

MAIN ALLIED BASE OF LAOS DRIVE HIT

Shelling of Quangtri Is First
Since Start of Incursion—
No Casualties Reported

FEB 25 1971

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Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Thursday, Feb. 25—The main allied rear base for the South Vietnamese drive in Laos was shelled by enemy gunners last night for the first time since the operation began.

No casualties were reported in the attack at Quangtri in which 17 rockets were said to have landed on the installation.

This incident in the northernmost province of South Vietnam was one of the few officially reported by military spokesmen, indicating that action in the South Vietnamese drive was tapering off. [Reports from the field said, according to The Associated Press, that two South Vietnamese positions were under attack about 10 miles inside Laos, one to the west of Route 9.]

South Vietnamese spokesmen reported again that forward elements of the 16,000-man Government force in Laos remained about 16 miles from the border. No advance has been reported in about a week.

[In Washington, Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird and a senior military aide insisted that the South Vietnamese had not "bogged down" in Laos but that they had deliberately paused to determine where the enemy might try to attack.]

Meanwhile, spokesmen for the American and South Vietnamese commands drew attention to the amounts of enemy materiel captured or destroyed since the operation began on Feb. 8.

For the first time, the United States command made public a summary of the damage

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that American planes and helicopters are estimated to have inflicted in their missions in support of Operation Lam Son 719, the South Vietnamese code name for the offensive.

The damage estimates, a spokesman said, are accurate guesses worked out under a complicated system.

He said they were based on reports from forward air controllers, aircraft crews and South Vietnamese ground units that moved into the areas after air attacks. Also taken into account, he added, are secondary explosions and fires.

The spokesman said that 500 enemy soldiers had been killed by American planes and helicopter gunships.

He said that a strike by B-52 bombers of the Strategic Air Command on Feb. 10 blew up more than 500 tons of ammunition, and that four days later 300 tons were destroyed in a raid.

The spokesman said also that American air action had destroyed 120 supply and weapons caches, 330 vehicles, 115 bunkers, 420 structures and 35 gun positions.

Last Thursday and Friday, he said, helicopter gunships destroyed four fuel pipelines running parallel to the Ho Chi Minh Trail network. He did not specify which of the labyrinthine branches of the network the pipelines paralleled.

The Vietnamese command reported the destruction of some 1,400 yards of a fuel pipeline four inches in diameter. The North Vietnamese are known to supply the heavy truck traffic along the network through these pipelines.

The South Vietnamese command said its ground forces and artillery and air strikes had destroyed 12 Soviet-built tanks, 87 trucks, 400 bicycles, 550 houses, 132,000 gallons of fuel, 12,703 tons of ammuni-

tion and large quantities of food.

In addition, South Vietnamese forces were reported to have captured a warehouse containing boots and gloves, 2,100 cooking pots, two tons of mimeograph paper, 2,000 chickens, 20 pigs, 1,030 shovels and many tons of food.

The growing emphasis on the Laotian operation as designed to capture enemy supplies while the advance of the troops appears stalled was interpreted here as indicative of doubt that the goal initially stated for the offensive—the cutting of the Ho Chi Minh Trail or at least the principal arteries of the supply system—would be achieved or even attempted.

The United States command announced yesterday that a total of 25 helicopters had been lost as a result of enemy action in the Laotian campaign and that four more crashed through other causes. Of the total of 29 helicopters lost, 18 were reported downed in Laos and 11 in South Vietnam.

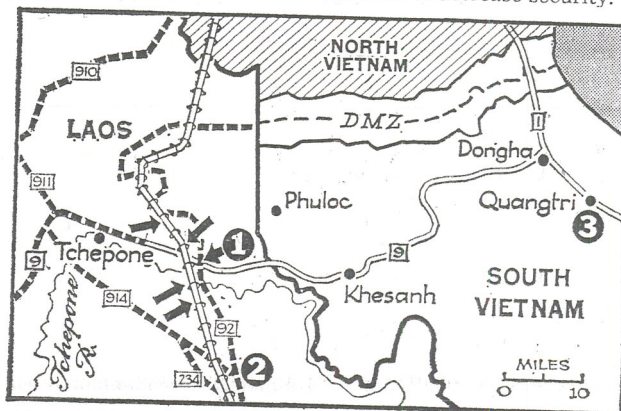
Forty Americans died in these craft, the command said, and 26 were wounded. It added that 15 men were missing in the various actions, which involved transport, medical evacuation and other flights in support of the South Vietnamese operation in forbiddingly mountainous and jungled territory.

Route 9 in Laos Still Closed

KHESANH, South Vietnam, Feb. 24 (AP)—Brig. Gen. Pham Van Phu, commander of the South Vietnamese First Infantry Division, said today that Route 9 in Laos remained closed to supply missions because of North Vietnamese ambushes.

"We must finish clearing it," he said in an interview.

The general reported that the road had been used once or twice for supply but added that the South Vietnamese were clearing areas on both sides of the road to increase security.



The New York Times

Feb. 25, 1971

Saigon units reportedly have cut enemy oil pipeline at points marked by arrows and blocked supply trail Route 92 nearby (1). They are said to harass another branch of the trail system (2). Foe shelled Quangtri base (3).