In the seat behind us, Kayak looked up from his book. He is a tow-headed American with an earnest face who might pass for a scout leader in his olive twill uniform were it not for the ammunition and rifle and the .45 revolver that he wore along with it.

The two Air American pilots skimmed the Piper Baron nimbly downward along the hilltops to the landing strip of Long Cheng, the once supersecret headquarters base of the tribal guerrilla army organized and financed by the Central Intelligence Agency and fleshed with Meo, Yao, as well as highland Lao volunteers, conscripts and confused-looking children.

Kayak and the Greek and the flight crew are part of the low profile American presence that provides the guns, ammunition, helicopters, transports, air strikes, medical evacuation—in short the wherewithal—that give the “friendlies” their plausibility as a military force.

Though much of the secrecy surrounding the CIA role in Laos has been lifted here under investigative prodding from Congress and instructions from the administration, there are still reminders that American participation is somewhat of a political liability.

“You can take all the pictures you want of the Lao,” I was counselled, “but please, we don’t want any photographs of Americans.” I agreed and complied.

On the ground, Gen. Vang Pao, the gritty Meo commander of the irregulars, greeted his visitor with a surprisingly shy smile and handshake. His two visiting sons, Van Su, 3, and Cha Leune, 4, clowned and romped with their father’s staff officers to his unalloyed delight.

Vang Pao is famous for his tough, soldierly talk, but today he reflected the seriousness of the state of affairs in the Plain of Jars.

“They have artillery and they have tanks. Their artillery is bigger than what we have here—they have a 27 kilometer range and ours is 15 kilometers. Out there on the Plain of Jars we have no artillery at all. We have very few people and not enough matériel. It is getting very difficult to hold the situation.”

HAZARDS

“Yes, we have American air strikes. But look at that haze.” He raised one hand to simulate an airplane and held out the other hand to represent the ground. “The airplanes can’t see and if they come down too far for support operations, they either crash in the mountains or can get shot down.” The upper hand smacked flatly against the lower hand which trailed toward the floor.

“The American B-52s did a very good job for us. We had our last B-52 strike just last week out along there.” He gestured beyond Skyline Ridge. “Maybe we will have to call for more B-52 strikes.

“But the best thing would be to get talks started again among the nations that participated in the Geneva Conference. We must have the neutralization of Indochina. They must get together and talk just once more.”

In the past 10 years, the fighting has decimated the ranks of Vang Pao’s Meos. His guerrillas once were almost 100 per cent Meo. But now they comprise less than 50 per cent of the force. The Meo mountain people have borne the brunt of the fighting and civilian casualties—as well as the dislocation.

“We have some irregulars up here now, from Saravane in the south. But they cannot walk in the mountains. They slow down our operations. A march that should take three days takes them nine days.” He shook his head sadly.

WORLD’S BEST

By the admission of some of the highest-ranking Americans in Vietnam, Vang Pao’s guerrillas are facing in the North Vietnamese units across Skyline Ridge perhaps the best light infantry in the world.

Although road and ground-bound, they are using newly supplied Soviet 130 millimeter cannons, the longest range artillery piece on either side in the war, with devastating effect. They are employing Soviet-supplied tanks as mobile gun platforms.

To bedevil American air reconnaissance, the Communists not only have succeeded in camouflaging their guns, but have fashioned dummy replicas of the guns visible from the air and can simulate secondary explosions with gunpowder firecrackers.

The enemy, declares U.S. Ambassador G. McMurtrie Godley, is a very formidable individual. Godley, who monitors the military conflict with a fervor that...
has earned him the nickname "Field Marshal Godley," concedes that the enemy's use of artillery and mortars is uncanny.

At Long Cheng one day last week there was a continuous shuttling of American helicopters, C-128 transports, observation craft and Laotian-flew T-28 jets over the 2,200-foot airstrip. Outgoing artillery pounded persistently at fixed targets on the other side of the ridge.

The C-128, a faithful workhorse that must land and take off on abysmally short runways, is the key to the mobility of men and supplies for the irregular army. Conceivably posted inside the planes are signs in Thai, Laotian, Vietnamese and English warning that "the transportation of opium and other narcotic products is absolutely forbidden on this aircraft." The signs also admonish that all passengers are subject to search and removal by the Air America crews if they are found to be carrying opium.

BRACING FOR ATTACK

About the strip there was evidence of the most recent North Vietnamese offensive, at the end of January, that penetrated into the Long Cheng Valley. There were spent cartridges, rocket casings and shell fragments.

"They got up to that point," a Laotian air controller said, pointing to the outer boundaries of the airport. "We managed to chase them out."

Now Vang Pao and his irregulars and the Americans are bracing for a new assault. Across the ridge, said Vang Pao, eight regiments of North Vietnamese are organizing for a new push.

A two-week-old spoiling operation directed against the North Vietnamese supply lines shows no sign of having seriously breached the Communist columns.

In the drowsy capital of Vientiane to the south, meanwhile, the ingrown diplomatic community gossips and backbites and entertains and no sound of war is ever heard. One night last week Premier Souvanna Phouma attended a bridge dinner at the Australian embassy and smilingly remarked with a smile perhaps not altogether original that President Nixon's visit to Peiping had broken down a great wall.

Souvanna is making new overtures for talks with his half-brother, Pathet Lao leader Prince Souphanouvong. The first secretary of the North Vietnamese embassy, Nguyen Van Than, has been bombarded by visits from Western news men applying hopefully for visas to Hanoi. Than managed to teach himself English with language records and assiduous reading and spends engrossing hours of conversation with the correspondents.

TEA AND SMILES

He is asked about President Nixon's visit to Peiping, and he smiles and pours a visitor more tea. "The Chinese have given us much assistance," he finally replies in measured cadence. "The Russians have also helped us greatly. But the solution to the war in Indochina will have to be reached by the Vietnamese people."

The resident Western press in Vientiane carries on its own weekly skirmish with American military spokesmen over the war to which most of them are denied access.

Several days ago a U.S. colonel, the regular briefer, stood before a dozen reporters and the adversary tensions were high. The colonel delivered a region-by-region briefing of enemy casualties with numbers killed and wounded, as reported to him by Laotian army sources.

Finally one newsmen blurted impatiently:
"Colonel, do you take these figures seriously?"
"No," he replied, "I don't. But I am obliged to pass them out. I will not act as a filter."

"But we come to these briefings in the hope that you will be a filter."
"I am a military spokesman," said the attaché, his voice tightening. "I am a guest of the host government. And the average Laotian soldier is as guilty of exaggeration in the heat of battle as the average American soldier."

And the newsmen went off to write their weekend military roundups.
TRAFFIC IN SECRETS

In Vientiane, where Chinese, Soviet, U.S., Pathet Lao, North Vietnamese and other diplomats commingle in an atmosphere of gossipy social congestion, there is a lively traffic in each other's official and personal secrets.

It is known, for example, who in the Soviet embassy is the principal KGB (secret police) operative. It is also an open secret in the diplomatic circuit who the CIA station chief is and which ambassador from what nonaligned country is his next door neighbor.

Secrecy in Vientiane is mainly an export commodity and it is safe to say that the North Vietnamese apparatus knows more about the local U.S. apparatus than most American congressmen.

The major outside powers in the Lao war still conspire to maintain the tattered fiction of compliance with Lao neutrality under the 1962 Geneva Agreements.

The North Vietnamese have never acknowledged the presence of some 90,000 troops in the northern provinces and along the infiltration trails into South Vietnam and Cambodia.

President Nixon has, since 1970, been more candid about the extent of American involvement in Laos. Nonetheless, the CIA paramilitary advisers here are still described with such antiseptic euphemisms as "case workers" and "field technical consultants." And the brunt of the American-supported war is still being fought by the CIA's clandestine irregulars and Thai-based U.S. tactical support air craft on battle grounds almost wholly inaccessible to journalists.

IN LAOS CROSS FIRE: MEO TRIBESMEN FIGHT ON

(By Daniel Southerland, Staff correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor)

Ban Xon, Laos—One hears so much about the low morale of the Meo tribesmen in Laos that one expects to see nothing but sul.len faces here.

But there is incredible strength—and sometimes laughter—in the faces of the Meo whom the war has deposited here.

Incredible, too, is the daily effort that is made from this American-run relief center to keep alive 120,000 refugees, half of them Meo. Scarcely a minute goes by, it seems, without a small aircraft lifting off the runway with a load of rice for refugees living near scores of scattered drop zones and landing sites in north-central Laos.

Two companies, Continental Air Services and Air America, provide the airplanes, under a contract with the U.S. Government. The pilots are tough, well paid, and expert at zooming in on small landing strips slashed at haphazard angles into the jungle and mountains.

Despite its importance as a refugee supply center, Ban Xon is hardly secure. The Americans, who work here fly up every day from Vientiane, 70 miles to the south, and return to Vientiane in the evening. It's not safe to stay here overnight.

A year ago, the North Vietnamese attacked Ban Xon, burned warehouses and villages, and killed 14 persons. But American relief workers with the U.S. Agency for International Development, who are dedicated to the Meo and speak the Meo language, note with pride that despite the attack, the Ban Xon center didn't miss a single day of operations.

The airplanes distribute salt and canned meat and a daily average of 44,000 pounds of rice to refugees in the area. If the refugees are on the run because of North Vietnamese pressure, they can get blankets, clothing, straw mats, and cooking pots.

Thanks to the relief program, there is no starvation among the Meo. But North Vietnamese attacks have driven the Meo farther and farther to the south, to the point, where they now are threatened with being forced out of the mountains into the lower altitudes, which they find unbearable.

The Meo, the largest ethnic minority in Laos, migrated into Laos from southwestern China in the 19th century. They practice a slash-and-burn system of agriculture on the mountain slopes and like to live above the 8,000 foot level. For them, Ban Xon, at 1,000 feet, is a hot and unhealthy place.
With the support and advice of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, the Meo have been the most effective fighters against the North Vietnamese in all of Laos. But forced marches have taken a heavy toll among them.

CHILDREN CARED FOR

And, having fought for more than a decade, their casualties in battle have been horrendous. For a population estimated at 300,000, the losses have been so serious—and the advance of the North Vietnamese so unrelenting—that some observers have been asking how much longer the Meo will be able to maintain their present way of life in their beloved mountains.

Fortunately for their children, there is virtually no such thing as an orphan among the Meo. Even if both parents are killed, someone will take care of the child.

If the child is a male, he stands a good chance of becoming a soldier when he grows up, and a Meo is considered a grown man at the age of 14 or 15. According to one estimate, about 20 percent of the Meo soldiers now are under 15 years of age.

WHY DID HE JOIN?

When a 13-year-old Meo soldier named Je Yang was asked why he joined the Army, he and his comrades laughed. They'd obviously never really thought much about the matter. There's been a war on for so long as they could remember, and it was simply expected that they would join the Army. "We are attacked, and we fight," said Je Yang, who is expert with an M-16 rifle. Much older men fight, too. Yang Yee Yang, 50, said that he had fought for many years—until a bullet wound in the leg stopped him at the age of 44. But retirement from the Army has not given him a peaceful life. He said that the war had forced him and his family to move seven times in three years.

TEN MOVES FOR FAMILY

A Meo who works for the U.S. Agency for International Development mission said that his family had been forced to move 10 times in only half as many years.

"Certainly these people, more than any other people I've known, can put up with tremendous suffering," said Jack Williamson, head of refugee affairs for the AID mission.

"They have a fatalistic attitude, and they make the most of moments of pleasure," he said. "They can laugh and joke. But the joking doesn't necessarily reflect their real feelings."

"There's hardly a family in this country that hasn't suffered a loss because of the war," said Mr. Williamson, a veteran of 11 years' work with the refugees in Laos.

"If every family in the United States lost somebody in a war, how would our morale be?"

[From The Washington Post, Apr. 30, 1972.]

SOME MEO TRIBESMEN WOULD RATHER RESettle THAN FIGHT

VIENTIANE—In the northern reaches of Laos, in the mountain country where the American embassy and the CIA run their no-longer-secret war, the Meo tribesmen are now being offered an alternative to the unremitting warfare they have endured for a decade.

For 10 years, armed by the United States and led by their Gen. Vang Pao, the Meo have borne the brunt of the Indecisive but debilitating war in the north. Despite cruel losses which have reduced them to a skeleton of their former force, the Meo have unflinchingly followed Vang Pao.

Now, however, a possible rival to Vang Pao has appeared. He is Ly Thek, a stocky, 34-year-old, Western-educated Meo who has established a sprawling refugee colony for Meo who want to drop out of the war.

"Ly Thek's colony is political," he says, referring to himself in the third person, "a political alternative to the war in the mountains. This is tomorrow's Meo. I am working on the future of the Meo."
Thirty-two miles north of Vientiane, for three miles off 13, Ly Thek’s Meo villages are in various stages of settlement, pushing westward along barely passable roads into the virgin wilderness.

Along the highway there is a sense of permanence to the homes, pig sites, chicken coops and garden plots. “Those have been here for two years now,” Ly Thek explains. “Those in the wilderness, for only days. These people at the front help those further back, then those help others even further until the very last ones will help the next to come. It is our system for building the Meo home.”

So far, approximately 8,000 Meo and Lao Theung have opted for Ly Thek’s alternative. The Lao Theung are highland Lao who, in recent years, have helped fill the ranks of Vang Pao’s once-all-Meo army.

The Americans are not pleased at the prospect of a pacifist Pied Piper leading the Meo out of battle.

The Meo were armed in the early 1960s, in the flush of Washington’s infatuation with guerrilla warfare. Originally it was intended that they harass the Communist Pathet Lao and whatever North Vietnamese they could find behind Communist lines.

The task of arming them fell to the CIA because the American military presence, like the North Vietnamese presence, was in violation of the Geneva agreements. The Meo, in their turn, were willing recipients of American arms because they resented Communist efforts to regulate their lives.

But the buildup in Vietnam brought the North Vietnamese into northern Laos in force, and a decade of relentless bloodletting has given some Americans in Vientiane second thoughts. After all, they say, northern Laos is far from the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Perhaps the whole Meo effort so close to the North Vietnamese heartland had been a needless provocation from the start?

But the official American view is that Vang Pao’s army is still the “only effective fighting force” on the government’s side, and that therefore it must be preserved.

Nearly everyone knowledgeable in Laos agrees that the Meo have been bled to the point of near collapse, and that alternatives must be found soon if the Meo are to have a future. But American officials note quietly that alternatives now will speed that collapse.

Therefore Ly Thek’s alternative has not found official favor, and, according to Ly Thek, the Americans have refused to give him the rice and refugee relief they give to Vang Pao’s Meo.

“They tell me, ‘Ly Thek, your people are not refugees, they wanted to move so we can do nothing.’ Okay, maybe that is the best,” he says.

“It will teach my people to depend on Meo—not on others. It will break habits they learn all these years with the Americans—to expect to be fed, given clothing, given doctors, given everything so that they will fight the Communists. We will create new Meo people here. We will become sophisticated and give up some of our mountain ways.”

American refugee officials in Vientiane say that Ly Thek’s settlement poses a special problem because only part of its residents are bona fide refugees eligible to receive assistance, the remainder having left northern Laos of their own choice. Figures on how many are in each category are not available, the sources say.

Traditionally, the Meo have always settled on the highest mountaintops to lead their semi-nomadic lives and perhaps to grow opium as a cash crop. It has always been said that they could not live in the sticky heat of the lowlands, and over the years no love has been lost between the aloof highlanders and the lowland Lao.

But the war has changed all that. Vang Pao’s Meo have been driven out of the opium-growing regions and Ly Thek’s colony is on the Mekong plain.

Ly Thek believes they will stay. “Look here, you see Meo beginning to learn to live here,” he says. “Soon it will be like the Lao villages. We will be Lao people because the Meo and the Lao people will forget about their differences.”

“Only time will tell whether their presence on the plain is proof of Meo adaptability or a measure of their willingness to go anywhere to escape the war. In the meantime, Ly Thek’s colony has begun experimental plots of sugar cane, pineapple and bananas, and he has already sent five of his people into Vientiane to learn furniture-making.

In Ly Thek’s view, “America will end its support for Vang Pao soon. . . . Ly Thek respects Vang Pao, but he does not think the Meo will accept Vang Pao—
after the Americans stop support. Once the Meo army is defeated the Meo will
look for a new leader. They already look for a new leader because they know."
Politics is a rough game in Laos, and assassination is something Ly Thek
jokes about. But it is a strong possibility, he admits:
"There are some who would like to kill Ly Thek now, but he must do what he
must do and not think to much about that."

[From The Washington Post, Feb. 6, 1972.]

LAOS: THE QUESTION IS HOW TO GET OFF THE TIGER

(By Stacy B. Lloyd)

The significance of recent events in Laos for the United States lies in the
decreasing ability of the U.S.-backed Royal Laos Government forces to maintain a
military balance of power with the North Vietnamese and Chinese. As a result
it is increasingly difficult for the United States to help support the neutral Laos
government, to which the United States is under no obligation, legal or moral. And
there is now a good chance that Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma may
decide to come to a political settlement with his half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, head of the Pathet Lao forces.

Recent weeks have been unusually grim for the government forces. The war in
northern Laos has escalated far beyond its usual range for this time of year.
Two weeks ago Long Cheng, long the central headquarters for Gen. Vang Pao
and the CIA-backed tribal forces, was almost overrun. Vang Pao's temporary
headquarters, Ban Son, some 20 miles to the southwest, has been under mortar
attack. The recent capture of the Sala Phou Khoun road junction on Route 18
by Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces, and the fall of the military post
and airstrip of Moung Phou 28 miles to the southeast plus the season's first
mortar attack on the Luang Prabang airport Jan. 28 are other signs of enemy
confidence. On Jan. 22, the Lao Defense Ministry reported a recent Pathet Lao
ambush of five civilian vehicles along Highway 13, 90 miles from Vientiane,
which could signal the start of a terror campaign between the major towns
along the Mekong River. On Jan. 28 the government imposed a curfew in
Vientiane.

In the south, the enemy has virtually wiped out the government's military
presence on the strategic Bolovens Plateau, coming to within 20 miles of Pakse.
U.S. dependents have been evacuated and many Lao are leaving Pakse.

To make matters worse, North Vietnamese surface-to-air missiles missiles
have been placed in southern Laos and have been fired at U.S. fighter-bombers.
This represents a real threat to Lao T-28s and U.S. forward air controllers.
And, for the first time, North Vietnamese Mig-21s have been seen over Laos. In
the north, in the Plain of Jars, the North Vietnamese have almost completed a
road system capable of sustaining traffic through the rainy season. Newer tanks
and heavier artillery are involved—155-mm. guns with a range of 30 miles, far
exceeding the 105-mm. guns usually employed by the government troops.

Enemy forces have swelled from a March, 1968, estimate of 31,600 (40,045
North Vietnamese, 51,645 Pathet Lao) to an April, 1971, estimate of between
114,765 and 189,000 (100,000 North Vietnamese and 89,000 Pathet Lao), accord­
ing to a staff report prepared for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

In addition, the Chinese have increased their activity in the northwest, where
their road-building crews are now protected by radar-directed anti-aircraft weap­
onics, including 85-mm. and 100-mm-guns, the latter said to be effective up to
68,000 feet. From an estimated 6,000 to 8,000 in 1969, the Chinese troops had
increased to between 14,000 and 20,000 by last April. Their road, extending from
Ming La in China's Yunnan Province, reaches down the Moung Houn valley to
Pak Beng, 20 miles from Thailand, with an east-west section from Dienbienphu
in North Vietnam to Ban Houei Sai, bordering on Thailand and Burma.

SURGE AND COUNTERSURGE

The annual dry season North Vietnamese offensives matched by Royal Lao
Government counteroffensives in the rainy season have occurred since 1962. At
that time the Neutralists under Capt. Kong Le and Souvanna Phouma were
allied with the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese against the Royal Lao
Government forces of Gen. Phoumi Nosavan. But the Neutralists soon balked at the Pathet Lao’s demands for continued military support and were pushed into a holding area at Moung Soul and Vang Vieng.

Since 1963, the enemy’s ability to sustain its lines of communication from North Vietnam has grown each year. In 1964, increased North Vietnamese attacks resulted in the Royal Lao Government under Souvanna Phouma asking for U.S. reconnaissance flights. As the war in South Vietnam focused on the need to halt NVN supplies moving to the south, the North Vietnamese reacted to increased U.S. bombing of its trail system by striking at secret radar guidance bases in north and central Laos.

By June, 1967, the Royal Lao forces had come to within 17 miles of the North Vietnamese border. Na Khang, the northernmost CIA-Meao guerrilla staging point and U.S. Air Force search and rescue area, was retaken by the government and Gen. Vang Pao came within reach of Sam Neua city, a Pathet Lao headquarters.

The government’s success lasted about a year. In 1968, the North Vietnamese sent in 11 new battalions and began the offensive that today has gained them the ground they need as a buffer against Thailand and as a sanctuary for their supplies moving south.

In 1969, Sam Thong, the government refugee center near Long Cheng, was captured and burned to the ground. This offensive had ominous overtones because it took place in the rainy season and involved the use of Soviet PT-76 tanks in Moung Soul, usually a haven for government troops retreating from the Plain of Jars.

By 1970, the enemy controlled areas from the western edge of the Plain of Jars, south through Sam Thong to Moung Phalane, east of Savannakhet, and seriously threatened the Bolovens Plateau, Pakse and Seno.

Further evidence that the military balance is shifting in favor of the North Vietnamese and their allies is the increased presence of CIA-trained and U.S.-paid Thai “volunteers.” Some 4,000 to 6,000 are now in Laos, and The Washington Post has reported that their numbers are likely to be doubled despite the heavy losses they have suffered since mid-December. There seems to be little alternative. According to last August’s Senate report, the government’s military base of nearly 115,000 men has been decimated, and 30 per cent of all new recruits desert.

The complete dependence of the Lao economy upon U.S. funds is well known. The total Lao government budget last year was $36.6 million. Total U.S. assistance was $284.2 million—$352 million in economic aid, $162.2 million in military aid, and $70 million spent by the CIA to support irregular forces. This was exclusive of the cost of Thai mercenaries and of the U.S. air war in Laos. Nor does it include the effect of last November’s devaluation of the Laotian kip by the International Monetary Fund, which advises the multination Foreign Exchange Operation Fund that supports the kip by buying it with foreign currencies. The Lao devaluation, plus December’s U.S. devaluation combined with its effect on the currencies of FEOP’s Japanese, French and British members, has devaluated the value of U.S. assistance almost 50 per cent.

This increasingly expensive and ineffective war is not one the United States need feel committed to. It is not, nor has it been, a treaty obligation. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State William H. Sullivan, a former ambassador to Laos, told the Senate Subcommittee on U.S. Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad in 1969:

“As I have repeatedly stated here, we have no obligatory commitment to Laos and, therefore, we are not in the position parallel to that of Vietnam.”

U.S. involvement in Laos has grown like topsy and not in any premeditated manner such as in Vietnam. The 1954 Geneva accords divided Laos into Communist and non-Communist areas and provided that the United States under
SEATO would stand with its allies against any armed attacks on Laos. In the 1962 Geneva agreements, however, Laos threw off this SEATO guarantee, preferring to remain neutral. In these agreements, a key clause was the removal of all foreign troops with the exception of a small French training mission. North Vietnam refused to comply and has never to this day admitted the presence of its troops in Laos.

This became the horns on which America built its dilemma: for in seeking to provide for the viable neutrality of Laos in accordance with the Geneva agreements, Washington also had to honor request from Laos for its defense. Early attempts by the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese to gain political and military control over Laos led to increased requests for military assistance. The United States, in order to respect its word, had to hide behind its own shadow, supplying arms and advisers to the Laoths through the CIA instead of openly.

Through the years, this arrangement has mushroomed into a huge deficit for both the Americans and the Lao. The question posed by the Nixon Doctrine is especially relevant here: how to get off the tiger.

Two Spheres of Influence

My feeling is that this year's events have shown the prime minister and other members of the Lao government that the situation cannot continue and that some solution must be found without loss of foreign assistance. Such a solution could well be a division of Laos into two spheres of influence—one under Western domination, another under Eastern domination. The benefits are an end in fighting, a regional power balance based on traditional Lao, Thai and Vietnamese buffer zones and a continuance of foreign assistance to all.

The grounds for something like this happening are based on the passage of time as well as on the realities of today. The surplus of refugees, loss of life and the strain on the Lao economy are all symptomatic results of the lack of a natural power balance based on regional security interest rather than the interests of foreign powers. Time has substantially changed the national hierarchy of the Pathet Lao, and many of the supporters of the original nationalism of Prince Souphanouvong are now younger than their leader, and more oriented to North Vietnam than to Laos. The same is true of the Royal Lao Government. Prince Souvanna Phouma is now 70, and there is no one to replace him as a national figure. This alone favors some new approach rather than waiting for the inevitably fragmented politics that would follow his death.

The people under the control of both sides depend increasingly on the values and lifestyle of separate systems instead of borrowing a little from both, as was true in the past.

A Lao recently returned from a visit with his family after five years' absence, told me that there had not been much change except that those he talked with seemed more oriented to the Western lifestyle. The people outside the ruling classes in both sections of the country still do not count in the political power structure.

In Western-oriented parts of Laos, there is no level of rising expectations among the general populace, and many civil servants and other middle-class Lao concentrate on improving their titles or "panya," rather than on solving national problems.

My friend returned with the distinct feeling that the country was really becoming two Laos and that there was no use trying to reunify the country within its French colonial boundaries. In the areas under government control the well-to-do drive Mercedes Benz and other Western vehicles such as Datsuns. By contrast, I was told, in the Hanoi-dominated areas life has become spartan, with emphasis on highly organized activities such as Youth Leagues and Women's Rice Brigades. The culture is more oriented to North Vietnam; songs heard from the area are Vietnamese melodies, not Lao. There are few consumer products and no luxuries. In short, given what really counts for a Lao—your name, your protector, your ethnic group—there is no territory to unify, only a necessity to stay alive.

A Lao Solution

It is in this spirit that an opting out of the war by Souvanna Phouma and Souphanouvong makes sense. Souvanna would have to risk a revolt from the rightists, such as Gen. Phoumi and some of the military, but U.S. and international assurances of continued aid could help avert a rightist coup and provide
a Lao solution to an Asian problem, without foreign influence. The Geneva concept of large nations solving the problems of small nations is as outdated as the Congress of Vienna. The time has come for large nations to realize that they cannot settle the problems of small countries without endangering both themselves and the fates of the small nations involved.

A recent statement by Souvanna may signal his increasing desire for a settlement. Until now, he has stressed in speeches that he will order an end to U.S. bombing in Laos only after the withdrawal of all North Vietnamese troops. On Jan. 14, however, he told a Voice of America correspondent, "We would agree to a cessation of the bombing if we had a guarantee that the North Vietnamese would not reinforce their troops in Laos."

For the United States, the significance of a Lao-settlement, free of foreign influence, is three-fold. First, it gets the financial and moral burden off the United States and lets us get off the tiger gracefully. Second, it fits with the concept of President Nixon's Guam declaration of letting Asians solve Asian problems. Third, it provides a basis for the continuation of foreign assistance in Royal Lao Government areas and allows grounds for a flexible response given possible changes in those areas controlled by the North Vietnamese. Finally, and maybe the most important, it is in the interest of the Lao people.

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[From The Christian Science Monitor, Mar. 16, 1972.]

ONLY Lao KING'S PRESENCE KEEPS ROYAL CAPITAL SAFE
(by Daniel Southerland, Staff correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor)

Luang Prabang, Laos—The Laotian Government is maintaining only a light defensive force around this royal capital in the hope that the Communists will continue to respect the inviolability of the King.

It is generally believed, and has been for years, that the North Vietnamese could take every town in Laos within weeks, if they were willing to accept heavy casualties. But the royal capital, which is also the seat of the kingdom's supreme Buddhist patriarch, seems even more vulnerable than most of the towns in Laos.

This town of 80,000, with its gilded Buddhist temples, is situated closer to the borders of China and North Vietnam than it is to Vientiane, the country's administrative capital.

Precarious though Luang Prabang's mountainous position may be, however, most observers believe it unlikely that the Communists will attack the town, mainly because of the presence here of King Savang Vatthana.

The six-foot-tall, 65-year-old monarch is a symbol of the country's unity, and each of the warring factions of Laos, including the pro-Communist Pathet Lao, has pledged at least formal allegiance to him. Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma consults the King on important questions, and most Laos revere him.

Nevertheless, the North Vietnamese and their Pathet Lao allies have come close to Luang Prabang many times, and they have attacked the airfield just outside the town where Laotian T-28 fighter-bombers take off on daily bombing and rocketing runs.

Last year, the Communists made what was described as their longest, strongest, and closest threat to Luang Prabang. North Vietnamese troops came to within only one or two miles of the airfield runway. But, in the end, they seemed more interested in making a show of force than in trying to take the town.

NO ATTACK CONSIDERED

A Pathet Lao representative in Vientiane, when asked about last year's threat to Luang Prabang, seemed offended that anyone would suggest that the Communists intended to attack the royal capital.

"We were only going after the airfield," he told a friend. "We weren't interested in hitting the city."

This year, after the start of the annual Communist dry-season offensive, the Pathet Lao cut the road between Luang Prabang and Vientiane, 130 miles to the south.
The road has been cut for more than a month now, and chartered American aircraft, loaded with nothing but rice, have had to make daily shuttle flights into Luang Prabang in order to feed refugees and troops.

AERIAL FIREWORKS

Communist troops fired a few mortar rounds at the Luang Prabang airfield only a few weeks ago, but caused no significant damage. A Laotian Air Force “Spookie” gunship, an aircraft armed with rapid-firing miniguns, responded by pouring a torrent of fire at the suspected mortar positions.

The plane fired a bit more than was necessary, but gunship crews always do that, because they can make a little extra money after each mission by selling the empty shell casings. The more they fire, the more they make.

But despite such dramatic moments, Luang Prabang remains a tranquil place most of the time. The morning market is packed with food and attracts small groups of mountain tribesmen from the nearby hills. One would hardly know there was a war going on except for the constant roar in the background of airplanes carrying rice and rockets.

One element helping stave off panic is the presence of the King. Like his father before him, the king has a reputation for never leaving Luang Prabang when the going gets rough.

Last March, when the North Vietnamese moved closer to Luang Prabang than ever before, American dependents living in the royal capital were evacuated. Premier Souvanna Phouma flew up from Vientiane to try to persuade the King to leave, too. But his attempt failed.

But the King would have stayed regardless of all this, and he did stay until the crisis was over.

So the King maintains a low profile. He leads a quiet life at his palace on the bank of the Mekong River, spends a great deal of time with his grandchildren, and cultivates flowers at his farm north of the royal capital.

[From The Washington Post, Feb. 6, 1972.]

U.S. RAIDS HURT LAOS AID PROGRAM

(By Jack Folsie, Los Angeles Times)

Pakse, Laos, Feb. 5—The refugee village headman spoke in desperate tones to Bob Wulff, the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) man.

Wulff, who has cared for innocent sufferers of Asian war for many years and is the author of a book on the resettlement of lepers, “Village of the Outcasts,” replied in Lao.

The headman seemed satisfied and saluted. As we drove away, the exchange saddened Wulff.

“He asked me to ‘stop the soldiers’ from bombing. He said his people did not want to flee again. All I could say was hopefully the bombs would not strike near his village.”

It is a tough position to be an American civilian doing relief work in an area where American bombers are constantly overhead. Whether escape from bombing or fear of North Vietnamese impressment causes more concern in Laos is in dispute. Whatever the cause, since the Hanoi-directed offensive began in southern Laos in mid-December, the refugee role here has grown to 11,000.

Refugees carrying their belongings on their heads, backs and in hand carts, have been streaming toward Pakse and the Mekong River. Asked why he is fleeing, a Lao on the run usually answers with a furtive look back at the battlefield while making noises of gunfire and diving airplanes. One Lao with his wife and a string of children in tow looked incredulous and his reply made the interpreter laugh.

“He thinks the foreigner must be crazy to ask such questions.”

Laotians who have lived for a time under North Vietnamese Army-Pathet Lao control and have been interviewed at length in refugee centers generally describe life in occupied areas as rigorous, particularly the required service as porters carrying supplies down the much-bombed Ho Chi Minh trail network.

When the see-saw war gave them a second chance to flee to areas under the Western-backed Lao government they took it.
In the long, unhappy struggle which began in Laos a decade ago, 700,000 lowland Lao and highland tribal minorities have become refugees, according to an American mission tally kept in the capital of Vientiane.

By AID definition, a refugee is a resettled person who must be provided with life's necessities until he has cleared and planted his own rice or money crop. It usually takes a family a year to get back on its feet but many are uprooted again and so the dependence on American largesse starts over. This fluctuating level of refugees peaked at just over 800,000 last year. It presently stands at 234,000, according to Jack Williamson, director of American refugee relief in Laos.

Of the present refugees, about 70 per cent are Meo or other hardy mountain people. They have been on the run practically since the war began. Coming mostly from the rugged areas close to North Vietnam, some Meos have moved as many as 10 times, Williamson said.

This fiscal year, direct refugee assistance—food, shelter, clothing and medical attention—is costing $5.7 million. Snatching refugees out of roadless terrain just ahead of the enemy is often done by helicopters or by shortfield planes. This costs another $5 million to $6 million for chartered Air America and Continental Airways planes. An emergency air evacuation is considered one of a pilot's most dangerous missions.

Distribution of American relief supplies is made by the Lao Ministry of Welfare. Its civilian administrators have been harassed and intimidated by the apparent desire of high-ranking military officers to divert some of the material for their own enrichment.

Wulff describes the average Lao welfare worker as dedicated and honest. Wulff himself appears able to cope with American bureaucracy and has initiated a new kind of refugee village.

"I don't think the paradeground layout of huts on bulldozed squares of land gives a refugee much incentive to stay," he said. "Our job is to find him fertile land to resettle on, cut an access road into it, give him a few supplies and hand tools if he has none and let him develop his new village as he wishes."

He has started such a project in rich but hard-to-tame jungle just outside Pakse. The land was classified as forest reserve. As soon as an AID tractor cut a road into it, a Lao colonel started putting his mark on prime hardwood trees. He was run off, Wulff said.

"It's his kind of encroachment on government-approved refugee effort which makes me mad," Wulff said.

[From Dispatch News Service International, Jan. 1972.]

U.S. BOMBING IN LAOS: AN INSIDE REPORT
(by Michael Morrow)

Bangkok—An American once intimately involved in U.S. bombing operations in Laos says an erosion of safeguards against indiscriminate bombing there has taken place under the Nixon administration.

According to Mr. Jerome J. Brown, a reserve Air Force Captain and former Senior Air Force Photo Reconnaissance expert attached to the Vientiane Embassy, 1966-68, restrictions on American Air Force operations have been quietly relaxed while control over the Air War by the American ambassador in Vientiane has been reduced.

Brown, 29, left the Air Force after finishing his assignment in Vientiane and is now a management consultant in Bangkok, Singapore and Djakarta. Commenting on the Moose-Lowenstein Report, the most up-to-date Senate account of American involvement in Laos, Brown said "in general the report is accurate, but you just cannot say the rules (for bombing) are stricter now than they were some years ago, as the report does."

"The rules of engagement were strictly adhered to from 1966 to 1968 but for all practical purposes after Ambassador William Sullivan left (in March 1969) they appear to have been discarded and are only cited to placate congressmen in Washington," Brown said.

According to Brown, rules of engagement previously in force prohibited napalm bombing by jets and demanded that most American strikes, except those in
response to enemy ground fire, have prior Embassy clearance. No site could be targeted for bombing that was less than five hundred yards from a motorable road or within two kilometers of a civilian building.

The Moose-Lowenstein report, released in August by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, states that napalm can now be used and the restricted areas around an "active village" ("defined as one building, hut or structure not validated by the Embassy for a strike") has been reduced to five hundred meters. No mention is made of a limitation imposed by distance from a motorable road.

According to the report, specially validated areas ("SOLOS"), partially validated areas ("PARVELAS") and special operating areas ("SOAS") have also been created, which are, in effect, fire zones. In these areas targets can be determined without prior Embassy approval and, in the case of SOLOS and SOAS, without Embassy consultation. SOLOS and PARVELAS refer to B-52 strikes while SOAS refers to tactical fighter strikes.

Well-informed sources in Vientiane told this reporter that the size of these various areas is growing and now includes most of the Plain of Jars and the Bolovens Plateau in addition to mountainous areas closer to the Vietnamese border.

Brown said that during his tour in Laos he personally participated in targeting sessions at Udorn Air Base in Northeastern Thailand. These meetings were held every Tuesday to determine targets for the fixed number of American air sorties allocated to Laos by the Air Force Command in Saigon.

These meetings were attended by the Director of Intelligence of the 7/13th Air Force (the organizational unit over all American Air Force operations based in Thailand) and representatives of the Airborne Command Center (a special night operations command for bombing over the Ho Chi Minh Trail), the Air Attache's Office in Vientiane (Brown), the Central Intelligence Agency and the 7th Air Force in Saigon.

According to Brown the target sites selected at these meetings were sent immediately to Vientiane. There Brown and his staff checked them against aerial photography to be sure they complied with the Ambassador's ground rules. The list plus the accompanying photography was then delivered to the "Bombing Officer," a junior officer in the Embassy, who was briefed on the targets. In most instances this officer gave final approval.

Prior to July 1967, said Brown, a CIA representative was also allowed to help with the briefing of the bombing officer. Brown feels this might be the case now as well.

But Ambassador Sullivan barred the CIA from this briefing "for trying to sneak by a target that violated the ground rules," Brown said.

Brown claims that he never allowed a target which violated the ground rules to be slipped past the bombing officer, even though this put him in disfavor at targeting meetings. He added, however, that the bombing officer would not have known if he had.

"I'd show him photography, I'd show him the maps, I'd show him the coordinates. He didn't have a clue of what was going on. He'd agree or disagree as the case might be. I'd say look this is a village here and you can't bomb it and he'd say O.K., but it could have been a mountain top. This used to really upset the CIA because they were not allowed in on this..."

Although Brown feels that control over the bombing was tighter under Ambassador Sullivan than under current Ambassador G. McMurtrie Godley, he admits that it was not all that tight under Sullivan either.

"In the first place, the Lao Air Force which was, in effect, commanded by members of the Air Attache's staff, was not subject to any of the controls the American planes were. They could and did carry napalm and white phosphorous and dropped it where they pleased.

According to the source, who later ventured into the town with Lao troops, "the Wat (temple) was the target and according to the BDA (Bombing Damage Assessment) it had been hit by 30 caliber machine-gun fire. We didn't find a single body but the town was destroyed except for the Wat." This incident occurred in the Spring of 1967.

In response to the failure earlier this year of Congressman Paul McCloskey (R. Calif.) to obtain from the Department of Defense aerial photographs of one hundred ninety six villages from which refugees have come in Laos, Brown said:
"It would take about four hours of one enlisted man's work to draw the target folders and/or the appropriate aerial reconnaissance traces to find out if the villages had been covered by air strikes in the last month, year or whatever."

Brown added that there are multiple copies of nearly all aerial photos of Laos and that at least one set is available in Washington with a security clearance of no more than "confidential."

Brown said that if you wanted to see a village that was destroyed by bomb ing "draw RLAF (Royal Lao Air Force) 307 folder on the Nam Ou River in Northern Laos and look at the village three kilometers down river east of the indicated target. It was destroyed in 1967."

[From Dispatch News Service International, Apr. 2, 1972.]

THE CAPTIVITY: THREE DAYS AS A CAPTURED U.S. PILOT

Part I

(By John Everingham*)

Bangkok—Two squat, broad-faced mountain Lao soldiers in baggy green jungle fatigues of the Pathet Lao blocked my way. They did not lower their rifles, U.S.-made M-2 carbines. I took the initiative, my voice rapid and unsteady. I knew my fate was in the balance.

"I am not American; I am not your enemy," I said in Lao. I lifted my shirt—no gun; dropped my pack to the ground, opened it slowly, no gun. They still looked suspicious.

Hours before on this afternoon of February 7 I was in Pak Sah village, seventeen miles southeast of Laos' royal capital, Luang Prabang. Bombs hummered the mountain walls a few miles away. Reverberations echoed down the valleys. People cowered in the village temple.

Pak Sah was the last village in the area controlled by the Royal Lao Government. East of it the Government exercises no control. I walked on hoping that my knowledge of Lao would get me in and out of the villages beyond, and permission to make the photographs I wanted, photographs of villages where no Westerner had visited in many years, if ever.

"You must go with us," said the older of the two Lao soldiers. He was about forty.

It was the beginning of 29 days of captivity during which I was locked in a wooden cage, suffered through attacks from American "Spooky" aircraft, and a bombing attack by American planes. I learned about life with the Pathet Lao at first hand.

After a three-hour walk up and down mountain paths I was led into a village burrowed deep in a thick patch of jade-black forest. The houses were small and rickety, with few of the normal village conveniences, and a scattering of pigs or chickens and many hungry children, their bellies distended. They were like no other I had seen in Laos.

Eight Vietnamese in Pathet Lao uniforms joined the growing crowd of villagers outside the headman's house where I had been taken.

"Who are you? Where are you from?" one of the Vietnamese, a young man about twenty, asked evenly. He had not heard of Australia. "You're not American?" he asked incredulously.

The Vietnamese were friendlier than the villagers, whose hostile stares worried me. I had something in common with the Vietnamese, perhaps that we were foreigners far from home. One asked about my home in "Oh-sta-la." About Saigon, "Are Oh-sta-la girls as beautiful as those from Vietnam?"

So far so good, I thought. But things were changing. I was formally put under arrest. A Pathet Lao tasseeng (district chief) arrived. The Vietnamese drifted away as did the villagers. An interrogation began.

My possessions were spread across the floor of the District chief's house, just a woven bamboo mat on bamboo ribbing. Each item was inspected and tested, then noted in my growing dossier. Extra lenses and accessories for my two

* John Everingham is the first Western journalist ever captured by the Pathet Lao forces. He is an Australian photographer/journalist who has spent the last 4 years in Laos. He was captured by the Pathet Lao on Feb. 7 and released 29 days later.
cameras aroused suspicion. One man picked out a lens filter and placed it carefully on my maps. A compass, he said, proved that I had been spying along the border of the Pathet Lao province.

"A pilot I saw captured in Xieng Khouang had a camera," noted a Lao soldier. "It looked like this one," he said as he lifted one of mine.

I again felt ill when I overheard a village headman tell the district chief in a mountain dialect I understood:

"The American must not escape. If he returns to Luang Prabang he may guide the planes to bomb this village."

The next morning, after a restless sleep under guard, I watched the district chief hand a young soldier the only copy of orders pertaining to me. It was somewhat crumpled because the chief had slept with it in his shirt pocket. As I left the village with my new escort I noted that none of the Vietnamese had seen those orders, nor had they participated in my interrogation. The Pathet Lao district chief appeared very much in charge.

I followed one soldier who carried my camera equipment. Another followed me, his gun aimed at my feet. "How many times have you flown a plane over Laos?" asked the rear guard. "How many villages have you bombed?"

Once again I began what was to become a litany, "Australia is a country..."

But it did little good. He would not believe that I was not an American and could not fly a plane. "In Laos people pole boats. We all can pole them. In America people drive airplanes. Don't all of you drive them?"

We entered a village deep in a forest. The houses were small bamboo huts. Cold stares and mutterings of "pilot", "American Soldier", "spy".

Racks of fresh-cut tobacco leaves were turning brown in the village's only sunlight, flooding through an opening in the forest ceiling. It had been made by lashing down young trees. It could be closed with a couple of jerks on a few ropes, which would loose the saplings and cut the village from view of passing planes.

As I was leaving the village with new guards, three T-28 bombers passed north, flying low. A little girl about six was still in the open playing. Her father screamed, "Airplane." The child ran and jumped into the brush in front of us.

Three more forest villages. A change of guard at each one. The legend about me grew. "Naik tim laber" (literally "professional bomb dropper"). We caught him at Pak Sau." The number of guards increased, guns trained at my back.

In another village about twenty men competed to guard me. The one selected shoved a bullet into his M-2 carbine much too zealously for my liking. I must have looked scared. "Don't be afraid. Really, I've never ever killed anybody," he grinned. "We won't shoot you now. We've captured you. We must send you to Sam Neua. Many like you are up there in jail."

Nearly ten hours walking ended in the largest village I had seen that day. It, too, was well hidden in the forest. My legs and back ached miserably from the long hike and it was welcome relief when the district chief's wife, a plump, middle aged woman, brought a bamboo tube of water for washing. She also gave me some freshly brewed tea.

She said, "I can't imagine you as a bad man. Why did you come to destroy our villages? Did President Nixon force you?"

We rose at first light. A brief farewell, and my guards and I disappeared into a warm blanket of fog and forest shadows.

I had been told we were on our way to see the chao meuang (assistant province chief). We found him in the second of two guerrilla camps, a medium-built man in his early fifties.

"Come," he finally said in what I mistook for a friendly voice, "you must stay here some days; we have a special house for you."

I followed him down the hill. The "special house" was unlike anything I had ever seen. The walls were made of logs bamped at the ends with bamboo thongs. The flat roof was also made of logs, four-layers thick. The ceiling was only five feet above the dirt floor.

I backed away. I refused to enter, tried to talk instead. The chao meuang's amusement turned to anger. Suddenly I was inside in darkness.

I tried to reason with the chao meuang. He stalked off. "You will stay in jail," he said in parting. "It was colleagues of yours who destroyed my village."
BANGKOK—Two days after my imprisonment by the Pathet Lao in the dark cramped low wooden cell I ceased being classified an American and "professional bomb dropper". Logs were removed from the doorway, and I crawled into the daylight. I had to grab a tree to keep from falling.

The crowds of curious mountain people had been so large on both days that I refused to come out when guards pulled down the logs and announced, "One hour out for exercise." Only once did I venture out, to defecate.

I got two meals a day, in keeping with Pathet Lao Army custom. They were generous by mountain Lao standards.

My new status of "detained Australian photographer" had been granted by a Pathet Lao regular Army battalion commander, Than Bon.

"When I saw your passport and press card I left my work immediately to come here," said Than Bon, a man of about forty with smooth lowland features and a smile etched upon his bronze face.

"Please forgive these Lao Teung (mountain Lao) people. They know only of Americans coming to Laos and are very angry because the Americans come to drop bombs in their villages."

Commander Than Bon said I would eventually be sent to Sam Neua, the Pathet Lao capital near the North Vietnam border. Four soldiers were assigned to guard me on the walk to Phou Khoun, a town fifteen grueling hours of march to the south.

We arrived at Phou Khoun at midnight. The next night, Feb. 14—seven days after my capture—I was to be taken to the Plain of Jars.

Four trucks pulled up in the dark. Chinese-made, they were just big enough for ten men in the back and two up front.

The road was pockmarked with bomb and rocket craters. We wove, pitched and bounded. A few hours out the driver of the truck I was in suddenly slumped over the wheel. He had fallen asleep, exhausted. We stopped. The trucks parked nose-to-nose in mid-road. We all dismounted and stretched our bedrolls out nearby.

Softly, out of the south came the drone of a plane. A flare over the road two miles behind. It was a Spooky—a O-47 transport with three heavy, rapid-firing machine guns mounted in the cargo bay. "B-r-r-r-r," "B-r-r-r-r," short burst of the machine guns. Ribbons of red tracers momentarily linked Spooky to the road.

The flare died. The drone grew louder. Suddenly a flare burst over us creating instant daylight. Our trucks were clearly visible. Spooky banked, and lazily circled us.

I bolted for the heaviest growth of trees right by my two guards' right on my heels. The drivers raced for their trucks.

"Spooky" spat out his bullets, bursts up to ten seconds, into each of the forested fullness running between open grassy hills. "Spooky" knew how people tried to survive out here, crouched as we were then behind trees too thin to stop its bullets. "Spooky" knew it was in these groves and gullies that the Pathet Lao camped and dug their tunnels, and where the villagers too stubborn to flee into the lowlands rebuilt their villages.

The drivers swiftly maneuvered from shadow to shadow, timing their moves to take advantage of camouflage offered by scattered trees which obscured Spooky's view.

Spooky's bullets crashed through the trees less than two hundred yards away, right where I had last seen the truck I had been riding in. I later learned that the driver had darted off to another shadow just seconds before.

The flare died out. Spooky flew off. It was like the end of a bad dream.

During the next three weeks of captivity I came to know more of danger from the sky.

I had been held in a Pathet Lao camp along Route 4, about thirty miles north of the CIA's Long Cheng base and about twenty miles west of the much contested Plain of Jars for only eight hours when the camp was bombed.

An American "Birddog" spotter plane had drifted overhead all that day. Its presence gave away the impending attack by the T-28s.

The camp had several air raid tunnels. An official warned me to crawl as deep as possible into the nearest one. I did, soon after two tiny ten year old Lao Teung girls from a nearby village.
Normally only eight or ten persons lived in the camp. That day, however, about forty were there. Most of them were visitors from nearby camps villages who had come to see the tall, towheaded visitor.

Having joined the spotter aircraft, three T-28 single propeller bombers circled overhead. Suddenly their engines accelerated, rising into a hawk-like screech. The ten of us in the tunnel squeezed hard together.

The earth shuddered with the blast. "Bomb," said one soldier evenly, using the local word for antipersonnel CBUa (cluster bomb units). "Two hundred meters south."

The T-28s struck twice more, farther away, and then they were back. A soldier's hand reached out to protect the back of my head, already buried between someone else's knees. Tension spread through the tunnel. "The Americans have arrived," the soldier partially exposed at the entrance announced loudly. Then he laughed.

A blast. A burst of shrapnel flew down the tunnel. The ceiling, a foot over our heads, split and partially collapsed. We were numb.

Slowly bodies unfolded, took back their shapes and identities, emerged, sucked deeply at the mountain air. Alive! Still alive!

In other tunnels a few were wounded. One soldier had serious shrapnel wounds, having caught the blast of a CBU as he stood at the entrance to a tunnel that took a more direct hit. Blood oozed from the countless tiny punctures from the fragments of the CBUs.

CBUs are released from a six-foot long "dispenser bomb," a composite of six aluminum tubes that spew one hundred-twenty of the finned yellow bomblets over a wide area. Each is twice hand-grenade size and lined with tiny ball-bearings. No person caught in the open by them is likely to escape. Still, in a hole you are practically out of danger.

"If the camp had not been so unusually crowded it is unlikely that anyone would have been hurt.

The camp itself, a battalion command post, was wrecked from dozens of the bombs that scored direct hits. But the damage was small, since all this command post consisted of was a pad of paper, a pen, a rubber stamp-and-pad and a bush telephone. The telephone line, severed by a piece of shrapnel, was repaired, and the Pathet Lao returned to their jobs.

T-28s returned the next day, and almost every day thereafter, to dump randomly more antipersonnel CBU bombs in the forested gullies between the mountains where both military camps and, separately, civilian villages were hidden.

Night brought the newest of the American gunships. Code-named Spectre, they were converted C-130 transports mounted with pom-pom guns and 20mm cannons, equipped with see-in-the-dark infra-red and low-light television scanners, heat sensors, computerized aiming devices, radar and God knows what else.

One night I definitely could hear Spectre's bullets crashing into the nearby forest. My body trembled uncontrollably. I called to the guard, lying next to me under a thick sheet of plastic tarp: "Don't you think we should get in the tunnel?" He sat up, listened a moment, then said, "Oh, that one. Don't worry; it hardly ever kills anybody." He went back to sleep.

Civilians, I often was told, are more often the victims of Spectre, CBUs, Spooky, etc., than are soldiers. Airplanes cannot distinguish between soldiers and civilians, villages and army camps, when all are similarly hidden. My own observations suggest that villagers must suffer more, if for no other reasons than that they are more concentrated, less mobile, lack military experience and have more possessions to lose.

"Only way to kill us," said Company Commander Thanonsak, one of the two officers assigned to guard me, "is to drop a big bomb right on one of our tunnels. Some soldiers will die then. But you can't do that very often."
“We must keep your cameras and notes to send to Sam Nena for inspection. If it is concluded that you were not spying everything will be returned to you.

“We now believe you are Australian so we must let you go. If we keep you prisoner very long your parents will worry and your government will be angry with us.”

Three days later I found myself back at Pak Sa where I had been captured twenty-nine days earlier. I drank a final glass of rice whisky with my last Pathet Lao guard, and boarded the sampan for Luang Prabang, the old royal capital of Laos.

The guard smiled, waved. “Please tell the truth about us,” he said.

Except for the first few days in the log cell when the Pathet Lao thought I was an American pilot, I had been a prisoner in the loosest sense of the word. Officially, I was a “detained Australian Journalist.”

I had lived with Pathet Lao soldiers for almost a month in the heavily bombed territory north of the Plain of Jars. I had learned to listen for the drone of the planes above me, to dive for cover without hesitation. I slept and ate with my captors, was allowed free run of the camps. These camps were virtually indestructible. The only furniture was handmade split timber and bamboo tables. Black plastic sheets served as tents or lean-tos. Cooking was done in metal pots.

I ate the Pathet Lao’s sticky rice and par daa1c (a pungent, fermented fish paste). I sucked on three-foot bamboo tubes dipped deep in lao hat, a sweet rice wine.

And at first hand, I learned of the Pathet Lao determination not to give up the fight.

“We are patriots. It is only American propaganda that says we are communists,” said company commander Thansans Darasing, one of the two officers assigned to guard and care for me. Thansans is also a well-respected Pathet Lao journalist.

A boyish 31-year-old, Thansans has been fighting for 12 years and was eager to discuss his life with me. I developed a deep respect for him during our days of constant talk. When I left he gave me his picture and scoffed at possible future danger which might come from using his name. “I am a Neo Lao Hak Sat, a person who loves his country,” he said.

In 1960, he was a 19-year-old student at a high school in Vientiane. His father, a courier for the Pathet Lao, was killed by government soldiers. His mother was also killed, he said, and his family’s water buffalo and silver confiscated.

With two brothers and two sisters he was led by an uncle to the Pathet Lao provinces in northern Laos. His oldest brother was killed by machine gun fire in 1969 in a battle with “American Meo” on the Plain of Jars.

“I don’t want to die—I’m like anybody else in that respect,” said Thansans. “But I’m not afraid to die. I can die for my country because my heart tells me I’m doing the right thing for my people. The Vientiane soldiers do not feel this.”

Thansans admitted that the North Vietnamese were helping the Pathet Lao, but “there are not many thousands like the Americans say,” he said. I did not see a single North Vietnamese officer or advisor with Pathet Lao troops except for the eight Vietnamese on the first day.

At least during the first nine days of my capture this could not have been rigged for my benefit—messages were often carried by foot and when I arrived in a new place there was confusion and surprise from top ranks down.

Everywhere I went the Pathet Lao exuded confidence. Pathet Lao soldiers consistently told me that even American air power would not stop them.

“Look,” a soldier told me, “if the bombing were any good, I’d be dead long ago. We’d all be dead. They’ve dropped hundreds of tons of bombs for everyone of our people. But we’re stronger than ever.”

In the midst of war, daily life continues for the Pathet Lao. Thansans is engaged to marry a Pathet Lao medic in June of this year. The newlyweds will honeymoon in a village hidden in the jungle for two weeks before resuming the battle.

“Twelve years is long time to fight,” Thansans said, his eyes moistening. “It is too long. We have watched the government in Vientiane let our country fall to ruin. They’ve allowed Americans to bomb the villages of the Lao people. Laos has had war for too many years. We must finish it.”
Phnom Penh, Cambodia—One out of every seven Cambodians has been classified as a war victim.

This is the Phnom Penh government estimate, which may be quite conservative.

Putting it another way, the government estimates that about 1 million people out of a population of roughly 7 million have suffered losses since fighting started here nearly two years ago.

Most of the war victims are refugees. But the 1 million figure also includes persons, both military and civilian, who have been killed or wounded or whose homes have been destroyed or damaged.

The 1 million figure, issued by Tiam Kim Chieeng, Cambodian Commissioner General for War Victims, shows an increase of 800,000 war victims over an estimate that he made about a year ago.

Shocking though these figures are, they fall far short of those issued recently by Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, who estimates that some 2 million refugees have fled their homes at one time or another since the war began.

Cambodian officials say that the Kennedy figure of 2 million refugees is "highly exaggerated" and that they have nothing to hide.

Another point of contention concerns civilian losses resulting from American and South Vietnamese bombing. A report prepared last December for the U.S. Government's General Accounting Office at Senator Kennedy's request concluded that bombing "is a very significant cause of refugees and civilian casualties."

Both U.S. and Cambodian officials argue that the bombing is neither a major factor in the making of refugees nor a major cause of civilian war casualties.

It would probably take scores of interviews with refugees to better understand six refugee families, selected at random, who came from six widely separated locations in the Cambodian countryside, indicate that the bombing— and artillery shelling—are indeed significant causes both of refugees and of civilian casualties.

All six families listed air strikes, artillery fire, or a combination of the two as reasons for fleeting their home villages.

Four of the six families said these were the primary reasons. The other two said the main reason for their leaving their homes was the arrival of attacking North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops.

Parents in four of the six families said that they had seen civilians killed and wounded by air strikes and artillery fire. Three of the families had their homes destroyed by bombing and artillery fire.

In only one case were North Vietnamese troops said to have burned down civilian homes.

ATTACKS WITNESSED

Phuong Sovann, a mother of seven children, said that her house in Svay Rieng Province burned down after being hit by artillery fire during the U.S. and South Vietnamese invasion in the spring of 1970.

"They thought that Viet Cong were in our village, but they were not," she said.

The family left its home village and took refuge in the provincial capital, later returning to build another, smaller house in the same village. Airplanes—Mrs. Sovann is not sure whether they were American or South Vietnamese—flattened the new house. The family decided then to leave for good when the bombs burned down the house in which they were living with other refugees. They then decided to move to Phnom Penh.

Mr. Ok said that he had also had trouble with South Vietnamese troops, who had demanded small amounts of money from him.

"I welcomed some of those soldiers into my home one day and gave them tea, and they took 20 rials away from me," the old man said.

Mr. Ok has no idea when he will be able to return to his home village. He spends days now grinding rice into a paste for cakes. But this work is not sufficient to give him the money he and his wife need to live. So the Cambodian Government has been providing the couple with rice and dried fish.
But getting food from the government is unusual. In most cases, the government provides food to refugees only during the first difficult days after they flee their homes.

Mr. Ok's case is also unusual in that he and his wife live in a refugee camp. There are still only a few such camps in Cambodia. Most of the refugees who have come to Phnom Penh have moved in with relatives or built bamboo huts with thatched roofs on vacant lots.

[From The Washington Post, Apr. 6, 1972]

CAMBODIA: TRAPPED IN A WAR IT CANNOT STOP

(By Peter Osnos)

Phnom Penh—This remains a lovely city, quieter and even cleaner than most. There are broad Parisian boulevards, some shaded with the kind of stately trees that pollution long ago killed off in Saigon. Sunsets on the banks of the Mekong River with the now empty Royal Palace as a glittering backdrop, can be spectacular.

The large central market has a selection of meats, fruits and vegetables as good if not better than any in South Asia. Lately, largely for seasonal reasons, the price of foods has fallen so that they are now only slightly more expensive than two years ago.

It is a measure of what Phnom Penh once was like that it could have been run down so far and still have so much. But it has run down very far.

The buildings look shabby, public places are neglected. Sidewalks are cluttered with barbed wire and wooden bunkers. Refugees from the countryside have streamed in, poor and often pitiful. The population of Phnom Penh, it is said, has more than doubled.

Off to the side of the main road that leads in from the airport is an area three football fields long where some of the refugees lived until a Communist rocket attack after midnight March 21 leveled most of their shacks. Civilian casualties were in the hundreds. Survivors still mill around a small dispensary waiting for meager handouts of clothes and other items.

Somehow, Phnom Penh has kept its natural charm and food is plentiful by the standards of the world's majority. Life, except for those at the very bottom, is bearable. But otherwise, the picture from the Cambodian capital is almost unrelievably gloomy.

A war that is no longer new and goes well only at the enemy's sufferance is sappling the public spirit. This is demonstrated in many ways. Fear and contempt, for the armed teenagers who make petty thieving demands on the population (a pair of shoes, a meal without paying) has replaced the admiration once felt for their rush to defend the nation.

Corruption, the people say, is getting increasingly worse. "There is too much of the bonjour everywhere," a young Cambodian complains, using the local euphemism for greasing official palms. The pockets of military commanders are stuffed with the salaries of dead or non-existent soldiers. A few months ago the embarrassment became too great and the government abolished 80 battalions that never really existed.

The fear of Vietnamese conquest, rooted in historic precedent, seems also to bind the people less in determining their will to go on. In early 1971, on Highway Four, the road to the Gulf of Siam, there was an 18-year-old girl named Sog Ghenda who replied softly when asked why she was there: "I volunteered for this battle because I love my country. I am not afraid and I will fight until I get killed." Her fellow soldiers nodded approvingly. Such ardor rarely finds voice anymore.

Partly, it must be the physical cost, the dead and wounded, the families separated, the homes destroyed or abandoned. The naivete of the early days about what had to come assured that it would seem especially harsh.

It is also partly disappointment with the unfulfilled promise of the coup against Prince Sihanouk. The monarchy, self-indulgent and patronizing, was abolished and with it went peace. Thus far the republic has offered them nothing better. Lon Nol, the semi-crippled mystic who presides over the country, is less a president than a surrogate king.
What probably troubles the people most of all, however, is the realization that Cambodia is trapped in a war it cannot win and cannot stop until the interests of bigger and more powerful nations have been served, possibly at Cambodia's expense.

If, for example, the present North Vietnamese offensive below the Demilitarized Zone turned out for any reason to be decisive, finally forcing the two Vietnams and their super-power patrons to a settlement, how much would the Cambodians be forced to give up for the sake of a broader Indochina peace? The decisions, Cambodians realize, are not theirs to make.

From time to time there is even reason to doubt the intentions of the United States, on whose offerings Cambodia so completely depends. There was open dismay here when President Nixon in his eight-point peace plan failed to mention what might happen to Cambodia and how its borders would be guaranteed.

Then, after the China visit, Assistant Secretary of State Marshall Green was sent on a tour of America's Asian allies to give them a report of what had gone on in Peking. The itinerary as first announced omitted Cambodia. Later it was added, officially only because Green was able to rearrange his flight plans.

Cambodians are baffled too by the vagaries of American politics that tightly limit the aid they can receive. They know as well that there are some public figures who believe Phnom Penh should get no help at all.

"I can't understand it," a Cambodian colonel said to me as we talked in the rubble of a destroyed town last December, just after government forces had suffered a particularly damaging setback. "When Vietnamese are fighting Vietnamese, you give Saigon all it needs, but when Khmers are fighting outside invaders, you say we must not have too much."

The colonel spoke less than a week after government troops were trounced in the biggest operation they had ever launched, intended to reclaim the road to the surrounded provincial city of Kampong Thom. It was a demoralizing defeat because in its early stages it had sparked so much confidence. The medals were awarded too soon. When the Communists counterattacked from positions the Phnom Penh forces ostensively had cleaned out, they showed conclusively how great the weaknesses were in leadership, strategy and logistics.

Overall, however, the military situation in Cambodia has been reasonably stable, in a way. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong overrun wide areas of the Cambodian countryside in the spring of 1970, just after Sihanouk was overthrown, and they have never been dislodged. Indeed, they have never even been threatened.

On the other hand, although they have battered government forces whenever they have chosen to stand and fight, the Communists have not enlarged the territory (or the population) over which they have control.

Most of the big unit operations take place east of the Mekong River in what used to be called the sanctuaries and continue to be major Communist staging areas. Most of 4 North Vietnamese divisions are there and the South Vietnamese do virtually all the allied fighting.

(When the South Vietnamese pulled out of their base at Krek in January, giving the Cambodian garrison less than a day's notice, the Cambodians fled behind them, actually crossing the border. The colonel in charge said he had no choice. His troops would have been wiped out.)

Elsewhere the fighting is usually small, certainly smaller than it seems from exaggerated news accounts. But the Communists have used terrorism with maximum psychological impact. It can be easily overlooked that an attack as devastating as the one on March 21 probably involved no more than a platoon or two of enemy troops plus a handful of demolition forces.

For three months at the start of this year, there was practically no battlefield activity at all, giving rise to speculation that perhaps both sides were content with the status quo and had reached a tacit understanding that the fighting was costly and accomplished nothing.

The lull ended, more or less, when the Cambodians started a trumpeted but very cautious operation around the Communist-occupied temples at Angkor. But it is indicative of the mood here that talk of accommodation is given so much credibility.

In the gossip mills, it is always the Russians, who keep the second largest mission in Phnom Penh, that are cast in the role of mediators and there is no doubt that they are doing what they can to encourage the belief that some arrangement is possible.
Chou-en-Lai said as much in a speech recently when he accused "certain powers" of attempting to drive a wedge into Prince Sihanouk's "united front." "I don't know of any such contacts," a middle-level Russian said at the embassy here last week, adding with a smile, "But journalists know everything. Of course our diplomats have a right to see officials of Cambodia. They study the situation and make reports to our government."

If a deal did become possible, the most popular formula is for the Cambodians to concede that the North Vietnamese fight it out for the sanctuary areas farther south. In return, the Cambodians would get nothing except a respite. It is still unlikely that Cambodian morale will fall so low that it would be willing to cede, probably forever, a third of the country. The possibility that it could happen is accepted, however, at the United States embassy. "The Cambodians stagger from one problem to another," said a senior official, "and I can understand why they might want to explore openings to Hanoi. But they don't have much to offer."

The feeling among ranking Americans in Phnom Penh, whose acuity has almost always been matched by their candor, is that Cambodia is not in any imminent danger of collapse or capitulation, although that could quickly change if pressure were significantly stepped up for a sustained period or American support were suddenly withdrawn.

There is little effort to put a gloss on the sorry state of things. The recent political events caused particular concern, especially the ousting of Sisowath Sirik Matak, whom the U.S. mission regarded as the most able man in the leadership. "The prospect now," an American official observed, "is for more inefficient government."

The apparent indispensability of Lon Nol, a demonstrably capricious man removed from Western and even oriental reality, promises further uncertainty. The Cambodian Communists, although continuing to take a relatively small role militarily, have been busy politically, proselytizing in the countryside and building an infrastructure growing in both numbers and influence. They too could become a formidable factor in the months ahead.

In terms of insecurity, corruption, public malaise and political unrest, Cambodia is not unlike South Vietnam in the period of the middle 1960s when the massive United States buildup got under way. If there is anything at all sure about what will happen in Cambodia, it is that no American expeditionary force will come to the rescue.

[From The Washington Post, May 8, 1972.]

CAMBODIAN EXPERIENCE TURNS SOUR

(By Laurence Stern, Washington Post Foreign Service)

"Cambodia is the Nixon Doctrine in its purest form."—Richard M. Nixon, November 15, 1971.

"The quarter-billion dollar aid program for Cambodia is, in my opinion, probably the best investment in foreign assistance that the United States has made in my lifetime."—Richard M. Nixon, December 10, 1970.

The army that marched in sneakers, rode ebulliently to war in Pepsi-Cola trucks and fired Chinese carbines only two years ago seems like a romantic fiction. There are now proper trucks and uniforms and American M-16s.

Nonetheless President Nixon's description of the Cambodian aid program is a piece of hyperbole that has turned bittersweet, if not completely sour.

The Cambodian army, known as FANK (Force Armee Nationale Khmer), has grown from a poorly equipped and ill-trained militia of 80,000 at the time Prince Norodom Sihanouk was overthrown in 1970 into a poorly led and frequently outfought force that is now, at least on paper, supposed to number 200,000.

Although the figure is still technically classified, the administration is seeking to raise its military aid sights to support a Cambodian army of 220,000, although U.S. military planners envision further expansion of the force.

The United States has been pouring in military supplies at a rate of 5,000 tons a month along the Mekong River from Vietnam and into Phoentong Airport in Phnom Penh. Half of the incoming cargo is ammunition.
More than 50,000 Cambodian troops have undergone training in South Vietnam, Thailand, the United States, Indonesia, Malaysia and elsewhere, knowledgeable U.S. officials in Phnom Penh report.

Since President Nixon spoke the above-quoted words 16 months ago the dollar value of assistance to Cambodia has more than doubled.

However, at least half of Cambodia's land mass and a quarter of its 7 million population now lie beyond the writ of the Lon Nol government, by official intelligence estimates.

**GUERRILLA STRENGTH GROWS**

The insurgent Khmer Rouge (Red Cambodian) movement has grown from a scattered force of about 2,000 to a wide-spread guerrilla force that one key White House official this week set at 50,000. State Department intelligence estimates of Khmer Rouge strength are 15,000 to 30,000.

The current North Vietnamese offensive demonstrates that the avowed objective of the American "incursions" two years ago and follow-up operations by the South Vietnamese army—the cleaning out of Cambodia's Communist sanctuaries—was short-lived in its effect.

Despite the rapidly rising scale of American weapons, logistic support and tactical air assistance, the Cambodian army failed its most important test of "Cambodianization" when a major offensive thrust along Route 6 last fall turned into a demoralizing rout.

These are not the judgments of amateur war critics or "knee-jerk" dissenters but of professional diplomats and military men whose job it is to know how the Cambodian conflict goes.

For the progress of the war is the test of the realism and efficacy of the military and economic support programs which in this fiscal year reached an obligatory level of $341 million from a zero starting point two years ago.

One well-informed U.S. official in Cambodia said the defeat inflicted by counter-attacking North Vietnamese in the Highway 6 operation, known as Chenia II, devastated the Cambodian Army for the 1971-1972 dry season.

**REOCUPATION IS CONCEDED**

Before the current Communist offensive into South Vietnam officials were conceding that the North Vietnamese had long reoccupied the eastern sanctuaries which served as the staging grounds for the new offensive probes toward Saigon and into the Mekong Delta.

Corruption, no stranger to the Cambodian military or to the civil government before Sihanouk's downfall, has increased in scale along with the enlarged range of opportunities.

The "phantom battalion" system that is a legacy of the Vietnam war experience, under which senior officers collect and pocket the pay of nonexistent troops claimed to be under their command, has achieved a solid reincarnation in Cambodia.

This has been tacitly recognized in the American assistance command. Last fall, at the direction of Gen. Theodore Metaxis, former head of the U.S. equipment delivery program in Cambodia, hundreds of cameras were distributed to Cambodian commanders for troop verification purposes. Several American surveys were also conducted on a spot basis. The results never surfaced nor, it is said by some observers in Phnom Penh, did the cameras.

"HAVEN'T LOST ANY GROUND"

"What does anyone expect of a ratty-assed, inexperienced little country of seven million?" asked one senior U.S. official with rhetorical fervor. "At least they haven't lost any ground they didn't have in 1970." That was the year the North Vietnamese backed their forces throughout Cambodia following the American and South Vietnamese incursions from the east.

The scope and objectives of the American aid that has poured into Cambodia in the past two years seem to have expanded at a more rapid pace than was implied in President Nixon's April 30, 1970, telecast announcing the American incursions.

"... We shall do our best to provide small arms and other equipment which the Cambodian army of 40,000 needs and can use for its defense. But the aid we will provide will be limited to the purpose of enabling Cambodia to defend its
neutrality—and not for the purpose of making it an active belligerent on one side or the other.”

On May 14, 1970, Secretary of State William P. Rogers said the defense of the Cambodian government is not “our primary purpose and that will not be our purpose in the future.”

But on March 14, 1972, Rogers told the House Foreign Committee: “As you know one of the reasons we have increased the request for Cambodian assistance is that we are anxious to see that the government in Cambodia survives.”

With the irresistible momentum that has characterized so much of the American experience in Southeast Asia, the commitment took wings.

**MILITARY AID GRANTS**

Within 12 days of his April 1970 speech Mr. Nixon signed a presidential determination for $7.9 million in military aid grants to the Phnom Penh government. By June 30, there was another trickle of $1 million. Within a month—$40 million more. By November the President asked Congress for a $255 million supplemental military aid program—$165 million for Cambodia and the rest to replay the program for the emergency Cambodian borrowings.

When Congress enacted the supplemental bill it signaled a new stage in the Cambodian commitment and also touched off an intra-governmental debate over the U.S. military presence there.

Until that point the MEDT (military equipment delivery team) program was funded out of the President’s own drawing account and run by ex-Green Beret Jonathan F. Ladd, a military maverick and legendary Vietnam combat advisor. Ladd was sent to Phnom Penh in May of 1970 by presidential National Security Adviser Henry A. Kissinger. His instructions were to provide objective reporting, set up a “primitive” logistics system and keep a low silhouette.

The mission was to his liking because of Ladd’s anti-bureaucratic style of operation.

**PENTAGON ASSUMES CONTROL**

But when the program was funded by Congress it automatically went under the control of the Pentagon and gradually Ladd’s influence waned while the military hierarchy in Washington and at Pacific Command headquarters in Honolulu took over.

The tendency from that point onward was toward more Americans, more sophisticated weapons and toward the erection of a typical military assistance bureaucracy in Phnom Penh. (The size of the American government contingent in Cambodia has increased from five in March, 1970, to about 160 today. A limit of 200 Americans has been imposed by Congress.)

An illustrative episode occurred last June when the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked for a U.S. logistics delivery team of 100 Americans in Phnom Penh. At the time Ladd had only 23 technicians working under him. Both Ladd and Ambassador Emory C. Swank protested vehemently. Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird halved the Joint Chiefs’ proposal to 50—still more than doubling the Phnom Penh contingent.

“No, no,” Ladd pleaded. “I have functional use for no more than seven men.” He got 27.

The size of the MEDT mission now exceeds 115, with less than half the number in Phnom Penh and the rest in Saigon. The new MEDT chief, Gen. John Cleland, who replaced the expansion-minded Metaxis, has put out the word that he will try to reduce the size of the American group and sharply police U.S. “end-use” inspections in the field. The end-use checks are intended to assure that the weapons are being put to the purposes for which they were delivered—and no more.

**PRESERVE BUILDING SYMBOLIZES**

The most palpable symbol of the American presence and of the Nixon Doctrine in Cambodia is a high-rise “tempo” building behind the enlarged American embassy that houses the MEDT program in Phnom Penh. Resident wags call it, as inevitably they would, Pentagon East.

American voices are heard where they would have been a jarring novelty in 1970. At the poolside of the Phnom (the republicanized Royal) Hotel, once a predominantly French sunbathing preserve, hefty U.S. technicians and officers shout, “Gar-sahn” at confused, scurrying waiters. It is an old page out of the Vietnam war next door.
Economic aid to Cambodia has also followed a well-rutted trail that winds through the earlier aid programs to Vietnam and Laos. The newly established Commodity Import Program for Cambodia is stalled dead center and reflects little attention to the priorities of the country's war-disrupted economy.

It has already become a matter of unfriendly attention on Capitol Hill that in the one-year lifetime of the AID program far more money has been pushed on Phnom Penh than the government has been able to digest.

During the first half of 1971 less than a tenth of the $70 million in economic assistance obligated for Cambodia was used. Nonetheless AID officials in Cambodia asked for another $110 million to finance commodity imports in this fiscal year.

**PROGRAM BORN OF HASTE**

The economic aid program for Cambodia was hatched in the greatest of haste. AID programmers arbitrarily set the level of the commodity import program, under which the U.S. finances the shipment of essential commodity items to Cambodian importers, at what they believed to be the level of imports before the war broke out in 1970. The guess proved disastrously high. Only a trickle of import applications were filed by the shrewd Chinese traders who form the elite of Indochinese mercantile society.

"It may be that they are unfamiliar with our procedures," conjectured one AID advisor in Cambodia, a theory that brings guffaws of incredulity from more experienced officials.

The Phnom Penh traders and financiers are past masters at dealing with governmental red tape, smuggling, black market operations, currency manipulation and the many other varieties of private enterprise in Southeast Asia.

The more plausible and commonly accepted explanation is that AID underestimated the disruption of the war on consumer demand.

Among the "essential items" approved by AID to underwrite Cambodia's economic survival last year were: 1,700 Italian motor scooters valued at $660,000; more than $100,000 worth of color movie film and other professional movie equipment; radio paraphernalia worth $507,700 to provide broadcasting facilities at the port city of Kompong Som and Battambang. (One U.S. official in Phnom Penh refers acerbically to the project as the "Cambodian Radio Amelioration Program, C-R-A-P."

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**CAMBODIANS TELL OF TERRORISM BY SAIGON'S SOLDIERS**

Prasaut, Cambodia, Sept. 8—Scores of Cambodian peasants have gathered in this bombed-out village on Route 1 seeking protection from what they describe as pillaging and wanton attacks by South Vietnamese soldiers operating in Cambodia.

Interviews with some of the most recent arrivals—more than 500 refugees have come during the last six weeks—confirmed a confidential American report of alleged depredations by the Vietnamese that Ambassador Emory C. Swank sent to the State Department in Washington Aug. 24.

Negotiations are now under way in Phnom Penh between the South Vietnamese military and the Cambodians, who reportedly want Saigon to withdraw its troops from all but a 16-kilometer zone along the Vietnamese-Cambodian border.

Prasaut, which is 18 miles west of the border, normally houses only 400 to 500 people but has recently grown to become a refuge for peasants who find they cannot live with the pillaging of South Vietnamese soldiers. Because of its location on Route 1, the villagers feel less isolated here and less likely to be terrorized by loosely disciplined Vietnamese soldiers who traditionally feel contempt for the Cambodians.

**COMMISSION SET UP**

The civilian in charge of security here, Sok Khim, says he does not know what can be done to stop the atrocities by South Vietnamese soldiers.

American Embassy officials passed through here several weeks ago to investigate the increasing number of assaults. Occasional reports of looting, however, date back more than a year, when the South Vietnamese first entered Cambodia.

A South Vietnamese Government spokesman refused to comment on the alle-
gations today. A joint Cambodian-Vietnamese commission has been formed to investigate the charges, but according to the report by Ambassador Swank red tape has considerably slowed down inquiries.

The Ambassador’s report said that embassy officials interviewed Cambodian peasants in Prasaut who told of rape, murder, kidnap and robbery by South Vietnamese troops. Provincial officials, the report said, felt that local feelings were running so high that the peasants would cut the throats of individual soldiers unwary enough to fall into their hands.

More terrifying accounts were told to be a reporter by refugees today. A 21-year-old mother named Ngetb from the vicinity of Kompong Rau, a small town 10 miles from here, spoke quietly, sobbing as she held her 2-year-old son close to her side. She described how Vietnamese soldiers entered her village on Aug. 27, beat her parents and her eight brothers and sisters to death with their rifles and then robbed and assaulted her.

**HUSBAND’S STORY**

“She begged them to leave us alone,” she said. “But they said we were Vietcong. I told them no Vietcong had been in our village for many months.” The woman said that nearly a hundred other Cambodians were beaten, tied together and led away by the Vietnamese soldiers.

Other refugees were gathering in close to share their stories of terror. A 27-year-old fought back tears as he described how five Vietnamese soldiers entered his house on Aug. 28, looted it, then pinned him to a chair while they attacked his wife.

A 50-year-old gray-haired woman stepped forward. “I was attacked, too,” she said. “They hit me on the head and then on the legs.”

She pointed in the direction of her village. “It was on the road, on the road,” she said. “They took my clothes off and forced me to the ground.” The woman picked up a cloth to wipe the tears from her eyes. She could not continue.

The peasants who have come to this village, which was mostly destroyed in fighting more than a year ago, all agree that South Vietnamese soldiers are attacking them and not the Vietcong, whom they are supposed to fight. Frequently, the peasants say, the Vietnamese soldiers have taken their livestock, including pigs, chickens and water buffalo, as war booty. They say family treasures and the gold bracelets often worn by the women as ornaments have also been seized.

**ROCKET ATTACKS REPORTED**

“The soldiers came to my house and took my parents’ treasures,” a 34-year-old pedicab driver said. “Then they took all my brother’s pigs and chickens. They said if I did not give them all they asked for, they would kill me and say I was a Vietcong.”

Villagers from Kompong Rau said that the South Vietnamese had shelled their homes with rockets on five consecutive nights although no North Vietnamese or Vietcong troops had been in the area for weeks.

“After the rocket attack on the first day six of their helicopters arrived,” said a 42-year-old farmer, who had not eaten in four days. They said they had come to investigate. “But all the soldiers did was tell us to get out of our houses. Then they entered and took our treasures and food and loaded it into other helicopters.”

The American embassy report confirmed such incidents and said similar looting had occurred in other parts of Cambodia. In a village in Prey Veng Province South Vietnamese soldiers stole sewing machines, outboard motors, clothing, animals, money and jewelry, the American investigators were told.

**BUDDHIST MONKS BEATEN**

Buddhist monks, too, were beaten by the South Vietnamese soldiers. Then the villagers were forced to load the booty into Vietnamese helicopters. The American report listed other examples.

The report brought into doubt the effectiveness of some South Vietnamese soldiers fighting the North Vietnamese in Cambodia.

In a village in an area where South Vietnamese troops had been operating for two weeks, peasants asked for and were given 100 weapons for self-defense. When asked why it was necessary to issue weapons to the villagers, Cambod-
ia’s Premier, Lon Nol, said that the South Vietnamese troops had not neutralized the North Vietnamese and Vietcong and that at least one enemy base area in the vicinity of Trapang Krasang had been pointedly avoided, the Ambassador’s report stated.

8 MURDERS REPORTED

Documenting depredations in the Krols Kos district, the report said that South Vietnamese forces had murdered three persons and committed five cases of rape in addition to their usual quota of plundering.”

The refugees in Prasaut are not receiving financial assistance. They live under the wooden frames of bombed-out peasant shacks and eat the fish and vegetables given them by the villagers here. Some beg food from merchants. But merchants, too, who travel Route 1 are stopped by South Vietnamese operating checkpoints set up to provide security by to extract “road taxes.” The hapless merchants must pay either in money or in the produce they carry.

The document also quoted the local provincial governor as saying that border markers were reportedly being moved and that he concluded that a deliberate attempt was being made by the South Vietnamese soldiers to drive the Cambodian peasants off their land so it could be taken by “land-hungry Vietnamese.”
A.I.D. COMMENTS ON GAO REPORT ON CAMBODIA

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT,
OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR,

Hon. Edward M. Kennedy,
Chairman, Subcommittee on Refugees, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN:

In my letter of May 16, I promised to give you our views and comments on the GAO reports of war-related civilian problems in Indochina, as requested in your letter of April 25. Since your letter asked for our views on five separate reports, I am forwarding our comments on each as they are ready, rather than as a package.

Enclosed are our views on the GAO report of February 2, 1972 entitled, "Problems in the Khmer Republic (Cambodia) Concerning War Victims, Civilian Health and War-related Casualties." I believe that these comments address the main issues raised in the GAO report. However, if you would like further information on any of the items, I will be happy to try to provide it.

Sincerely yours,

John A. Hannah.

AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (A.I.D.) COMMENTS ON GAO REPORT OF FEBRUARY 2, 1972, ENTITLED "PROBLEMS IN THE KHMER REPUBLIC (CAMBODIA) CONCERNING WAR VICTIMS, CIVILIAN HEALTH, AND WAR-RELATED CASUALTIES"

In considering the question of refugees in the Indochina area, one must take into account the differences between the situations in Cambodia and the neighboring countries of South Vietnam and Laos.

The GAO study was made in October-November 1971. The only significant military action in Cambodia had taken place in early and mid-1970 and that action was of limited duration and limited geographic terrain—the Cambodia-South Vietnam border sanctuary area. Consequently, the refugee problem in Cambodia has never approached anything like the severity of the problems in Vietnam and Laos.

The number of persons that is quoted as being involved is misleading because it includes people who voluntarily leave their place of residence, such as dependents of soldiers who elect to move close to the military camp; people who have already returned to their homes; and people who have temporarily taken up residence with friends and relatives in the more secure areas. This accounts for the fact there are few refugee camps, and accounts for the fact the Cambodian Government has not accorded a higher priority to the refugee question. In short, the problem is not viewed by them as being acute in Cambodia.

With respect to the specific points raised by the GAO report:

1. NUMBER OF REFUGEES

The report cites a Cambodian Ministry of Health estimate that more than two million persons have been displaced by the war between March, 1970 and September, 1971. This figure was used in subsequent press releases here.

The determination of the number of refugees, as we testified on May 9, is an extremely difficult task. The GAO report itself admits that the number of refugees is largely conjectural. There is no question that the two million figure is high.

If we are talking about refugees and is probably high even if we broaden our consideration to all persons who have, left their homes because of the war. The Commissioner for War Victims, for example, had a different calculation in estimating the number of people in a refugee status. He is cited as estimating about 150,000 refugees living in Phnom Penh and about 70,000 living in provincial capitals. Presumably he was referring to displaced persons who were not able to find shelter with family or friends. We conclude therefore there are no reliable statistics on this matter.

2. HEALTH CONDITIONS

Concerning public health conditions, the report states (p. 47) that the team was advised that as the result of the war shortages of medical facilities, equipment, supplies, pharmaceuticals, and personnel became severe. The need for medicines was described as “critical” (p. 49).

Data was gathered for the GAO report in the fall of 1971. The UNDP report, for which data was gathered in April of 1972, had an entirely different assessment. That report found that the problem was not a quantitative shortage of resources but poor utilization in many instances of the available resources. For example, the number of hospital beds per capita was found to approach international norms, but hospital doctors were often not available and too many beds were occupied by persons not requiring hospitalization. The UNDP found that “Present pharmaceutical stocks as well as facilities for their replenishment would appear to be satisfactory”. However, occasionally supplies of certain patent medicines ran out and second choice medicines had to be employed. More trained physicians and nurses are needed, according to the report, and the UNDP recommended that the GKR seek help in organizing a nursing training program from international organizations such as the World Health Organization and the International Red Cross, or from bilateral donors such as the Japanese and Australians.

On the question of importing pharmaceuticals, we have pointed out in our testimony that the Cambodian Government is now importing and can continue to import pharmaceuticals from their own foreign exchange resources which we have augmented with a $20 million cash grant and a $20 million reimbursement program. In 1970 and 1971 more than four million dollars worth of pharmaceuticals were imported annually into Cambodia. We expect at least the same amount to be imported in 1972.

3. U.S. POLICY

The GAO report states that the policy of the U.S. has been to not become involved with the problems of civilian war victims in Cambodia. It also states that there is no specific U.S. program for assisting refugees in Cambodia. Both are correct.

Reasons for this policy were stated in our testimony before the Subcommittee on May 9. As stated above, the situation in Cambodia is quite different from that prevailing in Laos and Vietnam where the war has gone on for much longer and has been much more destructive. In Cambodia, the problem is of a different order of magnitude; there have been no sustained onslaughts by the enemy aimed at capturing areas of Cambodia.

In Cambodia, most displaced persons tend to congregate in Phnom Penh and have generally been able to find shelter with relatives and friends. We believe that on the whole the GKR’s level of effort, combined with the efforts of the family and friends of the displaced persons, is meeting the current requirements and is consistent with the standards of living of the Cambodian people. Aside from the fact that the GKR, along with other nations and international bodies, is already involved in assisting refugees, U.S. programs have the disadvantage of requiring an increased American presence in Cambodia and a gradual shift in responsibility.

Though we do not have a U.S. refugee program in Cambodia, our economic aid program does have an impact on the well-being of those in the urban areas, where most of the refugees are congregated. Our economic aid program attempts to assure an adequate supply of essential commodities in the marketplace. Thus the urban populace, displaced persons as well as permanent residents, can have available a substantially larger amount of resources than they would if there were no U.S. economic aid program.
4. CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

(a) The report finds that "The Cambodian government has not developed an over-all program to deal effectively with the civilian war victim problem. There are, as yet, no specific programs for providing temporary relief to refugees. Relief has been granted on a case-by-case basis." The GAO report does point out, on the other hand, that there is a program of assistance for civilian war victims. Chapter 4 of the report gives the GAO's findings on the total level of financial assistance to war victims provided by the Cambodian government. Our own figures, as testified before the Subcommittee, show that the equivalent of at least $2.7 million has been provided by the GKR and private agencies for the relief of war victims.

(b) The GAO report cites a lack of coordination between the various Cambodian government agencies involved in assisting refugees. This was more true at the time the report was made than today. The GKR has improved coordination by establishing a central coordinating committee for refugees with representation from the various ministries involved.

(c) The report states that a total of 23,030 war claims for the equivalent of $130 million has been reported by the Cambodian government, but none has been paid. In the first instance, the $130 million figure is derived from converting riel to dollars at an exchange rate of 55 riel to the dollar. The current and more realistic rate of 150 riel to the dollar would lead to total claims of some $45 million. Furthermore, these claims include destroyed property owned by private individuals and business enterprises. We assume this includes the claims against the GKR of large private enterprises, such as the rubber plantations, for destruction due to the war. We agree, however, that although other assistance is provided to war victims, there has been no procedure established to compensate for war damage claims.

5. CONDITION OF REFUGEES

On the key subject of the condition of the refugees, the summary of the report indicates that "Although living conditions varied from place to place, conditions were generally less than adequate. Lack of sufficient food rapidly was becoming serious." The body of the report, however, gives a somewhat better, or at least more equivocal, assessment than does the summary statement. For example, on page 22 the report indicates that the GAO team was told by numerous persons that the availability of food was considered not to be a serious problem, but that some others did think it a serious problem. Based on our own observations, the GKR has maintained adequate stocks of rice and wheat flour in the urban areas and regular convoys by road and river have averted any sustained food shortages. We believe that the people are not going hungry. However, undoubtedly the diet of the refugees, as well perhaps as the diet of the general population, could be substantially improved in its protein and nourishment content.

As to the camps, the report indicates that three of the official refugee camps in Phnom Penh were adequate, and the fourth, supported primarily by a private charitable group, was found to be crowded and unsanitary. There was similar variation in the conditions of the camps in the rural areas. This would not appear to support the summary statement that "Conditions were generally less than adequate."

6. CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

The report correctly states the difficulty of obtaining reliable statistics on civilian war-related casualties. We agree that the blame for creating civilian casualties is not wholly on one side or the other.

The GAO report does state, however, on page 40, that the team was informed that "A large percentage of the refugees in Cambodia were persons who had fled from their homes in Communist-controlled territory and that a lower percentage of refugees were generated as a direct result of aerial bombardment and other competing activities." We suspect that the larger percentage of civilian casualties is attributable to Communist-initiated activity.