

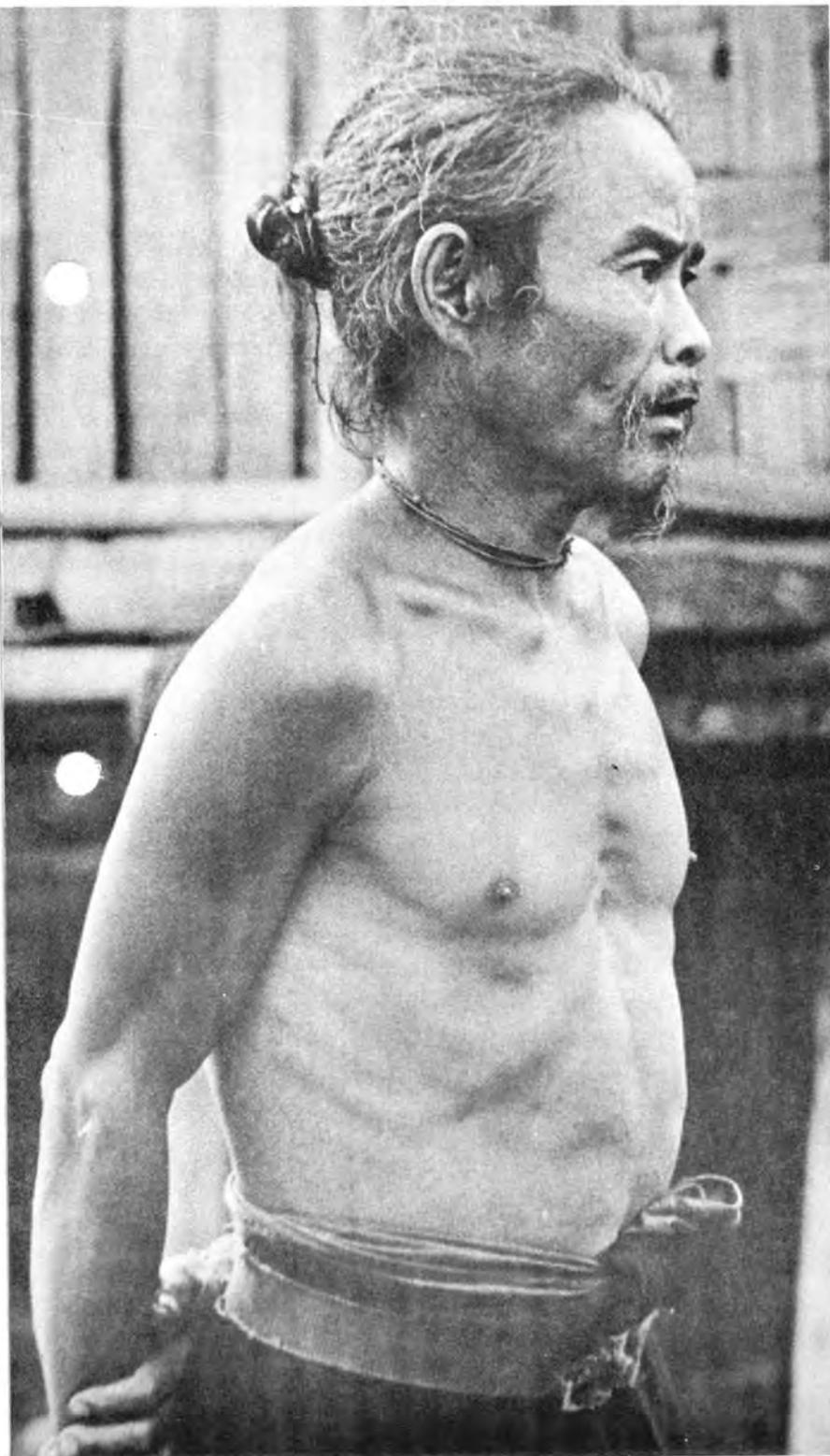


FACTS

REFUGEES IN NORTHERN LAOS BAN HOU EI SAI

USAID Mission to Laos

PHOTOGRAPHS



Ban Houei Sai is a town of some 3,000 people built along one main street on the east bank of the Mekong River in northwestern Laos. It is the logistics center for refugee relief operations in an area that extends 100 mi north to the mountains that mark the border with China, 60 mi east to Luang Prabang Province, and 200 mi south over the mountain range that separates Laos and Thailand. This is one of the most isolated regions in Laos. Mountains, covered with evergreen forests, rise to heights of 3,000 to 6,000 ft. The people practice a slash-and-burn agriculture. Traditionally, each family grew enough food to meet its own needs, trading any surpluses for tools, salt, and cloth. With the interdiction of the Mekong River between Ban Houei Sai and Luang Prabang, their trade route with the rest of Laos has been closed. The re-





ABOVE: "Kicking rice from a C-47 plane.

Transporting rice by river barge.

gion is inaccessible except by road through Thailand and across the Mekong River to Ban Houei Sai and by air.

Refugee movements in large groups are rare in this region; rather, the situation is one of the sporadic movement of small tribal groups, such as the Akha from the mountains that border China and the Lahu from Burma. At present, there are approximately 20,000 refugees, members of 20 ethnic groups of the hill tribes of Laos. About 16,000 of these refugees live in small, isolated villages built on the slopes and tops of mountains. They depend on the airdrop for food.

The planes for the airdrop take off from Ban Houei Sai or from Muong Meung, a village in a valley about 35 mi north of Ban Houei Sai. They fly 8 hours a day, returning to the airstrip at intervals of 45 minutes to an hour to reload.

Three types of aircraft carry the rice. The C-46 carries 117 40-kg bags, the C-7a (Caribou), 48, and the small STOL aircraft, the Porter, 10. On the C-46 and Caribou, the rice is loaded on wooden pallets which are placed on rollers on the floor of the aircraft. In the Porter, the rice is loaded on top of a trap door. Over the drop zone, the "kickers" who are assigned to each rice-drop plane, give the rice its final shove to the ground below.

On each rice drop, the aircraft circles the village to signal that a drop is scheduled. The C-46 and the Caribou circle at 1,000 ft to 800 ft; the Porter as low as 500 to 200 ft. Below, the small figure of a man moves across the drop zone, spreading on the ground the signal for his village - a 6 ft square letter of the alphabet cut from red or white cloth. When the rice drop is over, the signal is returned to the house of the village chief to await the next drop. In the region for which Ban Houei Sai is the logistics center, there are 61 refugee sites of which 52 are drop zones.

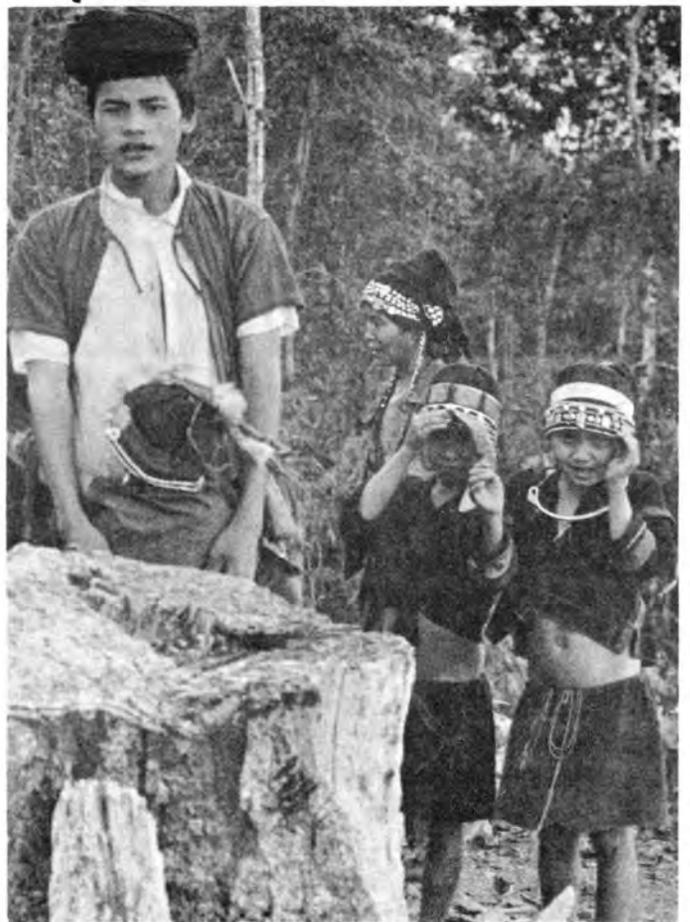
About 3,500 refugees live in villages along the Mekong River north and south of Ban Houei Sai. Here and in the isolated mountain villages medical and educational facilities are shared by refugee and nonrefugee. From July 1, 1971 (the beginning of this fiscal year) through March 1972, the 39 dispensaries in the region reported over 300,000 patient visits. The 54 temporary and 32 permanent schools enroll 3,862 students.

FACES OF REFUGEES.....

Akha and Lahu

The Akha and Lahu are a Tibeto-Burman people who live at elevations of 3,500 to 4,000 feet in the mountains of northern Laos, China, Thailand and Burma. They supplement their slash-and-burn cultivation of upland rice and corn with hunting. The Lahu particularly esteem the hunt and value highly the man who achieves the status of supreme hunter. Both share with neighbors a belief in spirits which have great power and are many and diverse. Among the Akha, the spirits of the ancestors join the other spirits and, like them, control the affairs and behavior of men.

The Akha women wear elaborate head-dresses of silver and silver medallions. The Lahu women wear cylindrical earrings of silver, heavy necklaces and beads.





ABOVE: A sewing class at Ban Houei Sai in which women learn to make clothing from PL-480 cloth. Training in the operation of the sewing machines was provided by the RLG Home Economists.

BELOW: Distribution of blankets, mosquito nets, mats, and cooking utensils at a refugee center.



Expenditures for refugee relief operations fall primarily into the categories of commodity costs, surface transport of commodities and air support costs.

REFUGEE RELIEF OPERATIONS

BAN HOUEI SAI

July 1971 - April 1972

\$ Thousand

Commodities		
Rice		\$ 249.1
PL-480	<u>a/</u>	45.0
Other	<u>b/</u>	68.0
Surface transport	<u>c/</u>	8.6
Medical supplies and equipment	<u>d/</u>	145.4
Air support		569.8
Total		\$ <u>1,085.9</u>

a/ Cornmeal, bulgur wheat, noodles, vegetable oil, nonfat dry milk, cotton cloth.

b/ Includes salt, canned meat, mosquito nets, sleeping mats, household utensils, plastic sheeting.

c/ Baht 180,000 at Baht 20.825 = \$1. Supplies are shipped directly by truck from Bangkok to Ban Houei Sai.

d/ Includes 22% transportation costs. The Regional Medical Warehouse at Ban Houei Sai supports USAID medical activities in Houa Khong, Luang Prabang and Sayaboury Provinces.

[August 1972]