

NEW ALLIED DRIVE NOT STARTED YET, U.S. AIDES ASSERT

They Do Not Expect Ashau
Valley Campaign to Begin
Before Wednesday

QUICK RAIDS REPORTED

But Preparations Are Going
According to Schedule,
American Believes
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LAVANG, South Vietnam, April 18—The Joint American and South Vietnamese invasion of the enemy-held Ashau Valley will not get under way until Wednesday at the soonest, according to ranking American military sources here at the operation's forward command post just south of Quangtri city.

Neither American nor South Vietnamese command centers have been set up yet, the officers disclosed. American soldiers are just beginning to build the roof of the building intended as the American headquarters, and one American officer, an adviser to the South Vietnamese First Division, said that the division had just begun to bring all the required maps, radios, and office material.

"As a matter of fact," an officer said as he looked at his watch, "they should have been here by now."

Officers Deny Delays

President Nguyen Van Thieu announced in Hue yesterday that the operation had been under way since last Wednesday. However, subsequent statements by American and South Vietnamese officers connected with the sweep have disclosed that, so far, only short-lived commando-like raids have been conducted in the famous valley, along South Vietnam's western border with Laos, and that no significant contact with the enemy has been made.

Both American and South Vietnamese officers have denied that there has been any delay in starting the sweep, which will involve nearly 10,000 American and Government troops.

There has been speculation that the fierce fighting around

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Fire Base 6 south of here in the Central Highlands has forced the Government to postpone the main drive. But a spokesman for the 101st Airborne Division, whose helicopters will transport the South Vietnamese troops, said today, "As far as I know, everything appears to be going as to plan."

The commander of the operation, which is code-named Operation Lam Son 720, is Brig. Gen. Nguyen Van Giai, who became a general shortly before President Thieu announced the operation. The command post is a pleasant, tree-shaded former French colonial barracks that is the headquarters of the First Regiment of the First South Vietnamese Army Division, which General Giai formerly commanded.

The American ground troops in Lam Son 720 will come from the 101st Airborne, which has been fighting bitter battles in the Ashau Valley yearly since 1968. The 101st's most famous—and controversial battle there—was the three-day assault on Apbia Mountain, which became known as Hamburger Hill, in May, 1969, when 62 Americans were killed and more than 400 were wounded in attacks on the summit.

At Camp Eagle, the base camp of the 101st, officers are reluctant to explain the role the Americans will play in Lam Son 720.

In keeping with the United States command's policy of playing down American involvement in joint operations—such as the earlier South Vietnamese invasion of Laos—officers here would say only that the Americans are to have a "support role."