

Rain, Fog and Mud Slow Drive Into Laos

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Special to The New York Times

QUANGTRI, South Vietnam, Wednesday, Feb. 10—Heavy rains and dense fog fell unexpectedly over the South Vietnamese drive against enemy supply trails in Laos yesterday, virtually halting United States helicopter supply flights and other air support.

The rains mired essential supply convoys in red mud and otherwise hampered the South Vietnamese westward advance, which, according to a military spokesman in Saigon, had reached a point six miles inside Laos along Route 9.

[A dispatch of The Associated Press said the main column of troops and tanks had reached a point 12 miles from the border

and that helicopter-borne troops had set up an artillery fire base three miles farther west.]

[About 300 miles to the south, a parallel westward drive by South Vietnamese forces into Cambodia ran into fierce resistance, The Associated Press reported. Communist forces were also reported stepping up their pressure near the Plaine des Jarres in northern Laos, where they attacked outposts near the Laotian base at Long Tieng.]

Meanwhile 4 American soldiers were killed and 11 were wounded here in the northern part of South Vietnam in three shelling attacks by Communist units that had moved up into mortar range of several United

States positions, under cover of the rain and fog. The attacks came near the Laotian border and in the hills northeast of the main allied supply base at Khesanh.

The South Vietnamese drive into Laos was preceded by a huge allied operation in this northernmost province of Quangtri involving 9,000 United States troops and 20,000 South Vietnamese. The operation here began Jan. 30.

Reliable sources said that the South Vietnamese task force in Laos, which reportedly numbers about 4,000 men, was staying close to Route 9 so far, while American spotter planes and helicopter gunships patrolled either side of the road.

In Saigon, a United States

military spokesman said American units in South Vietnam began artillery fire across the border at 6:30 A.M. Monday in support of South Vietnamese troops.

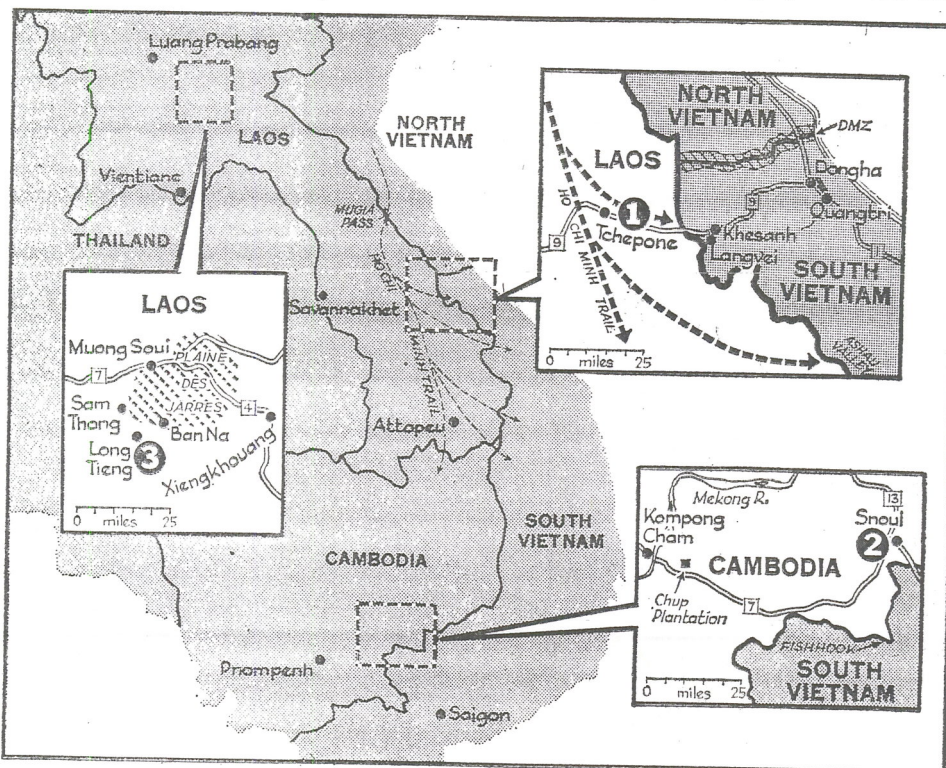
American officers said the sudden worsening of the weather had not been expected by allied meteorologists. The steady rain that fell all day yesterday in the steep, heavily forested mountains west of here turned the thick, fine red dust on the newly reopened Route 9 into sloughs of slipperiness, clinging mud.

Parts of the crudely engineered road, which United States forces opened to the border, were deeply rutted by the few trucks that straggled through to Khesanh from the coast yesterday. An army spokesman said the road would be closed for at least six hours today while emergency repairs were made.

The new dirt airstrip at Khesanh, which Army engineers had confidently predicted would handle 15 tons of supplies from C-130 cargo planes every 15 minutes, has been used as a helicopter landing zone ever since the first and only C-130 to land there got mired last Thursday.

The substitution, at least for the present, of large helicopters for airplanes to supply the operation has added to the problems of the allied commands, since fuel for the cop- ters must be trucked in to Khesanh along the already inadequate road.

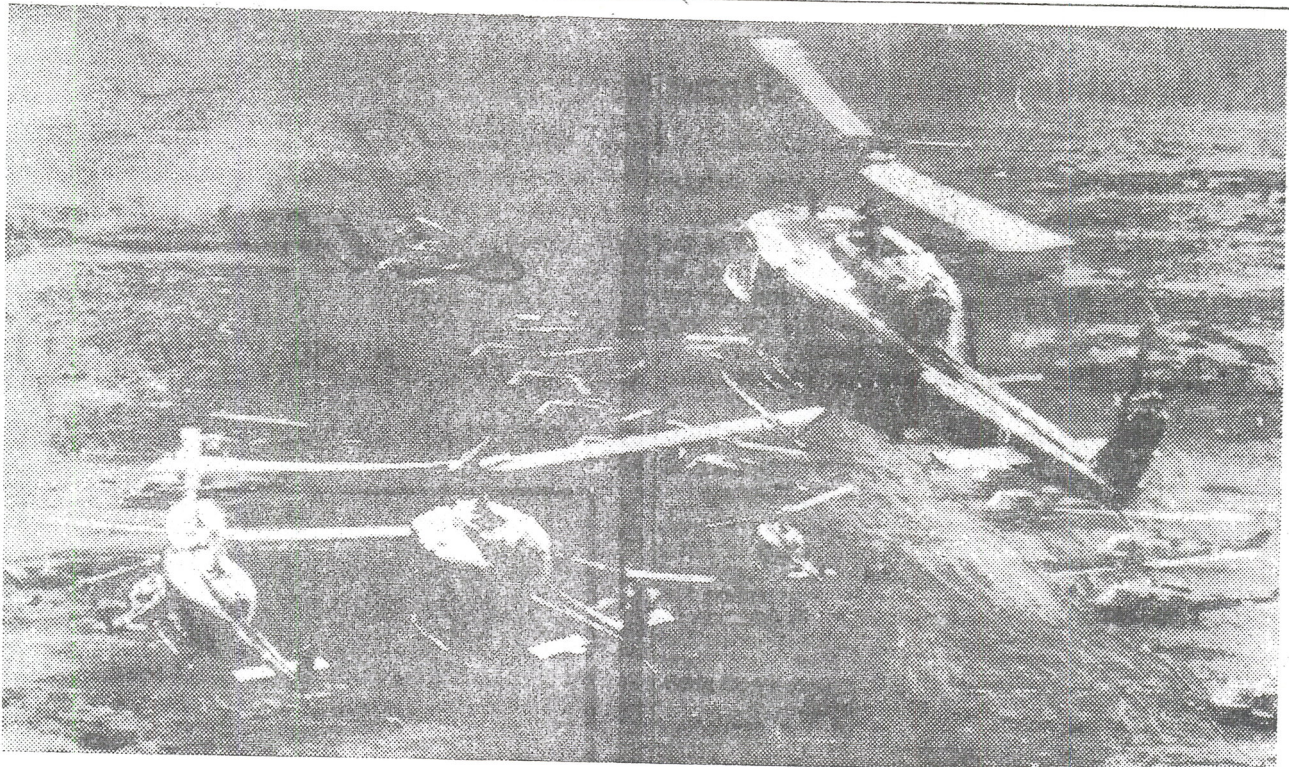
Bad weather has been a problem for nearly all allied thrusts against the enemy in northwest South Vietnam. In the spring of 1968, North Vietnamese soldiers used the covering fog to move their artillery within range of Khesanh



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Advance Saigon units were reported 15 miles inside Laos (1). South Vietnamese on a similar sweep in Cambodia came under heavy attack near Snoul (2). Communist forces in northern Laos were increasing pressure on the Government's base at Long Tieng (3).



United Press International

GATHERING FORCES: U.S. copters at Khesanh on Monday to ferry supplies and South Vietnamese troops into Laos

and nearly forced the American marines there to abandon the base. Heavy fog and rain made resupplying difficult and prevented United States bombers from hitting the enemy guns.

Road Damage Reported

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Wednesday, Feb. 10 (AP) — South Vietnamese troops and tanks, pressing west in southern Laos yesterday, were reported slowed both by bad weather and by the craters gouged in the road by United States bombers.

They also were said to be halting to seize caches of munitions.

Tchepone, the main trans-

shipment point on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and a North Vietnamese operating base, was reported almost deserted. The town, which has been heavily bombed, is about 30 miles inside Laos.

Reports from the field said that United States helicopter gunships, operating ahead of the South Vietnamese, attacked enemy supply depots about 15 miles from Tchepone, causing large fires and some explosions.

South Vietnamese officers said their intelligence reports indicated that the North Vietnamese troops in the operation area were mostly young and untrained and that the seasoned troops were deployed in Cambodia.

A South Vietnamese field commander said he expected his troops to push on westward along Route 9 during the next 10 days toward Savannakhet, on the western border of Laos, thus cutting all the branches of roads that form the Ho Chi Minh trail.

Sharp Clashes Near Snoul

Meanwhile, the South Vietnamese command, reporting on a parallel operation in Cambodia by 20,000 of its troops, said North Vietnamese forces deployed near the Cambodian town of Snoul had made three attacks against the advancing soldiers.

In the ensuing battles, the Saigon headquarters reported,

73 North Vietnamese were killed. South Vietnamese losses were put at 10 killed and 42 wounded.

Snoul is 90 miles north of Saigon north of the Fishhok area of Cambodia. South Vietnamese troops have entered Cambodia through the Fishhok and the Parrot's Beak section farther south to join other South Vietnamese already in the country in a sweep against enemy supply base.

Farther west, forest fires were reported raging in the huge Chup rubber plantation. The fires were believed to have been touched off by allied air strikes. South Vietnamese and Communist forces have been heavily engaged in the area.