

# Laotians Suffer a Setback Near Base at Long Tieng

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By The Associated Press

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VIENTIANE, Laos, Jan. 21—Counterattacking enemy forces overran some Government positions on a ridge overlooking the American-backed base of Long Tieng, and hand-to-hand fighting was reported today for control of the installation.

American military informants said Laotian troops who had succeeded in pushing an enemy regiment off most of the ridge three days ago were forced to abandon a helicopter landing pad in the counterattack.

The enemy's drive to regain control of the ridge reportedly began last night with a heavy bombardment by North Vietnamese mortars and artillery followed by an infantry assault against a Government-held bunker complex.

A United States officer said that American jets were experiencing difficulty in silencing the North Vietnamese long-range artillery, which fires on Long Tieng from the southern edge of the nearby Plaine des Jarres. So far, they said the planes have been able to destroy only five of some 20 guns.

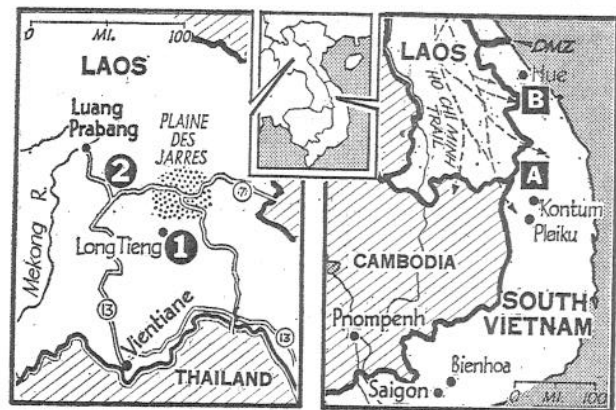
"They keep moving all the time," the officer explained. "The North Vietnamese are

dragging the guns around with tanks and five-ton trucks. A plane can make a bomb run only to discover the gun isn't there any more."

The battle for Long Tieng, 78 miles north of Vientiane, is said to involve 5,000 to 8,000 North Vietnamese regulars and

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Heavy fighting was reported at Long Tieng (1 on map at left) and at key Laotian road junction (2). In South Vietnam, U.S. bombers struck hard in Central Highlands (A on other map). U.S. copter was downed near Hue (B).

## Setback Suffered by Laotians In Area Near Long Tieng Base

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3,000 Government defenders.

Two weeks of fighting has reportedly cost each side more than 500 dead. To the northwest, meanwhile, four battalions of North Vietnamese regulars and Pathet Lao guerrillas were said to have attacked four Government positions guarding a road junction midway between Vientiane, the administrative capital, and the royal capital of Luang Prabang.

United States sources said one position was overrun last night and another was abandoned this morning. It was not clear who controlled the junction of Routes 13 and 7, known as Sala Phou Khoun.

### U.S. B-52 Strikes Continue

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Jan. 21 (AP)—An intensified bombing campaign by United States B-52's continued for the fifth day today with attacks on suspected troop concentrations and supply dumps in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam near the Laotian border.

Informed sources said that the North Vietnamese were concentrating tanks and artillery in the area and reported sighting new tank trails and signs of anti-aircraft guns and equipment.

Prisoners and captured documents have indicated the possibility of an enemy push next month to try to capture a key city in the highlands, perhaps Kontum, and declared it a liberated area.

The United States command said a unit of the First Cavalry Division (Airmobile) and part of an artillery battery had

been moved to Pleiku, another major highlands city, but emphasized it represented no major change in strength there.

The 250 men involved replace part of a withdrawing United States infantry battalion that had been on security duty. The only change is that the new men are equipped with helicopters.

Meanwhile, reports on battle action said the enemy had shot down a United States helicopter and continued a series of attacks on allied positions across South Vietnam.

The United States command said that the helicopter, a light observation craft, was shot down 29 miles southwest of the northern city of Hue and that its two crewmen were wounded.

In the heaviest of the enemy attacks, Saigon headquarters reported a barrage of 20 mortar shells was fired at a South Vietnamese armored cavalry position just south of the demilitarized zone, which straddles the border between the two Vietnams.

Three enemy rockets were said to have hit the United States helicopter base at Phuloi, 10 miles north of Saigon. The United States command reported only light damage and no casualties.

South Vietnamese military sources reported that Government troops killed 34 enemy soldiers and captured 6 others during the enemy attacks across the country. Government losses were put at 5 killed and 15 wounded.

### Hanoi Bolsters Defenses

HANOI, North Vietnam, Jan. 21 (Agency France-Presse)—Defense preparations against a possible American attack were reported under way today throughout North Vietnam.

The North Vietnamese apparently think the attack may come shortly or that it may be made between President Nixon's forthcoming visits to Peking next month and Moscow in May.

Its aim, North Vietnamese sources say, would be to convince North Vietnam's main allies that continued fighting would be in vain and that they should persuade Hanoi to accept a compromise.