

8 MORE COPTERS REPORTEDLY LOST BY U.S. OVER LAOS

Number Is Now Put at 15—
Pilots Based at Quangtri
Tell of New Downings

500 MISSIONS IN A DAY

Saigon Says Arms Cache
Has Been Found—Peking
Cautions on Incursion

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By The Associated Press

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Feb. 12 — Eight more United States helicopters were reported to have been shot down over Laos today, bringing to 15 the number lost in support of the South Vietnamese drive against enemy supply trails there.

The report came from pilots at the allied base at Quangtri, in the northern part of South Vietnam.

The United States had acknowledged earlier the loss of seven American helicopters in the first four days of the South Vietnamese offensive, which began Monday.

Transport Crashed

In addition, it reported the loss of four craft supporting South Vietnamese troops operating in Cambodia or in South Vietnam and the crash of a C-123 transport. At least 16 Americans were reportedly killed and 7 wounded in the total of 20 crashes.

The United States command gave a clue to the rising toll by announcing that United States helicopters flew 500 missions across the border yesterday. These included troop airlift, medical evacuation and supply flights as well as combat missions by helicopter gunships.

[Communist China said in

a broadcast statement that it "will not remain indifferent" to the Laos incursion and that it would "take all effective measures" to aid the Communist forces. However, it expressed confidence that "the Indochinese peoples" could handle the situation. In Washington, United States officials said that there were no indications that Communist China intended to intervene in Laos.]

There was no word on South Vietnamese helicopter losses. At least two were known to have been shot down earlier this week.

Meanwhile, the South Vietnamese command announced that its forces had cut several branches of the Ho Chi Minh

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Trail in Laos and uncovered the largest North Vietnamese arms cache found since the drive began. The South Vietnamese called a special briefing for newsmen at Quangtri to make the announcement, but provided no details.

There were reports that the enemy cache contained more than 500 weapons and 800 cases of ammunition.

A spokesman, Lieut. Col. Le Trung Hien, said the deepest penetration into Laos so far was about 13 miles. However, unofficial reports have placed some South Vietnamese units up to 25 miles from the South Vietnamese border.

He said the operation had resulted in the killing of 205 enemy soldiers and the capture of two. South Vietnamese forces, he said, have lost 35 killed and 124 wounded.

In another development, the United States Command issued a statement denying a report by the American Broadcasting Company indicating that American advisers were operating with South Vietnamese airborne units in Laos.

The command said that American helicopter crewmen had evacuated the bodies of four United States crewmen killed last Monday* when their helicopter was shot down, but not a fifth American body wearing the uniform of the South Viet-

namese airborne troops as reported by A.B.C.

Instead, the command said, South Vietnamese paratroopers who had been killed aboard the same helicopter were evacuated. The command said the fifth body had been that of a South Vietnamese paratrooper.

* 8 FEB 71