan

President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam has long sought American backing for the venture. Aware of the Congressional prohibitions against the use of American ground troops

in Laos, he apparently convinced Washington that his forces were strong enough to do the job, given intense American air and logistical support. It is understood that he left the final decision to signal the assault to President Nixon.

The operation, which is known as Dewey Canyon II, was hampered today by cold winds and cloudy skies of the northeast monsoon season.

No ground contact with the enemy was reported, continuing the pattern of virtually no enemy resistance since the operation began early last Saturday. But the United States command reported that five enemy soldiers had been killed 15 miles northwest of Khesanh in an engagement involving helicopter gunships.

In the operation so far, United States forces have cleared Route 9 to the Laotian border, repaired bridges and airstrips, providing highway security, reoccupied Khesanh, the old Marine Corps base that was under siege for 77 days in 1968, and opened a base at Langvei, about three miles from the border. They have also installed some heavy artillery in the border regions.

The movements of the South Vietnamese forces have remained secret. Reporters who went to their command post at Dongha were turned away by military policemen.

New Pressure in Laos

Special to The New York Times

VIENTIANE, Laos, Feb. 5—North Vietnamese and Laotian Communist-led forces today were reported to be continuing their pressure on government forces in northern Laos with small-scale attacks and aggressive patrolling near Sam Thong and Long Tieng, 80 air

miles north of Vientiane. Both are government-held mountain strong points near the Plaine des Jarres.

Striking North of Sam Thong last night, a Communist unit reportedly occupied a Government outpost. Another Communist contingent, it was said, was repulsed from a small Government hilltop position between Sam Thong and Long Tieng.

Toll in Cambodia Reported

SAIGON, Feb. 5 (UPI)—Mil-

itary spokesmen said here today that South Vietnamese and Cambodian troops searching suspected enemy sanctuaries in Cambodia had reported killing 69 Communists in a battle yesterday. The allied toll was put at 7 South Vietnamese killed and 28 wounded.

The sweep reportedly involving about 18,500 South Vietnamese and 3,000 Cambodians, was said to be going on 15 miles inside Cambodia southeast of Kompong ham.