

# Laos Reported Suffering Big Losses

By MALCOLM W. BROWNE

Special to The New York Times

VIENTIANE, Laos, Feb. 5—With Communist forces attacking heavily in many areas, the military situation of the Laotian Government has deteriorated sharply, military sources reported today.

These sources declined to speculate on whether the Communist offensive was related to the current Laotian cease-fire talks, but the talks have apparently entered a final phase, and seemed likely that the Communist-led Pathet Lao and their North Vietnamese allies were seeking to occupy as much territory as possible before a cease-fire.

Reports from the field indicated that despite the Lunar New Year holiday, Tet, which began Saturday, North Vietnamese forces in Laos were fighting harder than ever.

## Most Serious Loss

The most serious Government loss reported was the fall of a key rear-echelon supply and support base for irregular Lao forces fighting in the central part of the country.

The base, called Nam Yeu, is in a narrow river valley in northwestern Laos, 24 miles northeast of Houei Sai and about 15 miles from the Burmese border. It was defended by only about a company of Government troops when it was attacked by several battalions of Pathet Lao Saturday. Government forces supported by the base were many miles to the southeast at the time. Most of Nam Yeu supplies were reportedly evacuated by the time that the attack began.

Nam Yeu, which has been supplied by means of an airstrip, had never before fallen to Communist forces in many years of seesaw fighting in Laos.

Government forces have reportedly suffered another serious reverse in Southern Laos near the town of Muong Phalane, east of Saravane.

During the last two months,



The New York Times/Feb. 6, 1973

**Government's forces lost base near Houei Sai (1) and were pushed back in Muong Phalane area (2).**

these forces have sought to take advantage of the dry season, pushing eastward from Muong Phalane in the direction of the Communists' Ho Chi Minh supply trail. On Friday North Vietnamese soldiers, backed by tanks, opened a strong counteroffensive.

Reports today indicated that the North Vietnamese had so far thrown the Government forces back 12 miles, and were within 3 miles of Muong Phalane itself.

If the North Vietnamese were to continue moving west, they would threaten Dong Hene, a strong point, and potentially Savannakhet, the second largest city in Laos, 60 miles west of Muong Phalane.

Along the Mekong River, 60 miles to the north, the situation at the Government-held town of Thakhek was also reported to be deteriorating today.

Thakhek has been loosely surrounded for several months

by mixed Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces, and many residents have crossed the river into Thailand each night to sleep. Last week, 10 short-range rockets landed on the Thakhek airport and destroyed some houses, adding to the anxiety.

Reports today said that heavy fighting was in progress only five miles east of Thakhek, and that tanks of Communist forces had been sighted in the area.

Thakhek is directly across the Mekong River from the Thai town of Nakhon Phanom. The United States air base there is responsible for aerial surveillance of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, for rescue operations of pilots shot down in North Vietnam and Laos and for supporting irregular troops in Laos.

Near the southern end of Laos, North Vietnamese forces have reportedly begun a new drive against Government troops recently pushed out of Saravane.

The reports said that Government forces, which had been struggling for weeks to gain a foothold on the Plateau-des-Bolovens southeast of Saravane, were cut off from the base at Pak Song, and that attempts to reopen a supply line yesterday were repulsed under "fierce" fire.

The United States Air Force has been trying during the last few days to reduce the pressure in various parts of Laos by heavy raids, and vapor trails of B-52's are sometimes visible in the cloudless sky over Vientiane. Every day the Pathet Lao radio denounces "savage air attacks by the American aggressors," but it has not specified what targets were hit.

## U.S. Continues Bombing

HONOLULU, Feb. 5 (UPI)—

United States Pacific headquarters here announced today that American aircraft, including B-52's, were continuing operations over Laos. The command said that the bombing was at the request of the Laotian Government.