

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF COMMUNISM IN 1972

(Southeast Asia)

PART 1

ASIA / 1905
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HEARINGS

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON INTERNAL SECURITY

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NINETY-SECOND CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

MAY 25 AND JULY 20, 1972

Printed for the use of the
Committee on Internal Security



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COMMITTEE ON INTERNAL SECURITY

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

RICHARD H. ICHORD, Missouri, *Chairman*

CLAUDE PEPPER, Florida

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The House Committee on Internal Security is a standing committee of the House of Representatives, constituted as such by the rules of the House, adopted pursuant to Article I, section 5, of the Constitution of the United States which authorizes the House to determine the rules of its proceedings.

RULES ADOPTED BY THE 92D CONGRESS

House Resolution 5, January 22, 1971.

RESOLUTION

Resolved, That the Rules of the House of Representatives of the Ninety-first Congress, together with all applicable provisions of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, as amended, and the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970, be, and they are hereby adopted as the Rules of the House of Representatives of the Ninety-second Congress * * *

* * * * *

RULE X

STANDING COMMITTEES

1. There shall be elected by the House, at the commencement of each Congress,

* * * * *

(k) Committee on Internal Security, to consist of nine Members.

* * * * *

RULE XI

POWERS AND DUTIES OF COMMITTEES

* * * * *

11. Committee on Internal Security.

(a) Communist and other subversive activities affecting the internal security of the United States.

(b) The Committee on Internal Security, acting as a whole or by subcommittee, is authorized to make investigations from time to time of (1) the extent, character, objectives, and activities within the United States of organizations or groups, whether of foreign or domestic origin, their members, agents, and affiliates, which seek to establish, or assist in the establishment of, a totalitarian dictatorship within the United States, or to overthrow or alter, or assist in the overthrow or alteration of, the form of government of the United States or of any State thereof, by force, violence, treachery, espionage, sabotage, insurrection, or any unlawful means, (2) the extent, character, objectives, and activities within the United States of organizations or groups, their members, agents, and affiliates, which incite or employ acts of force, violence, terrorism, or any unlawful means, to obstruct or oppose the lawful authority of the Government of the United States in the execution of any law or policy affecting the internal security of the United States, and (3) all other questions, including the administration and execution of

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The Committee on Internal Security shall report to the House (or to the Clerk of the House if the House is not in session) the results of any such investigation, together with such recommendations as it deems advisable.

For the purpose of any such investigation, the Committee on Internal Security, or any subcommittee thereof, is authorized to sit and act at such times and places within the United States, whether the House is in session, has recessed, or has adjourned, to hold such hearings, and to require, by subpoena or otherwise, the attendance and testimony of such witnesses and the production of such books, records, correspondence, memorandums, papers, and documents, as it deems necessary. Subpenas may be issued under the signature of the chairman of the committee or any subcommittee, or by any member designated by any such chairman, and may be served by any person designated by any such chairman or member.

• • • • • • •

28. (a) In order to assist the House in—

(1) its analysis, appraisal, and evaluation of the application, administration, and execution of the laws enacted by the Congress, and

(2) its formulation, consideration, and enactment of such modifications of or changes in those laws, and of such additional legislation, as may be necessary or appropriate,

each standing committee shall review and study, on a continuing basis, the application, administration, and execution of those laws, or parts of laws, the subject matter of which is within the jurisdiction of that committee.

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Part 1

THURSDAY, MAY 25, 1972

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON INTERNAL SECURITY,
Washington, D.C.

PUBLIC HEARING

The Committee on Internal Security met, pursuant to call, at 10 a.m., in room 311, Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C., Hon. Richard H. Ichord, chairman, presiding.

Committee member present: Representative Richard H. Ichord of Missouri.

Staff members present: Donald G. Sanders, chief counsel, and DeWitt White, minority legal counsel.

The CHAIRMAN. The meeting will come to order.

The committee meets today for the purpose of holding hearings under the ordered hearings concerning theory and practice of communism. Under the Reorganization Act, the minority is entitled to 1 day of hearings, and those hearings today are for that purpose.

I understand, Mr. White, you have Mr. Edgar M. Buell.

Mr. Buell, it is a pleasure to welcome you to the committee. I understand you will testify concerning your 12 years' experience in the country of Laos.

Mr. BUELL. I guess that is right.

The CHAIRMAN. Would you first rise and be sworn, sir.

Raise your right hand.

Do you solemnly swear the testimony you are about to give before this committee will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Mr. BUELL. I do.

The CHAIRMAN. Please be seated.

Counsel is recognized to proceed.

Mr. WHITE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

TESTIMONY OF EDGAR M. BUELL

Mr. WHITE. Would you please give your full name, Mr. Buell?

Mr. BUELL. Edgar M.

Mr. WHITE. Would you tell us when and where you were born and something about your early life before you went to Laos?

Mr. BUELL. I was born on a farm near Hamilton, Indiana, in 1913, on the same farm my father and my great-grandfather were born on, and my son is on it presently.

I went to Laos, and I was a farmer, practically retired, when I went to Laos in 1960.

Mr. WHITE. In what capacity did you go to Laos?

Mr. BUELL. With the International Volunteers for Service.

Mr. WHITE. Would you give us a brief description of that organization?

Mr. BUELL. I think, to describe International Volunteers for Service is very simple. Very few people in this room, I doubt, know what International Volunteers for Service really is and what it was. But it was a group of volunteers that volunteered to go into foreign lands, undeveloped areas, where they have really no finances, and usually they would be contracted out to some other agency, such as U.S. AID, which they had in Laos.

I was a black sheep at that time. I don't have the greatest education in the world. I had quite a time getting through high school. I was the first to go with the organization without some type of a degree.

We are all very proud of IVS in them days and even today because there is no question that it was the forerunner of the Peace Corps. I think due to my going it has made it possible for a lot of young people, and older people even, to get into these organizations that do have experience other than education.

Mr. WHITE. How long did you stay with IVS?

Mr. BUELL. Nearly 2 years. Then I went with the AID department.

Mr. WHITE. Is it true you went in as a Foreign Service Reserve Officer in AID with a rather senior grade?

Mr. BUELL. No; I went in at a very low grade. I very quickly worked up to a senior grade.

Mr. WHITE. And you have been in that capacity ever since then, have you?

Mr. BUELL. Yes; up until this present assignment I got.

Mr. WHITE. Now, during this 12-year period, is it true that you were in very close contact with the communist forces in Laos and had an opportunity to observe their theory and practice of communism?

Mr. BUELL. Oh, I would say yes.

Mr. WHITE. What area were you stationed in, in Laos, Mr. Buell?

Mr. BUELL. In the northeast section.

Mr. WHITE. Would you point it out to us on the map there, the general area?

Mr. BUELL. This area right here, starting here and coming right up around to Dien Bien Phu.

Mr. WHITE. And on your northeast, you did have communist forces, did you not?

Mr. BUELL. Oh, yes, in the early days.

Mr. WHITE. And after that, what was on your northeast there? Did you have an opportunity to observe there how the communists take over territory?

Mr. BUELL. Oh, sure. You must remember most all of my work in them days was behind enemy lines. So you have got the enemy all

Mr. WHITE. Would you tell us when and where you were born and something about your early life before you went to Laos?

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Mr. BUELL. Oh, sure. You must remember most all of my work in them days was behind enemy lines. So you have got the enemy all

around you. And, of course, we worked with this great little leader, General Vang Pao, who even still continually keeps taking back areas that the communists take over. They take an area this year, and he gets it back next year, which gives you a very good chance to observe what the communists did. Yes, I observed that closely.

Mr. WHITE. What were your principal functions in those early days from 1960 to '62?

Mr. BUELL. Building schoolhouses, getting them seeds—vegetable seeds, and so forth—clothing, just to help them to survive; as they would be run off by the communists, they would always lose practically everything they had.

These are terrific people we worked with. They stay in there and fight. When they heard somebody scream, they didn't run; they would stay and fight to the end. Because of this, they would come out with just what they had on their back, and you would get them started again.

At the same time, you would always start building schools or dispensaries, which we are very proud of. We probably have one of the better medical programs of this type in all the world. I won't back up from any of them. So you would start your medical programs and your educational programs immediately, usually on the ground. We didn't build hospitals, we didn't build schools out of U.S. commodities, but we supported them and we would train these people to help withstand this communist aggression as it would come against them.

Mr. WHITE. Would you classify these people that you were helping as refugees from communist aggression then?

Mr. BUELL. Oh, yes, a hundred percent.

Mr. WHITE. About how many refugees did you have to deal with in this period of time, say 1960 to '62?

Mr. BUELL. Well, around '62 to '64, we had in north central Laos pretty close to a half-million people—450,000.

Mr. WHITE. What was the makeup of these people, Mr. Buell? Were they all of the same ethnic background or were there various ethnic groups represented?

Mr. BUELL. No; that is a good question. I think that especially back here in Washington and some places such as Vientiane, in north Laos—that is the capital city—they get the feeling that they are all from this Meo tribe of people that we hear about, and now, I understand, they are called the Nemung people; they want to give them a better name or something. But they are far from being all Meo people. General Pao himself, also, for the record, is a Meo. Many people that have a little opposition to General Vang Pao and maybe to his program and to our program say he was a boy that came in from Thailand or something, but he is 100 percent ethnic Meo.

The Meo tribesmen in this group we worked with probably didn't represent at the most more than 25 percent of the people. But in the early days where it became known as the Meo program and Pop Buell a Meo lover was because the Meo was the first on their own to try to withstand the communist aggression.

Mr. WHITE. Can you tell us the techniques that were employed by the communists there to take over additional territory; what would be a typical communist tactic? For example, did they attack at night and

drive refugees out into the jungles, and so forth? What were their techniques?

Mr. BUELL. You work in different periods. The communists are pretty smart cookies, as you know. They work according to the problem at hand. This year is not the same as last year; next year is not the same as it was this year; and it is all according to what they need, what their needs may be. They may need rice—the communists may need rice in the worst way. If they need rice, they definitely will attack where there is rice territory; they will definitely take the people, because when they get the rice they want the people to grow the rice for them, which also in turn carries so much of your porter work. This is like a tax. You are taxed—if things are normal, you are taxed so many portering days for the year.

Mr. WHITE. Is this a kind of forced labor?

Mr. BUELL. Yes, it is forced labor. In other instances they might not need rice at all, and they might need just the territory and terrain, and people is the last thing they want because, if they get the people in that instance, they would have to take care of them and that would be porters. If they need people bad enough, there is no tactics that they will not use—they will use any tactics to get them.

Mr. WHITE. Can you give us some information about their technique of driving individuals—I am thinking of one instance I heard about where the communists drove about 6,000 people out of a village at night and into the jungle and followed them and massacred large numbers of them.

Mr. BUELL. This is a case by itself, I think. I think this took place in 1963—I think late '63. It was really the first big drive that the North Vietnamese made into Laos. Right outside of Ban Ban, which is close to the Vietnamese border, we had a hospital set up in there and we were going real strong. But their main objective here was to prove, once and for all, to the Meo people how strong they were; that the Meo, who at this time felt they was pretty good guerrilla fighters and pretty strong—to prove to them, once and for all, "Buddy, we are the power, and you had better come on or this is what will happen."

They had been fighting back and forth for about 6 weeks, and the Meo had been holding their own pretty well, and then they came in with enough force that they really had—civilians had to leave, and this is when they got caught in this battle that you can read about, and the final slaughter was pretty close to 2,000 people, at least 1,500 that was killed any way possible.

Mr. WHITE. And these were civilians, were they not?

Mr. BUELL. Yes, all were civilians.

Mr. WHITE. Unarmed civilians, I take it.

Mr. BUELL. Yes. I was in on this myself. General Vang Pao and I helped feed these people all the way. They stopped for a rest period of 3 or 4 hours.

Mr. WHITE. Is it correct that many of these people were disemboweled with knives and other things?

Mr. BUELL. I don't say many; you only have to do it to one out of a couple of 300; I would not say many, no. This is very common in northeast Laos, this is very common in Vietnam, this is a very common practice, very common.

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Mr. WHITE. And did a number of these people die from disease and accidents incident to their flight?

Mr. BUELL. Yes; after this 2,000 we still lost about 15 to 20 percent afterwards, after we got them to where we could handle them and take care of them.

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Mr. WHITE. Prior to the arrival of Dr. Weldon and his wife, whom I understand is also a physician, were you very active in the field of first aid and necessary surgery and things of that kind?

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Mr. BUELL. Yes, I did.

Mr. WHITE. Were these, at least in many cases, the result of communist boobytraps, land mines, and things of that kind that the Meo people stumbled onto?

Mr. BUELL. Yes. In them days, of course, the communists learned this, too; they had not enough power to whip the Meo; the Meo was just as smart as they was. The boobytrapping deal could really get them. The Meo was not up on this. It was a communist best weapon to get them at that time.

Mr. WHITE. What kind of things did they boobytrap?

Mr. BUELL. Oh, anything: human beings, rice—rice is a real good one—any kind of food. Of course they had their pitfalls; they would boobytrap anything.

Mr. WHITE. You must have had some fear and trepidation when you performed your first amputation; didn't you?

Mr. BUELL. Yes.

Mr. WHITE. But it was a successful one?

Mr. BUELL. Really not that much, too, really not that much.

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Mr. BUELL. In most instances, yes. You see, in each little battle superstition comes into your work there. Those tribes in the north were not and still are not accustomed to using the knife.

Mr. WHITE. Prior to some of these operations of yours, these people had no medicine or no surgery; did they?

Mr. BUELL. Very little, very little at all. Yes; I will have to say they had their own herbs, and so forth, out of the jungle and used with their opium, and, believe it or not, some of their forms of medicine and drugs—as you know, grandmother came from Germany and hers wasn't too bad, and theirs wasn't too bad, but nothing compared to what we had. They have a couple or three drugs that I still, in fact, if I can get them, I will use out in front of ours.

Mr. WHITE. The communists frequently use the term "democracy" in describing their governments as being the "people's democracy." What did you observe in this connection? Would you say that the communist regimes in Laos were democratic?

Mr. BUELL. Democratic as far as what the communist calls their democratic form of government. I feel in most instances in a wartorn country—and the war is still going on; it has been all these years—that the communists' form of government was a fair communists' democratic form of government, which is not easy to live under. But if you do obey or go along with it, you can live; you are never going to get ahead, but you can live under it and you will never be very highly educated, only the ones that they choose. But it would still be better than no form at all. But it is one long ways from being even what a lowland Lao or a Thai—not saying us people here—would call a democracy.

Mr. WHITE. Did they have an elective process there in the communist-occupied Laos? Were their public officials elected?

Mr. BUELL. Down in the village level itself only.

Mr. WHITE. Not above the village level?

Mr. BUELL. No. It was make-believe, and even in the village level it was very difficult to even be a voter.

The CHAIRMAN. At that point, Mr. Counsel, let me understand Mr. Buell. Now, you were not in the Pathet Lao-controlled territory, you were not working there?

Mr. BUELL. I have treated Pathet Lao, I have given them medicine and I have given them rice. When you are talking about Pathet Lao, you are talking about two different things—Pathet Lao and Vietnamese.

The CHAIRMAN. The area of the country where you were working was not controlled by Pathet Lao?

Mr. BUELL. No.

The CHAIRMAN. Proceed, please.

Mr. WHITE. As I understand it, you testified that you were behind communist lines much of the time.

Mr. BUELL. Most of the time.

Mr. WHITE. This was not a hard-and-fast line?

Mr. BUELL. No.

Mr. WHITE. It sort of ebbed and flowed; did it not?

Mr. BUELL. There is never a hard-and-fast line until the communists once take over. If you will notice, back through the years, when they make a line, we don't cross their lines. When them and us together makes lines, they can cross, but we don't.

Mr. WHITE. What is the attitude of the communist government there in Laos concerning religion?

Mr. BUELL. The communists?

Mr. WHITE. Yes. Do they permit freedom of religion?

Mr. BUELL. No type—no type whatsoever, not any. This is bad, too. You see religion when you come back to your democracy, especially your Buddhist people—well, the Meo people, anybody, this is part of your democracy.

Mr. WHITE. How about freedom of movement within communist-held areas?

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Mr. BUELL. In no way—we have very much trouble getting help for our own operation to work. We have to know what is going on back in there, too, and it is awfully hard for our people to get contact with their own relations, maybe 6 months, and this is on the ground, where you would think it would be easy to get contact. They don't move out.

Mr. WHITE. They are not permitted to?

Mr. BUELL. No, no, no. This is why I again—whenever there have been any communist soldiers taken prisoner—the Vietnamese, Pathet Lao, whatever you want to call it—that is why it is so hard to get information about them, because they just move one direction and that is all they know, that little job they have to do.

Mr. WHITE. Let us recapitulate a little bit, Mr. Buell. When we talk about “communists in Laos,” what people are we speaking of? When we use the term “communists in Laos” as a political force or a military force, what are we speaking of? Are we speaking only of the Pathet Lao, for example, or are we speaking of the Vietnamese or North Vietnamese or a combination of these; and has this changed from, say, 1962 up until the present time?

Mr. BUELL. As you know, say '55 to '60, '62, we had what we called the Pathet Lao. Now, I don't know, I don't think it should be, anyway, I don't, the Pathet Lao were not communists, they just were not communists, that is all, what we think of communists as North Vietnamese communists or Chinese communists or Russian communists.

Mr. WHITE. When you say “we,” you mean the people in Laos?

Mr. BUELL. Yes. We might get to shooting guns here; it is the people of Laos, yes. But then you must say in '62 or '63, when they ran into the problems, we ran into problems, America and others, and he had to turn to somebody for help, so there was only one way to turn, and that was to the communists for help, and the communists are the ones that helped him; so this is where the Pathet Lao deal comes in, and I got to kind of believe that where the lines have not been drawn, and say there were no war tomorrow, that the remaining people that are Pathet Lao would still just be Pathet Lao; they would not be communists.

It is a political party, like Democrats and Republicans, and they would still be that way if the North Vietnamese would get out, we would get out, and everybody else would get out; it would come back to that. I don't think there is a chance of that. But after Souphanouvong had to go and get support from the other side, okay, then, he kept needing help so bad that there had to be other peoples come in to run their own show.

We are pretty much on that ourselves; we should be, anyway. We give a couple of million dollars away and we like to know how that is spent. So in order to do that, the North Vietnamese had to bring people in to run their show. Now, remember, that is 12 or 15 years ago, and when the North Vietnamese began to run their schools, and so forth, they were built and the teachings and the propaganda in them was communist, which now, 15 years later, there are no longer Pathet Lao, you might say, running this government.

Mr. WHITE. Is this really a communist military government of that area?

Mr. BUELL. Yes, I would call it so.

Mr. WHITE. Even though it may be enforced by civilians?

Mr. BUELL. I would call it so. I think you have to make a little different break there between there and North Vietnam itself. I think, probably, the communist-run form of government in Laos is probably more military run than in North Vietnam itself.

Mr. WHITE. Did the North Vietnamese withdraw their troops from Laos after the 1962 agreement, when most U.S. if not all U.S. forces were withdrawn?

Mr. BUELL. I will have to say no.

Mr. WHITE. They did not?

Mr. BUELL. I will say no.

Mr. WHITE. Did they withdraw any significant number of troops from Laos, that is, the communists?

Mr. BUELL. Numberwise in no way could I quote. They did withdraw some troops, but I will have to say a lot of them remained. I am talking about northeast Laos. Remember this always when I am talking; this is northeast Laos.

Mr. WHITE. To go back for just a moment again, Mr. Buell, when you first went to Laos you took up the languages or dialects used by the population; did you not?

Mr. BUELL. Yes.

Mr. WHITE. How many dialects do you speak there?

Mr. BUELL. The first one was no trouble when I went to Laos; it was the nicest little country you ever saw. I was on the Plain of Jars, and I learned the Lao language, which was important. Then when things hit the fan I had to go with these hill tribes, and this is where I learnt the Meo language. And then from there, of course, now, if you speak Laos, you can easily learn Thai; and I can speak four other tribal languages pretty good.

Mr. WHITE. How many different ethnic groups are there in northeast Laos, sir?

Mr. BUELL. In northeast Laos there is about 15 different ethnic groups.

Mr. WHITE. Would you name some of those for us?

Mr. BUELL. First you have got your ethnic groups of Thai, which are much different than what we think of Thailand; there are red Thai, white Thai, black Thai. We have the Lao Tong, we have some Ekaio, there are three different classes of Meo people, and you have some Yao. Most of your Yao is in the west, and we don't have them in the north. We have two groups of Chinese ethnic groups that come down through from Hannan, and then you have about three different types of what we call just Lao ethnic groups.

Mr. WHITE. When the communists take over a community, what technique do they use to gain control of the community? Do they attempt to do this through the village chief, for example, or what happens?

Mr. BUELL. If they are coming in working—and I have worked directly with some of their agents—they work no different than we do. In fact, I have got to say that I hopefully learned quite a lot from their methods. They come in naturally and ask if they want schools and explain what the schools are to them. In most instances back up until 1961 or '62, schools were nearly an unheard of thing in the mountain areas.

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If they are getting opposition, then they have to use the rough methods which kills him. And they work with the village chief when they are doing it that way, but when they come to the rough deal, they work with the village chief in a different way; they just then kill him.

Mr. WHITE. What do they do after they kill the village chief then?

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Mr. WHITE. Do they make a practice of capturing women, taking away girls?

Mr. BUELL. Yes, yes; very much so, very much so.

Mr. WHITE. What is the purpose of this?

Mr. BUELL. Mostly nurses, schoolteachers, and, as I have said before, the North Vietnamese makes good use of their womenfolks, much different than, as far as I am concerned, other places in Southeast Asia. I would say maybe they started sooner.

Mr. WHITE. In what respects do they do this?

Mr. BUELL. They do use them more; again I can't say this about our own area now, but they started, they was the first to start using women as nurses, as medics in the fields, as schoolteachers. When I first arrived in northeast Laos, there was not a woman schoolteacher; the Vietnamese had already done this.

Mr. WHITE. You mentioned General Vang Pao. Did he launch an attack, a counterattack really, against the communists in northeast Laos about 1965?

Mr. BUELL. Yes, all the way up; terrific—terrific.

Mr. WHITE. How successful was he?

Mr. BUELL. The Vietnamese at this time had not been clear into northeast Laos so strong; he launched an attack against the Pathet Lao and backed them clear back into Sam Nua city all the way, and this is when the Vietnamese, in turn—they was up there, and the Vietnamese had the borderline, and this is when the Vietnamese really came in, in force, and the Pathet Lao started running toward Vientiane.

Mr. WHITE. Did this military activity by General Pao have the effect of engineering a large number of Vietnamese troops?

Mr. BUELL. Yes.

Mr. WHITE. These troops might otherwise have been engaged presumably in South Vietnam?

Mr. BUELL. Not at that time, not then, not at that point; later on, yes, but not then.

Mr. WHITE. Do you consider General Vang Pao as an individual who is only defending his homeland and his people, or is he fighting in addition for some principle such as anticommunism?

Mr. BUELL. He hates communism; probably, next to me, he hates it worse than anybody in the world.

Mr. WHITE. You know General Vang Pao very well, do you not?

Mr. BUELL. Yes; it is a father-and-son agreement.

Mr. WHITE. He calls you "father"?

Mr. BUELL. That is right. He loves his people. General Pao does know what democracy is. He is a very highly self-educated man. In the early beginning, I would say that when he took over—and he had to take over, somebody had to take over—that he was more or less fighting for his people and northeast Laos, but soon that little world moved so fast, not only for me but for his thinking, that he could see what would happen.

He began to hear about the U.N. and the United States, and so forth, and to answer your question, I would like to say it like I heard a general from the U.S. about 1965 or '66. After we got run down from the north, he asked what did he need, did he want a lot of men—this was the third time they got offered men, I mean GI's from the United States—did he want that, what did he need to help; and his answer to this man was: "Sir, we don't need your boys; all I need is for you to supply me. When I say 'supply,' I mean supply me with anything I need, and you will not have to send your boys."

Mr. WHITE. This was General Pao speaking?

Mr. BUELL. Yes. "I feel what I am doing is my part of fighting for what the free world is fighting for. You have got people in Germany, you have people in Africa, now you have got people in Vietnam. This is what I feel I am doing for the free world." I think this well answers this question.

Mr. WHITE. This was General Pao speaking?

Mr. BUELL. Yes, his own words.

The CHAIRMAN. At that point, Mr. Counsel, the North Vietnamese units to which you refer, where are they, in what section of Laos are they now operating?

Mr. BUELL. Again, in northeast Laos they have control. Here we are right here, coming up into China; here is Dien Bien Phu; here is Sam Neua, a city up in Sam Neua, and here is your border. They now have control of everything right across that. At one time I had a hospital up in here. At one time I had a headquarters right there.

The CHAIRMAN. Do they operate solely as North Vietnamese units or are they mixed with indigenous communist forces?

Mr. BUELL. Mixed—well, as far as I am concerned they are all North Vietnamese. But if you are talking about ethnic groups, they are with them, yes, but to me they are all North Vietnamese. In this area up here there is no Pathet Lao there.

The CHAIRMAN. I have heard there are often Chinese advisers with the North Vietnamese forces. Do you know whether that is true or not?

Mr. BUELL. I would say possibly; I myself have never seen a dead Chinese adviser, I have never seen what I would call a dead communist Chinese soldier. Now, I think people get this wrong. In northeast Laos we have Chinese.

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Mr. WHITE. You mentioned General Vang Pao. Did he launch an attack, a counterattack really, against the communists in northeast Laos about 1965?

Mr. BUELL. Yes, all the way up; terrific—terrific.

Mr. WHITE. How successful was he?

Mr. BUELL. The Vietnamese at this time had not been clear into northeast Laos so strong; he launched an attack against the Pathet Lao and backed them clear back into Sam Nua city all the way, and this is when the Vietnamese, in turn—they was up there, and the Vietnamese had the borderline, and this is when the Vietnamese really came in, in force, and the Pathet Lao started running toward Vientiane.

Mr. WHITE. Did this military activity by General Pao have the effect of engineering a large number of Vietnamese troops?

Mr. BUELL. Yes.

Mr. WHITE. These troops might otherwise have been engaged presumably in South Vietnam?

Mr. BUELL. Not at that time, not then, not at that point; later on, yes, but not then.

Mr. WHITE. Indigenous Chinese?

Mr. BUELL. Right, that work with us. Some people might get that wrong. Now, about 2 years ago, not too far from what was my headquarters then, there were five Chinese killed—I did not see them; General Pao saw them—which could have been advisers, but the number of advisers down in any area that we have ever worked in, I have just about got to say that there is none.

Now, our people that are up in there, our own people that have been taken over by the communists, now that the Chinese has got working advisers, techniques, and so forth up in this area—we have really never had Chinese that much.

As far as these problems over here, that is an altogether different story; that has been known for years what was going to happen there, the road coming down there; and that is Chinese, as far as I am concerned, China owns that part of Laos.

The CHAIRMAN. Proceed, Mr. Counsel.

Mr. WHITE. Would it be accurate to say, from your experience and observation in Laos, that the North Vietnamese communists there have been following Mao's concept of power coming from a gun barrel?

Mr. BUELL. Pretty much so, yes; pretty much so—not all the way, but pretty much so.

Mr. WHITE. Are there relief programs? I think you have indicated they do have some sort of a relief program. Are they pretty well limited to what you have said?

Mr. BUELL. The communists?

Mr. WHITE. Yes.

Mr. BUELL. Yes; they have relief programs and they are limited. Your relief programs—naturally anything that is done or worked with is—in some form, in turn, helps them out very much. For instance, the big takeover we had in the area a couple or 3 years ago was hundreds of sewing machines in a cave. I know the communists gave out sewing machines. Sewing machines were not only to help the family, but to make clothes for the soldiers. For crops, they give them fertilizers and give them better seeds but, in turn, they are taxed to turn them back.

Mr. WHITE. What kind of percentages tax do they impose?

Mr. BUELL. It can go according to the troubles and times. It can go up as high as 60 and 70 percent, and when a percentage is put on, it is god; you have a poor crop or a big crop, you still get whatever that percent is.

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Mr. WHITE. Why is that, would you say?

Mr. BUELL. They are just not as rough; they are a little more human, much more so.

Mr. WHITE. You mentioned opium a while ago, Mr. Buell. We are interested in the possible communist exploitation of opium in attempts to subvert not only the U.S. forces in South Vietnam, but also possible exportation, either directly or indirectly, to the United States. I understand that opium is a common agricultural crop, or has been. When you first went to Laos, what was the situation in regard to production of opium in the area in which you worked there in the northeast?

Mr. BUELL. I kind of hate to comment on this, because I think I hate opium and drugs and some of these heroin much more than a lot of people back here that talk about it and pretend they do. I kind of got the name of helping the people of northeast Laos growing better opium in the early days, which is not too far from being true. But it was their sole way of making a living. It was their only product they had that they could sell or trade. There was no roads; there are still no roads. It would be good to tell them to raise a lot of corn and other things, but be sure, Mr. Congressman and Senators, that you have got vehicles, and so forth, to carry it on out. Our main opium territory was up here in the northeast, all in through here, from here across to here, coming up here just like that; that was my opium territory.

Mr. WHITE. What makes good opium territory?

Mr. BUELL. It is all determined by the ground, climate—ground and climate; it is a sweet soil and a cold, rainy season, not monsoon rain season. But as I drew that line, if you can see, that now all belongs to the enemy today. The opium that northeast Laos itself now grows, the people on the government side, is not anywhere near enough for their own use. The people there themselves that used to grow opium and sell it actually have to import opium to use.

Mr. WHITE. From whence do they import this opium?

Mr. BUELL. It comes from the north; most of it does come from the north that they use themselves because it is so much cheaper than it is from the south or from the west.

I think it is interesting to note that we feel that in northeast Laos in the past—I was going to say 12 but I will say 15 years—that the use of opium has decreased possibly 70 percent, at least 60 percent, 60 to 70 percent, has actually decreased—the use of opium.

The CHAIRMAN. What is the reason for that, Mr. Buell?

Mr. BUELL. I would say it is practically all education, education on their own part, that they have seen the Westerner—many of them have seen Western people now—that you can live to be older than 30 years old or 35 years old if you do a little more and take a little better care of your body. They have seen, without the use of it, that you not only become a better citizen, you become a better soldier, you become a better everything, you can become a scholar.

And also I won't cut our drug program short. Our drugs have done wonders to help. Because opium, the main part of it—they never did use opium like we think of it, as whiskey or something in the tavern—they used it for medical purposes, and some would get hooked on it. But our medical program has done wonders.

Mr. WHITE. Isn't it true that opium was one of their basic medicines, particularly for people with lingering illnesses, tuberculosis, cancer, and things of that kind?

Mr. BUELL. Very true, and it works.

Mr. WHITE. It kept the patient sedated?

Mr. BUELL. It worked. When I say "it worked," I don't mean it cured him, but it took care of the pain, which is the way it should be.

Mr. WHITE. Has opium been used as a method of suicide?

Mr. BUELL. Oh, yes; there is no question about that; it is a real good one. About that much, on the top of that pencil, that black part, will just about take care of anybody.

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Mr. WHITE. And be captured by the Communists?

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Mr. WHITE. Back now to the opium thing, can you make an estimate of, say, the total tonnage of opium that has been grown in northeast Laos there in the province, say, in times of peace when maximum production was possible? Could you give us an estimate?

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Mr. WHITE. Would not exceed a hundred tons?

Mr. BUELL. No more than that.

Mr. WHITE. And this could be reduced by conditions of war, could it?

Mr. BUELL. That is right. I would say that would be the peak that you could get in peacetime; I would say this would be their peak. Because when they are growing opium—these people didn't grow opium knowing that this piece of ground would grow just as good opium as this. Because they are great land lovers, they love their land, they will not abuse their land just to grow an extra crop. They grow what they need to take care of their own needs that year. They are not like us Americans, to hog the market; next year corn will be a big price, so they double their corn allotment; they don't do it that way. That would be about the amount for a normal, peaceful year, I would say; no more than that.

Mr. WHITE. Is the opium poppy difficult to cultivate?

Mr. BUELL. Very, very difficult to cultivate; it is hard to keep growing. You have to even be careful when you hoe it. Everything is done by hand. When you hoe it you have to be sure the ground is not too wet to turn the plant. As I have said before, it is the hardest plant, I think, on earth. I don't think there is a plant on earth that takes as much out of the soil as opium.

Mr. WHITE. How about the harvesting of it?

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Mr. WHITE. How is this done? Would you tell us about it?

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the petals fall off, they have little knives that they go around in the morning and split just a little hairline open in two or three places on that little poppy head, and they do that early in the morning while it is cool, and when the sun comes up, that will bleed out your raw opium. And this will last for about a week on one little head; that is how many times you have to go and come back. And then what is also difficult about it is that the crop never matures at the same time like we think of our wheat crop or other crops; it can extend as much as a month or 6 weeks to get the whole crop harvested.

Mr. WHITE. Does raw opium have a limited shelf or storage life or can it be kept indefinitely?

Mr. BUELL. No, it can't. It should be sold at the end of 2 years. It has deteriorated very little at the end of 2 years. But the end of the third year, it has deteriorated by 70 to 80 percent, and by the fourth year you might say, as far as selling, absolutely worthless.

Mr. WHITE. Is the quality of opium grown there, in the northeast part of Laos, particularly, of good quality opium?

Mr. BUELL. So they say; probably some of the best in the world. That is northeast Laos. Down in the south, further down, where we are at now, what we grow is very, very poor. But that up there is good. For instance, you could take 2 kilos of opium—one out of there and one out of west Laos or Burma—and have them on the market and you could get nearly twice as much for a kilo if they know it is from there.

Mr. WHITE. All of this territory is presently in the hands of the North Vietnamese communists, is it not?

Mr. BUELL. Practically all of it, 95 percent.

Mr. WHITE. And, to your knowledge, is this opium being exported from Laos to North Vietnam?

Mr. BUELL. No, I can't say. If I was saying—I have no pictures, I have nothing on it—I would say most of it is going up into North Vietnam in the raw opium form.

Mr. WHITE. And does this exceed the demands or the requirements of the North Vietnamese for opium?

Mr. BUELL. This I would have no idea; I really wouldn't. Again, if North Vietnam is growing any opium, which I don't know—I am sure you people probably can find this out some way—if they was growing any opium—I know pretty well where their opium land is—it could exceed their use if they had a good crop of opium and was growing opium on the opium lands, but this I don't know.

Mr. WHITE. You don't know whether or not the North Vietnamese—

Mr. BUELL. I am sure they have got enough opium, because, again, the North Vietnamese are pretty strict on their opium laws. After all, an opium addict is looked down on in North Vietnam about like they are looked down on in my area. You don't only go so far into using opium in that world.

Mr. WHITE. If they had exportable surpluses there in North Vietnam, where would these be exported? Could these be sent down the Mekong River to South Vietnam, for example?

Mr. BUELL. Not in my area you couldn't.

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