their training records, and their present assignments. To build this roster, RO and AIRA had done the following:

"We began by assembling old Invitational Travel Orders, transferring the data on punch cards and printing a consolidated roster. We then went to RLAF Hq and each base and obtained Base and Unit rosters to compare assignment with training; most of the rosters were in French and Lao, some were part Lao and part French; additionally, one hand-written copy had French names and Lao serial numbers. These rosters were translated and transcribed to punch cards and printed. Finally, the November payroll was compared to the previous ones to update the information and cross-check for persons possibly being paid on two different unit payrolls and/or nonexistent names being paid. This completed, we found only approximately six people on two payrolls in November being paid twice, we found two dead people still being paid, plus two prisoners, one deserter, and one transferred to the FAR. All other names appear to be valid. It might be worthy to note that there are approximately 125 people on Savannakhet's payroll that do not appear on the Savannakhet Base roster and possibly do not have a job. RLAF will be asked to identify the jobs these people are performing."

By using this roster, AIRA and RO were shortly to recommend some important changes in RLAF manning and training assignments.

RLAF--Coherence or Confusion

In April 1969, AIRA assessed the state of the RLAF, finding the same leadership problems and the same trend toward decentralization as had been noted the year before. Additionally, however, it was apparent that the RLAF personnel as well as the population were becoming "war
weary--they have been fighting a war for a generation and are weak, poor, and tired." The results of the growing decentralization were not encouraging:

"With the lack of strong leaders within the air force, the RLAF apparently will remain at the mercy of the FAR leaders. This being the case, unfortunately, the aircraft are not always used in support of the war effort."

To improve the situation, renewed emphasis was placed on the establishment of a Combat Operations Center (COC) at Vientiane, but there were some built-in obstacles, as one Assistant Attache testified:

"As far as corruption and dishonesty goes, one of the ideas in getting the COC going was to stop the opium traffic by scheduling every aircraft from a central point. I don't think it will work. They'll fly the stuff anyway, but they'll either lie or not report the flight."

In addition to approving plans for an operational COC, the RLAF was displaying what a Requirements Office representative called a "spurt of energy" toward general reorganization itself, putting forth new efforts to achieve the four-composite-squadron-concept submitted to them the previous year.

Not all U.S. agencies agreed with the composite squadron plan. PACAF, for one, did not at first approve:

"The reorganization of the RLAF into four composite squadrons will in effect place all the problems of each individual weapons system on the
materiel manager in each composite squadron. Conversely, there will be no one at the problem-solving level with an RLAF-wide view of the problems of one particular fleet. In effect, the materiel managers' efforts are dissipated when they should be concentrated to a scope within their capability; i.e., four squadrons are independently solving identical problems. Problems seem to multiply in direct proportion to the number of different weapons systems while the actual number of aircraft in one particular fleet is of lesser importance. Thailand has already tried and discarded the composite squadron concept for these very reasons. It is realized that RLAF materiel management is relatively embryonic and that the initial simplicity of the composite set-up is tempting. However, it is recommended that the concept be closely scrutinized. If adopted now, it is an ultimate certainty that as the RLAF matures, the composite concept is discarded in an effort to improve RLAF-wide system management to achieve realistic operationally ready rates and flying hour utilization."

The Deputy Chief, however, backed the suggestion, and in doing so delineated a difference of opinion between contributing agencies, a difference which did not so much concern methods as it did U.S. overall policy toward the RLAF. The DEPCHIEF said, "Finalized studies revealed that a composite squadron concept is the most feasible method of responding to tactical requirements which is, until hostilities cease, the primary concern of the RLAF and the U.S. augmented Air Operations Centers with primary control in Vientiane." Expansion was also required "due to increases in the North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao activity."

The U.S. Charge to Laos further spelled out U.S. intentions at that time:

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"Discussion of composite squadron concept as applied to RTAF is valid. However, objectives for RTAF and tactical requirements in Laos substantially differ. As stated in UE study there is no plan for RLAF to become self-sufficient to extent of supporting total aircraft inventory of composite squadrons. Composite squadron concept with U.S. augmented Air Operations Centers with central control in Vientiane is most feasible method of responding to tactical requirements. RLAF, until hostilities cease, is primarily concerned with tactical operations and associated airlift. Country team provides major central control function for both operations and logistics. Members of country team serve as counterparts of RLAF commander to assist in single managing of logistics and operations. Other personnel augment at squadron level to advise on operations functions rather than to solve operational and logistics planning needs. Weapon systems are therefore managed at country team/RLAF level using contractual support. Only flight line maintenance and daily operation requirements performed at composite squadron."

As a result, CINCPAC recommended to JCS on 15 March that the four composite-squadron-reorganization be adopted, and by June, plans for the reorganization were in motion, drafted under the overall mission as defined by the Country Team:

- Fight the war to a successful conclusion; then organize the Air Force toward a self-sufficient Air Force.
- Obtain maximum participation from the Lao in all fields of aviation support and augment above their capability by contract to support 1.
- Support only personnel actually required and who can be utilized to accomplish the primary mission.
- Induce the RLAF to provide tactical logistical air support to the five military regions.
- Obtain maximum utilization of MAP-supplied equipment.
In short, at mid-1969, the U.S. assistance program to the RLAF was intended to develop maximum tactical efficiency, not self-sufficiency.

In line with this policy, the graduation on 19 June of six additional Meo T-28 pilots permitted full-scale operations out of Vang Pao's Long Tieng headquarters (Site 20A), a development which distressed the Ambassador but one which he felt was necessary:

"None of us are happy operating T-28s out of Twenty Alternate, but psychologically it is a must, and all of us including of course AIRA, believe that this is one of the risks we must face. Dispersion of our small fleet is not at all helpful, for it gives us one more forward operating site to be supported; but at the same time, I can assure you that flying T-28s out of Twenty Alternate has done more to improve Vang Pao and his troops' morale than any other single action we have taken."

The RLAF, too, was not particularly ecstatic, and a series of incidents in the months following hampered operations slightly. On 15 August, the Vientiane AOC Commander stated that he did not know what the status of the RLAF was at his base. An RLAF order had limited the number of aircraft operating out of Vang Pao's headquarters to four, but at the same time, seven Meos and two Lao RLAF pilots were being carried on the books at 20A. The RLAF, still attempting to integrate the Meo pilots into the normal system, had planned a regular rotation of pilots from Vientiane to 20A, but neither the Meo nor the Lao apparently wanted such a program. A similar request from CAS through AIRA to the RLAF that two Lao helicopters be temporarily stationed at 20A received no support,
causing an Assistant Attache to remark, "Probably the RLAF thought the idea rather ill advised, as they don't want VP to have his own air force." As a result, an "emergency request" was "made to 7AF/13AF at Udorn to acquire CH-3 helicopter support from USAF for the month of September."  

Further conflicts ensued. On 12 September, five RLAF pilots from Vientiane refused to return to 20A, and again on 19 December, an Assistant Attache remarked that there were T-28s not being used at Vang Pao's headquarters because some RLAF pilots still refused to return and fly, having had personality clashes with the general himself and his Meo-speaking Forward Air Guides (FAGs). The planned rotation of RLAF and Meo pilots had not succeeded, and by the end of the year, Vang Pao in effect did have his own air force with an operational AOC and nine USAF Raven FACs whose primary job was directing USAF airstrikes in MR II.

RLAF Training

Faced with the ever-increasing tactical requirements, the RLAF Air Training School at Savannakhet showed little or no development during 1969, but one trend which alarmed some U.S. advisers became apparent. The RLAF "100-hour-course" in 1968 had produced just six lightplane pilots; accordingly, C-47 upgrading at Savannakhet had to draw either from experienced RLAF T-28 pilots or those which one Assistant Attache called "the RLAF pilots who are not acceptable for our MTT." Of greatest concern was the loss of the T-28 pilots.
There were two aspects of the dilemma, however, for many of the RLAF T-28 pilots were by now approaching 1,000 combat missions. Some had even more. Transitioning to the C-47 was the only way a pilot could avoid what an AOC Commander called "the T-28 pilot's fate: You fly until you die." Nevertheless, draining some of the most experienced assets from the RLAF strike force caused one AOC Commander to remark bitterly:

"Lts. Sayfa (L-39), Suwon (L-08), and Phouma (L-54) have followed orders, and thus three of the most experienced tactical pilots, and certainly the best trained in this country, are attending C-47/ground school to learn just how to smuggle and haul passengers for hire. If that statement sounds bitter, it is only because of the utter futility of the situation as felt by the individual. Lt. Vath, Lt. Sayfa's temporary replacement, is a very conscientious individual and a fairly good pilot. However, he does not possess the experience, the judgment, nor the leadership potential of the aforementioned individuals. To date, he has received no orders confirming his position."

Included in the C-47 upgrading were the only two CONUS-trained T-28 instructor pilots, a transfer which caused the RLAF Chief of Operations to say later, "When the two IPs left the T-28, I was so angry, but there was nothing I could do about it."

Also at Savannakhet, the first attempt to qualify an RLAF pilot as a Forward Air Controller was thwarted despite an intensive upgrading effort by two assigned Raven FACs. With the O-1s originally programmed for an RLAF FAC school now being used for combat missions, plans were postponed to develop a course of instruction run by the RLAF. Instead,
USAF Raven FACs were asked to instruct two available RLAF student pilots in FAC procedures. One of the pilots described the results:

"In May 1969, when I first got there, I worked as an IP in the FAC school. We had two Lao students then, Peng and Ratsume Sanannikone. As Ravens, we split our time, FACing half a day, acting as IPs the other half. When Vereo (the other Raven FAC) came over, he was told he was to be the FAC IP, but there was never any real program set up. Then Tom Vereo got hepatitis, and everything stopped until he got out of the hospital in July. Then we picked up again, and had to start from scratch. We would put the student in the front seat after a few back seat FAC missions and conduct a simulated FAC strike. There were briefings and debriefings, and we made up a syllabus as we went along. There was no formal program. We flew when we could. Ratsume used to go off to Vientiane often, and we didn't really know when he would be available to fly. Both students wanted to be FACs, but Peng had a lot of problems. I let Ratsume work USAF Hoboes, and he did a pretty good job. I didn't let him work the jets. When we graduated him, we made up a certificate and gave it to him."

Lieutenant Ratsume, however, would never direct a solo strike. After his successful "graduation" on 18 August, he returned to Savannakhet from leave with orders to check out in the U-17. He had been told not to fly as a FAC, a result of pressure from the powerful Sanannikone family whose members controlled much of the military. With unfortunate irony, Lt. Ratsume Sanannikone would shortly be killed in the crash of the only U-17 assigned to the Savannakhet Air Training School.

**RLAF Pay and Support Functions**

One of the recommendations made at the 5 March 1968 joint meeting
had been to investigate the feasibility of incentive pay for the RLAF. On 1 June 1969, a suggestion made to AIRA, based upon a cumulative and projected sortie rate of 1,200 sorties per month, established a standard combat pay procedure. Pilots were to be paid 500 Kip ($1.00) per sortie, an amount which was to provide an additional $26.52 per month to each pilot. With extremely low base and flight pay, the RLAF pilots badly needed a raise.

Called "combat rations," this pay was to be provided by CAS through the AOC Commander who, after determining the exact amount per pilot, would then distribute the money. Partially, as a result, the RLAF sortie rate soared in late summer. At Vientiane, for example, in October during one week, the "sortie production was so high...that our bomb dump has not been able to keep sufficient ordnance built up to support mission requirements." The next week was worse: "Our ordnance expenditure has been so high...that after Friday, the 25th, we will not have any bombs to load." Other bases reported the same phenomenon. At Pakse, the squadron exceeded its programmed sortie rate for August and September. On 1 November, according to the AOC Commander, "CAS furnished combat sortie pay...and it was distributed the same day. As a result, the sortie rate is starting out high the first week of November." Contrary to rumors which had been circulating, many of the RLAF pilots were still flying conscientiously, as the Pakse AOC Commander attested: "The missions have not been flown out to the closest point to drop on trees and monkeys in an attempt to
add up more sorties. Instead, nearly all flights have been controlled by Raven FACs." The AOC Commander added, "However, this could not have been accomplished if it were not for the hard work that the U.S. maintenance personnel have been doing to keep the aircraft in flying condition and the munitions ready to load."  

Although pilots on an individual basis chose to give a certain percentage of their combat pay to their ground crews, there was no prescribed formula established or enforced. Consequently, some bases experienced problems of a new sort. During the first week of September, Savannakhet logged an extremely low sortie rate. There were a variety of reasons, said the AOC Commander:

"First and foremost is a mass refusal of 34 assigned line personnel to load munitions and maintain aircraft because the more they work, the more the pilots fly, and they don't feel they should be required to work so hard just so pilots can earn more sortie pay (combat rations). Actually, the pilots attempted to alleviate this problem last month by donating 10 percent of their combat rations plus profits from CBU dispensers, etc., to the maintenance personnel. If Savannakhet had a normal Operations/maintenance complex or even a decent base commander, this should have been effective. The basic problem is one of organization."

What another AOC Commander called "an interesting pay discrepancy" soon occurred. In his words:
"The T-28 pilots receive 'combat ration' pay based upon sorties which last 40 minutes or more. The most a man can usually fly is five or six a day. The H-34 guys, however, can get in 15-20 missions a day. At a dollar a mission, that's quite a difference. Also, we have to take their word on the number of missions—we have no way to check it."

Despite discrepancies and the fact that groups of pilots took care of their ground crews in different ways, the combat pay provided a much needed boost for the young RLAF pilots.

As pointed out by the Savannakhet AOC Commander, however, organization at the local level of the RLAF still remained a major problem. So did logistics and supply. In April, for instance, a Savannakhet AOC Commander called the supply problem "overriding":

"This covers the whole spectrum from the procedure of requesting supplies through actual receipt of the items. This is not limited to aircraft parts, because many other support functions are just as important as the aircraft in-commission rate. For example, the last 60 days we have had only one forklift operating and when it breaks down for more than 24 hours, the complete strike operation ceases because we are unable to get bombs to the aircraft."

The Luang Prabang AOC Commander agreed: "Supply is probably the largest single problem confronting the bases."

AIRA concurred as well: "The capability of the RLAF to even distribute supplies which have been given to it is limited." Reasons were "poor command and control, lack of understanding of personnel operating the system, and lack of communications."
Drastic changes in supply procedures were in progress, but the new rationale behind the RLAF supply operation was not clear to the Savannakhet AOC Commander:

"Within the area of supply, if our mission is to train the local Air Force to be self-sufficient, removing them from the supply function will not provide a workable operation, unless we plan to maintain in-country personnel indefinitely. I realize we have an excessive amount of pilferage within the supply system, but I personally feel we should try to get this to some acceptable level and allow them to continue to supply their own units."

As mentioned before, RLAF self-sufficiency was not, in 1969, the primary advisory mission. Accordingly, in mid-1969 the main in-country depot was moved from Savannakhet to Vientiane and placed under direct Requirements Office control. "Our goal," said an RO representative, "is to turn this facility back to the Lao when they develop the capabilities and establish the necessary controls." From that time on, only mission-essential spares and equipment, housekeeping items, and expendables for a 30-day stockage would be kept at the individual base supplies.

By the end of 1969, it was hoped that at least some major problems in RLAF supply had been solved.

RLAF Gunships

Early in 1969, the DEPCHIEF's June 1968 request for a .50 caliber side-firing modification to the RLAF C-47s was tabled by the Chief of Staff, pending a review of funds. On 13 March, the first USAF AC-47
Spooky flew in support of RLG forces under attack, and subsequent missions proved that gunship support was the most effective means of stopping an enemy which had begun to stage his attacks mainly at night.

More than a year after the initial request, on 25 July 1969, the DEPCHIEF was promised the first gunship for training purposes. Despite the need in Vietnam for the AC-47s, it had been a "year long frustration" for the USAF representative at DEPCHIEF:

"It has been extremely hard to understand and explain to the Deputy Chief (Army) and to the Ambassador to Laos why it has taken over one year to obtain approval to modify four C-47s with a simple .50 Cal. capability or to obtain the release of SUU-11A kits which appeared to have been in excess to USAF requirements."

Very shortly, not only would SUU-11 kits be available but there would soon be a gunship flood. First 5 AC-47s, then 8, and eventually 12 would be provided, as USAF assets were phased out of Laotian operations.

The first AC-47 crew was graduated from the Udorn MTT on 1 August, having received additional AC-47 combat training which consisted of 20 hours of flying time and 7 targets struck on 5 nights of flying.

Recorded comments by the USAF AC-47 instructor were brief: "Capt Tousane flew one-half of the total effective mission time. Tactical Air Navigation (TACAN) new to him. Wants to talk in Lao. Can't read maps too well. Very good stick and rudder. Above average shot. Gunner throws up all the time."
The instructor did not, an assistant at that the crew was incapable, but that they s closely supervised. He also recommended that Udorn MTT Instructor Pilot be sent TDY to as ning but not to fly combat. This latter out for some time.

AIRA suggestions were to immediately pr keep the trouble-plagued guns in firing order and control procedures, and plan a program be fore the crew began to fly combat. The assi bility of the RLAF Spooky program has been s will be a disappointment to many, but much wi the first aircraft." Adding that the first at Udorn, he said he did not think it was re concluded, "I don't know how to stall it of-

The first RLAF AC-47 in Vientiane arrived the bird will be here or at Luang Prabang has said the AOC Commander. Initially flown + Spooky was soon returned to Vientiane as me mount. The Luang Prabang AOC Commander lis lems:

. Point-to-point and air-to-ground
. Location of alert facilities.
Who has operational control of aircraft.
- Aircraft and gun maintenance personnel.
- Spare parts and tools.
- Ramp space for aircraft.
- FAGs for more of the field units.
- Lao pilots' fear of flying at night in a combat zone and in the mountains.

On the first three missions flown in September, the guns would not fire at all, and by the end of the month as RLAF pilots in Savannakhet began to hear that they would be getting some AC-47s, the AOC Commander there had questions of his own:

- How many will be assigned Savannakhet as home station?
- Will assignment status be same as other C-47s or T-28s?
- Approximately when may they be expected?
- What provisions have been made for maintenance of aircraft? Weapons system?
- Are these aircraft equipped with a flare dispensing system?
- Has a supply source been established for weapons system spares and special tools? Ammunition?

Two weeks later, having received an AC-47 at Savannakhet, the AOC Commander summarized the progress to date:
"The AC-47 program has gone over like the proverbial lead balloon. To quote a conscientious crew-member: 'The aircraft will not fly, but if it could fly, I cannot talk to the troops because the radios do not work, and if the radios worked I cannot help them because the guns do not shoot.' Despite the initial flop, local interest in the program remains high, and the residents of Keng Kok are still a little puzzled and awed by the strange 'DAKOTA' that shot 'ROCKETS' all over their lake."

That same week, a 7AF team, headed by the Director of Air Munitions, DCS/M, arrived in Vientiane to rebuild the gun system, and within a week declared all five gunships had demonstrated a 100 percent fireout. On 4 November, two USAF weapons mechanics were assigned TDY to train personnel and maintain the Spooky's guns.

At almost the same time, the decision was made to increase the number of RLAF gunships, along with a change in armament configuration. Instead of the SUU-11 system, the eight new AC-47s (to be exchanged on a one-for-one basis with C-47s already possessed by the RLAF) would be armed with the more easily maintained MXU-470A guns. The swap, while alleviating maintenance and operational difficulties, created a new, fortunately temporary, series of tribulations. According to an assistant Air Attache, the first and second MTT graduates:

"had problems because we started training with a borrowed Spooky with the MXU-470 system; then the first birds we received had the SUU-11 guns. So we started training them in the SUU-11, but the birds were all exchanged for the better MXU-470, so for a while we were right back where we started."
The increase from five to eight AC-47s also insured that the hard-pressed MTT program would have to provide additional pilots for the already severely undermanned RLAF AC-47 force. Accordingly, the Ambassador proposed the following:

"The original program for C-47 MTT training envisioned the production of sufficient aircrews and IPs to support a fleet of five AC-47 aircraft. Since that time the AC-47 fleet has been increased to eight in number. In addition, operational necessity has precluded the availability of the trained IPs for use in the instructor role and has required their use as operational pilots. With the manning required for the use of 24 C-47 aircraft and eight AC-47 aircraft, the lack of pilots qualified for night and instrument flight conditions will continue to be a problem. We envision the C-47 MTT as the method of alleviating this problem rather than only producing qualified AC-47 crews. In short, all existing and future C-47 crews must receive night, instrument, and some degree of tactical training. When this training is accomplished, the RLAF could then reasonably be expected to simultaneously support the tactical effort as well as a training program. A factor which must also be kept in mind, which is one proved by previous experience, is that of aircraft and crew attrition. We may expect that as C-47 and AC-47 pilots become more experienced they will also become more aggressive. Coupled with the hostile environment in which they operate, combat lessons must be reluctantly expected."

Two days later, on 12 December, JUSMAG forwarded the request to CINCPAC.

Despite the early problems, by December the MTT training had, like its counterpart T-28 instruction, produced a Lao AC-47 capability which an Assistant Attache described as "better than we expected." RLAF Spookies were flying in MR I and MR III by mid-December, and on the night of the 26th, RLAF Spooky 19 assisted Hunter and Pogo ground FABs in MR
Although at first hesitant to communicate freely with the USAF Airborne Command Post because of the language difficulty, the RLAF crews soon adapted themselves, and by 28 December, according to an Assistant Director of the Air Battle Staff (DABS), the contact between ALLEYCAT and the English-speaking pilot of the RLAF Spooky was satisfactory:

RLAF and RLG Operations - 1969

What contributed to the most severe growing pains in the RLAF's history was the extremely variable military and political position of the RLG in 1969. In effect, this year was a microcosm of all the ebbs and flows which the Laotian part of the Indochina war had evidenced in the past. The difference this time was that everything happened much more rapidly and with greater intensity. The "crunch," it seemed, was always on. Despite internal problems within the RLAF itself, the T-28 and, later, the AC-47 pilots extended themselves beyond all reason, often flying in hazardous weather conditions, ever ready to fly another mission, and always pressing. As became obvious, however, some of them pressed too much.

As detailed in previous CHECO reports, the fighting increased in intensity during 1969, as new NVA troops were introduced and as RLAF and USAF strike sorties reached all time highs. By way of comparison, total RLAF FY 68 sorties had been approximately 5,500; FY 69 produced more than 10,000; and FY 70 would see more than 20,000. These figures represented a fourfold increase in just two years. The previous high
monthly total of 1,526 sorties, achieved in December 1968, would be sur-

passed often in 1969.

Despite this year-end peak, however, in early 1969, the RLG forces were unable to stem a series of NVA/PL advances, in many instances because ground forces would be withdrawn for tactical reasons, even though a site could have been defended, if the FAR and guerrilla troops had been willing to take casualties. With few exceptions, the RLG forces could not afford heavy losses, especially in the lower command ranks. There were just not enough experienced leaders.

Another factor also affected the ground troops' movements—the availability of air support. Ironically, as the number of sorties soared upward, the RLG and guerrilla forces became so dependent upon close air support that when it was not available, they would often abandon positions with little or no resistance to the enemy.

On 3 January, Vang Pao's attempt in MR II to recapture Site 85 (Operation PIGFAT) stalled, and by 7 January, confronted with fresh NVA battalions, his Special Guerrilla Units (SGUs) were in retreat. Never again would a major RLG force penetrate so close to Sam Neua, the capital of the Pathet Lao. Two months later, the much contested Site 36 was abandoned, and the enemy forces committed to these two sites were now free to move farther down into MR II.
At the same time in MR IV, NVN/PL forces were boasting that they would soon capture the Bolovens Plateau and seize Attopeu, then push on to the Thai Border. They tightened the siege of the garrison at Tha Teng, but for the first three months of the year it appeared that the reinforced strongpoint might hold. Politically, Prime Minister Souvanna considered a defense necessary, and to hold off the enemy, USAF aircraft had seeded the approaches with mines and delayed munitions. At one time, RLAF and USAF strikes had accounted for 500 enemy KBA.

There were problems, however, at Tha Teng. According to the Air Attache, the Ambassador had requested that RLAF helicopter assets alone be used for supply and evacuation of wounded, but the RLAF H-34s found the groundfire too heavy to operate. To relieve the pressure on the fort, it was decided to insert a company of RLG troops on a hill overlooking the besieged position. A rift developed between ARMA and AIRA advisers as to proper helicopter tactics for this operation, with the MR IV Commander, General Phasouk, caught in the middle. When the final decision was made to helilift the troops, along with intense USAF strike support, General Phasouk decided in favor of the AIRA plan and the troops were landed without incident. "But from then on," said the Attache, "relationships were never good between AIRA and ARMA."

As happened several times in northern Laos, however, an improvement in the friendly situation did not mean an improvement in Lao willingness to fight. Despite later paratroop reinforcements and substantial air
support, the 250 Lao defenders deserted the fort at Tha Teng on 4 April. There was no more significant action in MR IV during the year, as the enemy had other plans.

With MR III reporting little enemy activity, attention centered on northern Laos. In MR I, having consolidated his hold on Nam Bac, the enemy pushed against Pakbeng, except for Luang Prabang the last sizable RLG town north of the Mekong. Coupled with the increased Chinese road-building efforts south from their border, the fall of Pakbeng in May caused alarm about possible danger to the royal capital as well.

In an attempt to counter the growing NVA/PL presence in MR II, the RLG in mid-March had authorized Operation RAINANCE, a joint USAF/RLAF strike package around the Plaine des Jarres which would be followed by a government advance. From 17-21 March, 261 USAF and 43 RLAF sorties initiated the operation. By 3 April, when USAF F-105s leveled Xieng Khouangville, the RLG position was improving, but still considered critical. Hopes rose slightly when Vang Pao's forces occupied Xieng Khouangville from late April to 24 May, but when the enemy retook the town and started a general move westward from the PDJ toward the Neutralist town of Muong Soui, RLG hopes plummeted.

During this period of relatively good weather, the RLAF T-28s had been flying more and more sorties. From 28 March to 30 April, for instance, they logged 1,436, and in May set a new record with 1,695. With 45 aircraft available for combat (nine of which were flown by the Thais), the
once desired total of 40 sorties a day had been far surpassed. Contributing to the rise had been Vang Pao's oldest surviving Meo pilot, Capt. Lee Lua, who had flown in April the incredible number of 117 sorties. True, the sorties from 20A were usually not much longer than 30 minutes; nevertheless, that kind of pace for a fighter pilot cannot last for long.

An Assistant Attache recognized this fact:

"In March, I think it was, I took Lee Lua aside and told him straight he was flying too much, that he was going to kill himself. He was flying too low, taking blast damage all the time. It was right after he had bailed out and I think I got to him for a while. I told him he was doing things that no pilot should be doing, and I told him I just wanted to say goodbye, right there. But then the Muong Soui push came...."

On 2 June 1969, the Ambassador assessed the situation:

"The current waning dry season offensive by the enemy took every bit of energy and all the assets this mission could muster in support of the armed forces of the Royal Lao Government in order to avert a potential disaster. We were required to employ even the advanced attrition T-28 aircraft on hand in order to bolster the government's morale and safeguard its tactical position on the ground. We expect similar severe enemy offensive efforts during the next dry season."

Unfortunately, the enemy offensive was not waning at all. The wet season was late in arriving, and as RLAF and USAF airstrikes attempted to stop the resupply efforts, it became obvious that the NVA/PL forces would attempt one more move before the rains washed away their lines of communication. On 24 June, they began their attack on Muong Soui. With tanks and
artillery, fresh NVA battalions were under orders to "take Muong Soui or die trying." When the Neutralist troops refused to hold positions, Muong Soui fell on 28 June 1969. After the 24th, when 48 USAF and 29 RLAF strikes were flown, the weather had closed in, severely restricting air support.

At this critical point in 1969, the 19 June graduation of 14 new RLAF pilots including the six Meos, certainly did raise Yang Pao's morale, as the Ambassador had noted. Within a year, five of the Meos would be dead and one would have been severely burned from a bailout after being hit by groundfire. In addition, the new class could hardly have had a worse introduction to combat flying, for on 11 July, Capt. Lee Lua dueled his last 12.7 mm gun. Known alternately as "the Red Baron" or "the Golden Boy," he was "just worn out from flying 10-12 sorties a day," according to the Assistant Air Attache. In his 14 months as a pilot, he had logged at least 800 combat missions and had been secretly decorated by the USAF.

His loss occurred during Yang Pao's unsuccessful attempt (Operation OFF BALANCE) to retake Muong Soui, a drive which was again hindered by Neutralist desertions and extremely poor weather. That same day, another RLAF pilot was shot down, and from 11 July to 11 August, a total of four pilots would be lost.

Despite the government's deep despair of July, however, RLG forces would embark on two operations, JUNCTION CITY JR. and ABOUT FACE, the latter called by a CAS official "the first major victory in the history
of the Royal Lao Government." In MR II, Vang Pao's guerrillas would move nearly to Ban Ban, and in MR III, with talk of interdicting the Ho Chi Minh Trail, JUNCTION CITY JR. would enter territory which had been occupied by the PL/NVA for the past ten years.

In the latter operation, USAF air provided most of the support. Primarily a CAS-advised SGU operation, JUNCTION CITY JR. had begun as a limited probing offensive, but when little enemy resistance was encountered, the decision was made to push on as far as possible, and the operation was given its nickname. The new offensive was scheduled to start on 1 September and last six days, with hopes that the town of Muong Phine could be secured for a week. Unfortunately, CAS planning was not revealed to USAF until too late to schedule air support for the first day; as a consequence, USAF air did not arrive until 2 September.

At Savannakhet that week, only 21 T-28 interdiction and combat support sorties were flown by the RLAF, partly because of the ground crew strike, but also because of a failure of either the FAR JOC or CAS to give the RLAF any targets. In fact, said the AOC Commander:

"CAS was too busy with JUNCTION CITY to post a representative to JOC during the past week. Thus absolutely no targets have been generated through JOC throughout this period although 3+ battalions of SGU have successfully moved into and secured hundreds of square miles of enemy territory. I feel Operation JUNCTION CITY would have been a much costlier maneuver in both SGU casualties and time to secure if not for the constant presence of USAF-fragged air cover. I also feel that
without the above stated problems to contend with, MR III T-28s could have provided nearly all the air cover required and at a much, much lower cost in terms of flying time and munitions. Perhaps if this example can be rewritten and presented to the RLAf Commander as an example of the unreliability caused by poor organization and lack of interest within his own command structure, it may generate some interest in AIRA's proposed reorganization plan and at the same time alleviate a local problem here."

At the same time in Pakse, the situation was different. The AOC Commander said, "The JOC is functioning smoothly now. Both the FAR and SGU, especially the SGU, are providing an adequate number of valid targets to support the increased sortie flow." That week, the six Pakse T-28s (there were 12 at Savannakhet) had logged 70 strike and combat support sorties.

During the next seven days, Savannakhet sorties picked up to a total of 65, but 58 were flown for interdiction, not close air support. The RLAf H-34s did airlift a battalion of FAR troops into Ban Tang Vai to reinforce JUNCTION CITY Jr., a feat which was called "notable" by the AOC Commander because the crews flew on a national holiday.

On 13 September, Muong Phine was occupied by FAR troops, and other units early in October reached the Route 9/914 junction, quite close to Tchepone itself. The enemy, however, began attacking all along the extended lines of the RLG forces, and by the end of October, the troops of Operation JUNCTION CITY Jr. were on their way back. Although the RLAf T-28s from
Savannakhet had provided some assistance, air operations had been conducted primarily by the USAF.

To the north, as Operation ABOUT FACE began to gather momentum after 6 August, USAF air support also vastly exceeded that of the RLAF, in number of sorties as well as tons of ordnance. There was a difference in MR II, however, because the rapport which General Vang Pao had with his Meo pilots caused them to fly more sorties than the pilots in any other Military Region. He also paid his pilots more. In addition, Vang Pao had a unique method of targeting which took two forms: at the daily meeting, usually during or immediately after dinner, he would brief on the next day's operations, then personally instruct not only his 0-1 back seat FAC observers but also his pilots. In no other Military Region did the commanding general have such close contact with his air assets. Occasionally, Vang Pao would also bypass the normal system and order an immediate strike. An AOC Commander described such an incident:

"VP runs his own show here. He does most of the targeting, sometimes using CAS, sometimes using his own sources which he doesn't tell CAS about. He'll recommend the ordinance and the locations. The other day, we were standing on the flight line and VP came down with a target. It was on the sides of two parallel ridgelines beside a river. He wanted two T-28s to come in along the sides and parallel the ridgetop, dropping half-way up the hills. He did not go through CAS, and the guys on the flight line were the first to know."
By way of comparison, the T-28s flying from 20A (and later staging from Vang Pao's forward command post at L-22 in the PDJ) flew 137 and 114 sorties, respectively, during the first two weeks in September, compared to the 21 and 65 already noted at Savannakhet. Sortie figures alone can be misleading, though, because, due to the terrain surrounding the runway, the T-28s from 20A could not carry the ordnance load that the aircraft from either Savannakhet or Pakse could. Rarely did the T-28s from 20A carry 500-lb. bombs; their armament consisted mainly of 250-lb. bombs, rockets, and 50 caliber guns. A maximum of four 250-lb. bombs could safely be carried. During the remainder of 1969 and into 1970, the pilots from 20A were to fly almost nothing but strict close air support, first to advancing, then to retreating troops.

Time after time, the RLAF T-28s supporting Operation ABOUT FACE would be called upon to work over one of the small hilltop outposts in the hilly terrain of MR II, as they did on 19 and 20 August against Phou Nok Kok, the strategic position overlooking Route 7, a main enemy supply route. As a result, SGUs took the position easily. With the Raven FACs controlling most of the USAF air, the RLAF aircraft would fly to targets briefed by Vang Pao and work with a ground Forward Air Guide (FAG). It was on such a mission on 4 September that Lt. Vang Sue, soon to be Lee Lua's successor as a legendary pilot, was shot down near Phou Kout Mountain. After six hours, a successful SAR effort retrieved the seriously burned pilot, and after recuperating in the hospital, Vang Sue began flying once again.
As Operation ABOUT FACE began to exceed anyone's wildest hopes in territory covered and enemy supplies captured or destroyed, sorties for the RLAF continued to climb. For the last two months of the year, the RLAF flew 4,629 sorties, an amount which compared very favorably with the 6,984 produced by the USAF in BARREL ROLL. From 9-16 November, the average was 85.9 sorties per day for the RLAF, with an operationally ready figure of 27.5 T-28s.

At year's end, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma had made an "inspection trip" of the Plaine des Jarres and declared that he would like to see it held. A sapper attack on Lima Site 22, however, on 22 December had signaled the enemy was about to begin his expected drive to regain the territory he had lost. With a phased withdrawal plan drawn up, Vang Pao intended to use his air support to help his SGU and FAR forces conduct, if necessary, an orderly retreat.

Despite the organizational, supply, and maintenance problems, it had been a year of unusual activity for the RLAF. On the surface, it was no nearer unity and self-sufficiency than ever before; nevertheless, as a result of Operation ABOUT FACE, the T-28 pilots throughout the RLAF had for the first time a sense of accomplishment and, even more important, a series of successful air operations to look back upon.

The U.S. Ambassador to Laos, sounding a warning about depleted aircraft stocks and the need for more T-28s, summed up a view held by many at the end of 1969:

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91/

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"I have been struck with admiration expressed to me by U.S. airmen for the job that the RLAF and its USAF maintenance supporters have performed. One senior competent airman described RLAF action as an incredible air offensive run on a shoe string... The RLAF, from every point of view, is the outstanding success story in Laos."
CHAPTER V
1970 AND BEYOND

As spectacular as the gains of ABOUT FACE had been, they were not to be sustained. When the enemy reacted, he did so with determination. By April, despite heavy losses, the NVA/PL had pushed Vang Pao's Meo and FAR battalions back to the doorstep of Long Tieng itself. In MR I, the steady nibbling process would eliminate all RLG control north and west of the Mekong. Site 209 fell early in the year. In MR IV, reacting to the U.S./SVN thrusts into Cambodia, enemy troops would occupy first Attopeu, then Saravane, and threaten all of southern Laos. By the middle of 1970, the RLG position would appear even worse than it had seemed at the same time in 1969.

The ground reverses, especially those in April, had an unexpected and beneficial effect, not only on the RLAF but on the Lao military as a whole. For a while, ethnic and geographical differences seemed forgotten, as troops from other Military Regions were sent to assist Vang Pao, then T-28s and an AC-47 were shifted to MR IV as General Phasouk's forces came under increasing pressure.

For the RLAF, the first half of 1970 was important not only for the still rising sortie rate but also for the growing indications that the RLAF officers themselves were beginning to look at some of their own problems with an eye toward eventual solution. Certainly, the announced U.S. cutbacks in Southeast Asia and the steadily decreasing USAF sortie
rate affected the RLAF outlook, but equally significant was the fact that certain United States trained officers had reached positions of responsibility and, importantly, had been promoted to higher rank. Even so, the ultimate FAR power structure remained unchanged, in fact became even stronger as right-wing factions quietly circulated their discontent with Souvanna's professed neutralism. Nevertheless, by mid-July, with 50 combat-ready pilots, 44 T-28s, and eight operational AC-47s, the RLAF was more than ever the most effective military force in Laos.

RLAF Operations - Jan-Jul 1970

In MR I, the loss of Pak Beng and the solidification of Chinese influence caused a CAS official to reflect later, "We have lost northwest Laos. The CHICOMs are in full control, and all we have left is an intelligence gathering capability." Even though T-28s from Luang Prabang continued to work area and later river targets, there was little change in the ground situation. It was MR II that received most of the attention in early 1970, as first the strategic summit of Phou Nok Kok fell, then Xieng Khouangville, Lima Site 22, Muong Soui, and many other important sites, with Yang Pao's planned orderly retreat turning into a rout. Only Site 32, north of the PDJ, was not overrun, and airpower was given credit for saving it. Many planned enemy assaults against Site 32 were disrupted during the day by USAF and RLAF strikes; then in the evenings, USAF and later, RLAF AC-47s successfully held off the enemy.

At first, it appeared that Phou Nok Kok might be held, as nearly continuous air support to determined SGUs accounted for heavy enemy
casualties. USAF aircraft provided most of the strikes in and around the PDJ, but when Muong Soui was reactivated on 14 January, RLAF T-28s from Vientiane and 20A used this forward staging base for much quicker turnarounds. Sorties flown there were often no more than 15 to 20 minutes each, and from 14-21 January, as many as 41 sorties were flown from Muong Soui on a single day. As the length of the sorties decreased, their numbers began to rise. In the next five weeks, until Muong Soui was abandoned on 24 February, T-28s flew 3,350 strike sorties, setting an all-time record from 12-17 February when they flew 920. With U.S. maintenance and munitions support increasing daily by Air America C-123 shuttle, the RLAF operations from Muong Soui were a high point of an increasingly deteriorating ground situation.

Worsening as well was the weather, as the normal dry season haze resulting from the farmers' slash and burn methods was made denser by additional fires set, some said, by the enemy. With unusually low cloud conditions appearing early in the year, there were only 13 days in January, 14 in February, and 6 in March when ceilings and visibilities consistently remained over 5,000 feet and five miles. The weather was almost zero-zero when the last strongpoint on Phou Nok Kok finally fell on 14 January, and from then on, the visibility continued poor.

With resistance at Phou Nok Kok gone, the enemy had a clear path to the PDJ. Bringing in trucks, APCs, and tanks, on 20 February, the NVA/PL forces quickly routed the defenders of Lima 22 when air support was not
available because the USAF AC-47s had left the station to return for fuel.  

6/ Xieng Khouangville was evacuated the next day, Muong Soui was abandoned within a week, and except for a series of sites which came to be called the Yang Pao line, the enemy had a clear shot at the MR II Headquarters of Long Tieng.

Almost all the attacks had come at night, many when the weather was bad, and the RLAF T-28s and USAF air could not stop the enemy advance. Furthermore, having come to depend on air support around the clock, the ground forces would not hold when the aircraft were not there. As a CAS official noted:

"Vang Pao looks upon air as a magic wand. All he has to say is kill the enemy here and it's done. This worked while he was on the offensive. Then they thought the same way of air on the defensive and they expected air to defend them. When it didn't, they got scared and ran."

With Vang Pao's headquarters being evacuated, the Yang Pao line bypassed, and the enemy apparently massing for an attack, the FAR and SGU troops were going to run no more. Documented in the CHECO Report, "Air Operations in North Laos, 1 Nov 1969 - 1 Apr 1970," dated 5 May 1970, the stand at Long Tieng from 17 March to 1 April should be remembered as the first time the FAR and Meo troops from all Military Regions, in the air and on the ground, achieved a common purpose for a common goal. At first, weather conditions were unbelievably bad, with visibilities of less than a mile common. When USAF air was unable to conduct visual strikes, the RLAF did. During this period, two of the
RLAF pilots flying from 20A accomplished 31 sorties in a single day. Shortly afterward, a Lao pilot would fly 19 missions in one day.

Long Tieng held, due in part to a break in the weather which allowed more air support but also as a result of the determination of all concerned that it would not fall. By mid-April, guerrillas were conducting probes of their own, and while the enemy remained nearby in some strength, now it was the RLG forces who were seeking the NVA/PL instead of the reverse. By the end of July, the situation in MR II had stabilized.

RLAF operations throughout this period took various forms as ground positions changed so rapidly. In mid-April, a fallback staging base at Muong Khasi (LS-249) was readied in an extremely short time, and until the rainy season made the dirt runway unusable, RLAF T-28s flew from there daily. In MR I, attention turned to the Nam Ou River, and with USAF aircraft rarely available because of commitments to MR II, RLAF T-28s concentrated on structures, caves, and boat traffic associated with the enemy's resupply attempts down this waterway. In one week of early April, for instance, T-28s from Luang Prabang collapsed six caves near the Nam Ou and achieved secondary fires and explosions from four others. At night, an RLAF AC-47 worked traffic on the river itself. In MR V, a Spooky supporting friendly forces near Paksane on 8 April broke an enemy mortar attack, accounting for 19 KBA and many wounded. One report stated: "Both FAR Chief of Staff and MR V Commander are enthusiastic about the Spooky quick reaction time and ordnance on target."
Not all the AC-47 missions were as successful, however, and there were problems in scheduling and some conflicting opinions about RLAF versus USAF air support. General Vang Pao for a while would not permit RLAF Spookies to launch, preferring to use USAF AC-47s and AC-119s instead. It had been a struggle to get the RLAF AC-47s to work Long Tieng in the first place; so AIRA and USAF officers convinced Vang Pao that the RLAF should do more of the job. Then another problem occurred when RLAF AC-47s were asked to divert farther north to Site 32 and other friendly positions. They simply refused to go. As an Assistant Attache said in May:

"There are no navigators in the AC-47s. We've trained some, but they just drift away. They find they can make more money in a headquarters outfit...The little lads are afraid at night. If they go down, who's going to pick them up? They have no authenticator information, and no U.S. chopper is going to go in after someone with a foreign accent who just says he wants to be picked up...There are divert problems, too. They don't know the area as well. We don't command them. It's their airplane and their country. We can push them, but we can't command.

While these and other problems were being worked out, MR IV was heating up rapidly, and the RLAF pilots from Pakse abruptly found themselves in what an MR IV CAS official called a sudden change "from the minor to the major league." The abandonment of Attopeu marked the first major RLG loss; Saravane would be the next. By the end of July, the enemy would have a foothold on the Bolovens Plateau and be pressing hard in extreme southern Laos.
Control of the Bolovens Plateau was vital if RLG forces were to be able to prevent the enemy's unrestricted use of the Se Kong River as a LOC; consequently, most of the efforts of the Pakse squadron were initially in support of ground forces, as the small sites at the eastern edge of the escarpment changed hands frequently. During the third week in May, RLAF T-28s flew 167 strike sorties in close air support to friendly troops, and on the 28th, four RLAF flights forced enemy troops to abandon the positions from which they were mortaring PS-38, a key site. A patrol sweep through the area later counted 10 enemy bodies and numerous blood trails.

Even though the Air Attache noted at this time that the RLAF was capable of generating 85 sorties a day, air support alone was not able to prevent the fall of Saravane on 9 June. According to the Attache, "General Phasouk did not have the necessary forces to hold." Moreover, his troops were tired, and "he knew his men would run, because their morale was low...and the reports were that the enemy force was very large." Nevertheless, the general said that Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma wanted Saravane held for political reasons. Possessing a three-day advance notice of the attack, Phasouk could not secure permission for what he called a "planned withdrawal". Consequently, most of his equipment was abandoned when his troops retreated. In the abortive attempts to retake Saravane, there was also some command confusion when General Phasouk, claiming he was ordered to start an offensive with a tired force one-third the size of the enemy's, failed at first to get CAS and ARMA approval for helicopter
assistance to insert a company for a blocking force. Finally, a last minute helicopter fleet of mixed RLAF and Air America aircraft did succeed in landing the troops; then, when the counterattack failed, the RLG forces were able to withdraw.  

The day Saravane fell, Raven FACs from Pakse dropped leaflets which announced that the town would be retaken, using mainly bombing by the RLAF. Residents were enjoined to "get away from the enemy." Shortly afterward, extremely accurate bombing by RLAF T-28s demolished only those buildings which were suspected of housing the NVA command post. After the strike, a jubilant squadron commander said that intelligence had reported an NVA general killed. That week, the 106 sorties flown by the Pakse squadron were credited with having destroyed 51 structures, while damaging only one.

The Pakse squadron was augmented on 12 June by two additional T-28s and one more AC-47, a result of what the RLAF Commander called "the ability of the COC to function properly." The Combined Operations Center at Vientiane had formally opened on 26 May, and this TDY shift of aircraft and personnel was another first for the RLAF. As first envisioned, said an Assistant Attache, the COC "was not to be an integrated command post, just a means to know where the airplanes were and to control the transport aircraft, gold, and opium." Now, he added, the COC was "designed to control everything--the T-28s, AC-47s, and C-47s. It's modeled after the DASC-TASC systems in Vietnam." The RLAF Chief of Operations agreed.
"The COC is a great help in moving aircraft. Before, we had to go through the JOC only. To move an aircraft, the request would come to the AOC, then to me at operations, and I would have to go into General Sourith and then send the answer back the same way. It took a day. Now we can do it with a radio call."

By mid-June, as the enemy kept constant pressure on forward RLG sites, the Pakse squadron each month was averaging about 60 sorties and 40-50 hours of flying time per pilot, according to the squadron commander. Additionally, the American AOC Commander fervently wished the RLAF possessed a unit citation award (it did not) in recognition of the squadron's achievement in close air support around PS-38. On 12 June, the squadron formed a ten-ship formation to strike, then to overfly Saravane. Major General La, a member of the FAR General Staff, commented later that evening:

"We need U.S. airplanes too to fly over Saravane for a show of force. You understand the show of force. That is what we did this afternoon with the T-28s. They took Saravane so we responded and let them know that we were powerful."

Unfortunately, the NVA, veterans of much larger shows of force over Hanoi, did not respond as hoped. By the end of July, they were massing on two sides of Khong Island, the site of the Dooley Foundation Hospital and the southernmost RLG bastion in Laos.

If one defines air operations only as the ability to take aircraft and deliver ordnance upon a target and return, then for the first half of 1970, RLAF operations were overwhelmingly successful. For the fiscal year,
their sortie rate averaged 530.02 sorties per week, as compared to the 
USAF BARREL ROLL average of 860.37. For the first week in July, the RLAF 
started out almost even with the USAF, flying 426 sorties to the USAF's 
506.

Another comparison is even more startling. Averaging 36-41 aircraft 
in commission during a given month, the RLAF possessed about one-third 
the resources of their counterpart service, the South Vietnamese Air 
Force, whose A-1s, F-5s, and A-37s totaled 114. According to the DEPCHIEF, 
munitions delivered during a three-month period in 1970 compared as fol-

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<td>Feb</td>
<td>VNAF 15,000</td>
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<td>Mar</td>
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<td>RLAF 9,652</td>
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Once again, however, the dedicated and daring pilots of the RLAF, 
along with their USAF Allies, had succeeded only in hurting and delaying 
the enemy. They had not stopped him. Operationally, the RLAF had pro-
gressed, but the Lao armed forces had definitely not yet succeeded.

RLAF Trends - Jan to Jul 1970

As the RLAF increased in size, strength, and capability, the indi-
vidual bases and composite squadrons began to take on more characteristics
of their own, a product (as has been noted earlier) of decentralization. Hopefully, a properly operating COC would eventually bring them back together. Within the RLAF, however, there was no real standardization, and the character of a given composite squadron depended more than ever upon three personalities: that of the Military Region Commander, the Base/Wing/Squadron Commander, and the American AOC Commander. By 1970, most of the AOC Commanders were volunteers who had returned for their second or third Southeast Asia tour, and many by then were well experienced with Laotian operations either through AIRA, Project 404, or SOF. As long as these men continued to be available, the consensus was that the RLAF operations would improve.

On the RLAF side, the situation was somewhat different. In 1970, certain commanders were newly assigned; others had been in the same or nearly identical position for years. Some were efficient and motivated; others definitely were not. The Luang Prabang Wing Commander (who also doubled as the Base Commander) was strong, according to the American advisers. "I don't say he's a good leader," said one, "but he makes his men work. When he's not there, they slack off. He isn't afraid to throw them in jail." The Deputy Commander of MR II was General Bounchanh, the man whose Group Mobile force had lost Pakbeng. He had come to respect the need for proper targeting. Accordingly, the targeting procedure in MR I was as follows:
"Our targeting comes from three references: CAS FG Northwest and FG East, and MR I HQ. At 1600, CAS, ARMA, and MR I sit down together and discuss the intelligence, plot it on the board, and talk about which are the best targets. ARMA can then request Infrared flights if they're needed. Then the FACs go and VR the area and can either recommend striking or holding off. We always try and send a FAC up if possible. It's paying off. Look at the recent KBA. We're trying to get away from the concept of using TACAIR as artillery ... Now we can throw the whole frag out the window if we want to."

In MR I, a Raven FAC continued, the enemy was no longer mobile, and the ground situation was very similar to what it had been before Nam Bac fell, but "farther south--to within 25 miles north of Luang Prabang."

In mid-1970, the Luang Prabang squadron was striking primarily pre-briefed area targets, and about 25 percent of their sorties were controlled by USAF Raven FACs. "We do work well with CAS at LP," a FAC said, "but that's not to say they tell us everything." The AOC Commander concluded: "I think Luang Prabang is the only place where everyone gets along."

At Vang Pao's MR II headquarters, however, the situation was quite different. The variable targeting methods which Vang Pao used have been discussed; what differentiated the military situation in MR II from that in MR I was the extreme mobility of Vang Pao's forces, the intense loyalty of his Meo pilots while they were still alive, and Vang Pao's close relationship with CAS. One should remember that it was Vang Pao's troops which CAS first started training and that MR II had traditionally been the scene of the heaviest ground fighting.
At 20A, according to the AOC Commander, only about one percent of the RLAF sorties were directed by Ravens; the rest were briefed by Vang Pao from CAS, AIRA, and his own intelligence sources. Consequently, severe questions arose throughout 1970, both from AIRA and USAF commanders in Thailand and Vietnam, as to the accuracy and effectiveness of this extremely personal targeting concept and Vang Pao's use of airpower as artillery. MR II was also the region into which the largest number of USAF strikes were directed—many of them controlled by Raven FACs.

In June, the concept was changing, as an AOC operation similar to those in the other Military Regions was finally agreed upon. According to the Air Attache, the Ambassador had authorized an AIRA representative to go daily to organize the command and control system. The concept was to be:

"The AOC Commander will be the focal point. He'll get VP to use the board, and VP will not pull T-28s when he wants to. He'll be like any other military region commander and participate like the others, providing inputs to a JOC. The AOC Commander will run the operation up there."

"It's a major change in policy," said the AOC Commander. "CAS is now requesting that an ALO be assigned." He continued:

"The concept is new, but maybe the Meo aren't ready yet. We may be bringing them along too fast. Don't forget, it took a long time for the U.S. to develop the concepts we have now, and our standards may be too high. Yang Sue, for instance, wants to fly his own aircraft all the time, the way we used to in WWII and Korea. He doesn't want Yang Xiong to fly..."
his because he says Yang is too hard on his aircraft—but Yang says the same thing about Vang Sue."

Also mellowing was Vang Pao's attitude toward his pilots. According to the AOC Commander, "YP is changing his thinking a bit. He realizes that his pilots should not fly as much as they do." But Vang Pao would always be reluctant to delegate any more authority than he had to, and the AOC Commander doubted if he would ever release any of his Meos to fly in other Military Regions.

At Savannakhet, there were similarities to MR I and MR II, with the added ingredient of a Base Commander whom a former AOC Commander had called "operationally illiterate and morally responsive only to his own welfare." Major Kongsana had been reduced in grade for his part as aircraft commander of the ill-fated smuggling flight to Saigon, but in 1970 he held the same position as he had before. At Savannakhet, according to the AOC Commander, Major Kongsana was not at all subordinate to the Wing Commander, with the result that such friction often occurred that "everybody who's any good always seems to go."

The Savannakhet T-2Bs worked "mainly with the CAS battalions," said the AOC Commander. "The FAR does very little here, and the RLAF likes to work with CAS because they get good BDA." CAS did keep the MR III FAR Commander informed, but rarely if ever consulted with him beforehand. The newly appointed Wing Commander, Lt. Colonel Thongdy, was a C-47 pilot who had flown T-28s on General Ma's staff, while the
Squadron Commander of the AC-47 and T-28 squadrons was Captain Chantasone, who in June 1970, was flying T-28 and AC-47 missions simultaneously. In July, he was transferred to Udorn as an instructor pilot with the fourth C-47 MTT. Targeting was discussed at the daily JOC meeting, but the real control came from CAS, traditionally reluctant to reveal plans until the last minute. In June, concerning a planned operation, the AOC Commander reminded a CAS official, "Be sure and let me tell AIRA in time so we can get some USAF air."

It was at Pakse that the only field grade current T-28 pilot in the RLAF was also the Wing Commander. Lt. Colonel Khouang, one of the first H-34 students in 1963, had transferred to T-28s to take command at Pakse. After the establishment of the JOC in late 1969, Colonel Khouang had apparently taken firm charge, if we may accept the following comment of the AOC Commander:

"Under the leadership of the newly assigned Base Commander, Lt. Col. Khouang, the discipline and military conduct of the entire base has noticeably increased. The morale of the aircrews is high and that of the ground crews is improving. The lethargy and the 'let the Americans do it' attitude has all but disappeared."

During 1970, this impression persisted. Performing both Base and Wing Commander functions, Colonel Khouang, when asked who controlled the C-47s, replied simply, "I am in command of the C-47s. They work for me." On 12 June, a written fragmentation order was introduced, as the deteriorating situation required the CAS SGU battalions on the Bolovens
and the FAR forces commanded by General Phasouk to work in closer concord. By the end of the month, Raven FACs were controlling most of the RLAF airstrikes. According to the Ravens, the Pakse squadron preferred FAC-directed strikes, and the AOC Commander noted that the RLAF pilots were starting to follow the FACs' instructions much more closely, even dropping their ordnance singly, whereas they had formerly released doubles and often salvoed all ordnance on one pass.

Although there was a JOC functioning in MR V, variable situations resulted when 20A was evacuated and all MR II Raven FACs, Meo pilots, and Thais, as well as the Vientiane squadron, flew from this base. Except for the Thais, who conducted most of their strikes in MR V, no real operational pattern had developed by July. According to the AIRA COC liaison officer, there were joint meetings at the MR V JOC between J-3 (Operations), the T-28 Commander, and CAS, but there was still no real "joint planning for anything," and the RLAF was "just beginning to know its capability." Although CAS at that time did not attend the COC daily briefings, the liaison officer added that the JOC concept was working well in Military Regions I, III, and IV.

At all the bases, AC-47s were scheduled on alert, and except for MR I, flew against very few pre-briefed targets. By the end of July, two AC-47s had been lost, one from mechanical difficulties, the other apparently from pilot error, as one of the Pakse pilots, attempting to make an automatic direction finder (ADF) approach on 27 June in very poor
weather, failed to lower his landing gear. Ironically, this was the same crew that survived the first crash in MR V. This time, only one gunner lived.

As aircraft were finally being shifted from one military region to another and the COC began to monitor operations by squadrons which functioned independent of and different from each other, a major defect of the RLAF command structure became apparent: The Chief of Operations, Major Concy, a dedicated and capable H-34 pilot, did not have the command authority required to function as he should. In fact, as an AIRA report said:

"The RLAF General Staff is capable of making plans and decisions. There are pilots and other workers capable of implementing these plans and decisions, yet the RLAF does not have one man that could truly be described as an 'Operations Officer.' This duty must be performed by an American."

In July, there was one USAF adviser working on a day-to-day basis strictly with RLAF operations. A former assistant air attache had another idea:

"What would I suggest? Send an operationally experienced American colonel up there and give him to Sourith. Let him live with him and make all his decisions."

Manpower Survey Results

Even though there were still severe RLAF middle management and command problems, by mid-1970 the effects of the AIRA/RO manpower survey
were beginning to be felt. By the end of January, analysis of the RLAF force strength printout showed that in many instances, U.S.-trained Lao personnel were serving in fields alien to their specialty, were scheduled to attend training courses for the second or third time, or in some instances, had simply dropped from sight, even though their commander was still collecting their pay. In the latter instance, Savannakhet showed the greatest discrepancy. According to an assistant attache, General Sourith had expressed an amusing--albeit not especially productive--attitude toward sending students for U.S. training: "I knew he could pass the course, so I sent him again."

An AIRA proposal to seriously restrict all training unless the discrepancies were corrected did not have to be implemented. Upon receipt of the training rosters on 16 February, Lt. Colonel Xeuam, the U.S.-trained RLAF Chief of Staff, approved reforms, asked to retain only seven of the 106 RLAF personnel who were currently undergoing training again. These seven were mainly officers who had been previously trained as enlisted men. The other 99 were reassigned to slots in the new UMD, the first ever drawn for the RLAF. This UMD was a direct result of the manpower survey.

With precise training records and the UMD, U.S. advisers could now monitor the organization and performance of individual RLAF units much more closely. For instance, an RO report in May noted the following discrepancy:

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Figure 17

Source: AIRA
Note

For reasons of "National Security," this page remains classified.
"AOC Pakse informs me that RO coolies are being utilized to assemble bombs, because the RLAF ordnance personnel do not feel this to be their job and feel it beneath their dignity. In pursuing this problem, I have asked for a count of trained RLAF ordnance personnel at Pakse. Mr. Thomason informs me there are at least 12 trained ordnance men at each base; therefore, I'll discuss this problem with our ordnance people in RO and see if they can come up with the solution."

By June, another trend was beginning. Although previous years' promotions had been strictly controlled by the FAR, with the RLAF getting very few, the new procedure called for consideration of each service separately. According to the Chief of Operations, "This year, promotions have been given with the UMD in mind—to fill the slots needed." He acknowledged, however, that "the important families have played a large part in RLAF promotions. I do not know whether this is going to change or not." Major Concy's brother, Lt. Colonel T. Xeuam Phimpavong, was currently the RLAF Chief of Staff.

USAF Training

The graduation on 6 March 1970 of 16 new pilots from WATERPUMP swelled the RLAF T-28 pilot strength to 53, the highest it had ever been at one time. Flying a total of 130 combat missions with their instructor pilots, these students had received the most intensive training yet. They operated under Nail FAC control and bombed in an area about 60 miles north of Nakhon Phanom, receiving credit for the destruction of numerous bunkers and the cratering of some roads. The class in training,

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