

ALLIES REPORTED PROBING IN ASHAU

NYTimes

SAIGON Troops Move In and
U.S. Planes Strike Again

APR 20 1971

By The Associated Press

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Tuesday, April 20—Government reconnaissance troops were reported pushing through the Ashau Valley yesterday in preparation for an allied drive against that long-time enemy stronghold near the Laotian border.

For the second day, United States fighter-bombers struck at suspected enemy positions in the valley, which has served as an infiltration corridor from a major North Vietnamese supply area in Laos into the northern quarter of South Vietnam.

Meanwhile, the United States command reported that two fighter-bombers sought to protect planes bombing the Ho Chi Minh Trail network in Laos early yesterday by firing missiles at two enemy missile sites, one in North Vietnam and the other in the upper Laotian Panhandle.

A spokesman said the planes made their "protective-reaction" strikes upon receiving electronic indications that the enemy installations were about to fire missiles at American aircraft.

The site in Laos was put at 70 miles north of the demilitarized zone that straddles the border between North and

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South Vietnam. The one in North Vietnam was said to be 40 miles north of the zone.

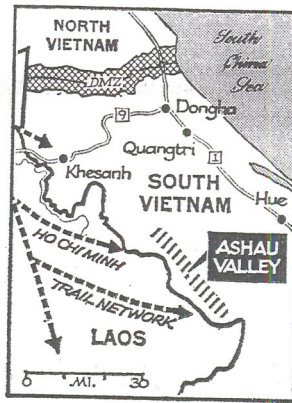
South Vietnamese patrols have been scouting the Ashau Valley since last Tuesday and so far have made no significant contact with enemy forces. [According to United Press International, some American troops are also in the valley.]

Reports from the field quoted officers as having said that a task force consisting of 100,000 South Vietnamese and 2,000 Americans was committed "on paper" to a sweep of the 30-mile-long valley later this week. However, its scope, they said, depends on what the patrols find.

At its largest, it could extend into Laos, they added. But no one suggested that the Americans would cross the border.

The South Vietnamese forces include two regiments from the First Infantry Division and two brigades of marines, all of whom took part in the drive into Laos in February and March. American troops scheduled to participate in any Ashau Valley sweep are from the 101st Airborne Division.

About 60 miles northwest of the valley, North Vietnamese forces are reported to have crossed the Laotian border into the northwestern corner of South Vietnam to seize war materials left behind at Khesanh by the allies after the Laotian operation.



The New York Times April 20, 1971

United States sources reported indications that enemy trucks had used Route 9 to drive to the abandoned combat base. Reconnaissance helicopters found other evidence, the informants said, that enemy troops had visited Khesanh since it was abandoned by United States and South Vietnamese forces March 25.

While some American and South Vietnamese units destroyed the equipment they abandoned at Khesanh, others did not.

Witnesses reported having seen cases of ammunition, artillery shells, C-rations, vehicle parts, radio batteries and other items lying around the base at the time of withdrawal.

Cambodians Under Attack

PNOMPENH, Cambodia, April 19 (AP)—The high command reported today that Cambodian troops trying to clear Pnompenh's highway to the sea had reached a point three miles from the position where other Cambodians were surrounded and under enemy attack.

The area is at Pich Nil Pass, 63 miles southwest of this capital. The command said the enemy attacked the Pich Nil positions before dawn today. First reports were that six Cambodian soldiers were wounded.