

# Allies Try to Bar Laos Infiltration Path

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, May 2—The South Vietnamese Army has reported no new contact with the enemy in its 18-day-old operation in the mountains around the Ashau Valley.

Most of the allied activity of the last week has been concentrated on three critical areas along the Laotian-South Vietnamese border where American bombers and gunships and South Vietnamese forces are seeking to stop the infiltration of enemy troops and supplies before the rainy season hampers operations.

The three main areas are the northwestern corner of South Vietnam, adjoining the demilitarized zone that straddles the border between the two Vietnams, where the bulk of United States B-52 strikes have been concentrated. The Ashau Valley area, and the area where the border of Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam come together.

## Raids in 3 Areas

This last border area includes Fire Base 6, the embattled South Vietnamese base that was overrun by North Vietnamese troops and promptly retaken by the Government at the end of March.

All of last week's B-52 raids were in these three areas. The heaviest raids, a total of 18 attacks of three or more bombers each, were directed against a small valley and surrounding hills about 15 miles northwest of Khesanh, not far from the demilitarized zone.

This heavily bombed target, where the North Vietnamese are said to have built heavily



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Numbers show 3 areas where the main fighting has been taking place.

bunkered storage and troop assembly areas, is not far from the terrain briefly covered by this spring's South Vietnamese incursion into Laos.

There are no United States troops left northwest of Khesanh, but American helicopter gunships regularly see the North Vietnamese soldiers who followed the retreating Government troops back into South Vietnam at the close of the incursion.

## 10 Missions in Ashau Area

Of this enemy presence, a Saigon-based American Army officer said, "Just on the basis of the reports, I'd say the Laotian operation hasn't stopped much of the enemy from coming into the South. But we don't know how much worse it could have been if they (the South Vietnamese) hadn't gone into Laos in the first place."

Ten B-52 missions were

flown against the enemy in support of the operation around the Ashau during the last week. The South Vietnamese say they killed 52 North Vietnamese in the operation there, while describing their own losses for the same period as "light." Casualty reports indicate a relatively low level of ground fighting, especially in view of the estimate that almost 2,000 enemy soldiers were killed in South Vietnam during the same week.

Unlike the northwestern corner and the Ashau Valley area, there are said to be nearly 7,000 Government troops operating in Kontum Province, across from the three-border area. Allied officers in Pleiku, the supply and headquarters area for the campaign there, said yesterday that the lull in fighting around Fire Base 6 was the result of the enemy's continuing efforts to reinforce troops from bases in Southern Laos and Northern Cambodia.

Five B-52 raids were carried out last week against the enemy's infiltration routes along a valley 8 to 11 miles south of south of Benhet and the juncture of the three borders.

Significantly, no new actions were reported farther south along the Cambodian border with South Vietnam, where the presence of South Vietnamese troops in Cambodia is believed to have provided a fairly effective seal against infiltration.

Ground action in the Ashau operation, which consists primarily of quick raids on suspected enemy locations by small allied units, has been negligible all week, except for the ambush in which five Americans were killed and 10 wounded northwest of Aloui on Friday.