

DEC 18 1972

NYTimes

DEC 18 1972

MONDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1972

THAI BACKS PLAN ON U.S. COMMAND

Leader Approves a Move From Saigon in Truce

BANGKOK, Thailand, Dec. 16 (UPI) — Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn said today that he had given approval to the United States to move its military headquarters from Saigon to a remote base in Thailand only 60 miles from North Vietnam if a cease-fire went into effect in Vietnam.

Field Marshal Thanom con-

firmed that there were plans in existence for such a move to isolated Nakorn Phanom air base about 380 miles northeast of Bangkok. Situated nine miles west of the Mekong River, the base is commonly referred to as "NKP" by United States airmen.

It formerly served as a major center for close air support of Government troops and troops sponsored by the Central Intelligence Agency in Laos, and was the jumping off point for the unsuccessful commando raid on the Son Tay POW camp in North Vietnam in 1970.

It is the closest base to both Laos and North Vietnam.

The field marshal said that some United States troops would be withdrawn from

Thailand in the event of a cease-fire but that with new arrivals from Vietnam the number of American military personnel in Thailand would remain at about its present level. There are now about 45,000 United States troops here, according to United States spokesmen.

This figure has never been confirmed, as the seven air bases in Thailand are technically listed as "Royal Thai Air Force bases," and the Thai Government seldom permits reporters to come onto the American-staffed and -operated air fields for what they call security reasons.

Field Marshal Thanom said that he had discussed arrangements on the move from Saigon

with United States Ambassador Leonard Unger. The Thai leader did not give details of the United States military organizations involved, but American sources here confirmed that the United States command structure was involved.

United States military sources in Saigon said this week that planning had been completed and that the supreme United States headquarters there, Military Assistance Command Vietnam (M.A.C.V.), and the headquarters of the 7th Air Force were designated to make the move.

The new command was slated to be named Military Assistance Command Southeast Asia, or M.A.C.S.E.A., the sources said.