

SFChronicle FEB 10 1973

U.S. Spy Plane Downed in Laos

Washington Post Service

Washington

An American EC-47 electronic intelligence gathering plane has been shot down over Laos while supporting continuing U.S. air attacks against Communist forces in that country.

The U.S. Air Force Pacific Command in Honolulu announced the loss yesterday, reporting the crew of the downed plane as now missing in action. The command did not say how the plane went down or how many men were missing, but Pentagon sources say the craft was brought down by enemy antiaircraft fire and such planes normally carry a crew of eight.

The downing represents the first announced loss of a U.S. plane in the Laos air

action which has continued for the past 13 days since the cease-fire affecting Vietnam was signed in Paris January 27.

The loss will have the effect of adding to a missing in action list in Laos which

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already has more than 300 names on it and which is a major source of concern for the Defense Department because the North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao forces have only accounted thus far for about seven American military men lost in Laos.

The Pentagon also announced that U.S. planes returned to the attack in Cambodia for one day on Thursday at the request of the Cambodian government.

The attacks by U.S. fighter-bombers based in neighboring Thailand marked the first time the U.S. has carried out air attacks in Cambodia since January 30, when the Cambodian government announced a unilateral cease-fire in that country following the Vietnam cease-fire negotiated in Paris January 27.

The Pentagon described the attacks as needed to counter a Communist attack north of the capital at Phnom Penh for which the Cambodian government has requested air support.

Pentagon spokesman Jerry W. Friedheim said the air attacks were not "a major effort," and at this point were an isolated incident which did not signal resumption of full-scale U.S. bombing in that country.

HOPE

"We continue to hope and expect that a lasting cease-fire will be observed by both sides in Cambodia," he said.

At the same time, the Pentagon revealed officially that the continuing U.S. war against Communist forces and supply areas in Laos involved an average of 280 individual flights a day by B-52 bombers and smaller tactical fighter-bombers.

Friedheim read a statement to the press from new Defense Secretary Elliot L. Richardson confirming the size of the U.S. air effort in Laos.

It was the first time in more than eight years of American air attacks in Laos and the rest of Southeast Asia that the Pentagon had provided any specific information on the level of the effort being carried out in Laos.