

patrolling was much more aggressive. Rocket and 130mm fire was increasing. On 12 or 13 February I informed Udorn ,Vientiane and Hqs. that a heavy attack on Long Tieng(not Skyline Ridge) seemed imminent and there were insufficient ground troops and on call air support to defend. Long Tieng and the air field . Knowing the odds were not good for us to withdraw from Long Tieng in an orderly manner once hostilities began, I recommended only the most essential U.S. personnel remain with the bulk of U.S. personnel to leave as soon as possible. I was very much aware of the political aspect of such a move on our part. Gen. Vang Pao, might decide we were abandoning him in his hour of greatest need. I had to also take into account the political fall out for the U.S. if Long Tieng had been overrun, 20 odd Americans captured,most of whom, were CIA, and were paraded on the streets of Hanoi. Fortunately,Ambassador Godley, the senior American and the person to make the decision was a man who possessed excellent judgement and common sense. I remained with a small group of CIA and USAF personnel..

At 1900 hours 14 February the NVA began their attack with a 122mm and 130 mm bombardment followed by close in RPG-7 rocket fire. By 2200 hours our position was becoming untenable,indeed precarious, because NVA units had reached the airfield and were beginning to destroy the ammo dump and adjacent buildings. Our compound, the CP where the Americans stayed along with some Hmong,Thais and Lao, was in flames. We had lost commo with Gen. Vang Pao and the Hmong units defending the airfield. Not until a few hours later did I realize how precarious our position was. Hmong forces had withdrawn from our rear and on our right flank.They assumed we had been overrun when they saw our area in flames. By mid-night or perhaps 0100,I do not recall, we finally got some air support in the form of F-4s (as I recall it). Unfortunately in the first pass they dropped a big load of 30 minute delay CBUs on us not the NVA.I make this statement not to take a cheap shot at the USAF but to insure accuracy of what happened. In time of war we know of many instances when friendly forces made a mistake and fired on their own people. You have to remember it was night time, and because of the steep topography the aircraft had to make high angle attacks with virtually no chance to adjust their flight path at the last minute. However, later on they really did a job on the NVA. Air power kept us from being overrun. The NVA came right up to our wire but were unwilling to pay the price to take it all. Even so, they hurt us badly . Long Tieng was heavily damaged and ceased operating as a forward base from then on.

Now to your paper.

Page 1- My recollection is that the Skyline Ridge/Long Tieng battle took place from December 1971 until about early to mid-March 1972. My recollection is that Hmomg,Thai and Lao(almost exclusively from Pakse and Savannakhet) forces numbered closer to 8,000 rather than 10,000. I do not recall that the NVA deployed 20 bns against

us, certainly not 20 full strength bns. I do not recall the specific estimated strength of the NVA at the outset of the battle. My judgement, however, is that it was in the 9-11,000 range. What they had going for them was excellent training good artillery support and motivation.

Page 3- The Hmong did acquit themselves well in a number of battles prior to 1970 and later. However, we must remember that the NVA was focused on South Vietnam leaving the Pathet Lao to fend for themselves. Anyone looking at the population base from which Hmong and Lao soldiers came from and compared that with the population base of North Vietnam were deluding themselves if they thought a "permanent change in the tactical balance..." was in the cards. (For example: I believe it was either Pop Buell or another USAID officer who performed a population study of the Hmong in late 1970 or early 1971 to get a handle on just how much rice was needed to feed the Hmong civilians as well as the Hmong military. Pop told me that as far as he was concerned the war was already over because there were 20% plus more females age 15-30 among the Hmong than there were males. We all knew that the Hmong had taken very heavy casualties but even Vang Pao was alarmed over these figures which he did not dispute .)

Page 4- Iden

Page 5- The number of Americans in Long Tieng never exceeded 28-32 excluding transient air crews who rarely remained over night in Long Tieng. This included the USAF contingent and the redoubtable Father Bashard, an American Catholic priest who ministered to the sick and dying. Bashard was not part of our unit but a genuine Catholic priest who is now in Borneo.

The 300-400 figure by Bill Colby may have included those whose primary duty was Laos in the CIA Hqs. at Langley. There certainly was nothing like that figure in Laos.

A word about Mac Godley ,our ambassador. We served together in the Congo during the insurrection where he was very much an activist. In Laos he often visited me in Long Tieng and remained over night. He was a tough,no nonsense ambassador who insisted on going to the forward areas to see for himself what was going on. As you know ,he served with distinction as our ambassador in Beirut during the height of the bombings there.

Page 7-I really did not have the authority to "direct" Air America or Continental. We were blessed with having Air America and Continental air crews that knew their jobs and knew the mission. They knew we would never ask them to perform missions where the odds favored the enemy. I had not one armed chopper or armed fixed wing aircraft under my operational command and yet these guys repeatedly risked their lives to med evac the wounded and downed U.S. airmen. You were proud to be an American when an unarmed Twin Otter with part the vertical tail section shot away and holes in the wings made an ammo and food drop and limped home but was

ready to go out again once the plane was patched up. These guys put their lives on the line every day and I know of not one single instance in the over two years I was in Laos that these air crews shirked their duty. The same accolades go to the Thai,Lao and Hmong cargo pushers on the planes.

Page 8- See my previous comments about the fire bases on the PDJ.

I am sure the people in Udorn were encouraged that the Thais would hold out. Remember,however, that these fire bases ASSUMED ON CALL CLOSE AIR SUPPORT FOR THEIR SURVIVAL.

As for B-52 strikes we did get some. Gen. Vang Pao.myself,other CIA officials and Ambassador Godley talked many times to Adms Gayler,Moorer, Mc Cain and Gen. Abrams about our needs but of course the primary need was to protect U.S. troops and the withdrawal. I am not especially proud that we professionally exploited the few opportunites we did have to use B-52s.

Page 11- I have nothing but memory to go on but I do not recall our estimating NVA forces at 19,000. My recollection is closer to 10-12,000. What ever it was they were trained,equipped and motivated.

Our forces were as previously stated.

Page 14- The low U.S. casualties in MR II were due primarily to the strict discipline instilled in CIA officers by senior CIA officers in Udorn and the COS in Vientiane. This discipline was reinforced by Ambassador Godley . You have to understand that CIA, USAID and USAF officers in MR II were by nature "activists" who were mission oriented. They had a strong psychological attachment to the Hmong and felt they should go into combat with the Hmong. They also knew how high the stakes were and the consequences to the U.S. if they were captured or killed. I have no doubt that some of our officers took risks with the Hmong. However, those who could not submit to the discipline were sent home.

You comment about the Bay of Pigs "fiasco" and the inability of CIA to conduct large scale military operations. I was part of the Bay of Pigs task force. I did not go ashore with the landing force but I was very close to that scene. This was not a CIA fiasco. This was a failure of the president of the U.S., John Kennedy and Adlai Stevenson in the UN. Also ,CIA has never deluded itself that it can or should conduct large scale military operations. Covert action military operations are never a substitute for a well thought out and executed foreign policy.

CIA can buy some time for foreign policy decisions to be reached but CIA covert action has its limits.

General Vang Pao would dispute Doug Blaufarb's remarks. What alternative did the Hmong have? You must remember that the Lao and their French patrons never had a very high regard for the Hmong whom they called "miao" a perjorative term. So far as I am aware, the U.S. did not lead the Hmong or Gen. Vang Pao down the garden path. We

gave them military,economic(food ,clothing shelter) and political support

I confirm that I was an enlisted man in the Marine Corps in WW II serving in the South Pacific. I was briefly assigned to the Raiders in WW II but did not see combat with them.I was commissioned in the Marine Corps after WW II and participated in the Korean War. My actions during the Korean War remain classified.

I hope my comments are helpful.

Sincerely yours,
J. Richard Johnson
J. Richard Johnson

Oct 1969 Series of NY Times articles on Laos -
Senate subcommittee hearing - Laos comes
"out of the shadows"

October 1969 - April 1970

Major Jesse E. Scott was with Project 404 in Laos in TDY from the 1st Special Operations Wing at Hulbert. He was nominally assigned to Udorn but in fact was with the Air Attaché's office at VTE. He first served in the Air Operations Center (AOC). From January to late February 1970, he was a T-28 operation at LS-108 (Muong Soui in the northwestern corner of the PDJ). The site was overrun in late February. They then opened a T-28 operation at LS-249, about 30 miles west of the PDJ. (He went home in April but he believes that the site operated into the summer.)

Scott deployed from the US in civilian clothes and was processed into Laos as part of the USAID contingent, listed as a "communications technician." He had firm instructions not to fly in combat. The TDY personnel were known as PALACE DOG. There was an AOC for each of the five military regions in Laos, with a site commander for each (on TDY). In all, there were about 100 to 120 USAF personnel involved. CIA chief of unit was the counterpart of the AOC site commander.

Army attaches worn uniforms, flew in Army helicopters, and advised FAR units. Meo were handled by the CIA, using Air America. CIA not involved with FAR. There were CIA case officers with each Meo battalion. They would touch base with the unit every day for rice and ammo requirements.

Thai pilots flew missions from VTE, arriving from and returning to Udorn every day. There were some 20 Thai pilots on a six-month contract to fly T-28s. In April 1970, Scott recommended that the contract be cancelled as there were sufficient Lao pilots for the T-28s.

Scott found the Thais very professional. "Although they were mercenary, they had a deep concern for what they were doing." (Contrast with Randle comments) The Thais had operated from an airstrip at Muong Soi during the 1968-69 fighting but declined to return in 1970 due to primitive conditions. It was a short dirt strip with no rescue capabilities, but it could generate a high number of sorties per day and therefore was extremely useful. When Scott went to Muong Soi in January there were four Americans and about 20 Lao involved. Lao and Meo pilots flew strike sorties. Vang Pao would send in food and water every day via Air America. Sorties averaged 50 to 60 per day.

Initially five Meo pilots were trained at Udorn. CIA selected them and conducted a language program. They flew T-28s from Long Tieng and were funded by the CIA (there also were Lao pilot at 20A. The group were known as Long Tieng Strike Force.

Pratt, RLAF

1970

MR I: CIA official at meeting of Barrel Roll Working Group on June 8, 1970: "We have lost northwest Laos. The CHICOMs are in full control, and all we have left is an intelligence gathering capability." [112]

MR II: Nearly continuous air support for Phou Nok Kok until it falls on January 14 during bad weather. Lima 22 falls on February 20, followed by Muong Soi on February 24. The spectacular gains of ABOUT FACE were not sustained as a determined enemy advances despite heavy losses. Most enemy attacks takes place at night or during bad weather.

USAF provides most of airstrikes. Muong Soi reactivated on January 14 and is used as forward staging base for RLAF T-28s. Between January 14 and February 24, 3,350 sorties flown (record 920 during week of February 12-17. Air America C-123 shuttle provides logistics. RLAF operations from Muong Soi "a high point in an increasingly deteriorating ground situation." [113]

The defense of 20A marks the first time that Meo and FAR troops from all regions achieve common purpose for a common goal. 20A survives due to a break in the weather and the determination of the defenders. The situation in MR II stabilizes by the end of July. [114]

MR IV: War heats up in south. CIA official at Barrel Roll Working Group on May 18: Region moves "from the minor to the major league." Attopeu falls, followed by Saravane.

With steadily decreasing USAF sortie rate, RLAF presence grows. By mid-July, 50 combat-ready pilots, 44 T-28s, and 8 AC-47s.

[NVA employ 312, and 316 Divisions for major offensive, beginning in December 1969. They quickly overrun the PDJ and push southwest, burning Sam Thong and threatening 20A. Reinforcements from throughout the country and from Thailand are sent to reinforce 20A. Following diversionary attack in June (Operation Leapfrog) on southern edge of PDJ, enemy pulls back from 20A.]

[George Doole spends \$85,000 for film "Flying Men, Flying Machines," done by John Willheim Productions.]

[Glerum to WML, January 4, 1993: "USAF resources were difficult to use effectively in the Laos environment and thus perhaps easy to mis-use. The only true close-in tactical capability disappeared with the A-1's and B-26's, leaving primarily the fast movers with their limited loiter capabilities and SOP-mandated high altitude ordnance release minimums. Nevertheless, as time wore on, Vang Pao and the other local field commanders became increasingly insistent on tacair support and frequently would be reluctant to move at all outside of their artillery fan unless that believed the target areas had been softened by air strikes. Also we regularly were presented with short notice opportunities to use large weather diversion packages, originally targetted against North Vietnam. Not wanting to look the proverbial gift horse in the mouth, we applied them as best we could, but they also often tended to produce little in the way of secondaries or other observable BDA. Perhaps the epitome of this phenomenon were the B-52 Arclight strikes. Vang Pao fell in love with the Arclights, which certainly did produce impressive noise and perhaps did have at least a significant psychological impact on the NVA. However, the perceived MIG threat dictated that the bombing runs be made north to south and, in north Laos, the valleys tend to run east/west. In other words, much of the ordnance was expended against the

ridgelines while the NVA hunkered down in defilade.
Tangible BDA again probably was limited in most instances.
I recall visiting one of the Arclight target areas within a
few hours of a strike and having difficulty even seeing
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January 18, 1970

Casterlin to parents: PDJ "getting touchy again" and
we are losing ground.

[Conboy, "Vietnam and Laos": Two regiments of 316
Division ordered to recapture PDJ and Long Tieng. During the
first week of February, attack mounted from Phou Nok Kok.
"Government troops at Xieng Khouangville held back two tank

assaults, but, after a Vietnamese rocket ignited the garrison's ammunition dump, the based defenders crumbled during a third attack." By April, PAVN forces controlled the PDJ; attack on Long Tieng frustrated by arrival of reinforcements. PAVN pull back from PDJ with beginning of rainy season. "The government forces, however, were so weakened that they were unable to significantly expand their area of influence."]

February 17, 1970

War in the Shadows: "On February 17, 1970, U.S. B-52s were used for the first time against Pathet Lao forces in the around the Plain of Jars . . ." Souvanna Phouma sought U.S. assistance to blunt Communists offensive to recapture PDJ. Operation code name GOOD LOOK. Until 1969, air operations in Laos mainly centered against Trail, with limited number of missions in north in support of Vang Pao. "But with the inception of Operation Good Look the air war in northeastern Laos changed dramatically." Missions flown from February 17, 1970, to April 17, 1973: 2,518 B-52 sorties dropped 58,374 tons of bombs. Initially, crews used onboard radar bombing system; later, Skyspot radar system was installed at Udorn to direct Good Look missions.

Department of Defense, "Report on Selected Air and Ground Operations in Cambodia and Laos," September 10, 1973 [described by the Washington Post as "a Pentagon White Paper" that has been sent to Congress and reveals the White House-inspired system of dual reporting to keep B-52 bombing of Cambodia secret - also dimensions of bombing in Laos]:

B-52s used for first time in northern Laos on February 17 to bomb targets on PDJ [aircraft previously used against Ho Chi Minh Trail in southern Laos]. Purpose of GOOD LOOK "was to counter the buildup of approximately 15,000 North Vietnamese personnel and their supplies north and east of the PDJ area and poised for an imminent effort to recapture this area." First mission "in response to a specific request" from Souvanna. As PDJ area initially fell outside capabilities of ground radar systems [ground directed radar

bombing site later located at Ubon, Thailand], radar scope photography was needed of PDJ area as part of normal planning for any contingency. B-52 radar recon, GOOD LOOK ALPHA (authorized by RLG) was flown over area in August 1969. After enemy offensive in late January 1970, second radar recon, GOOD LOOK BRAVO, was flown. "This mission was authorized in the hope that Hanoi would perceive the warning that B-52 operations were being considered in the PDJ, and would modify its operations in northern Laos." Each PDJ area target request submitted through special security channels. "The need for extra security had been established by the U.S. Ambassador to Laos based on the expressed concern of the Laotian Government."

Sorties and total tonnage dropped in PDJ area from February 17, 1970 to April 17, 1973:

1970	147 sorties	4,217 tons
1971	270	6,513
1972	1,051	25,097
1973	1,050	22,547

March 4, 1970

Washington Post article by Peter O'Loughlin, datelined Sam Thong: "Covered with dust, a three-day growth of beard on his chin, Edgar "Pop" Buell stood in the door of his house and watched an American helicopter bring in a wounded Meo soldier, only 14. 'They can't take it much more,' he said. 'Do you know there have been so many young Meos killed that girls are having difficulties finding husbands? the soldiers are getting younger and younger.'" Buell responsible for feeding and caring for some 350,000 people in surrounding area, about half Meo tribesmen. Number of Meo have dwindled by 100,000 during course of war. Buell said Meo now have two choices: remain in mountains after the North Vietnamese take over or flee. In the past, less than 10 percent have stayed behind; the remainder have left. "Buell thinks the current fighting in which the Meos are taking most of the casualties may be their last stand." Buell considers Vang Pao "the best man I've ever met." However, Meo are unlikely to stop PL/NVA, who are now within 8 miles of Sam Thong. He commented that this year's offense is much bigger than last year's. "'This time they've got more units, bigger units.'"

March 12, 1970

Cambodian government cancels trade agreement which allows NVA/Vietcong to use Sihanoukville as source of supply. Premier Lon Nol issues ultimatum that Vietnamese troops must leave Cambodia in 72 hours. Six days later, while returning to Cambodia from Moscow, Norodom Sihanouk is ousted as chief of state in bloodless coup by Lt. Gen Lon Nol.

These events cause NVA to place renewed emphasis on security of Ho Chi Minh Trail, launching a series of offensives in southern Laos.

March 17, 1970

Enemy attacks Sam Thong.

March 18, 1970

Washington Evening Star report attack on Sam Thong. Situation confused. Warehouses and several houses are on fire. Military hospital has been evacuated. Edgar Buell among last to leave area. Meo population of 6,000 has fled into the mountains. Some of the 40,000 people at Long Tieng are starting to leave. [Long Tieng now second largest city in country.] 300 Thai troops landed at Long Tieng by fixed wing and helicopters under shellfire.

Hugh D. S. Greenway, Life magazine, April 3, 1970:
"Sam Thong has fallen. The North Vietnamese are in the town. The American bungalows around the airstrips, until just a few days ago the headquarter for U.S. aid and refugee relief, are now only burned-out ruins." Long Tieng, headquarters for Vang Pao's clandestine army, may soon be next. Thousands of Meo tribesmen trudging south with all their belongings on their backs; Air America planes dropping bags of rices to fleeing refugees. Situation "desperate" for Vang Pao: "In the last six months he has lost more men than any comparable period in the last 10 years. His people have become discouraged, and only Vang Pao's leadership keeps them going. There are no longer enough young men left for the Meo girls to marry, and some of Vang Pao's troops are mere 12- or 13-year-old children." Buell "darkly pessimistic about the outcome." Just before evacuation from Sam Thong "his clothes rumpled and his eyes red from lack of sleep, wondered aloud how much longer Vang Pao and his Meo could keep up the fight. Maybe a couple of years more, he thought, but eventually the Meo would have to make some accommodations with the North Vietnamese. This is Buell 10th year with the Meo, and he put his leathery face in his hands and said: 'It's all been running and dying, just running and dying.'"

"For years the Laotian war ran on in the wings of the larger Vietnam theater, with neither side pushing the other too hard. . ." This has changed in last two years. U.S. decided to escalate bombing in November 1968. "The decision was not made in response to increased North Vietnamese aggression in Laos, as President Nixon indicated in his speech." U.S. using air assets previously used against North Vietnam, first in south, then in north. NVA took strategic government garrison of Muong Soui in June 1969, causing morale to ebb. "Perhaps to restore their confidence, the U.S. last summer encouraged, helped plan and supported General Vang Pao's brilliant capture of the Plain of Jars. Militarily, the maneuver was a huge success. Lightning helicopter assaults, flown by American pilots, put Vang Pao's Meo deep into enemy territory to the east of the Plain of Jars, severing North Vietnamese supply lines. The plain fell with very little resistance and the retreating North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao abandoned huge stores of food and ammunition." NVA responded with current offensive.

JMH: Hmong patrols spotted enemy troops only a few miles from Sam Thong on March 18. "Sam Thong was defenseless except for a few policemen and school superintendent Moua Lia and his teachers." At 3 p.m., March 18, about 200 Lao/Hmong soldiers arrived at Sam Thong. The NVA attacked at 5 a.m., March 19, blowing up with satchel charges the hospital built by Pop Buell. Artillery

fire from Long Tieng was ineffective. Sam Thong evacuated in the afternoon. NVA blow up warehouses and school and destroy town. Hospital staff moves to Ban Xon, LS-272.]

March 19, 1970

500 Lao/Hmong troops arrive Long Tieng from other military regions.

March 20, 1970

Additional reinforcements arrive Long Tieng.

Rich logbook: Sam Thong has fallen. Enemy on Skyline.

March 21, 1970

Bowers: Visibility at Long Tieng borderline for air operations. Forward visibility near zero. Pilots saw "black burnt particles, some as large as carbon paper" flying past their windows.

March 1970

NVA troops move under cover of heavy rains that prevent airstrikes and overrun govt positions two miles west of Sam Thong. Sam Thong abandoned to advancing troops on March 18. USAID moved to Huong Son (LS-272). 20A comes under seige. Reinforced by Hmong and Thai troops, with Thai positioned along Skyline ridge. NVA withdraws on March 26.

[JHM: Enemy infiltrated southern ridge of Skyline after taking Sam Thong. Enemy spotters direct artillery into valley. Some 30,000 civilians flee to LS-272. Thai "volunteers" and Hmong from other positions brought in by helicopter to help defend Long Tieng. (See Kissinger, White House Years, p. 457) Following pounding by US/Thai/Lao aircraft, NVA withdrew on April 1.]

April 17, 1970

CIA, Office of National Estimates, "Stocktaking in Indochina"

"The most positive thing that can be said about Laos is that it still exists as a non-Communist state." The major factor in its survival has been US support. The US pays the salary of all Lao military forces. NVA now playing the major combat role in Laos. "Hanoi quite clearly considers Laos a less important target than South Vietnam. The Communists believe that when they obtain their objectives in South Vietnam, Laos will fall into their hands. But as long as they have been able to use Laotian territory to support the war in South Vietnam, they have not been willing to pay the costs or run the risks of decisive action in Laos."

Communist military forces number 115,000, with 67,000 NVA (versus 9,000 NVA in 1962).

"The regular Lao forces generally perform poorly in combat. And although Meo guerrillas have fought well, they

are battle weary and their losses over the past year or so have exceeded their capability to replace them."

"Although the Communists have the capability to overrun all of Laos, they probably believe that the situation as it has evolved since 1962 has served their purposes reasonably well." Their current objectives are to remove Vang Pao's forces as a serious military threat, obtain a halt to all US bombing, and enhance their political position in a reconstituted government.

Thailand has contributed planes, pilots, and artillery support for the war in Laos. It also have allowed its territory to be used extensive for US air activities. There have been recent discussion about a Thai regimental combat team for Laos and additional artillery support. [DDRS 1977/270C]

June 1970

Souvanna asks Thai government for three army battalions to counter increasing NVA/PL attacks.

Theodore Shackley, The Third Option: In June 1970, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma appealed to the Thai government for three army battalions, to be employed around population centers in southern Laos to counter increasing NVA/PL attacks. The US was to underwrite these units, as well as those already in northern Laos. The US and Thailand refused the request "for policy reasons." Instead, Thai

volunteers were formed into "CIA Special Guerrilla Units" and seeded in southern Laos trouble spots. There were no trouble finding recruits. As the men were trained, they relieved the regular Thai units at Long Tieng, who had been there for more than a year. By mid-1971, all Thai regulars were out of northern Laos. Thai participation was now on a volunteer basis. Each new 550-man battalion was led by officers from the regular Thai Army. The program developed a formidable combat force which made a major contribution to the defense of Long Tieng. By the end of 1971, there were 6,000-8,000 Thai soldiers in Laos; by the end of 1972, the number had reached 21,000. Meanwhile, Vang Pao fought a war of position and maneuver against two NVA divisions. "Success was largely due to the professional fighting instincts of the individual Thai soldier, the leadership of General Vang Pao, and the sound approach by Lao, Thai, and American officials to what at first appeared to be a complex problem."

[In April 1970, the NVA seized Attopeau in an effort to expand security of Trail to the west following coup in Cambodia; in May, they seize Saravane.]

September 1970

B. Hugh Tovar replaces Devlin as station chief in Laos.

Tover, March 13, 1992: Tovar served as COS until May 1973, when he was replaced by his deputy, Daniel C. Arnold, who remained until the end. Before Arnold, Clifton R. Strathern had been Tovar's deputy. Strathern had served as chief of the Laos desk at Langley. Bill Dodds, a retired army colonel, was a member of Tovar's senior staff.

His objectives, as he understood them, were (1) to sustain the Royal Lao government, and (2) to support the war effort in Vietnam.

To var sees Devlin as wanting to control everything. Also he lacked a Far East background. To var had a good relationship with Pat Landry, who he had known since Pat's days in Indonesia. He also got along well with Ambassador Godley. Unlike Sullivan, Godley had an open style and would delegate responsibility. He was completely ~~privately~~ to all aspects of the operation, was intimately involved with most, and had a zest for the job. Vang Pao ran his own war and was not "a controlled agent." To var wonders "How far did we push him beyond the point he was prepared to go." To var sees Generals Evans and Searles as having a narrow USAF view on the use of air power. There was a constant battle for air support. The situation improved under General Hughes at 7/13AF and General Vogt at 7AF. BGEN John W. Vessey, Jr. (DEPCHIEF February 1972) was "wonderful to work with."

O'Dell went through one year of training for the Special Operations Group (with Greek, Kayak, and Redcoat), then was assigned to Laos. He arrived at Long Tieng on October 16, 1970. Vince Shields was chief of base (being replaced by Dick Johnson - a Marine Raider at 17 in World War II and recalled for Korea); Howie Freeman (one of O'Dell's instructors at the Farm) was his deputy; Will Green was chief of operations (he was reassigned to Savannakhet early in 1971 and replaced by Jerry Daniels, transferred from LS-32). Either the day he arrived, or shortly thereafter, Vang Pao held a bassi for the departing Shields. Devlin, who also was leaving, was there for the ceremony.

"As far as I could tell, Tovar was a "hands off" boss, he didn't interfere with Dick Johnson as chief of base. Devlin apparently was very much a "hands on" guy. When we were run out of Long Tieng one time, or some other such major event, the word was passed to Tovar over the radio that night. Apparently he said something about keeping him posted; call early the next day, etc. One of the old timers said 'if that'd been Devlin he would be up here in the morning, M-16 in hand!'

"Godley was quite a guy. We called him the Field Marshall, some said the Mad Bomber. I think he'd been a Marine in WW II. He pretty well called the shots when it came to B-52 strikes. Once when we were under siege at 20A we were commuting each night to Vientiane; we'd have our ops meeting at the airport in a room loaned to us by Continental Air Services. Godley was there every night for the briefing and knew exactly what was going on. He certainly had a 'zest' for the job."

O'Dell served as a case officer with GM 21 from October 1970 to September 1972, then was assigned to LS-32 for two months. GM 21 had most of the original and best of Vang Pao's troops. It had an authorized strength of 1,200, but put fewer men into the field. Case officers with the GMs had five major duties:

"1. Responsible for supervising the assisting the logistical support of approximately 800-1500 irregular troops. This involves the timely supply of ordnance, weapons, quartermaster items and food to these troops.

2. Arrange for and provide general supervision over the tactical and support air resources necessary for combat operations in his area of responsibility. Frequently run tactical air traikes med. evacs.

3. Report on enemy and friendly activities in his zone of responsibility to include a daily SITREP of his area. Brief supervisor, other officers and pilots on area of operations. Report will include enemy & friendly activity, enemy and friendly OB, flight path and other operational recommendations for logistical & tactical support for area of responsibility.

4. Prepare monthly report on irregular dispositions; weapons lost; equipment lost, etc. Include all items necessary to keep units effectively operational.

5. Conduct liaison with battalion and higher commanders. Have liaison contacts with other US agencies necessary to the performance of his duties."

Hugh Tovar, March 13, 1992: The first use of the Thai irregulars came in January 1971 when two battalions were sent in to hold a road junction along Route 23 in MR IV. The NVA launched a night frontal assault and lost 137 KIA to a single Thai fatality.

Ingham: The first two battalions were BC 601 and BC 602. This first action took place on the Bolovens Plateau. "The one Thai who got killed got so excited in the action that he jumped up on top of his bunker and was firing his rifle from the hip just like he had seen John Wayne do in the movies."

[Lofgren & Sexton, Air War in Northern Laos, April-November 1971:

Background: By presidential directive, the US ambassador to Laos was responsible for "overall direction, coordination and supervision" of military operations in the country. He consulted with his country team: air attache (AIRA), army attache (ARMA), CIA, and Requirements Office of USAID. The ambassador, in consultation with his country team and the Royal Lao government, developed overall political and military objectives and parameters. He had to give final approval to all large scale plans before they could be implemented. "Although all plans for military operations in Laos had to be approved by the Ambassador, his approval did not guarantee their full implementation."

There were five Air Operations Centers (AOC) in Laos under AIRA, one for each military region. They were manned by 21 personnel on TDY from Eglin. The code name for the AOC's war Palace Dog. Actual control of airstrike was by 21 Raven FACs and by Lao/Thai Forward Air Guides (given six days of training at Udorn and assigned to each of Vang Pao's battalions).

The CIA organized, trained, equipped, paid, and controlled the irregular forces. CIA staff planned and directed the employment of these forces and coordinated their operations with regional commanders. The staff was composed largely of former military men. The USAF considered these people "weak in air operations." CIA "for all intents and purposes controlled the ground war." CIA developed ground plan with occasional input from ARMA and AIRA. CIA "placed almost unlimited confidence in the Ambassador's ability to get the necessary air support." This confidence usually was justified. The ambassador could - and did on occasion - go directly to CINCPAC, JCS, and State to bring pressure on 7AF for the necessary resources.

In 1969, irregular forces totalled 33,000: MRI, 5,000; MRII, 16,000; MRIII, 5,000, MRIV, 7,000. (In addition, 37,000 FAN/FAR and 58,000 NVA/PL). The irregulars bore the brunt of the fighting. In 1969, the Hmong were reorganized into Guerrilla Battalions of approximately 300 men (three companies of 100 men) and Mobile Groups (GM) of three to six battalions. There also were smaller, independent units.

The Hmong fought the NVA in these larger, conventional units for the first time in 1969 and were decimated. Regular Thai units were sent to Laos in 1969 to stem the NVA drive on Muong Soi and Long Tieng. They were replaced by volunteers recruited from the Royal Thai Army. The US provided all equipment. Also, equipment was supplied to Thailand to replace troops serving in Laos on a one-to-one basis. The volunteers were sent to the CIA training center at Koke Kathiem, where they were organized into battalions and GMs. By April 1971, there were 12 Thai battalions serving in Laos (one battalion took over 60 percent casualties defending Long Tieng).

[Ingham: "There Thai volunteers were not all recruited from the Thai Army. The officers and NCOs were from the Army but the troops came from all kinds of places. A few came from the army as they were being discharged from their obligated service but most were off the street. At the beginning of the program the officer and NCO supply was plentiful and there was no problem getting them to volunteer for the program. As time went on and it became clear that one could get killed in this business, the supply and the quality really tailed off. The higher numbered battalions - those over BC 609 - had noticeably weaker cadres of officers and NCOs.

I am wondering which battalion took over 60% casualties at Long Tieng??? One of the early ones went on a sweep north and west of 20A and really got their butt kicked. Maybe it was them? It was at that point that we began to realize that the Thais were not going to be capable of much in the way of offensive operations in the mountains of Laos."]

CIA/Embassy plan passes via AIRA to 7/13AF. 7/13AF then prepared air support package for 7AF.

TACAIR for Laos was under the operational control of 7AF. TACAIR had responsibility both for the interdiction of enemy supply routes and direct support of indigenous forces. 7AF tended to view direct air support in terms of the war in Vietnam and to emphasize interdiction. The link between the embassy and 7AF was the deputy commander 7/13. MGEN Andrew J. Evans was deputy commander 7/13 from October 1970 to June 1971. MGEN DeWitt R. Searles was 7/13 from July 1971 to September 1972. GEN Lucius D. Clay, Jr., commanded 7AF from September 1970 to July 1971. GEN John D. Lavelle commanded 7AF from August 1971 to April 1972.

Evans had a "firm set of relationships" with Ambassador Godley and GEN Clay, and he exercised considerable influence over the conduct of the war in northern Laos. "During the tenure of General Evans, 7/13AF tended to make

recommendations in consonance with 7AF views. As Commander of 7AF, General Clay gave General Evans considerable latitude in his advisory role."

GEN Lavelle (August 1971) exercised more direct control over Barrel Roll, reducing Searles's freedom of action. Searles saw his role as accepting CIA/AIRA plans and translating requirements into specific proposals acceptable to 7AF (although he had his own view about proper use of airpower in Laos). He had frequent contacts with Godley and tried to attend the ambassador's weekly staff meeting in Vietiane, which was a forum for the informal exchange of views. There also was a Tuesday afternoon tactical briefing conducted by the CIA Udorn.

During the 1970-71 enemy dry season offensive, 10-12,000 NVA from two divisions had driven the Hmong into 20A and held positions along Skyline Ridge. The February 1971 the offensive was halted by intensive air support and the arrival of reinforcements, including 12 Thai irregular battalions (one of which took over 60 percent casualties). USAF sorties during the height of the seige reached 60 per day. Normally, sorties consisted of 40 F-4s and 4 A-1s fraged to Ravens to be used against TIC and troops concentrations with the "Raven Box" (a geographical area 15 to 30 kms north and east of Long Tieng). At night, 4 AC-119s were fraged for air support, with occasional AC-130s diverted. The enemy also had Ban Na (LS-15) under seige. The fighting stabilized in early April 1971, as the weather closed in.

In April 1971, the mood in Washington was "one of withdrawal and disengagement." Any offensive operations which might appear to be dragging the United States deeper into the war were viewed with the greatest concern. The NVA was "stronger than ever." Since 1969, the NVA had been developing supply bases inside Laos and were now able to maintain larger forces in the field during the wet season. (Major, well-defended supply bases at Ban Ban and Xieng Khouangville.)

Also, there had been a political/financial decision in 1971 to limited US air support for Southeast Asia to 10,000 TACAIR (including Navy), 1,000 B-52, and 750 gunship sorties a month (effective at the beginning of the new fiscal year on July 1, 1971). There represented a reduction of 50 percent from the previous fiscal year. Under OPLAN 730, 70 percent of these sorties would go to Steel Tiger, and 10 percent each to Barrel Roll, Cambodia, and Vietnam. For Barrel Roll, this amounted to 32 sorties a day (down from 60 a day).

Washington's objective in Laos in 1971 was to maintain a neutral buffer state between Thailand and Vietnam/China. There would be no major wet season offensive beyond clearing the approaches to Luang Prabang and Long Tieng. The remaining effort would go to preparing strong defensive positions southeast of the PDJ. However, the Prime Minister and the King wanted more positive action, causing a gulf between US and Laotian national policy. In any event, "For both emotional and military reasons, Vang Pao was determined to conduct an offensive." He planned to sweep across the PDJ and establish strong positions in the high ground north and east of the PDJ, then raid the enemy supply depot at Ban Ban. And he wanted to do this before air support dropped off on July 1. General Evans favored using USAF assets in an air campaign against enemy supply areas, but his recommendation was not followed. "The Embassy was in an awkward position. On the one hand, it reflected the Washington policy of no offensive; but on the other, it approved Vang Pao's plan to launch an offensive." As VP intended to carry out his plans with or without US support, Godley believed that under the circumstances it would be best to support him. There followed a difference of view over TACAIR. The Embassy/CIA wanted to "dedicate" sorties to Raven FACs, allowing them to select targets. However, this would violate the Air Force doctrine of "centralized command and control." 7AF was reluctant to issue a "blank check" for a war over which it had no control. (Evans tended to lean toward 7AF view; Searles support Embassy.)

Interview with LTC Vaughn H. Gallacher by Mildred Wiley,
December 16, 1971, USAFHRC

Gallacher was Director of Joint 7/13 Air Force Tactical Air Control Center at Udorn from November 1970 to November 1971. Around April 1971, the responsibilities of 7/13 "changed suddenly." 7/13 became more concerned with monitoring and supervising operations and logistics in Thailand. However, 7/13 maintained target responsibility in BARREL ROLL and provided support for ground actions in that area. "We worked very closely with the Air Attaché's people in Vientiane and not only attempting to get 7th Air Force to provide tactical air support to hit enemy ground forces but also in obtaining targets that would hit enemy supplies or suspected storage areas."

Targets in BARREL ROLL nominated by 7/13AF intelligence, director of operations, or by air attaché's staff in VTE (which also had intelligence and operations sections). Any target nominated in northern Laos had to be approved by the ambassador (to insure no damage to civilian population and structures). 7/13 would then nominate target to 7AF. "7th Air Force Intelligence would make their assessment of it, sometime agreeing and sometime not, although very infrequent they did not agree with us. Their problem with the allocation of air power over the whole broad spectrum, that is, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. There was just so much of the pie and that pie could be cut in so many ways to send sorties, so they would assign priorities. And they, in the final analysis, must, in my opinion at least, be the one who determine which target would be struck." For example, a request to 7AF for 30 F-4 sorties might include a request for 20 sorties to be given to Ravens to support ground action; 4 sorties for hard targets (a cave or supply cache); and 6 sorties with laser or optically guided bombs to hit roads. "But 7th Air Force allocated the sorties." With respect to priorities, approximately 60 to 80 percent of total air resources were directed at interdicting the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Gallacher notes that total air resources were inadequate in 1971. USAF had withdrawn the F-100s and UC-123 flare ships, and was "making adjustments" in F-4 strength. Also, withdrawal of B-57s was being considered. "Our whole total inventory of aircraft platforms was decreasing at a time when our activity was increasing." RLAF provided support in MR II that was "extremely good and extremely effective," but their resources consisted of approximately 33 flyable T-28s which could carry only four 250-pound bombs. "Back during February and March 1970 when Vang Pao was about to be overrun around Long Tieng, the Royal Laotian Air Force was flying between 2500 and 3000 sorties a month and with only 30 to 34 T-28s, a fantastic job, and the same thing with their gunships." They had ten

AC-47s and were flying about 150 sorties a month. These were all day sorties. Lao pilots received about six month's training and lacked instrument qualifications. USAF because of withdrawal and because of emphasis on trail interdiction would allocate only limited number of sorties in MR II. "However, back in February and March [1971], at the same time again when Vang Pao was about to be overrun, they increased the sortie rate up to between forty to sixty aircraft a day. These were F-4s going into that area and Vang Pao had been driven so far back, by this time to practically his headquarters at Long Tieng, that they established IFR bases where they could drop night and day and there was a tremendous amount of ordnance dropped in these areas. In my opinion, U.S. tactical air power saved the day."

Gallacher concerned with "too heavy a fascination with killing trucks along the trails in Laos." During the period January-March 1971, trucks kills by AC-130s, AC-119s, B-57, and fighters were approached an estimated 10,000, with 10,000 damaged. Yet sensors still detecting the movement of 2,000 to 2,500 trucks a night. "Well, there just aren't that many trucks." "But I personally felt that more air should have been provided for protection of the ground forces in northern Laos. I feel that we are obligated to those people and I feel that we must lend them every help that we can, but I feel that the people down in Saigon, the 7th Air Force, are so far removed from this particular area that they do not see the problems. If we do not improve or increase our assistance by providing more tac air up in Laos, I don't really see how General Vang Pao could hold off much longer."

As the wet season ends, VP has 10 irregular battalions (5,139 men), 10 Thai battalions (8 infantry and 2 artillery - 3,095 men), 4 battalions of FAR infantry (645 men), plus a company of commando raiders at Long Tieng.

[Conboy, "Vietnam and Laos": During December 1970, PAVN easily able to reoccupy PDJ with elements of 312 and 316 Divisions. By March 1971, PAVN had greatest number of troops to date around PDJ: 148 and 174 Regiments of 316 Division around Long Tieng; 165 and 209 Regiments of 312 Division along western rim of PDJ; 866 Independent Regiment west of PDJ; 766 Independent Regiment along northeastern corner of PDJ. "Again, Hanoi had ordered the capture of Long Tieng, but again the government defenders were able to hold back the Vietnamese." During April, anticipating rainy season, PAVN withdrew bulk of forces northeast of PDJ, leaving only 148 Regiment in vicinity of Long Tieng. With onset of rainy season, government decided that unlike previous years it would heavily defend PDJ. "Several dozen 105mm and 155mm howitzers were airlifted onto the plain, along with eight light infantry battalions and an equipment number of irregular Groupement Mobiles."]

February - April 1971

Interview with COL Robert K. McCutchen, 21 Dec 71
[assigned to C-130 Airborne Command and Control Center]:
McCutchen recalls that between February and April, the
majority of FAC air support went into the Long Tieng area.
The hospital at Udorn "looked like a takeoff on MASH." VP
is "still hanging in." "I think the only thing that saved
him was our air power."

[McCutchen arrived in Udorn in June 1970 and stayed
until March 1971. He was assigned to the 7th Airborne
Command and Control Center (ABCCC), that was concerned
primarily with the war in Laos. Air ops in the north were
called BARREL ROLL and in the south steel tiger. ABCCC did
day and night orbits with the call sign CRICKET during the
day and ALLEYCAT at night. They used modified C-130Es. It
carried a capsule (made by Ling Temco) that slid in and out
of the aircraft. There were 6 to 8 aircraft involved. The
capsule had 20 radios: UHF/UHF/HF. The C-130 had antennas
on the wings that looked like refueling probes on a
helicopter. On the bottom, the plane looked like a
porcupine. McCutchen often spoke to Forward Air Guides
(FAGs). They usually were Lao, but sometimes "you'll talk
to a round eyed FAG and I'm sure he's the CIA man out
there." "If the situation gets real tight, we wind up
talking to an English-speaking FAG." [O'Dell, Jan. 5, 1993:
"He's correct about the 'round eyed FAGs.' When it got
tight, the case officer was always talking to Cricket or the
Raven and was usually the one running the airstrikes. I
spoke to Cricket daily.]

There were two operations officers on every flight.
One was called the Director of Airborne Battle Staff (DABS)
and was a LTC or higher. The other officer, usually a
captain or major, was called the Battle Staff Operations
Officer (BSOO); he usually had a fighter background. There
were four air traffic controllers, with two on duty at one
time, and two intelligence specialists who were in constant
contract with the FAGs. The FAGs usually needed more rice
or ammo. These requests were relayed to Vang Pao's
headquarters at Long Tieng.

ABCCC would handle 4 to 500 sorties in a twelve-hour
period during the day. Most missions came out of the 7th
Air Force frag shop. Vang Pao had authority to validate
targets. "The south was a truck-killing war. . . . In the
north it was a people war."

ABCCC was important in SAR and was responsible for most
rescues in northern Laos. They monitored 119.1, the Air
America frequency. "We monitor Air America and if a pilot
went down, the faster you got them out the better our
chances were. Very few we got after he spent a night or two
out there." "The sky was full of Air American helicopters
up there and most of the rescues made in BARREL ROLL were

made by Air America. . . . Some people badmouthed Air America that they're overpaid but they earn every penny they get - or in my books - and they did a fine job. The rescued most of our people and they got nothing extra for rescuing a pilot. That's part of their duty and they zigged in to those hot areas and do it. When they zigged in, they usually zigged in without A-1s. They come in, get them and get out fast. That was our best rescue system."

Soutchay Vongsavanh, RLG Military Operations, p. 62:

"While Lam Son 719 may have interrupted the Communist supply flow temporarily, it strengthened the North Vietnamese resolve to further expand in southern Laos and remove any possible threat to a constant flow of supplies. This resulted in significant losses to the RLG when the province capital of Khong Sedone and the key Bolovens Plateau town of Paksong were overrun by the North Vietnamese.

...shortly following Lam Son 719, the North Vietnamese significantly upgraded their combat capability in southern Laos, reverting to conventional warfare utilizing regular NVA combat units in regimental attacks supported by long

range (122-mm and 130-mm field gun) artillery and, for the first time, armor units in attacks against Lao population centers near the Thai border (Kong Sedone). While it is not certain that Lam Son 719 caused the North Vietnamese leadership to decide on this strategy it certainly must have reinforced their favorable consideration of this course of action. . . .

The year 1970 was thus the turning point in the nature of the war in the Laos panhandle. Concurrent with the greatly increased demand placed on its logistical and replacement system by the expanded and intensified conventional combat in South Vietnam, the NVA faced serious threats to the continued operation of the Ho Chi Minh trail complex in the panhandle. And not only was the trail under constant attack by American air power, but access to South Vietnam by sea - that is, across the beaches of South Vietnam and through the Cambodian ports - was being denied by US-Vietnamese "Market Time" operations by the new Cambodian government of Lon Nol. Consequently, to avoid as much US air interdiction as possible, to increase the number of available routes and storage areas in the panhandle, and to develop a greater capability to move supplies through Cambodia, the NVA pushed westward in the panhandle, seizing Attopeu and Saravane in the process. Then, in early 1971, the South Vietnamese attack on Tchepone gave even more urgent impetus to the NVA westward expansion. Conventional combat had come to the panhandle."

Mike Ingham, Jan. 7. 1993: "The two battalions of Thai troops at Ban Na were Royal Thai Army (RTA) regulars. They were not volunteers. I am not sure of the number of troops but 1,200 sounds high. If I had to guess, I would say more like 600-800.

KAYAK (George Bacon) was the case officer for the Thais at Ba Na and he was certainly at odds with the AAM guys by the time I got there (which was toward the tail end of the Ba Na saga). I sat in on a number of the briefings that Kayak gave for missions to Ba Na and it was clear that the AAM folks were very suspicious of Kayak's enthusiasm for the project. That friction created a good deal of hostility on both sides and it colored the opinion not only of the case officers (mostly "old hand" case officers like Digger and Ringo) but the AAM guys who were forever more suspicious of

the customers' motives. This was particularly true of the older guys like Ted Cash, Frenchy Smith, etc.

After I saw this, I became more cautious in how I treated the AAM crews and in what I asked them to do. As time went on, the suspicion abated somewhat as some of the younger AAM pilots and newer case officers moved up in MR2.

It is worth noting that the war at this stage was making a change from the low intensity, guerrilla effort put on with the Hmong troops to the more traditional, massed formation effort as it was conducted by the Thais. Ba Na was fixed position warfare not the guerrilla warfare that the AAM guys had seen previously. The war had escalated with the introduction of the Thais (which was in response to the NVA taking over from the Pathet Lao) and the risks escalated with it. Some of the friction was caused by a change in the makeup of the case officers assigned to 20A. Younger guys like myself all had VN experience, with the chopper as an integral part of the exercise. We were used to the chopper pilots being told to do something risky, saluting and marching off to do it - just like the groundpounders. Neither the older case officers nor the older AAM pilots had firsthand, military experience, with the chopper as an integral part of the war effort.

Kayak was from Attleboro, MA. While in VN he had been shot in the upper chest by an AK-47. For some reason, he had an almost pathological hatred for communists - maybe because of the wound. That translated itself into the aggressiveness that caused him problems with the AAM folks and later got him killed as a mercenary in Angola. George's father tracked me down after George was killed and tried to enlist me in an effort to prove that George had been sent to Angola by the Agency. I tried to help him establish that this was not the case (because I knew it not to be) but he just did not want to hear it and bugged me for months."

August 1972

VP attempts to relieve pressure on 20A and secure foothold on PDJ before anticipated ceasefire. Commando Raider company parachuted north on PDJ on night of August 14. Two heliborne guerrilla regiments link up with them the next morning and drive south in poor weather.

Accidental B-52 strike on friendly forces. Mini-offensive ends in September.

James E. Parker:

Plans were developed to reequip and retrain the GMs to recapture the PDJ. Parker and DIGGER took their GMs to the training facility that was run by Tony Po. The GMs came back to Long Tieng in early September (August?). TAHN returned with his GM from MRI; BEAR arrived with his GM from MR III. KAYAK had two Hmong GMs; CLEAN had the remaining GMs. BAMBOO had the commandos. Parker's GM moved north to LS-15; KAYAK's force was taken by helicopter into positions east of the PDJ. As a diversion, DIGGER's GM was to be placed into the northwest corner of the PDJ, along Route 6, near Moung Phanh. B-52s prepped the area, then a small group of BAMBOO's commandos were inserted by Air America (in terrible weather) in the evening to set up landing lights. The remaining Commandos parachuted in from an AAM C-130 to secure the area (77 men jumped without injury). Parker's GM then began moving out of LS-15, while KAYAKs GMs headed north toward the PDJ. TAHN and BEAR were in reserve at Long Tieng. There was no resistance for three days. Following contact with the NVA, TAHN's GM was brought in by helicopter. Due to confusion, TAHN was left with his GM overnight. The NVA overran the position that night, and TAHN was killed. (TAHN was a University of Washington graduate who had served in Vietnam with the USMC combat engineers.) Vang Pao and HOG went out at first light with a company of Vang Pao's best soldiers, retook the position, and brought out TAHN's body.

[Ingham: Seaborg was killed by a B40 rocket that landed right in front of his fighting hole. His body was recovered by a chopper flight mech by the name of Bob Noble.]

Parker's GM eventually gained the western edge of the PDJ against light resistance. He sent patrols onto the plateau, but then pulled back after running into an old mine field. The unit remained in position as bait for an NVA attack. When it came, the area was socked in due to unseasonable haze. Parker and DIGGER put up a good fight, then pulled back. A Raven was shot down during the time period.

O'Dell to WML, 5 January 1993:

"GM 21 and I think GM22 went to Thailand for training by the Special Forces during summer '72. Mule and I were at Pits Camp, Thailand, for 8 weeks. Then we returned, GM 21 was involved in the operation re retake the PDJ.

That operation began with a pathfinder team inserted onto the PDJ and then a Commando Raider parachute jump. GM 21, with me on board, went into the zone early that morning via USAF helos. The offensive was bogged down and we took some pretty heavy casualties. I don't remember the B-52 strikes but there was a lot of rain and we had an unusually high amount of immersion foot and trench foot. I remember being in a Porter trying to run a medevac when one of the AAM helos took a lot of ground fire. The ground FAG had assured us that it was all clear before the helo went in. I humbly apologized to the pilot after it was all over. He had no hard feelings about it; he knew if I'd thought it was dangerous I'd have asked for air cover or, if it just didn't make sense, we wouldn't have done it. This was my last operation with GM 21.

Glerum to WML, 4 January 1993:

"While I am on the subject of USAF support, you may have heard of the operation (Phu Keng on the western edge of the PDJ) which to me best exemplified the difficulty of marrying our 'irregular' war with an air support capability hobbled by an enormous array of restrictive ground rules. We had been living for years with the USAF requirement that all HLZ's used by their armed and armored heavy lift helicopters be 'secured' - usually by first sending in several of the unarmed AAM choppers with a few troops, and often a project officer. In the case of Phu Keng, we knew that beyond any shadow of doubt a first light landing of the 1000 man GM we wanted to move would be unopposed. Because of the size of the movement and number of USAF resources involved, the USAF would not accept what HLZ security we could provide via AAM and backed out - virtually at the eleventh hour. Our solution was to insert a commando raider team via night capable AAM S-58's and have the commando raiders light up at DZ for a night C-130 drop of circa 100 troops, most of whom had had no parachute training, to 'secure' the HLZ's. Somewhat to our surprise, the operation worked out perfectly and the USAF moved the GM the following morning without incident."

September 1972

Ray Seaborg, case officer (radio call sign TAHN), killed on southern end of PDJ near Lat Sen. Seaborg was one of three CIA case officers killed in Laos in 1972. The total KIA was six (not counting O'Jibway and Johnson).

October 1972

LTC Raymond C. Mullen, Jr. arrives Laos (remains until April 1974). Mullen with Project 404 (296 Army and USAF personnel). MR I: HQ at Luang Prabang; one 404 officer and 4/5 NCOs -- MR II: HQ Long Tieng; one Army and one USAF officer; "strictly observers" "It was a CIA operation." -- MR III: HQ Savannakhet; FAR show; a few 404 officers with FAR and at Airborne Training Center at Seno -- MR IV: HQ

Pakse; situation close to but not as extreme as Long Tieng - - MR V: HQ 4 miles east of VTE at Camp Chinaimo; 90 percent FAR and 10 percent FAN. Mullen was in charge of MR V, reporting to Col. Broadus Bailey, the military attache in VTE.

Upon arrival, he took orientation flight of MR V in CASI Porter, stopping where there was at least one FAN or FAR battalion HQ: Paksane, Ba Keun, Muang Phone, Vang Vieng, Muang Kassi, Sala Phu Khoun, Sannakhan. Vang Vieng was a good sized town with USAID, long airstrip, hospital run by Filipinos, a CIA camp south of town, and a leper colony run by French priests also south of town. When he arrived, there was a battle being fought a few kilometers east of Sala Phu Khoun. Two FAR brigades (245 men each) were surrounded. Mullen arranged to evacuate one by helicopter; the other walked out.

FAR and FAN were led by their own officers and neither group was very aggressive. Thai mercenary force (most recruited from northern Thailand and more Lao than Thai) "couldn't spell offense." Lao mercenaries from Bolovens Plateau were led by CIA officers and were "tigers." CIA case officers "tactically not too proficient" but they "lacked nothing when it came to courage." They were mostly former US military; most hated US regular military.

October 2, 1972

Story by Richard Pyle in Pacific Stars & Stripes:
Pyle with a group of reporters invited to visit Long Tieng. Vang Pao's view of military situation in north-central Laos "is a sober one." VP: 'We must take back the Plan of Jars this year. If we do not, maybe we lose Long Cheng. If we lose Long Cheng, then we cannot stay in Vientiane.' VP says that weather is crucial factor. 'If good, then we get good support. If no good, we have problem.' VP is conducting a four-pronged operation around the fringes of the PDJ, hoping to regain territory lost ten months ago when Communists launched fiercest assault of the war. VP's short range objective is to restore a more favorable military balance of power before the dry season begins in three months. His long term objective is to restore the Hmong to their mountain homes. US officials acknowledge that his drive has bogged down. One senior official: 'He can't win back the plain. The best he can hope for is to deny it to the other side.' Diversion of US air power to fighting in South Vietnam, plus intensified bombing of North Vietnam, has meant less airpower for Laos.

Mark Peterson KIA 19 Oct 72 near L-44 (Saravane)

December 22, 1972

UH-34, C.R. Carpenter hit by hostile fire during medevac near LS 180 (New Paksong); damage to fuselage and main transmission.

[Bowers: AAM acquires eight CH-47Cs late in 1972]

Jerry Connors to Dan Williams: Taipei "is finished." Regional office in Bangkok, with direct link to Washington. "Hard to tell what peace will mean for the company. I think pilot group will see a cut but can't be sure. . . . Customer folks not overjoyed with pilots, in particular the R/W heros. God some of them are bad, and these of course are the ones who ruin it for the rest who are doing a fine job." "Things about the same up here in Happy Valley - would like to get out but there is not damn place for me to go." "As you know we lost too many F/W these past 24 months; a lot of the kickers talking about quitting. Cliff White quit, Knop, and about 6 others plan to leave (including Gene Hasenfuss). Hated to see Cliff leave." "Some of the old timers are back both up country and down south. Hog and Bag talking about

buying a sail boat & drinking beer for about a year - that would be a dandy."

Jess Hagerman to WML, August 28, 1991:

Beginning in late 1972 and continuing into 1973, the situation in southern Laos took a turn for the worse. Until this point, aircraft fire had been light. Now, there was not only heavy fire but also Strella SA-7 hand-held missiles. (Henthorn was one of the first pilots to have a missile fired at him.) The helicopters began to carry smoke bombs. If the characteristic white corkscrew smoke pattern was spotted, the flight mechanic was to toss out one of these smoke bombs. The crews also were issued parachutes, although no one explained how a helicopter pilot was supposed to bail out.

[Frahm to WML, 1 Aug 92: The story that Frahm heard was that Henthorn had gone to investigate the downing of a C-123 near Thakek [Hansen?] Reaching the crash site, he suddenly turned the helicopter on its side for a better view. "Don was known to be rather abrupt with the controls." A SA-7 went spiraling past the bottom of his aircraft, which was nearly vertical to the ground. "He then beat a hasty retreat from the area."]

The situation in the south got to the point where a number of people would refuse to fly there. The crew scheduler at Udorn (Maurice) expressed his gratitude that Hagerman was willing to take the assignment. As a result, Hagerman ended up at the end going south nearly every week. He figured that it was better to go down on a regular basis and keep in close touch with the situation than to down there only from time to time and take a chance of being surprised.

January 27, 1973

Paris agreement on Vietnam signed.

Isaacs, Without Honor: Article 20 of the agreement pledged U.S., South Vietnam, and North Vietnam to respect Lao and Cambodian neutrality and to end military intervention. "But Article 20 was plainly little more than a diplomatic ornament. Only 185 words long, it contained no deadline for intervention to end. Nor did it create any mechanism for enforcement. It was simply a promise - one that had been made in two earlier peace treaties in the preceding nineteen years, only to be broken both times." (pp. 153-55)

[Last U.S. troops airlifted out of South Vietnam on March 29 as release of POWs completed.]

Issacs notes that Hmong forces reached a peak of 40,000 in 1967, but took heavy casualties thereafter. In 1971,

they suffered 2,259 killed and 5,775 wounded, representing 30 per cent of their strength. By early 1972, there were 27,000 Hmong. "By the time Henry Kissinger and Le Dc Tho initialed the Vietnam peace agreement, the Hmong of Laos had virtually been destroyed as a people, and in their future lay not peace, but further devastation as the Communist conquest of Laos two years later scattered them in a diaspora ending either in death or in years in squalid refugee camps in Thailand." (p. 169) U.S. arranged in early 1970 for Thai "volunteers" to replace the depleted ranks of the irregular units. They were recruited from the Thai army, sheepdipped, and given Lao ID cards. They were paid by the CIA with DOD funds. There were about 7,000 Thais in Laos in late 1971, increasing to 21,000 by late 1972. (pp. 169-70).

February 21, 1973

Cease fire agreement signed in VTE. On the same day, NVA retake Paksong.

US halts air strikes; last two B-52 strikes in April. Hmong down to 25,000 troops, but some 20,000 Thai in Laos. Enemy number approx. 60,000 in northeastern Laos. Coalition government formed, dominated by Pathet Lao.

Issacs: In early February, the PL/NVA increased pressure at the conference table and on the battlefield (temporarily capturing Paksong). At the same time, the US was urging the Lao to make concessions. The agreement of February 20 clearly favored the Pathet Lao: The US and Thailand were obligated to end military operations in Laos but North Vietnam was not mentioned. The ceasefire was to take effect on February 22.

Issacs visited Long Tieng on the afternoon of February 22. T-28s were conducting strikes in support of VP's troops against enemy positions as close as nine miles away. "We could hear the deep crunch of the bombs falling in the hills." Vang Pao showed Isaacs an unsigned typed communication that he had received a few hours earlier. Issacs copies in into his notebook:

To: Major General Vang Pao, commanding general,
Military Region 2
From: Chief of unit, SKY, Long Tieng
Subject: Cease-fire agreement

1. In accord with the terms of the cease-fire agreement between the Royal Lao Government and the Neo Lao Hak Sat that established 1200 22 February as the time armed action between those forces would cease, the United States is honoring the agreement.

2. As we discussed previously, USAF air support would cease as of 1200, 22 February. I confirmed this prior to attending your lunch in honor of your distinguished vistor today [Prince Sisouk] by talking with CRICKET, the ABCCC in this area. USAF were under instructions to clear Lao air space by 1200 this date.

Vang Pao told Isaacs that his positions, which were under heavy attack, could not hold out without US air support. (pp. 178-79)

The next morning in Vientiane, Souvanna charged the PL with violating the cease fire and asked for US air strikes. Nine B-52s hit targets near Paksong that night. Unimpressed, the PL continued fighting into March but without diminished intensity. There were B-52 strikes on April 16 and 17 but not full scale resumption of the war. A protocol to establish a new government was signed in September. The new government was formed in April 1974. Remnants of Hmong fought on but many fled to Thailand. (pp. 180-81)

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April 1973

Castle: Cites End-of-Tour report by M/G James D. Hughes that was critical of Godley's reliance on CIA military advice and showing "poor judgement and a misunderstanding of air power." [see chapter 7, pp. 20ff]

May 1973

Daniel C. Arnold replaces Tovar as COS VTE.

Tovar, March 13, 1992: Tovar said that he "swallowed the party line" on Laos. He did not believe that the US ever would just walk away. If the ceasefire was broken, he believed that the US would come to Vang Pao's assistance.

He also points out that the NVA suffered heavy losses in Laos. They stopped only when they were beaten.

June 1973

Parker: BAMBOO, KAYAK, and DUTCH leave. Parker remained at 20A with ZACK, HOG, and CLEAN.

In July 1973, Arnold (who had replace Tovar) sent word to disarm the Hmong "to facilitate the intent of the cease fire." "This was ludicrous." The Hmong were not going to surrender their weapons; they would have been slaughtered. Arnold subsequently came to 20A and told the remaining officers: "Put down your Hmong. Go home." Parker left on December 3, 1973. The Hmong GMs were disbanded but retained their weapons. HOG and ZACK stayed.

Joseph M. Glasgow to WML, February 17, 1993

"My position vis-a-vis the USAF performance over Laos is one of gratitude and respect. They did not always perform up to my expectations but when you are of a relatively few Americans surrounded by and dependent on unreliable locals, on the ground, the F-4, A1E, F-111 were welcomed sights. Having said that, I share my colleagues frustrations when we could not get the numbers of USAF fighter/bombers we thought could be spared from support to the rapidly diminishing ground forces in the main battle area - SVN.

I recall being with [Hugh Tovar] on a helicopter pick-up pad in South Laos (when the Thais were being choppered into Paksong) and the Jolly Greens from Ubon (I think) made their first lift and we got word they were aborting and returning to base. (As you know, using the USAF choppers operationally in Laos was an international violation and pilots were strictly enjoined not to allow themselves or their birds to become targets of the press.) Needless to say, Hugh was livid. Here we were with only a small contingent of troops on the target HLZ near Paksong and the Air Force was throwing in the towel. As we watched in anger, we saw the formation of big bids flopping towards Thailand. Suddenly, the formation swung around and started back toward our position. Hugh proclaimed, as I recall, 'I didn't think they would just pick-up and leave us; here they come back.' As they flew over our position, the lead pilot radioed us he was indeed going home. And they did. I will leave Hugh's disposition to your imagination.

It was such acts that really caused us to be disenchanted with the Air Force. Their major assessment of us civilians on the ground was we didn't understand and appreciate air force resources, tactics and ROE. We did. General Slay was probably accurate in his end-of-tour report. They did play a major role, if not the most effective, in holding off the NVA near Long Tieng. Without the B-52s and daily USAF frags we would have been forced out (my personal opinion) in December of 1971. (You must recall I was not officially assigned to MR II until March 1971.) On Christmas Day, 1971, my wife and son and I were on the beach at the Kahala Hilton. In fact before I left Udorn, the Stick [Landry] instructed me to get up to the PDJ as soon as I returned from leave and note what Swanson and friends had accomplished in constructing the artillery positions on the PDJ. Of course they were overrun quickly but only after allowing time for most of the other troops to get away. On the positive side, the NVA had to mass their people for those attacks, providing great targets for the air force. And that, in my opinion, was the single most

effective tactic we had: deploy large troops units to forward positions where they built bunkers, put up shelters, prepared chopper pads and drop zones, patrolled less than aggressively, and waited for the enemy to mass and we could get air and artillery on them. Now, our own Muoung T-28 pilots were more than a match for the air force. In a nutshell, we, the men on the ground and closest to the enemy, were not considered qualified to direct/control USAF high performance aircraft unless we were in actual contact with the hostiles or could see them.

One more anecdotal experience: Lumberjack (Norm Gardner) recalls seeing enemy troops take refuge in a tree line and asked the Raven to hit them. Reluctantly, the Raven called Cricket (the ABCCC) and got a pair of F-4s. Raven told the fighter to hit his smoke in the trees, and after the strike the pilot asked what he had killed. The Raven replied: 'Just another bunch of trees.' What do you think Lumberjack felt? Because the Raven did not actually see the enemy, he couldn't believe the case officer right there on the ground. As you can see, the Air Force was helpful to us but it was like pulling hen's teeth often.

[Glasgow notes that the F-111 unit employed in Laos, the 474th TFW, has an annual reunion at Nellis AFB (Las Vegas) every September. Also, there is a unit history at Maxwell. "Many of the crew members sent gifts up to Long Tieng for the Red Dog radio operators and asked for any souvenirs they (the Muoung guys) could send to them at Takhli. VP and I got together and located a recently found AK-47, twisted, covered with rust, fractured stock, and then wrote a letter over VP's signature to the CO of the 474th. In the letter we said we recovered the AK after an F-111 strike (and it's possible that's how the rifle was abandoned) and told the CO how much we appreciated his help and professionalism and told him we learned the NVA around Long Tieng called the F-111 'Whispering Death' because they couldn't hear the plane and the bombs fell night or day, bad weather or good. (Usually, no bombs fell on the enemy at night - B-52s excepted -or during heavy weather when the Raven couldn't see the enemy.)

September 17, 1993

Mr. William M. Leary
Professor of History
Department of History
University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia 30602

Dear Bill:

The baby has arrived, some visitors have departed and I once again have access to the room where my computer is located. I sincerely regret this long delay in answering your April letter.

I have read the material in your April letter many times. I conclude that trying to comment page by page would be confusing to you and not add much to what you already know from your previous research. I will take the "thematic" route and hope that my comments will be helpful. I do not want to be accused of "selective" memory so I will forego making definitive statements about time, place, dates unless I am certain of my ground. Here goes.

AIR POWER

We had three air resources. USAF for B-52 strikes (which were few and far between except for the seige of Long Tieng), tactical air involving F-4's and occasionally A-6 aircraft plus the heavy lift capability of the USAF choppers, especially needed when moving battalion size units 50-75 miles, and fixed winged aircraft especially C-130's. The RLAF which consisted solely of T-28's and a rare C-47 gunship. Finally, we had civilian air support in the form of Air America and Continental.

VP and our unit had some input into the missions assigned USAF aircraft but, practically speaking, virtually all of the tacair was controlled by the Air Attaché in Vientiane, the Ambassador and elements of the 7th AF. The RAVENS did a great job with their O-1 spotter aircraft and the psychological lift they gave to the Lao and Muong pilots made a world of difference to these indigenous pilots. However, air observation alone did not usually result in juicy targets. The USAF tacair would have been much more effective if our ground units had been able to locate and pin down NVA ground units until tacair could be deployed against these NVA units. Except for portions of the PDJ, most of the terrain in MR II was hilly with many caves and in places a fair amount of vegetation cover. Also, the NVA did a good job of camouflaging their weapons, especially the 130mm artillery pieces and the 122mm rockets. The NVA units were trained and disciplined and rarely offered the easy target to tacair. The NVA realized that they were no match for the USAF during daytime hours and for that reason they usually holed up in caves or ravines during the day and made their logistical and tactical moves at night when air power was not as effective.

The T-28's based at Long Tieng were under the operational control of VP. Their missions were given them by VP and while some lip service was given to the RAVENS there is no doubt in my mind that the Muong pilots did what VP told them do in terms of missions. The Muong and Lao pilots were courageous and mission oriented. Their equipment and training simply did not permit them to be as effective as might otherwise have been the case.

The bulk of the resupply effort, troop replacements, food and munitions, was provided by Air America and Continental rotary and fixed wing aircraft at great personal risk to their pilots. During my two years in the area we had many incidents between officers assigned to me, the so-called "customers", and the air crews of Air America and Continental. You have to realize I did not "command" any of these civilian crews in the sense that I could say "go" and they would obey. Vientiane and Udorn were the sites where these organizations had their own support and management offices. While these organizations certainly did respond to our needs most of the time it was inevitable that on occasion we did not get the level of support on a particular day we

felt we needed. MR II was not the only area Air America and Continental supported. They also had to support MR I and they, like us, did not have unlimited resources..

The case officer on the ground had the responsibility to insure that his units were equipped and fed and the dead and wounded were taken care of expeditiously. His perception of the risk and danger is conditioned by his direct responsibility to the Muong he worked with on a daily basis. The civilian air crews never had that same kind of attachment to the Muong, not because they were callous types but because they seldom had occasion to actually work and socialize with the Muong. The air crews were, for the most part, operating in a hostile environment with virtually no protection except what they could get from the ground units and their skill in screening their aircraft from hostile fire. I have little sympathy for the view that since the Air America and Continental crews made a bundle and the case officer made much less that the air crews should have taken more risks . It was simply a job for a number of civilian pilots but for the majority of these air crews it was a job and a mission they were willing to take considerable risks to insure success. As for risks the Air America chopper crews on many occasions went in under fire, unarmed and with no escort to pick up downed air crews,wounded troops and to deliver supplies. Continental crews in Twin Otters and other fixed winged aircraft repeatedly exposed themselves to hostile fire to supply our units. Sure there was the occasional civilian pilot that we had serious problems with. When that happened, and I can recall at least two occasions, I told the Vientiane offices of Air America and Continental that we did not want a particular pilot back in our area. Obviously,we had to have our facts right and give the pilot his day in court. As far as I am concerned the civilian pilots and crews did an outstanding job under very difficult circumstances. We had occasional problems with USAF crews as well.

To illustrate my point let me cite a specific situation. A USAF CH-47 had been hit and was down at Sam Thong. The USAF said they would go in and get their people. After a cursory pass the USAF rescue chopper pilot broke off the mission and came to me saying the risks were too great. Needless to say I was very angry because they had an escort and an armed chopper. Within 15 minutes, one of my officers,Dutch Snyder, was in an Air America chopper . The unarmed and unescorted Air America chopper went in and made the pick up of the remains of the downed flight crews.

No useful purpose is served by beating up on military and civilian air crews. With the perspective of time I am as certain as I can be that both the USAF and Air America/Continental acquitted themselves exceptionally well in a very difficult situation.

The NVA had trained disciplined troops that were motivated. They also had good equipment in the form of long and short range rockets and the 130mm artillery piece. So long as we stayed south and west of the PDJ they tolerated us but once we began to threaten the northern and eastern portions of the PDJ they showed the capability to react quickly and professionally. The equalizer for us was air power but air power alone would not win it for us ,only delay the time when we had to face NVA units determined to deny Long Tieng to us as a base. Air power alone did not save our fire bases on the PDJ once the NVA decided to run us off the PDJ.

The allocation of so many sorties per day to Barrel Roll was one thing. Actually getting the planes on station and remaining long enough to be of value was another. Weather and generally low cloud cover and morning fog made things even more difficult for air but the real problem is what I call "on call" air support. That is something immediately available when a target is sighted. This was never available to MR II in a significant way. The reasons are obvious-we had to compete with the Trail and South Vietnam for air resources..

VANG PAO OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS

VP had many fine attributes-courage,determination,knew his own people, the Muong,knew the terrain and had fought the Pathet Lao and NVA enough to know something of their tactics. He had one mission-secure northern Laos -especially MR-II- to insure the survival of the Muong people. He could not accomplish that alone. The Lao government was weak and never trusted the Muong so support from the government was not something VP could count on,especially not equipment,supplies and certainly not troops except in a token fashion. VP looked to the U.S. for all tangible support and with very few exceptions he got what he asked for

until the 1971 era when the U.S. policy in South Vietnam began to change. Up to that time the U.S. had been generous indeed in supporting VP and rightly so because he was contributing in a very meaningful way to the accomplishment of U.S. policy in the area. In my view even after our policy changed we supported him very extensively by letting him call the offensive moves in his area knowing full well he did not have a prayer of winning a victory on the battlefield.

VP is a very private person and rarely shared any of his doubts with me but he knew the U.S. would NOT dump him and so long as he tried to save the day we would do our best to support him. He knew he could count on Pat Landry in Udom to fight his supply battles for him even though I might seriously question the wisdom of some tactical moves-for example deploying forces on the PDJ without thinking through the "what if" factor. VP was absolutely certain the U.S. would make every reasonable effort to save the day even if a bad tactical move was implemented. While I was there we did exactly as we promised even though many of us felt some of VP's offensive moves were ill conceived and made assumptions, especially about tacair support, that simply were not valid. Let me make crystal clear now that I am not second guessing VP after the fact. No matter what my own and other officer's personal misgivings might have been we did not undermine him nor did we slack in our effort to make his deployments successful. Our job was to support VP's forces to the fullest extent our resources permitted.

In planning a new offensive ,VP would go to a large acetate covered wall map in his house and draw out his tactical deployment scheme. We would then translate his ideas into an op plan. This plan was sent to Vientiane and Udom because invariably the support required was beyond the resources available to me at Long Tieng. Unless the troop move was 100-150 troops we had to get heavy lift choppers from the USAF that had to be scheduled around other USAF commitments. The USAF choppers needed F-4's as escort and that had to be scheduled. If artillery was to be moved to a forward area we needed a Skycrane and on and on. My point is that VP expected the U.S. to support his tactical moves and we did. The problem,invariably, was this.-what resources was the U.S. willing to expend if the forward deployment onto the PDJ ran into trouble and the troops had to be extricated. We ,of course ,did have problems as your research shows and we did not always have the resources to retrieve the situation-for example, the Thai fire bases,Ba Na,deployments to the eastern and northern PDJ.

On numerous occasions I discussed deployments with VP because we had to provide the support. VP had been in command so long and was so certain of his ability that he brooked no questioning of his tactical moves. He said it well to me one day: "There can be only one general here and I am it."

VP may not have been educated at St Cyr but he knew enough about politics to realize that he had to keep on the offensive to keep us supporting him and unless we made the commitment every day, he and Laos ran the risk of losing that support. We needed each other but he knew we could walk away from Laos and still survive. He could not survive without us but we did not play the heavy handed supporter by saying do it our way or there will be no support. He got the support.

LONG TIENG SKYLINE RIDGE

Long Tieng was the political center for the Moun people,their home the real symbol of their culture. Its symbolic value was tremendous. Add to this a decision made several years earlier,in better times, that Long Tieng would be the locus of supply ,especially aerial logistical support. At one time(early 1971,I believe) we had over 400 take offs and landings per day at the airfield. Most of this was chopper traffic but a fair amount was fixed wing,especially C-123 K's carrying supplies and T-28 traffic. Landing and taking off at Long Tieng was a truly "sporting" event,especially in poor weather. The airfield was our lifeline because all of our supplies arrived by air.

Defending Long Tieng required a lot of resources,especially in the dry season. While Skyline Ridge had to be defended the only effective defense was forward of Skyline which required more troops,more supplies and on and on. In many respects, Long Tieng became our Dien Bein Phu- we were tied to a fixed base more for political and cultural reasons than tactical. The NVA could not get to us by air because they had none for use in MR II so they resorted to

130mm artillery and rockets. Because of the many limestone karsts around Long Tieng we did have some natural defenses but occasionally the NVA got lucky and did some damage. VP was adamant about defending Long Tieng and maintaining our main supply base at Long Tieng. My point is that because of understandable political reasons we got tied to a fixed base of operations and in the process lost a lot of operational flexibility. The NVA knew where we were, could keep us off balance and chose to attack on their terms. To keep the NVA off balance we, in turn, had to go far afield - the PDJ. - in an effort to keep the NVA guessing about our moves. They had no real fixed bases we could hack away at with air power to reduce their flexibility. Political realities required that we support LS-32 but militarily it was an isolated place, surrounded by the NVA and very difficult to resupply.

I believe VP realized the futility of defending Long Tieng from a military stand point but his options to change that were severely limited by the politics of the situation. We simply did not have the troops and resources to try and hold the considerable ground around Long Tieng and also launch offensives to dislodge the NVA from the PDJ. As I mentioned to you before no one on the U.S. side ever seriously believed we could evict the NVA from northern Laos unless the U.S. was willing to vigorously pursue the war in South Vietnam. The most we could hope for was to tie down a significant part of NVA elements that would otherwise go south and fight our troops in South Vietnam. I am sure there were analysts that had serious doubts about the usefulness of our activity.

BAN XON BASE

The move to Ban Xon was dictated by the tactical situation around Long Tieng. The supply and ammo dump at Long Tieng had been hit on occasion by rockets and 130mm rounds. The airfield was being closed regularly and the T-28 ramp was being hit with incoming. We decided that we could no longer afford to run the risk of losing aircraft and supplies by maintaining Long Tieng as the main forward base. VP was opposed to this for obvious reasons because it could symbolize to the Moun that the U.S. was reducing its support. It was becoming clear that the U.S. could no longer look on this situation as an open ended commitment. Money was an issue and supplies represented money so there was a need to protect our supplies as best we could consistent with providing support to VP as we had in the past. Once the tactical situation at Long Tieng became untenable all of us, Udorn, Vientiane and HQs. decided to move our HQs. to Ban Xon. Because the Agency logistical people were first rate professionals who always had a "can do" attitude Ban Xon was operating efficiently in a matter of days. I do not believe our support to VP in terms of supply diminished at all as a result of the move to Ban Xon. While a lot of credit justifiably goes to case officers and the civilian air crews for our part in Laos not enough has been said about the Agency logistical people who worked under very poor conditions to create a logistical network that produced the goods when needed. We owe much to these logistical officers who were master scroungers.

PERSONALITIES

Inevitably personalities intrude into any operation of this scale. I was generally blessed with very good Agency officers and very good personnel from the Army and the USAF to work with on a daily basis.

I informed you earlier that Eli, who was not a part of my unit, may have performed as he claimed. I simply cannot recall the details he gave to you.

George Bacon was one of a kind. We need people like George - determined, competent, eccentric with a full measure of self confidence. He identified with and bonded with the Moun. He loved the life in the field and he looked forward to action every day he was with us. We all have a few quirks and George had his share but no one questioned his courage or willingness to share risks with those he was supporting.

The personalities that stand out for me are Jerry Daniels, now deceased. He was close to VP because he had been there at least two years before I arrived. He spoke the language, a very difficult language, and he identified closely with the Moun. Jerry was a doer and a thinker. His untimely death in Thailand was a real shock for me and a loss to our nation.

The other personality that stands out is Ambassador Godley. He was a hands on type who visited my area often, remained over night and had a very good feel for the situation. I liked him because he in fact was the senior U.S. official in Laos and exercised the authority that came with his position. A good listener and a person of compassion but also a person who would not suffer fools easily. One had better know the subject before taking on Amb. Godley. One of the real tragedies of our operation was the hatchet job done on Amb. Godley by the Congress of the U.S. As a minimum he should have been Assistant Secretary of State. I served with Amb. Godley in the Congo so I knew what to expect when I arrived in Laos.

As I read the above comments, I am not at all sure I have added anything to what you already know from your extensive research. If these comments have been helpful, fine, if not I have the bureaucratic excuse that at age 68 my memory for facts has eluded me.

I look forward to seeing you in northern Virginia on the evening of 3 October. I leave today on a trip but I plan to be back in my home by the evening of 26 September.

Regards,

Dick

Johnson