70-02, had only 12 students, primarily because of stricter requirements for English language proficiency. Seven more Meo pilots had been attending English training at Phone Keng, but their attendance record had been poor. Only two of the Meos had been present for more than 60 percent of the scheduled class time, and when 70-02 began flight instruction on 23 April, five of the Meos would remain in language school for further schooling. In June, a CAS-sponsored Meo major with more than 1,000 hours of flying time, according to an Assistant Attache, was entered midway through the course, and his instructors noted that he was doing very well.

The C-47 MTT was having some student problems too, but, unlike the T-28 course, there was no problem with language. By the end of July, the Udorn-based MTT had three working Lao instructor pilots assigned, one of whom was handling all the academic training. A request had even been made to send two USAF IPs home. The C-47 problem concerned the experience level of student pilots. Originally designed as an upgrading program, the fourth MTT found itself forced to construct a basic undergraduate pilot training course; for some students possessed as little as 11 hours in Savannakhet O-1s. As an assistant air attache testified, "They were all we could find to send." Accordingly, the course was lengthened to include more basic instruction, and, halfway through, the instructors were satisfied with their students' progress. Also being trained were ten Lao maintenance instructors, as well as senior supply and armament NCOs.

In June, a new experiment attempted to bolster what were thought to be sagging RLAF AC-47 operations. A five-man team of three USAF
navigators and two pilots who had been flying with the terminated USAF AC-47 program were sent TDY to AIRA, Vientiane, to standardize, instruct, and assist the Lao crews. As mentioned earlier, the RLAF was short of navigators; as a result, no RLAF AC-47 carried a navigator on board. An impromptu navigation school was set up at Vientiane, and the USAF AC-47 crew-members toured the RLAF bases, assisting where they could. At the end of July, AIRA was requesting extensions, as well as the assignment of a full-time senior officer with staff and AC-47 experience. 69/ As a former assistant attache had said, "One of the major problems is that there's no H-34 man assigned as an adviser; neither is there anyone strictly for the C-47s. All the emphasis has been on the T-28s." 60/

In all, from FY 65 to FY 69, there had been approximately 139 RLAF pilots trained by third country programs, with an additional 56 in training during FY 70. In March, the RLAF listed 147 pilots on its rolls, but as an assistant attache commented:

"In the last ten months, the RLAF has lost 26 T-28 aircraft and 16 T-28 pilots in combat. It is somewhat ironic to note that this month precisely 16 new pilots were graduated from T-28 flying training, and this week will be engaged in combat operations."

Phrasing the problem in different words, a former assistant attache said, "Yes, it's always seemed true--the attrition equals the inputs. When I came, the RLAF had 31 pilots, and when I left, I think they had 63/32." The "fly until they die" motto of the RLAF T-28 pilots certainly had its roots in fact.
In-Country RLAF Advice and Training

As for the RLAF at home, in mid-1970 many of the USAF personnel in advisory and instructor positions looked back with more than mild chagrin. "What we should have done," said an AC-47 instructor pilot, "was to let the first Lao MTT students fly with the USAF Spookies." A maintenance officer concurred: "The RLAF has absolutely no advisory maintenance capacity. We could have given it to them, if it were'nt for the operational commitment." In-country, two AOC Commanders found fault with the policy which did not permit them legally to fly combat missions with the RLAF. As one saw it:

"The AOC Commander should be allowed to fly, if for no other reason than to check tactics and delivery techniques— to monitor procedures and continuing proficiency. Their dive angles tend to shallow out and their airspeeds go to hell. They drop too low, too. Someone should continue to check their proficiency."

The second corroborated this feeling of frustration:

"The AOC Commander is hamstrung in the one area in which he is best qualified and most able to influence the development of the RLAF pilots...I do not advocate that the Commander be placed on the daily mission schedule but that he be given the prerogative of flying those missions he deems necessary, without placing himself in the position of violating a direct order."

Summing up one part of the continuing problem, another AOC Commander said, "The SOF people assigned to an AOC just don' t have enough time to instruct the Lao. We're too busy doing our job." An assistant attache agreed:
"As far as the Air Force is concerned, there is very little training going on at the local level. The AOC Commander acts like a base commander, but the U.S. personnel are usually too busy loading bombs and fixing airplanes to do any training. The augmentees do not advise—they work. The regular attaches do have an advisory function, but at the staff, not at the working level."

Finding that the in-country "training advisory effort was marginal," the DEPCHIEF was encouraged by the U.S. Embassy response to criticism:

"AIRA has long been aware of deficiencies in all phases of the RLAF in-country training program. These deficiencies are mainly due to poor supervision and lack of adequate personnel management. To resolve this problem, AIRA and RO/USAID are collaborating in an effort approved by the Ambassador, to acquire a civilian training coordinator whose primary duty would be to monitor the expanding RLAF in-country training programs including flight associated programs."

Because of the operations-directed orientation of the in-country programs, USAF augmentees had been unable to increase the capability of the RLAF to supervise itself. To create a greater self-sufficiency in case of a U.S. scaledown of efforts, an assistant air attache said simply, "We'll need more people."

The RLAF in 1970—Problems and Prospects

After many years of continuously increasing U.S. financial and advisory support, the lack of command and middle management ability still prevented the RLAF from being able to take care of itself. One USAF colonel, formerly attached first to AIRA and then to the DO of 7AF/13AF at Udorn, commented:

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"As far as the future of the RLAF goes, if you were to close WATERPUMP and cancel Contract 0028, the RLAF would just stop being. They cannot do it themselves. Don't forget, we've got more than 1,000 Americans working for the RLAF."

An acting RO Chief who had been associated with Laos affairs for nine years added perspective:

"After the accords of 1962, the RLAF did start doing things for themselves, like supplying rice. Now it's all a U.S. effort, primarily T-28s. For self-sufficiency, the USAF and RO effort now is too much. We're not letting the RLAF do enough. An example: two years ago the C-47s carried more passengers and cargo in support of the FAR than they did last year."

Two years earlier, it must be noted in fairness to the Laotians, there had been many more airfields available for use by RLAF aircraft.

Operations and Aircraft

In hopes of better RLAF capability, proposals were in being for a further authorized strength increase to 112 T-28s. The 1970 DEPCHIEF Five-Year Plan called for six T-41s to be added for training, with 27 T-28s per year to be supplied to maintain a five-squadron air force with 72 aircraft, increasing to 86 by FY-75. Without a drastic change in RLAF procedures and ability, however, more aircraft would require more Americans to supervise their operations, maintenance, and supply.

Consideration was also being given to a follow-on aircraft for the RLAF. Of course, the pilots wanted one. The RLAF Chief of Operations
had heard a rumor that there were 200 WW II Corsairs available. "We would like to fly them," he said, "because they carry more than a T-28. I would also like to fly the A-37--or any jet." Although AIRA was investigating a twin-engine Volpar turboprop modification to the T-28, the general consensus, as expressed by the Pakse Commander, was that the T-28s were the best possible aircraft for the foreseeable future. "Of course I would like to fly a more advanced airplane," said Lt. Colonel Khouang, "but..."

The drawbacks to the introduction of a new weapons system were many. As one AOC Commander shrewdly analyzed the problem of new aircraft, "Where the problem will lie is with support, not pilots. These guys can be taught to fly anything, but you'd have to start another WATERPUMP all over again. And I can't see the tactical advantage." An assistant attache agreed:

"As far as new aircraft go, only an out-country MTT could handle it. It could not be done in-country, simply because of facilities and ramp space. For supply and support, the U.S. role would have to continue as it is at present. The Lao have no capability of their own. Considering a replacement aircraft, the big problem is--what kind? The choices seem to be either a modified aircraft or maybe the OV-10. Otherwise, they'd have to go to jets like the A-37 or F-5. They could learn to fly them, but they could never maintain them. Furthermore, Vientiane has the only runway they could operate from, and think of the foreign object damage problem."

The WATERPUMP Director of Maintenance, even more deeply opposed, did not bother with alternatives or explanations. He said, quite simply,
"No new aircraft for the RLAF." 80/

Maintenance

Considering the RLAF maintenance capability at mid-1970, an AOC Commander stated that the RLAF now needed "technical, rather than tactical assistance." 81/ Even the USAF mechanics would have trouble with Form 781 write-ups such as these recorded at WATERPUMP:

"Me speak Radio--Radio no speak back.

"Engine all the time go fast, go slow, same-same power setting. Last time this happen airplane crash and pilot killed. You fix very soon please."

Most U.S. maintenance people agreed that the Lao could perform basic maintenance, but the problem lay in their ability to diagnose and prevent mechanical problems. In the words of an RLAF pilot, "Our problems with maintenance are not with the taking apart and putting together again, but with the trouble shooting--finding out what is wrong." An RO Maintenance Adviser put it another way:

"There is a maintenance time factor with the Lao. What would take an hour for a USAF technician takes the Lao three or four days. They tend to solve problems by going from the difficult to the easy way. For instance, if an aircraft has a mag drop, the first thing they'll do is take off the magneto and take it apart."

An AOC Commander added another dimension: 84/

"As for maintenance, the RLAF is all right, by Lao standards. They don't know anything about
preventive maintenance. For them, the time to change a brake is when the aircraft comes skidding sideways down the runway... One day I saw a pilot about to taxi and I went over and looked at his aircraft. The tires were almost flat. I had an air compressor brought out and the crew chief filled up the tires until they 'looked good.' I made him go back and get a tire gauge. They usually don't care whether a tire has 55 pounds in it or not. I've checked some out at 90 pounds."

The already mentioned Lao dependence upon the Americans and Udorn was succinctly demonstrated on 12 June, when the RLAF Pakse Commander noted the problems with the MJ-1 bombloader, adding that the crews were often forced to load their bombs by hand. Later, the AOC Commander explained why:

"They just don't maintain them. When one breaks down, they say 'Send to Udorn and get another one.' When this happens, what I've done is order a hand loader instead. Maybe this will work."

The WATERPUMP DM summed up the RLAF maintenance capability at mid-year:

"What they need is discipline and the ability to hold the people they've got. If so, they could provide minimum maintenance for the T-28s. If all U.S. personnel were to be pulled out of Laos, they could keep the aircraft going for 100 hours until it was time for Udorn, but from a service station standpoint only."

Supply and Support

After the U.S. position toward RLAF self-sufficiency was clarified in 1969 with the movement of the depot from Savannakhet to Vientiane, the
RLAF developed little further capability in supply and support. The prevailing in-country attitude by both USAF and RLAF personnel was summarized by an AIRA report: "Since all materials are supplied by the U.S., very seldom does the RLAF want for anything...In short, the U.S. can provide more than the RLAF is capable of expending." Prior to mid-1970, this impression was correct, but, as the U.S. commitments to Southeast Asia began to diminish in 1970, there were indications that the concept of an unlimited budget was a thing of the past.

Concerning munitions, for instance, a DEPCHIEF survey found that under programmed funding, if combat operations continued at their present level, "early in calendar year 1971 we will start running out of some items, and be completely out by March." Specifically, according to the acting RO Chief in June, "If the RLAF goes at the rate of 3,000 sorties a month, they'll be completely out of 250-lb. bombs by the first of the year." Consequently, DEPCHIEF was proposing that an allocation committee be formed from members of DEPCHIEF, RO, ARMA, AIRA, and the Laotian armed forces, in an attempt to effect better allocation methods.

Once in-country, supply was also a problem, mainly because of the differing needs of the scattered bases and the variety of methods needed to supply them. Luang Prabang, for instance, received most of its supply by air, as did 20A and the forward operating locations and Lima Sites. Only Savannakhet and Vientiane were considered secure for ground transportation. An RLAF supply network was established on paper, and at
mid-year there was hope that an RLAF senior officer recently returned from CONUS supply training could improve matters, but, generally, the system was cumbersome. Moving the main depot to Vientiane had reduced losses from theft, but delivery problems remained acute. A Luang Prabang AOC Commander had this to say about the situation:

"The supply system is lousy. For instance, if I want a generator at LP, the AOC goes to RO. RO says that if it's for an RLAF resource, to go through the RLAF supply channels, but they aren't any good. Once I ordered an O-1 carburetor and got one for the T-28. The little guy in Vientiane went to the O-1 carburetor bin, but someone had put a T-28 carburetor in the box and he didn't know the difference."

Asked for a suggested solution to the problems, the same commander replied:

"Yes, I have a suggestion: Do away with RO completely and make it a military operation. Let the military have jurisdiction over the logistics and supply. There are two reasons--first, RO can't get the right people to do the job, and second, they can't control the theft. I think the military, in or out of uniform, could."

According to the AIRA/RO manpower survey, there had been seven officers and 61 enlisted men who had been trained and were still active in supply, almost enough to support a minimum effort for the present RLAF strength of 1,915 men. A Requirements Office representative and an MTT instructor pilot agreed that a major problem occurred when the trained airman crossed the Mekong. Said the former:
"It's not that the Lao can't do it, with proper supervision. They're good at Udorn; but when they get across the river, all their knowledge seems to get left in the Mekong, and they revert to where they were before they left."

The MTT instructor added, in much the same vein:

"Here, the Lao are aggressive. I think they're better than the Vietnamese—but once they get across that river... For instance, we have a Lao supply NCO who just took the 7-level test. He got damn near a 100%, better than many Americans."

Although the manpower survey had shown only 68 RLAF personnel active in supply, DEPCHIEF records indicated that as of the end of FY 69, 112 supply personnel had been trained in third country courses alone. Apparently, 40 percent of them had simply drifted away.

Personnel and Training

To bring the RLAF up to strength would take about five more years, AIRA estimated. With nearly all of the UMD slots being for technical positions, proper training and assignment were difficult in a land which had the lowest literacy rate in Southeast Asia. Encouraging, however, were recent recruiting results. In March, for instance, of 196 men enlisted, 85 percent were found capable of being taught the English language. In July, the Director of the Savannakhet English Language School stated that 97 of these recruits would qualify for CONUS training. "They are motivated," he said, "but teaching them anything is difficult, when you have to start completely from scratch. They've never used a bathroom, for instance, or worn shoes."
RLAF officers themselves wanted to increase their own training capability as well. The Chief of Operations and the Commander of the Savannakhet Training School said RLAF instructors for flying training programs existed. The problem now was one of materiel:

"With six IPs we could run a basic flying school at Savannakhet. We have two IPs at Udorn and two more training in the States. If we could get the airplanes, we could start a school soon—give them the basic flying and then let Udorn teach gunnery. We could do it much easier and quicker than the Americans. Savannakhet is secure. There would be no problem.

"The same goes for the H-34. We have three H-34 IPs but no airplanes for Savannakhet. We have asked for them."

In Bangkok, the Chief of the Air Force Division of DEPCHIEF agreed in part: "Regarding the H-34s, we could turn that right now into an all-Lao operation, but we have received no requests to do so."

The RLAF School Commander believed that even gunnery could be taught at Savannakhet and that landings could be practiced at nearby Seno, where there was a good runway. He also understood the need for an RLAF FAC capability: "We have no FAC IPs, and we need them. I have asked General Sourith." He also recognized some basic problems: those of hangar and ramp space, runway conditions, lack of a taxiway, and inadequate housing for students and instructors. Unless these matters were taken care of, a full-scale flying school at Savannakhet remained an impossibility.
An AOC Commander suggested that one way to resolve the RLAF middle management training dilemma would be to send more NCOs to Udorn to work with the USAF support people at advanced levels. Generally, only basic skills had been taught. An MTT instructor agreed: "They should send more down here and let them work in the docks. That's where they get the best experience." The WATERPUMP DM had a more drastic suggestion:

"It all depends upon what the U.S. wants to do. To support a fleet of 100 aircraft, they'll need about 600 trained people, including overhead. It could be done in a year, if it was possible to send them to the States for a complete nine-month course."

Hopefully, once the planned position of in-country Training Coordinator was filled, the RLAF personnel and training situation would improve.

**Corruption in RLAF**

No study such as this would be complete without attention to one of the largest problems which constantly undermined the U.S. attempts to improve the condition of the RLAF. With what AIRA admitted to be "dismally low pay and allowances" (App. I), officers in the Lao military found it difficult, if not impossible, to resist the temptation to participate in the illegal activities in which practically every level of Laotian society was involved. As the Chief of Operations attested:

"I receive 40,000 Kip per month /$60.00 U.S./, and a sack of rice now costs 5,000 Kip at the market. It is not easy to live on that. When I see that someone has taken a load of opium, it is very bad for my morale. I am very sad for many days, especially when I think of the money they get and the money I am
getting. It is very difficult. As for the morality, I do not think it should be done."

This attitude was typical of many RLAF pilots. An AOC Commander commented:

"The RLAF pilots say they don't want to smuggle opium, but they have to. It's opium that's building their new chow hall. Once, the Lao came to the Americans with a logical proposition. When the trucking companies increased their prices so much to haul gas up here, the RLAF said they could use their airplanes and haul the gas for much less. The U.S. said no, that doing so 'would be unfair to private industry.' So now the U.S. pays more to have the gas hauled and the RLAF doesn't get anything."

Although smuggling opium and gold was the method used mainly by high-ranking officers, the continued acceptance of this practice no doubt implied tacit condonation of the outright theft which was also prevalent. Both smuggling and theft definitely affected RLAF operational capability.

For years, U.S. personnel had confronted and at times circumvented the problem of corruption in the RLAF. As mentioned earlier, the 5 March 1968 meeting had sought "to eliminate some of the more galling and obvious abuses in the FAR." What occurred during the next few years was that many of the "abuses" went underground. In early 1969, AIRA commented as follows:

"Although General Souri would like to feel he is powerful enough, strong enough, and enough of a leader to remove 'the Oudones' and stop corruption, that is not the case. Although I feel he does not"
realize it, he is still just a pawn of the top military leaders. He remains the Commander of the RLAF at their pleasure and only because he does not present a problem or obstacle to those that desire to use military aircraft to further their own personal gains. If and when he becomes more than that, he will likely be removed very quickly."

Far from having been dismissed from the RLAF, Colonel (later General) Oudone had been moved to the FAR G-3 Section, where, AIRA explained, he was to work with the COC. Commenting on this politically-motivated transfer, one report suggested that "in this capacity, he might be able to be used better than in his former position."¹⁰⁸/

Serving as the unofficial hub of all smuggling activities was Savannakhet, where the 1968 Base Commander, Lt. Colonel Outama, was described as "a ringleader of illegal activities and...important to those involved in corruption."¹⁰⁹/ A plane load of opium, such as the one flown from Savannakhet to Saigon, might net crew-members as much as 6,000,000 Kip ($12,000 U.S.) per person.¹¹⁰/

In early 1969, noting that the Pakse Base Commander was believed to be deeply involved in opium and gold smuggling to Cambodia, an AIRA report summed up the frustration felt by all Americans:

"It is discouraging to see corruption running rampant, to see U.S.-furnished aircraft and supplies involved, and to witness individuals that appear more concerned with personal gains than supporting their country in its war efforts... For Americans to step in...appears to be an impossibility. If AIRA personnel, particularly
By 1970, there were indications that some of the activity had shifted from RLAF to private aircraft owned by some high-ranking officers, but, as of May, RLAF assets were still definitely being used. Regarding the defense of Site 32, a CAS official commented that one of the reasons it had held so long was that "the poppies aren't harvested yet." As confirmation of his suspicions, on 30 May there were calls from the site itself for additional RLAF helicopters to carry out the "food."

The continuing existence of smuggling activities caused different opinions to emerge concerning participation of the RLAF Commander, General Sourith. The air attaché considered him honest:

"I think Sourith is straight. I can ask him how much money he has and he'll tell me. He uses the money Ouane gives him for the RLAF, putting it in a fund he calls 'the pot.' Ouane does pay him for the use of his transport aircraft. Sourith is a realist—he knows that if he doesn't do this, Ouane will deal directly with his people. This way, Sourith maintains control."

Others, however, had reservations, and there was very definitely no one with command responsibility in the RLAF who showed signs of emulating General Ma's resistance to corrupt practices. The RLAF Chief of Operations might say, "I think the traffic in opium is much less this year than before," and that "because there is no more gold allowed into Saigon, there has been no gold carried this year," but there was still enough illicit traffic to reward a few people handsomely.
"General Ma told me that he had personal knowledge that two separate shipments of U.S. travelers' checks of one million dollars each were made to Swiss banks on the 25th and 26th of June from Vientiane. He also saw loads of Kip at Nong Khiaw which were payment for U.S. arms given to Laos and sold into Thailand."

A Requirements Officer acting chief summed up the state of illicit activities in mid-1970, commenting in the process on an interesting aspect of RLAF self-sufficiency:

"You talk about the RLAF not being able to do or organize anything by themselves--look at their smuggling operations. That's something they do very well indeed."

Theft

In addition to many instances of vanishing supplies, which in great part caused the removal of the main RLAF depot from Savannakhet to Vientiane, there were repeated instances of theft at the various bases. In 1968, for instance, AIRA listed some examples:

"Stealing gasoline from ground-powered equipment, stealing .50 caliber ammunition from the bomb dumps, so that the brass can be sold, and breaking into the AOC buildings themselves and taking office equipment, hand weapons, etc. These incidents have resulted in both loss of operational capabilities and great financial losses."

Further instances kept occurring. At Vientiane, the following happened later in the year:
"Our gasoline for the tugs, forklifts, and bomb lifts is being stolen. At the present time, more is being stolen than is being used. We have presented this problem to the RLAF /Base/ Commander and he increased the guards. Now the guards are either stealing it or giving it away to friends. The man that operates the pumps was told to take the license number of vehicles that get gas, but when this list is presented to the RLAF /Base/ Commander and he sees the names he says never mind."

After electrical power leads for an APU were cut off and stolen at Vientiane in August 1969, security measures were tightened for the rest of the year. Thefts still continued, however. An example occurred at Pakse in 1970, when platinum-tipped spark plugs were stolen out of parked T-28s and replaced with the wrong type. In July, the Savannakhet RLAF Squadron Commander stated that he did not dare load the guns of his T-28s at night because the bullets would be stolen for the brass shell-cases. "It is the Base Commander's job to take care of security," he said with a wry smile.

Generally speaking, thievery was still a definite problem in mid-1970, its existence and toleration a direct result of the corruption at higher levels. At Savannakhet, for example, communications lines were being buried because the above-ground wires had been stolen. The Americans, working as hard as they could to protect the U.S. equipment, nevertheless evidenced the same attitude toward Lao corruption as a whole as they had before. In 1968, AIRA had defined the reluctantly-accepted U.S. position: "In order to maintain any semblance of a working
relationship with the locals, in most instances the Americans must turn their heads and let the practices continue. Hopefully, the personnel reorganization and the emergence of strong Composite Squadron Commanders would begin to solve this problem. The policy of the air attache continued to be: "Do not interfere, but report all instances."

**RLAF "Supplemental Pay"**

The 1969 issuance of combat ration pay to the aircrews was a step in the right direction, but there were other ways by which the pilots and crews could supplement their meager official pay. At Luang Prabang, for instance, in 1968, an AOC Commander reported the following:

"The empty CBU containers were sold here locally the other day. There were 210 of them and they brought $2.00 apiece. The breakdown was:

- Each Pilot - $20.00 = $160.00
- Maint Perio - 16.00 = 80.00
- Weddings - 20.00 = 40.00
- Base CO* - 70.00 = 70.00
- Dep CO* - 70.00 = 70.00

$420.00

"AOC was not involved in any way."

By 1970, inflation had raised the prices of CBU containers at Luang Prabang to $3.00, while at Vientiane they sold for $4.00. Additionally, the shellcases from the AC-47s brought 6 Kip (about one cent U.S.) on the market, meaning that an RLAF Spooky crew stood to make upwards of $200.00 a night from the sale of brass alone. It is no wonder that an AC-47 assignment was considered choice.

*Money supposedly was to be used for base welfare."
### FORCE STRENGTHS - RLAF

#### PERSONNEL

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#### HELICOPTERS

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<th>4 (MAR)</th>
<th>12 (MAY)</th>
<th>12 (APR)</th>
<th>14 (MAR)</th>
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<td>11 (LAGOS BASE)</td>
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#### TOTAL AIRCRAFT

| 68 (DEC) | 71 (DEC) | 63 | 64 | 86 (DEC) | 112 (OCT) | 115 | 148 (MAR) |

#### TOTAL PILOTS

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<th>33 (58-25)</th>
<th>56</th>
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*Active, no co-pilot

*B Team will remain at approx 20 avail (phase out, 1970)

*Includes radio operators

*Includes USAF ACFT

*On paper

**FIGURE 21**
Another method of supplementing the pay of the transport pilots was to sell seats on RLAF C-47s. The price of a ticket was usually about $2.00, which was split with the crew. On 2 September 1969, a C-47 crashed, killing all 33 aboard. Only 19 bodies could be identified, and a month later AIRA said that "the total passenger list is not yet confirmed and may never be, since RLAF C-47 pilots have a habit of selling seats on their aircraft to civilians at planeside."  

In an attempt to regularize this supplementary pay, in June 1970, the Chief of Operations said that General Sourith had sent out a letter to all RLAF commanders directing that "any money which is made must be shared with the people who worked on the airplanes too." At Luang Prabang, a month later, however, the AOC Commander said that he had "never seen a letter from General Sourith about standardizing the payoffs."  

Generally, the effect that this rather complex system of corruption, thievery, and "payoffs" had on operations was significant. Savannakhet in late 1969 provides an example. There, the T-28 Commander was outranked by the maintenance officer; hence, according to the AOC Commander, the lieutenant had to "ask" that the aircraft be maintained and the bombs loaded. "In the past, this request has been in the form of a $20 bill paid monthly out of the pilot's pocket."  

For the RLAF Chief of Operations, a possible solution existed, one which also showed the absolute dependence of the RLAF on the United States:

SECRET
"For the U.S. to double the pay of the RLAF right now might help. For me, I could get along very well on twice what I am making now."

Command and Control--U.S. and RLAF

It was clear to all in 1970 that the greatest deficiency in the RLAF was command, control, and middle management. Ironically, however, with CAS intelligence and direction, plus Embassy and AIRA control of RLAF operations, these managerial and command functions were the very ones which U.S. personnel had been performing all along. Key positions such as AOC Commander, line chief, and supply officer, as well as the important jobs in intelligence and targeting, were all held by the Americans. Operational necessity had precluded the luxury of allowing RLAF personnel to make the decisions and mistakes from which they could learn to operate by themselves.

As an assistant attache phrased it:

"We, the Americans in AIRA, are seemingly the ones charged with keeping the show running, i.e., seeing that the MJ-1a are in working order, generators are on the line, etc. This apparently is a fact of life and, I guess, the only way we will ever see the mission halfway accomplished."

It had not always been a unified effort, and weaknesses in the expanding U.S. support program had been evident to many. In 1968, for instance, the DEPCHIEF had noted that neither AIRA nor ARMA was actually advising but both were actually performing the jobs for the FAR and RLAF. In addition, there was a basic flaw in the U.S. support organization:
"There is no one individual or office charged with the overall responsibility. RO/USAID is responsible for logistical advice, ARMA for operational advice to the Army, and AIRA for operational advice to the RLAF. In theory, actions of these offices are coordinated. Any difference of opinion, however, is difficult to resolve."

The following year, the DEPCHIEF recommended unsuccessfully:

"Since the USA and USAF Attachés in Laos had been charged with advising the Royal Laotian Armed Forces and had been augmented in strength (Project 404) for that purpose, there was no further need for the separate RO/USAID organization, responsive to agencies other than the DOD, to perform the same function."

An even stronger request was made to JCS by CINCPAC in 1970, proposing that there be created a CINCPACREPLAOS to "assist the U.S. mission in Laos by directing all JANAF and MASF Support Activities including those functions assumed from DEPCHJUSMAGTHAI, RO/USAID, ARMA/AIRA and Project 404." He would report directly to the Ambassador.

One of the reasons for this continuing proposal by DEPCHIEF was the limited access to Laos for DEPCHIEF representatives, because of the clandestine nature of U.S. presence. In April 1970, for instance, the DEPCHIEF again reported that "the Terms of Reference under which the DEPCHIEF organization functions could not be fully implemented because of the restrictions imposed upon DEPCHIEF's activities." A specific example was control of U.S. personnel, most of whom were assigned to the DEPCHIEF: "The combination of strictly controlled limited access to
Laos, plus loss of operational control of Project 404 personnel, precluded Deputy Chief's monitoring the utilization of such personnel. Interestingly, when DEPCHIEF personnel were allowed in-country, they were not always afforded a comprehensive examination of U.S. assets. For example, PEG reports for 1969 and 1970 mentioned the problems which affected the "two armies, the FAR and FAN," and cited visits made to "Sam Thong, the MR II Headquarters." In reality, Sam Thong was not the MR II Headquarters. This was at Long Tieng, the home of General Vang Pao and his guerrillas. At no time in the two annual reports was mention made of the third army in Laos, the CAS-advised SGUs, who traditionally had done most of the fighting.

"Our biggest problem all along has been command and control," said the air attache, "even during the early SEACOORD meetings...We did not know where the command lines were then, and nothing has changed." For a while, he added, "We knew who was running the show, because all the Ambassador's messages were info to the White House." Citing specific defects, such as the use of airpower as artillery, overexpenditure and inefficient use of U.S. assets, and improper manning, two DEPCHIEF representatives summed up their views. The Chief of Staff said:

"In all the years we've been helping them, we haven't taught these people a damn thing about how to manage their resources...Overall, the RLAF is an example of improper utilization of air assets. The Ambassador says that he really doesn't 'command,' that he 'approves.' Well, if approval isn't making a decision, I don't know what is."
The Chief of Air Force Operations agreed:

"What we need is one manager, rather than the multiple managers we now have. The whole operation is a mass of unrelated efforts. ARMA-AIRA-CAS all work and are funded separately. No one knows what the other is doing."

A discussion of this problem with a CAS official* elicited the disclaimer that "We know who's running the show. That's just the way it has to be. If Seventh Air Force understood what was going on up here, they wouldn't keep sending all their airplanes against the Ho Chi Minh Trail."

Faced with the overwhelming power of the "grand seigneurs" of Vientiane, compelled by operational necessity to make USAF personnel do, rather than advise, and restricted by an extremely cumbersome command and control system, U.S. officials in Laos, both Air Force and quasi-civilian, had quite understandably had little success in helping the RLAF create a self-sufficient organization of its own, despite the many years of American assistance.

*Despite official permission from CIA Headquarters in Washington (Msg, CINCPACAF to CHECO, Udorn, subj: RLAF Report 160228Z May 70), the author of this report was never able to interview Air America or CAS personnel officially, despite repeated requests. On one occasion, after having been granted permission to interview General Vang Pao by CAS, Vientiane, the author was refused access to General Vang Pao by CAS 2OA.
EPILOGUE

Irrespective of the problems connected with U.S. support and RLAF organization, nothing can detract from the performance for so many years of so many dedicated men, both United States and RLAF. The combat pilots of the Royal Laotian Air Force, however, who flew first T-28s, then AC-47s from primitive fields, in extremely bad weather and at night with only unreliable ADF approach aids, deserved the greatest recognition. The saying at WATERPUMP that 'We take these little guys right off the backs of water buffalo and make fighter pilots out of them in six months' was often literally quite true; yet an experienced AOC Commander told the author of this report that "I wouldn't hesitate to fly combat with any of them."

An incident reported in the 11 July Joint Operational Summary provides an example of both bravery and foolhardiness, and indicates why, if operations were to keep on as they had in the past, the RLAF pilots might well continue to "fly until they die:"

"On 8 July, A-1s and T-28s failed repeatedly to hit a very small cave entrance at TG758287, known to be occupied by a number of enemy. Lt. Yang Xiong, senior Meo T-28 pilot, arrived on the scene and was directed to target by General Vang Pao, who told the pilot many airplanes had tried, but that nobody could hit the narrow cave opening. Yang Xiong made one dry pass and announced he could hit the target, and, if he missed, he wouldn't eat for the rest of the day (he has a weight problem, being that rare creature, the fat Meo). His first bomb was a bit short, but his second, dropped from a dangerously low altitude, exploded squarely in the cave.
entrance, enlarging the opening by several hundred percent and apparently killing all occupants.

"Three bodies were visible after the strike, and it is believed that many more enemy met their fate at the same instant. (Yang Xiong ate a hearty dinner that evening.)"

In the words of another AOC Commander, "I don't know why we keep calling them 'the little guys'--hell, they're great big men."
LAOS AIR FACILITIES

- 6000 ft or over: 1
- 2000 ft to 5999 ft: 56
Total: 57

Note: Only selected airfields are shown.
FOOTNOTES*

INTRODUCTION

1. (S) End of Tour Rprt, Col Robert S. Ferrari, DEPCHJUSMAGTHAI, Jun 68. (Hereafter cited: Ferrari EOT Report.);
2. (S) Ferrari EOT Report.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. (U) Dommen, pg 184.
6. (S) Ferrari, EOT Report;
   (U) Dommen, pg 196.
8. (S) Ferrari EOT Report.
9. (S) Ibid.
10. (U) Dommen, pg 209.
12. (S) Ltr, J. W. Tribble, Acting Chief, RO/USAID to C. A. Mann, Director, 27 May 70. (Hereafter cited: Tribble Letter.)
14. (S) Ferrari, EOT Report.
15. (S) EOT Report, C. J. Keen, Chief, Requirements Organization. 10 Oct 66, pg 1.
16. (C) History Summary, DEPCHJUSMAGTHAI, Col J. G. Cornett, 10 May 66, Incl 6, pg 1. (Hereafter cited: DEPCH History, May 66.);
   (U) Dommen, pg 104. (USAID statistics total $24.0 million for FY 63.)

* Extracts from documents classified TOP SECRET have a classification no higher than SECRET.


20. (S) Ferrari EOT Report; Memo to SecDef, subj: Channel for Support of Attaches, Laos, 5 May 66.


22. (S) Tribble Letter.

23. (S) Ltr, RO/USAID to AMEMB, VTN, subj: MAP, Atch 1, 12 May 70.

24. (S) Ferrari, EOT Report, pg 161.


26. (S) DEPCH History, May 1966, Incl 6, pg. 3.

27. (S) Interview, Col R. F. Tyrrell, AIRA, VTN, with Maj John C. Pratt, 2 Jul 70. (Hereafter cited: Tyrrell Interview.)

28. (S) Intelligence Information Report, DOD, 6 856 0080 70, 21 Mar 70. (Hereafter cited: IR, DOD.)
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1. (S) IR DOD, 1 856 0001 68, 5 Jan 68, pg 1.
2. (S) Biographic Report, DOD, General Thao Ma, Vientiane, Laos. (USAIRA Files)
3. (U) Briefing Notes, USIS, Vientiane, Laos, "Briefing Notes on the Royal Kingdom of Laos," May 69, pg E-2; (U) Dommen Quotation, pg 101.
4. (S) Interview, RLAF Captain Attachanh and Captain Khampao, Udorn RTAFB, with Maj John C. Pratt, 9 Jun 70. (Hereafter cited: Attachanh - Khampao Interview.)
5. (S) Interview, RLAF Lt Colonel Champeng, Comdr, Air Training School, Savannakhet, Laos, with Maj John C. Pratt, 3 Jul 70. (Hereafter cited: Champeng Interview.)
8. (S) Attachanh - Khampao Interview.
9. (S) Interview, Major Concy, Chief RLAF G-3, with Maj John C. Pratt, 15-16 Jun 70. (Hereafter cited: Concy Interview.)
10. (S) IR, DOD, 1 856 0084 68, 27 Jun 68.
11. (S) Concy Interview.
12. Ibid.
13. (S) Interview, Lt Colonel Khouang, RLAF, Wing Commander, Pakse, with Maj John C. Pratt, 12 Jun 70. (Hereafter cited: Khouang Interview.)
14. Ibid.
16. (S) Interview, Capt Chantasone, RLAF, Squadron Commander, Savannakhet, with Maj John C. Pratt, 3 Jul 70. (Hereafter cited: Chantasone Interview.)
17. (S) Concy Interview.
18. (U) RLAF Flight Log, AOC, Savannakhet, Laos.
19. (S) Khouang Interview.
22. (S) Champeng Interview (from old photograph).
23. (S) Rprt, CINCPAC, Roster of Laos Students Trained in CONUS. (RO/USAID File, Vientiane)
24. (S) Concy Interview.
25. (S) Biographic Report, DOD, Item #50.
26. (S) Concy Interview.
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29. (S) Khouang Interview.
30. (U) Dommen, Ch 11.
31. (S) Concy Interview.
32. (S) Record, RO/USAID, Vientiane. (Operations Files)
33. (S) Interview, Col R. F. Tyrrell, AIRA Vientiane, with Maj John C. Pratt, 2 Jul 70. (Hereafter cited: Tyrrell Interview.)
34. (S) Champeng Interview;
(S) Records, RLAF, Savannakhet.
35. (S) Concy Interview.
36. (S) IR, DOD, 1 856 0060 68, 13 May 68, pg 1.
37. (S) Khouang Interview.
38. (S) Concy Interview.
39. (S) Tyrrell Interview.
40. (U) Dommen, pp 255-6.
41. (TS) CHECO Rprt, 20-7, pg 19.
42. (S) Tyrrell Interview.
43. Ibid.
44. (U) Dommen, pg 256.
45. (S) Tyrrell Interview.
CHAPTER II

1. (S) RO Records, Vientiane, Laos.

2. (TS) CHECO Rprt, 20-7; (S) RO Records; (TS) DEPCHJUSMAGTHAI Records.

3. (S) Tyrrell Interview.


5. (TS) CHECO Rprt, 20-7, pg 30; (TS) CHECO Rprt, 20-2, DOTEC, Hq PACAF, "Escalation of the War, Jul-Dec 64." (Hereafter cited: CHECO Rprt, 20-2.)

6. (S) Tyrrell Interview.


8. (S) Concy Interview.


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22. (TS) Tyrrell Interview.
23. (S) Attachan - Khampao Interview.
25. (S) Attachan - Khampao Interview.
26. (S) Tyrrell Interview.
27. (S) Memo, RO/USAID, Dec 65; RLAF Summary, CONUS Tng, FY 63-67, 19 Apr 68.
29. (S) Memo, RO/USAID, Dec 65.
30. Ibid.
31. (S) Interview, Maj Karl W. Leuschner, AOC Commander, Savannakhet, Pakse, Luang Prabang, with Maj John C. Pratt, 3 Jun 70.
32. (S) DEPCH History, May 66, Inclosure 7, pg 2.
33. (S) Ltr, Major Peerson, AIRA, to Colonel Pettigrew, AIRA, Vientiane, 23 Jul 65. (Hereafter cited: Peerson Letter.)
34. (S) Tyrrell Interview.
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38. (S) Interview, Maj John Garrity, AAIRA, VTN, with Maj John C. Pratt, 3 Jun 70.
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42. (S) Tyrrell Interview.
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45. (S) Memo, Col Pettigrew, AIRA, Vientiane, 1600, 18 Nov 65.
46. (S) Concy Interview.
47. (S) Peerson Letter.
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49. (S) Briefing Records, DEPCHJUSMAGTHAI, Jul 70.
50. (S) Tyrrell Interview.
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52. (TS) CHECO Rprt, 20-27, pg 67.
55. (S) Hist Records, DEPCH, Atch to DEPCHIEF Hist (show 1014 for Jan, 800 for Feb, and 600 [est] for Mar) May 66.
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66. (S) Tyrrell Interview.
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4. (S) Interview, Maj Karl W. Leuschner, AOC Comdr, with Maj John C. Pratt, 3 Jun 70. (Hereafter cited: Leuschner Interview.)

5. (S) Historical Summary, DEPCHJUSMAGTHAI, Col R. S. Ferrari, 11 May 68, pg 170. (Hereafter cited: DEPCH Hist, 11 May 68.)

6. (C) Ltr, Maj Gen Jack E. Thomas, Asst Chief of Staff for Intelligence, to AFCCS, 27 Oct 66.

7. (S) Memo for Record, Capt Morcel A. Wiedmaier, Foreign Liaison Div, USAF, subj: Conversations with Lt Col Kouprasong, 3 Nov 66.

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22. (S) Concy Interview.
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29. (S) Msg, AOC Luang Prabang to AIRA, VTN, 220140Z Dec 67.
31. (S) Concy Interview.
32. (S) Msg, AIRA, VTN to AOC, LP, 141015Z Jan 68.
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34. (S) Msg, AOC LP to AIRA, VTN, 140300Z Jan 68.
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37. (S) IR, DOD, 1 856 0120 68, 24 Oct 68.
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59. (S) IR, DOD, 1 856 0046 68, 11 Apr 68, pp 1-2.
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| 68.  | (S)   | IR, DOD, 1 856 0011 68, 4 Feb 68, pg 1.   |
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| 75.  | (S)   | EOT Report, Maj Richard D. Patterson, 30 Oct 68, pg 1. |
| 76.  | (U)   | Ltr, George W. Nathan to General Sourith, 3 May 68. |
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| 80.  | (S)   | Ibid, pg 175-6.                          |
| 81.  | (S)   | Interview, Col Thomas J. Heller (USA), CS, DEPCHJUSMAGTHAI, with Maj John C. Pratt, 31 Jul 70. |
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| 83.  | (S)   | Munsey-Reich Interview.                  |
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| 85.  | (S)   | Champeng Interview.                      |
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90. (S) Champeng Interview.
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93. (S) Historical Summary, DEPCH, 1 Oct 68 - 28 Feb 69.
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1. (S) DEPCH Hist Report, 1 Oct 68 - 28 Feb 69.

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4. (S) IR, DOD, 6 856 0121 69, 13 Aug 69.


6. (S) Ltr, Lt Col Clyde C. Angley to Col Tyrrell, AIRA, VTN, 1 May 69.

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9. (S) Interview, Majors Neal and Jenkins, C-47 MTT, Udorn, with Maj John C. Pratt, 21 Jul 70. (Hereafter cited: Neal-Jenkins Interview.)


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32. (S) Interview, Maj Charles Loucks, AAIRA, Vientiane, with Maj John C. Pratt, 6 May 70.
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36. (S) Interview with RLAF Student Pilot, undated.
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