

U. S. Shifts Secret

HUE (Vietnam)—(UPI)—The United States has quietly shifted its controversial electronic warfare program from the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos to North and South Vietnam, military sources said today.

The program, still largely shrouded in official secrecy, is run from the heavily-guarded Nakhom Phanom airbase in Thailand.

Pilots and U.S. ground forces are spending more and more time in Vietnam. More than 200 Americans

scheduled to leave Vietnam two months ago have had their tours extended.

The electronic warfare program being used in Vietnam — mostly just above and just below the Demilitarized Zone — has been described by Pentagon officials as the “war of the future” when machines will do the work of many ground troops.

Almost a Cropper

In theory, the program spots enemy troop and supply movements and comput-

ers order the necessary steps to block impending attack.

In practice, the program of electronic warfare almost came a cropper when the North Vietnamese offensive began last March 30.

Despite the machines, planes and other paraphernalia, the Communists managed to smuggle hundreds of tons of guns, ammunition and artillery pieces down the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

The U.S. Air Force made little or no attempt to ex-

Viet Electronic Warfare

plain away the apparent failure of Operation Igloo White, as the program in Laos was code-named, and merely switched electronic warfare to Vietnam.

U.S. jet warplanes first dumped hundreds of expensive sensors along suspected Communist trails and roads leading to the coastal lowlands around Hue and Quang Tri cities.

Huge Computers

At Nakhom Phanom, near the Laotian border, technicians worked long hours re-

programming the huge IBM computers that are the heart of Igloo White.

Then EC121 planes, military versions of the Super-Constellation airliner, took to the skies over central Vietnam, their fuselages packed with a ton or two of supersophisticated electronic gear.

For the U.S. Air Force, the reason for shifting Operation Igloo White to Vietnam was twofold. First was a desire to stop the Communist offensive.

Second was an attempt to

save the electronic warfare program, in some eyes a flop.

Order Up Bombers

The EC121s are relay stations. When a North Vietnamese soldier walks or talks near one of the sensors, a signal is sent out. The plane's gear picks up the signal and relays it to Nakhom Phanom's computer and/or to a smaller computer at the U.S. “Coast Guard Station” at Tan My, six miles east of Hue.

Guided by American tech-

nicians with high security clearances, the computers order up bombers and the type of bombs to block the North Vietnamese.

Many of the bombers themselves are guided by computer radar to the target, and the bombs drop off the planes automatically. These planes need a pilot only to take off and to land.

Sensors called acubuoys are also dumped in streams and rivers to detect attempts by the Communists to move men and goods by water.