leader of a small band of Meo who conducted guerrilla warfare against the PL and NVA. By 1969, this force had grown to an army of 20,000 fighters. Although Vang Pao held a commission in the Laotian army, his position among the Meo was that of a War Chief. He depended upon personal magnetism and personal intermarriage (he reportedly has eight wives) with many important families to secure a military following, but allowed political control of the group to rest with a Council of Elders.

(S) In the chaos that followed the collapse of the Tripartite Government in 1964, this group appeared to be the only effective anti-communist force in the country, and the U.S. decided to place their primary reliance upon them. Under the auspices of the CIA, the Meo were organized into Special Guerrilla Units (SGUs) and provided with American arms and equipment. Since regular U.S. "advisors" were not permitted in Laos, CAS "case officers" were assigned to each of the units as well as to Vang Pao's headquarters at Long Tieng to advise and assist with training and the use of American equipment. CAS also supplemented the regular pay of Vang Pao's soldiers with a stipend and provided rice and other supplies to the families of the guerrillas. Loyalty was ensured because these troops were regularly paid and could be reasonably assured that their families would be provided for in their absence.

(S) Although Vang Pao was subsequently promoted to Major General and appointed commander of MR II, his relationship with the FAR was
never cordial. This stemmed in part from a natural antipathy on the part of the Lao for the Meo "savages" and in part from jealousy of Vang Pao's proven fighting ability. Relations were further strained by the fact that American aid and support were directed toward the Irregulars at the expense of the FAR/FAN. For his part, Vang Pao had little regard for the poor fighting quality of the regular forces and for the ineptitude of their leaders. Nevertheless, he served the government faithfully.

(S) Prior to 1969, the Meo operated strictly as guerrillas conducting hit-and-run raids behind enemy lines. After 1969, however, they were reorganized into Guerrilla Battalions (BGs) of approximately 300 men each (three companies of 100 men), and into Mobile Groups (GMs) of three to six battalions. (In addition, numerous smaller independent units continued to exist.) In the Wet Season campaign these units fought the NVA in a conventional manner and their ranks were decimated. By 1971, many families were down to the last surviving male (who was often a youth of 13 or 14), and survival of the tribe was becoming a major concern. Under these circumstances, the Council of Elders began to seriously consider moving the entire tribe to a safer location in Sayaboury or even into Thailand.

(S) In order to fill the depleted ranks and to expand operations, CAS began to recruit from other tribal groups and even from among the ethnic Lao. Thus, there were at least three separate recruiting programs in each military region: the FAR, FAN, and Irregulars. (In addition, since the PL were legally recognized as a part of the government, they were likely recruiting also.) In general, the lower pay of the FAR/FAN
was offset by the relative security of garrison duty, while the better
pay, training, equipment, and glamor of the Irregulars was offset by the
higher risk involved in offensive operations.

(S) In recruiting the Irregulars, CAS recognized and accepted the
ethnic animosities, and each battalion was composed of a single ethnic
group. As long as they were stationed in a particular military region,
these irregular units came under the operational control of the respec-
tive MR Commander through a Deputy for Guerrilla Warfare, who in turn was
advised by a staff of CAS case officers. The general pattern was for the
Irregulars to be used for offensive operations; then, when an area had
been secured, FAN or FAR units were moved in to garrison it while the
Irregulars moved on to other operations. Since these units were paid
and controlled by CAS, they could be shifted from one region to another
without consulting the region commander or the FAR General Staff, although
troops from one region were less inclined to risk their life in some
"foreign" land than in defense of their own home.

(U) When these expanded recruiting efforts failed to produce enough
suitable fighting men, the Laotian and American governments asked Thailand
for assistance. The Thais had always considered that their first line
of defense lay east of the Mekong. In addition, the Lao were ethnically
related to the Thais, and Laos had historically been a part of Thailand.
As early as 1969, regular units of the Thai army had been sent to Laos
to stem the NVA drive on Muong Soui and Long Tieng.
Note

For reasons of "National Security," this page remains classified.
Note

For reasons of "National Security," this page remains classified.
(TS) In addition, a Mobile Strike Squadron—drawn principally from aircraft stationed at Vientiane—operated out of Long Tieng. These units were advised and directed by the five AOCs manned by AIRA "Palace Dog" personnel. On-site maintenance was handled by the RLAF with the assistance of "Waterpump" mechanics from Det 1, 56 SOW, while major maintenance was performed by Air America at Udorn RTAFB. Although small in number, the RLAF had already earned several distinctions in the records of air warfare. It was not uncommon for the 35 T-28s to fly three or four missions per aircraft per day, and many pilots flew over 1,000 missions a year. Naturally, this took both a physical and mental toll of the pilots. Nevertheless, morale was among the highest in the world, and when it came to accurate delivery of ordnance, the RLAF was unexcelled. Organization, however, was an RLAF weak point, as an AIRA advisor commented:

The RLAF is a "gaggle" of trained, capable and experienced pilots whose lack of effective organization makes them dependent on U.S. direction and assistance.

Enemy Organization

(S) Opposing the friendly forces were 32,000 PL and 26,000 NVA (another 45,000 NVA were engaged in activities along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Steel Tiger). The PL, with their headquarters at Sam Neua, were divided into regional commands. The Xieng Khouang Region included all of northern Laos, while the South Laos Region was roughly equivalent to the Steel Tiger area. Each region was further subdivided into provinces corresponding to the administrative divisions of the country.
Like the FAR/FAN, the PL were normally recruited and trained locally, and operated principally within their own province. In general, PL units were kept separate from the NVA forces, but combined NVA/PL battalions were organized in a number of areas. Regardless of the formal organization, the PL were, in fact, controlled by the NVA, and this occasionally caused some friction between the two forces.

(S) A case in point is the incident involving the death of General Phouma Douangmala, the PL commander of the South Laos Military Region. Phouma was something of a local Robin Hood figure who was noted for his Lao nationalism and resistance to NVA domination. With his three PL battalions (11th, 12th, and 25th), he would normally enter a village, kill a few pigs, and throw a party for the villagers. After much eating, drinking, and camaraderie, he would give a speech or show a propaganda film and then move on to another village. In this manner, he gained real popularity and became one of the most effective PL leaders in the country—too effective, in fact, for the NVA. Sometime in November 1970, Phouma was wounded in a clash with government forces. Although his wounds were minor, the NVA insisted that he be transferred to one of their own hospitals, where he died. Since a number of other PL officials had met violent deaths at the hands of a special NVA unit formed to ensure PL adherence to the party line, Phouma's followers blamed the NVA for his death. After several months of "agonizing reappraisal" and careful maneuvering to avoid arousing NVA suspicions, one of Phouma's battalion commanders switched loyalty to the RLG on 23 March 1971 and gave the
UNCLASSIFIED

Pathet Lao Administrative Subdivisions - Laos

FIGURE 5  50

UNCLASSIFIED
location of an NVA regiment operating in his area. Three days later, a massive air strike by 20 USAF and 23 RLAF aircraft virtually eliminated this unit. In the weeks that followed, most of the 11th, 12th, and 25th PL battalions rallied to the government and returned to the field to fight the NVA.

USAF Support

(TS) USAF support for the Barrel Roll War took two principal forms—helicopter airlift of CAS/AMEMBASSY ground operations and direct air support of Laotian forces in contact with the enemy. Aircraft support came principally from the 432 TRW at Udorn and the 56 SOW at Nakhon Phanom. In addition, aircraft from other units, primarily the 8 TFW at Ubon and the 388 TFW at Korat, flew in the area as the situation required. (See Figure 6.) The 432 TRW and 56 SOW also took part in operations in Steel Tiger 98 and North Vietnam. Helicopter airlift operations were controlled directly by the Deputy Commander, 7/13AF, and carried out through the 7/13AF Special Activities Division (DOZ) by the 21 SOS at NKP. These operations included two separate programs. The first of these were small infiltration and exfiltration missions in which special CAS ground teams were airlifted deep into enemy-held territory to conduct intelligence collection, harassment, interdiction, and other clandestine operations. These missions were normally carried out by Air America resources, with USAF providing A-1 escort and back-up helicopter support. However, 7/13AF was frequently called on to provide both primary airlift
**USAF AIRCRAFT DEPLOYMENT IN SEA AS OF 31 JUL 71**

### Aircraft 647

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### Personnel 49,395/37,095

- **SOUTH VIETNAM**
  - **Personnel**
  - **Aircraft**
- **BIEN HOA**
  - A-37: 25
  - HH-43: 2
  - HH-53: 2
  - OV-10: 23
- **TUY HOA**
  - UH-1: 7

### Aircraft 415

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### Personnel 29,320/25,690

- **THAILAND**
- **Personnel**
- **Aircraft**
- **KORAT**
  - **Aircraft**
  - **Personnel**
- **NAKHON PHANOM**
  - **Aircraft**
  - **Personnel**
- **TAKHLI**
  - **Aircraft**
  - **Personnel**
- **DON MUANG**
- **KORAT**
- **NAKHON PHANOM**
- **TAKHLI**

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**NOTE:**
1. Transient, administrative support, and weather map aircraft not included.
2. Total country assigned military as of 30 Jun 70/30 Jun 71.
3. Personnel data for major locations shown below aircraft data.
4. Includes personnel assigned to Saigon.

**SOURCE:** USAF MANAGEMENT SUMMARY SEA

19 October 1971

**FIGURE 6**
and escort. When such a mission arose (either a primary or back-up), CAS would notify DOZ approximately 48 hours in advance and provide all necessary information. CAS also provided pertinent photo/intelligence information to 56 SOW, arranged for some facilities, provided communication facilities, and prepositioned JP-4 jet fuel to support the operation. DOZ then collated this information with other mission requirements, determined the helicopter and escort requirements, and fragged the helicopters. (7AF fragged the A-1 escorts, if required). The 21 SOS scheduled the aircraft and crews, appointed a mission commander, and performed the actual mission planning. Normally, the helicopters operated in pairs. The usual pattern was for troops and their support equipment to be loaded aboard one helicopter while the second aircraft served as backup and, if necessary, conducted search and rescue (SAR). In this fashion, the second helicopter could act as prime recovery ship if the first encountered any problems. Escort was provided any time the path of flight took the aircraft over an area where enemy ground fire could be expected, or when the helicopter landing zone (HLZ) was in an area of known or suspected enemy activity. In the event that 7AF did not frag the required escorts, the mission was usually cancelled. Overall, these operations went very smoothly.

(TS) The second type of USAF helicopter support was larger in scale than the first. Helicopter missions required to airlift FAR or Irregular ground forces into battle, although less frequent, necessitated more USAF resources and encountered greater difficulty in planning and execution. In general, the procedure for these missions followed
the same pattern as the infiltration operations discussed above, varying principally in size and scope. Missions were often multi-battalion operations involving several shuttles by a large number of helicopters. Extensive TACAIR support was often required in addition to the normal A-1 escort. Since these operations required far more coordination than the smaller CAS/team missions, 7/13AF wanted to be included in the planning phase. Again, as previously noted, CAS and AMEMBASSY rejected this request for "security reasons." The only restriction placed upon helicopter support was a 500-hour per month flying time limitation, which never proved to be a constraint.

(TS) The second major form of USAF support for the Barrel Roll war was directed air support of Regular and Irregular Laotian forces in contact with the enemy. As with helicopter support, direct air support was primarily the responsibility of the RLAF. However, the RLAF was limited both in numbers and in capability. For one thing, the T-28s had limited ordnance capability, limited range, and were extremely vulnerable to AAA. Consequently, their operations were limited to troops-in-contact (TIC) situations and to low threat areas where their lighter bomb load could be effective and where they could expect to encounter nothing larger than small arms fire. The more heavily defended targets, and those requiring heavier ordnance, were left primarily to the USAF. This support involved strike aircraft, reconnaissance aircraft, and forward air controllers (FACs), and consisted of both pre-planned and immediate targets. Pre-planned strikes for clo
air support were generated and validated by AIRA based upon inputs from the field, and submitted to 7/13AF where they were consolidated and passed to 7AF. Immediate air requests within the Raven Control Box* were supported by diverts from other missions. Often, Quick Reaction Force (QRF) strike aircraft on ground alert were used. These requests were passed by the FAC/FAG to the Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center (ABCCC), which relayed the request to the 7AF Command Post (Blue Chip). In all of these cases, Embassy validating procedures were followed, and approval of Blue Chip was received through the ABCCC.

(S) Seventh/Thirteenth Air Force could also generate pre-planned and immediate targets in the Special Operating Areas (SOA--a designated free-fire area which contained no friendly troops) based upon photo or visual reconnaissance, provided that they met Embassy-established criteria. These targets were fragged in the same manner as the AIRA requests. In addition, USAF FACs could generate immediate air requests against lucrative targets. Again, Embassy validating and USAF divert procedures were followed.

(TS) The biggest problem was how to distribute the limited resources allotted to the Barrel Roll among these different missions. Within the Raven Box, the ground situation was constantly shifting and pre-planned targets were rare. Since getting diverts or QRF aircraft on-scene in time to handle immediate requests was uncertain, AIRA preferred

*A defined geographical area approximately 15 to 30 KM north and east of Long Tieng within which all USAF strikes were controlled by Raven FACs.
to have F-4s and A-1s dedicated to the Ravens in order to have a continuous air cap over the battle area. Since the SOAs were rich in hard targets as well as in fleeting targets, 7/13AF preferred to see the weight of effort directed to these areas. Seventh Air Force preferred not to dedicate resources since, in effect, control of these sorties was lost. Consequently, 7AF warned both parties that except for the helicopter support:

There is no specific level of air assets routinely available to the American Embassy Vientiane and CAS Udorn for the support of operations in Laos. Additional MACV air assets are provided to support operations in Laos on an "as requested" "as available" basis, with the number of sorties and percentage of overall air effort adjusted weekly as the SEAsia war picture changes. Under the single air manager concept, this headquarters retains the flexibility to shift the weight of effort as the military situation dictates.

(S) USAF was also involved in support for Laos in a number of other ways. The Waterpump/MAP program has already been mentioned (page 48). Medevac and air rescue, including support of Joint Personnel Recovery Center (JPRC) operations, also required considerable resources. Psychological warfare, civic action, local base defense, and logistic support of isolated Tacan sites in Thailand and Laos rounded out the range of USAF activities. In addition, the US Army provided a significant amount of air support with its OV-1s and CH-54 "Flying Cranes." As support is often a nebulous concept that must be placed in the context of operational reality, the following chapter will address the trials, successes and failures of USAF support against a background of the ground campaigns.

*Tactical Air Navigation
CHAPTER III
OPERATIONS

Military Region I

(S) Having halted the enemy drive on the royal capital by 30 March 1971, government forces were prepared to go on the offensive to clear the enemy from the approaches to Luang Prabang and, if possible, break into the NVA supply bases in the upper Nam Ou Valley. At the same time, a joint operation with the Thais was planned in Sayaboury province to disrupt Thai Communist (CT) base camps and lines of infiltration. The Sayaboury operation, code named "Phalat," was launched on 2 April by a single Thai Irregular battalion. Handicapped by an absence of artillery or air support, the operation was a failure. Concurrently, on the Thai side of the border, a much larger force--consisting of two regimental combat teams (RCTs), two artillery batteries, an airborne battalion, and RTAF support--began a sweep of the border area. Contact was light and sporadic as the CT chose to drift back into Laos rather than engage this force. Nevertheless, in three weeks of operations, the Thais did manage to destroy several base camps and disrupt the enemy's lines of supply.

(S) In Luang Prabang, the 3,600 defenders were reinforced with five battalions from other military regions. Organized into three Tactical Groups (regiments), the combined force of 4,900 launched an offensive on 8 April with the support of an armored car platoon and gunboats of the Lao River Flotilla (LRF). Since the enemy had already withdrawn, leaving only a light screening force behind, this drive met little opposition.
Nevertheless, progress was slow as the friendly forces conducted cautious probes and sweeps to be sure that no enemy troops were left in the area. By 21 April, this force had retaken the King’s farm and reached the Nam Suong River, located approximately 13 kilometers north of the capital. Here they rested and regrouped for about a week. Additional reinforcements brought the force up to 5,900 men. When the drive resumed on the 29th, enemy resistance increased in defense of his forward supply areas. Progress continued, however, until the middle of May when the government force reached the enemy’s main line of resistance some 20 to 25 KM north and east of Luang Prabang. After two days of bombardment by the RLAF and strong probes by the ground forces had failed to dislodge the enemy, the friendly force disengaged and began to secure its own position. Throughout the operations, air support came primarily from the RLAF: seven T-28s and AC-47s flew over 1,600 sorties, or an average of more than 40 sorties per day. USAF support was limited to a few F-4s which delivered special ordnance not available to the RLAF. These strikes consisted mainly of seeding enemy supply routes with CBU-42s, dropping wide area anti-personnel mines (WAAPM), and bombing cave storage areas with LGBs. (S) On 17 May 1971, overcast weather prevented further air strikes. Correspondingly, the ground action also fell off to minor skirmishes and patrolling. In September, as the weather cleared, operations resumed. In Sayaboury, three irregular battalions launched "Operation Sourasai Montry" (later changed to "Somlar") with the support of four T-28s. Compared to "Phalat," "Somlar" went very smoothly, and although it encountered stronger
resistance, the friendly forces were able to retake most of the strong points along the Mekong. Refugees from the area who had earlier fled to Thailand began to return to their homes. Since this operation was beyond the range of the T-28s stationed at Luang Prabang, a shuttle technique was employed in which the T-28s took off from Luang Prabang, dropped their bombs, and recovered at Ban Houei Sai. After flying one to two strikes from Ban Houei Sai, they flew a final strike on their way back to Luang Prabang. Following the conclusion of "Somlar" on 2 October 1971, action continued light and sporadic for the remainder of the wet season.

(S) North of Luang Prabang, the receding Nam Ou River revealed a large number of previously camouflaged cave storage areas. Increased boat traffic on the Nam Ou, along with a general increase in enemy activity, indicated that the NVA 335th Regiment had returned from North Vietnam and was preparing for an offensive. To forestall the offensive and break into the NVA supply bases, the RLG launched "Operation Tham Thiny" with five FAR battalions on 21 September. This force immediately encountered and was quickly halted by the 335th Regiment.

(S) Meanwhile, RLAF and USAF aircraft struck at the river traffic and storage areas. The enemy countered by moving at dawn and dusk, when visibility was poor and there were few sorties fragged. They also hugged the river banks in order to put in at any of the numerous villages along the river, since friendly aircraft were restricted from bombing within 500 meters of a village. Phase II of the operation (renamed "Sy Thit") began
on 2 November with the addition of two Irregular battalions, but again no significant progress was made. It did appear, however, that this show of RLG strength upset the enemy's timetable. A CAS official summarized the situation by saying that although the enemy continued to pose a threat to Luang Prabang, the capital had gained some breathing room. He added that to the west most of the positions along the Mekong had been retaken, and although Sayaboury was still contested the enemy no longer had a "free pass" in the area. Thus, the situation at the end of the wet season was virtually identical to that which existed 12 months earlier.

Military Region II

(S) As usual, the most extensive Laotian military operations and the preponderance of USAF support were concentrated in MR II, where Vang Pao had once again halted the enemy on the doorsteps of Long Tieng. During the height of the siege of Long Tieng, the USAF had provided a total of 60 strike sorties per day. Normally, these sorties consisted of 40 F-4s and four A-1s fragged to the Ravens for use against TICs and troop concentrations (TPCs) inside the Raven Box. When weather or lack of a suitable target precluded their use in this role, they could be diverted to special IFR bombing boxes using Loran or Combat Skyspot. Two additional F-4s were loaded with LGBs for use against AM, and another four F-4s were held as a QRF in the event that additional targets became available. At night, four AC-119s were fragged and an occasional AC-130 diverted to support TICs. These gunships were required to remain within 25 nautical miles (NM), 10 minutes flying time, of Long Tieng in order to respond rapidly to the
ground situation, and were thus prohibited from ranging farther afield in a search for trucks. Six F-4s were also held on QRF each night for use if the situation required. In addition, OV-10 "Nail" and F-4 "Laredo" FACs, RF-4 "Bullwhip" photo reconnaissance, and C-123 "Candlestick" flare ships were provided. In spite of weather, maintenance problems, and diverts to other missions, an average of 52 F-4 and A-1 sorties per day were effective. Of these, 45 percent struck visually under Raven control; another 10 percent struck at night under gunship or flare ship control; approximately 40 percent dropped their bombs with Loran; and the remaining five percent struck supply areas behind enemy lines. During the hours of darkness, an average of three gunships were effective. These supported 119 ground actions and destroyed or damaged 29 trucks. During the siege of Long Tieng, the RLAF added over 1,000 sorties.

(TS) With the fighting already somewhat stabilized between 7 and 14 April, the weather closed in, providing a temporary lull in fighting. For both emotional and military reasons, Vang Pao was determined to conduct an offensive. He realized that his position in front of Long Tieng was untenable, and that his forces could not withstand a prolonged siege—especially with the prospects of reduced air support in the offing. He also recognized that the PDU itself was basically indefensible. Therefore, his plan was to sweep across the PDU and establish strong positions to the east, from which he could raid the enemy supply depot at Ban Ban. This strategy was explained by the Embassy:

In MR II General Vang Pao has been ordered by the King and Primin [Prime Minister] to gain control of as much
territory as possible in Xieng Khouang and Houa Phan (Sam Neua) provinces. Vang Pao does not have the forces needed to drive the enemy out of these provinces. His aim, however, is to gain control of the entire Plain of Jars and to secure its defense by controlling the high points to the north and east. He would also like to cut Route 7 in the vicinity of Nong Pet and Route 4 as far east as Xieng Khouangville to hamper the enemy's ability to mount counterattacks. (See map, Figure 7.)

Vang Pao realized that even these positions could not be held indefinitely, but that they would give him room to fight a series of delaying actions as he fell back across the Plain. This was essentially the same strategy which he had employed in the two previous campaigns. Yet this year there was a note of urgency since anything that was to be accomplished would have to be done before 1 July, when the level of American air support was to be reduced from 60 to 32 sorties per day.

(TS) There were, however, two major problems with Vang Pao's plan. First, the enemy was stronger than ever before, having well-developed supply bases in and around the PDJ. Second, Vang Pao's plans rested largely upon American support, and Washington's policy was not to support any offensive moves.

(S) General Evans doubted Vang Pao's ability to achieve his objectives in view of the projected reductions in air support; he thus favored an air campaign against the enemy's supply areas. In support of such a campaign, General Evans proposed that Vang Pao secure strong defensive positions in the hills to the north, southeast, and southwest of the PDJ. From these positions he could dominate the Plain, and deny
Military Region II

FIGURE 7
the enemy its use without actually occupying it. At the same time he could perform ground reconnaissance on the Plain and into the Xieng Khouangville and Ban Ban areas to identify supply caches for strikes by aircraft. However, General Evans could only advise, and his recommendation was not followed.

(TS) The Embassy was in an awkward position. On the one hand, it reflected the Washington policy of no offensive; but on the other, it approved Vang Pao's plan to launch an offensive. At the same time, Ambassador Godley assured General Evans that if Vang Pao did launch an offensive, he would be "off on his own." Nevertheless, the Embassy insisted upon air support once the offensive got underway and warned that, if necessary, it would go to Washington and bring pressure to bear in order to get that support. With or without American support, Vang Pao was going on the offensive, and the Embassy believed that under those circumstances America's best interests were served by supporting him.* This was precisely the policy that the United States had followed in the past.

(TS) The Embassy's view was not shared by 7AF or MACV, as was made clear by the MACV Concept Paper and OPLAN 730. Operations in northern Laos were considered to be a diversion from the principal area of concern--Steel Tiger East. OPLAN 730 was based on the assumption

*It should be noted that Vang Pao and his Meo forces were essentially mercenaries in that they were hired, paid, trained, equipped, and supported to fight a war in behalf of U.S. interests. They were not, however, soldiers of fortune: each Meo had a personal stake in keeping the NVA enemy from his door. Vang Pao, acting in accordance with national interests as articulated by the King and Prime Minister and his own interests as a Meo, declared his intention to carry out his plan on the PDJ with or without U.S. assistance.
that there would be no offensive in Barrel Roll, thus permitting a reduction in the sortie allocation to that area. However, General Clay deferred to his Deputy at Udorn to recommend the required level of air support. As usual, this placed 7/13AF squarely in the middle, trying to reconcile two irreconcilable positions without having any authority of its own. Like the Embassy, 7/13AF was constrained to operate within the limits set by higher authority, yet at the same time tasked to provide the most effective air support possible to any operations in Barrel Roll.

(S) This complete dichotomy between policy and strategy was reflected in the meetings of the Barrel Roll Working Group during the spring and early summer. On 30 April, 7/13AF proposed a reduction to 40 sorties per day and a shift in emphasis from the Raven Box to the SOAs. They called for 12 F-4s and four A-1s to supplement the RLAF in support of ground action, while an additional four F-4s were held on QRF. Two more F-4s were scheduled for AAA suppression. If mining or seeding was required, these sorties would be taken from the Raven allocation. To strike at the enemy's supplies and LOCs, the proposal called for eight F-4s per day and four gunships at night. The gunships would continue to seek TICs as their primary mission, but would be released from the 10 minute "tether" in order to search for trucks along the LOCs when there were no TIC situations. Since "truck hunting" would take them into areas of heavy AAA, the proposal called for six F-4 escorts carrying flack suppression ordnance, normally napalm and CBU's. C-123 Flareships
(Candlesticks), slow OV-10 FACs (Hails), fast F-4 FACs (Laredos), and RF-4 photo recon (Bullwhip) missions were also to be flown. This proposal led to a heated discussion within the working group which pointed up the divergence of views and the absence of joint planning. The representatives from the Wings were unanimous in wanting to shift even greater weight against the storage areas, since they felt that their aircraft could be used more effectively against these targets. They urged leaving the TICs to the RLAF T-28s and AC-47s, which were better suited for that mission. AIRA recognized the desire of the gunship crews to go "truck hunting," but pointed out that:

An enemy mortar can do progressively more damage the further away, time-wise, the gunship flies from the potential TIC environment. At present, 10 minutes flying time is authorized.

CAS felt that the whole proposal was "premature" since the enemy drive had only been blunted: enemy forces still exerted pressure on Long Tieng and held both Ban Na and Bouam Long under siege. Instead of a reduction, CAS called for 20 sorties per day in addition to the 60 already being fragged. When asked if the additional sorties should go to the Ravens or to strike the supply areas around Ban Ban, the CAS representative replied, "top priority goes to the guns that are hitting Ban Na." (The increased sorties would also support Vang Pao's planned, though unannounced, offensive.) Actually, the CAS proposal was unrealistic, but it served as a useful ploy in the bargaining that followed.

(S) As a result of these discussions, a revised proposal was submitted to 7AF on 5 April which restored the full 60 strike sorties and
retained the "tether" on the gunships. Seventh Air Force accepted this
plan, and fragged the requested aircraft. Of these, a daily average of 125
51 F-4/A-1 sorties and 4.5 gunship sorties were effective. Seventy-
five percent of the fighter sorties struck in support of ground action
during April, while the remaining 25 percent were diverted into the SOAs.
That same month the gunships supported 135 ground actions and destroyed
or damaged 58 trucks.

(S) A month later, 7AF agreed to continue the 60 sorties per day
until July, but the basic disagreement over joint planning and sortie
allocation remained. CAS insisted that the bulk of the sorties go to
the Ravens since the enemy offensive would be followed immediately by
a friendly counter-offensive, with friendly units being heli-lifted
behind the enemy to block their retreat. When the 7/13AF Director
of Operations interjected that "we've got to know these things," the
only answer was a reassurance that 7/13AF would be informed "sufficiently
in advance." Later, when asked what the objectives of the proposed
offensive were and how far it would go, the answer was a restatement of
the Embassy goals:

1. Protect Souvanna Phouma's government by stabilizing
the military situation along the lines of the 1962 Accords.
2. Inflict maximum damage on NVA forces occupying and
transiting Laos; and
3. Document how the U.S. helped defend a country without
the infusion of massive American manpower.

While these were sound objectives, it was pointed out that this was hardly
the basis for planning a coherent air campaign.
(S) The Wings still favored shifting the weight of effort to the LOC/storage areas in order to "hit the enemy on the way out, before he can get established in secure areas." Such a program included pre-planned hard targets as well as perishable targets of opportunity, and required more Nail and Laredo FACs "to be there when the targets came up." Since the enemy had perceived that air strikes against LOCs were restricted to targets within 200 meters of a motorable road, they had adopted the simple expedient of stacking supplies in the open just beyond this limit. The Wings wanted the Rules of Engagement (ROE) changed to move the existing limits out to 500 or 1,000 meters, and preferably to 2,000 meters. The 388th TFW also proposed a comprehensive program to cut, mine, and seed the three principal interdiction points (IDPs) leading into the PDJ. Under this proposal, gunships— and F-4s, if needed— would be used at night to harass enemy repair efforts. Such a program would require 12 to 16 sorties per day for an indefinite period against each IDP, and would also require a change in ROE to permit the use of WAAPM. However, AIRA reminded the BRWG that "AIRA is not in the route structure business" and that such a program would take too many sorties away from the Ravens. Furthermore, requests for seeding and strikes beyond the 200 meter limit would be considered on an individual basis.

(S) As a result of these discussions, it was finally agreed that the previous month's proposal would be continued, except that four sorties per day would be shifted from the Ravens to hard targets. This frag request then became standard for the last two months of the fiscal year, and 7AF generally fragged the sorties requested.
Meanwhile, Vang Pao was not waiting for anyone. As soon as the weather cleared on 15 April, he launched a counterattack to clear Skyline Ridge and Hill 1662. In spite of strong enemy resistance, Skyline Ridge was cleared by the 18th, but the attack on Hill 1662 was repulsed. The line then remained static for the next five days during which Vang Pao launched one of those surprise moves for which he was famous. On 18 April 1971, a single battalion was airlifted to Pha Phai (LS-65), east of the PDJ. From there, the group moved overland to interdict Route 4 between Xieng Khouangville and the PDJ. (See map, Figure 8.) Although the raiders staged several spectacular ambushes, they were not reinforced and were eventually forced back into LS-65, from which they continued to launch occasional raids.

On the 23rd of April, Vang Pao's force from LS-5 initiated an attack on Phou Phaxai, which was beaten off. The enemy then launched a counterattack which drove the friendly forces off Phou Long Mat. This position was retaken on the 27th, and although the enemy still held Hills 1662, 1798, and the Phou Phaxai ridge, the situation was deemed safe enough for Vang Pao to move his wives back into Long Tieng. The Raven FACs also returned to remain overnight, but the T-28s continued to operate out of Vientiane.

Since frontal attacks had failed to dislodge the enemy from his positions southwest of the PDJ, troops were airlifted from LS-5 to the Khang Kho area (LS-204) on 1 May. They were to secure the site and prepare for a thrust directly onto the PDJ to cut the enemy's LOCs and...
force him to withdraw. By 3 May, LS-204 was secure and the remainder of GM 21 was brought in as reinforcements.

(TS) However, the enemy was not intimidated by this move and clung to his positions. Determined to remain in the Long Tieng sector, they brought in helicopters to resupply these forces. Although the NVA restricted their helicopter operations to the hours of darkness in order to minimize detection, several enemy helicopters were noted in flight during the early part of May, and an AC-119 actually observed one land near LS-15 on 13 May. However, it was not until 10 days later that permission was received to engage the NVA helicopters. By that time, though, they had discontinued forward operations, and thereafter remained well clear of areas where allied aircraft were known to operate.

(S) Gradually, the cumulative effects of air strikes, ground attacks, and rain began to have their effect on the enemy. First, he was forced off Hill 1662, then Hill 1798; on 17 May, Phou Phaxai was occupied by friendly forces without a fight. Although the enemy still held Ban Na and remained in strength southwest of the PDJ, the initiative had clearly passed to Vang Pao. With the immediate threat to Long Tieng removed, most of the reinforcements which had been sent to MR II were redeployed, and Vang Pao's attack faltered as he tried to realign his forces for a resumption of the offensive.

(S) Meanwhile, the enemy had not been idle. NVA replacements brought the enemy force to a total of 2,500 men which were pitted against the defenders and their families at Bouam Long.* However, Bouam Long was

*See Figure 3, Page 25.
located on a nearly inaccessible mountain whose approaches were protected by a series of smaller sites. In addition, the defenders, who had lived on the mountain all of their lives, believed that the mountain was sacred, and they were determined to live and die on its slopes.

(S) The NVA attack on Bouam Long began on 20 May under the cover of bad weather, and reached its climax three days later. During this crisis, Vang Pao dispatched aid by air, bringing the number of defenders to 1,200. At the same time, USAF added a new dimension to the action with the introduction of a single PAVE MACE. This device enabled a gunship to locate enemy positions through the use of a ground beacon set by ground observers. Using this device, USAF gunships were able to pour their deadly fire into the enemy ranks regardless of the weather or visual conditions. By the end of the month, the NVA withdrew to North Vietnam to rest and refit. This withdrawal left three PL battalions to screen Bouam Long, and prevent a breakout of friendly forces into the PDJ or LOCs.

(TS) At this point, Vang Pao decided to ignore the 3,000 NVA who were still in the Long Tieng area, and struck directly for the PDJ. On 3 June, a combined force of 700 men moved out of LS-204 for the PDJ, arriving at the southern tip of the Plain the following day. From there, the force began to move up to the western edge of the Plain toward Phou Seu. Although his move was characterized as a "defensive" maneuver, intended to force the enemy to withdraw from Long Tieng as well as relieve pressure on LS-32, it did, in fact, herald the beginning
Note

For reasons of "National Security," this page remains classified.
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Vang Pao's success had been due largely to the continued high level of air support and to the mobility afforded him by the use of helicopters, both Air America and USAF. During the first phase of his advance, 7AF had fragged an average of 55 strike sorties per day (of the 60 requested by 7/13AF). Weather, maintenance, and diversions reduced the number of effective sorties to 45, of which approximately 50 percent were in direct support of Vang Pao's advance. Another 20 percent expended IFR, while 20 percent struck LOCs and storage areas. The remaining 10 percent were gunship escorts. The RLAf continued to provide another 35 sorties per day with 10 T-28s. Although small in number, this combined air effort had produced excellent results. For one thing, the limited area of operation contained 20,000 enemy troops. In addition, as long as the friendly forces were moving, they developed numerous targets by forcing the enemy to react, thus exposing himself to air strikes. Thus the ground forces flushed the quarry for air strikes, and airpower made further advances possible.

(S) Vang Pao's hopes for success in phase two of his offensive depended in large measure on sustained air support. Here, however, two problems were encountered. The first was in the realms of policy and coordination. This was brought out clearly by General Evans in a message to General Clay:

Request this Hq be informed as to current plans and objectives for MR II wet season operations which will involve the commitment of USAF resources. There has been a complete lack of coordination of the PDJ operation with 7/13AF
or your headquarters. I intend to discuss subject with Ambassador Godley tomorrow on my farewell visit to Vientiane, but will have to leave follow-up action to General Searles. In view of the current policy to wind down the war and decommit air and ground resources wherever possible, I feel the wisdom of a major ground effort by Vang Pao at this time should be questioned. In addition, the continuing use of USAF strike sorties in support of this operation is not in accord with Ambassador Godley's statement to me that Vang Pao was off on his own.

(S) The second problem was the reduced sortie allocation scheduled to go into effect on 1 July. On 15 June 1971, 7AF representative to the Barrel Roll Working Group reaffirmed that the 32 strike sorties per day as outlined in OPLAN 730 would hold firm for the remainder of the campaign. Activity along the Ho Chi Minh Trail was declining rapidly while Vang Pao was already well into the PDJ. It became obvious that he could not remain there; he had to either go forward or retreat. After lengthy discussion, the Barrel Roll Working Group agreed that Vang Pao would need 24 to 28 sorties per day—in addition to the RLAF sorties—to support his advance. Since this would leave virtually nothing with which to strike storage areas (the 7/13AF targeting section had already identified over 200 lucrative storage area targets), the Group decided to state the Raven requirement as primary in its proposal to 7AF and then ask for additional sorties to strike hard targets. The resulting proposal called for 39 strike sorties per day—26 F-4s and four A-1s to the Ravens, four F-4s to hard targets, and five 145 gunships per night.
(S) Since the enemy AAA threat had decreased with the rainy season, and since the gunships would generally be supporting TICs which were normally outside the AAA high threat areas, escorts and flak suppression flights were deemed unnecessary. The proposal also recommended that none of the fighters be placed on QRF. If the aircraft could not strike as fragged, they would bomb the storage areas IFR or be diverted to targets of opportunity. Under the existing circumstances, the Group considered this proposal to be modest and reasonable. However, 7AF was unconvinced by the Group's reasoning and fragged an average of 33 sorties per day--20 F-4s and four A-1s* to the Ravens, four F-4s to hard targets, and five gunships. Since 7AF desired that every sortie produce the maximum effect, it was decided to hold one half of the fighters on QRF when weather limited the availability of good targets. As a result, over one third of the fragged sorties were cancelled due to weather, and the few remaining sorties did not have a significant effect on operations.

(S) With or without air support, Vang Pao was determined to resume his advance. On 1 July, the eastern task force moved out from Phou Teung and crossed Route 4. At the same time, three battalions from the center task force were airlifted into the vicinity of Xieng Khouang airstrip (L-22). Six days later, another three battalions were airlifted from Phou Seu into the vicinity of Phou Keng, and by the 8th this force was at the base of the mountain. To support these

*Actually fragged as medevac escort. A-1 support was not always available to the Ravens.
attacks; Vang Pao brought his artillery* forward, and established a "Mustang" battery consisting of two 105mm and four 155mm howitzers just forward of the Finger Ridge.

(S) While Vang Pao's aims appeared open-ended, in reality a very definite limit had been set by a combination of political restraints, reduced air and helicopter support, and unexpected resistance from the enemy. Since Vang Pao was now threatening the intermediate storage depots, the enemy returned two regiments to the PDJ and increased the use of PT-76 tanks to harass friendly forces. In general, the tanks were used as mobile artillery rather than assault vehicles. The enemy also showed a preference for attacks by fire (ABFs) rather than TICs which exposed his troops to air strikes. While this combination slowed Vang Pao's drive, it also showed the NVA's determination to protect his rear areas. That the NVA was able to bring these reinforcements into the theater during the height of the rainy season also showed the importance of a comprehensive interdiction campaign to complement the ground campaign.

(S) The first friendly force to encounter this renewed resistance was the eastern task force, which was driven back across Route 4. On 12 July, this force was redirected down Route 4 toward Xieng Khouangville, and actually reached a point 10 KM from the town before it was halted. In the center, L-22 was captured on the 17th but lost three days later.

During the remainder of July and August, the battle swayed back and forth

*Artillery was an added dimension of Vang Pao's capabilities. It was not included in the original plan of action, but its addition resulted in a diminished air requirement.
before the friendlies were able to secure the airfield. The western task
force was also meeting stiff resistance in its attempt to take Phou Keng,
but succeeded in taking both Phou Keng and Phou San on 29 July when enemy
forces were temporarily diverted.

(S) However, Vang Pao's drive had reached its zenith. On 12 August
the enemy launched a counterattack on the force near Xieng Khouangville,
and by the 16th had driven the Meo irregulars back to Phou Teung. The
enemy also recaptured Phou San on 29 August. Thereafter, battle lines
stabilized along Route 4/7 from Phou Keng to L-22 and Phou Teung, with
Vang Pao looking for further enemy advances.

(S) At this point, Vang Pao was in a very vulnerable position.
Stalled in the middle of the Plain, he could not advance and would not
retreat. He could only wait for the enemy offensive which he knew
must come. Just how long such an offensive could be delayed depended
almost entirely on the USAF and how it used the 32 strike sorties
allocated to the Barrel Roll. This question was addressed at the July
meeting of the Barrel Roll Working Group. Since the ground forces
were no longer advancing, they were not developing targets for air
strikes. At the same time, the enemy was free to move, choosing his
time and place, and making maximum use of camouflage to hide this
movement from aerial observation. Under these circumstances, the
Wings--and now 7/13AF--favored a definite shift to the SOAs in order
to slow the enemy buildup. The 7/13AF target list was approaching the
300 mark, and the enemy was bringing in more supplies every day. Some
of the supplies were placed in the existing storage sites, but new areas were constantly being developed. One of the enemy's favorite devices was to dig deep bunkers, fill them with supplies, and then cover them with dirt and bags. Once covered, they were almost impossible to detect from the air, and nothing short of a direct hit with a delayed-action 2,000 pound bomb would break them open. Another device was to store supplies in small quantities in existing bomb craters in the apparent belief that lightning never strikes twice in the same place. This was, of course, a fallacy, but going after these supplies in driblets consumed a lot of aircraft, and each new bomb crater was just one more place to store supplies. In spite of the obvious need to destroy these caches before they could be used against Vang Pao, CAS and AIRA remained firm in their position that the major weight of air effort go into the Raven Box. As the friendly forces had advanced, this box had been gradually extended until it included the entire PDJ.

(5) An alternative was proposed by the ABCCC and supported by most of the Wings: most or all of the aircraft were to be fragged to the ABCCC, since it was the closest control agency to the scene of action. As the extension of Blue Chip, it could then direct the aircraft as needed. Such a plan obviously contained the greatest flexibility, but was opposed by 7AF as well as by CAS and AIRA. Seventh Air Force considered the ABCCC a radio relay platform, and had no intention of delegating any real authority to it. At the same time, CAS and AIRA feared that under this system there would be a tendency to "hunt BDA" in the
SOAs at the expense of the Ravens. They much preferred dedicated sorties. The result was a counter proposal which called for 36 sorties: 16 F-4s and four A-1s to support the Raven, six F-4s to hard targets, six more F-4s to targets of opportunity, and four gunships at night. Seventh Air Force acquiesced in the proposal and recommended that one half of the sorties be placed on QRF. This became the standard frag for the remainder of the wet season.

(S) Since the 20 Raven-support sorties per day were inadequate for either offensive or defensive operations by the friendly ground forces, on 28 August AIRA formally submitted a request to 7/13AF to increase the requested support to the Ravens. The urgency of this request was even more apparent three days later. In a message requesting increased F-4 support for Raven FACs in MR IV, where friendly forces were trying desperately to recapture Paksong, AIRA stated, "request these sorties not, repeat not, be taken from Barrel Roll assets." General Searles also made an appeal to 7AF for more sorties, and submitted a detailed estimate of the situation to support his request. This request noted:

We have been told that friendly forces were being restrained by political considerations while the enemy is preparing for an October offensive. In the absence of any friendly offensive:

The enemy will continue to be reinforced and will gain the offensive as the wet season draws to a close. Determined attempts will be made to dislodge friendly forces in the northwest and southeast portions of the PDJ and force them to withdraw to the south. This will put
pressure on the high ground positions of Phou Teung and Phou Keng. Friendly forces will be on the defensive and will attempt to hold their present positions relying on strong support from artillery and Tacair. While friendly forces are stronger than they have been in the past due to the presence of new battalions and artillery support, it remains to be seen whether an all-out defense of friendly positions will be undertaken. This headquarters estimates that friendly forces will be withdrawn if severe personnel losses appear imminent.

As for the existing level of sorties, the message stated:

This number of sorties provides the minimum support required during the next 30 days, and is consistent with the sortie requirements agreed on by AIRA, CAS, 7/13AF and your 7AF representative in the September Barrel Roll Operations Proposal, 30 August 1971. Additional sorties, if made available, can be effectively utilized against lucrative storage areas in the Ban Ban valley and Route 73. These storage areas are supporting the enemy operations, and, if struck before the dry season, will degrade the enemy offensive potential. Up to eight additional F-4 sorties per day against these hard targets can be utilized for a 10 day period starting on or after 18 September 1971, depending on other priority air requirements of the Bolovens at that time. This would provide a maximum of 40 F-4 sorties per day. Normally 20 sorties for hard targets and 20 sorties for Raven control. When these additional sorties are fragged, a minimum of three Laredo FACs and two Nail FACs should also be fragged to fully exploit the targets [sic] when warranted. The additional sorties will be requested on a daily basis through the 7AF Frag Shop, depending upon forecast weather, the tactical situation and the results of previous strikes. Primary delivery of ordnance will be VFR however the majority of the targets will also be validated for all weather IFR delivery. This request will be made with the understanding that all sorties dedicated to hard targets may be diverted to the Raven FACs in support of troops in contact.
(TS) It was felt that this modest increase of eight F-4s per day would not seriously degrade the effort in Steel Tiger (then receiving an average of 250 sorties per day), but would almost double the ordnance available to halt the enemy buildup in Barrel Roll. The 7/13AF Deputy Commander's request came at a time when enemy activity in Steel Tiger was insignificant, while the buildup in Barrel Roll was already well under way.

(TS) General Searles also asked for an increase in night support from four to eight gunships per night:

Four AC-119K and four AC-130 gunships are requested to provide coverage for TIC/TPC situations, truck hunting and other targets of opportunity. Two AC-130 gunships should be dedicated for late afternoon coverage of the PDJ. All gunships should be fragged primarily to TIC support; however, one per night may be selected for armed reconnaissance of the LOCs when the ground situation permits. If the ground situation becomes critical, additional gunship support will be requested. All AC-130s should operate principally using Pave Mace concept with Forward Air Guides (FAGs) or other target acquisition systems.

(S) On 13 September, in an effort to get more sorties, AIRA added another direct plea to 7AF to consider interdiction in the Barrel Roll on an equal footing with Steel Tiger East. However, no action was taken on either request.

(S) The remainder of the wet season saw little activity in MR II. During the week ending 20 September, Irregulars maintained their tenuous hold on key positions on the PDJ. On the night of 15/16 September, probably fewer than 100 NVA, supported by mortar and
recoilless rifle fire, dispersed a 400-man Group Mobile force occupying three high ground positions in the foothills north of the PDJ. After brief exchanges of fire, the Irregulars evacuated these outposts, but the NVA made no attempt to occupy the abandoned posts. In a weekly summary, CAS commented:

Apparently, enemy is concentrating forces against the Irregulars on the northern PDJ. Coordinated artillery missions and the effective employment of Tacair has kept NVA off balance and incapable of massing for attacks on a broad front across the northern PDJ.

By 15 October, PDJ clearing operations were begun when 187 FAR troops were airlifted to L-106. While rallier reports indicated that LS-32 might be the first enemy objective of the dry season campaign, only minor sporadic fights continued throughout the PDJ through November 1971, with little advantage gained by either side.

(TS) The close of the wet season left the RLG forces in a typically ambivalent situation. Their units held the approaches to Luang Prabang and controlled the PDJ in the north and Pakson and other centers in South Laos. But in both sections of the country NVA forces were poised to make a comeback. In its analysis of the forthcoming dry season campaign, 1971-72, the American Embassy in Vientiane stated:

On the military side, of course, the NVA will be attempting to maintain a massive logistical base in south Laos in preparation for whatever moves Hanoi may undertake next year. These factors lend a political dimension to the conclusion that the current dry season will be the most critical so far faced by the RLG, a conclusion
already indicated by reports of massive NVA build-ups east of the PDJ, and by the unfavorable RLG position in MR III.

(TS) On the asset side, the RLG ended the wet season with far better positions and a wider cushion of terrain (everywhere except MR III) than had been the case the previous year. In Barrel Roll, government troops had been successful in regaining the PDJ, Muong Soui, and the lower Nam Ou Valley in Luang Prabang. Moreover, the morale and capabilities of the FAR had been improved, as had the leadership and troop performance of the Thai volunteers and Lao irregulars. In MR I, younger, more vigorous, and more capable officers had either assumed command themselves or had moved into positions of primary tactical influence. Moreover, the reorganization had begun a process of breaking down regional parochialism and fostering national cooperation.

(TS) Another asset was the accomplishment of the national training center at Phou Khao Khouai which regularly produced adequately trained infantry and artillery personnel. About 1,100 recruits, two infantry companies, and one 4.2 inch mortar battery had already been trained with many more programmed by the end of FY 72.

(TS) On the liability side in FAR/FAN, the most significant problem was that of manpower losses. These could not be made up with the inadequate recruiting system, pay scales, and medical facilities then in existence. At the close of the wet season, there was little hope that FAR units would have any sizeable increase in unit strength.
For the Irregulars, the primary gain was the increased deployment of the Thai volunteers. Since the Irregulars were the favored forces for U.S. support, their primary problems lay not in the material realm but in the area of morale. Several months previously the Meo civilian leaders came en masse to see Vang Pao to petition him to initiate a Meo civilian exodus from the MR II region. The Meo leaders had witnessed Vang Pao's successful drive across the PDJ come to a halt, and the Meo troops ordered to take up fixed positions. Vang Pao took their petition to Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, who succeeded in convincing these leaders to await the early dry season before pressing for a Meo withdrawal. According to the Embassy:

If the Meo suffer severe losses in the PDJ campaign this year, or if Bouam Long falls to the NVA, massive refugee movements will be generated from north of the PDJ, the Long Tieng area, and the Ban Xon Valley, and impetus behind the Meo desire to pull out of the war completely will grow significantly. If the civilians began to leave Bouam Long, Muong Moc, Long Tieng, or Ban Xon, heading west, it would be difficult if not impossible for Vang Pao to prevent his troops from joining their dependents in a mass exodus from MR II.
CHAPTER IV
STATUS AS OF 1 DECEMBER 1971*

Military Region I: Enemy Strength/Capabilities

(TS) The focal point of enemy interest in MR I had been the royal capital Luang Prabang which had been severely threatened in March/April. At the end of the wet season, there were in MR I approximately 2,000 PL and NVA combat-experienced troops with good knowledge of the terrain. These forces could be used to embarrass the RLG by threatening Luang Prabang and neutralizing its airstrip. In the Sayaboury area, the Pathet Lao had about 1,000 troops in six battalions. These forces, however, did not pose an immediate threat to the Thai volunteer battalions operating in the province. At least 14,000 to 15,000 Chinese personnel were believed engaged in construction and defense of the China Road. Aerial photography disclosed that road construction had resumed in late August after more than a year of inactivity, and a motorable trail had been extended along Route 46 as far southwest as a point 20 KM from the Mekong River.

Military Region I: Friendly Strength/Capabilities

(TS) In defending Luang Prabang, FAR/FAN units remained in the immediate area with FAK elements in the vicinity of Ban Houei Sai, Hong Sa, Sayaboury, and Pak Lay. Although Irregulars were scattered

*The data for this chapter is extracted from the 1971/1972 Dry Season Plan (TS), from AH EMBASSY, Vnt, to SEC of State, dtd 8 Dec 71. All quotations from Ambassador Godley are extracted from this plan.
throughout MR I, most were being directed into MR II for the forthcoming defense of the PDJ during dry season operations. Friendly units in the region included 12 FAR battalions, two FAN battalions, 16 Lao irregular battalions, and three Thai irregular battalions for a total of 23 battalions or about 13,200 troops.

Military Region II: Enemy Strength/Capabilities

(TS) Except for a brief period during Typhoon Hester near the end of October, enemy supply activity along Route 7 had steadily and dramatically increased since the rains ended. Large numbers of trucks were destroyed/damaged in the Ban Ban Valley around Nong Pet and in the Khang Khai/Phong Savan area, testifying to this activity. As the wet season ended, all indicators pointed to an early, strong enemy effort to regain the PDJ and then to threaten MR II headquarters at Long Tieng as seriously as they had previously done. An estimated 50 enemy battalions (37 infantry) with a total strength of 12,200 troops were believed deployed in Xieng Khouang and Houa Phan provinces. Of these, NVA battalions numbered 27 and their overall strength was nearly 8,000; the remainder were Pathet Lao units. An estimated 15 NVA infantry battalions were deployed along the northern, eastern, and southeastern flanks of the PDJ and at least one NVA battalion was positioned south of the Bouam Long enclave. Intelligence suggested that this force was being massively reinforced with men and materiel, including antiaircraft weapons and a new artillery weapon larger than any previously deployed by either side. The PDJ was threatened by NVA forces, estimated at three battalions, in a semi-circular battle line.
Government forces reoccupied the strategic town of Muong Soui on 24 September. Elements of four "Patriotic Neutralist" (Deuanist) infantry battalions and one PL artillery battalion with an overall estimated strength of 1,600 men had been identified in the Muong Soui area. On 30 October Deuanist ralliers indicated an attack on Muong Soui was imminent and that the enemy forces were waiting for food resupply before beginning an offensive. The morale of PL and Deuanists in this area was reported to be low, but control of the Muong Soui sector would be valuable to the enemy since it would provide him an avenue to outflank Long Tieng from the north. Therefore, in late November, the enemy took Muong Soui.

Military Region II: Friendly Strength/Capabilities

As the wet season ended, Maj Gen Vang Pao's forces were considerably outnumbered as they attempted to hold the PDJ and defend Long Tieng. These forces included: 19 battalions of Lao irregulars numbering some 5,139 men; 10 battalions of Thai volunteers (eight infantry, two artillery) with a total strength of 3,095 troops; and four battalions of FAR infantry, a mere 645 men. A company of highly effective commando raiders was assigned to Long Tieng. It was anticipated that the enemy offensive would commence in mid-January 1972 and all Vang Pao could do was plan for the redeployment of forces from other regions should their assistance become necessary. He did, however, possess an advantage that his enemy was denied: airpower.
Military Region V: Enemy Strength/Capabilities

(TS) Enemy units consisted mainly of small, local guerrilla (home guard) elements. After the RLG had reoccupied Muong Soui, the enemy withdrew several of the battalion-size forces that threatened the region. With the withdrawal of enemy units in the Sala Phou Khoun area, west of Muong Soui, total enemy strength was estimated at 1,500. The NVA/PL still maintained the capability to mass troops and attack and seize selected, isolated friendly positions in the region. However, friendly air superiority and the long enemy lines of communication and supply rendered it impossible for the enemy to hold seized positions. Paksane was the most active area of enemy interest. Enemy morale there was judged to be good because of rainy season successes in the Ban Nalong area.

(TS) Along Route 13 from Vientiane to Luang Prabang, the enemy possessed the capability to mount occasional ambushes and harassing attacks. In August and September, enemy units were forced to withdraw from the Sala Phou Khoun-Xieng Dat area with the loss of large quantities of supplies. Although there were reports of attempts to damage the Nam Ngum dam, they were viewed chiefly as propaganda and as an effort to tie down RLG security forces.

Military Region V: Friendly Strength/Capabilities

(TS) As the wet season drew to a close there were 14 infantry battalions, two armor battalions, one field artillery battalion, and
two separate commando companies with a total friendly strength of 5,600 men. The total present for duty strength, however, was approximately 67 percent of the authorized strength. Combat units were deployed throughout the region in a defensive posture and many of these units were poorly motivated.

(TS) FAR morale within MR V was fairly good, based primarily on the success of "Operation Golden Mountain" which, with the aid of MR II irregulars, resulted in the recapture of Muong Soui. The return of these troops from Muong Soui added to friendly strength in MR V.

(S) In summary, the lineup of forces in northern Laos was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGION</th>
<th>ENEMY</th>
<th>FRIENDLY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MR I</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>13,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR II</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>8,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR V</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>5,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>16,500</td>
<td>27,700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTALS FOR ALL OF LAOS: 96,700 60,700

Based upon these figures, 17 percent of the enemy troops in Laos were in the northern part of the country, while of the friendly troops in Laos 46 percent were in that area.

Tacair Sorties

(TS) The employment of TCAIR (both U.S. and Lao) in north and south Laos differed due to the separate operating concepts in effect
in these two areas. The daily tactical air requirements were determined by specific campaign and by specific objective. At the close of the wet season, the RLG sought a total of 133 sorties per 24-hour period: 43 U.S. and 90 RLAF. As discussed previously, this was an increase in the number determined available by the Barrel Roll Working Group. Although keyed to current operations, the sortie requirement anticipated the dry season activity even though the possibility of large scale enemy action was not included. In the event of greatly increased enemy initiatives, the requirement for TACAIR could have easily doubled. The RLAF had the capability for a two to three month surge, but this was contingent on increased funding for munitions.

RLAF Air Order of Battle

(TS) At the close of the 1971 wet season, the fleet of T-28s and AC-47s was in good shape. Three thousand T-28 sorties per month were being flown, and the RLAF could surge up to 4000 if additional funds were made available for air munitions. There were 45 T-28 and 10 AC-47 aircraft in-country. Although the AC-47s would remain the same, it was hoped that the T-28 fleet would be increased to 60 aircraft by the anticipated mid-January enemy offensive of the PDJ. The AC-47s were programmed for 225 sorties per month, with a surge capability of 350 sorties, again dependent upon munitions funding.

(TS) The subject of budgetary constraints had always played an important role in the war and strongly affected programming. Experience showed that Irregular as well as FAR morale and resolve to hold