

Marines Secretly Move to Thailand

S.H. Examiner—Page 9
☆☆ Mon., June 12, 1972

KHON KAEN Thailand) — (AP) — A contingent of U.S. Marines has moved secretly into northern Thailand, apparently to ready an unused air base for Marine fighter-bombers.

Thai officials in Khon Kaen indicated that the new influx of Americans is not welcome.

The U.S. Embassy has not confirmed the presence of the Marines, and there is no official word on how many are present.

But numerous trucks and other vehicles with USMC markings can be seen around the Nam Phong Air Base 21 miles north of Khon Kaen and 240 miles north of Bangkok.

Base Ready

On many other vehicles, the Marine Corps insignia and other markings are blocked out with masking

tape, apparently to conceal their identity.

Reports from Washington yesterday said Marine squadrons that were recently moved into South Vietnam to help blunt the North Vietnamese offensive will be moved to Nam Phong.

The base was built in the mid-1960s and 10,000-foot runways to serve as a U.S. air base, but it was never used.

Although the Marines at Nam Phong stick close to the base, a small collection of plywood bars already has mushroomed on the road outside the barbed wire main gate.

"We are hoping that we will grow like Udorn," said one Thai girl, referring to the town that has spread outside the big U.S. Air Force base at Udorn, 51 miles north of Nam Phong.

But Gov. Buri Promlakano

of Khon Kaen province said he didn't want the Marines in his capital.

40,000 Men

"Let them go to Udorn," he said. "Udorn has night-clubs, hotels and other facilities. Khon Kaen has only a few hotels and two night-clubs.

"If we allow the Americans to come here, there would be economic difficulties when they are withdrawn."

The U.S. Embassy in Bangkok said today that U.S. military strength in Thailand is now 40,000 men, an increase of 7500 since the North Vietnamese offensive began March 30.

Most of the increase is in Air Force personnel participating in the air war over Vietnam and Laos. The Marine contingent at Da Nang which is to be moved to Khon Kaen numbers about 1000 men, according to the Washington reports.