

Laos Blocked Reds--U.S.

SAIGON — (UPI) — U.S. military sources said today the South Vietnamese drive into Laos had frustrated Communist plans for a dry season offensive and that U.S. air raids had cut truck traffic on the Ho Chi Minh Trail by half. U.S. helicopters flew more South Viet-

namese into Laos today. Spokesmen in Saigon said a 650-man South Vietnamese battalion was flown in today by a fleet of American UH1 (Huey) helicopters to an area southwest of Route 9, the road that is the axis of the South Vietnamese drive

across the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

The reinforcements were the first marines to go across the border in the drive by 16,000 infantry, paratroop and ranger forces.

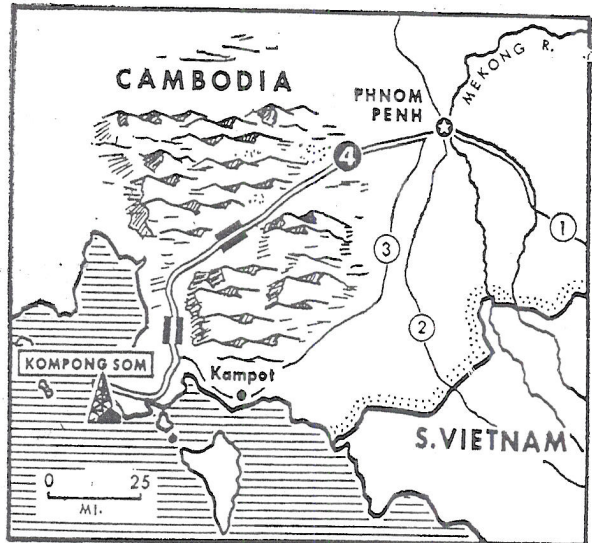
Military sources said all of South Vietnam's three marine brigades — from 10,000 to 13,500 men — had been moved up to staging areas inside South Vietnam and held in reserve.

In a day of major developments:

- Communist troops in Cambodia today destroyed 80 percent of the nation's only oil refinery at the port of Kompong Som, 120 miles southwest of Phnom Penh, and temporarily closed the airport there. Direct rocket hits blew up four of the six storage tanks there and caused explosions that did other heavy damage. Communication with Kompong Som was cut off.

- The U.S. Command said at least 15 American fighter-bombers attacked North Vietnamese missile and anti aircraft sites 13 miles east of the border with Laos and 17 miles north of the demilitarized zone. It was the 16th "protective reaction" strike this year

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Map locates Kompong Som, where a Cambodian oil refinery was blasted. Route 4 leads to Phnom Penh.

Laos Invasion

U.S. Claims Move Blocked Red Drive

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against missile sites firing on U.S. planes bombing the Ho Chi Min Trail.

• Field reports said B52 bombers today bombed Communist forces around the South Vietnamese 1st Division fire support base at Hong Ha II, also known as Hotel 2, 10 miles south of Highway 9. UPI front dispatches reported yesterday the base had been abandoned. Its loss was announced officially today.

• Laotian troops backed by CIA-trained guerrillas and units of the Thai regular army, opened a major offensive against Communist supply routes north of the Plain of Jars in northern Laos.

• South Vietnamese spokesmen disclosed that a tribe of about 900 Laotians was found in the heart of the battle area in Laos — the first civilians to be reported in the area. Capt. Cao Dai, a 1st Division Officer, said they were living in bunker type houses as protection against U.S. air raids and had been conscripted by the Communists to repair roads and carry weapons.

• U.S. military sources said the North Vietnamese for the first time had moved heavy Soviet-made T54 tanks into the Laotian panhandle. South Vietnamese spokesmen in Saigon said at least 52 lighter PT76 amphibious tanks had been destroyed in tank battles and by U.S. air power.

Khe Sanh Hit

South Vietnamese military spokesmen said the South Vietnamese marine reinforcements were flown into Laos

from the major forward operational base at Khe Sanh, which itself came under Communist mortar attack today for the first time since American troops reoccupied the plateau a month ago.

The U.S. Command said 15 82 millimeter mortar rounds hit outside the northeast perimeter of Khe Sanh, a dusty, treeless base occupied by more than 3000 of the 10,000 Americans involved in supporting the South Vietnamese incursion of Laos.

Reports that the South Vietnamese invasion had forestalled a Communist offensive in South Vietnam and Cambodia came during an official briefing. The military sources said the allied drive in Cambodia and particularly the 23-day-old Laotian operation had "preempted plans for an enemy offensive."

Air Strikes

The sources said at least 800 tons of ammunition and 300 tons of rice had been destroyed or captured in the Laotian campaign and that the allies had destroyed enough individual and crew-served weapons to equip three to four North Vietnamese battalions (up to 2400 men).

The spokesman said the United States had flown 2300 tactical air strikes and 180 B52 missions in support of the Laotian campaign and that nearly 20,000 helicopter sorties had been flown.

Officials said 3235 Communists had been killed and that the government lost 321 men killed, 1030 wounded and 99 missing. However, UPI field dispatches indicated much heavier losses than those admitted publicly.