



FACTS

REFUGEES IN NORTHERN LAOS

LUANG PRABANG

USAID Mission to Laos

PHOTOGRAPHS

At present, there are over 38,000 refugees in Luang Prabang Province. For the most part, they live in villages in the environs of Luang Prabang, the Royal Capital of Laos. Most of the refugees are Lao Theung interspersed with groups of Lao and Meo. Like the Meo, the Lao Theung are a hill people who practice a slash-and-burn agriculture. They are a Mountain Mon-Khmer group who are called by the Lao "people who live high up." When Sala Phou Khoun, 35 miles south of Luang Prabang, fell to North Vietnamese forces in late January of this year, about 10,000 Lao Theung and Meo moved north along Route 13 toward Luang Prabang. With the fall of Kiou Kha Cham on Route 13 north of Sala Phou Khoun, about 5,000 Lao Theung sought refuge in the Nam Khan valley and hills south of Xieng Ngeun. Among these refugees are the people who are resettling along a new road through the Nam Khan valley.

At nine miles south of Luang Prabang, the new road stretches from Route 13 at Xieng Ngeun southwest 36 miles to Muong Nane where it connects with a road leading to the Mekong River. At present, the road is scarcely more than a trail which has been cut with bulldozers through forest and thick underbrush and levelled with a grader. It extends 25 miles through the Nam Khan valley. For a distance of three miles on either side of the length of the road, the land has been declared in the public domain to make up an area of 86,450 acres which the Royal Lao Government has reserved for the permanent resettlement of refugees.

The decision to open the Nam Khan valley to refugee resettlement is the direct result of the pressure of people on the land near





ABOVE LEFT: Early morning loading of 100 kg rice bags at a USAID warehouse. ABOVE: Refugees patiently waiting to register for their rice quota. LEFT: Registering at a rice distributic center with a "thumb-print" signature.



RIGHT: A refugee mother registers for her quota of baby - food formula. BELOW LEFT: A refugee (and onlooker) help open rice bags at distribution point. CENTER: An appraising eye is run over the pile of rice waiting to be distributed. BELOW RIGHT: After receiving her rice a Lao Theung girl pauses to rest a bit.



the Royal Capital. The valley is enclosed by low, rolling hills that toward the west become steep mountain slopes. It is a terrain familiar to the hill people of northern Laos, and the soil is suitable for growing upland rice and field crops. The valley was inaccessible until the new road was built between January and May of this year. The road opens the area to commerce in providing a land route between the important rice-growing Sayaboury valley where the Nam Tan Project is located and the Luang Prabang market. On either side of the road for 8 miles are new villages that the refugees have built. The villages number 11 at present, inhabited by some 4,000 people. Sites for 18 villages have been surveyed. In all, approximately 10,000 refugees will resettle in the Nam Khan valley.

The refugee situation in Luang Prabang is not so much one of increasing numbers of refugees, but rather one of the flight of people from their villages in the attacks and counterattacks of each dry-season offensive. In May 1971 and again in 1972, North Vietnamese forces pushed to the outskirts of the Royal Capital, destroying the villages along the Mekong River, 15 miles north of Pak Ou. In the sense that they return and rebuild their villages when the fighting ends, the approximately 10,000 people who live along the Mekong are not refugees. In the sense that their rice fields are destroyed and that they must receive food until they can harvest a rice crop, they are refugees.

Refugee makes fish traps which he sells for Kip 400 (about 65¢).



Undistributed clothing and household utensils being checked in at the RLG Ministry of Social Welfare warehouse.

In refugee situations such as that in Luang Prabang Province, a routine is set up which changes but slightly except when it accelerates and expands in times of military conflict and refugee movements. Throughout the year, USAID and the Ministry of Social Welfare distribute rice and PL-480 cornmeal, vegetable oil, and cotton cloth among the refugees who live in the complex of villages around Luang Prabang. From two warehouses, one operated by the Ministry of Social Welfare and the other by USAID, these supplies are trucked to rice distribution points set up for the villages along the Mekong River north of Luang Prabang and for those to the south where most of the refugees are located. Each day, four trucks, each loaded with 40 to 50 100-kg bags of rice and a PL-480 quota, move to rice distribution points which are set up to serve a maximum of 1,000 people. Each refugee receives 15 kg of rice a month under a registration system in which each member of the family receives a quota card for rice, canned meat, cornmeal and vegetable oil.

Expenditures for refugee support operations in Luang Prabang Province fall into the following categories: Commodities, air and surface transport of these commodities, medical care, educational facilities, and resettlements costs.



ABOVE: Cluster of refugee houses along new road in Nam Khan valley.



REFUGEE VILLAGE SCENES: Woman pounding rice. Below: Refugee woman sells skewered frogs at roadside stand.



REFUGEE SUPPORT OPERATIONS

LUANG PRABANG PROVINCE

January 1971 - April 1972

\$ Thousand

Commodities	
Rice	\$ 654.4
PL-480	10.0
Other <u>a/</u>	208.4
Air transport	494.7
Surface transport <u>b/</u>	252.2
Medical supplies and equipment	36.0
Permanent classrooms <u>c/</u>	63.0
Nam Khan Valley Resettlement Project	
Road construction <u>d/</u>	28.0
Land clearing for village sites <u>e/</u>	7.0
30 temporary classrooms <u>e/</u>	2.5
10 dug wells <u>e/</u>	1.2
Total	\$ 1,757.4

a/ Includes salt, canned meat, mosquito nets, sleeping mats, blankets, household utensils, plastic sheeting. Cost of rice and other commodities computed for Fiscal Year 1972.

b/ Kip 60,517,539 at Kip 240 = \$1, the official exchange rate until April 1972. Commodities are shipped from Vientiane to Luang Prabang by truck and by barge.

c/ Includes Kip 7,477,787 (\$ 31,157) in personnel, commodity, and miscellaneous costs.

d/ Includes construction of STOL airstrip at Xieng Ngeun.

e/ These costs are estimated. Work is in process or planned.

[July, 1972]