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### Secrecy on Ashau Drive

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SAIGON, April 25—The joint United States and South Vietnamese operation in the Ashau Valley area is 12 days old and still surrounded by official secrecy, leading some observers to wonder if something has gone wrong, or if the operation is just a training exercise for fresh Government troops.

Since it was announced by President Nguyen Van Thieu in Hue on April 14, operation Lam Son 720 has been mentioned in the Government's military communiqué just once, when three minor clashes with North Vietnamese were reported. Otherwise, the Government has refused to discuss the operation.

The Americans, who are reportedly providing as many as 4,500 troops and all the helicopter support for the operation, are even more close-mouthed about what is going on.

Although an American helicopter has been shot down in the Ashau Valley and although there are unconfirmed reports that units of the 101st Airborne Division have fought some heavy battles there, the United States military spokesmen here refuse to say where the American troops are, what they are doing or what losses they have suffered.

At Lam Son 720's joint allied command post at Lavang, American military policemen firmly turn back reporters seeking news from American officers.