

More Saigon Troops Are Airlifted to Area Near Laos

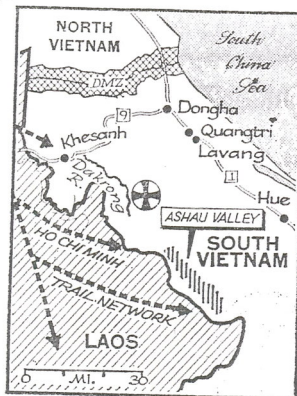
By CRAIG R. WHITNEY
Special to The New York Times

LAVANG, South Vietnam, Friday, April 23—More Government troops were airlifted yesterday into a mountainous area near the Laotian border where a search for enemy troop and supply concentrations continued.

The search was under way north of the Ashau Valley, long an enemy stronghold and infiltration route into the northern part of South Vietnam. The 1,500 South Vietnamese marines airlifted into the Dakrong River area north of the valley on Wednesday have reportedly encountered little enemy resistance.

Yesterday afternoon, a battalion of South Vietnamese infantrymen—estimated at about 525 men—was flown by United States helicopters to a mountaintop artillery base overlooking the Dakrong River valley and about 18 miles north of the Ashau area. This troop movement was preceded by a B-52 raid near the base. The troop-carrying helicopters reportedly ran into only light small-arms fire.

There were no Government soldiers in the Ashau Valley yesterday, according to Brig. Gen. Vu Van Giai, commander of the operation, code-named Lamson 720, to which a total of 10,000 South Vietnamese troops have been committed. He said there were no South Vietnamese or American artillery bases in the valley, although some were within range of it.



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Saigon troops were flown to fire base in Dakrong River area (cross) just north of Ashau Valley.

The general said that small commando units that went into the valley on April 13 had spotted some heavy troop movements but did not come under enemy fire.

The commandos later pulled out, he said, and are now waiting at the forward command post at Lavang, in the northeastern corner of the country. The general and his American advisers have described the purpose of Lamson 720 as finding enemy troop concentrations and supplies in the western mountains of the two northernmost provinces and then pouncing on them with forces of battalion-size or larger.

His deputy, Col. Le Phuong, said some small American units of the 101st Airborne Division were in the valley. He reported that they destroyed several

North Vietnamese trucks on Route 548 there on Wednesday night.

The 101st Airborne, which has a force of about 4,500 men committed to Lamson 720, has not permitted correspondents to observe its units in the field and has made public no information about them.

Another Aim Indicated

In Hue Wednesday night, Brig. Gen. Pham Van Phu, commander of the South Vietnamese First Infantry Division, assigned to Lamson 720, alluded to perhaps a key aim of the operation when he said: "This proves that the First Infantry is still capable of launching a big operation, even after Lamson 719."

In that large-scale sweep of about 23,000 men against the Ho Chi Minh Trail network in

Laos in February and March, the First Division suffered heavy casualties, and its men were among the last to leave Laos, with enemy troops in pursuit.

Foe Ridicules Lamson 720

HANOI, North Vietnam, April 22 (Agence France - Presse)—Lamson 720 was ridiculed here today as a "farce" invented to raise the morale of the South Vietnamese Army after its "defeat" in South Laos last month.

The army newspaper Quan Doi Nhan Dan said the operation is a complete invention.

"The defeat in southern Laos, that of Lamson 719, greatly impressed international and American public opinion, shook the cities of South Vietnam and hit the morale of the Saigon army," the paper asserted.