



FACTS

USAID OPERATIONS AT LS-272

PHOTOGRAPHS

Sixty miles north of Vientiane on a plateau near the village of Ban Xon, a complex of wooden buildings along the airstrip designated LS-272 is the control center for refugee supply operations in Xieng Khouang Province. In this mountainous region of forests, there are at present 119,322 refugees or 49 percent of the refugee population of Laos. Most of these refugees are Meo who for more than a decade have been pushed into an ever-diminishing land area as the war in Laos has increased in scope and intensity. Over 110,000 now inhabit a stretch of land that extends 80 miles east from LS-272 in the Muong Cha valley to the village of Muong Nam southeast of the Plain of Jars. Over 8,800 refugees are located in three isolated enclaves north of the Plain of Jars. The mountains in the region rise 3,000 to 6,000 ft in a series of sharp crested ridges; in this range, Phou Pha, the highest mountain in Laos, rises to 9,242 ft immediately south of the Plain of Jars.

Their villages are built on the slope or summit of the mountains. If they remain long enough in one place or if the land is arable, they plant upland rice on the hill sides. These conditions seldom prevail. Over 80 percent of the refugees depend on outside help for food. If the terrain permits, they clear an airstrip near the village where a Porter (a small STOL aircraft) or a helicopter can land. If the terrain does not permit, they clear a space on the hillside where food for the village is air-dropped from Porter or C-46 aircraft. At any one time, over 65 percent of the total number of refugees in Xieng Khouang Province depend on the airdrop for food.

LS-272 was established in March 1970 after the fall of Sam Thong which, until that time, had functioned as the supply center for refugee operations in Xieng Khouang Province. The site was a public works construction camp located 44 km from Route 13 on the Houei Pamone road





Loading rice on an H-34 helicopter.



Porter takeoff for rice drop. A Porter carries 10 rice bags of 40 kg each which are dropped from the aircraft trapdoor.

which was to link Route 13 with Sam Thong. Refugee movements into the area began in January 1970 when 8,000 people were evacuated by air from Houa Phan Province near Sam Neua. The fall of Sam Thong and the drive against Long Tieng pushed the major portion of the population of southern Xieng Khouang Province into the area that they now occupy.

A stream in which children play separates LS-272 from Ban Xon, a village of 214 people. The roar of aircraft is constant. On the 3,040 ft gravel runway, aircraft land and take off at intervals measured in minutes. As many as 900 landings in one day are recorded.

The USAID complex consists of a rice warehouse, a medical supply warehouse, a 200-bed field hospital, an air operations office, and a trailer which is the USAID office. Here, schedules for air delivery of food to refugee groups scattered on remote hilltops are coordinated from messages which arrive by "jungle telegraph" or modern telecommunications. At 54 sites, delivery is by airdrop; at 42 sites, there are short, crude landing strips where cargo can be air-landed. During April 1972, the delivery of 1,872 MT of commodities was coordinated out of LS-272. These commodities consist of rice, salt,

Refugees waiting for space on an aircraft going to their village.



canned meat, PL-480 corn meal, cooking oil, corn soya milk (CSM), and wheat soya blend (WSB) noodles manufactured in Vientiane. Commodities have totalled as high as 4,325 MT a month during periods of conflict and refugee movement.

Ban Na Sou hospital treats both refugees and military casualties. Patient load varies from dry season to wet season and with the degree of conflict in the area. Since March 1970 when the field hospital was set up in temporary buildings used by the road construction crew, 31,300 people have been treated at Ban Na Sou.



Family ward of hospital.

Currently, LS-272 supports 71 field dispensaries in Xieng Khouang Province. Their number varies with security conditions. Since March 1970, these field dispensaries have recorded over 3,000,000 patient visits.



There are an estimated 50,000 children of school age among the refugees in Xieng Khouang Province. In the area that LS-272 supports, 308 temporary classrooms and 66 permanent classrooms have been constructed. At its highest point, enrollment totals 17,000 pupils, a number which drops as low as 6,000 during the dry season because of security conditions.

A Meo refugee brings his child to the outpatient clinic.

ABOVE: Emergency room.
BELOW: Hospital complex.





Expenditures for LS-272 are incurred under two broad categories: Cost of commodities and the air and surface transport of these commodities and cost of medical care and educational facilities for the refugees in Xieng Khouang Province.

REFUGEE SUPPORT OPERATIONS

March 1970 - April 1972

\$ Thousand

Commodities			
Rice		\$	4,860
Salt			149
Canned meat			2,932
Vegetable seeds			91
Tools			69
Clothing			13
Bedding			74
PL-480 foodstuffs, cloth			380
Air transport			
Commodities			8,965
Medical supplies			1,717
Surface transport			
Commodities	<u>a/</u>		344 <u>a/</u>
Hospital construction			64
Hospital			
Medical supplies			
and equipment	<u>b/</u>		556
Dispensaries			
Medical supplies			
and equipment			1,219
Classroom construction			30
		Total	<u>21,463</u>



ABOVE

A large warehouse adjacent to the airstrip provides storage space and packing area for medical supplies which are transported to almost 100 Meo and Lao medics stationed in small dispensaries throughout the area.

Market in Ban Koua Lak Nam Meuy (Village of the Iron Bridge over the Meuy River), a town built by the refugees a mile from LS-272.



a/ Rice, salt, beef, medical supplies, PL-480 foodstuffs and cloth, POL. 18,130 MT were transported by truck from Vientiane to LS-272 at a cost of Kip 82,675,600 converted at Kip 240 = \$1, the official exchange rate until April 1972 when the unified conversion rate of Kip 605 = \$1 was established.

b/ Includes equipment at original installation at Sam Thong.

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