

Biggest Battle Yet

Fresh Saigon Units On Way to Laos

Airlift To Invasion Front

Associated Press

Saigon

The South Vietnamese military command is sending as many as 16,000 troops northward to bolster battered units fighting seven North Vietnamese regiments in southern Laos, military sources near the battle front reported yesterday.

They said the troops are being drawn from other areas of South Vietnam and flown to the Laotian operations zones in C-130 cargo planes.

The South Vietnamese originally committed 16,000 troops to the Laotian incursion that began February 8. It could not be determined from the military informants as Quang Tri how many of the 16,000 fresh troops would be replacements or how many would be classified as additional troops inside Laos.

The South Vietnamese forces facing seven enemy regiments in Laos are engaged in the biggest battle yet of the Indochina war.

REACTION

Lieutenant General James W. Sutherland, commander of U.S. forces supporting the South Vietnamese offensive, said the North Vietnamese appear to be marshalling all their forces to thwart the Laotian drive.

"This is it," he said at Khe Sanh. "The enemy has chosen to react with everything he's got left so it appears we'll have to fight him right here."

As the third week of the Laotian campaign ended, the fierce fighting of the past several days appeared eased somewhat around the South Vietnamese bases on Hills 30 and 31.

But U.S. helicopters providing fire support still drawing heavy anti-air fire and the number continued to command three more Saturday