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U.S. Reports 1,600 Blasts In Raids on Foe's Supplies

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Wednesday, March 10 — Air strikes by United States fighter-bombers in Laos reportedly set off 1,600 explosions of enemy fuel and ammunition supplies yesterday.

This total, announced by the United States command, was the largest single day's tally of enemy supplies reported destroyed since the start of the Laotian operation Feb. 8. The explosions were counted by American pilots in the same area where South Vietnamese troops had observed 500 secondary explosions set off by B-52 strikes Sunday about a miles northeast of Tchepone, a main enemy supply hub about 25 miles inside Laos.

According to a command spokesman, American air strikes and South Vietnamese ground forces have already destroyed or captured more enemy ammunition, food and other supplies in the last four weeks than the enemy forces lost during the first two months of last year's allied invasion of their sanctuaries in Cambodia. At that time, American commanders estimated that the enemy's activities had been set back from six months to a year because of losses in Cambodia.

U.S. Cautions on Results

However, an American Army spokesman cautioned today that "It's still too early to translate the results of the Laotian operations into an expression of the effect they will have on the enemy."

"But it's pretty clear that if you disrupt their base areas you will affect their future operations," he added.

The South Vietnamese command reported today that 13,411 tons of enemy ammunition, 1,700 tons of food and masses of armaments and equipment had been destroyed in Laos.

A Government spokesman reported that 78 enemy soldiers were killed Monday in a battle seven miles west-northwest of Laobao on the South Vietnamese border. He said 12 South Vietnamese infantrymen were wounded.

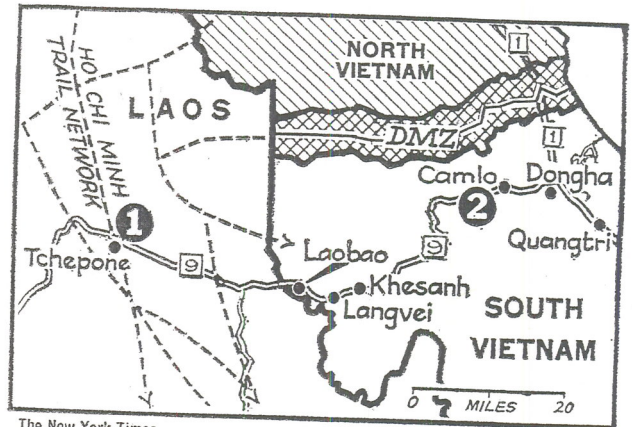
Clashes Near Laobao

Fifteen enemy soldiers were reported killed by Government troops in another fight seven miles east of Laobao at about the same time Monday. One South Vietnamese infantryman was wounded, the Government spokesman said.

Enemy forces, meanwhile, kept up their harassment of the American forces in South Vietnam backing up Saigon's troops in Laos. They ambushed a United States supply convoy yesterday morning on Route 9, seven miles west of Camlo, on the way to Khesanh. One United States soldier was killed and 21 wounded, according to the United States spokesman, while the enemy withdrew without leaving any trace of losses.

On Monday, the United States command reported American soldiers engaged an enemy force four miles west of yesterday's ambush and killed four soldiers. American losses were put at three wounded.

In a related development, military sources disclosed that the United States command had moved to reopen an old road



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Hundreds of explosions were set off in an enemy supply area near Tchepone (1) by U.S. air strikes. American convoy in South Vietnam was ambushed near Camlo (2).

running directly from Quangtri to Khesanh, to supplement the overworked and vulnerable Route 9 leading from Dongha, seven miles north of Quangtri, to the allied forward staging base at Khesanh.

Rains Imperil Road

The sources reported aerial photography flights over the old road. They said that Route 9, which was reopened by United States Army engineers in the preparatory phase of the Laotian operation seven weeks ago, is in danger of being washed away by the mid-May rains. They also said that its many bridged ravines and hairpin curves made it extremely vulnerable to enemy action.

The new road would cut at least a third of the distance between the two important bases, the sources said.

Although the sources are not provided with South Vietnamese strategic planning information, they speculated that the road plans indicated that the Government intended to keep its troops in the western mountains — and possibly in Laos — past the onset of the rainy season.