

U.S. JETS HIT CIA BASES

Guerrilla Headquarters Suffers Heavy Casualties



AP Wirephoto

South Vietnamese troops found this section of the Ho Chi Minh trail had been covered by a canopy of bamboo and foliage to conceal it from U.S. planes

Attempt To Repel Red Attack

Associated Press

Saigon

American planes mistakenly bombed a U.S. Central Intelligence Agency base in Laos yesterday, causing heavy casualties to CIA-backed guerrilla forces headquartered there, reliable sources reported.

It was the second mistaken bombing reported in a week during air operations in Laos.

U.S. Air Force F-4 fighter-bombers were attempting to drive off a North Vietnamese attack when their bombs dropped on the CIA compound and airstrip at the Long Cheng base, the sources said.

The base, 78 miles northwest of Vientiane, is the headquarters of General Van Pao's guerrilla army.

BARRACKS

The informants said that the American barracks burned down and at least one CIA agent was wounded. The exact number of casualties suffered by Vang Pao's forces was not known. Heavy damage to the base was reported.

Other bombs reportedly started fires in Long Cheng town.

The U.S. Command in Saigon said it had no comment on the report.

Although the fighter-bombers came from bases in Thailand, they are under the tactical control of the U.S. Seventh Air Force in South Vietnam.

A week ago, a U.S. Navy fighter-bomber mistakenly dropped scores of tiny bombs the size of hand grenades on South Vietnamese troops massed along the border for a drive into Laos. Six men were killed.

KEYSTONE

The situation at Long Cheng, the keystone of Laotian defenses in the north central section of the country, appeared worsening. Vang Pao made an urgent

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trip to Vientiane to seek reinforcements for the garrison but was reported turned down by higher authorities.

The American bombers were called in after North Vietnamese troops launched heavy rocket, mortar and ground assaults against the base. Some of them drove through the perimeter.

In southern Laos, other U.S. bombers roamed across the east-west axis of the Ho Chi Minh trail attacking North Vietnamese mountain hideouts overlooking Highway 9 on the approaches to the town of Sepone, a major target of the invading South Vietnamese troops.

"We're trying to clear Highway 9," a senior U.S. officer said "We're putting considerable effort in there."

Scores of B-52s and smaller tactical fighter-bombers took part in the strikes.

SEPONE

South Vietnamese headquarters said its main column was within 12 miles of Sepone, which is 25 miles from the Vietnamese border. South Vietnamese reconnaissance teams have been moving in and out of the devastated town, and infantrymen have been patrolling to the north and south to secure the flanks.

In Quang Tri, in northern South Vietnam, South Vietnamese convoys remained south of the border, the third successive day without a border crossing. This led to speculation that the North Vietnamese had cut Highway 9 behind the advancing South

Vietnamese tanks and armored personnel carriers.

The South Vietnamese drive by more than 10,000 troops with full American air support began last Monday.

SUPPORT

The U.S. Command disclosed additional details about American air support. It said that U.S. helicopter gunships and troop lift, supply lift, medical evacuation and command helicopters flew 4500 missions into Laos during the first six days.

The command did not give the number of sorties flown by fixed-wing planes, but sources said 400 to 500 combat missions are being flown each day throughout all of Laos. The missions include support of the South Vietnamese operation, support of Royal Laotian troops and bombing of the entire Ho Chi Minh trail, more than 300 miles long.

South Vietnamese spokesmen in Quang Tri, one of the rear operational bases, said 343 North Vietnamese had been killed in the drive and about 300 tons of ammunition destroyed along with 35 trucks and four tanks. South Vietnamese losses were put at 43 killed and 148 wounded.

Elsewhere in Indochina, 20,000 South Vietnamese troops continued a parallel drive against North Vietnamese and Viet Cong sanctuaries in eastern Cambodia, more than 300 miles farther to the south. These sanctuaries are supplied by the Ho Chi Minh trail and its extensions.

There was virtually no action across South Vietnam.