

Pentagon Reports Foe May Be Firing New Missile in Laos

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WASHINGTON, March 4 (AP)—A Defense Department spokesman said today that the North Vietnamese might be firing a new anti-aircraft missile in Laos against United States aircraft supporting the South Vietnamese drive against enemy supply trails.

The spokesman, Jerry W. Friedheim said at a briefing there was a heavy surface-to-air missile fire from the Tchepone area yesterday. He called it the first major firing of enemy anti-aircraft missiles outside North Vietnam.

Mr. Friedheim said returning pilots had not identified the missiles as Soviet-made SAM-2's, which have been aimed at American aircraft over North Vietnam since 1965.

The Pentagon spokesman suggested the new weapon might be a smaller tactical mobile missile. He said there was no evidence it was the more advanced SAM-3, designed for use against low-flying aircraft.

No photos have been taken of the new missiles, Mr. Friedheim said, indicating that experts were trying to figure out the nature of the missile from reports by pilots.

Mr. Friedheim said he had seen nothing to support some reports that the enemy was using a hand-fired heat-seeking missile.

According to official accounts, the United States has lost 30 helicopters in the Lao-

tian operation so far as well as several fixed-wing aircraft.

The presence of anti-aircraft missile weapons in the Ho Chi Minh Trail area would represent a serious threat, particularly to helicopters, whose maneuverability is limited.