in support of the RLG forces. Although fighting continued throughout the day, Thateng remained in government hands.

Activity occurring in the Thateng area was merely a segment of a well-coordinated offensive by the enemy against all RLG holdings north of the Bolovens. On 11 December, with increasing enemy pressure growing around Thateng, the decision was made to move four irregular battalions at Thateng north to Saravane, which had fallen on 6 December to a force estimated at three to five NVA battalions, to launch a surprise government counterattack on the provincial capital. It was hoped that such a move might find the NVA unprepared, and the town could be quickly brought under RLG control once again. Thus, Thateng, for the most part, was abandoned to a higher priority. A small contingent remained in Thateng, and the task force along Route 16 continued their clearing operation. The entire area remained precariously under government control. Most of the enemy units apparently shifted direction also in coming to the defense of Saravane.

The Enemy Capture of Saravane

Throughout the month of November, increasing evidence indicated that the enemy was strengthening its force around Saravane. On the morning of 16 November, an irregular team reported an estimated four NVA battalions with heavy weapons in the Toumlane Valley, 19 kilometers north-west of Saravane. FAGs directed RLAF and U.S. TACAIR strike aircraft to the location, resulting in an estimated 70 enemy KBA. Throughout November, RAVEN FACs also found evidence of considerable enemy tank and truck activity running generally east-west and north of the Se Don River.
The anticipated attack on Saravane came on 5 December at 2200 hours when the enemy began probing friendly positions near the town. At 0500 hours on 6 December, three NVA battalions launched simultaneous attacks on the RLG troops in the area. Throughout the night of 5-6 December, the TICs were supported by an RLAF AC-47 gunship; at daybreak, TACAIR strikes were directed against enemy positions. However, in spite of 60 TACAIR strikes controlled by RAVEN FACs against the NVA, at 1430 hours on 6 December the FAR commander ordered Saravane abandoned, and the friendlies dispersed north and west of the town.

Once the North Vietnamese had taken Saravane, they began to redeploy their armor forces from the Toumlane Valley into the town. After four tanks and six trucks were reported crossing the Se Don River on the morning of 10 December, AIRA requested air support to mine the approaches to the city. These approaches, identified and validated for mining, were the fords of Route 23 across the Se Don River and Route 23 in the Toumlane Valley.

Following the fall of Saravane, U.S. and RLG officials began planning a counter-offensive to retake Saravane before the NVA could become firmly entrenched in the city. The friendlies from Saravane had regrouped 32 kilometers west of the town several days following the NVA takeover. Between 8 and 15 December, the units were re-equipped and launched toward the objective. AIRA requested that four sorties of fast movers be fragged to MR IV RAVEN FACs on 15 December to help prepare the area for the coming assault. Ordnance was to be CBU-42 munitions and MK-36 mines.
Two FAR battalions, BV-41 and BV-46, comprised the western flank of the attack while an irregular GM from the Thateng sector (see page 28) moved overland to attack from the south. On 20 December, the Thateng GM was located seven kilometers south-southeast of Saravane.

During 22-23 December, the four irregular battalions from Thateng called in air strikes on enemy positions around Saravane and followed these strikes with ground assaults on the city. An estimated 250 NVA were killed by combined air strikes and ground assaults during the period. Eventually, MR IV commanders decided that even if Saravane could be retaken, the position would be untenable. The four battalions were then ordered to move westward toward Khong Sedone (LS-289, WC8524) along Route 16. The irregulars linked up with BV-41 and BV-46 while leaving the Saravane area on 24 December.

Operation Thao La Ends

On 16 December, with the departure from Thateng of four irregular battalions, Operation Thao La was officially closed. Although Thateng was recaptured and Ban Phon was temporarily secured, there appeared to be no substantial gains from the operation. The eastern Bolovens Plateau was not secure, Saravane was lost, and the enemy continued to bring in reinforcements and supplies at will. In short, the government hold on the Bolovens was precarious.
CHAPTER IV
FALL OF PAKSONG AND LOSS OF THE BOLOVENS

Although Paksong experienced 21 probing attacks, it was not severely threatened by the North Vietnamese during the month of November. The primary cause for the lack of significant activity was initially Operation Bedrock. (See page 21.) According to Pathet Lao ralliers, the NVA 9th regiment had been frustrated in their preparations to retake Paksong when the RLG posed a serious threat to Thateng during the early part of November. The NVA position was further irritated by Operation Thao La, during which the RLG did capture Thateng. (See page 25.) Thus, the enemy around Paksong was forced to use economy-of-force tactics.

On 8 November, BI-9 was moved to the Paksong area to join with BV-48 and BV-46 already garrisoning the town. This not only strengthened the RLG defense in Paksong proper, but allowed four battalions of an MR III task force to return to Savannakhet.

During the first week of December, when Saravane was falling and Thateng was coming under increasing pressure, RAVEN FACs in the Paksong sector observed fresh enemy bunkers which, in some cases, were located within 50 meters of friendly positions. Activity increased on 8 December in the Phou Nongkin area when a firefight resulted in two RLG soldiers KIA and 12 WIA. Ten enemy were KIA, with airstrikes accounting for another probable 20 KBA.

Probes against the city by the North Vietnamese increased during 10-17 December. There were 19 attacks concentrated mostly to the north
and northeast of Paksong. Between 10 and 12 December, clashes ranged in magnitude from short-duration, small-unit firefights to company-sized contacts lasting several hours. The enemy employed B-40 rockets, DK-82 recoilless rifles, and 60mm mortars. The irregulars were supported by artillery, RLAF T-28s, and AC-47s. On 13 December, the irregular unit on Phou Nongkin abandoned its position because of strong enemy pressure and redeployed to the twin peaks of Phou Thevada, three kilometers east of Paksong.

On 14 December, a four-battalion irregular force ambushed an NVA concentration which had assembled north of Paksong. On 16 December, this same government force was ambushed with attacks from three sides. The GM was dispersed by heavy ground assaults which followed 60mm and 82mm mortar fire. By the afternoon of 17 December, 425 men of the GM had reached Ban Phakkout, nine kilometers west of Paksong on Route 23.

Pressure from some 1,000 NVA troops continued on friendly positions around Paksong. Instead of direct attacks, the enemy used 60mm and 82mm mortar fire on the friendly forward defensive positions. Resupply of these positions became difficult and, at times, impossible. With the decline in morale of government forces, the enemy pressed to cut Route 23, the last ground means of escape open to the RLG.

RAVEN FAC visual reconnaissance of the northern Bolovens Plateau area indicated enemy patterns of activity similar to those noted prior to the NVA capture of Paksong the previous May. On the night of 18/19 December, FACs sighted vehicle headlights moving into the Phou Nongkin area. Visual reconnaissance of an area 12 kilometers northwest of Paksong the following
morning revealed possible truck or tank parks in heavy foliage. The following day, FACs reported tank tread marks of perhaps three or four tanks approximately 14 kilometers north of Paksong. In addition, the NVA had moved supplies into protected areas immediately adjacent to Paksong. All conditions seemed favorable for an attack against the town.

While the ground situation in MR IV was critical during the month of December, in northern Laos around the Plaine des Jarres (PDJ) it was desperate. On 18 December, NVA forces in MR II launched an offensive to take the strategic plain. Within three days, the friendlies had been swept from the area. The MR II headquarters at Long Tieng (LS-20A, TG8214) was now the primary target for the North Vietnamese. As a result, priorities called for U.S. TACAIR to be utilized in northern Laos and few additional sorties were available for MR IV. Added to this problem, the attempt to retake Saravane on 22-23 December coincided with unseasonably bad weather. The Saravane campaign utilized most of the USAF TACAIR allotted to MR IV. These factors reduced effective TACAIR counterstrikes around Paksong.

On the morning of 24 December, a RAVEN FAC observed an unknown number of NVA near the agricultural station west of Paksong on Route 23. On 25-26 December, AIRA reported that the enemy had deployed several 12.7mm heavy machine guns around Paksong; these machine guns increased the threat to any resupply or airlift attempt.
On 27 December, after two days of heavy bombardment of the RLG northern defense perimeter at Paksong, two NVA battalions launched a ground assault on the town. The FAR defenders north of Paksong fled into the city with 11 KIA and 4 WIA. The two irregular battalions which had occupied Phou Thevada north and south also abandoned their positions and withdrew into the town.

Although the RLG had numerical superiority over the enemy, the friendly forces began to evacuate Paksong on the first day of the attack, withdrawing to the west along Route 23. Four 105mm howitzers and five trucks were among the equipment in Paksong left behind by the departing troops. The North Vietnamese entered and burned the city on the 28th of December.

A CAS field report describing the collapse of Paksong stated that the morale of the friendly forces in the Paksong area had been steadily decreasing. ... FAN BP-104 had received mortar fire nightly since its deployment to the Paksong area on 15 December. One of the three irregular battalions in Paksong was a new, inexperienced group which had only been deployed in Paksong since 21 December. The two other irregular battalions here had recently been under heavy enemy siege at Phou Nongkin for a two week period. The other of the two more experienced battalions was due to go on leave 20 December but had been extended.

On the evening of 28 December, TACAIR destroyed the four 105mm howitzers and the five trucks abandoned in Paksong. With that accomplished, the RLG campaign in MR IV was concluded with no gain—the NVA still controlled the Bolovens and the strategic towns of Paksong and Saravane.
APPENDIX A
U.S. AND RLAF SORTIES, 28 JUL-28 DECEMBER 1971

<table>
<thead>
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<th>U.S.*</th>
<th>RLAF**</th>
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<tr>
<td>TACAIR***</td>
<td>Gunships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,973</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: 1. Directorate of Operations, 7/13AF  
2. 7AF DOYR Computer Printout  
3. AIRA Laos DISUM

**Sources: 1. AIRA Laos DISUM  
2. JANAF

Note: These numbers represent total MR IV RLAF sorties during this time period. No sortie breakdown was available for the Bolovens area.

***TACAIR includes both USAF and Navy Air sorties during the time period of the Bolovens Campaign.
APPENDIX B
BOLOVENS CAMPAIGN CASUALTIES, 28 JULY-28 DECEMBER 1971

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government Forces*</th>
<th>Enemy**</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KIA: 399</td>
<td>KBA: 653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIA: 1,376</td>
<td>KIA: 551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIA: 343</td>
<td>WIA: 763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: 2,118</td>
<td>Total: 1,967</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: 1. 7/13 AF Daily Laotian SITREP, 28 Jul-29 Dec 71.
2. AIRA Laos DISUM
3. JANAF

**Sources: 1. 7AF DOYR Computer Printout
2. Directorate of Operations, 7/13AF
3. JANAF
4. WAIS
### APPENDIX C

**U.S. AIR-INFLECTED ENEMY BATTLE DAMAGE (BDA)**

28 JULY-28 DECEMBER 1971

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bunkers and other military structures destroyed or damaged</td>
<td>2,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapons destroyed or damaged</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracked and wheeled vehicles destroyed or damaged</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary fires and explosions</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meters of trenches destroyed</td>
<td>563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. sorties RNO**</td>
<td>996</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: 1. 7AF DOR Computer Printout
2. Directorate of Operations, 7/13AF
3. JANAF
4. WAIS*

**U.S. sorties RNO due to darkness, smoke, foliage, and weather.**
FOOTNOTES

1. (S) 7/13AF Daily Laotian Sitrep, 9-12 Jun 71. (Hereafter cited as 7/13 DLS.)

2. (S) Barrel Roll Working Group "Minutes," 15 Jun 71. (Hereafter cited as BRWG "Minutes.")

3. (S) Special Report of Representative, FOV Nr. 13,537.


5. (S) Project CHECO, USAF Operations from Thailand, 1 Jan 1967 to 1 Jul 1968, 20 Nov 68. (TS) Only Secret material extracted.

6. (S) Weekly SITREPs, 1 Jan 67-1 Jul 68.


9. (S) Ibid.

10. (S) Unless otherwise specifically annotated, the references for the chronology of events are the 7/13AF Daily Laotian SITREPs, 28 Jul-29 Dec 71 and all times will be local times ("G" time zone).

11. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 30 Jul 71.

12. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 5 Sep 71.

13. (S) AIRA Laos DISUM, 4 Sep 71.

14. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 30 Sep 71.

15. (S) CAS Field Comment, 7/13AF DLS, 4 Oct 71.

16. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 8 Oct 71.

17. (S) Ibid., 14 Oct 71.

18. (S) Special Report of Representative, FOV Nr. 13,537.


20. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 1 Aug 71.
22. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 25 Aug 71.
23. (S) Ibid., 7 Jul 71.
24. (S) Ibid., 30 Jul 71.
25. (S) Ibid.
26. (S) Ibid., 7 Aug 71.
27. (S) Ibid., 19 Aug 71.
28. (S) Ibid., 29 Aug 71.
30. (S) CAS Field Comment, 7/13AF DLS, 11 Sep 71.
31. (S) AIRA Laos DISUM, 4 Sep 71.
32. (S) Intvw, author with Maj C. C. Cavoli, Hq 7/13AF (Current Operations),
      31 Jan 72.
33. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 9 Sep 71.
34. (S) CAS Field Comment, 7/13AF DLS, 11 Sep 71.
35. (S) Ops Ord VI-71 (Operation Sayasila Follow-up Plan for Capture of
      Paksong).
36. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 12 Sep 71.
37. (S) Ibid., 13 Sep 71.
38. (S) 7/13AF Daily Intelligence Briefing.
39. (S) End of Tour Report, Maj Gen J. G. Wilson, DO, 7AF (U), 7AF, 1 Dec
      71, p. 5.
40. (S) Msg, 7/13AF to 7AF, 151015Z Sep 71.
41. (S) Msg, 7/13AF to 7AF, 181000Z Sep 71.
42. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 21-25 Sep 71.
43. (S) WAIS, 29 Sep-6 Oct 71.
44. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 4 Oct 71.
45. (S) Ibid., 8 Oct 71.
46. (S) Ibid., 11 Oct 71.
47. (S) Ibid., 13 Oct 71.
48. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 15-18 Oct 71.
49. (S) Ibid., 23 Oct 71.
50. (S) Ibid., 29 Oct 71.
51. (S) WAIS, 27 Oct-3 Nov 71 and DLS, 1 Nov 71.
52. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 1 Nov 71.
53. (S) Ibid., 17 Aug 71.
55. (S) End of Tour Report, Maj Gen D. R. Searles, Dep Cmdr 7/13AF, (U)
   7/13AF, 1 Jul 71-8 Sep 72. (Hereafter cited as Searles EOT.)
56. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 3-10 Nov 71.
57. (S) WAIS, 3 Nov 71.
58. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 20-22 Nov 71.
59. (S) Ibid., 29 Nov 71.
60. (S) Searles EOT.
61. (S) Msg. USAIR A, Vientiane to RUMOSRA, 7/13AF, 15 Nov 71.
62. (S) WAIS, 17-24 Nov 71.
63. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 24 Nov 71.
64. (S) AIRA Laos DISUM, 24 Nov 71.
65. (S) Msg, 7AF to CSAF, 240200Z Nov 71; Searles EOT.
66. (S) Msg, 7AF to CSAF, 211825Z Nov 71.
67. (S) Msg, 7AF to CSAF, 260110Z Nov 71.
68. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 1 Dec 71.
69. (S) Msg, 7AF to CSAF, 290420Z Nov 71.
70. (S) Msg, 7AF to CSAF, 300045Z Nov 71.
71. (S) Msg, 7AF to CSAF, 010515Z Dec 71.
72. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 1 Dec 71.
73. (S) Msg, 7AF to CSAF, 060045Z Dec 71.
74. (S) Msg, OUSAIRA to 7/13AF, 3 Dec 71.
75. (S) Msg, OUSAIRA to 7/13AF, 050245Z Dec 71.
76. (S) Msg, OUSAIRA to 7/13AF, 3 and 9 Dec 71.
77. (S) 7/13 DLS, 10 Dec 71.
78. (S) Ibid., 6-16 Dec 71.
79. (S) Ibid., 17 Nov 71.
80. (S) Ibid., 1 Dec 71.
81. (S) Msg, 7AF to CSAF, 070100Z Dec 71.
82. (S) 7/13 DLS, 7 Dec 71.
83. (S) Msg, 7AF to CSAF, 122306Z Dec 71.
84. (S) Msg, OUSAIRA to 7/13AF, 13 Dec 71.
85. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 6-15 Dec 71.
86. (S) Msg, OUSAIRA to 7/13AF, 13 Dec 71.
87. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 16-22 Dec 71.
88. (S) Ibid., 23-26 Dec 71.
89. (S) Ibid., 17 Dec 71.
90. (S) WAIS, 10-17 Nov 71.
91. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 8 Nov 71.
92. (S) WAIS, 1-14 Dec 71.
93. (S) WAIS, 15-22 Dec 71.
94. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 13 Dec 71.
95. (S) WAIS, 15-22 Dec 71.
96. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 15-22 Dec 71.
97. (S) Ibid., 18-21 Dec 71.
98. (S) Ibid., 21-23 Dec 71.
99. (S) Ibid., 27 Dec 71.
100. (S) WAIS, 28 Dec 71-4 Jan 72.
101. (S) 7/13AF DLS, 27-29 Dec 71.
102. (S) Ibid.
103. (S) Ibid., 29 Dec 71.
GLOSSARY

AA  Anti-aircraft
AAA  Anti-aircraft Artillery
ABF  Attack By Fire
AIRA  Air Attache
ARMA  Army Attache
BC  Battalion Commando
BI  Battalion Infantry
BP  Battalion Parachutist
BV  Battalion Volunteer
CAS  Controlled American Source
CDU  Cluster Bomb Unit
CIA  Central Intelligence Agency
CINC PAC  Commander-in-Chief, Pacific
CP  Command Post
CSAF  Chief of Staff Air Force
DISUM  Daily Intelligence Summary
FAC  Forward Air Controller
FAG  Forward Air Guide
FAN  Forces Armee Neutralist
FAR  Forces Armee Royale
FSB  Fire Support Base
GM  Group Mobile
HILZ  Helicopter Landing Zone
HQ  Headquarters
IFR  Instrument Flying Rules
JANAF  Joint Army Navy Air Force
JCS  Joint Chiefs of Staff
KBA  Killed by Air
KIA  Killed in Action
LOC  Lines of Communication
LS  Lima Site (short take-off and landing strip)
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>MACV</td>
<td>Military Assistance Command, Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIA</td>
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<td>MK</td>
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<td>mm</td>
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<td>North Vietnamese Army</td>
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