

Nov. 15, 1980

Mike Wallace
TV- 60 Minutes
New York, NY.

Dear Mike,

I enclose a Reader's Digest reprint which I wish you would make a point of reading carefully. You recall our story on the Hmong refugees in Thailand which you did in 1979. Well, this is a follow-up on the most horrific single aspect of that story, namely the use of chemical warfare against the Hmong. I am informed that there are now only about 70,000 left in Laos who remain alive, out of a population that numbered up to 500,000 in 1960. The remnants live largely in caves to escape the chemicals dropped from the air, eat largely roots because the crops and exposed jungle plants are contaminated, and drink from holes they scrape in the ground since the normal water sources are poisoned. Obviously they are dying off fast, and many are now too weak even to try to escape.

I have some hope that the new Administration may consider some steps to help these people that have not been taken heretofore, but in the private sector much can also be done. International public opinion could be a powerful factor. Which brings me to the point of this letter.

If TV cameras had covered the holocaust in Auschwitz, it would not have happened. If TV cameras could cover the extermination of the Hmong, it might stop also. But how? I believe that CBS could find, presumably in France and other foreign countries, a team of camera-men willing to be infiltrated into Laos to film the life of the Hmong victims of genocide. I mention France because it seems to produce the kinds of people who do special stories for Paris Match, or the Jacques Cousteau types - individualists, adventurers and idealists. I don't know whether such a dramatic story would fall within the purview of "60 Minutes" or of a CBS Special, but it would be sensational, do a lot of good, and demonstrate how far TV coverage can go if animated by courage and talent.

I do not think this idea is totally impracticable. There are plenty of people who would go into Laos. Light mobile handcarried equipment is available. Hmong guides regularly go back and forth between the camps you visited and the areas where the gassing takes place. Clothing and masks to protect the crews could be carried, and freeze-dried food. The result could be a story more dramatic, even if horrifying, than anything probably ever to be shown on TV. Its impact on world opinion could be enormous. It might do more to save the remnants of a victimized people than anything else that could be done.

Please think about this.

Thanks
Orliss
Orliss Williams