

# 1,000 U.S. PLANES BOMB FOE IN LAOS AND IN CAMBODIA

NY TIMES

## Heavy Raids Reported Near Tchepone, Where Saigon Expects Counterattack

MAR 8 1971

By The Associated Press

SAIGON, South Vietnam, March 7 — The United States continued widespread bombing raids today, sending more than 1,000 planes into action against enemy forces in Laos and Cambodia.

Some of the raids were in support of two South Vietnamese operations in Cambodia. The first operation, a new move by 2,000 men, is directed against what were described as North Vietnamese and Vietcong sanctuaries in eastern Cambodia. The second is the larger, continuing South Vietnamese operation against the enemy.

American planes also carried out heavy air strikes around Tchepone, a major North Vietnamese supply shipment point 25 miles inside Laos on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. South Vietnamese forces captured the town this weekend.

[The South Vietnamese troops at Tchepone were reported to be consolidating their positions in anticipation of a possible enemy counterattack from the north.]

### Some Planes Held Back

There are 1,200 to 1,500 American planes available for use in South Vietnam. Some were held in reserve, apparently for use against surface-to-air missile sites in North Vietnam should they threaten United States bombers attacking targets along the border.

The planes also flew in support of Laotian Government troops fighting in northern Laos.

The raids were mounted from at least four bases in Thailand, half a dozen bases in South Vietnam and from carriers of the Seventh Fleet in the Gulf of Tonkin.

In addition, United States helicopters are flying thousands of support missions—armed cover, medical evacuation and troop transportation.

The United States command

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said that 2,400 helicopter missions were flown in Laos and Cambodia yesterday and that three more United States helicopters were shot down and destroyed in Laos. Two crewmen were reported to have been wounded in the three crashes.

In a revised report, the command said that 56 American helicopters have been lost in the Laotian campaign: 44 in Laos and 12 on the South Vietnamese side of the border. Again revising casualty figures in the air losses, the command reported 50 Americans killed, 14 missing and 43 wounded.

A South Vietnamese communiqué said that 5,699 North Vietnamese soldiers had been killed since the Laos invasion began Feb. 8. About a third of this number was attributed to United States air strikes. South Vietnamese losses for the same period were put at 423 killed, 99 missing and 1,522 wounded.

The big United States base at Quangtri in northeastern South Vietnam, a staging base for the Laotian operation, was shelled at mid-afternoon for the second time in less than 24 hours. The base was shelled the first time shortly before

midnight, only a few hours after enemy gunners opened fire on Khesanh, another forward post supporting the operation.

United States sources in Quangtri said that at least seven Americans had been killed and eight wounded in the attacks.

## Counterattack Possible

By IVER PETERSON

Special to The New York Times

KHESANH, South Vietnam, March 7—South Vietnamese troops at the town of Tchepone were reported to be consolidating their newly gained positions on the Ho Chi Minh Trail today in anticipation of a possible counterattack from the north.

The commander of South Vietnamese troops in Laos, Lieut. Gen. Hoang Xuan Lam, said at his mountaintop command post overlooking this base that the enemy was getting reinforcements to the north of Tchepone.

"So now I await their decision," General Lam continued. "Maybe they will fight on the north side of our flank—I don't know."

General Lam described the South Vietnamese occupation of bombed-out Tchepone as "a big surprise for the Communists," which the enemy might try to

undo by driving down from unchallenged infiltration routes to the north. The general added that he had no plans to move his troops farther west now, in case the counterattack should begin.

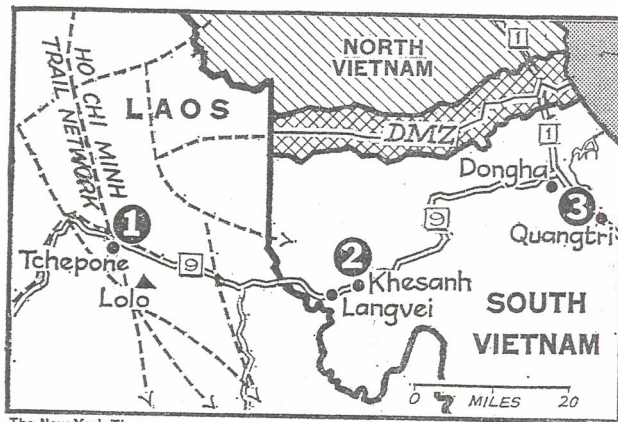
### Four Years of Bombing

Tchepone, 24 miles west of the South Vietnamese border by air, lies in a wide valley whose surrounding hills are already occupied by South Vietnamese artillery and infantry forces. General Lam said that the town had been almost leveled during the last four years by repeated American air attacks against nearby supply trail junctions.

The first counterattacks against the new forward positions came at an artillery base called Lolo about six miles southeast of Tchepone. A South Vietnamese spokesman said that 31 of the enemy had been killed and that 4 of Saigon's soldiers had been killed.

South Vietnamese troops later reportedly fought a brief skirmish at an undisclosed distance south of Tchepone. Six of the enemy were reportedly killed and a large amount of food and ammunition was captured.

Despite this action, the chief of staff of the First South Vietnamese Infantry Division,



The New York Times

March 8, 1971

**U.S. bombers supporting Saigon's sweep struck at enemy's positions around Tchepone (1). Enemy gunners attacked U.S. bases at Khesanh (2) and Quangtri (3).**

whose troops occupied Tchepone, said "The tempo of the fighting has gone down, especially in the last three days." He speculated that the relative lull might cover enemy preparations for a counteroffensive.

#### Copter Crew in Laos Saved

QUANGTRI, South Vietnam, March 7 (Reuters)—Seven crewmen of an American helicopter shot down over Laos on Friday were rescued today after being stranded for 48 hours in an area surrounded by North Vietnamese troops.

The crewmen were shot down 13 miles inside Laos and about 500 yards north of Route 9, the axis of the invasion, while on a mission to recover another downed helicopter in the area.

At a news conference here, Capt. Ralph E. Elliott, 23 years old, of Jacksonville, Fla., said his helicopter had been hit by heavy ground fire when it was about 20 feet above the ground. He said none of his men had been injured and he had been able to land.

He said he and his men had taken cover in a nearby bunker and he had used his small survival radio to notify other helicopters of his position.

Captain Elliott was promoted from lieutenant while he hid in Laos.