



Associated Press

KILLED IN ATTACK ON FIREBASE 6: Bodies of North Vietnamese soldiers at base 300 miles north of Saigon

Enemy Raids Cast Doubt on Claims of Success in Laos

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, April 4—Professional American and South Vietnamese soldiers who have assessed favorably the recent operations in Laos have been unpleasantly surprised by the last week's heavy enemy attacks within South Vietnam.

The claims of immediate success that Saigon made for its operations during the last two months against the Ho Chi Minh trail complex were deflated last week by three enemy raids—on an American artillery base south of Chulai, a South Vietnamese base in the Central Highlands and a refugee settlement in Ducduc, a district capital southwest of Danang.

Those attacks, coming on top of reports of the conviction and

sentencing of Lieut. William L. Calley Jr. for murder in the Mylai massacre three years ago, struck a hard blow to many American soldiers here—career men and other G.I.'s alike.

Many of them feel that people at home do not understand what they face here. "Hell, Ducduc was a North Vietnamese Mylai," said one major at the United States command here yesterday. In that attack last Monday enemy forces reportedly burned homes and killed more than 100 of the townspeople, apparently to show that the Government was powerless to provide security for them.

The day before that, a North Vietnamese demolition squad cut the barbed wire around the perimeter of an American artillery base called Marianne and

threw explosives into the bunkers where the troops had sought shelter. At least 33 Americans were killed and 76 wounded, according to the figures released here by the command.

On Wednesday, North Vietnamese forces overran an artillery base operated by Saigon's forces near Dakto in the Central Highlands, near the Laotian border. Four American advisers there were reported killed and another one was reported missing.

Sixty-eight South Vietnamese have been reported killed and 110 wounded in the fighting around the base through the weekend.

Psychologically and politically, the three incidents probably added up to a victory for the North Vietnamese, who have

never shown any reluctance to sacrifice manpower when it might gain them a political advantage.

After the Communist forces drove the South Vietnamese out of their fire base, the Americans launched a massive B-52 bombing strike, coordinated with a counter attack by South Vietnamese infantrymen.

The infantrymen reoccupied the base on Thursday. They say they have killed more than 1,500 enemy troops, 60 to 70 per cent of the 28th North Vietnamese Regiment.

The pattern of last week's events is a familiar one. The allies often come out second best in the propaganda battles—their statements that the re-

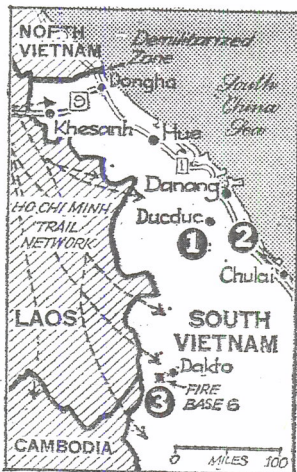
Continued on Page 9, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 7

cent Laos operations would force a delay of about six months in plans for Communist offensives in South Vietnam appear vastly overstated.

But Saigon, with American air support, has the power to do tremendous physical damage to the North Vietnamese even as they are winning these psychological victories.

The operations in Laos against the northern stretches of the Ho Chi Minh Trail network, and the setbacks the South Vietnamese suffered in the intense fighting there in February and March, for example, did not have any noticeable effect on two other large



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Enemy raids on Ducduc (1), American base near Chulai (2) and near Dakto (3) hurt allied image.

operations the South Vietnamese are conducting in Cambodia and in the U Minh Forest, a Communist base area at the southern tip of Vietnam.

The Cambodian operations involve about 20,000 men. Last week, in a big battle three miles southwest of the Cambodian town of Suong, near the Chup rubber plantation, South infantry and rangers reportedly killed 225 enemy soldiers, bringing to 411 the reported number of enemy dead for the week.

The U Minh campaign, which has been going on since last Dec. 1, involves more than 10,000 infantry soldiers of Saigon's 21st Division.

The U Minh is in low, marshy land, laced by rivers and canals, and for that reason was never penetrated by allied forces until recently. Last week, Saigon's military spokesmen have said, 71 enemy soldiers were killed in battles there.

It is probably in Cambodia and the southern reaches of Vietnam that the ultimate effects of the Laotian operations on the enemy's ability to infiltrate men and supplies southward will become clear.

In the meantime, in the area of Quangtri Province around Khesanh, from which the Laos operation was launched, action has been much lighter in the last week or so than was expected just after March 25, when the 20,000 South Vietnamese soldiers were chased out of Laos by a North Vietnamese counterattack.

For a few days, it looked as though the North Vietnamese might try to sweep across the border and attack the 5,000 Americans who were supporting the South Vietnamese forces from the area around Khesanh.

But there have been no large-scale engagements in western Quangtri Province, and South Vietnamese commanders appear to be trying to assess the feasibility of staying in Khesanh and other bases established for the Laos operations well into the rainy season, which usually begins in May.

If that means American soldiers will have to stay there much longer, the Americans will not be pleased. One company commander near the border, Capt. Bruno Maniccia of Cortland, N. Y., said last week, "I sure hope we get out of here soon. I don't think there's a single hill here we haven't been up." One of his men added later, "And back to home they told me the war was ending."

608 Copters Reported Damaged

SAIGON, April 4 (UPI)—Enemy gunners damaged 608 United States helicopters during the six-week Laos offensive, shooting down 104 of them, Lieut. Gen. Hoang Xuan Lam told South Vietnam's Senate Defense Committee in a report made available today.