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VITAL ALLIED STRONGHOLD CAPTURED IN LAOS

[Article by Le Van; "Muong Ngan Is Liberated"; Hanoi, Quan Doi Nhan Dan, Vietnamese, 3 December 1968, p 4]

Muong Ngan is an important position along the road from Xiangkhoang to Paksane and to Vientiane. Between Muong Ngan and Thathom is the high and erect Phuthenchau mountain chain, called the "gate of heaven" and covered with clouds year round. The Namsan Stream begins in Phuthenchau and flows during all four seasons into the Mekong River. More than 3,000 people of Muong Ngan live in a narrow valley where the villages lie very close together. There are few slash-and-burn fields, and, therefore, when they used to live under the yoke of oppression of the U.S. lackeys, no matter how hard they worked under the sun and rain, the people of Muong Ngan could never obtain enough rice to eat.

Right after their liberation in 1964, the people of Muong Ngan, under the leadership of the Patriotic Front and through industrious labor, created long canals meandering like colossal pythons from one mountain to another bringing water for constantly green two-crop rice fields. An automobile route was opened from Xiangkhoang to Muong Ngan and the influx of goods was unabated from pounds of salt and meters of cloth to pots and knives. Children are busy carrying their books to school. Young men and women enthusiastically joined the guerrillas and motivated one another to join the liberation forces. The people of Muong Ngan are ardently attached to their fields and villages because they have for countless ages shed sweat and even blood to work and fight to hold onto their native villages.

The American invaders and the lackeys were furious at the victories of the Muong Ngan people. They tried in every way to recapture this important territory. In August 1967, when the rice in Muong Ngan has ripened completely and all of Muong Ngan was like a gold rug, the Americans sent helicopters to hurriedly land lackeys there. The number of enemy troops brought in was fairly large: battalion 23, battalion 601, special battalion 204, and one element of battalion 603 equipped with 105's, number 75 mountain artillery, and 106.7 mortars. Night and day enemy guns fired continuously, randomly murdering the people of Muong Ngan. The bandit general Vang Pao haughtily went there to drink with the commanders of the rightist army and with the local lackeys. Xieng Ba, who had served as a stooge for the imperialists since the time of the French colonialists, hurriedly and excitedly flattered the gang of American advisors: "The parents have returned to the children and the children will do everything in their power for the parents!"

The people of Muong Ngan were forced by the enemy to live a life of suffocation in three areas of concentration tightly controlled by them. Muong Ngan had a large rice crop but after they finished harvesting it and went back to their "U.S. aide" mat sheds and small straw huts in the areas of concentration, no one had any more than a handful of "United States" cornflower for a whole day's food. Immeasurable quantities of paddy and rice were scooped up by the invaders and taken to Longcheng and Padong to feed the country-robbing and country-selling elements. All that the people of Muong Ngan could see was destruction, ruins, and misery. People were killed by the invaders for no reason, fields and roads and plows were destroyed by the invaders, and houses were dismantled and used as military fortifications and as fencing around posts. In just a short period of time, nearly 1,000 water buffalo were seized by the invaders and butchered. The Americans and lackeys cut up Muong Ngan and sowed unknown misery and suffering for the Muong Ngan people. With their tradition of unyielding and steadfast struggle and with the resentment which had been growing in their hearts, the people of Muong Ngan rose up to attack the enemy. Not long after the enemy had arrived in Muong Ngan one of its command posts at Phuvieng had been wiped out by the Liberation Army and the local population. In several battles at Phuvieng, Phuphalang, and Phuquat, the commander of special battalion 204 and dozens of other officers and hundred of American lackey enlisted men were forced to pay for their crimes. At Phudenchi and Phutum there are piles of downed T28's and U.S. jets.

During the days of temporary occupation, even though they were under the tight grip of the enemy, the people of Muong Ngan looked to the Patriotic Front and gave active assistance to the struggle to liberate their native village. The people regularly reported to the cadre, troops, and guerrillas on the enemy situation. Although the Muong Ngan people had to eat corn they had rice to reserve for the troops. When the troops came the people were ready with places to hide them. The liberation troops have the thousand ears and thousand eyes of the people; the enemy troops are virtually deaf and blind. For this very reason, right before the liberation troops opened fire to attack the stronghold of Muong Ngan, the enemy commander in this area sent a message to his superiors reporting that "the situation at Muong Ngan is peaceful!"

Early in the morning of 3 February 1968, i.e., just 24 hours after that final message from the enemy commander was sent, the Laotian People's Liberation Army and the guerrillas thrust in to attack the enemy right in its nests. After the dazzlingly bright signalling shot was fired, grenades and automatic rifles intermixed with the resounding vanguard shouts of the Laotian People's Liberation Army. The command post of the enemy stronghold was wiped out with the first salvo; the command post of battalion 23 at Homtieu did not survive either and the victory flares of the Liberation Army also landed at Phuche. Thus, in the space of just six hours, 12 enemy strongholds in the vicinity of Muong Ngan were razed and more than 100 of the invaders were killed, captured, or surrendered. The Liberation Army even used artillery seized from the enemy to pour shells at the fleeing remnant troops. The people and the troops rapidly stretched out a search net, encircled, blocked and apprehended the enemy troops seeking to escape. Along with the victory at Muong Ngan, Thathom and later Muongmoc District Capital were liberated from the invaders.

The clear Namsan Stream is no longer darkened by the invaders. Rows of coconuts at Thathom swing noisily greeting the military achievement of the indomitable Muong Ngan. The day of liberation for the native village was even happier than the traditional "bun hot nam" (water-splashing festival) day.

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