.-Aided Laos Base Hit Hard

By CRAIG R. WHITNEY Special to The New York Times

-The long-secret military base 9,000 men. maintained here by the United that commands it.

year veil of secrecy from the Vietnamese base and allowed a group of launched against it. observe military

Long Tieng came under heavy naissance equipment from the attack on Dec. 31 by a North base. LONG TIENG, Laos, Jan. 19 Vietnamese force of 6,000 to Since then, however, a force

Central Intelligence long paved runway, with re- on what is known as Skyline Agency to help Laotian irregu- loading facilities and stores of Ridge, overlooking the base lars battle the North Vietna- bombs for the small Laotian from the north. Included in the mese is badly damaged and has T-28 bombers, a complex of force are perhaps 2,000 of the been put out of effective ac- communications buildings at Meo tribesmen for whose clantion by the Communists even either end and a large cluster destine operations the base was though the Laotians have re-occupied most of a high ridge civilians before the attack be-"volunteers," in addition to gan and they fled. By Jan. 12 regular Laotian troops. The United States and Lao- all this was in imminent danger tian Governments lifted a 10- of falling to the largest North ridge, the helicopter that carattack

ter today to land on it and the Laotians had moved most

of about 6,000 Laotians has re-The base consists of a mile-taken most of a key position

Despite the advance atop the ever ried reporters and some United States officials to the central newsmen to charter a helicop- By that time the C.I.A. and part of it came under mortar

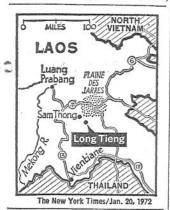
operations. of their electronic and recon- Continued on Page 9, Column 1

C.I.A.-AIDED BASE IN LAOS HIT HARD

Continued From Page 1, Col. 5

attack from North Vietnamese troops only a mile away. Sporadic sniper fire ricocheted in the deserted streets of Long Tieng and made it unsafe for planes to land there.

High-ranking American officials, who acceded to requests for the visit to the base on condition that they not be identified, said the Laotians had suffered at least 600 killed.



wounded or missing in the continuing conflict around the base.

Maj. Gen. Vang Pao, com-mander of the military region and of the Meos in the C.I.A .supported irregular forces, was ebullient today as he was calling in American and Laotian air strikes on North Vietnamese positions on the craggy limestone pinnacles that dominate the eastern end of the base.

He quoted casualty statistics that appeared to be wildly op-timistic—8,000 of the enemy killed-but he is usually either elated or despondent. American officials said they estimated that North Vietnamese casualties had been heavy and might have reached 600 to 700 killed in the current fighting, the heaviest in Indochina at the moment.

At the general's headquarters on a hill overlooking the south side of the Long Tieng com-plex, a handful of young Americans in civilian clothes were planning B-52 raids on the Communist positions around the base.

A visitor on a wide-ranging tour encountered no Americans in ground combat anywhere on or near the base. But the skies were filled with American planes—cargo aircraft dropping arms and food by parachute, and helicopters-all operated for the C.I.A, and the Laotians by the charter line Air America-plus occasional United States Air Force jet bombers from Thai-

Official Explains Change

A ranking American official, asked to explain why reporters were suddenly given a guided tour, replied: "This is a North Vietnamese invasion of Laos, and there's no point in keeping you people from seeing it for yourselves. This year they've brought in a lot more troops, heavier equipment, and showed more determination than they ever have before-for what political objective I just don't know."

Both the Americans and the Laotians here - the Laotians have made the defense of the spectacularly beautiful mountain valley their primary effort by bringing troops from all over the country—expect the North Vietnamese drive to entensify.

In the steep, trackless jungled hills to the north the North Vietnamese are believed to have moved 6,000 to 9,000 first-line combat troops across the Plaine des Jarres. They have used powerful artillery with a 20-mile range to commanding advantage.

Usable but Cluttered

The attacks have halted in the past two days, but fear of them prevents the Air America planes from landing on the air-strip, which is still usable but cluttered with ordinance for the T-28's, which now operate from Vientiane.

Some of them were dropping cluster bombs-antipersonnel devices that break into small bomblets and explode like firecrackers-on remaining Communist positions at the southern end of the valley.

The North Vietnamese have also been harassing the Laotian forces that have been driving them out of bunkers on the ridge by firing mortars at them, mostly at night.

Two mortar rounds aimed at a helicopter landing position wounded three Laotian soldiers; 28 have been killed and almost 70 wounded in the action there this week.

One of the wounded was a boy who was struck in the head by a piece of shrapnel. He said he was 14 years old but was part of the regular Laotian armed forces. He was flown out in a helicopter.

A sergeant dug in. "No sleep much at night," he said.