

U.S. Bombing In Laos Is Stepped Up

Associated Press

Washington

The Pentagon disclosed yesterday U.S. bombers have intensified attacks against Communist forces trying to drive Laotian government troops out of key positions before an expected cease-fire.

Major General Daniel James told newsmen that American pilots have flown about 100 more daily raids this week than last week "because of increased enemy activity and further requests for assistance by the Royal Lao government."

U.S. tactical fighter-bombers and B-52 heavy bombers are flying an average of 380 sorties a day against targets in Laos. A sortie is one flight by one plane.

CAMBODIAN

James, a ranking Pentagon spokesman, also acknowledged that U.S. planes have continued ranging over Cambodia in support of government troops there. He characterized the Cambodian operations as being "at a very low level" but still tens of sorties a day.

James voiced the hope expressed by many U.S. officials "that a cease - fire

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agreement will be achieved in Laos."

He said nothing about a cease - fire in Cambodia, where a unilateral halt in the fighting announced by the government at the time of the Vietnam cease - fire January 27 was ignored by Cambodian insurgents and their North Vietnamese supporters.

TARGETS

James refused to go into any detail on targets being attacked, but it is known that U.S. planes based primarily in nearby Thailand have been flying in support of Royal Lao regulars and mountain tribesmen trying to stem Communist thrusts in several important regions.

Reports reaching the Pentagon tell of Laotian government troops being pushed out of a series of road-junction towns in the Bolovens plateau area of southern Laos, which the North Viet-

namese have by stages turned into a major supply base for military operations in South Vietnam and Cambodia.

Far to the North, government troops have been driven from a wide area along the Mekong river frontier with Thailand. A struggle also is under way in the Plain of Jars region.

GOAL

U.S. military authorities view these North Vietnamese drives as aimed at controlling important sections of Laos in advance of a cease-fire and thus strongly influencing the future control of the country.

The only U.S. loss reported so far in the bombing campaign was the downing of an electronic-surveillance plane in southern Laos last week.

The craft's eight crewmen were listed as missing, bringing to 316 the total of U.S. servicemen still unaccounted for in that country.