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KY SEEKS STEP-UP IN U.S. AIR SUPPORT

Says It Is Needed in Laos to
Avert 'Difficult Situation'

By IVER PETERSON

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KHESANH, South Vietnam, March 4 — Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky said today that unless South Vietnamese forces in Laos received increased American air support, they would be "in a difficult situation."

The Vice President, who is on an extended tour of inspection of the month-old South Vietnamese drive in Laos, said that his country's forces were not in any danger—"that is not the right word," he said—because of the current level of American support.

But he said that unless American firepower and logistical support are increased, "our troops in Laos will be in a difficult situation."

He said that there had been "discrepancies" in American support of the operation until now, but stressed that those problems had occurred primarily at the outset and that "the situation is improving."

20,000 Copter Sorties

More than 20,000 United States helicopter sorties and 2,500 bombing missions have been flown since the operation began Feb. 8.

The vice president, who is a former marshal of the South Vietnamese Air Force, also said that bombing of North Vietnam was "a necessity" to support the operation. But he would not specify whether he meant a continuation of American air strikes against North Vietnamese missile sites or a resumption of bombing of all military targets north of the demilitarized zone that straddles the border between North and South Vietnam.

He refused to comment on President Nguyen Van Thieu's declaration last night that the South might invade the North unless Hanoi withdrew its forces from the South.

The Vice President said in particular that increased B-52 strikes were needed to help the South Vietnamese overcome the disadvantages of the mountainous and jungled Laotian terrain. He added that the jet fighter-bombers used by the United States to support the South Vietnamese were not as effective in the rough terrain as the big bombers.

Discrepancies Held Normal

"I do not blame anyone," the Vice President said, "and I think these discrepancies are normal." He pointed out that Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower had similar problems of organizing allied resources for the invasion of Normandy in World War II.

The Vice President is known to have been skeptical of some aspects of the Laotian incursion, since it was launched, particularly about the preparations for support of the Vietnamese troops in the field.

Since the operation began, complaints of insufficient American air and logistical support have also been voiced by South Vietnamese troops returning from battles in Laos.

However, the Saigon command had repeatedly denied that such problems exist.