



JOINT TASK FORCE - FULL ACCOUNTING
BOX 64044
CAMP H. M. SMITH, HAWAII 96861-4044

Mrs. Deborah L. Pirkle

June 29, 1994

Dear Debbie

Enclosed is the clear copy of the report I FAX'ed you, plus a copy of the investigation sheet I give to the team and maps of the area. I also FAX'ed this same information to your son Scott. I am fairly confident we will be able to recover Lowell's remains and bring them home, but there is still the possibility we will not find anything. As I told you, the team will be going out into the field on August 3rd and we should know something within a week of then. Our people in Vientiane have already given the Lao Government the information on the case and the Lao are sending a team out next week to do the pre-coordination for the investigation.

Sincerely

Bill F.



JOINT CASUALTY RESOLUTION CENTER
LIAISON OFFICE
AMERICAN EMBASSY
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96346

TH 4493
J. P.

FROM: JCRC-LNB
TO: Commander, JCRC

REF: RPT #T86-274
25 June 1986

SUBJ: JCRC Report T86-274, American Grave Site on Phou
Houay Namla Mountain, Laos (U)

Source:

Summary: Source provided information about the death and burial of an American crew member on a H-34 helicopter which was destroyed in a Pathet Lao attack on Phou Houay Namla in the general vicinity of TH 4493. Source's brother was also killed in the incident.

Information:

In August 1967, Source was with the 11th Battalion stationed at Camp No. 24958 on Phou Houay Namla mountain near Ban Nambak in Louangprabang Province. Source was with a platoon sized unit stationed at a helicopter landing site on the side of the mountain less than a half kilometer west of the main encampment. The landing site was a small flat area cut out of the surrounding forest, and encircled with fox holes which had been dug in the red clay earth. On an unrecalled date, a helicopter was requested to come in and pick up three casualties from an engagement the day before with Pathet Lao forces who occupied a position on the opposite mountain, about one kilometer away. At approximately 1630, an H-34 "Choctaw" helicopter landed at the site carrying two bags of rice and two large clay jars of "pa la" (pickled mud fish, a popular Lao fare) for delivery to the Lao soldiers. Aboard the helicopter were three Americans, including two pilots and a mechanic and two Lao nationals who helped with loading/unloading. Thirty minutes after the chopper landed the landing site began taking

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bazooka fire from the Pathet Lao position across the valley. The American mechanic, the two Lao crewmen and the Sergeant Somsri, Source's older brother who was assigned to the same unit, were in the passenger/cargo section of the helicopter when the sixth bazooka round hit the chopper mid-section. All four men were killed. The two American pilots who were not in the helicopter at the time were not injured. They were kept safe by friendly Lao forces and eventually returned to US control. The Pathet Lao continued the assault into the evening and early morning hours, forcing the men at the landing site to retreat to the main camp.

The next morning while Btn 11 was preparing to evacuate their position, Source and 23 other soldiers were sent to the site to bury the dead. The American mechanic and Source's brother were found on the ground near the still burning helicopter. The remains of the other two Lao were inside the destroyed cargo section. The bodies of the American and Source's brother were placed in adjacent fox holes which were then filled in with dirt. No markers were placed. No attempts were made to retrieve the two bodies in the chopper due to lack of time.

Describing the site location, Source stated that it was about 15-20 kilometers to the northeast of Ban Nam Bak (TH 3582). Source stated that there was another smaller village, Ban Houay Namla located about five kilometers southwest from the site (not shown on reference chart), and suggested that Hmong villagers of either village would know the location of the helicopter wreckage. Source was not familiar with other locations or landmarks in the area.

Source stated that the helicopter was oriented north/south with the nose pointing to the south. The adjacent fox holes where the two bodies were placed were located about 15 meters south of the helicopter's nose. Each fox hole was about waist deep, and dirt was filled in creating a slight mound - about five to six inches high - over each grave. Source stated that no personal effects were taken off of the American's body before he was buried. He does not know any of the American's names.

Comment: JCRC Rep explained that the US Government is currently negotiating with the Lao Government to obtain permission to go to crash sites to recover American remains, and assured Source that his information would be helpful if we have an opportunity to go to the site he reported. If the opportunity did arise, JCRC asked Source if he would want the remains of his brother disinterred and returned to his family? After giving it some thought, Source responded that it would serve no useful purpose to return the remains, and felt it better if they were left where they are.

94-6L ANALYST WORKSHEET

REFNO: 2061

RANK & NAME(s): MR. PIRKLE, LOWELL Z
POSITION: -01 FLIGHT MECHANIC VEHICLE/#: UH34D/153125
(PROBABLE ACFT NUMBER)
STATUS: INVESTIGATE CALL SIGN: H48

PROVINCE: LOUANGPHABANG

DATE/TIME: 3 AUG 67/1745L

DISTRICT: NAMBAK

(AIR AMERICA) UTM: 48QTH280670
(REPORT T86-274) 48QTH430938
(BAN NAMLA) 48QTJ375025

GEO: 202900N1022330E
204340N1023155E
204659N1022841E

UNIT: CIVILIAN, AIR AMERICA,
UDORN AB, TH

MAPS: 5449-I, 5550-III/IV,
5450-I, NF 48-13,
F-48-121/110/109

J225 ANALYST: MR. BILL FORSYTH

ORDNANCE ONBOARD: THE CREW AND THE LAOTIAN PASSENGER PROBABLY CARRIED INDIVIDUAL WEAPONS. (ONE WITNESS INDICATED AIR AMERICA FLIGHT MECHANIC'S NORMALLY CARRIED AN AK-47 OR SIMILAR WEAPON)

AIRCRAFT IDENTIFICATION FEATURES: SIKORSKY "SEAHORSE"; 14.25M (CABIN LENGTH) X 4.36M (CABIN WIDTH); TWO CREW POSITIONS IN THE COCKPIT; ENGINE 1 X WRIGHT R-1820-84B/C/D, NINE-CYLINDER AIR-COOLED RADIAL, 1.378M DIAMETER (WEIGHED ABOUT 1,310 LBS/595 KG), MOUNTED IN THE NOSE OF FUSELAGE; FOUR-BLADE MAIN ROTOR 17.07M DIAMETER, FOUR-BLADE TAIL ROTOR 2.9M DIAMETER; 2 X MAIN GEAR TIRES 11.00 X 12, TAIL WHEEL TIRE 6.00 X 6.

OTHER IDENTIFICATION FEATURES: MR. PIRKLE MAY HAVE STILL BEEN CARRYING HIS MILITARY DOG TAGS. HE WAS DISCHARGED FROM THE ARMY IN MARCH 1966 AS AN E6 WITH 10 YEARS OF SERVICE. DENTAL AND MEDICAL RECORDS SHOULD BE AVAILABLE.

BASIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

- MR. PIRKLE WAS THE FLIGHT MECHANIC ABOARD AN AIR AMERICA UH34D HELICOPTER ON A ROUTINE FLIGHT TO A HELIPAD IN THE VICINITY OF GRID COORDINATE TH2867. AS THE AIRCRAFT HOVERED ABOUT TWO FEET ABOVE THE PAD WHILE PREPARING TO LAND, IT WAS HIT BY AN ENEMY 57MM RECOILLESS RIFLE ROUND OR ROCKET PROPELLED GRENADE ON THE RIGHT SIDE, JUST BEHIND THE PILOT AND NEAR MR. PIRKLE'S POSITION. THE CREW ATTEMPTED TO TAKE OFF AGAIN, BUT THE TRANSMISSION HAD APPARENTLY BEEN HIT. MR. PIRKLE WAS REPORTEDLY OBSERVED FALLING BACK INTO THE CABIN WHEN THE AIRCRAFT WAS HIT. THE PILOT AND COPILOT WERE ABLE TO GET OUT OF THE AIRCRAFT; HOWEVER, MR. PIRKLE AND ONE LAOTIAN SOLDIER, WHO WAS A PASSENGER, DID NOT EXIT THE AIRCRAFT. THE AIRCRAFT WAS HIT BY ANOTHER ROUND, CAUGHT FIRE, AND WAS DESTROYED. THAT EVENING THE HELIPAD WAS OVERRUN BY HOSTILE FORCES AND THE TWO SURVIVING CREWMEMBERS, ALONG WITH THE FRIENDLY TROOPS FROM THE SITE, EVADED TOWARD LIMA SITE 131 (MOK LOK/TH3671) AND WERE SUBSEQUENTLY PICKED UP BY ANOTHER AIR AMERICA UH34.

- HOSTILE ACTIVITY IN THE AREA PRECLUDED THE RECOVERY OF THE REMAINS.

- A REPORT (T86-274) BY THE BROTHER OF A LAOTIAN SOLDIER KILLED IN THE INCIDENT SUGGESTS THE HELIPAD AND CAMP #24958 WERE LOCATED ON "PHOU HOUAY NAMLA", 15-20 KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF MUANG NAMBAK AND FIVE KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF "BAN HOUAY NAMLA", IN THE VICINITY OF TH4493. REPORTEDLY MR. PIRKLE AND THE LAO SOLDIER WERE BURIED IN FOXHOLES WHICH SURROUNDED THE HELIPAD.

DOCUMENTATION COMMENTS:

- AIR AMERICA DOCUMENTATION PROVIDED BY THE NEXT OF KIN LISTS THE HELIPAD AT GRID TH2867, BUT ALSO SAYS IT WAS LOCATED 24 MILES NORTHEAST OF LOUANGPHABANG; HOWEVER, TH2867 IS LOCATED 34 MILES NORTHEAST OF LOUANGPHABANG. THE ENTRY SAYING THE SURVIVING CREWMEMBERS WERE ATTEMPTING TO REACH LIMA SITE 131, WHICH IS ONLY NINE KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF TH2837 AND 33 KILOMETERS FROM THE 24 MILE LOCATION VALIDATES THE TH2837 POSITION AND IT APPEARS THE 24 MILES WAS A TYPOGRAPHICAL ERROR.

- THE COPILOT, WHO WAS NEW TO LAOS, WAS INTERVIEWED AND PROVIDED A DESCRIPTION OF THE PAD AS BEING ON ONE OF THE HIGHEST PEAKS IN THE AREA, ABOUT 100 FEET FROM THE TOP, WITH AT LEAST TWO BUNKERS NEAR THE TOP OF THE HILL. HE SAID WHEN THEY EVACUATED THE SITE IN THE EVENING THE ONLY REMAINING WRECKAGE WAS THE TAIL CONE AND PROBABLY THE ENGINE, THE REST OF THE AIRCRAFT APPEARED TO BE A GLOWING MASS OF ASHES.

- THE COPILOT THOUGHT THE HELIPAD WAS CONSIDERED A "LIMA SITE", BUT COULD NOT RECALL A NUMBER FOR THE SITE; LS-176 (NAM THUAM) IS LISTED IN "AIR FACILITIES DATA LAOS" AT TH2568, ABOUT THREE KILOMETERS WEST OF THE LOCATION PROVIDED IN THE DOCUMENTATION; HOWEVER, THIS COORDINATE PLOTS ON A FLAT PLAIN AND THE BOOK LISTS LS-176 AS HAVING A LEVEL ROUGH SURFACE RUNWAY 1200 X 75 FEET ON A NORTH/SOUTH HEADING; THIS DOES NOT MATCH THE DESCRIPTION OF THE HELIPAD AREA. (NOTE: THERE IS NO LIMA SITE LISTED NEAR THE LOCATION PROVIDED IN THE REFUGEE REPORT. LIMA SITE 247, NORTH-NORTHWEST OF BAN NAMLA, HAD A 600 FOOT RUNWAY AND DOES NOT FIT THE DISCRIPTION OF THE SITE.)

- USING THE AIR AMERICA GRID AND THE COPILOTS DESCRIPTION, THE HELIPAD MAY BE LOCATED ON HILL 854 NEAR TH274669.

- THE SOURCE OF REFUGEE REPORT T86-274 SAID THE HELICOPTER WAS HIT 30 MINUTES AFTER IT HAD LANDED, WHILE THE AIR AMERICA DOCUMENTS AND THE COPILOT SAID IT WAS HIT JUST BEFORE IT LANDED, AT AN ALTITUDE OF ABOUT TWO FEET AND WAS LATER HIT BY A SECOND ROUND; THE COPILOT STATED THAT IT MAY HAVE BEEN TWO MINUTES OR TWENTY MINUTES LATER WHEN THE SECOND ROUND HIT THE AIRCRAFT; THE SOURCE MAY NOT HAVE BEEN AWARE OF THE EARLIER ROUND AND ONLY SAW THE ROUND WHICH SET THE AIRCRAFT ON FIRE. THE SOURCE FURTHER RELATES THAT A TEAM RETURNED TO THE SITE THE NEXT MORNING AND BURIED HIS BROTHER, SERGEANT SOMSRI, AND THE AMERICAN FLIGHT MECHANIC (MR. PIRKLE) IN FOXHOLES. THIS ACCOUNT IS VERY PLAUSIBLE. REPORTEDLY THERE WERE ALSO THE REMAINS OF TWO OTHER LAO IN THE WRECKAGE OF THE HELICOPTER WHICH WERE NOT BURIED.

- THE SOURCE OF T86-274 DESCRIBES THE ENCAMPMENT AS BEING LOCATED ON PHOU HOUAY NAMLA, ABOUT FIVE KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF BAN HOUAY NAMLA. NEITHER THE MOUNTAIN NOR VILLAGE ARE ON LAO OR AMERICAN CHARTS OF THE AREA; CURRENT LAO CHARTS DO SHOW A BAN NAMLA AT TJ375025, THIS IS 20 KILOMETERS DUE NORTH OF MUANG NAMBAK; HOWEVER, THE SOURCE SAID THE MOUNTAIN WAS 15-20 KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF BAN (NOW MUANG) NAM BAK. THE NAM LA STREAM FLOWS NORTHEAST FROM MUANG NAMBAK AND THE ESTIMATED LOCATION OF TH4483 PROVIDED BY THE REPORTING OFFICIAL MAY BE A GOOD LOCATION. BASED ON THE SOURCES DESCRIPTION OF THE HELIPAD BEING WEST OF THE MAIN CAMP AND THE COPILOTS DESCRIPTION OF THE CAMP BEING ON THE HIGHEST PEAK IN THE AREA,

IT IS LIKELY THE SOURCE'S "PHOU HOUAY NAMLA" IS THE UNNAMED PEAK WITH A SPOT ELEVATION OF 1182 METERS LOCATED AT TH432940. IMAGERY DATED 27 JANUARY 1973 (THE OLDEST WE HAVE AVAILABLE) SHOWS WHAT APPEARS TO BE A FORTIFIED POSITION AT TH430938, THIS MAY BE CAMP #24958; HOWEVER, NO EVIDENCE OF A HELIPAD IS EVIDENT AND IT IS PROBABLY GROWN OVER. THIS AREA IS OVER 30 KILOMETERS NORTHWEST OF THE AIR AMERICA LOCATION; HOWEVER, IT IS LIKELY A LAO MASTER SERGEANT (T86-274 SOURCE) WHO WAS STATIONED ON THE MOUNTAIN AND LOST HIS BROTHER THERE WOULD HAVE A BETTER IDEA ON ITS LOCATION THAN THE COMPANY.

- THE SOURCE AND THE COPILOT DESCRIBED THE HELIPAD AS BEING LOCATED BELOW THE MAIN CAMP, WHICH WAS LOCATED ON THE SUMMIT. THE SOURCE SAID IT WAS 500 METERS FROM THE MAIN CAMP, WHILE THE COPILOT ESTIMATED IT TO BE ABOUT 100 METERS AWAY. THE SOURCE REPORTED FOXHOLES ENCIRCLED THE HELIPAD AND SAID HE BURIED HIS BROTHER AND THE AMERICAN IN ADJACENT WAIST DEEP FOXHOLES, 15 METERS SOUTH OF THE HELICOPTER'S NOSE, WHICH WAS ORIENTED WITH THE NOSE TOWARDS THE SOUTH. THE GRAVES WERE NOT MARKED AND WERE FILLED IN WITH A SLIGHT MOUND OF EARTH ABOVE GROUND LEVEL.

- THERE IS NO SAR LOG FOR THE PERIOD AND THE CRASH SITE IS NOT LISTED IN THE JSARC CRASH SITE LOG. THE ALL LOSS DATA BASE LISTS AN AIR AMERICA H34 LOSS ON 3 AUGUST 67, BUT DOES NOT PROVIDE A GRID; THIS IS PROBABLY THE SAME HELICOPTER INVOLVED IN THIS INCIDENT, THE LISTED AIRCRAFT NUMBER IS 153125.

PREVIOUS INVESTIGATIONS:

- NONE.

J225 RECOMMENDATIONS:

- CHECK WITH DISTRICT OFFICIALS AT MUANG NAMBAK AS TO THE LOCATION OF PHOU HOUAY NAMLA OR BAN HOUAY NAMLA, THE VILLAGE IS REPORTEDLY ABOUT FIVE KILOMETERS SOUTHWEST OF THE MOUNTAIN. DISTRICT OFFICIALS MAY ALSO HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LOCATION OF THE BATTLE FOR CAMP #24958 IN EARLY AUGUST 1967.

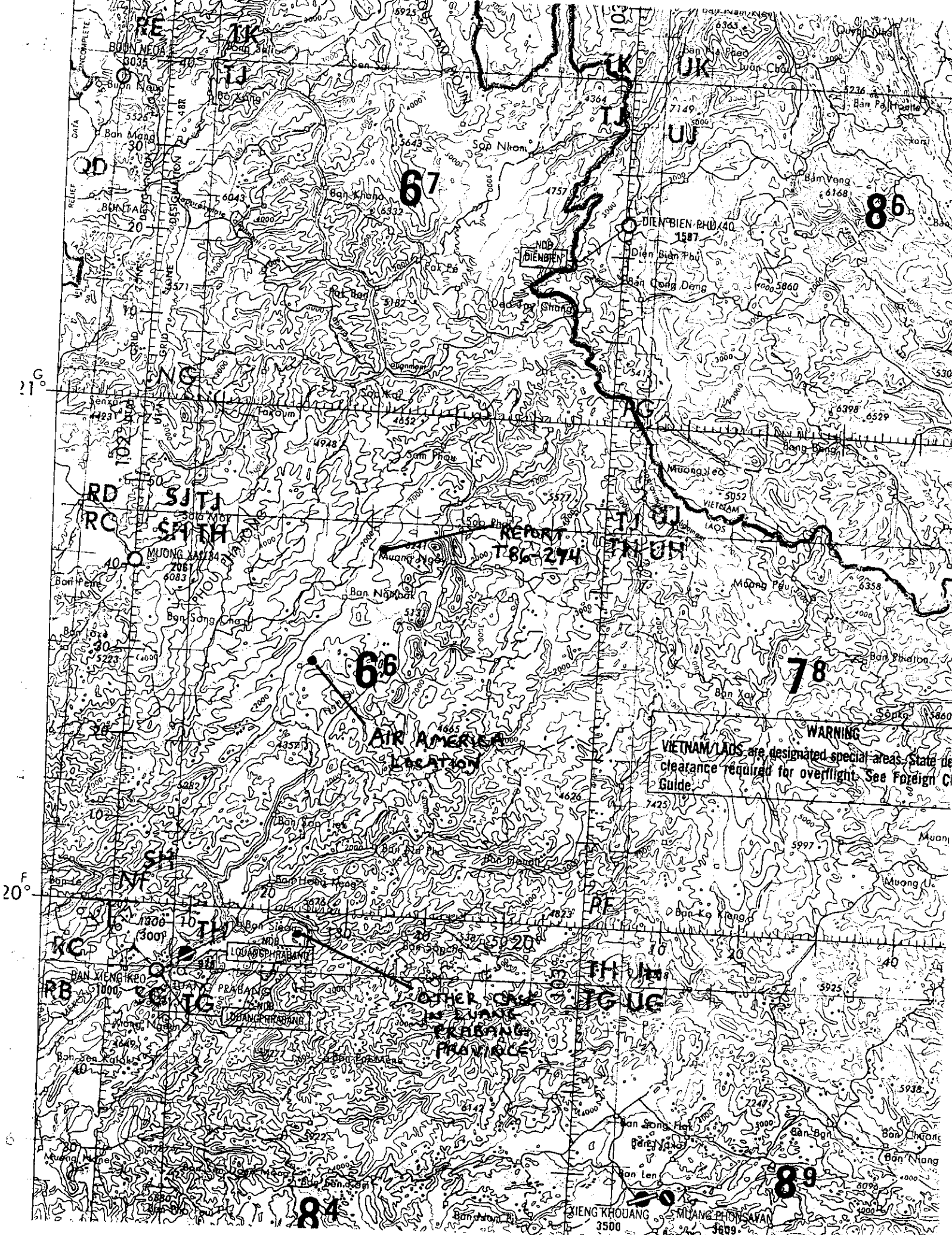
- IF DISTRICT OFFICIALS HAVE NO INFORMATION CONCERNING THE LOCATION OF THE MOUNTAIN OR THE BATTLE, FIRST INVESTIGATE IN THE VICINITY OF THE AIR AMERICA LOCATION (TH2867) AND HILL 854 (TH274669). BAN XIANGDA (TH225635), BAN NAMTHOUAM (TH250670), AND BAN HOUAYKHUA (TH290678) ARE THE VILLAGES IN THE AREA.

- IF NOTHING IS FOUND AT THE AIR AMERICA LOCATION, INVESTIGATE REFUGEE REPORT T86-274 IN THE AREA NORTHEAST OF MUANG NAMBAK, ALONG THE NAM LA STREAM, BETWEEN TH4093 AND TH4499. VILLAGES IN THE AREA INCLUDE BAN HOUAYKONG (TH408934), BAN HOUANA (TH431967), AND BAN NAMAI (TH412984). VILLAGERS MAY HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF THE BATTLE AND CRASH SITE. IF NO WITNESSES ARE FOUND, CONDUCT AN AERIAL SURVEY OF THE POSSIBLE CAMP ON HILL 1182 (TH430938) AND CHECK THE SURROUNDING PEAKS FOR EVIDENCE OF FORTIFICATIONS AND THE HELIPAD. IF ANY ARE FOUND, CONDUCT AN GROUND SEARCH.

- IF THE CRASH SITE HAS NOT BEEN FOUND, CONTINUE THE INVESTIGATION OF REFUGEE REPORT T86-274 AT BAN NAMLA (TJ375025).

COMMENTS:

- IT IS LIKELY THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT WRECKAGE REMAINING AT THE SITE WILL BE THE 1300 POUND ENGINE.



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REPORT T86-274

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AIR AMERICA LOCATION

WARNING
VIETNAM LADS are designated special areas. State clearance required for overflight. See Foreign Clearance Guide.

OTHER COUNTRIES
Khabang Province

89

84

3500

3600

21°

20°

6