

# U.S. COPTERS TAKE SAIGON BATTALION FARTHER INTO LAOS

500 Infantrymen Are Flown  
to Area 7 to 9 Miles West  
of Principal Fighting

## BORDER CLASHES HEAVY

Enemy Force Attacks South  
Vietnamese Paratroops—

4 U.S. Copters Downed

MAR 5 1971

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By CRAIG R. WHITNEY

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Friday, March 5—South Vietnamese forces in Laos have begun a new move westward in their drive to cut the North Vietnamese supply-trail network.

Stalled for two weeks no more than 16 miles inside Laos, South Vietnamese troops were flown in United States helicopters to landing zones seven to nine miles farther west, according to military spokesmen at the rear base in Quangtri, in the northeastern corner of South Vietnam.

They said that the new landings, which began Wednesday and continued yesterday, carried a reinforced infantry battalion of about 500 men to a forward position just southeast of Tchepone, long described as an enemy supply transshipment point and staging area.

[The United States command said three American helicopters were shot down over Laos Thursday and one was downed in northernmost South Vietnam, Reuters reported.]

## 400 Reported Killed

Meanwhile, heavy fighting was reported within six miles of the South Vietnamese border. Eight hundred South Vietnamese paratroops reportedly were attacked by a North Vietnamese regiment Wednesday night and yesterday a mile southeast of Hill 31.

South Vietnamese military spokesmen in Quangtri said the paratroops were supported by artillery and air strikes and killed nearly 400 enemy soldiers. Yesterday, in the same general area, they destroyed two North Vietnamese tanks, the spokesmen reported.

The United States command here announced that late Tuesday evening three surface-to-air missiles were launched from sites in North Vietnam against an unarmed American Air Force reconnaissance plane flying 20 miles northwest of Khesanh, over the demilitarized zone straddling the border between North and South Vietnam.

Although the slow propeller-

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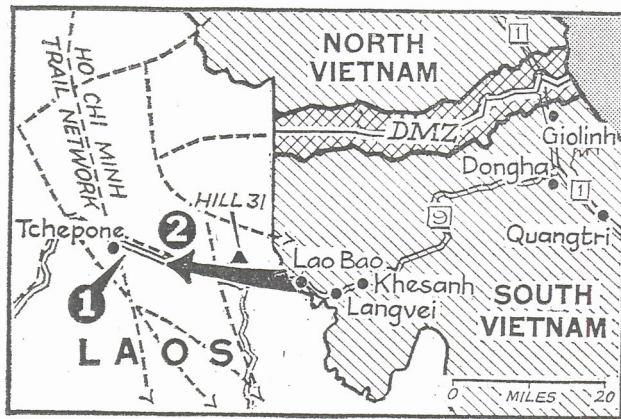
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driven aircraft was not hit, the missile attack was the fourth the command has reported this week. All the attacks took place Tuesday, and two of them involved the first announced instances of SAM firings across the demilitarized zone at airplanes flying over South Vietnam.

In the fighting in Laos Wednesday, the South Vietnamese command said, enemy gunners fired more than 300 mortar and recoilless rifle shells into the important fire support base of Alouoi, 11 miles west-northwest of the border-crossing point at Laobao. The base is close to Route 9, the east-west road that passes through Tchepone. Four other shelling attacks on South Vietnamese bases in Laos were also reported.

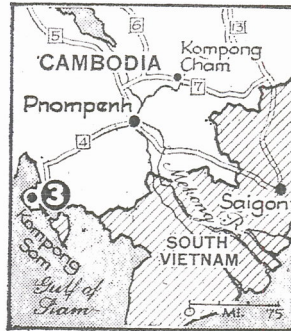
With the new landings, the South Vietnamese, after enduring two weeks of shelling and intense ground fighting around fixed positions into which they had been airlifted by American helicopters, appear to be trying to restore some of the momentum they lost in the attacks.

The South Vietnamese are learning that if they stay in one place for more than 24 hours, they are inviting shelling, one American adviser in Khesanh said.



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Saigon troops moved by air to Tchepone area (1) after being stalled for two weeks 16 miles from border (2). In Cambodia, foe struck oil refinery at Kompong Som (3).



The South Vietnamese operation in Laos, which began Feb. 8, encountered stiff North Vietnamese resistance around Feb. 21, when a ranger battalion holding a hilltop position just west of the border was overrun. Since last week there has been heavy fighting on and around Hill 31.

About 2,000 troops reportedly were moved into Laos on Tuesday to reinforce the 16,000 that Saigon said were already there.

In other war action, the giant Danang air base, from which many of the American planes operating in support of the South Vietnamese forces in Laos take off, was hit by about 15 rounds of 122-mm. rocket fire. The command reported eight casualties, light damage and no fatalities.