

Saigon Force Opens Campaign in Eastern Cambodia

SAIGON, South Vietnam, March 10 (AP)—A South Vietnamese armored force of about 5,000 troops and 100 vehicles swept into eastern Cambodia today in an attempt to prevent enemy attacks on the approaches to Saigon. It was the first major drive into eastern Cambodia since Nov. 22.

An adviser to the South Vietnamese troops said: "We're going to destroy any bases found in the area of our advance. This is an operation designed to pre-empt the enemy attacks. Instead of waiting for them to attack, we are attacking."

Reports from the field say that the size of the force could increase to 20,000 men by next week as the offensive developed.

No major contact with the enemy has yet been reported in the drive, which is north of the Saigon-to-Pnompenh highway, 6 to 10 miles inside Cambodia and 75 to 100 miles northwest of Saigon.

B-52 Role Reported

The South Vietnamese command reported a major clash in a smaller drive that has been under way 25 miles farther southwest since Feb. 1.

The command said that 35



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South Vietnamese drive is indicated by arrow.

enemy soldiers were killed with the help of air and artillery strikes. South Vietnamese losses were given as two killed and eight wounded.

The only American role in the new South Vietnamese drive is air support with B-52 bombers and tactical fighter-bombers, United States advisers reported. The B-52 raids had prepared the way for the new offensive, west of Tay Ninh, a provincial capital.

In ground action reportedly involving American soldiers, a

reconnaissance patrol from the Third Brigade, First Air Cavalry Division, fought briefly with enemy forces 32 miles northeast of Saigon. The United States command said that one American was wounded and that enemy losses were unknown.

United States fighter-bombers attacked antiaircraft defenses inside North Vietnam for the ninth consecutive day in the 90th so-called protective-reaction strike reported this year by the command.

Foe Reported Ambushed

From two to four F-4 fighter escorts struck an anti-aircraft-artillery site about 50 miles northwest of the demilitarized zone which straddles the border between the two Vietnams, after it had fired on an unarmed United States reconnaissance plane, pilots said. The United States command said that results of the strike were not known and that there was no damage to the American planes.

The South Vietnamese command said that 23 enemy

soldiers were killed in an ambush followed by artillery strikes a mile northwest of the base at Benhet in the Central Highlands.

A source in the field said that the enemy soldiers that were killed had been from the 52nd Regiment of North Vietnam's 320th Division. He said that this indicated the enemy had moved elements of another regiment into the Central Highlands.

"We know the 64th Regiment is out there, but this is the first time the 52nd has moved into this area," the source said.

Just north of Benhet, South Vietnamese border rangers reported the discovery of 40 bunkers, which one source described as "brand new — they were just built."

In the coastal province of Binh Dinh, Government militia-men reported killing 18 North Vietnamese soldiers and capturing 3 after a 25-minute clash three miles north of Annon, a district town. No South Vietnamese casualties were reported.