

U.S. Discloses Use of B-52's Over Northern Laos

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 3 — The State Department disclosed today that the United States, in support of the Laotian Government, has been using B-52 bombers to strike at enemy targets in northern Laos.

The statement, made by Under Secretary of State John N. Irwin 2d at a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, was the first official acknowledgment that B-52's were being used in the war between the royalist Government and the forces of North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao.

The Pentagon had previously confirmed that B-52's were used on one occasion in February, 1970, against North Vietnamese troops during an intense battle for the Plaine des Jarres. But never before had Administration officials publicly confirmed that B-52's were being used on a regular basis in northern Laos, as clearly indicated by Mr. Irwin.

The large strategic bombers, Mr. Irwin said in response to a question by Senator Clifford P. Case, Republican of New Jersey, are being used to at-

Senate Group Told of Raids by Big Bombers in Support of Royalist Regime

tack enemy "troop formations and supply lines" in northern Laos and are under "very careful rules to seek to avoid bombing villages."

The use of fighter-bombers, such as the F-4, in northern Laos was previously known in contrast to fighter-bombers which normally conduct close-in strikes at a target. The B-52 operates from a high altitude and carries out saturation bombing over a large area. The B-52 can carry up to 30 tons of 500-pound and 750-pound bombs. The F-4 carries six 750-pound bombs.

Since 1964, United States Air Force planes based in Thailand have been providing air support for Laotian forces as well as a semiautonomous army of Meo tribesmen financed by the Central Intelligence Agency. But until the issue was forced into the open last year by a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee headed by Senator Stuart Symington, the military

activity in northern Laos was kept secret by the Johnson and Nixon Administrations, which repeatedly gave the impression that American bombing in Laos was limited to strikes along the Ho Chi Minh Trail network in the south.

William H. Sullivan, former Ambassador to Laos and now Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, told a reporter after the hearing that B-52 bombers had been used in northern Laos for "about two years."

Senator Symington, a Missouri Democrat, said that during his subcommittee's investigation in 1969 and 1970 of American involvement in Laos no mention had been made of the use of B-52's. Mr. Sullivan was among the State Department and Pentagon officials who testified before the subcommittee in October, 1969.

Senator Case expressed astonishment when both Mr. Irwin and Mr. Sullivan—as well as the many advisers seated behind them—said they did not know whether B-52 raids in northern Laos had increased in the last year. "I can't believe that none of you, including the Under Secretary of State, do not know such information," the Senator exploded.