

BUILD-UP GROWING AT LAOS BORDER

Helicopter Traffic Indicates South Vietnamese Force Is Preparing to Move In

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Feb. 7 — Heavy helicopter traffic shuttled between American and South Vietnamese bases along the Laotian border today as Allied activity quickened in preparation for an expected South Vietnamese strike into Laos.

Observers at positions along the border in the northwest of South Vietnam reported seeing troop-carrying helicopters heading west toward Laos.

There was, however, no indication by late tonight that any South Vietnamese border crossing had begun in force. Helicopter reconnaissance flights have regularly crossed the border in recent days and South Vietnamese ground troops are known to be conducting limited ground forays into Laos to gather intelligence.

6 Killed in Bombing

As has been the case ever since the huge United States South Vietnamese troop movement to military Region I began nine days ago, the enemy was rarely in evidence, with no engagements reported today. American casualties remained at one killed and seven wounded, according to the United States command. The enemy toll was reported unchanged at 14 killed.

The most serious allied loss in the last 24 hours occurred last night when a plane, believed to be a United States Navy A-6, dropped cluster bombs on a South Vietnamese unit six miles west of Khesanh, killing six South Vietnamese soldiers and wounding 51.

Cluster bombs spray a number of smaller bombs upon impact, each of which explodes to blanket a wide area with shrapnel. The command, which acknowledged the accident under questioning at the daily briefing this afternoon, said an investigation was under way.

In action in Cambodia, the South Vietnamese command re-

Continued on Page 13, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 5

ported another sharp battle with enemy troops near the Mekong River city of Kompang Cham. The command said enemy troops, beginning at 3 A.M. fired 500 mortar shells at positions of an armored cavalry unit and two Ranger battalions, following up with a ground attack.

The Government spokesman said 119 enemy soldiers were killed in the attack, mainly by artillery and air strikes called in by the defenders. South Vietnamese casualties were listed as 2 killed and 30 wounded.

In a clash near the same spot yesterday, South Vietnamese troops reported killing 91 enemy soldiers. Ten South Vietnamese were reported killed and 37 wounded.

The South Vietnamese military spokesman continued to profess no knowledge of a planned attack on the Ho Chi Minh Trail network in Laos.

He denied that any South Vietnamese troops had already

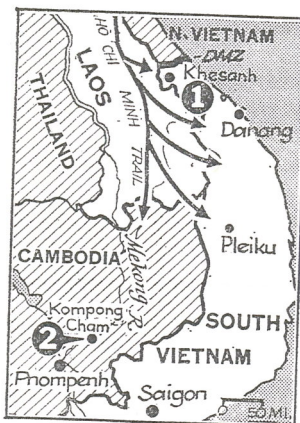
moved into Laos. However, he appeared to offer some hint of the action ahead when he said that the activity in Military Region I constituted only a "movement" of South Vietnamese troops and "there is no operation yet."

Even while eyewitnesses were reporting on South Vietnamese incursions into Cambodia last April, the Government spokesman was denying they were taking place.

Correspondents of The New York Times at Quangtri, headquarters for the entire operation in the north, which is known as Dewey Canyon II, reported unusually heavy helicopter traffic today between Quangtri and Khesanh and Langvei, the two key United States bases and command centers to the west only miles from the Laotian border.

There were also helicopter transport flights from Phubai, headquarters of the United States 1st Airborne Division, which is contributing a large number of the 9,000 American troops taking part in the operation along with 20,000 South Vietnamese soldiers. The United States has said that no American ground troops or advisers will cross into Laos.

Thousands of South Vietnamese troops and scores of armored vehicles have been massing at border crossing points, apparently waiting for the order to advance into Laos to cut the flow of enemy supplies to the South.



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Allied activity quickened along Laotian border (1). In Cambodia, battle broke out near Kompang Cham (2).