

B-52'S BOMB LAOS LESS THAN A DAY AFTER THE TRUCE

Pentagon Says Strikes on
Communist Troops Were
Requested by Vientiane

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WARNING TO HANOI SEEN

Need to Respond to Attacks
Is Stressed—Raids Also
Resumed in Cambodia

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 23—The Defense Department announced today that American B-52 bombers had struck Communist troop positions in Laos less than 24 hours after a cease-fire formally went into effect there. The Pentagon said the raids were made "at the request of the Royal Laotian Government." No further details were given in the announcement, released simultaneously at the Pentagon and at the headquarters of the Pacific command in Honolulu.

Senior military officials disclosed that nine B-52's struck positions near Pak Song, on the Plateau des Bolovens in southern Laos, sometime before midnight last night.

[In Paris, the Foreign Ministers of the Saigon Government and of the Vietcong's Provisional Revolutionary Government met alone for the first time and agreed to open political talks, starting between March 5 and 10 in the French capital. Page 5]

New Raids in Cambodia

The Pentagon also announced raids in Cambodia that it said had been requested by the Government in Phnom Penh. Sources there said the raids were staged by a small number of fighter-bombers. They would disclose no other details.

The sources did say, however, that the United States would keep open the option of strikes in support of the Cambodian Government until a cease-fire agreement can be worked out.

On Jan. 30 Cambodia announced a halt in offensive operations pending negotiation of a formal cease-fire agreement, and United States raids were halted. On Feb. 9 the United States provided air support requested to counter a Communist offensive north of Phnom Penh.

Lesson for Hanoi

Administration sources said that the resort to limited air strikes in Laos was decided upon for a combination of short-term and long-term considerations.

The sources said that any failure to respond to active combat thrusts by North Vietnamese or Pathet Lao forces after the cease-fire might have tempted further disregard of the truce.

They added that willingness to resume B-52 strikes in Laos would add force to private warnings that any major cease-fire violations in South Vietnam by North Vietnamese troops might bring a resumption of air operations against the Hanoi Government.

The premier of Laos, Prince Souvanna Phouma, had informed reporters in Vientiane that he would request renewed

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air support to counter what he called a general offensive by troops opposing his Government.

"I am certainly sure that the United States will respond to the request," he said. "We cannot tolerate being trampled."

Nixon Administration officials said that the response by the Communists would determine whether additional raids would be conducted in Laos. "If they keep flouting the truce, they can look forward to additional air strikes," a Pentagon source said. "But things quieted down very quickly at Pak Song after the B-52's hit. They quite obviously had not expected our reaction."

The B-52's, operating out of U Taphao Air Base in Thailand, are believed to have carried up to 30 tons of bombs each.

"We realize how fragile the

truce might be," another official said. "We have no desire to overreact and run the risk of the Laotian cease-fire coming apart at the seams. But now it depends on the other side. The ball is in their court."

Trial Was Bombed

Military sources were reluctant to talk about the level of military traffic down the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. Under the true accord Laotian territory is not to be used to infiltrate weapons, ammunition or troops.

The sources said that up to the hour of the cease-fire—midnight Wednesday, New York time—American B-52's, fighter-bombers and gunships were pounding truck conveyors, storage areas and roads along the trail network. About 380 strikes a day were flown shortly before the cease-fire went into effect.

"We destroyed or seriously damaged hundreds of trucks in

the weeks before the cease-fire," a military analyst said. "This is their dry season, the traditional time for peak movements along the trail."

The Laos agreement also calls for a cease-fire in place, with each side controlling the territory it occupies; the formation within 30 days of a new coalition government; the withdrawal of all foreign troops within 60 days after the formation of a new cabinet, and the reactivation of the International Control Commission, made up of India, Canada and Poland, to supervise the truce and troop withdrawals.

The renewed bombing in Laos and Cambodia were condemned in a statement issued by the National Peace Action Coalition. The group said it would picket the White House starting at 10 A.M. tomorrow to "demand an end to all U.S. bombing and total U.S. withdrawal from Indochina."