Q. And did you see the airplanes? Did they have the Lao emblem on them or did they have another emblem on them?
A. He says he didn’t see the markings ... they were very high, and doesn’t know about them. The planes were very high.

Q. Were they motor driven airplanes or were they jet planes?
A. He says sometimes they were jets and sometimes they were T28s. They call them “Ts.”

Q. And did you see any Pathet Lao soldiers killed?
A. He says no, he doesn’t know about that ... he never went out ... looking around the place.

Q. But did you ever hear of Pathet Lao being killed or injured by the bomba? A. He said that he heard of Pathet Lao soldiers being wounded but the never heard of any dying.

Q. Were you ever injured or any of your family injured by the bombings?
A. No.

Q. What did you do, you were just a young man when the bombings began. Did you run, did you hide or did you watch?
A. He said at first he didn’t know what they were, he just looked. But afterwards, when they started to shoot close, he ran and hid.

Q. Where did you hide?
A. He hid in a hole in the forest, a trench in the forest.

Q. Did the bombs ever hit near your own hut, your own home?
A. He said yes, they bombed everywhere.

Q. What did the bombs do to your own home?
A. They destroyed his home.

Q. What was your home made off? Was it a thatched or a tin roof?
A. It was a wooden house with a thatched roof.

Q. After your home was destroyed, where did you live?
A. They made a little shelter in the forest. He says this house he’s talking about was in Phone Savan.

Q. How do you spell it?
A. P-h-o-n-e — S-a-v-a-n.

Q. Is Phone Savan near Vinh ... near the beginning of the Ho Chi Minh Trail?
A. He doesn’t know where the Ho Chi Minh Trail is.

Q. But were there Pathet Lao being in your village?
A. (Interpreter) Phone Savan is a town.

Q. Yes, in your town ...

Q. Let me ask you. Did the Americans or the Lao government in Vientiane ever come and help your village with medical supplies or with new homes for the people who were bombed?
A. (Interpreter to questioner; you mean, after September 1969?)
Q. After September, 1969.
A. He says that they brought them to Vientiane.

Q. That’s all; huh. Why you think they were bombing your village?
A. He doesn’t know, he doesn’t know anything.

Q. Could you tell me how old you are?
A. 25 years old.

Q. And you are from what town?
A. Phonesavan.

Q. And how far is Phonesavan from the Ho Chi Minh Trail?
A. He says he doesn’t know. All he knows about is route 6 and route 7.

Q. And this Phonesavan is on route 6?
A. He says those roads go to the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Q. Now, were there any military facilities of any kind in your town?
A. Only a police station and a cooperative store, to sell things to the people.

Q. And this all there were in Phonesavan.
Q. Were there many Pathet Lao in Phonesavan?
A. There were only people in the town and not soldiers.

Q. What year did the bombing first begin in Phonesavan?
A. 1964.

Q. At that age you were in your teens, do you recall looking up and seeing any emblems on the airplanes?
A. He only saw the airplanes, he couldn’t see the letters, it was pretty high up.

Q. Did you ever see letters on any of the planes, or emblems?
A. He saw them, but he didn't understand them.
Q. Well, what did they look like?
A. He said they were French or English, but he didn't know how to read them.
Q. Were there jets and motor planes or just motor planes or just jets?
A. Many kinds, there were F106s, T6s, T28s, and Beavers. Many, many kinds of planes.
Q. And what sort of bombs did these planes drop?
A. Destructive (fragmentation) bombs, big bombs, napalm, anti-personnel bombs, rockets, and machine guns.
Q. Did they drop any bombs that stuck in the ground and exploded only later when a vibration agitated them?
A. Yeah, they had delayed action bombs. They call them time bombs. The exact translation is "time bombs."
Q. Did these time bombs ever hurt anyone? First, let me establish how many houses and how many people were in your village of Phonesavan?
A. More than a hundred.
Q. More . . .
A. Houses.
Q. How many people . . .
A. 7 or 8 hundred. Altogether, many races.
Q. Was there any school in Phonesavan?
A. Yes, there was a school, but it was outside of Phonesavan. In '62 and '63 it was in Phonesavan. When the planes started coming in '64, they moved it outside.
Q. Was it destroyed even though it was moved outside?
A. He says from '64 to '67, they bombed around Phonesavan and in '68, '69, they bombed the village itself.
Q. But the school was not damaged?
A. He said that they did build the building out in the forest, the school, but they camouflaged it and hid it, so it couldn't be seen from the air. So it wasn't destroyed.
Q. How many of the 100 houses in the town weren't destroyed or damaged by the bombing?
A. 1969 they were all lost, but he says in some cases there were still posts standing.
Q. How many of the posts were left and of these 700 or 800 people were any of them injured and killed? And if so how many were killed and how many injured?
A. 20 were killed and 30 injured.
Q. And these were different people than this gentlemen spoke about (unclear)
A. Separate.
Q. Of the 20 killed approximately how many were under the age of 12?
A. 5 or 6.
Q. Did you actually see any of the children who were killed or did you only hear about it.
A. He says he's seen in the hospital some of the children who have died. He saw one child in the hospital who later died.
Q. Where was the hospital?
A. Far outside of Khan Kay.
Q. So it was fairly near Phonesavan. How far was it from Phonesavan?
A. 6 kilometers from Phonesavan.
Q. How did the child die?
A. Anti-personnel bomb.
Q. Delayed action or anti-personnel?
A. Yeah, it was an anti-personnel not a delayed-action bomb.
Q. How old was the child and where was the child injured?
A. 7 or 8 years old. Came in here and went out. . . . a piece out . . .
Q. A piece of shrapnel through the chest. And how long was it after the bomb hit that the child died?
A. He said she was in the hospital for two days. He's not sure the exact time when she died. He says he just saw that she was wounded and later on heard that she died.
Q. Did he know the family of the girl?
A. No, he didn't know the family.
Q. Among the 20, were there any older people ... well wait, how did the child die?
A. He doesn't know ... he says usually it's this business of them being very naughty and playing around and not going into their holes. But he doesn't know for that particular child.

Q. O.K. About what year was this?
A. 1968.

Q. Did you have any idea of why those bombs were being dropped?
A. He says it's a political question ... he doesn't know anything about politics.

Q. Tell him it's a political question and I don't understand why they're doing it either.
A. All he knows is that the planes came, he hid, and if he didn't hide, he'd die.

Q. Did the planes also destroy things other than the houses or the people?
A. He says they didn't know the difference between a person and a water buffalo. If they saw anything moving they'd shoot.

Q. You mean they'd strafe the water buffalo?
A. He says if they had bombs left over, then they'd bomb the buffalo.

Q. Did any of your family die in the bombing?
A. His brother died.

Q. If it's not too painful for him to tell me, could he tell me how that happened?
A. In June, '68 ... He says he wasn't there then, he was at Lat Houang. He was, the brother was still in Phonesavan. But, it was 2 in the afternoon.

Q. And what was his brother doing when the plane came?
A. He doesn't know ... He was a Khang Kay ... He says he wasn't there, he didn't know. So I said, "did you hear about it afterwards, from a friend?"

Q. He says, yeah, what they said is, he didn't make it back to a hole. It was an anti-personnel bomb that got him.

Q. And how old was his brother at the time?
A. 19.

Q. Was he working with his father in the fields or was he working in a store?
A. He helped around the house.

Q. His father was a farmer or a ... ?
A. A merchant.

Q. And he helped around the house with the stock and that sort of thing?
A. I asked him if he helped his father sell things and he said yes.

Q. But he was not a soldier?
A. No, he was just a regular citizen.

Q. What did the father ... how did his father feel about the Americans killing his son who was not even a soldier?
A. He says he doesn't know what his father was thinking. He only knows that his father was crying. His father couldn't speak ... he was just crying all the time.

Q. Was he the eldest son?
A. (Interpreter) It's his youngest brother.

Q. And where was his brother injured? ... When he died I mean?
A. In his chest.

Q. And he died immediately, I gather.
A. He died at 8 P.M. the next day.

Q. Were they able to get him to a hospital?
A. He died in the hospital.

Q. Were there any Pathet Lao in your town at all?
A. He says, he doesn't know ... he didn't see anything.

Q. Didn't they come in every now and then and talk to the people?
A. When the shooting (bombing) started they weren't there.

Q. The townspeople were but the Pathet Lao were long gone, huh?
A. Yes.

Q. But do you know if any of them were killed by the bombing?
A. He says we were just in a trench. We couldn't go out. How could we hear about these kind of things?

Q. (Interpreter) But you said that you went to Lat Houang that day?
A. Just that one day.
Q. Even though it's the same town, I want to ask just a very few questions to other refugees.
A. 18.
Q. Now let me ask these questions—since they're from the same town, recently. When did the bombing start, were there jets, and motor driven, did he see any emblems?
A. F105s, Ts, and Beavers.
Q. Did he see the emblems on any of the airplanes?
A. Just when they fell. When they were shot down.
Q. Did he see any shot down?
A. He saw one shot down.
Q. What kind was that?
A. An F105.
Q. What year?
A. 1967.
Q. And how did it get shot down?
A. A Pathet Lao shot it down, shot it directly in the airplane and it exploded in the air. And it was a DCA, and anti-aircraft, it wasn't small.
Q. Was the anti-aircraft there in Phonesavan?
A. 3 kilometers outside of Phonesavan. He was 1 kilometer outside of Phonesavan itself.
Q. And had the plane been bombing the village, or making a sweep to strafe?
A. It was coming in to bomb, Lat Houang is where it was shot down. He says it just started down, then as it was going up they got it.
Q. And did you ever see any anti-aircraft guns in the town of Phonesavan?
A. No.
Q. Were there any military facilities in the town?
A. No.
Q. Only in Ban Houa?
A. He says there were in the forest around Ban Houa. He says, yeah, there were military vehicles, tanks... It was a tank also with a gun to shoot at airplanes.
Q. One tank with a gun?
A. There were many tanks.
Q. And does he have any idea why the Americans or the Lao were strafing his town of Phonesavan?
A. No, he doesn't know anything about politics.

G. Excerpts from essays by the Lao Refugees

1. "For me, the world consisted of several dozen houses built in the centre of green mountains, with their natural beauty, the plains and the cleared areas that the villagers, from father to son, had reclaimed despite their heavy foliage. The inhabitants of my village were peasants who were full of good faith and of vigour. We were supremely happy in the fact that we were content with our lot in the nature of our village. We were convinced that in the evil world there were too few people who were content with so few things like we were, and could call it "happiness." The majority of them were confused in the world where there would never be satisfaction and sufficiency and that that was the origin of evil and unhappiness.

   "My childhood was in harmony with nature among the gardens, the fields and the mountains. I was part of my village which I would never be able to leave—Night and day, in the light of the moon, in the fields, in the forest, with the natural music of the birds, my friends would wander in the most perfect calm, the happiest in the world. When the seasons of planting and sowing came, together with my friends, in high spirits, we fought against every caprice of nature and thus kept the traditional rhythm of our ancestors."

   [from a 21 year old former nurse]

2. "I think about the season of flowers in which I used to gather such varieties with joy, in the company of my comrades of the village! And about the days when we used to search in the forest for wood for fuel, and the mornings when we fished in the rivers in the bounty of nature. According to our tradition, we often celebrated the holidays in the Pagoda, The Phou Bao (young boys) and the Phou Sao (young girls) exchanged beautiful poetic sayings in tune to the Khene (Laotian musical instrument). The audience gathered around and applauded them. We danced the Lam Vong (traditional
Laotian dance) following the harmonious Laotian music. We lived joyfully." [from a teenager]

3. “Unfortunately, this peaceful life of my village lasted only until 1964-65. In the blue and peaceful sky exploded the shells dropped by planes which criss-crossed in all directions over my poor village. The mortal thunder of the bombs were heard everywhere, showing there the black smoke, here the homes blown apart, taking fire like pages of paper. The survivors ran out of them to the trenches. The trenches! The trenches! This was the only word that everyone had in their heart, dropping their activities in the fields. All that mattered was to save one’s life. The strength of our arms which normally devoted themselves to produce food, the vital articles for everyone in the world, now turned to digging trenches which more often became our own tombs, if the good god did not chase the bombs outside of our door.

“The problem of food became more and more unsolvable because our rice paddies were transformed into bomb craters. Nothing else remained to us but sad eyes seen on the faces of each villager. The war became like a very heavy rock pitilessly weighed on our heart. We could not understand why our peaceful little village changed into a heap of the bombs.” [from a village leader]

4. “In 1964 we knew another: the bombs falling from the sky. In fact, from this year on, Xieng Khouang began to bombarded. The population underwent another war, the aerial war. They learned another form of civilization, the trenches. My family and I had dug our trench in our garden in the middle of a shower of bombs: Such difficulty! But we fought to save our skin. We dug day and night. Between times the planes bombed day and night. I thought that I would surely be killed. Finally, my village was bombed and reduced to ruins. Our granaries of rice were set on fire. And so we lost our provisions. We then had to work in the rice fields during the night in order to escape from the bombs. “Finally, the planes bombad the bamboo forests where we hid our tunnels, wounding two children who did not have time to seek refuge. Our village was filled with bomb craters, the land bare on which nothing grew.

“I grieved very much to see my village in ruins, my animals disappeared, my crops destroyed . . . each day, news came about such and such a village being bombed and that there were more and more deaths and wounded.” [from a teenager]

5. “In 1968-69, every school had been completely destroyed by the bombs. In August 1968, the school in my village met the same unhappy fate. On that day I saw the plane coming, but I was too frightened and nervous to reach the large tunnel so a few of my friends and I threw ourselves into a small trench 600 metres from our school. We were then able to see our school take fire. A few minutes later other planes came to join the action. Towards the end of the day, they had not yet stopped destroying our village. At that time I thought I would never leave alive. Even after the departures of these instruments of death, I still remained immobilized in my hole. My school teacher had described to us once how a bomb had fallen very near the trench where my other comrades were sheltered; killing two of them, one was 16 years old and the other was 18 years old. I ran to see them but all that was left was a mass of blood. Since then the children didn’t dare any more to go to school, which was newly reconstructed in the forest. We spent our lives in the trenches. In the night time our fathers and brothers went out to look for rice in the hidden granaries, and they brought back news of others who had been killed and wounded.” [from a farmer]

6. “The roar of the bombs and the noise of the planes frightened me terribly. Our life became like one of animals who search to escape the butcher. It was without tomorrows. Each day, across the forests and ditches, we sought only to escape from the bombs. When looking at the face of my innocent child, I could not stop crying for his future. This made me hate the war. Why do the men in this world not love each other, not live together in peace and not build happiness in development and progress? And why do they kill each other this way? Human beings, whose parents cherish them, died from the explosion of the bombs. Who then thinks about the affection and love that their parents feel for them? Who then pities them? Who then is responsible for the separation from those whom they love?

“In any case, in all that happens, it is the innocent people who suffer
all the terrible consequences so fatal and tragic. As for the other men, do
they know all the unimaginable atrocities which can happen here in this
war?" [from a 30-year-old woman]

7. "After two days walking across mountains and valleys we reached a
place where helicopters brought us away from our home forever. While on
board we had a last glimpse at our land. No houses, no pagodas, no rice
plants, nothing to tell us that there was some human life there. It was
interesting to see some mountains with bare red-tops, usually with a little
lake on it, far away there were columns of smoke looking like mushroom.
Such was the wonderful skyline as painted by the war in its newest art.

"Over there we left our home, over there we left our rice. Neither our
goods nor our beast could be brought with us—what will we do without them?
"Farewell—our buffalos, our pigs, our fowl—we hope they will be smart
easy to hide themselves. If not, they will all get shot and eaten by the
soldiers. How sorry we were not to take them with us.

"Farewell—rice fields, orchards, bamboo gardens and lakes filled with
fish! It is not our will to leave you, but the war obliges us. It is not our
weakness to go away but it's because of the barbarity of some stronger
people with their machines.

"Farewell—everything that makes that place our home. Farewell ...
"[from a young folk singer]

II. Sample case histories of victims of bombings

1. Me Oue's Son-in-law: My mother-in-law, Me Oue, was 50 when she died.
She was from Tasseeng Sene Noi, She had been hiding in a trench most of
the day on February 20, 1968. About 3 p.m., she decided to go out and
enter her home to get some warm clothing for herself and her grandchildren.
While she was in the house planes came over and bombed suddenly.
She was burned to death.

2. Thao Tong: My name is Thao Tong. I am 38, married, with four children.
I am from Ban Kom.
In July 1967, I was working in my rice field next to Ban Kom when
planes came over about 8 a.m.
I began running for the forest nearby, but didn't make it.
The planes dropped anti-personnel bombs all around, and I was hit in
the head and hand. My head was split open.
1 was blinded.

planes bombed our village. I was out transplanting rice at the time. It was
about 5 a.m.
The planes dropped two large bombs directly over our village. One fell
on my house.
My father, aged 68, mother aged 64, wife aged 21 and my three sons aged
6, 3, and 1 were all inside.
They were all killed.

4. Thao Sipha: Thao Sipha's father; My son is six years old, We are from
Ban Ngou.
Sao Tong became very afraid and jumped out of trench and began running.
The planes bombed, and she was killed.
In July, 1969, we were all sitting in our small shelter out in the forest,
when planes bombed around 11 a.m.
Two people with us, a man aged 60 and a little girl aged 7, were killed
lying in their beds.
My son's hand was hit and his fingers flew up, embedding themselves in
the roof.

5. Chan Nan Taa's son: I am from Ban Nam Thom. My father, Chan
Nan Taa, was 63.
In June, 1968, about 8 a.m. he was taking a walk outside. Suddenly a
plane came over. He began running for a house. But he was too old, and
couldn't make it.
The plane bombed, and he was killed.

6. Thao Son Dii: Village Chief: Thao Son Dii, is from Ban Thom. He
is 10 years old.
On August 13, 1968, planes came over suddenly. Everyone was taken by
surprise.
I only have one other daughter. I . . . I . . . I . . .
60-970—71—pt. 2—8
Som Dit began running for a trench, but he didn’t make it. He was burned in his leg from the explosion of the bombs.
7. Siang Bouna Pha’s mother: My son, Siang Bouna Pha, was very ill from sickness in his lungs in May, 1968. He was in the big hospital at Moung Khanl, which was in a cave. While he was there, planes bombed it and he was killed. More than 100 other people were burned alive in the cave at the same time.
8. Sao Souphan: Village Chief: This is Sao Souphan, aged 8. We are from Ban Thakhel. Her father, Thit Khamphong, was sitting in his shelter on April 14, 1969. He was sick and his family was caring for him. Planes bombed about 1 p.m., and he was killed at the age of 54. He couldn’t get to a trench in time because he was too sick.
9. Nang Pha Sii’s mother-in-law: Nang Pha Sii was my daughter-in-law. She was 20, and had one child. She was living at Ban Soot. In August, 1969, planes bombed the village. She was hiding in a trench with her family.
Her father was killed. Her mother and two other villagers were wounded. She was killed, shielding her year-old child with her body.
10. 3-year-old girl: Village Chief: This girl is three years old. We are from Ban Thom. In March, 1969, she was being carried by her 9-year-old sister. Planes came over about 9 a.m. The 9-year-old began running, but didn’t make it.
A big bomb exploded. This little girl was burned in her breasts, stomach and vagina.
11. Sao Toun’s mother: Sao Toun was my daughter, aged 12. We are from Ban Houel. We were hiding in our trench in July, 1969, when the planes came over about 10 a.m. Sao Toun became very afraid and jumped out of trench and began running. The planes bombed, and she was killed.
I only have one other daughter, I . . . I . . . I . . .
(N.B. Interview terminated as mother broke into tears.)
12. Khamphong: Khamphong’s father: This is my daughter, Khamphong. She is three. We are from Ban Nhoun. On February 28, 1969, I was fishing in a stream about 3 p.m. All seven of my children were with me. Suddenly planes came over and dropped anti-personnel bombs all around. Six of my seven children were hit. See, you can feel pellets still in Khamphong’s body.
13. Sao Boul’s son: My mother, Sao Boul, was 68. We are from Ban Ngouit. In June, 1969, she was sitting in our small shelter out in the forest. Planes came over and dropped several bombs, striking my mother with the concussion. We dragged her deeper out in the forest to try and save her. But her chest had been destroyed inside. She died soon after.
14. Nang Khamma’s mother: Nang Khamma was 20 years old. She was married and had two children. One day in June 1969, about 5 p.m., Nang Khamma went out to fetch our buffalo. Suddenly she heard the planes coming. She didn’t have time to escape. They bombed, and she was killed while crawling to a trench about 10 yards away.
15. Po Seng Som’s wife: Po Seng Som was over 60 when he died on September 16, 1968. It was about 6 p.m. He was out working in his rice field alone. First a small plane came and saw him. Then other planes came and dropped anti-personnel bombs all around.
I was sitting in a small shelter by the side of the field and was wounded by pellets. My husband was killed.
16. Sao Thongdan’s husband: Sao Thongdan was 55. We had eight children together. We are from Ban Thom. Planes bombed near our shelter in August 1969, about 11 a.m.
My sister, aged 83, was killed. Two of my nieces, aged 3 and 4, were killed. Another niece, aged 6, was wounded. My wife, Sao Thongdan, was killed.

1. Tape transcript of interview with refugee sub-district chief, part of a 16 mm color film on bombing victims in Laos

This interview was taped with the sub-district chief from sub-district Khat, up on the Plain of Jars. It was taped and filmed at the Ban Na Nga refugee camp, 40 kilometers outside of Vientiane. The people came down to Vientiane in February, 1970. The sub-district chief is about 40 years old. He was a former teacher up on the Plain of Jars, and was appointed sub-district chief when he came down here by the Royal Lao Government.

There are about 2600 people living in the refugee camp, which is one of five such centers situated near Vientiane.

The interview took place at the camp during the last week of August, 1970, and is presented verbatim.

Q. What position do you have here?
A. My position is sub-district chief.

Q. Where did you come from?
A. I came from sub-district Khat, Pak district, Xieng Khouang province.

Q. On the Plain of Jars?
A. Yes, on the Plain of Jars.

Q. In sub-district Khat, how many villages are there?
A. In sub-district Khat, there are 21 villages total.

Q. How many villages came on this side?
A. On this side there are 16 villages.

Q. When you were there, there were 21 villages, what were they?
A. Up there: Ban Thai; Moung Lok; Ban Vong; Ban Han; Ban Dong...

Q. Now, there were 21 villages on the Plain of Jars, right?
A. Yes, on the Plain of Jars.

Q. Are there any other villages?
A. Up on the Plain of Jars there are 5 villages with the Pathet Lao in Tasseng Khat.

Q. Thank you. Now, among those 21 villages are there still any houses left?
A. Now, among those 21 villages, there is not a single house left.

Q. Why is there not a single house left?
A. The airplanesomboed them.

Q. The airplanes bombed them all?
A. Yes.

Q. Now, the airplanes came since 1965 and what?
A. The airplanes bombed from 1965 until 1967; they didn't bomb much. But from 1968 until 1969 the airplanes bombed heavily.

Q. When the airplanes came to bomb, how many times did they come to bomb?
A. They came to bomb many times. I can't count how many times.

Q. You can't count how many times?
A. Yes.

Q. In one month how many times did they come to bomb?
A. Airplanes came more during the day.

Q. During the day they came?
A. Yes. During the day a lot came, at night a few came. And in 1969 during the day a lot came and during the night a lot came also.

Q. Now, you say that there is not a single house left, right?
A. Now, there is not a single house left.

Q. In what year did you lose the most houses?
A. Most houses were lost in 1968 and 1969... most houses were lost.

Q. Now, in 1968-69 were the villagers inside the village or did they go outside?
A. During 1968 and 1969 the villagers went out to live in the forest in holes (peua het louang yu nai paa, nai kim ban—translation very incoherent). 1969 the villagers were no longer in the villages; they all went out to live in the forest.

Q. They went out to live in the forest?
A. Yes.
Q. When they were out in the forest, were there also villagers who died?
A. While they were out in the forest, there were also villagers who died... the airplanes bombed and hit villagers.

Q. Now, Mr. Sub-district chief, what village did you come from?
A. I come from Ban Lat Houang-Nangon, sub-district Khon.

Q. Before, when there were not many airplanes, you slept in a normal house, like this one, right?
A. Yes.

Q. Now, in what month and year did you leave your house and go into your trench?
A. I left my house, my village, to go live in the forest on the first day of the year in 1969. The first day, the first month of 1969.

Q. I understand. Now when the airplanes came; did they come very low or very high, when they dropped their bombs?
A. When the airplanes had arrived, they came down very low, then they dropped their bombs, then they went up.

Q. Now in 1964-65, there were what kind of airplanes?
A. In 1964 and 1965 there were AT-6 airplanes and T-28s.

Q. In 1966-69, there were many, right?
A. In 1967, 1968, and 1969, there were many.

Q. What kind of airplane were there, and what quantity?
A. In 1968 and 1969 there were AT-6s; T-28s; jets—F105s, F101s. F-4s.

Q. Were there more jets or more AT-6s and T-28s? Which kind came more in 1968 and 1969?
A. There were more jets than AT-6s and T-28s. In 1969, the majority were jets.

Q. In 1968 and 1969, did they [Rachet Lao] shoot at the airplanes?
A. Yes, in 1968, and 1969 they shot at many airplanes.

Q. Were there many that they shot down?
A. Yes, there were many that were shot down. In Moung Ngene one was shot down; in Ban Thone one was shot down; there were two that I saw shot down.

A. In one month they came to bomb many times. In one month, say about 30 days; on one day they might come once, twice, or they might come two times, or they might come seven, or eight times, in one day.

Q. When the airplanes came, were there the people?
A. When the airplanes came, the people went into trenches or caves.

Q. Oh, I understand. Now, in 1968 and 1969, were there many airplanes?
A. Yes, there were many.

Q. Did the people only enter into the trenches, when the airplanes came; or did they stay in the trenches all the time?
A. The people were in the trenches when the airplanes came. When the airplanes went away, the people came out. They went out to farm, to go up in the mountains, and build (song sau—untranslatable).

Q. When the airplanes came, how did you feel?
A. When the airplanes came the people felt that they were afraid the airplanes would see and bomb them; were afraid the airplanes would think they were soldiers of the North Vietnamese Army. For that reason, the people wanted to save their lives, so they entered into the trenches to hide in order to protect themselves.

Q. Were there many people who died from the airplanes?
A. A certain number of villagers died from the airplane bombings.

Q. What do you mean, "a certain number"?
A. By a certain number I mean different numbers died. For example, in one village two or three people died, or in a village there would be nine or ten who died, or a certain number.

Q. How many villagers were wounded by the airplanes?
A. There were some villagers who were wounded by the airplanes.

Q. Many or few?
A. Many.

Q. Were there many people who died from these airplanes?
A. In the village, all of us died, everybody died. In the whole village, everybody died.

Q. Now when the airplanes came to bomb you what kind of bombs did they use?
A. They used 100 kilo bombs; 1000 kilo bombs, anti-personnel bombs, small bombs; and 250 kilo bombs.

Q. Only those bombs?
A. No. There were also napalm bombs, burning bombs, as well as destructive bombs.

Q. Which kind of bomb were there the most of?
A. The anti-personnel bombs were the most, together with the 500 klo bombs. There were also many napalm bombs.

Q. There were many napalm bombs?
A. Yes.

Q. Were there many or few?
A. There were many napalm bombs.

Q. Did they ever drop napalm in villages?
A. They did drop napalm in villages.

Q. Now, did more airplanes come during the day or at night?
Q. When the airplanes were shot down, were there ever pilots that escaped the airplanes without dying?
A. Pilots?
Q. Yes; that parachuted down; that didn’t die; were there any?
A. Yes. An airplane that was shot down at Phou Theung, the pilot parachuted down first, the airplane crashed later; the pilot hadn’t yet lost his life.

Q. What kind of man was the pilot?
A. The plane that fell at Ban Thone, Tasseng Sane Nol, Moung Khoune, Xieng Khounang province, it was a jet.

Q. The pilot was what man?
A. The pilot was an American.

Q. When they used napalm; when they dropped it in the villages; how many times in one month?
A. In one month, I can’t count how many times.

Q. Napalm?
A. Yes, napalm bombs. I can’t remember, I didn’t write it down.

Q. Did they use napalm often?
A. Yes, they used it often.

Q. Now, as you said; “villagers died”; the majority were of what age? Old people, young people, average people; what kind were the majority?
A. All ages died the same. (another Lao man). No, what kind were the majority who died? (sub-district chief again) The majority were old people and children.

Q. Why?
A. They moved too slowly. When the airplanes came, they couldn’t run quickly, they couldn’t make it.
HOPES THIN FOR THE MILLIONS ADrift ACROSS INDOCHINA

(By Henry Kamm)

SAIGON, South Vietnam, April 20—Uprooted, sometimes by those who are called friends and sometimes by those called enemies, millions of living victims of the war are adrift in Indochina.

They wash up here or there, sometimes for a brief respite, often for a long stay without a future. Then they move on, mostly to another place where they do not want to stay.

In a region where 80 years of war have made a mockery of numbers, it is a fair estimate that of the 27 million people thought to live in South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, at least a fourth have been uprooted at least once. About half of that number remain in places that they cannot consider home.

In all three countries tens of thousands are still being made homeless by a war from which the United States may be disengaging but to which the people of South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos see no end.

The United States finances everything done on behalf of the uprooted in South Vietnam and Laos and will presumably do the same in Cambodia. A Senate subcommittee headed by Edward M. Kennedy has earned the respect of American officials for focusing attention on how the United States exercises its responsibility for displaced persons. The subcommittee will hold hearings on the issue tomorrow and Thursday, and William E. Colby, who is in charge of the American side of the pacification effort in South Vietnam, will be the principal witness.

"They are not fleeing the enemy and not fleeing the allies," said Keo Viphakone, the overburdened man in charge of the insusitable refugee problem of Laos. "They are fleeing the soldiers."

In tropical lands where food grows swiftly, the refugees often go hungry because they do not even stay long enough to raise their own or because they are crowded so densely into inhospitable places where not enough can be provided.

"We are preventing them from dying," a missionary in Phnom Penh said, summing up the extent of what is being done for the displaced persons of Cambodia. And—it is clear after seven weeks of travel through Indochina, visits to refugee sites and interviews with scores of displaced persons and officials charged with their care—the missionary might have been talking of those in the two other countries as well.

In the general absence of security as long as the war continues, refugees can be resettled elsewhere or returned to their native regions only at the risk of a renewal of hostilities that will again cast them adrift.

The greatest number of refugees is in South Vietnam, where a conservative estimate is five million displaced persons in a population of 17 million. As early as 1964, when Vietnam was partitioned, nearly a million Vietnamese fled south rather than live under the Communists in the North.

Of the three million people thought to live in Laos, the number of those displaced at least once is put at 750,000.

Cambodia, which lived in relative peace until last year, has not been at war long enough yet to compile even approximate statistics. But 200,000 ethnic Vietnamese have been evacuated to South Vietnam, the population of Phnom Penh is thought to have risen from 600,000 to more than a million and there are refugees all over the countryside.
No figures are available on displaced persons in the Communist-controlled regions of the three countries, where regular attacks from the air have turned many inhabitants into cave dwellers. The bulk of the bombing is conducted by the United States, but the South Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian Air Forces are no more sparing of the lives of their countrymen.

The air war, along with other weapons in the vast arsenal that the United States has brought to Indochina, is generally accepted as a major cause of the mass displacements. That view is shared by most American refugee officials interviewed, but because of the touchiness of the subject most ask that their names be withheld.

There is another side to the problem. When the Communists enter a village and impress its men, even temporarily, to fight for them or to serve for a month or two carrying the goods of war on their backs, the village has the choice of doing their bidding—and becoming the target of American or South Vietnamese air strikes, artillery barrages or ground attacks—or facing Communist retaliation for refusal.

In the “revolutionary warfare” the Communists practice, they also spread terror to demoralize civilian populations in contested areas; not only do they employ threats and propaganda, but they also carry out mortar and rocket attacks on civilian targets.

Such tactics have often caused entire villages to move voluntarily to areas more firmly under Government control, particularly since they are assured of safety from the allied air attacks that are a constant threat in areas not clearly on the Government side.

The South Vietnamese Minister of Social Welfare, Dr. Trinh Ngoc Phieu, noted in an interview that the United States introduced saturation bombing and shelling to save human lives, expending ammunition rather than men. Dr. Phieu, a man of tact, did not add that the lives being saved were American, perhaps at the expense of those of Vietnamese.

“Our kind of war has destroyed all the accommodations that once existed,” an American official said, “The scale and scope of our operations preclude any live-and-let-live. With our air power and our artillery, we have made it a massive war all the time.”

As American troops withdraw there is a decline in the amount of artillery being used, even though the air war continues without letup. In February, 1969, official figures show 1,078 American guns fired 961,154 rounds. For last February the figures show 560 guns and 316,275 shells.

At least until recently the Americans appeared to have abandoned the tactic of large military bases that were termed “refugee-generating”—that is, entailing forcible relocation of the civilian population of an area, often without warning and preparation.

But since last year the practice has been renewed by the South Vietnamese command. Some American civil officials accuse the United States of failure to exercise the responsibility that American power confers on it in Vietnam to halt the practice.

“The place is called Pleiku, and there are more than 2,000,” said the foreign volunteer nurse who has been driving there daily although the road is sometimes mined by the Vietnamese. “They were brought there in Vietnamese helicopters on Dec. 16. Of the 300 who have died, I think about 86 per cent were children.

“But I found only two dead today, when usually there are five or six. They die of malnutrition because all they have to eat is rice, roots and leaves.

“They’re not angry. They are so beaten down they don’t have any reaction. They are all down out there.”

Pleiku is 15 miles from Pleiku, a provincial capital, regional military headquarters, and the seat of a major American civil and military establishment. In the warehouse of the provincial social-welfare authorities there are large quantities of dried fish and powdered milk.

That attitude enrages others in CORDS, the mixed civilian-military Civil Operations and Rural Development Support organization, which is headed by Mr. Colby. In turn, the critics are termed bleeding hearts by those who...
accept the official line. The response to the criticism is that, however much one may sympathize with the tribesmen's plight, advisers should advise only and let the Vietnamese make the decisions.

Irving D. Hamberger, refugee adviser for the provinces of Daklak and QuangNgoc, accused Washington in an interview of so impressing the American advisers with the need for establishing good rapport with their Vietnamese counterparts that their advisers are encouraged to support actions that they believe to be immoral.

Mr. Hamberger, a tall and energetic former real-estate developer from Arizona, recalled with anger hearing a colleague say, "We must be pragmatic, not moral." Mr. Hamberger is planning to leave Government service next month because of his deep dissatisfaction with the American stand on refugees.

About 300 people, mainly children and women, camp alongside the military airstrip at Ba Mienhout waiting for a plane. They have waited for a month, and no one has told them that no one intends to send a plane.

They are mountain tribesmen from Cambodia who left their homes last May and June to cross into QuangNgoc at a time when South Vietnam offered more peace than Cambodia. There were about 8,000 of them, and the Government in Saigon allotted money to feed them.

Local indiogenoes have kept all but a fraction of the money from being spent on feeding the refugees. Hungry and neglected, they stowed away on planes that had brought ammunition to a military base near their camp. They thought they might get to Phnompenh, but they landed at Ba Mienhout, where no one wanted them.

They camp at the side of the airstrip. Some live in a shack, others in big United States Air Force packing crates, others in covered holes in the ground.

They have nothing to do but wait for a plane and hope for food. What food they get, mainly from American supplies, they divide among the families.

A sack of dried fish was divided first, little fish by little fish. Then the bigger fish were cut into small pieces that were added to each pile of little fish until the sack was empty. Each person accepted what he got without argument or complaint. They smiled.

"When is the plane coming, sir?" they asked in pidgin French.

The uprooting of montagnards, as all the members of the many hill tribes of Indochina are called, has been a particular sore point in the record of forced relocations in Laos as well as South Vietnam. Even in times of peace the hill tribesmen have all the problems of ethnic minorities in countries governed by the people of the plain. The effect of war is the more traumatic.

The hill tribesmen have won the particular affection of Americans working with them in Laos and South Vietnam, not only for fighting well despite heavy losses in mercenary units organized by the United States but also for appearing more open and friendly than the more sophisticated Vietnamese.

Even Americans not passionately committed to the montagnard cause, as well as many Vietnamese, agree that the attitude of most Vietnamese officials toward the relocation of montagnards is indifference at best. Those more involved accuse the Vietnamese of chasing the tribesmen from their traditional lands to exploit them themselves.

"The Vietcong attack us, the Americans bomb us and the Vietnamese rob us," a montagnard nurse said as she rocked her infant son, whom she had tied to her body.

Over strong objection by CORDS, relocation of montagnard hamlets was resumed last summer under orders of Maj. Gen. Ngo Dzu, commander of Military Region II. Fifty-one thousand had been moved by last month, with 30,000 more due to be uprooted.

On American insistence that, with mounting Congressional interest in refugee questions, such moves might endanger American support of other programs, General Dzu suspended the relocations. But the relocations will eventually be carried out," a senior American official said. "All we can do is try to see that they are done right.

Buon Minh is a resettlement site for the people of six hamlets of the Rhade hill tribe near Ba Mienhout. Close to 900 people live in an agglomeration of temporary shelters in a cleared site off Highway 14. It has not been attacked by daylight.
The Vietcong visited their old hamlets about twice a month, lectured to the people and forced them several times to turn over a can of rice per family. Government troops also came now and then, accused them of dealing with the enemy and sometimes took away men for questioning.

Last September, just before the rice harvest, troops came to tell them they would be evacuated to more secure lands. They were lucky because there was enough transport to allow them to carry their possessions. They worried about their rice, but the soldiers assured them that security would be provided at harvest time so that they could go to reap it.

They did; but the Communists attacked the soldiers and both the soldiers and the villagers were afraid to stay. Most of the rice was lost.

The land provided for the villagers will be cleared soon and they will plant. But it is far from sufficient for the people of Buon M'bre and it is seven months until the next harvest.

The Government gave them small amounts of food in the early stages. To buy their rice now the whole village, men and women—a boy is a man at the age of 12—work as day laborers for the Vietnamese who own most of the land around the camp. They earn 200 piasters a day, or 70 cents, except the younger ones, who get 150 plasters.

They supplement their diets with roots and leaves, digging deep for roots they do not like. “Now we have dug up all the roots,” a man wearing red shorts and a blue shirt said. “Even those under the rocks.”

To show the people of Buon M'bre that the Government cannot give them security, the village was severely attacked in December, and six soldiers and seven members of their families were killed. The Vietcong kidnapped three teen-age girls and beat up a number of men.

About 70 per cent of the hamlets in which the montagnards of Vietnam, estimated at close to a million, live have already been uprooted, according to Gerald C. Hickey, an American anthropologist who is regarded as the leading expert on the hill people of Indochina.

“If these poorly implemented resettlements continue, there is a strong possibility that the montagnards will be left a poverty-stricken population living on the fringes of Vietnamese society,” Dr. Hickey said in an interview.

His views are shared by most of the Americans concerned with civil affairs. The Minister of Social Welfare, Dr. Phieu, expressed sympathy with the montagnards but said that the generals did not often communicate their plans to him.

The Banson area in the hill country north of the Lao capital of Vientiane is the center of life for the Meo mountain tribesmen and other northern hill tribes. The United States feeds about 120,000 of them, by airdrop, helicopter and plane delivery and by handing food over to those who come on foot into the valley.

The Communist soldiers of North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao left thinly defended Banson alone until last March 6. Early that morning they broke in.

“A woman sat weeping softly in the wreckage of a shack near the airstrip. She pointed to a ‘stem bundle’ at her feet. ‘Only one, only one,’ she said, and raised her hand with the index finger pointing upward.

The bundle was her daughter, her only child, killed a few hours earlier by a grenade fragment. The Americans who work there called the child the watermelon girl, because of what she sold, smiling at them and joking. She was 12.

Nearby lay the body of the only enemy soldier killed in the attack. He was a Meo; some people said, but others thought that he was a Lao or a Vietnamese. He seemed little older than the watermelon girl.

The mountain people of northern Laos have been on the move since the early nineteen-sixties, retreating while fighting the North Vietnamese invaders. Most have had no time to stop and grow their rice in years, and they have depended on the United States for most of their necessities. In return, they have fought.

But there are few mountains left and life in the larger communities of the plain fills them with apprehension. American and Lao and friends of the tribesmen fear that the attacks on their civilian centers are a final warning that the depleted tribes must be led out of the enemy’s way and given a better chance of survival.
The continuing forcible relocation of montagnards in Vietnam is only the most striking case of Saigon’s turning its back on its stated policy of bringing security to the people rather than uprooting people to take them to security.

The policy was first proclaimed in the pacification plan for 1969, following years of what Dr. Phieu called “dumping people like baggage.” It was observed until the middle of last year, when General Dau resumed the relocation of montagnards.

This month similar operations were revived in Quang Ngai Province, a strongly contested area of Central Vietnam and the scene of much earlier dislocation of people. American pressure managed to hold up temporarily an operation that may remove about 12,000 people, but the operation has now received the required authorization, ex-post facto, and is proceeding.

An operation undertaken earlier this month slightly south of Quang Ngai City has already removed 650 people from a Vietcong-controlled valley.

The operation was ordered by Maj. Gen. Nguyen Van Toan, commander of the Second Division, and was strongly supported by his senior American adviser, Col. Stephen Day. But Maj. Ben G. Crosby 8d, who as district senior adviser is part of the civilian-military province advisory team, strongly voiced his team’s objections in a conversation with the colonel.

The major said the principal reason for the operation was to “upgrade” the rating of Quang Ngai Province on the hamlet evaluation scale, an American computerized classification of all populated places in South Vietnam as to security. The ratings run from “A” to “E” in descending order of security and end with “V,” a hamlet controlled by the enemy.

Major Crosby discounted the colonel by declaring that he thought the principal motive for the removal of the people from their homes and fields was to eliminate the V hamlets of the Songye Valley.

The area will be under Communist control, the major said, and the people will be away from their fields with not enough forces in the region after the operation has been completed to guarantee their security.

“I don’t have any confidence of operation,” Major Crosby said. “It’s like punching a pillow.”

“When we are forced to leave the insecure areas we can control them better,” said Vu Duc Chinh, a lieutenant colonel in charge of pacification and civil affairs of Military Region I in Danang, speaking of forced relocations.

“I have never yet seen a relocation that improves security in any significant way,” said an American refugee official with long experience in the region about which Colonel Chinh was talking.

“The rural population remains basically uncommitted. Their primary concern is their status quo. If they have land and draw from it their subsistence, and if they can look from one growing season to the next and see survival, they do not want to move.”

Among American refugee and pacification officials, from the top of the pyramid in Saigon to those at the district level, the conviction is nearly universal that the hamlet ratings are the chief villain in the return of the “refugee-generating” operations.

A high rating on the scale, designed as a “management tool” to help officials in judging the security situations, has become the goal.

Pressure for upgrading ratings, whether they reflect actual gains in security or not, originates in Washington, ranking officials say. It is then passed on, by the United States mission here, anxious to show success, to the Saigon authorities, who are eager to please, Washington, particularly if it can be done by bookkeeping devices.

The pressure was heightened, reliable American sources said, when President Nguyen Van Thieu quietly passed the word throughout his administration last spring that by the spring of this year he wanted all D and E hamlets brought to higher ratings.

The withdrawal of American troops, which spreads troops and security, more than, is believed to be another factor in Saigon’s renewal of efforts to concentrate the population.

Nguyen Thieu, deputy hamlet chief of Chiao, said he did not know that his native area was known as the Street Without Joy. It was named by the French solitary of the first war of Indochina, who found that the region,
of sand dunes north of Hue was more suited to the Communists than to their own forces. He said he was glad to be back, now that security had improved. This is home, said Dang Cuoc, a 67-year-old shopkeeper.

And Col. Ngo Van Loi, province chief of Quang Ngai, who came from Hanoi when the Communists took over, said, “All Vietnamese want to go home eventually.

“You too, colonel?”

“Yes,” he said, after a moment, “Me too.”

The people of Culac returned to their village in July, 1969. After having been made refugees by the fighting in March 1967.

The Government’s Return to the Village Program has helped 900,000 South Vietnamese to rebuild their lives in or near the places from which they were driven. It is the fundamental aim of most Vietnamese who have not made a new life in a city, for their ties to the native soil are strong and durable.

The return is voluntary and is usually decided on by the village elders after inspection of the site and assurances of reasonable security.

Those who resettle are entitled to a food allowance of 3,600 piasters ($13) a person and 10 sheets of tin roofing and a 7,500-piaster ($27) construction allowance a family. Since most are not familiar with their entitlements, it is believed that many have gotten less than their due.

Even critics of the Vietnamese and American attitudes toward refugees agree that Return to Village has worked well and is consistent with the desires of the people. They hope that the increase in secure areas that has made possible the growth of the program is due more to a real increase in Government strength than to a tactical decision by the Communists to maintain a null in fighting until the Americans withdraw.

There are more houses in Culac now than before the people were driven out, the housekeeper on the Street Without Joy said, but the village was nicer then.

“There were green fences,” he related, “and good gardens, trees and flowers. Perhaps years and years later people will make Culac nice again.”

“I do not know when,” the shopkeeper continued, “Even the Government does not know.”

“Peace depends on the Governments of Saigon and America,” the deputy hamlet chief said, “About the Government in Hanoi we do not know at all.”

[From Time Magazine, May 10, 1971]

INDOCHINA: A GENERATION OF REFUGEES

The abbreviated Teletype messages dribble endlessly into offices in Saigon, printing out the cold statistics of blood and violence. At times the tempo is feverish, at times sluggish:

22 April 71 2300 hrs. Tan Long hamlet, Nhon An Village, Nhon District. Unknown No. VC (Viet Cong) infiltrated hamlet, killed two civ and kidnapped the hamlet chief and his wife.


Saigon, May 1 (AP) — US B-52 bombers flew missions in South Viet Nam's northern sector for the third straight day, aiming bomb drops at dirt roads and trails used by the enemy. Four flights of the eight-engine jets, a total of 12 planes, unloaded 360 tons of explosives.

These relentless bulletins are part of a chronicle of immense human suffering, caused, with a hammer-and-anvil effect, by both Viet Cong terrorism and U.S. firepower. The victim of that disaster is the civilian population, all too easily overlooked amid the concern for American and South Vietnamese military casualties. In the process, millions of civilians, the innocent and largely silent victims, have been killed, injured or rendered homeless. In South Viet Nam alone, there have been an estimated 1,050,000 civilian casualties, including 325,000 dead, since 1965. Reliable figures on civilian losses are not available for Cambodia, but it is estimated that 10,000 Laotian
civilians have been killed and 20,000 injured since the heavy air war over Laos began in early 1969.

Of the survivors, vast numbers displaced by the terror and the bombs have moved to special camps or have taken refuge in the filthy shantytowns of cardboard and corrugated tin that embrace the outskirts of all the major cities. A few found ways to earn a little money, although jobs are harder to find now that the GI's are leaving Viet Nam. Most are merely waiting for the chance to go home.

The war's most ubiquitous—and most poignant—victims are the children. Some are orphaned, some maimed, some merely lost. Only 50% attend the first three grades in school. A professor at Saigon University remarks, "When I was growing up, the rice fields were full of herons and cranes. These are things I can never show my children." Demented their traditional birthright, many of Viet Nam's youngsters are spending their childhood cooped up in cities that have become seemingly permanent bomb-shelters.

Rise of Urbanization. Nobody knows for certain how many refugees there are, but it is generally believed that about one-third of the 27 million people who live in Indochina have been driven from their homes.

In South Viet Nam, according to Senator Edward Kennedy's Judiciary Subcommittee on Refugees, which has been investigating the problem since 1965, the total number of refugees has reached 6,000,000.

In Laos (pop. 3,000,000), some 700,000 people have been displaced since 1962. Many fled from their homes last year when North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao forces recaptured the Plain of Jars after ten days of fighting. Others have been forced from their villages by U.S. bombs. The terror of the Laoian bombings has been reflected in a series of refugees' drawings collected by Fred Branfman, formerly of the International Voluntary Services.

In Cambodia, the refugee problem is less severe because the war there has scarcely a year old. The population of Phnom-Penh, the capital, has grown by 400,000, but the city has absorbed them gracefully. "The refugee problem hasn't surfaced yet," says a Western diplomat. "Give it another year." Moreover, since far less land is owned by absentee landlords than in Viet Nam, the average Cambodian peasant is less apt to leave it in moments of stress, and more anxious to return to it when the fighting eases. Cambodia's most serious refugee problem has been the plight of the ethnic Vietnamese, who became the target of war-inflamed hatred last year. About 200,000 have been repatriated to Viet Nam; tens of thousands of others remain in squalid camps in Cambodia.

The reasons for the massive displacement of civilians have been debated as heatedly as any of the basic tenets of the war. U.S. officials maintain that most of the problem in Viet Nam was created by the Tet offensive of 1968 and other Viet Cong harassment of innocent villagers. U.S. antiwar groups insist with equal fervor that the problem has been created solely by American policies and bombs. Both sides in the bitter struggle have played a role in turning a proud, independent rural people into a displaced urban population, and the process is far from over.

Free-Fire Zones. The nature of the guerrilla war precipitated the dislocation. Viet Cong tactics derived with bloody logic from the Maoist metaphor that compared the guerrilla to a fish in the sea of humanity. Viet Cong terrorists viewed village officials as legitimate targets and the murder of innocent peasants as ideologically justified. "It is better to kill ten innocent persons," according to a Radio Hanoi slogan, "than to let one guilty person escape." Countless peasants fled their homes to escape terrorism. U.S. military power accelerated the process. In adapting traditional weaponry to guerrilla warfare, military strategists placed heavy reliance on body counts and too little emphasis on the lives of innocent civilians.

Vast areas of Indochina beyond the urban centers are "free-fire zones," where any moving person can be fair game. In the late 1960's, brigade-size units regularly cruunched through the countryside on search-and-destroy missions; during the same period, artillery laced patterns of "H & I" (harassment and interdiction) fire from dusk until dawn, throwing tons of shells at village crossroads that might—or might not—be used as routes for infiltration. Bombs still fall from unseen planes without warning; some inevitably land in the wrong place, others in the right place but on the wrong people. Bureaucratic demands for a show of allied progress on the basis of "hamlet-
evaluation systems" have sometimes encouraged officials to evacuate villages unnecessarily. In early April, 650 people were removed from a Viet Cong-controlled valley south of Quang Ngai city. A U.S. senior adviser subsequently charged that the real motive behind the exercise was not a military need but a desire to eliminate the "V"-rated (Viet Cong-controlled) hamlets and thus improve the overall rating of Quang Ngai province.

Children of War. The streets of Saigon contain an incredible panorama of Hieronymous Bosch figures—limbless veterans stumbling about in camouflage fatigues, hideously "napalmed" women, nursing children on the sidewalks, deaf-mute prostitutes selling their wares in sign language, and lepers holding bats in gnarled, swollen hands. But few are more poignant than the ever-present "street children."

By day, these Asian Oliver Twists scratch out a living by pimpling and peddling drugs to American G.I.s, stealing the watches and shining the shoes of American civilians, and always trying—but not always succeeding—in keeping a footfall ahead of the police. By night, they make a bed out of a door stoop, windowsill or car seat, with a discarded magazine under their heads and an army poncho for cover.

Most of their parents are dead, the victims of bullets and bombs. Some of the street kids are the illegitimate offspring of American G.I.s (unlike the French government, the U.S. has never provided aid for such children or their mothers). The street kids are among the most innocent of the war's victims, and the most neglected. One of the few people who have tried to give them a roof and a purpose is Richard Hughes, an ex-actor from Boston, who has created five "project homes" for them.

How Many Tears? Each boy's life story is a vignette of the war. Huu Ket, 12, survived an attack on his village by U.S. planes because he was playing in a distant field; an old woman sent him to Saigon, and for three years he shined shoes and slept on the streets until he moved to Hughes' "Hope 5" hostel. After his father was killed by the Viet Cong, Nguyen Van Thanh, 12, ran away from his village and met a bar girl, who brought him to Saigon; there he ran away again and moved to the streets. When Son ("Mountain") was eight, his mother left him in an orphanage and disappeared to the U.S. with his father. He disliked the orphanage, partly because of the harsh treatment and partly because of an air strike by U.S. planes that were trying to bomb a Viet Cong stronghold. Finally Son ran away and collected enough money by begging to buy a bus ticket to Saigon.

Hughes has succeeded in helping many of his young charges, but failed with others. One boy, after attempting suicide at the age of 15, was killed in a traffic accident two years later. In his pocket his friends found a one-plaster note on which he had written "How many tears, how many drops of sweat?"

Of the 200 kids to whom Hughes has given refuge in the past year, no fewer than 15 have committed suicide.

The war has had an equally brutalizing effect on the young girls of Viet Nam. For them, marriage is an increasingly unattainable goal; families and clans have been scattered, eligible young men have been killed or are away at war. In the chaos of war and relocation, tens of thousands of girls have gone to the cities to become prostitutes, often lured by newspaper ads promising money, English-language lessons and good times to those who become "hostesses." An astonishing number of Viet Nam's 300,000 whores tell the same story: they live in fear that their family will find out the truth about the "city job" that pays far more than their parents ever earned.

The effect of war on Viet Nam's preadolescents is just as devastating. The records of Saigon's Center for Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery are full of case histories of childhood gone awry. A 10-year-old girl fell into a well running in the fields outside Nha Trang when he stumbled upon a fountain pen. Shouting to his friends, he placed the pen in his mouth and bit into it; it turned out to be a Chinese-made plastique bomb that destroyed half his face. Similarly, a 35-year-old named An was raiding a garbage heap at the U.S. airbase at Tan Hoa when he set off a mine that blew off both his legs. The center has operated on some 3,000 children burned by napalm, white phosphorus ("Willie Pete" to the G.I.s) or the highly flammable JP4 jet fuel that sometimes finds its way to the local black market as cooking fuel. Earlier this year, its doctors treated a 15-year-old girl whose hands had
been cruelly burned by an incendiary bomb years before. "I'm convinced," says the hospital's Dr. John Champlin, "that out in the bushes there are many people who'll come in after the war. We haven't hit 20% of the injuries yet."

**Beginning of Debate.** There is also the question of how many may have suffered genetic damage from the herbicides used in defoliation. A cause-and-effect relationship has not been proved. But, says Champlin, "I do not know a doctor in this country who doesn't think there is a higher incidence of birth defects in this generation than the last and who doesn't attribute it to the use of herbicides."

The U.S. experience in Viet Nam has proved that, if guerrilla wars are to be fought at all, new ways must be devised to protect the innocent. The subject has not attracted noticeable attention in any of the Communist countries that sponsor terrorism, but it is causing considerable concern in a U.S. shaken by the disclosures of My Lai and the general effect of the war on the Vietnamese populace. As a first step, Senator Kennedy recommended last week that the President create a military-practices review board that would advise the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Said Kennedy: "There continues to be a vast gap between the official policy of our Government and the performance in the field. We must resolve that what has been done in Indochina in America's name will never happen again." The subcommittee's hearings may well represent the beginning of a national debate that will last as long as U.S. soldiers are fighting in Indochina and until the last refugee has been resettled.

**From Time Magazine, May 10, 1971**

**The Agony of Going Home.**

For most of South Viet Nam's displaced population, rehabilitation is years away, but a few have gone home already under the government's "return to village" project. Time Correspondent Jonathan Lorenz visited two settlements in Quang Nam province last week. His report:

The narrow northern end of South Viet Nam once had the ethereal beauty of a Chinese scroll. The Annamese mountain chain sloped and plunged from the Laotian border eastward into the tight flat iron plains that hugged the coast, generating white water rivers and misty waterfalls. Woodcutters prowled the thick jungle at will looking for hardwood cinnamon, hunters tracked boar and rabbit, and farmers tilled neat, geometric rice paddies in the rich lap of the foothills.

Now that idyllic landscape has become one of the major battlefields of the longest war in American history. The mountain jungles have been cratered and burned and sprayed; the woodcutters and hunters have fled. The farmers have been driven east; their villages leveled and their fields scorched and abandoned. The people of Quang Nam province, once scattered like seed across the land, are now huddled together along the shoulders of new cement roads in huts made from U.S. artillery crates.

At Thanh Tay, 7,000 refugees are crowded into an area hardly big enough for a dozen water buffalo. Thanh Tay is known as a "temporary resettlement camp," but it has been in use since 1965, when the fishing village of Cam Hai was overrun by the Viet Cong. Its people now live in four long, tin-roofed sheds, in cubicles divided "off like horse stalls; six to ten people occupy each stall. Ironically, peace has already returned to their former village, but their houses are occupied by the 2nd Korean Brigade, so the refugees will not be able to go home until the soldiers leave."

In stark contrast to Thanh Tay, Phu Loc is a model return-to-village project. Its 200 families came back last April after spending several years as unregistered refugees. In earlier times, Phu Loc was a prosperous hamlet of brick houses on some of Quang Nam's richest river land. Besides raising rice and corn, the farmers had their lucrative silk industry.

The new houses of Phu Loc are made of artillery crates laid out in rigidly straight lines and bunched together for security. In 1965, the area was completely burned by American bombs because the land was too rich to leave to the Communists. Today, not a single tree or bamboo shoot grows there. Asked what he missed most from earlier times, the village chief replied:
"The jack-fruit trees and the bamboo. They gave us wood, fruit and shade. Now it will take at least five years for the trees to grow back."
The area is only marginally secure. The village is fortified like a cavalry compound in the old American West. Women and children venture beyond the village perimeters only by day, and then with care. "When the Americans were still here, the government 'cadre' could go all the way to the 'river,'" the chief recalled. "Now they can go only half-way." Future security, he said, would depend on regular government-troop operations: "If they have enough troops to make those operations, we will be safe. If they don't, we will be in trouble."

Nonetheless, the people of Phu Loc are better off than most of their former neighbors; it will take years and perhaps decades to bring back all of Quang Nam's refugees. However, one wonders about the people, squatting in their refugee camps with little gainful employment, thrown into an urban environment they can hardly understand or cope with, many have lost their grip on their traditions and values. The land will mend, but what of the social fabric? In some places it is already tattered beyond repair, and the longer those millions of refugees stay cooped up in their tin sheds, the more the fabric will unravel.

[From the Boston Globe, May 28, 1971]
WHAT LIFE IS LIKE IN INDOCHINA
(By Michael Parks)

VIENNTE, Laos.—For centuries, Laotians have prayed each spring for early rains. Until a few years ago, they were sought for the rice crop. Now they are wanted to halt the Communists' dry-season offensives.

The rains are beginning now in Laos, but no one is sure that they will bring the usual respite from war this year. The Communist Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese may continue fighting through the wet season.

There seem to be so many new factors in the equation of peace and war that many observers believe it has been substantially modified—but to what no one knows. Among the principal charges:

-The acknowledged inability of government forces to launch an effective rainy season offensive for the second year and the prospect that North Vietnamese forces will hold their advanced positions around the strategic Plain of Jars.

- Efforts by North Vietnamese troops in the southern Laotian Panhandle to spread their complex of supply trails and storage areas westward. For the second year, the North Vietnamese are apparently prepared to continue working through the rainy season.

-The on-and-off talks about peace negotiations between the government of Premier Souvanna Phouma and the Pathet Lao. Despite recent signs of revival, most diplomats believe the talks will be unproductive until the Pathet Lao are put in a winner-take-all position by the North Vietnamese army.

-A growing feeling that the 1962 peace formula has been rendered unworkable by the Vietnam war.

- Finally, the apparently spreading friction between the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese, who outnumbered them by about 70,000 to 35,000. More than 200 Pathet Lao have defected in large groups, led by their officers and bringing their families in the last two months.

This winter's American-backed South Vietnamese invasion of Laos plays only a marginal role in these calculations, for there are really two wars in Laos.

TWO WARS

One is between the Vientiane government and the Communists for control of the north and its population. The other is between the United States and South Vietnam and the Communists for the North Vietnamese supply routes in the south.

Shortly after the South Vietnamese pulled back from Laos, the Laotian Defense Minister, Prince Sisouk Na Champassak, commented in Vientiane, "When South Vietnam came in, they said it would help us tremendously in the south of Laos. Actually, we hardly knew they were there. Our war is to the north."
Indeed, the fall of three key positions in southern Laos along the nine and on the edge of the Bolovens Plateau caused nowhere near the concern as did the North Vietnamese threat to Luang Prabang, the royal capital north of Vientiane.

The Communists did not take Luang Prabang—although no one really thought they would—but they have not begun to pull back with the start of the rainy season, which makes resupply difficult.

The rainy season also reduces the amount of support the government’s 55,000 soldiers will receive from the US Air Force, which has made Laos the most heavily bombed country in history in the American determination to prevent its loss to the Communists.

The bombing has also turned about a third of the country’s three million people into refugees at some time in the course of the conflict.

Politically and economically, Laos is almost totally dependent upon the United States, which provides about $50 million in economic assistance and whose support of Prince Souvanna Phouma as premier renders a semiannual coup attempts futile.

American officials here say the United States does not enjoy its role as the preserver of Laos, but they expect little from current efforts to start peace talks unless the Communists’ position improves—which is something the US Air Force works around the clock to prevent.

“One is always in the peculiar position of seeing in near-calamities, like the government’s military position, a silver lining, such as the possibility of serious peace talks,” said a western diplomat.

Although all parties to the Laotian conflict still express hope for a settlement under the 1962 Geneva agreement that set up a tripartite neutralist government, there is a growing conviction here that this is outdated and a new formula will have to be found—if serious peace talks ever begin, that is.

“The clock would have to be turned back 10 years, to before Vietnam blew up, to make those accords work,” said one Communist diplomat recently. “It is impossible to settle the Laotian question until the Vietnam question is settled...”

But the defection of more than 200 Pathet Lao soldiers with their families in southern Laos in the last two months may cause the Communists to move more quickly for a settlement than now foreseen.

“The implications of these soldiers’ return to the government side are immense,” said Prince Sisouk. “They show the great disillusionment all patriotic Lao are undergoing as they are increasingly dominated by the North Vietnamese.

“We could quickly reach an accommodation with the Pathet Lao and end our war. Then the war in the south, where no Lao live, would simply be between the parties to the war in Vietnam.”

CAMBODIA

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia.—Cambodia’s slow-motion political crisis that left it without a government for almost three weeks is now resolved, but the interregnum underscored the country’s vulnerability to military, social and political catastrophe.

The new premier delegate, Prince Sisowath Sirik Mataak, is now faced with overcoming the Khmers’ basic inertia to resolve a series of increasingly pressing problems for which no one can see easy, early or complete answers.

But Gen. Sirik Mataak, despite his reputation as an efficient administrator, does not enjoy the universal confidence that the titular premier, Marshal Lon Nol, did.

“If we are to survive, our government must act quickly and decisively,” said a former cabinet minister recently, “but our government now is of one coalition and thus it will be able to move only when a consensus is reached.”

“Also I believe this government will last only until one faction or personality has gathered enough support to push the others out.”

Many observers, both Cambodian and foreign, warn that further political squabbles will only divert attention from the Phnom Penh regime’s efforts to survive the 50,000 man North Vietnamese attack.

Although the Cambodian army now numbers about 185,000 men, about a third of whom are armed and trained, it will be able to launch only limited offensives for the next year in the view of most military observers here.

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If it loses no territory, the government will control one-third of the country and the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong one-third. The rest is a no man's land, and, controlled by whoever happens to be there at the time.

**ATTACK FAILED**

South Vietnam's invasion of Laos diverted Communist attention from Cambodia this spring, according to the Cambodian high command, but another South Vietnamese offensive to break up new enemy sanctuaries failed.

As a result, a Western military attache said recently, "Cambodia survived another year, but the stage has been set for bigger, bloodier battles over the new sanctuaries. The Laos operation may be cited as a failure—I don't think it was that bad—but the decisive loss was in Cambodia."

The Phnom Penh government's inability to retrieve lost territory also means that the Vietnamese Communists are virtually undisturbed in their efforts to recruit or impress Cambodians for their forces, which ostensibly are fighting to return the ousted chief of state, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, to power.

As American and South Vietnamese bombing continues, many Cambodian peasants seem increasingly neutral in the war and even reluctant to support the government. "It is no longer important to me who wins," said a farmer at the heavily damaged village of Taing Raur: "Peace is what is important."

The government hopes that retaining Marshal Lon Nol, able to work only an hour a day following a February stroke, will provide inspiration for the country's seven million people as well as effecting a truce among all politicians in Phnom Penh.

**DUBIOUS**

But many diplomats are dubious. "Sirik Matak is going to have to do unpopular things to keep what's left of this country together," said one European ambassador, "he is going to have to reduce corruption, make the people work longer hours and generally knock heads together."

"But factionalism is increasing, and we haven't seen the last of the power grabs, and then the government must still make good on its commitment to establish a more open, republican regime."

At the first meeting of the new 14-man cabinet, Gen. Sirik Matak set a 3-month deadline for the drafting of a new constitution, which will be followed by elections.

The premier-delegate also ordered "immediate steps," which were not spelled out, to control Cambodia's compounding inflation. Most foods are still plentiful if more expensive. Manufactured consumer products are increasingly scarce, however.

"The economy is a worry, but our only real concern is keeping the cities fed," said Brig. Gen. In Tam, the new first vice-premier and former president of the national assembly. "We are afraid our farmers may plant only what they themselves need, and that would be very serious."

The United States has allowed up to $30 million for food in its economic aid program, which also includes $70 million to finance imports. The current military assistance program totals $185 million.

Next year's assistance is expected to jump to $110 million in economic aid and perhaps $200 million in military assistance.

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**A. LAOS**

*[From the Washington Post, May 23, 1971]*

**LAOS: A CASE OF OVERKILL**

(By Laurence Stern)

The writer, an assistant managing editor of The Washington Post, was its chief correspondent in Indochina in 1970.

The seven-year-old American air war in northern Laos has been waged, by and large, out of the range of television, cameras and newsmen and—until recently—Senate debates.

Only within the past year has there been a dawning of public awareness in the United States of the punishing intensity with which American airpower has been brought to bear on the little Indochinese kingdom. By the admissions of American officials closely associated with the war there, Laos has been the most heavily bombed country in the history of aerial warfare.
...Yet today, despite the hundreds of thousands of tons of explosives dumped on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the south and populated "enemy-held" village in the north, the Communists control more territory than ever before in Laos. North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao forces are threatening the Mekong Valley population centers from Luang Prabang southward to Pakse, areas which have been under the control of the Royal Laotian government since the 1962 Geneva accords.

The bombings began without public notice in 1964, both against Communist infiltration trails and also in support of Royal Lao government forces in the Plain of Jars, which has been traded back and forth between the opposing sides of the struggle for many years.

Gradually the pace of the bombing stepped up to its peak in 1968 and 1969 after the halt in the bombing of North Vietnam. If it were not for the development of new targets in Laos, combat operations of the 7th and the combined 7th/18th Air Forces, based in Vietnam and Thailand, would have been drastically reduced. The planes and bombs were available as a result of the halt, and so they were turned on Laos. The number of daily sorties by American jet bombers then rose to more than 700, according to testimony given to congressional committees by State Department and military witnesses.

A POINTLESS BLUDGEON?

Some day it may be argued that Laos—even more than Vietnam—could be the supreme example of air power's ineffectiveness against a determined though primitively equipped subpower.

But the more immediately discernible truth is that the chief casualties of the war that has been waged from the air as well as on the ground have not been the Communist military forces but the thousands of civilians driven from their villages into crowded government centers or the jungle.

There has been a dispute of near-theological intensity over whether the great refugee flood in Laos (roughly 700,000 in the past decade) has been generated by the bombings or by Communist military activity. The official U.S. view, as it is expressed by former Ambassador to Laos William H. Sullivan, is that the bombings have not, under our rules of engagement, been directed against populated villages. The targets, it is asserted, are primarily the Ho Chi Minh Trail as it traverses the Laotian panhandle, and enemy military concentrations in the north.

There have been American officials in Vientiane, however, who concede privately that American bombs have fallen on populated centers in Laos by "stupidity and confusion," rather than by intentional violation of the public rules of engagement.

And there are yet others, both in and out of government, who feel on the basis of their own investigations in Laos that the U.S. agencies involved in prosecution of the war are deliberately bombing villages in order to destroy the Pathet Lao "civilian infrastructure."

One classified survey of refugees from the Plain of Jars, which was forced into the public domain by Rep. Paul N. McCloskey Jr. (R-Calif.), revealed that 97 per cent of the sample group had experienced a bombing attack; 75 per cent said their homes had been damaged by bombing.

The survey was conducted by the United States Information Service, which operates as an arm of the American embassy. It sharply contradicted the claim by U.S. officials in Vientiane that bombing of villages was a rare and accidental occurrence.

In March of last year I visited a refugee camp some 20 miles east of Vientiane, where 900 residents of a village on the Plain of Jars were trying to resettle under the supervision of the Agency for International Development. An interpreter was provided by AID officials.

The refugees told a consistent story. They had been evacuated from the Plain of Jars, then in its customary state of being contested, by Air America pilots on Feb. 5, 1970. It was the first day of a massive airlift that carried some 17,000 Laotian men, women and children from their embattled villages to the Vientiane plain, beyond the range of the shooting and bombing.

These simple villagers could describe with chilling precision the nomenclature of American fighter-bomber aircraft, such as F-4s and F-105s. They were also intimately acquainted with the various explosives dropped from the skies: antipersonnel cluster bomb units (CBU's), white phosphorous bombs, napalm,...
The villagers fashioned curtains from the bare parachutes used for night-bombing and made lamp bases of the flare tubes.

Although the Pathet Lao had first moved into the Plain of Jars in 1964 and their village sawed between Communist and government control repeatedly, life had not become intolerable; they said, until the last two years of the intensified bombing—1968 and 1969. Today, whatever is left of their native village of Moung Koun is still under Pathet Lao-North Vietnamese control.

Possibly the most extensive chronicle of the impact of the bombings on Lao villages in the north was compiled by Fred Branfman, who spent four years as an educational adviser to the International Voluntary Services Inc. and also as an independent writer. Branfman, who speaks Lao, interviewed more than a thousand refugees from northern and southern Laos. All of them, asserts Branfman, said their villages were either fully or partially destroyed by aerial bombardment. He was expelled from Laos by the government early this year.

If the refugees were to be believed, the American air war—whether by accident or design—was directed at populated villages, contrary to the public rules of engagement announced by the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane. If the official government version is correct, then there is no way to account for the pervasive thrust of the refugee testimony from the Plain of Jars.

A QUESTION OF CONTROL

Technically, the American ambassador in Vientiane, G. McMurtre Godley III, must approve and "validate" every bombing target in Laos. These target decisions are theoretically reviewed and coordinated with the 7th and 7th/13th Air Forces as well as the Central Intelligence Agency, which oversees and underwrites Gen. Vang Pao’s Meo tribal army. Vang Pao has done the bulk of the government’s fighting in the Plain of Jars.

With the rate of daily sorties by American jet bombers soaring into the hundreds, it is easy to see how such a complex process of target review could break down in operation.

During his recent and controversial visit to Laos, McCloskey heard the same testimony that the refugees in government camps have given visiting journalists and government investigators since March of last year.

McCloskey has raised the question of how many of the 8,500 villages behind Pathet Lao lines may already have been destroyed by air. There is the related question of how many of the 150,000 refugees generated during the 1969-70 fighting period were a result of the aerial war.

But the more fundamental question is whether the aerial bombardment of northern Laos, which does not lie along the infiltration corridor into South Vietnam, serves any purposes—Laotian, American or Vietnamese.

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WAR TURNS LAOS CAPITAL TO REFUGEE NIGHTMARE

(By Tammy Arbuckle)

LUANG PRABANG, LAOS.—More than 9,000 refugees have flooded into the Lao royal capital, fleeing Communist forces north of the city.

The influx is causing severe sanitation and water supply problems, Lao and U.S. officials said. Luang Prabang’s population is 20,000.

Officials took correspondents to a sand bar in the middle of the Mekong River opposite King Savang Vatthana’s Palace.

There several thousand refugees are living in straw lean-tos without water or sanitation facilities.

The sand bar is completely devoid of vegetation and exposed to the blazing sun. Several refugees on the island died of dysentery despite treatment by a Swiss medical team.

An outbreak of cholera is feared.

The sand island is just a few hundred square yards in size and the refugees are squeezed like sardines. Some lean-tos are right at the water’s edge.

“Those people chose to set themselves up here. I don’t know why. We couldn’t stop them,” an official said.
For 3,890 on the banks of the Mekong, conditions are just as bad. Here, there are two groups—Mee tribemen and Lao Theung tribes.

The Mee are living in low-lying burnt rice fields, blistered by the sun and wind. Their only shelter is straw lean-tos. Water is scarce. Dysentery and other tropical diseases such as yaws are prevalent. They are living off U.S. rice drops.

Nearby, in search of coolness, Lao Theung families have built grass shelters in a gully among the rice fields.

STINKING WATER

The gully still has water in it, rapidly drying into a series of muddy pools. The water stinks.

“We are trying to teach these people about sanitation but it’s difficult. They squat down everywhere,” an official said.

City officials say Luang Prabang’s water storage facilities are for the population influx. There is no water half the day.

More refugees are on their way here. In villages north of here along the Mekong people are collecting their possessions, jumping into their boats and heading for the capital.

At one place, Muong Kham, three miles north of the capital, people jumped into boats as Lao troops moved up in an assault on Communist positions.

Officials expect the refugee total in Luang Prabang to reach 14,000 within a few days, further straining the city’s meager resources.

[From the Evening Star, March 30, 1971]

A DAY OF LAOS WAR TO RETAKE VILLAGE, THEN TAKE IT AGAIN

(By Tammy Arbuckle)

LUANG PRABANG, Laos.—The fighting is see-sawing across sun-dried fields, through the sharp thorn bushes and elephant grass three miles north of here, as Lao government troops try to push North Vietnamese forces back from positions they use to shell the airstrip or the royal capital.

In the early morning, lines of soldiers snake through banana plantations and deserted villages, moving up to attack.

Government mortar bangs sporadically. A child, wearing a monk’s orange robe, scurries out of the temple carrying his few possessions.

The government’s first objective is a wooden bridge on Route 4, leading to King Savang Vatthana’s farm. The second objective is the village of Ban Don Cho which has changed hands several times in the last few days.

RAVEN SPOTS TARGETS

As the troops move up three Lao dive bombers swoop over, led by “Raven,” the American air controller who spots targets. Soon comes the rumble of bombs and cannon fire. The Lao troops perk up.

On a brush-covered knoll the Laotians pass through their forward special guerrilla unit positions. The target is 300 yards away and it is reported that 40 enemy troops are in the gully under the bridge.

The Lao troops lob a few mortar rounds at the bridges and move forward in line. There is the brief crackle of small arms; then they’ve taken the bridge. There was no opposition.

LUNCH WITH A VIEW

The Lao soldiers settle down for the noon meal, sticky rice and U.S. C-rations. They sit on an outcropping of rock, watching the air force soften up the next target, a ridge above Ban Don Cho.

Raven drones over, placing marker rockets on the ridge. Then come the dive bombers, using napalm, rockets and bombs.

There are about 30 sorties in waves of three.

Lao troops cheer as one particularly daring pilot seems to scrape the tops of the trees before firing.

As the aircraft return to Luang Prabang, mortar shells fall around the bridge, sending the troops scrambling for cover.
The Lao commander, Col. Khampet, is in a rage. He thinks another Lao unit, code-named "Red Tiger," are firing on his troops. He can't raise "Red Tiger" on the radio and in frustration stands and bellows at them to cease fire.

Suddenly there is another burst of small arms fire—Communist AKs! The mortars are coming from the enemy on the hills.

One government soldier, hit in the head and face, walks back supported by two companions. The firing stops again.

Fifteen minutes later the small arms and mortar fire resumes. Government howitzers put down a barrage which silences the Communists. Lao troops later find that the artillery knocked out the mortar.

NO ATTACK THAT NIGHT

But the Lao commanders still aren't happy. They are advancing up the valley with the Mekong River on their left and the Communist-held ridge on the right. They fear the enemy will come down from the hills and cut them off from Luang Prabang. They move forward with caution.

By late afternoon they are on the ridge overlooking Ban Don Cho, the second objective. The men dig foxholes in the hard, stony soil. The expected counterattack does not come that night. The next morning the troops move through the village. The only enemy found there are five dead Vietnamese and one alive but stunned.

HANOI TOOTHPASTE

The wounded man's clothes and Czech-made submachine gun are covered with blood. He has been hit by several bomb fragments.

As he is questioned in Vietnamese, by a correspondent, he claims he cannot hear. He speaks with a Hanoi accent. He carries toothpaste with "Hanoi Soap Factory" written in English on the tube.

The Laotians don't want to advance further. They dig in at the village. If the enemy puts on pressure tonight the Lao will have to retreat.

Then there will be another day advancing to retake the same bridge, the same ridge, the same village.

(From the Far Eastern Economic Review, Feb. 27, 1971)

THE VICTIMS

(By Fred Branfman)

VIENTIANE, LAOS.—Officially, American bombing in Laos and Cambodia is limited to "air support for troops in combat" or "enemy troop concentrations or structures." Over a thousand interviews with refugees from communist zones, however, contradict this. Every refugee has stated that his village was destroyed by bombing while he still inhabited it. In almost all cases refugees report there was no ground fighting, and communist soldiers were dug into mountains or roamed the forest some distance from their village.

The American embassy here estimates that over a million civilians inhabit the mountainous two-thirds of Laos controlled by the Pathet Lao. The past year has brought more than 30,000 of them into the Mekong Valley, and their reports have given outsiders the first clear picture of the life under bombing now being led by the hundreds of thousands of villagers left behind.

The refugees say that from 1964 until 1967, bombing of villages was relatively sporadic and mostly conducted by Lao and American-propelled aircraft. But in 1968 regular bombing of villages began, largely by American jets, and most were evacuated. Raids increased considerably after November 1968, when jets were diverted into Laos after the bombing halt over North Vietnam. In 1969, according to the refugees, the situation became even worse, with bombing attacks occurring as often as five or six times on a given day. As an old man put it, "the planes came like the birds, and the bombs fell like the rain."

During 1967 and 1968 most moved into the forest in the vicinity of their villages. They constructed small bamboo shelters near caves, trenches dug into hills, or holes camouflaged by sticks and leaves. Many stayed in their hiding-places for months on end. Others would live in their shelters, running for a
trench, cave or hole at the sound of an aircraft. It took four people about a month to dig a trench or hole suitable for a family. Most households report that they dug several such hideaways during the course of the heavy bombing. "We would try to find places where we thought the planes wouldn't bomb," a 62-year-old woman from the Plain of Jars explained, "but in the end they bombed everywhere."

As a result, the bombing caused heavy casualties—often as high as 25% in villages surveyed. Most civilians were killed or wounded by anti-personnel bombs, though victims of 500-pound bombs, napalm, fragmentation bombs and strafing have also appeared in refugee camps. The villagers had to leave their retreats regularly to raise food, care for livestock, pound rice, and perform other such essential tasks. Many casualties occurred during these occasions.

Older people and children form an unusually high percentage of the victims. This was because the children were the most likely to become afraid and fail to find shelter during a raid. Older people "could not run fast enough" or did not react quickly due to the disabilities of age.

Education, commerce, religious observance and agricultural production were severely curtailed. Even before 1000 schools, markets, co-operative stores and pagodas had to be relocated in the forest. Heavier bombing after that made regular groupings of people almost impossible.

Fear of being seen from the air also restricted farming activities. By 1969 villages had abandoned most of their ricefields, turning to cultivation of manioc in the forest and subsistence plots of rice. They worked on their fields mainly at night, with the aid of small kerosene lamps. Harvested rice lying out in the open was a particular target.

One of the greatest hardships was the long and often hazardous porterage of ammunition and rice for the Pathet Lao. Before the bombing began, the villagers say: the guerilla army handled its logistics itself. But as the raids grew in intensity, villagers were called upon to carry supplies for several months a year.

Livestock posed a particular problem. Many cows and buffaloes were killed by bombs or by ingesting grass or water poisoned by defoliants.

The danger of lighting fires is also often mentioned. Smoke by day or firelight at night tended to attract the bombers. People were often afraid to cook, and found it difficult to bear the cold during the freezing dry-season nights.

The material damage was considerable.

The bombings had little effect on the Pathet Lao army, refugees say. Communist guerillas could move through the forest in small groups, avoiding the villages. They were adept at digging-in and figuring out where aircraft were likely to strike. Interviews with about 100 Pathet Lao defectors tend to confirm this. One former company commander said: "The planes could rarely locate us. If they did, they could not come too low or we might shoot them down. If they stayed high, they could not hit us."

Refugee reports are supported by such eyewitness accounts as those of Jacques Détrornay, La Monde correspondent, who visited the Pathet Lao stronghold of Saint Neua province in the spring of 1968; US Senate studies issued by the Kennedy subcommittee on refugees and a paper prepared by a UN expert here.

The refugees interviewed are in some ways relatively fortunate—they are out of the firing line. Life under the bombs continues for hundreds of thousands of Laotians whose minimal wish, one can presume, is that American air activity be confined indeed to "troops in combat" or "enemy concentrations."

[From the Baltimore Sun, Feb. 21, 1971]

THE MEK OF LAOS—CIA, ALLIANCE BRINGS RUIN TO PROUD RACE

(By John B. Woodruff)

BAN SUN, LAOS.—A decade of feeding men into the only aggressive pro-government army in Laos has made totally dependent refugees of the hundreds of thousands of once fiercely independent hill tribesmen now gathered about this malaria-infested valley.

"I don't know why we carry on with these people," an Air American pilot shouted over the whine of his helicopter high above a cloud bank somewhere over northern Laos. "They don't fight any more, but we just go on dropping rice and medicine to them, just like in the old days."

"
PLENTY OF HELP

In Vientiane, a top American official discusses the relationship with the Meo and other hillmen who make up the Central Intelligence Agency's clandestine army:

"Look, they came to us for help [in 1960] and we have given them plenty of help."

He then hastens to assure his questioner that the United States can accept it philosophically if rank-and-file Meo finally make the uncomfortable accommodation with the North Vietnamese that he feels sure must inevitably come some day.

The accommodation is one that some Americans insist the tribesmen would have made several years and tens of thousands of lives ago had the Americans not armed them and exhorted them to keep fighting.

Until 1960, the Meo of Laos lived much as their grandfathers did—in primitive freedom and disease, on hilltops seldom lower than 3,500 feet, in villages of no more than 20 or 30 thatch houses.

WAY OF LIFE CHANGED

Since the mid-1800's, when they came from Yunnan province of China, where most Meo still live, they had often carried their flintlocks and crossbows down to the valleys to defend their independence against their Lao and other neighbors. The fights earned them a reputation as aggressive, cruel attackers.

The alliance with the Americans radically changed their way of fighting—and their way of living.

It turned the Meo into a far more modern and potent army than they could have imagined in 1945—long before the Americans came—when they added a few European rifles left over from World War II to their own primitive arsenal and won their first fight with the North Vietnamese.

For the Americans, it also provided the badly needed military punch that officials readily acknowledge was the main strength of all United States policy in Laos for the last 10 years.

But to many who have long watched the war in Laos, the new strength provided by the Americans seems, in ironic retrospect, to have been the tribesmen's downfall; it made them, these observers say, a force the North Vietnamese had to crush in order to maintain Communist control of the "liberated zones" of the country.

HALF AT BAN SON

Today, a fourth of the Meo, maybe more, are dead—thousands of soldiers from combat and tens of thousands of civilians from exhaustion or illness as they walked for weeks on end to escape the enemy they have fought for 10 years as allies of the United States.

More than half the Meo mountain tribesmen of Laos are gathered here now, and it is virtually impossible to find anyone here who has not lost at least one close relative to the long war.

Semi-official estimates—based on recorded death benefit payments—list 10,000 Meo, Lao Thung, Yao and Thai Dam tribesmen killed in combat, from an army that has probably never numbered more than 15,000 men at any one time.

But by far the greater death toll has been exacted by long walks forced upon entire villages in recent years since the Lao Peoples' Revolutionary Army and North Vietnamese troops began systematically removing both the CIA army and the Meo population from traditional Communist territory.

3-WEEK MARCHES

Some villagers have walked for as long as three weeks with little rest and scant food to escape enemy pressure. Some have had to move as many as six times in a single year as one outpost after another fell to the Communists.

A few village leaders tell gory tales of reprisal massacres in which, they say, North Vietnamese soldiers methodically slaughtered the women, children and old men who make up most of the refugees.

But these incidents seem to have been the exception. The most efficient killer has been the sheer torture of the long marches.
Weakened by exposure to hot sun or monsoon rains, exhausted by days or weeks of walking with only nominal rest stops, sometimes hungry for days on end until pilots with the United States Agency for International Development can find their trail and drop rice to them, the refugees soon fall victim to the chronic malaria which their bodies have learned to resist under normal conditions.

**YOUNGEST, OLDEST DIE**

The very young and the very old tend to die on the trail. So do mothers weakened by pregnancy or recent childbirth—and their number is far larger than in the West, for many Meo women bear children almost annually.

Many of those who survive the walk soon fall victim to the new strains of malaria or dysentery in their new home—or to the tuberculosis, pneumonia and dozens of other diseases to which the malaria and dysentery leave them susceptible. American refugee workers say that whenever they take a census at the end of a major move, between 10 and 15 per cent of the population is dead a year later.

Edgar L. Buell, a retired Indiana farmer who has worked with the Meo hill people since 1960, believes that the Meo and other hill tribes have lost a fourth of their population in refugee moves and combat.

**65,000 DEAD**

A combination of his estimate with the aid agency's figures showing about 200,000 tribal refugees now under American care suggests that more than 65,000 tribesmen have died—the vast majority of them Meo civilians forced to leave their villages. A few officials give lower estimates; most run far higher.

The Meo of Southeast Asia—there may be as many as 4 million of them altogether, scattered in tiny hilltop villages across northern Thailand, Burma's Shan plateau, northern Indochina and eastern Yunnan and western Kwai Chao provinces in China—are traditionally among the richest of the many hill tribes that complicate the region's teeming ethnic divisions and subdivisions.

**OPium Riches**

In Laos, their most famous source of wealth was the poppy, from which they took the opium sap by processes their ancestors brought from China when they came to Laos just over 100 years ago.

The opium of Sam Neua province, now the Communist "capital" of Laos, is known to all the world's smuggling rings as some of the best there is.

The $100 or so a Meo farmer was able to get for his annual crop enabled some men eventually to adorn their wives with as many as five or six of the heavy, ornate silver necklaces Meo women use to dress up their traditional black shirts and long pants. Even infant daughters—and sometimes sons—commonly wore two or three lighter necklaces, and sometimes a bracelet.

**Skilled Farmers**

My primitive tribal standards, the Meo also were skilled at raising livestock and fruits, and their herbs and orchards were measures of prestige as well as wealth.

All of that is lost now to the Meo of the CIA army.

The poppy fields and the orchards, if they are still being farmed, are well inside the Lao Communists' territory. The livestock gradually has been left behind in the chaotic mass escapes of the last three years.

Even most of the silver jewelry has been sold off for money. All that is left is American aid.

American officials in Vientiane are quick to point out the spectacular Western-style efforts that the Agency for International Development has made to help the Meo.

**Risks Cited**

Heroic pilots of Air American and Continental Air Services, they point out, have braved tiny mountain passes, incredible weather problems and Communist gunfire to drop rice and medicines to hilltop villages.

Men like Mr. Buell—who the Meo call Tan Pop, which translates roughly as Mr. Sent-From-Above—have risked all manner of hardship and disease to
live in Meo villages and bring them schools, train village medics and improve their farm tools, the Americans say.

Days in Meo refugee villages and interviews with Meo and American refugee officials fill in the details of some of these claims.

The rice distribution program to Meo villages is years old now, but refugee officials in Vientiane acknowledge that it was only under intense pressure from doctors working with the tribesmen that the Agency for International Development finally started last spring a $1 million-a-year program of distributing meats and other protein supplements.

That program, they say, is calculated to provide for about one refugee in every five now under the agency’s care. It goes to tribesmen chosen by doctors according to their illnesses or their degree of malnutrition.

Some officials who work with the program acknowledge that the food the aid agency provides is calculated to fend off starvation but not to replace even the simple diet the Meo had before their constant moves cost them their livestock and farms. Every medical worker interviewed said that malnutrition is now extremely widespread among the Meo, even by primitive tribal standards.

The American-sponsored village health program has brought small thatched-roof dispensaries and trained medics to most Meo communities.

ARMY TOLL FORCES ACTION

But the schools also have brought the Meo arithmetic, reading, writing. Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D, Mass.), has documented the need to which this program was the American response: It was undertaken when it became clear that the CIA army’s wounded were getting virtually no care except that of the traditional Meo witch doctors, whose ancient ritual of shrieks, gongs, charms and dances quickly proved unequal to the effects of modern grenades and automatic rifles.

Pop Buell estimates that 100 of the medics trained for this ostensibly civilian public-health program have died on the battlefield: That, he says, is about one in every five.

RECRUITING AT SCHOOLS

Even the small, thatched schoolrooms Pop Buell encouraged the Meo to build have sometimes been turned to benefit the CIA-sponsored war effort, according to some U.S. aid workers.

"I was in a village one day when the neighboring village was attacked," one aid worker says. "A nai-kong (village leader) came to the classroom and rounded up all the boys over 10 years old, handed them guns and limlocaks and started giving them instructions just outside the school—it was an instant recruiting pool."

But the refugee subcommittee of the Senate Judicary Committee, headed by which no government ever tried to give them before, and has taught them the language of the lowland Lao, the language of government in Laos. In so doing, the schools have greatly strengthened their ability to deal with the Lao, Chinese, Indian and Vietnamese merchants who have traditionally exploited their simplicity.

[From the Baltimore Sun, Feb. 22, 1971]

THE MEO OF LAOS—II: U.S. FINANCIERS VICTOR-TO-REFUGEE TRANSIT

(By John E. Woodruff)

VIENTIANE, LAOS—On September 25, 1945, Toubby Lyfong received a letter from Gen. Le Thiep Honk, then Viet Minh commander of the Yenb region of North Vietnam.

It is from this letter that Mr. Lyfong, who soon afterward would be dubbed "King of the Meo" by French journalists, dates the chain of events that eventually brought his people to their current state of total dependence on United States aid.
Mr. Lyfong says the letter notified him that Viet Minh troops planned to cross into Laos through Xieng Khouang province, where he was the French-appointed chief of Meo hill tribesmen. It asked him to let them pass so they could start organizing resistance to the expected return of the French after World War II.

Perhaps Seminal Battle

He refused—largely, he says, out of loyalty to the French, who had given him eight years of schooling, the most ever permitted a Meo. Two weeks later, Viet Minh troops and a few of their Lao allies fought Mr. Lyfong’s mountain tribesmen at an outpost near Nong Het, just inside Laos.

The fight was a chaos of aged French and British colonial weapons, Meo crossbows and flintlocks and a few Japanese and American rifles scavenged during World War II; history seems to have overlooked it, although it may well have been the seminal battle of the tragicomic struggle that still sputters back and forth across Laos today.

That day, according to Touhy Lyfong’s memory, the Meo were the bombers. Mr. Lyfong organized loosely run Meo guerrilla forces for the French from then until 1954, when the Viet Minh scored their spectacular victory at Dien Bienphu and drove the French from Indochina.

When Mr. Lyfong went to France to retire after the war, though, his loyalty was scarcely rewarded; refused permission to transfer his $250,000 fortune to Paris from the colonial bank, he relates, he had to return to Indochina after only two weeks.

Helpful to U.S.

By 1960, his continued presence in Laos was to prove helpful to new foreigners: the Americans, who were starting to organize an army of hill tribesmen to supplement the pathetically ineffective Royal Lao Army they tried to build for the Vieltiane government in the late 1950’s.

It was in that year that Touhy Lyfong says he cemented an alliance, with the right-wing Gen. Phoumi Nosavan and Prince Boun Oum—and thus with the United States Army and Central Intelligence Agency, which then were financing and supplying the Phoumi army in southern Laos.

Refused Promotion

Throughout 1960, Mr. Lyfong lent his prestige—as well as the many local officials he had appointed while province chief and his remaining friendships from the days as a guerrilla organizer—to a little-known army major named Vang Pao.

Maj. Vang Pao, the highest-ranking Meo in the Lao Army, twice had been refused an overdue promotion to lieutenant colonel by Lao officers who could not accept the idea of a hill tribesman as their equal, according to Mr. Lyfong.

Promised better treatment by General Phoumi and Prince Boun Oum—and promised money and arms by the Americans—Vang Pao set out to build a hill-tribe army. For General Phoumi and Boun Oum, the alliance offered at last the prospect of a friendly force in parts of northern Laos that long had been largely the preserve of neutralist and pro-Communist forces with whom they frequently had quarreled.

In Government Office

By early 1961, as minister of social welfare under a short-lived government headed by Prince Boun Oum, Mr. Lyfong was able to give Vang Pao’s infant army more tangible help. He diverted Lao and American refugee goods to the Meo of the Plain of Jars region, whom Vang Pao had regrouped according to a prearranged plan when neutralist troops took over the plain as they retreated before a drive by Vieltiane by General Phoumi’s men.

Soon afterward, Vang Pao became commander of Military Region II, Xieng Khouang and Sam Neua provinces, the toughest Communist-held territory in northern Laos.
ON 7 STRATEGIC HILLTOPS

Vang Pao's regroupment of the Meo onto seven strategically located hilltops surrounding the plain radically altered the course of the war in northern Laos, for it welded a large group of rugged Meo mountaineers into the beginnings of what gradually became the Viêtiane government's most effective single fighting force.

It also radically altered the lives of the Meo by separating them from their tiny hilltop villages of no more than 20 or 30 houses each.

Now Vang Pao's Meo followers were gathered into settlements and soon proved too crowded for their way of farming, which consists of cutting and burning trees and brush from the sunny side of a mountain, planting rice and corn for two or three years until the soil is depleted and then starting over again on a different hillside.

The refugee supplies sent from Viêtiane by Mr. Lyfang—largely rice bought in Thailand with American money—thus became the first step in the Meo's decade-long walk to total dependence on United States aid.

It is fashionable among high American officials in Viêtiane today to point out that the Meo already had had some fights with the Communists before the Americans organized them and to insist that the Meo "came to us."

"Look, these people came to us for help, and we have given them plenty of help," one top-level diplomat says.

An anonymous memorandum of the Vientiane office of the agency that preceded the United States Agency for International Development presents a more complex picture.

OFFICIAL MEMO

Arguing in favor of giving the Meo help that was soon to be justified publicly as humanitarian refugee aid, the 1960 memorandum said, in part:

"Toughened by their hard work in the high mountains, accustomed from childhood to firearms and to hunting in groups, used to traveling long distances on foot from one village to another, they become excellent fighters with a minimum of training."

"For many months now, ever since the Communists seized control of the Plain of Jars, the Meo, working together with officers and soldiers from the Lao armed forces, have been formed into regular (Laotian Army) military units. They have defended their homes and given great assistance to their brothers in arms elsewhere in Laos by harassing the enemy's convoys and military columns."

Some lower-level Americans who work with the Meo argue that the relationship established in 1960 was by nature unequal, even if it had been a simple case of responding to a Meo request for aid.

THOUGHT HELP GENEROUS

One says: "It's no help to your case if you tell the judge the 12-year-old girl invited you into her bedroom."

"The Meo were primitive people who thought for a long time that we were generously helping them defend their little hilltops and thatched huts. They know now that they are being used in something bigger, of course, but now it's too late."

"We saw the thing in terms of geopolitics—or the struggle against communism, or whatever you want to call it—from the beginning, and we were only too relieved to find some effective warriors in Laos who were willing to take on an enemy much bigger than they could ever have understood."

Whatever the precise relationship was at first, the uses to which the Meo army soon was put gave little support to the "they-came-to-us" view.

GREEN BERETS CAME IN

By 1962, Meo units were stiffened by the presence of "white star" teams of the Green Berets and had spread the American-paid army deep into Sàu Néa province, the regroupment area granted to the pro-Communist Pathet Lao by the 1954 Geneva agreements.

Edgar L. Buell, now head of the United States AID program for hill-tribe refugees, talks of this achievement by his beloved Meo with considerable pride:
"When I came here in 1960, as a $65-a-month International Voluntary Service worker, we couldn’t set foot inside of Sam Neua province. Within a couple of years, we were able to work the whole province."

Then the 1962 Geneva conference on Laos called for an end to the confused fighting and prohibited foreign troops on Lao soil.

**SHIFTED TO CIA**

But its chief effect on the American-backed Meo army was to shift it from Green Beret to CIA sponsorship.

By this time, Vang Pao’s army had become a force the Communists would not ignore, and soon after the cease-fire Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces attacked Meo positions near the Plain of Jars, arguing that the Meo and their American advisers had been parachuted into the mountains after the cease-fire.

[From the Baltimore Sun, Feb. 23, 1971]

**THE MEO OF LAOS—III: A WAR-EXHAUSTED PEOPLE SEEK A WAY OUT**

(By John E. Woodruff)

VIEN TIANE, LAOS.—Edgar L. (Pop) Buell believes that many Meo hill tribesmen are starting—gradually and in small groups—to make a painful peace with the Lao and Vietnamese Communists they have fought on and off for 25 years.

“I’ve lost about 75,000 people, Meo and others, in the last 18 months,” says Mr. Buell, a retired Indiana farmer who has worked with the Meo as a civilian adviser since 1960. “Of course, some of them are dead from the war and the long walks. But most of them, I’m convinced, are Meo, and a few from other tribes, who have finally either found their way back into their old places in Communist areas or else decided the last time the Communists came that they just were not going to run any more.”

**ONLY WRONG IN NUMBER**

Many Americans here believe that Pop Buell’s figures are extravagant, but few question his sense for the trend of Meo affairs. One top military official says, “The Meo are terrifically worn down as fighters.”

“Their morale is shot, and they are slow to engage in battle. If you are going to have a Guerrilla Army, you have to make your move fast and clear out fast. That is what the Meo used to do best; now they just don’t do it.”

Another top-level official says, “If the fight goes on, and the North Vietnamese really decide to turn on the pressure, the Meo will be crushed.

**SOME WAY OUT**

“What else can they do? They are going to have to find some way to get out of the way of the battle sooner or later, and if the worst comes, many of the leaders like Vang Pao (leader of the Meo Clandestine Army) will have to come here to Vientiane or maybe even leave the country.”

No one is proclaiming it as a policy, but this tacit assumption that most Meo eventually will end their decade of fighting and running under U.S. sponsorship by finding a way to co-exist with their old enemies is the stated expectation at the very top of the U.S. mission here.

Mr. Buell is convinced that such an accommodation is possible, although it will by no means be pleasant.

**ONLY SO FAR**

“The Communists know their limits with the Meo—they know they can tax them so far, and they can get so much forced labor, and they can go just so far with the political ideas and then they stop.

“And this isn’t going to be any overnight thing—it’s going to go on like it is now, a few hundred or a few thousand here and there.

“And I don’t hardly expect the Meo are going to fight for the other side after all, for the Communists. It would be a big thing to just get the Meo the hell out of the war.”
Many critics of American policy insist that the kind of accommodation Mr. Buell describes is what the Meo would have had to do 10 years ago — before losing their health, their wealth and much of their population — had the United States not provided the massive backing that enabled them to become a fighting force too important for the Communists to shrug off.

BEFORE CONGRESS

That argument was outlined at length last May 7 by Ronald J. Rickenbach, who served for several years as a U.S. Agency for International Development worker at Sam Thong.

In testimony before the refugee subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee headed by Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D., Mass.), Mr. Rickenbach argued that when the North Vietnamese moved into Laos, the choices open to the Meo were to "accommodate themselves, fight or flee."

"They could not very well fight without arms and assistance; they could flee, but to nowhere as suitable to their way of life than where they already were, or they could accommodate themselves in some peaceful, subservient way to the Vietnamese presence, and thereby allow something of a local political balance to be affected in cognizance with the realities of the time."

PAWNS OF U.S.

When the Americans came on the scene with unlimited arms and extensive food supplies, he said, the Meo yielded to the temptation to fight. A primitive tribe thus "became unwitting pawns of the United States."

American officials in Vientiane generally reject this argument.

Even the Americans who now readily accept the probability that the Meo one day will have to make their peace with the Communists insist that could not have happened in 1960, pointing out that the Meo were already fighting the Communists under the French before 1954.

More recently, an intensive American effort has often been needed to keep the Meo in the fight, and that effort is invariably made, even by Americans who personally feel strongly that the Meo are a depleted and exhausted people and that their Army has a severe case of combat fatigue.

MOVE OPPOSED

Americans at several levels are known to have visited Gen. Vang Pao many times to dissuade him from a plan he often mentions to move the Meo en masse into Sayaboury province of western Laos, where there has been little fighting. Ambassador G. McMurtrie Godley, himself is known to have made more than one such visit to General Vang Pao since becoming ambassador a year and a half ago.

One key U.S. official says: "Hell, what else could the old man have done — it's still true that without the Meo, there would just be no such thing as American policy in Laos; we just wouldn't have any force to back it up with."

FOR MORAL PURPOSES

The ambassador is known not to take the Sayaboury idea seriously and to regard his visits with the general as efforts to bolster the morale of a highly mercurial tribesman who is temporarily "down in the dumps."

Americans who work with Vang Pao say that the Sayaboury move is only one of a collection of half-formulated ideas he often mentions as means of retiring the Meo from the war.

But the inability of a man who grew up a primitive tribesman to formulate a plan fully does not, they insist, mean that he does not take the problem seriously.

"It's a deep and constant preoccupation," one American says.

"Sometimes, it's as if he were the only Meo leader with the foresight to understand how important it is to their people."

THE "MEO" MAFIA

Some time ago, they had an annual "meeting at Long Cheng. He spent half the day with the civilian politicians — we call them the Meo Mafia — and the other half with the top Army officers. He told them the time had come to get
out, and that place was where they would go, and they should start getting ready.

"When he finished, they just sat there—both the morning group and the afternoon group—just silence, no questions, no interest, no response. "That's how it's been a lot of times—no action until the fighting actually starts. The Moo are just that way."

Others confirm the story but insist that the Moo are not "just that way."

"They've moved so damn many times, and every time it was just this once more," one says. "How can we expect them to move again when there isn't really even a plan to follow?"

The absence of plans—or the profusion of half-coherent and conflicting plans—is as striking among the Americans as it is among the Moo.

Various responsible Americans mention at least five different parts of Laos, including Sayaboury province, as places where they expect the main body of Moo to go to escape the war.

How the Moo will get there, where they will get food and supplies to tide them over the year it will take to harvest their first crops, what will become of their weapons—all of these and other equally fundamental questions go unanswered.

SOME ARE BITTER

The absence of planning has provoked bitterness among a few Americans who care deeply about the Moo.

"We always had plenty of plans for how they should defend our gear at Phou Pha Thi, and for scouting missions, and for how they could disrupt the North Vietnamese for us," one says. "It's only now that we seem to be running out of plans."

This bitterness is not shared by most Americans, however. Most argue that if what the Moo must do is make peace with the Communists, then too much American intervention can only poison prospects that are already bleak from a decade of bitter warfare.

IN LINE OF MARCH?

Meanwhile, even the location of the Moo refugee camps is becoming controversial among the Americans, some of whom contend that the long, oval-shaped gathering of camps east of Ban Son was planned deliberately to keep the Moo in the line of Communist advance toward Vientiane.

"I don't buy that idea," one experienced American says. "If the Communists want to take Vientiane, they can skirt the Moo and come right up the Mekong."

Talks with Americans who work with the refugees suggest that most of the hill-tribe villages east of Ban Son got there mainly because the people there came from eastern Laos and simply stopped walking when they got to relatively secure territory.

VIENITANE ATTACK DOUBTED

However the refugees got where they are, the Communist pattern of recent years has not suggested that any direct attack on Vientiane is in their plans.

Instead, they have sought to move the battlefield from place to place north of Vientiane—and the royal capital of Luang Prabang—in a manner that creates an impression of growing pressure on the two capitals.

The areas where this tactic can be most effective are approximately the ones where the Moo are concentrated, and the increasing presence of North Vietnamese troops around Long Cheng and Sam Thong suggest that the Moo are not yet out of the way.

"I'm not going to say they're through yet," Pop Buell says. "God knows, nobody thought they could make it this long—it was always just hold out for six more months, and then six more and six more."

(From the Washington Post, Mar. 20, 1971)

PATHET LAO SQUEEZING MOO OUT

By D. E. Ronk

VIENITANE, March 24—Pathet Lao forces in northern Laos are apparently moving to squeeze out the 100,000 Moo tribesmen who have long served as a buffer for government forces in the area.