

Ex-Marine Testifies of '69 U.S. Mission in Laos

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WASHINGTON, April 23—A former Marine lieutenant told a group of Congressmen today that his unit penetrated nearly five miles inside Laotian territory in February, 1969, as part of a two-week "interdiction and ambush" mission.

The operation, he said, involved 1,500 United States marines and was subsequently reported by the military command in Saigon as having taken place entirely within Quangtri Province, South Vietnam.

The casualties suffered during the operation were also reported as having occurred in South Vietnam, he said.

The lieutenant, Everett B. Carson, 23 years old, told his story before an overflow audience at a special Congressional hearing in the New Senate Office Building. The hearing was attended by three Democratic Senators, George S. McGovern of South Dakota; Walter F. Mondale of Minnesota and Philip Hart of Michigan, and by Representative Charles A. Vanik, Democrat of Ohio.

The special one-day hearing was called to let members of Congress hear testimony from

some of the 1,000 Vietnam veterans who have gathered in Washington to protest the war.

"We were told not to talk with newsmen about the fact that we had entered Laos," said Mr. Carson, a former platoon leader of G Company, Second Battalion of the Ninth Regiment, Third Marine Division.

In March, 1969, The New York Times reported that about 100 United States marines had seized and held several hilltops just inside Laos.

The operations violated the much-abused neutrality of Laos, which was provided for in international agreements reached in Geneva in 1954 and 1962. The North Vietnamese have used Laotian territory to move men and matériel down the Ho Chin Minh Trail since 1965.

Dressed in a green fatigue jacket over street clothes, the red-haired former marine said that his unit was participating in an operation code-named Dewey Canyon 1—a massive sweep of the densely jungled Ashua alley in northwestern South Vietnam adjacent to the Laotian border. A force of 10,000 South Vietnamese soldiers is now operating there.

At the height of the 1969 mission, Mr. Carson said, about 1,500 American Marines went into Laos up to a limit of 8,000 meters, or 4.8 miles. He said that they remained in Laos for 14 days, conducting search and ambush operations along Route 922, a major enemy supply route into the Ashua Valley.

Mr. Carson emphasized that the units were not sent across the border in "hot pursuit," the Pentagon doctrine which American forces are permitted to cross the border for short retaliatory attacks after being fired upon by enemy units. The implication of his remarks was that it was an American-initiated operation to search out and find enemy units.

There was no immediate official comment on the former marine's account by the Pentagon tonight. A senior officer who declined to be identified said however, that Mr. Carson had exaggerated the length, size and scope of the operation.

The officer maintained that it was a "shallow incursion" by a small force of marines that lasted less than two weeks. He said that it was justified on the basis of "hot pursuit."

On May 19, 1970, a year after the operation, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird testified that United States forces had made brief incursions into Laos on limited missions. He did not specifically mention the operation referred to by Mr. Carson, but justified all such missions under the "hot pursuit" doctrine.

In late 1969, the Defense Appropriations Act was amended to prohibit the use of United States ground forces in either Laos or Thailand. Last year this was expanded to include Cambodia.