

and Saravane in June. Then they advanced onto the Plateau des Bolovens.

Meanwhile, the U.S. air effort against the Communists in southern Laos increased in intensity. With this, the flood of refugees also increased so that by 1971 perhaps as many as one-third of the population of Laos were refugees.

By 1972 the course of events dictated a change in strategy. The forces necessary to push back to the Vietnam border or even close to it—in Samneua and Xieng Khouang—were simply not available. Neither were forces available to seriously threaten the Ho Chi Minh or Sihanouk trail systems in southern Laos. Even a strong force of regulars from South Vietnam had fallen short of its objectives in its offensive in the Tchepone region in early 1971. There was no way that the NLA or the Laos irregulars could muster the combat power necessary to oppose the NVA in this region that the North Vietnamese regarded vital to the prosecution of their offensive in South Vietnam.

In addition to these practical military realities that compelled a retrenchment in the employment of our army and the irregulars, the Laos government was faced with the prospect that a cease-fire might be imminent. It would therefore be prudent for us to hold onto what we then controlled and attempt to expand our holdings only in those regions that were habitable and contained good, arable land. We could afford to ignore the inhospitable jungles and highlands and concentrate on the rice-producing region of the Mekong Valley and the Bolovens Plateau. We would hold the Sam Thong--Long Cheng line and attempt a limited advance into Xieng Khouang Province.

In order to accomplish even this modest strategy, we agreed with our American advisers, notably Brigadier General John W. Vessey, Jr., then Deputy Chief, JUSMAGTHAI, that we would have to reorganize the Laos Armed Forces into a mobile, well trained force. Secondly, we should reorganize our logistic system to support more efficiently and economically this force. General Vessey had been encouraging this latter reform since 1971 but with little success.

The political contacts between the Pathet Lao and the government which had resumed at Ban Namone in 1961 had continued over the years.

Souvanna Phouma still considered that the coalition government of which he was premier was the *de jure* government of Laos and his half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong was still vice-premier. Although all the Pathet Lao members of the government had long since fled Vientiane, Souvanna Phouma kept their positions vacant, waiting for their return.

The international climate was right for another serious try at peace in Laos and in 1972 Pathet Lao delegates returned to Vientiane to resume discussions to end the war. How these talks culminated in the final agreement of 1973 and how this agreement was implemented is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER VIII

The 1973 Cease-Fire

Ever since Laos gained its independence in 1950, whatever government was in office in Vientiane regarded the Neo Lao Hak Sat as a political party within the Lao nationalist movement and not a government itself, even though its military arm, the Pathet Lao, had made war against the Lao people and government. Coalition governments in which the Neo Lao Hak Sat was represented were formed but genuine cooperation in the administration of the country and its defenses was never achieved. Truces that were reached between the government forces and the Pathet Lao were inevitably fractured by one side or the other and external governments extended their rivalries to Laos soil making rapprochement between the two sides even more difficult.

Unlike the situation in Vietnam and Cambodia, however, the search for peace among the Lao adversaries continued throughout the fighting and the individuals on each side maintained good relationships with each other. Whenever the political and military situations permitted, contact and negotiations between them resumed. Pathet Lao units were even integrated into the National Army in 1958 and later Neutralist units joined forces with the Pathet Lao. But these alliances were short-lived.

Prince Souvanna Phouma had come to power following the Kong Le *coup* of 1960 and, except for the Phoumi Nosavan interlude, had headed the Vientiane government ever since. His government had included Neo Lao Hak Sat members since 1962, although subsequent actions of the right wing had forced them to leave Vientiane. In any event, Souvanna Phouma considered his government still to be a coalition of the Right (four cabinet seats), the Left (four Neo Lao Hak Sat seats), and the Center (eight Neutralist seats).

Despite the almost continuous war, the successive governments of Laos had developed some working institutions of public administration and instituted the forms of democratic government in which all the people of Laos participated, except of course those residing in the Pathet Lao controlled zone. The people, although heavily dependent on foreign economic assistance, appeared to be in charge of their own destinies and enjoyed the practice of free economic enterprise. During the two intervals in which the Neo Lao Hak Sat briefly participated in the government, the Communists were unable to change this.

As the United States and North Vietnam appeared to be close to reaching an agreement to end the war in Vietnam, the United States threw the full weight of its influence on the Laos government to reach a corresponding peace with the Pathet Lao. The Lao people were always ready to make this effort and this encouragement from the United States caused the Souvanna Phouma government to redouble its attempt at reconciliation with the Neo Lao Hak Sat.

Difficult Steps Leading to Signature

The delegates the opposing sides sent to the conference table in Vientiane in 1972 were experienced negotiators. They had been through this exercise for years. But this time the government delegates faced a new situation. For the first time, the Neo Lao Hak Sat was to be treated not as an opposition political party that happened to have a military force—the Pathet Lao—behind it, but as a co-equal entity with the Neutralist government of Laos. Furthermore, the Neo Lao Hak Sat refused to recognize the Souvanna Phouma administration as the legal government of Laos emphasizing that it was only a political group claiming to govern in Vientiane in opposition to the Neo Lao Hak Sat which represented the "Patriotic Forces" of Laos. They referred to Souvanna Phouma's government as "the Vientiane party." They further diminished the government's negotiating power by refusing to recognize the numerous political parties that were represented in the government; neither did they give any weight to the number of people—about two-thirds of the entire population—that lived in the government controlled zones. So

far as the Neo Lao Hak Sat were concerned, there were only two parties to this dispute: themselves and the Vientiane group, and these two parties would negotiate on equal terms. Souvanna Phouma agreed to this concept. If he wanted to get the negotiations moving—and he certainly did want this—he had no choice but to agree to this demand.

There was another interesting aspect of the Neo Lao Hak Sat approach to the negotiations. They would negotiate for a share in the Vientiane government, a share in the Vientiane infrastructure, its buildings, vehicles, roads, power supply, even its treasury, but they would not give up any of their own assets or permit any government intrusion into Pathet Lao zones.

So eager was Souvanna Phouma to conclude an agreement with the Neo Lao Hak Sat that he appointed a former Neutralist partner of the Pathet Lao to be the government's plenipotentiary representative at the negotiations, Mr. Pheng Phongsavan. During the Neutralist-Pathet Lao alliance, Mr. Phongsavan had been the Neutralist delegate to the Ban Namone meetings. The Neo Lao Hak Sat delegates to Vientiane in 1972 were the same comrades who had brought Mr. Phongsavan to Ban Namone in Soviet helicopters in 1961.

And so the negotiations began in earnest. The first issue was crucial and set the pattern for all that followed. This issue concerned which draft agreement would be the subject of discussion, modification and eventual adoption, the one proposed by the Vientiane government or the one submitted by the Neo Lao Hak Sat. (In English, the socialist side called itself "the Party of the Patriotic Forces" and its delegate, "the representative of the Patriotic Forces.")

Each side insisted that its draft be used as a point of departure but only the Neo Lao Hak Sat held firm to its position. The Vientiane government position crumbled as Souvanna Phouma, who was already under great pressure from the American Deputy Chief of Mission, John Dean, to see that some kind of an agreement was reached, gave instructions that the Neo Lao Hak Sat draft be accepted as "the memo of discussion." This was an enormous break-through for the Neo Lao Hak Sat, not only because of the substance of the issue—the Neo Lao Hak Sat draft would retain its character regardless of the modifications that might be made

to it—but because the Vientiane side had made the first important concession. This event demonstrated Souvanna Phouma's eagerness to reach an agreement and that he would likely give in on most subsequent hard issues so long as the Neo Lao Hak Sat held firm. This was exactly the case. The Neo Lao Hak Sat surrendered on no important issue from that point on.

The Government of Laos had a legislature, the National Assembly. Elected by popular vote, the delegates to the Assembly could be members of any *bona fide* political party. It was the government's expectation that this legislature would be retained in any new coalition government that might emerge from the Vientiane negotiations. The National Assembly did survive the negotiations but it lost all its influence to the Joint National Political Council proposed in the Neo Lao Hak Sat draft. This organization was in the draft because the Neo Lao Hak Sat, having no members in the current National Assembly, refused to recognize the legitimacy of that body.

The Neo Lao Hak Sat had a perfect remedy for the problem of the National Assembly. New elections would eventually be held to seat a new National Assembly, in the words of the final agreement, "which will truly represent all the people of all nationalities throughout Laos." No one could argue against that. But in the meantime, the policies of the government would be shaped by the Joint National Political Council. The Council would be composed of members appointed by each side in equal numbers, plus a few "other qualified persons who support peace, independence, neutrality and democracy" agreeable to both sides. Again, this seemed to sound fair.

The leadership of the right wing, myself included, saw the trap however, and advised the government's negotiators to beware of this proposal. We knew that the Council would be stacked in favor of the Neo Lao Hak Sat and this is precisely what happened when this proposal became part of the final agreement. The protocol to the agreement specified that the chairman of the council would be from the Pathet Lao side. All Neo Lao Hak Sat members of course voted by instruction from their leadership. Souvanna Phouma appointed only weak and largely

ineffectual members of his own clique to the Council and the so-called "neutral" members agreed upon by both sides had to be amenable to the socialist cause or the Pathet Lao would not have agreed to them. Thus, the right wing had no representation in the most important policy-making institution in the country. This was the Neo Lao Hak Sat's second major victory in the negotiations.

At the close of each negotiating session, the government delegation would submit the results of the day's meeting to Souvanna Phouma and his cabinet. Committees had been formed in the government to study the issues raised at each stage and to advise the delegation. As chief of staff of the Army at that time, I was a member of the military committee.

The guiding philosophy of the military committee was that we should not rush into a bad agreement just in order to achieve an early cease-fire. We should work carefully and steadily, doing all we could to make progress no matter how slowly, but we should be aware at all times that we must prevent a Communist take-over. A fair agreement that preserved a balance of influence must be the result of the negotiations.

The fact that we and our adversaries were able to sit down together and calmly discuss the issues that divided us in the midst of a long and bitter war gave us reason to be optimistic about the future. Certainly we enjoyed an advantage in this respect that was denied the opposing sides in Vietnam and Cambodia. If we could only approach this with deliberate reason and not be propelled hastily into an agreement that would ultimately destroy our liberties and our identities as Lao patriots, citizens and soldiers.

On the other hand, Souvanna Phouma's approach was quite different. He firmly believed in the fundamental honesty of his half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, and that under his leadership, the Neo Lao Hak Sat would negotiate in good faith. Furthermore, he believed that any agreement was better than none at all and that we should not be overly concerned with the content; we could work it all out later after the new coalition government took control. In a word, he was impatient; he wanted an agreement now!

Souvanna Phouma was not the only impatient one. Mr. Dean was also very anxious that the negotiations not stall. He and his staff frequently

urged members of the government to make more concessions to the Neo Lao Hak Sat. Some of these urgings took the form of thinly veiled threats of cuts in American assistance. It was quite difficult for any Lao official, who knew that resistance on his part could put the country on the ropes very quickly, to fail to respond to the Embassy pressure.

The Pathet Lao negotiators were well aware of what was going on. They already knew that Souvanna Phouma would agree to almost anything; now they knew that the Americans were, in effect, in their corner. Armed with these advantages, they became even more obdurate.

As the days and weeks passed, more hard issues surfaced at the conference table. Heated discussions became the norm, but each time an impasse occurred, Souvanna Phouma ordered his delegation to concede. On the worst of these occasions, the right wing members would threaten to resign. This put Souvanna Phouma in a difficult position which was ameliorated by pressure from the American Embassy. We would find that the weekly shipments of American supplied rice for the Army would not arrive, or that the American supplied money to pay the Army would be delayed, or that only part of the fuel needed to run the Army's vehicles would be delivered. Capitulation by the right wing was essential to maintain the NLA. The American military attaches made this very clear to all senior officers of the NLA.

It pleased Souvanna Phouma to see that the right wing leadership—which essentially was the leadership of the NLA—was being rendered impotent by American pressure. In his view, he had suffered for too long the opposition of the right wing during the years when American support had contributed to their strength. He failed to understand or appreciate that he could not have remained in office for the past 13 years without the support of the NLA. Now his actions indicated, "I don't need you." The result of all this was an agreement with the Pathet Lao that, as it was implemented, turned the country over to the Communists.

Implementation of the Agreement

The Agreement on the Restoration of Peace and Reconciliation in Laos was signed in Vientiane on Wednesday, 21 February 1973. The cease-fire called for in the agreement was to take effect at noon the following day. Except for some minor skirmishes, the cease-fire was generally observed by both sides.

The agreement specified that Vientiane and Luang Prabang were "neutralized" and that law and order would be preserved in the two capitals by a joint police force. Security for the Pathet Lao members of the Provisional Government of National Union would be provided by a battalion of Pathet Lao infantry in Vientiane and a smaller force in Luang Prabang. As soon as the agreement took effect, the Pathet Lao contingents began moving into the two cities. The Vientiane government, of course, had to supply the quarters, vehicles, communications and rations for these units. As provided in the protocol to the agreement, 1,000 Pathet Lao police entered Vientiane; 500 took up duties in Luang Prabang. The government side was limited to units of infantry and police in equal numbers to the Pathet Lao in these cities.

An equal share in police authority was considered an important matter to the Pathet Lao. Similarly, they said that because Vientiane was crawling with foreign agents -- Americans, Thais, Formosans, Filipinos, and South Vietnamese—they needed their own infantry battalion for security. As a matter of fact, the 1,000 policemen they sent to Vientiane were actually infantrymen too and they were equipped as such.

The materials and personnel the Pathet Lao brought to Vientiane and Luang Prabang were, under the protocol to the agreement, supposed to be inspected and accounted for as they were disembarked at the airfields. Government security units were charged with the responsibility of checking the cargoes and troops landed at Vientiane by Soviet Aeroflot and at Luang Prabang by Chinese transports. This should have been a routine matter but it wasn't. Despite the protocol that provided for these inspections, the Pathet Lao objected to them and one of their leaders complained to Souvanna Phouma. Characteristically, Souvanna Phouma summoned the officer in charge of the joint security force to his

office and ordered him to allow the Pathet Lao and their equipment to enter without any control. His attitude was that it didn't really make any difference how many Pathet Lao entered the city; they considered their mission a sacred one and we must show them our generosity.

The security officers came to us for advice (at this time I was Director General of the Ministry of Defense—the level of under-secretary) and we told them to continue to make their checks as thoroughly as possible. It was important that all requirements of the agreement and protocol be fulfilled, even if the Pathet Lao didn't like it; otherwise the entire agreement would become meaningless. We wanted to know how many and who of our erstwhile enemies were entering our capitals, and who and what they were bringing with them.

The security force continued its checks but obstructions by the Pathet Lao diminished somewhat the effectiveness of the controls. We did learn, however, that a number of North Vietnamese advisers arrived and were ensconced in the building we turned over to the Pathet Lao for their headquarters in Vientiane.

The streets of Luang Prabang and Vientiane were patrolled by pairs of policemen, one government policeman and one Pathet Lao soldier-turned-policeman. All sensitive areas of the cities were under the surveillance or control of the joint force such as the airport, police stations and immigration services. But the Pathet Lao had no interest in the non-political, routine police services such as administration, traffic control and the like. These duties had to be performed by the government police. The Pathet Lao objective in this regard was clear: they wanted their men in positions where they would be highly visible and in direct, constant contact with the people. This afforded them the opportunity to spread anti-government, anti-imperialist propaganda. Their troops overlooked no occasion to exploit this opportunity. From time to time citizens would approach them to inquire about relatives believed to be in Pathet Lao ranks or zones. Before they would answer any questions, the police would launch long, prepared speeches attacking the United States, the Vientiane government and the so-called affluent Vientiane politicians. It was all very well programmed and rehearsed.



The Author (Center) Reviews the NLA Troops
at the Paksane Airfield, in 1974, Accompanied by the Foreign
Attache Corps. The Occasion was an Inspection of the Bridge
Built by the NVA Engineers over the Nam Kading River Near Paksane

The infantry battalion the Pathet Lao were permitted to station in Vientiane, ostensibly to protect their mission in the capital, also had the primary mission of propagandizing the population. This was an unusually large battalion but because of Souvanna Phouma's attitude and Pathet Lao resistance, we were unable to get an accurate count of its personnel. In any event, it embarked on a well-planned propaganda campaign as soon as it settled in Vientiane. Each day its soldiers, some in uniform and others in civilian clothes, would visit the neighborhoods around their camp and make speeches extolling the virtues of the socialist system and attacking the evils of capitalism, the United States and the Vientiane government, especially the right-wing element.

The hard-sell propaganda effort appeared to have little effect on the villagers around Vientiane, but it did provoke anti-government responses from some government functionaries and many students who had been unable to get into the universities and who swallowed the Pathet Lao promise of greater opportunities under socialism. Pathet Lao soldiers in mufti became *agents provocateur*, inciting demonstrations against the government while others joined the mobs protesting, striking, or otherwise disrupting the functions of government and good order in Vientiane.

An anomalous situation developed wherein government employees and officials, with Pathet Lao urging, demonstrated against their own government. A group of young university graduates, mostly from French universities, formed an activist association to propel the government as rapidly as possible into a new, liberal, socialist course. They had already absorbed a large dose of socialist doctrine during their student years in Paris and now this was reinforced by their contacts with the Pathet Lao in Vientiane. Their viewpoint was that the leadership in Vientiane was old and reactionary; that only the educated youth of Laos were qualified to shape the destiny of the nation.

Most of these bright young people held positions as service directors—about the fourth echelon—in government departments. Souvanna Phouma looked to them for the support he needed to oppose the right wing and to execute the so-called progressive policies of his government.

No affront, no apparent injustice was too small to become the cause for an anti-government demonstration. These public administrators

even led protests against their own offices. Some of these instances were obviously more self-serving than idealistic. For example, one young police officer, a nephew of Souvanna Phouma and a minor official in the department led a demonstration against the police. He was disgruntled because he had not been promoted and it was fairly simple for him to find a number of other police officers who felt similarly ill-treated. So he led a police strike, a great embarrassment to the government; the director of police resigned and the striking officers went back to duty. Souvanna Phouma's nephew was promoted. Naturally, the Pathet Lao benefited from the disturbances and from the steady erosion of right wing influence in public administration.

In reward for their faithfulness to Souvanna Phouma's policies many of the young service directors were promoted to positions of greater authority in the coalition government and some even became members of the Joint National Political Council. The consideration they later received from the Pathet Lao when the Communists gained full control was less beneficial. Only a year after this event those who were able escaped to Thailand and later to France or elsewhere, while the less fortunate ones are in Pathet Lao prison camps.

The Pathet Lao did not by any means confine their provocative activities to Vientiane and its environs. Strange new faces spouting socialist propaganda appeared in all our cities. From defectors and covert sources we learned not only of Pathet Lao infiltration across the cease-fire lines, but about the significant financial support these agents were receiving from the foreign socialist embassies in Vientiane. Furthermore, weapons were smuggled into the cities to arm their civilian supporters.

The Pathet Lao went beyond propaganda to undermine the government's influence. In the two provinces in which Vientiane and Luang Prabang were situated, they also executed a well-orchestrated plan to install their own officials in the local offices. By the protocol, the two sides had agreed that appointees to the offices of governor and district chiefs in the capital areas in these two provinces would have to be approved by both sides. When the agreement took effect, the coalition government took no immediate action to select new candidates for these positions but permitted the incumbents to remain in office. The Pathet

Lao immediately began criticizing these administrators with virulent propaganda attacks and mobilized demonstrators to embarrass them. When they were unable to incite the local residents, they even brought civilians from the Pathet Lao zones, gave them rations and used them to demonstrate. The result of most of these prolonged disturbances was a joint investigation by government and Pathet Lao officials from Vientiane, the resignation of the government official involved, and the appointment of an official approved by the Pathet Lao.

At the national level, the Joint National Political Council (as we in the right wing had expected) turned out to be a tool in the hands of the Pathet Lao. The presidency of this 42-member body belonged to the Pathet Lao (Prince Souphanouvong was president) and the Communist membership included all the important Neo Lao Hak Sat leaders. Souvanna Phouma attached little importance to it, and the inexperienced or naive representatives he assigned to the Council were no match for the skilled Pathet Lao delegates. Consequently, during the very first meeting of the Council many of the Pathet Lao political and economic programs were approved and sent to the government for implementation. The Pathet Lao regarded the Council as the instrument of social, political and economic change for Laos, and that is how they used it. They completely ignored the fact that there was still a legal National Assembly not yet dissolved by the king, or that major changes in government policies should wait until the new Assembly called for in the agreement could be elected. The Pathet Lao had designed the Council in order to institute immediate changes in the entire structure of Laos and they employed it to that end.

Although the agreement had implied that the Pathet Lao influence on local affairs would extend only to the capital regions, the edicts of the Joint National Political Council reached to all provinces and districts in the country. And they even reached into the National Lao Army. Perhaps this was another thing that Souvanna Phouma had not foreseen when, in his eagerness to conclude a peace with the Pathet Lao, he agreed to the Joint National Political Council.

The government departments with the responsibility to carry out the policies of the Joint National Political Council were also heavily influenced by Pathet Lao cadres. If a department or ministry had a

Vientiane government chief, the deputy was appointed by the Pathet Lao and *vice versa*. All decisions made by a minister or department chief required the endorsement of the deputy. Since most of Souvanna Phouma's appointees were pliable, the Pathet Lao generally had their way in administration of the government's affairs. The Pathet Lao had entered Vientiane empty handed and with nothing in their pockets, yet within a few months were managing the government of Laos.

Other procedures required by the agreement that operated to the exclusive benefit of the Pathet Lao were the matters of the withdrawal of foreign troops and the exchange of prisoners of war. With regard to the former, since neither the Pathet Lao nor the North Vietnamese ever admitted the presence of North Vietnamese troops in Laos, the Pathet Lao had nothing to report about a withdrawal. Nevertheless, we gave the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese the list of North Vietnamese soldiers we had captured and sent them back to the Pathet Lao zone. Naturally, the Communists denied that the prisoners were regular NVA soldiers and charged "capitalist fabrication".

The Pathet Lao still had several hundred Thai soldiers they had captured in combat and after arrangements were complete, aircraft transported the Thais directly from the Pathet Lao zones to Thailand. Very few foreign captives were accounted for by the Pathet Lao. Two or three Americans were released by them through the Vientiane airport.

Despite the many years of war, there were no Lao prisoners still held by either side. When a Pathet Lao soldier was captured by our side, he was sent to a camp for several months and educated on the government policies and structure. Following that, if he wished he could enlist in the Army. Otherwise, he was released and sent to his home village. If his village was in a Pathet Lao zone, he could remain in the government zone if he wished.

When a government soldier was captured by the Pathet Lao, he was obliged to stay in their zone or serve in their forces after his indoctrination course.

The war had created thousands of refugees who had fled their villages in the Pathet Lao zones because of the fighting or to escape air attacks. About one-third of the Laos population were displaced persons

living in the government controlled zone. Many had been there for years, had adjusted to their new environment and preferred to remain. A sizeable number, however, wanted to return to their native villages and the government had to provide the transportation to get them there.

The reconciliation of the two sides in Laos depended more than anything else on observation of the cease-fire called for in the agreement. This of course was also the most visible aspect of the agreement and the one on which the officials at the American embassy placed the most emphasis. The Pathet Lao knew this and exploited it to their advantage. Whenever clashes between opposing forces occurred, Souvanna Phouma automatically held the NLA responsible. Even when it was unmistakably clear that the Pathet Lao had fired first or had intruded across the recognized cease-fire marker, Souvanna forbid the NLA from retaliating.

Toward the end of 1974 and early 1975, Pathet Lao units ignored the cease-fire line entirely and moved around and behind NLA units on the line. Souvanna Phouma sent strict orders that the NLA would take no action against the Pathet Lao units; even if attacked, they could only take passive measures to protect themselves.

The most flagrant Pathet Lao cease-fire violation occurred during the Lao New Year holidays of 1975, April 15 to 17. Traditionally the high government officials and the diplomatic corps would attend the formal ceremony at Luang Prabang celebrating the new year with the king. The Pathet Lao chose this occasion to attack the NLA positions at Phou Soung which protected the Royal Road—Route 13—at the junction of Route 7. The military region commander reported the attack to the Ministry of Defense and asked for instructions. The Minister of Defense, Mr. Sisouk Na Champassak, concerned for the safety of the diplomats and officials who would shortly be passing by Phou Soung on their way to the king's ceremony, gave orders to Vang Pao to counterattack. Vang Pao's troops, supported by Air Force F-28s, recaptured the lost positions and the convoy of visitors passed without incident. But that was not the end of the incident. A few hours later, Souvanna Phouma summoned Sisouk Na Champassak and firmly berated him for issuing the orders to counterattack and accused the leading officers of the NLA of being war

provocateurs. This sort of reaction from Souvanna Phouma had become routine in circumstances such as this. Needless to say, morale in the NLA suffered because of it.

Demobilization and Modernization

If the effect of Souvanna Phouma's negative attitude toward the NLA's legitimate right to defend itself and its positions undermined morale in the armed forces, the immediate and drastic demobilization of thousands of officers, NCOs and soldiers was infinitely more debilitating.

The dissolution of the irregular forces was a matter of urgency. Article 4 of the agreement treated them in the same category as foreign troops and required that they be completely demobilized within 60 days of the founding of the Provisional Government of National Union. Since the United States made it clear that its support of the SGUs would not be continued beyond the time limit, no delay could be permitted and the military region commanders were well advised of this by the government as well as by the CIA.

The Defense Ministry exercised no control over the irregulars; these units responded to the orders of the military region commanders who, in turn, received their guidance on the employment of the SGUs from Americans. This being the case, the SGUs had some of the characteristics of private, regional armies. Unit commanders and staff officers were closely connected—by blood or personal loyalty—to the region commanders. It was obviously very difficult for the region commanders to dissolve these loyal units which had fought so many hard battles for so long.

The Defense Ministry understood the problem but had no choice but to pass the order for demobilization. Generally, the officers and men understood the situation too and accepted it without much resistance, although some of the battalion and group commanders delayed as long as they could. The difficulties were ameliorated somewhat by the fact that the Provisional Government of National Union did not come into being officially until 5 April 1974.

The SGU officers and NCOs who had joined the irregulars from the NLA were permitted to return to the Army, usually in the military region where they were then serving. The others were simply sent home.

Contrary to the case of the irregulars, the agreement and protocol were silent on the matter of the status and size of the regular forces, but the United States was not silent and it was footing the bill. It was only logical that the army that was to serve the needs of the Provisional Government of National Union would be much smaller than the force extant at cease-fire. The American concept was that the armed force would have to shrink from its cease-fire strength of about 150,000 (all forces—NLA, irregulars, Neutralists, Air Force and River Flotilla) to about 50,000 over a five year period. The American planners proposed for the core of the ground forces a NLA force of three brigades in each military region, supported by artillery and an engineer battalion.

According to the American plan, the Air Force would be reduced about one-third from a force of about 150 aircraft to about 100. Significantly, the ground support capability of the Air Force would be cut in half: from about 80 T-28s to 40.

The Lao government's schedule for the reduction of the NLA was even more drastic than that proposed by the Americans. It called for a force of only 45,000 at the end of two years and the final objective was 30,000. The idea was that the manpower of the armed forces could be employed to greater national benefit in economic development projects and that the foreign assistance support Laos received, principally from the United States, should be devoted to development now that the war was over.

The American concept was also to reduce the armed forces to a size and structure capable of peacekeeping and nation building; a small, well-trained, mobile force. This meant that an intensive program of training and logistics reorganization was called for because within 60 days of the establishment of the Provisional Government of National Union the Laos armed forces would have to be self-sufficient in all phases of operations and the management of resources. As it turned out, the new Deputy Chief, JUSMAGTHAI, Brigadier General Richard G. Trefry, had only a little over 13 months to accomplish the task.

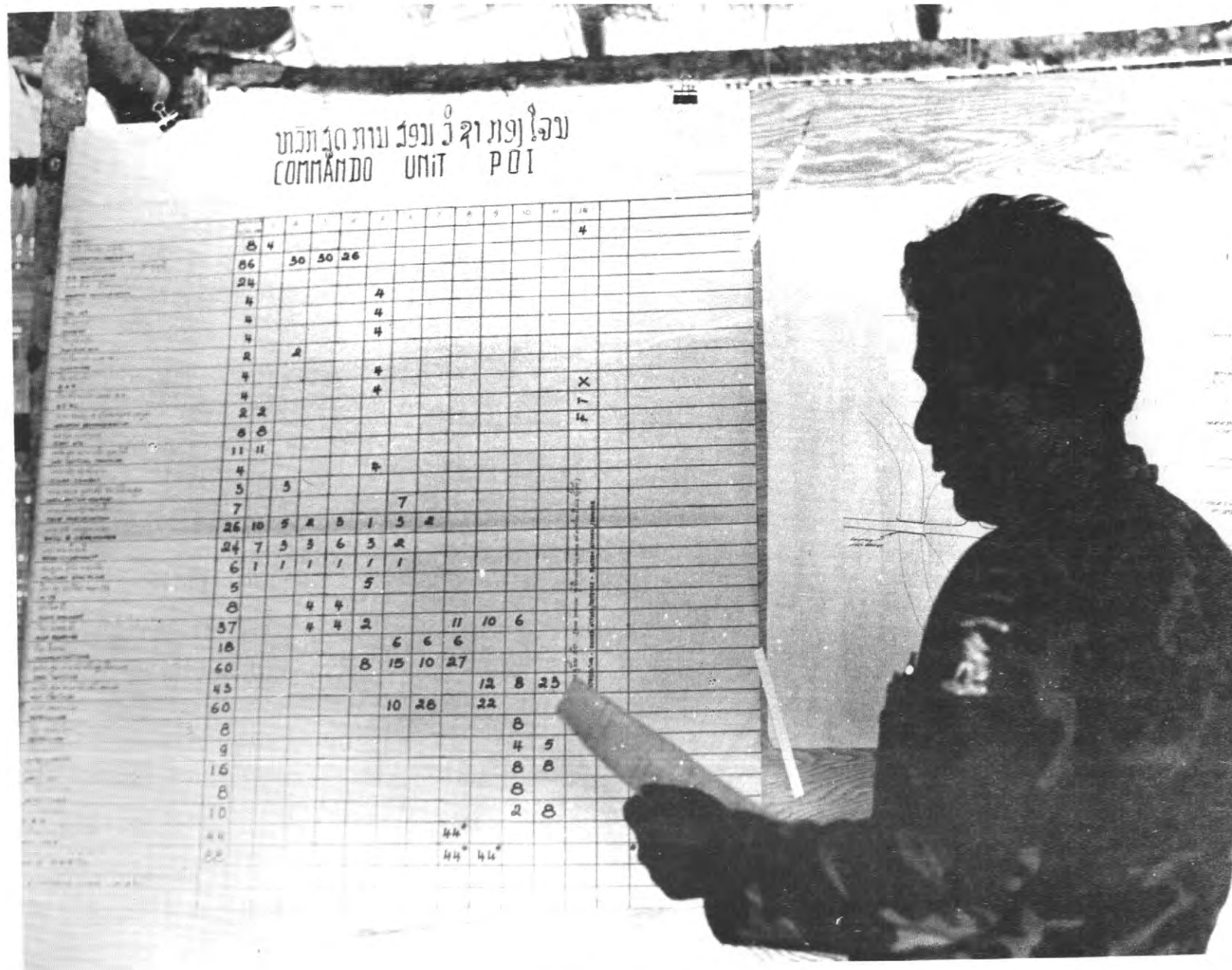
The American program for upgrading the combat capabilities of the NLA was ambitious. It consisted principally of two aspects: rotate the infantry battalions through refurbished regional training centers for refresher training and improve the NLA artillery by concentrating its training at Phou Khao Khouay training center (Military Region V, near Vientiane).

The infantry battalion training program fell short of its goals because the regional facilities were inadequate, the tentative cease-fire situation made some battalions unavailable for training, regional commanders for their own reasons refused to send some battalions, and the government of Souvanna Phouma gave less than full support to the program. The government regarded the upgrading of capabilities and improved readiness of the NLA battalions as threats to the security of the government itself. Rumors of *coup* plots were frequently associated with battalions on the move, especially well-trained battalions.

Reorganizing the NLA logistical structure was the other main mission General Trefry set out to accomplish before the deadline. This also proved to be a difficult task. The idea wasn't new. General Vessey had proposed it as long ago as 1971 but had been frustrated. The main difficulty lay in the fact that the reorganization contemplated would destroy too many vested interests.

The NLA logistical system, like most other aspects of the Army, was inherited from the French. Its basis was the group of technical services—ordnance, quartermaster, medical, signal, and engineer. Each technical service chief, and each of his subordinate commanders, had exclusive control over supplies, storage, spare parts and maintenance of all items in the category of his service, much the same way service chiefs once functioned in the United States Army.

The structure of the technical services in Laos meant that the chiefs were extremely powerful, they controlled valuable resources, and the opportunities for private gain were manifold. They didn't want these little empires broken up. Nevertheless, by mid 1974 much of the reorganization had been accomplished. The system was patterned along American lines and much better suited to the use and control of American military aid for that reason. The functional organization provided for



An Officer of the National Lao Army
Briefs on the Program of Instruction for Commando Training at
the Fifth Military Region Training Center, Phou Khao Khouay, Circa 1972

units responsible for supply, maintenance and transportation of all categories of equipment.

The demobilization of the NLA was an even more difficult process than the elimination of the SGUs. The military region commanders had developed close ties with their units and subordinate commanders, many of whom were relatives. Furthermore, as the region commanders viewed the security situation in their areas of responsibility, they were loath to reduce their capabilities. The Pathet Lao were sowing dissension and disorder throughout the countryside and the Army was the only stabilizing force remaining. In fact, the Army was the only agency of the government that took no part in anti-government demonstrations.

The Pathet Lao were waiting for an uprising in the NLA, but it never happened, despite Communist successes in infiltrating agents into the ranks and cultivating individual dissident leaders. Cognizant of the danger of an army revolt, or of independent action by a region commander, the Ministry of Defense was careful not to press too vigorously for a rapid demobilization. But as the process dragged out, the government was faced with serious financial difficulties. The funds to support the NLA were dwindling.

Despite their low pay, the regular Lao soldiers were reluctant to leave the security of the Army with its medical care, rations, and assistance to families for the uncertainties of civilian life. A good percentage of senior officers also resisted early retirement. These were largely ineffective, desk-bound officers who owed their positions to political connections. None volunteered to retire and forcing them out usually proved to be politically impossible. But despite the difficulties and hardships, we had the NLA down to less than 50,000 men by early 1975.

The Pathet Lao in the Defense Ministry

When the Provisional Government of National Union was proclaimed in April 1974, it was time to implement that part of the agreement and protocol that placed Pathet Lao members in all of the departments of the government. Despite the fact that no progress had yet been made on

integrating the NLA with the Pathet Lao—indeed, there had been no attempt at this—the Ministry of Defense was no exception.

Souvanna Phouma had selected Mr. Sisouk Na Champassak to be his Minister of Defense. Mr. Na Champassak was familiar with the management of this ministry because he had done it before. During the period when Souvanna Phouma held the portfolio of the defense ministry (at the same time he was prime minister) he appointed Mr. Na Champassak as *chargé de mission* to actually run the Ministry of Defense, even though Mr. Na Champassak was also Minister of Finance. In fact, the close relationship between the prime minister and Mr. Na Champassak caused some foreigners to refer to him as Souvanna Phouma's *dauphin*.

Mr. Na Champassak was a well educated young man who had been a frequent Lao ambassador; he once held this post at the United Nations. He was also one of the few prominent civilian promoters of the CDNI in 1958 and 1959 and a respected member of the right wing.

Across the hall from Mr. Na Champassak's office in the Ministry of Defense sat the Pathet Lao Deputy Minister of Defense, Mr. Kham Ouane Boupoua, ex-colonel, National Lao Army. The reader may recall that Colonel Boupoua was the former chief of Phong Saly Province in northern Laos before Kong Le's 1960 *coup d'etat*. He is the one who had an arrangement with the Chinese across the border, kept a consul in China, kept the NVA out of his province, and was generously financed and supported by the CIA. He also was a member of the right wing CDNI. But his politics changed radically when Kong Le seized control. He became, almost overnight, a left-leaning Neutralist and began supporting Souvanna Phouma. Communications between Vientiane and Phong Saly continued for a while after the *coup* but were later cut. When the war intensified in the northeast several years later, no one in the south heard much more about Colonel Boupoua except that he was on poor terms with the NVA. The next we saw of him was when he came to Vientiane to be Deputy Minister of Defense.

Mr. Kham Ouane Boupoua, although he was a deputy minister, had a problem of rank in his dealings with General Bounpone Makthepharak and me. I was then Director General of the ministry and I, like General Makthepharak, had been Boupoua's superior officer in the NLA. Even in

his position as deputy minister, we dealt with him as a subordinate and he seemed to realize that. Many other senior officers in the NLA also remembered Boupha as a classmate in officers candidate school or had served with him before. The Americans knew that he had attended Ranger School at Fort Benning.

Besides the security guard in his house, Kham Ouane Boupha brought only two officers with him to work for him in the ministry. One of these was Captain Damdouane, formerly of the NLA, who was a graduate of the French staff school and who had been captured by the Pathet Lao in battle. He was from Vientiane and was the adopted son of the former NLA Commander-in-Chief General Sounthone Pathammavong.

Boupha's other aide was a former lieutenant in the NLA military police. During 1959, when Phoui Sananikone locked up Souphanouvong and other prominent Pathet Lao figures in the military police headquarters, this lieutenant was on duty there. He evidently helped engineer the escape, for he fled to the Pathet Lao zone along with Souphanouvong and the others.

The presence of Boupha and his aides in our headquarters created a problem of security for the NLA. Naturally, Boupha believed that as deputy minister he was entitled to all information about the ministry and the NLA. Of course, this arrangement would not work in reverse; we had no minister or representation of any kind in Pathet Lao headquarters. We realized that in the other ministries the Pathet Lao officials had access to all aspects of the administration of their departments; even in such a sensitive area as the conduct of foreign affairs. In fact, the Minister of Foreign Affairs was Pathet Lao. But it was still our view that we should withhold all classified and sensitive information from Boupha in the Ministry of Defense unless we were supplied similar information about the Pathet Lao. Of course, we knew that this *quid pro quo* would not be forthcoming.

Consequently, Minister Na Champassak, General Bounpone Makthepharak and I directed that no official in the ministry or in the armed forces would provide any information to Deputy Minister Boupha. All requests for information would be referred to one of us and Boupha always received the same answer from us: provide us with the corresponding data on

Pathet Lao forces or you will get nothing from us. This confrontation took place almost daily.

Furthermore, all members of the headquarters were informed that if anyone asked to see Mr. Boupha, that person was to be referred directly to Minister Na Champassak personally.

Eventually, Deputy Minister Boupha became very frustrated and began complaining about our non-cooperation at the weekly cabinet meetings. Each time the subject came up, Souvanna Phouma would order Minister Na Champassak to give the requested information to Boupha. Nevertheless, we kept all sensitive documents away from Boupha and, in order to finesse the situation, sometimes passed innocuous, routine papers to him.

Although we successfully blocked the Pathet Lao efforts to gain military information at our level in the ministry, they didn't give up. Boupha knew that Minister Na Champassak, General Makthepharak and I were beyond approach, but some other senior NLA officers were not. He occasionally invited ranking NLA officers to his house to meet senior Pathet Lao leaders. Once, four of the highest ranking NLA officers took lunch with Prince Souphanouvong in the prince's quarters. The Pathet Lao were making progress.

They didn't concentrate all their efforts at the top echelon either. From time to time our security service would discover that some junior NLA officer had gone too far in cooperating with the Pathet Lao and had released some information. When that happened, the culprit was transferred to a post where he would have no contact with the Pathet Lao.

The Pathet Lao also resorted to buying information that they wanted badly. This technique was probably quite effective because official salaries were so low and living costs were high.

During the year in which I observed the Pathet Lao operate in our Ministry of Defense—from April 1974 to April 1975—they were never responsible for any administration or operation, and had no impact on defense policy. We managed to thwart all of their attempts to gain influence there.

Besides their persistent attempts to get information, one of the other techniques they used was the weekly ministerial staff meeting at which we were supposed to develop ways to implement the policy decisions of the Pathet Lao-controlled Joint National Political Council. Naturally, Boupha was committed to support vigorously all decisions of the Council and heated discussions were inevitable. After presiding at two such meetings, Minister Na Champassak had had enough. He could not withstand the verbal assaults but he knew that I could stand up to Boupha in any political or military discussion. After that, he told me to conduct the weekly meetings on his behalf. This I did and was able to handle Boupha well enough.

Although Kham Ouane Boupha was legally in the Ministry of Defense, he was the only Pathet Lao official entitled to office in the defense establishment by the agreement and protocol. All other penetrations of the defense ministry and the NLA by the Pathet Lao were by illegal infiltration. Since Pathet Lao representatives were not permitted in the military region commands, these headquarters remained secure. This was not the case, however, in units in the field. There were instances where Pathet Lao soldiers infiltrated our zones in civilian clothes and then joined the NLA units. Other penetrations were less covert. Pathet Lao soldiers and officers would wander into our zones on the pretext of finding long-lost friends or relatives. These excursions were very well planned and purposeful and resulted in many personal contacts between the Pathet Lao and our officers.

These were very unsettled times and many of our junior officers—and seniors as well—were confused and worried about the future. The Pathet Lao made glib reassurances to them, promising security and promotions for them in the future. If the NLA officer was having financial difficulties, the Pathet Lao friend would help. What Kham Ouane Boupha was unable to accomplish in the ministry, the widespread Pathet Lao operation to sow disaffection in the ranks was achieving in the field.

The Final Days and the Communist Take-Over

In April 1975 the Provisional Government of National Union was one year old but no progress had yet been made to integrate the two armed forces—the NLA and the Pathet Lao. We still controlled all commands and all staffs of the NLA as well as the Ministry of Defense and Kham Ouane Bouppha, the Deputy Minister, was still frozen out of any real participation in defense matters (*Chart 3 through 8*). But impelled by the disastrous course of events in Vietnam and Cambodia rapid changes were taking place in Laos.

Souvanna Phouma continued his absolute appeasement of the Pathet Lao and they grew ever more powerful. We in the right wing had been virtually leaderless for years; Mr. Insixiengmay had abdicated the leadership of our faction to Souvanna Phouma. Prince Boun Oum Na Champassak had long since dropped out of the picture and we had no national figure around whom we could rally to oppose Souvanna Phouma. We met from time to time to discuss this problem but could find no solution. A *coup* was out of the question. Who could we install as prime minister if we succeeded? And how could we possibly succeed without American assistance? It had been made very clear to us on many occasions by members of the American mission that U.S. aid would stop immediately if we took any such drastic steps. Furthermore, a forcible seizure of the government on our part would start the war with the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese all over again. Without American support, we could not possibly win such a war. In a word, we were defeated. And most of us realized it.

As the last days of April approached Vietnam teetered on the brink of defeat. Seeing the handwriting on the wall, some of us began preparing to leave because we knew that we could not survive when the Pathet Lao took over. Many other senior officers and civilian officials, however, took a different course, one designed and promoted by the Pathet Lao. These men made contact with the Pathet Lao who promised them safety and brotherhood in the new regime to come.

Vietnam fell to the Communists on 30 April and the following day regular Pathet Lao formations began marching into Vientiane and our other

Chart 3 – Organization of the Ministry of National Defense and Veterans
As of May 1975

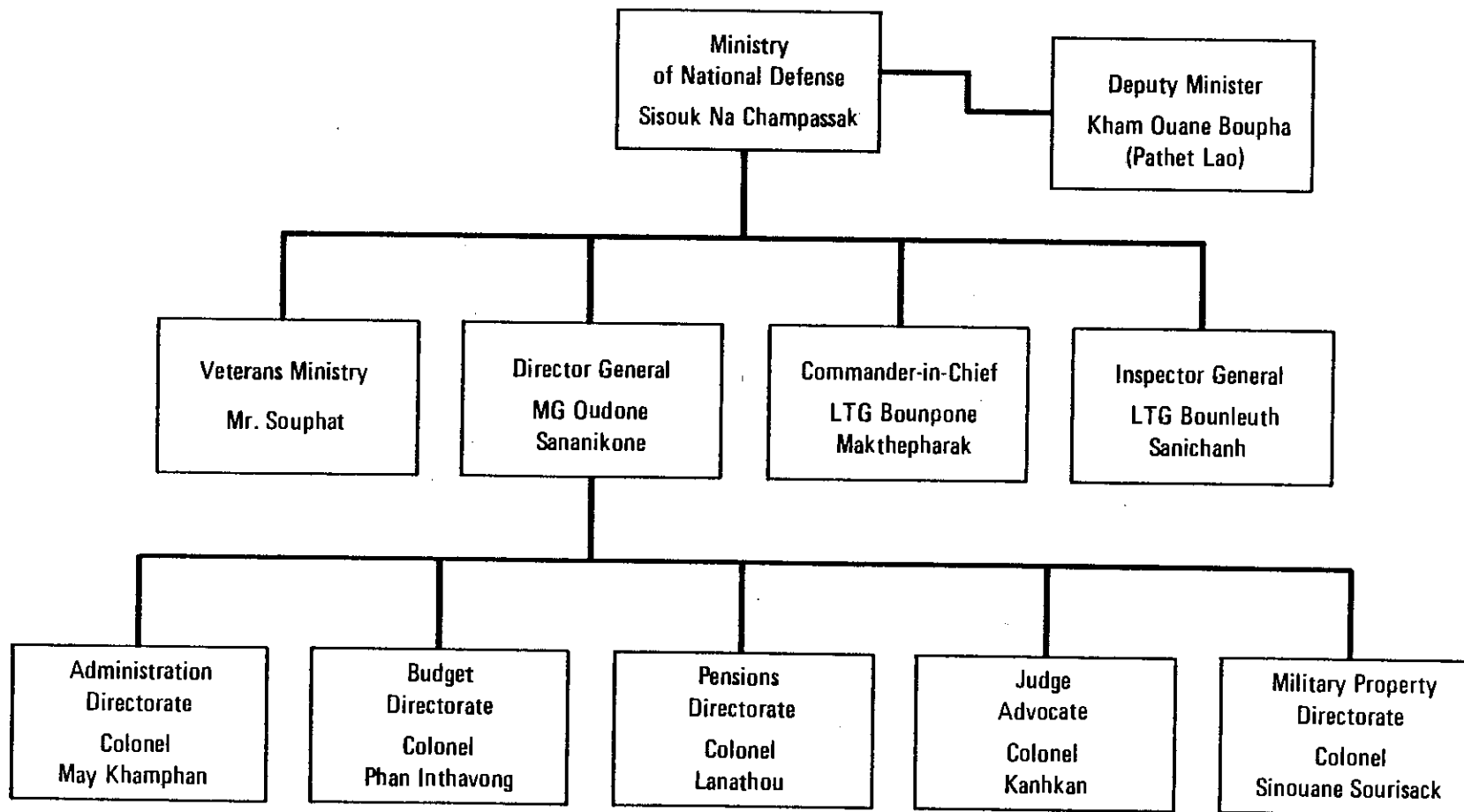
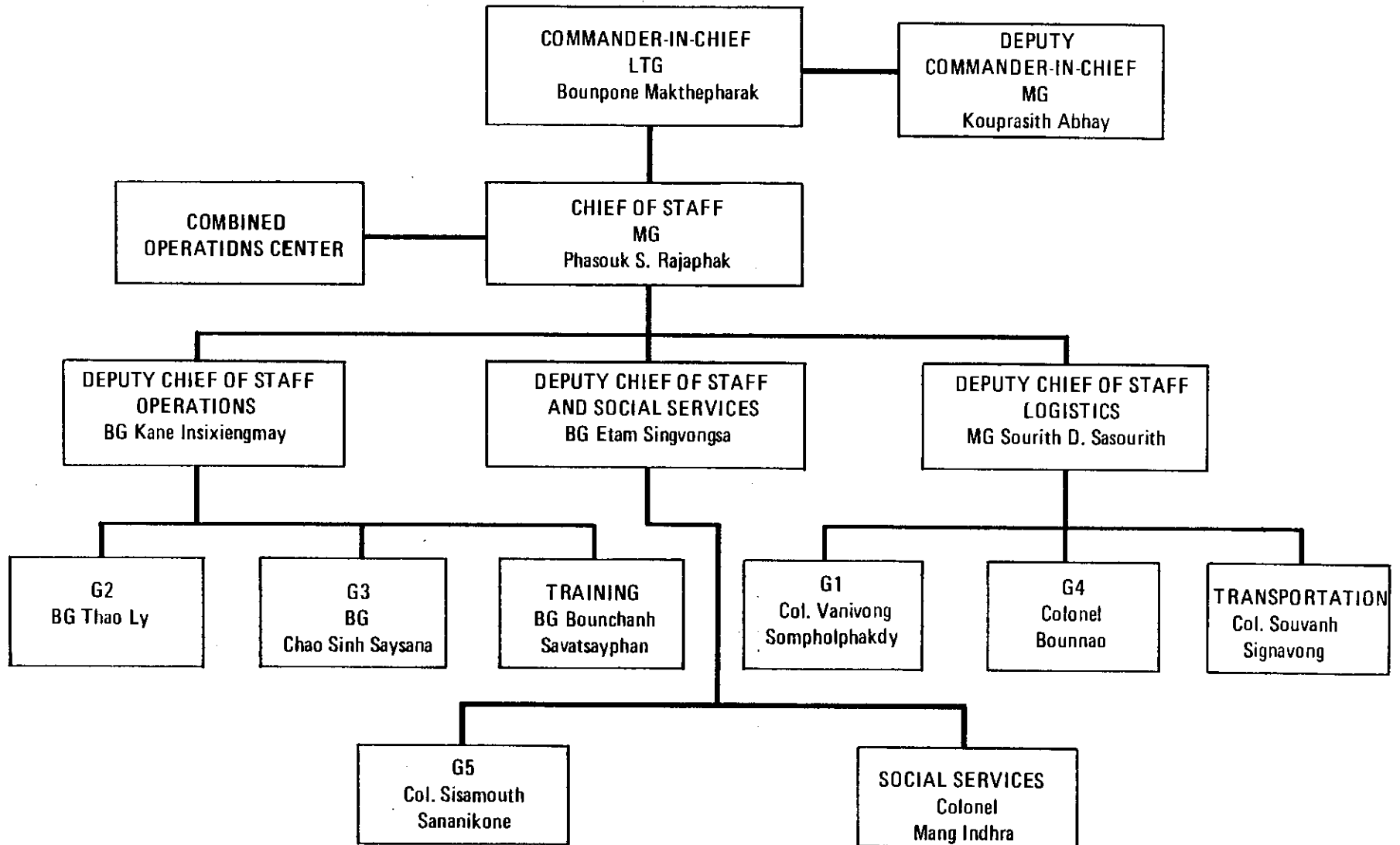


Chart 4 – National Lao Army Staff Organization
As of May 1975



**Chart 5 – Territorial Organization
As of May 1975**

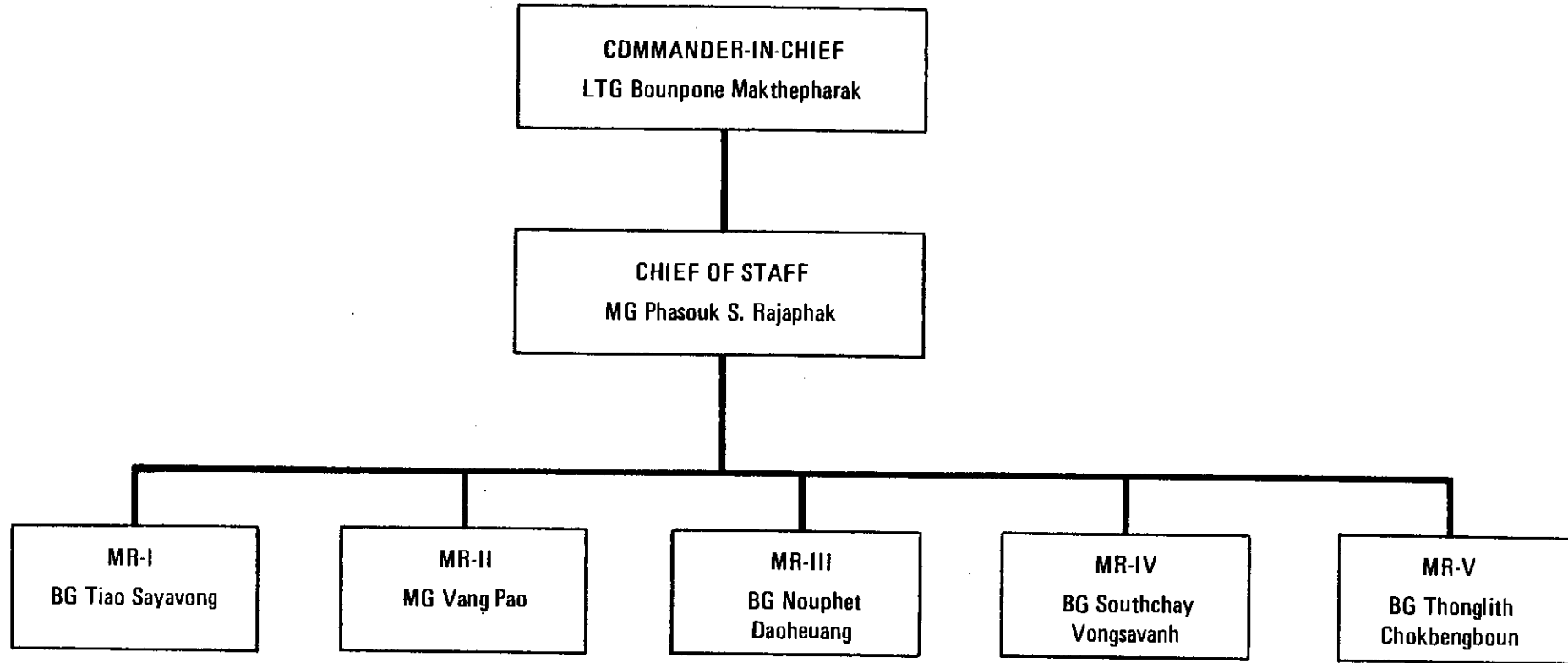


Chart 6 – Organization of the Combat and Combat Support Branches
As of May 1975

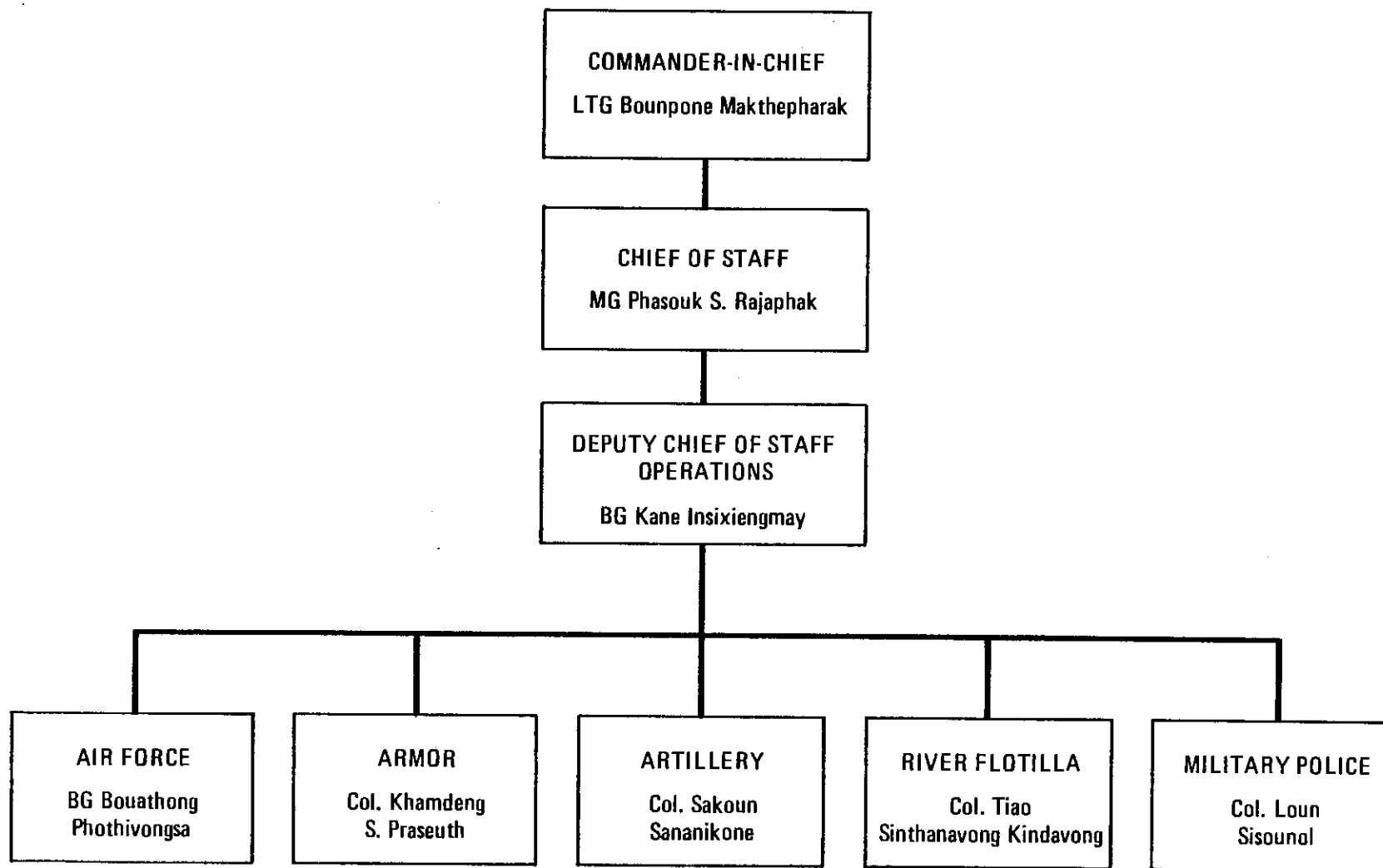


Chart 7 – Organization of the Technical Services
As of May 1975

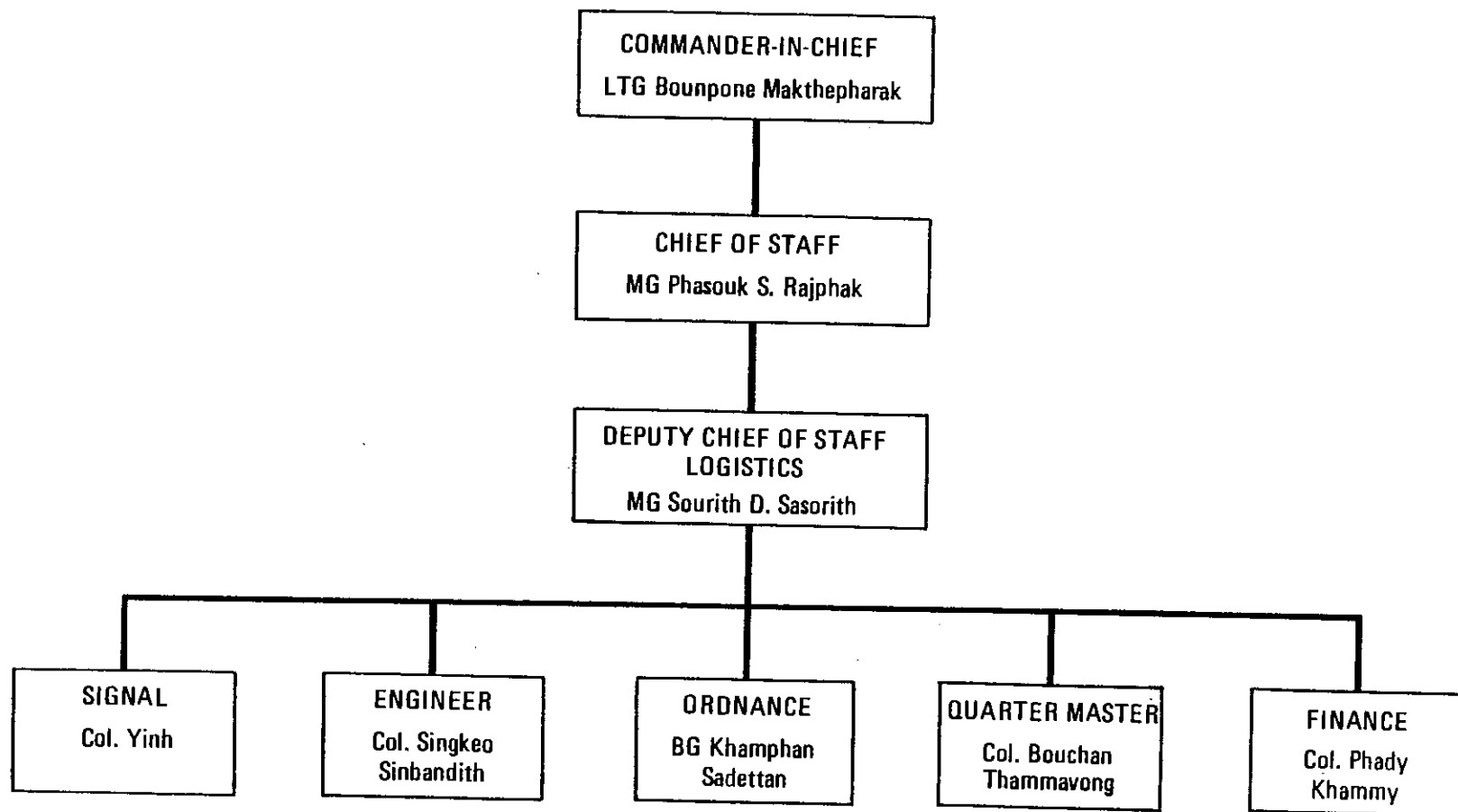
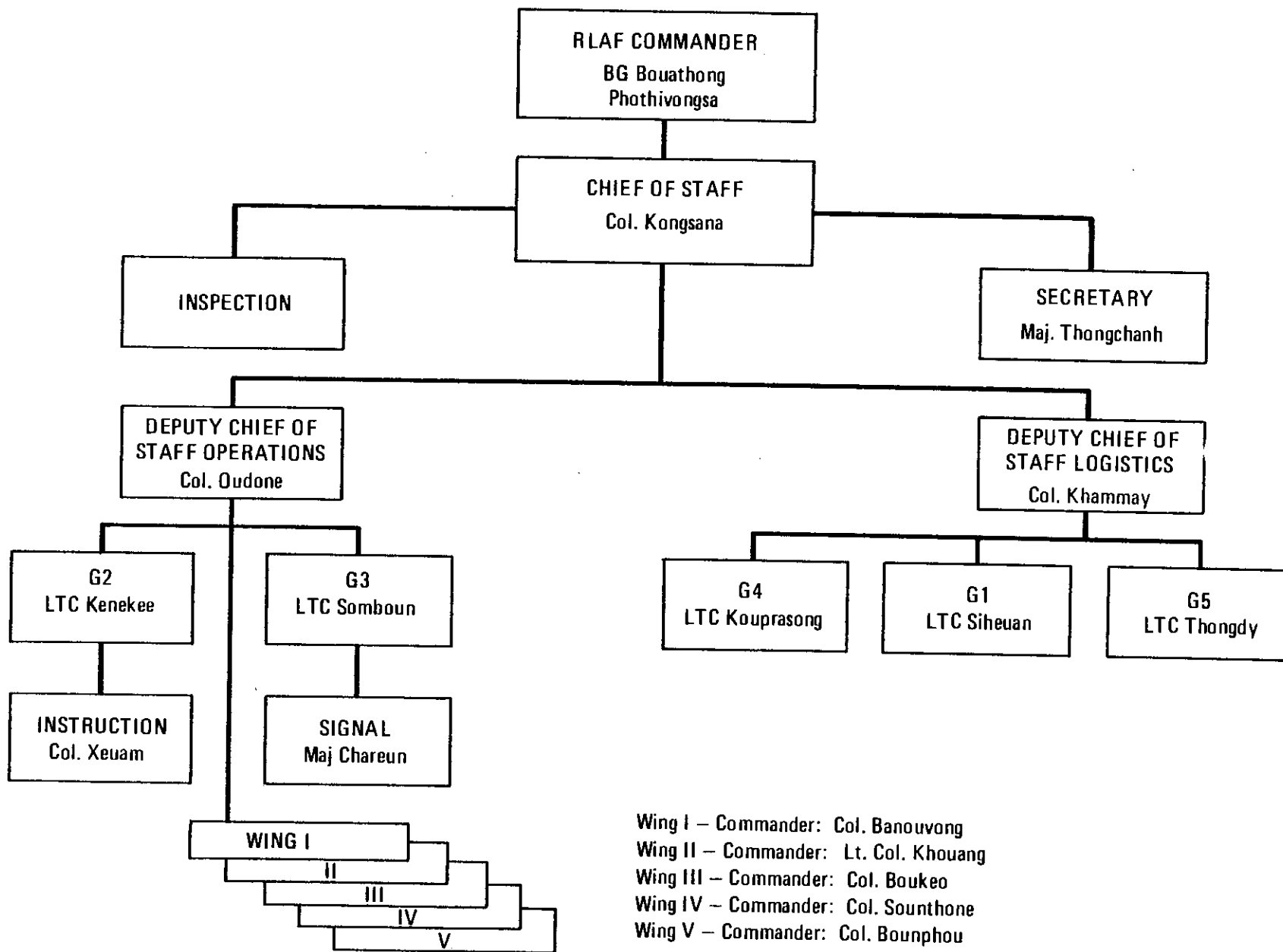


Chart 8 – Royal Lao Air Force Organization
As of May 1975



Wing I – Commander: Col. Banouvang
 Wing II – Commander: Lt. Col. Khouang
 Wing III – Commander: Col. Boukeo
 Wing IV – Commander: Col. Sounthone
 Wing V – Commander: Col. Bounphou

cities. There was no opposition; no force was used by either side. All we could do was observe and report.

On 8 May, with the city crowded with Pathet Lao in uniform and in civilian clothes, a great demonstration was held against the police and leadership of the NLA. When Souvanna found out about it, he said he would order the demonstration stopped. But there were no powers competent to enforce Souvanna's order and the group in charge of the demonstration had already said that they would reject any such order. More than half of the demonstrators were armed Pathet Lao and any police or Army attempt to disperse the crowds would have led to a battle and, in light of the large force the Pathet Lao had concentrated in Vientiane, to a Pathet Lao armed seizure of power.

There was no course for Sisouk Na Champassak and me but to resign from the government. This we did and on 11 May I left my country for the last time.

Two weeks after our departure, the Pathet Lao convened a seminar at Fifth Region headquarters near Vientiane. All senior NLA commanders and staff officers who had not already left the country were ordered to attend. The ostensible purpose was to proceed with integrating the armed forces. After a few days of meeting, however, all ranking officers were taken to the Vientiane airport and flown to prison camps in the Pathet Lao zone. Every director and deputy minister remaining in the Defense Ministry disappeared into the Communist zone. This even included the Commander-in-Chief, General Bounpone Makthepharak. Also included were every general staff chief, the commanders of Military Regions I and III, and every technical service chief. So much for the leadership of the NLA and so much for the promises of the Pathet Lao.

Souvanna Phouma himself remained in office for about a year before he was asked to resign.

CHAPTER IX

Observations and Conclusions

The colonies and protectorates of Indochina experienced similar difficulties and held similar aspirations for independence during the period of French domination and while the Japanese occupied the region during World War II. But the diversities among the peoples and emerging nation-states of Indochina were many and significant.

Among its neighbors, Laos was the least developed nation of all and the least able to chart its own course in the modern, postwar world. Some of Laos' disadvantages were obvious. It had a very small population in relation to its size and it had no access to the sea. The French had done little during their half-century of control to develop an infrastructure in Laos upon which a modern economic and social structure could be based. The educational system was primitive during the French period; for years there was no high school in all of Laos. The small percentage of young people who were able to pursue a higher education were sent to Hanoi (the capital of French Indochina) or Phnom Penh, or Saigon.

Public administration in Laos was in the hands of the French or managed by Vietnamese whom the French imported for that purpose. With this legacy, unlike Vietnam, Laos was ill-equipped to handle its own political and economic affairs when independence was finally won. Nevertheless, with the residue of French administrators and new help from other developed countries, notably the United States, Laos was able, despite the years of war, to build the foundations of a modern state with all its institutions for the conduct of international relations, economic and fiscal management, representative government, internal security and national defense.

But for all the form and structure of a sovereign state, Laos could not escape the forces that denied her true independence of action. The strongest, most persistent, and eventually dominant of these forces that

shaped the destiny of Laos in the last half of this century was the North Vietnamese Communist movement for independence from France and conquest of South Vietnam.

As soon as Laos had gained her own independence from France, she was drawn into the war the French were waging to defeat the Viet Minh. It was during this period that the North Vietnamese began to exert their control over that faction of the Lao Issara movement, led by Prince Souphanouvong, that refused to join in the French-sponsored government of newly independent Laos.

The Vietnamese Communists have a long view of history, and their conception of their proper role in the destiny of mainland Southeast Asia extends well beyond the frontiers of Vietnam. To true believers in Communism in general, and especially to Vietnamese Communists, international borders are there to be crossed in the process of expanding the dominions of the international Communist movement. With this driving philosophy joined to a nearly fanatical compulsion to drive the last vestiges of French colonialism from Indochina, it was natural that the Viet Minh leadership would cultivate and shape Souphanouvong's faction to its own purposes. They found this not difficult to do.

Souphanouvong went to North Vietnam when the French returned to Laos following the defeat of Japan. There, with his Vietnamese wife who was a Viet Minh cadre, he was given refuge and a small staff by the Viet Minh. Souphanouvong has been called "the Red Prince," but he was truly a most unlikely Communist. He still preferred to be addressed as "your highness" and it is quite clear that he never really became an ideological Communist. This didn't matter to the Viet Minh so long as they could use him and through him influence events in Laos.

I had become casually acquainted with Prince Souphanouvong and his wife in Bangkok during the formative years of the Lao Issara, but I didn't see him again until after the Vientiane Agreement of 1973 had been signed. On this last occasion, he had invited me and a few other senior officers to his home for lunch and conversation. Even at this time, social contacts between the Pathet Lao and the right wing at this level were rare, but what made this luncheon different than most was the microphone

on the table and the machine behind the teakwood screen on which the friendly conversation was being recorded.

I still don't know what plans the prince had for the tape of that meeting but I suspect that he might have used it to show his Communist friends that he had expanded his influence over the Vientiane political scene to include the leadership of the National Lao Army. During the meeting it seemed that he wanted to impress upon us that despite the long and bitter war we had fought against each other, he was still the good, patriotic Lao prince. Contentious issues were generally avoided by all of us and Souphanouvong talked about his university days, about his experiences as a soccer player and recalled his conversations with prominent Communist leaders around the world. He kept emphasizing that the international struggle against imperialism would continue until every little dominated nation had been finally liberated.

As gently and indirectly as possible I tried to get him to put on the record his views of the future. Gradually I got around to the real point of my questioning: would the North Vietnamese really leave Laos now that peace had come and what would happen if they refused? I said that I did not believe that he had fought the French only to be subordinated to the Vietnamese. Prince Souphanouvong appeared embarrassed by this line of questioning and was unable or unwilling to give a direct response. He spoke in general terms of the world-wide struggle against colonialism, the brotherhood of all Asians, and so forth.

Another subject that embarrassed him when I brought it up was the unnatural alliance between a member of the royal family (the prince would allow no one to forget his royal heritage) and the Marxists-Leninists of North Vietnam. I suggested that the partnership was probably temporary; that it would last only for as long as the prince was of use to the Communists in gaining full control of the country.

The fact was that the Communists began preparations to take over control of Souphanouvong's Neo Lao Hak Sat and the Pathet Lao very early in the struggle. The instrument of this project was a Lao-Vietnamese from Savannakhet named Kaysone Phomvihane. This Communist functionary joined the independence movement in the mid-1940s, was educated in Hanoi

and became closely associated with the Viet Minh since that time. During all the years of fighting Kaysone Phomvihane maintained a low profile but organized within the Neo Lao Hak Sat a strong Communist faction that split the movement into two camps, the Nationalists and the Communists.

The importance of this strategy did not become apparent to the outside world until two or more years after the 1973 agreement. Then it became clear that the long term, consistent strategies of the Indochinese Communist leadership in Hanoi were coming to fruition. For awhile after 1973, it still appeared that Souphanouvong was the dominant figure in the Pathet Lao-Neo Lao Hak Sat hierarchy. He was the president of the Joint National Political Council and later, when the right wing crumbled in 1975, he became the first president of the Socialist Republic of Laos. But who became premier? Kaysone Phomvihane!

Soon after, all non-Communist officials inside the Pathet Lao controlled government began to be replaced. Those who were deficient in their acceptance of the socialist ideology were taken to so-called re-education camps deep in the jungles.

Prince Souphanouvong, although he is still chief-of-state, no longer represents the nation at important state events. Premier Kaysone Phomvihane has taken over that function. The consistent, singleminded coordinated, long-term strategy of the North Vietnamese paid-off.

The United States Army, the United States Air Force, and the thousands of dedicated American civilians who served in Laos from 1956 to 1974 can be proud of their many achievements on behalf of the National Lao Army, the Air Force, the irregulars, and the prosecution of the war against the North Vietnamese.

Unhappily, because United States policy lacked a coherent, long-term strategy, these many heroic accomplishments had no lasting, decisive effect. The Programs Evaluation Office helped start the National Lao Army on the road to modernization and began converting it into an Americanized force in doctrine, training and equipment.

The Military Assistance Advisory Group followed with the White Star program that originated one of the most successful irregular armies ever to fight in Indochina. This beginning was brought to full flower by the

Special Guerrilla Unit project, managed by the CIA, that held off the best divisions the NVA could throw into battle.

Meanwhile, the United States used its foothold in Laos to pursue its air war against North Vietnam and the Ho Chi Minh trail. It even supported a South Vietnamese invasion of the Laos panhandle to interdict the Ho Chi Minh trail and paid for Thai volunteers to assist the NLA and Lao irregulars against the NVA.

All of these American strategies were crowned with a measure of success, some more than others, but none was carried to the point of decision.

Throughout the long struggle, the leadership of Laos, whether it happened to be right wing, left or center, could exert very little real influence on the ultimate course of events.

Lacking the resources, population and infrastructure to survive without external help, each Lao government was the captive of the policies, programs and strategies of its benefactor. First it was France. Then it was the United States. Now it is Vietnam.

Glossary

ADC	Auto Defense de Choc
BCL	Bataillon des Chasseurs Laotiens Lao Infantry Battalion of the FUA
BI or BIL	Lao Infantry Battalion of the NLA
BLL	Lao Light Infantry Battalion
BP	Lao Parachute Infantry Battalion
BS	Battalion Special — Chinese Kuomintang
BV	Volunteer (provincial) Battalion
CCL	Compagnies des Chasseurs Laotiens Lao Infantry Companies
CDNI	The Committee for the Defense of the National Interests
CV	Volunteer Company
FTL	Forces Terrestres de Laos French forces in Laos
FUA	French Union Army
GM	Groupe Mobile
GT	Groupe Tactic
ICC	International Control Commission
JUSMAGTHAI	Joint United States Military Assistance Group, Thailand
Lao Issara	The Laos independence movement — Free Laos
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group

Mission d'Organization de la Gendarmerie Royale MMF/GRL	The French mission to train the Lao military police The French training mission in Laos - Mission Militaire Francais près le Gouvernement Royal Laos
MR	Military Region
NCO	Noncommissioned officer
NLA	National Lao Army
NLHS (or NLHX)	Neo Lao Hak Sat (or Xat) -- The Communist- influenced political party of Souphanouvong
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
OCS	Officer candidate school
OSS	Office of Strategic Services (U.S.)
PEO	Programs Evaluation Office -- The American military assistance office in Laos <i>circa</i> 1955-61
PL	Pathet Lao - the fighting arm of the Communist-influenced Lao nationalist movement
R.O.	Requirements Office -- The U.S. military assistance office in Vientiane after 1962
ROCS	Reserve Officers Candidate School
SGU	Special Guerrilla Unit
Viet Minh	The Vietnam liberation army in the First Indochina war
White Star	U.S. Army Special Forces training mission in Laos, 1961-1962