

# U.S. Troops Join Attack On Ho Trail

SAIGON — (UPI) — Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, the U.S. Commander in Vietnam, said yesterday ground troops will join the South Vietnamese offensive now under way through the A Shau Valley near the Laotian border.

Abrams said the campaign could be broadened with South Vietnamese units actually crossing into Laotian territory to attack Communist bases along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

President Nixon has barred American foot soldiers from Laos but authorized U.S. air and artillery support for such invasions.

U.S. B-52 Stratofortresses flew two missions near the A Shau Valley yesterday and American spokesmen in Phu Bai, 35 miles east of the valley, said "American forces have been committed to the support" of the South Vietnamese offensive.

That statement apparently applied to air and artillery support. U.S. headquarters in Saigon said there were no American troops in the A Shau Valley as of last night.

Abrams' statement that U.S. ground units would be committed came as a surprise.

U.S. commanders have been trying to reduce American participation in South Vietnamese offensives to a

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minimum under the program to Vietnamize the war and send more Americans home.

Abrams spoke with reporters at the old imperial capital of Hue, near the A Shau Valley, where President Nguyen Van Thieu renewed his threat to send South Vietnamese troops against North Vietnamese forces in North Vietnam itself and said that Hanoi "really fears" such a move.

He said the Communists were losing the war and that South Vietnamese troops intended to keep the pressure on the enemy in both Laos and Cambodia.

South Vietnam's new offensive through the A Shau valley began last Wednesday and Saigon headquarters shrouded details of the campaign, named Lam Son 720.

Asked about its size and purposes, the official spokesman for South Vietnam headquarters said: "We have nothing further to say about this operation because there has been no contact."

"Operation Lam Son 720 does not rule out some degree of incursion in Laos, but I don't know if it is going into Laos," Abrams told newsmen at Hue.

He said American ground units would be used in the South Vietnamese part of the valley but gave no indication of their specific role.

U.S. troops have conducted operations in the valley many times in the past four years and these sweeps have cost at least 376 Americans lives, according to Saigon headquarters.

Elsewhere in South Vietnam yesterday, battlefields were reported quiet.