



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY
COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO 80901

4 February 1988

Command Sergeant Major Larry S. Martin
[REDACTED]

Dear Command Sergeant Major Martin

This letter is a follow-up to our telephone conversation of 3 February 1988. As I mentioned during our talk, I am conducting pre-doctoral research on American-Lao relations during the Indochina conflict. Air America, in concert with the Defense Attache office in Vientiane (see atch 1), played a critical role in supporting the Lao government. More often than not, however, these efforts have been the subject of false and malicious reporting. My task, therefore, is to write an accurate and comprehensive study based on reliable sources of information.

Your tour in Laos with "Project 404" (particularly your presence at Long Tieng) provided a unique participatory view of the war. In short, you have just the sort of background and knowledge I need to accurately record this important chapter of American and Lao history. Specifically, I request your assistance in defining the mission, organization, successes and the failures of "Project 404."

As a collateral project I am also involved in an Air Force funded research assignment focused on search and rescue (SAR) activity during the Vietnam era. In particular I would like to document non-military search and rescue efforts in Laos. My previous research (see atch 2) and recent visit to the Air America archives at the University of Texas at Dallas confirm my belief that Air America played a significant role in Southeast Asian search and rescue. I believe this was true both before and after the arrival of dedicated USAF rescue units. Your recollections as to specific rescues involving Air America and/or the Hmong would be much appreciated. I have been told Colonel Thong, an ethnic Lao officer assigned to MR II, was also particularly active in search and rescue missions.

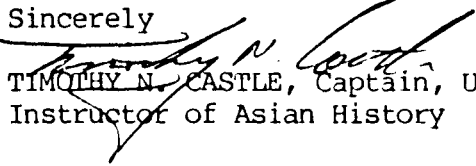
In an effort to insure my research is as complete and accurate as possible I would like to correspond/talk with as many former Air America employees and "Project 404" personnel as possible. I have talked to Captain Lashomb on the telephone and written to him requesting my name and research efforts be publicized to members of the Air America Club. Likewise, during my visit to the Air America archives in Dallas, I asked that my research project be promoted by the library staff.

I know that the war was a long time ago and may possibly be a subject of bittersweet memories. My own experiences, as an enlisted troop flying with the 21st Special Operations Squadron out of Nakhon Phanom and, twelve years later, as an intelligence officer interviewing Hmong and Lao refugees in Thailand, have left a mark. I want to tell the story. And, although I don't know you, I suspect you also believe the war in Laos needs to be professionally documented.

With regard to security issues, I believe I can comply with any caveats you might wish to attach to future discussions and/or correspondence. You need not be identified by name in any written products. I can also provide documentation of my security clearances up through the Top Secret/SCI level. I will, of course, insure any classified material is submitted for review and declassification prior to publication.

Thank you for talking with me. I have already called Mr French and he will be sending me some information. I hope you will be able to assist me with my research efforts. I may be contacted by telephone at Autovon (259) 3230/3622 or in writing at the above address.

Sincerely


TIMOTHY N. CASTLE, Captain, USAF
Instructor of Asian History

2 Atch
1. "Project 404" (Excerpt
from Air War College
report #5689)
2. "Sky Warriors" (Paper
delivered at University
of Minnesota)

12
AIR WAR COLLEGE
AIR UNIVERSITY

REPORT NO. 5689

PART I

TWENTY-THREE YEARS OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO LAOS

by

Frederick J. St. Jean, 045-26-2008
Colonel, USAF, 1934-

Terrence W. McClain, 046-24-1433
Lt Colonel, USA

Ronald C. Hartwig, 024-301-504
Major, USAF, 1940-
(ACSE Student)

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

MARCH 1975

Project 404

As the war intensified in these years, so did US military support to the RLG. In 1966 about 50 USAF officers and enlisted men were assigned to the Air Attache's office in Vientiane in response to an RLG request for increased US assistance. These men were considered necessary to provide proper control for the increased US air operations which had been requested. Later in 1966 Project 404 was approved by DOD to provide PCS augmentation and logistics support for the army and air attaches in Laos. Prior to this time such augmentation was accomplished by bringing in TDY personnel. A total of 117 military and five civilians were approved in the initial Project 404 package. These personnel were assigned administratively to DEPCHIEF with duty station in Laos, and under the operational control of the army and air attaches. The functions of the augmentation group were primarily operationally oriented. Included were communicators, intelligence, and operation specialists in about a 70/30 army/air force mix. They were stationed at RLAJ bases and Army Military Region Headquarters throughout Laos to advise, assist in the targeting effort, and to effect coordination of regional air support requirements via the Air Operations Centers (AOCs), Joint Operations Centers (JOCs) which were co-located in

the MRS, and the Combat Operations Center (COC) located in Vientiane. Some technical advisory assistance was provided to RLAF units in Laos on a TDY basis, using USAF SOF and 7/13th AF assistance which included maintenance support, communications, medical aid, and command and control. In addition to the advisory assistance provided to the RLGAF previously noted, in 1966 US "Raven" FACs³⁸ began operating O-1, U-17, and at Luang Prabang and Long Tieng, T-28 aircraft in the FAC role, each time carrying a Laotian observer for target validation.

Target Validation

The American Ambassador in Vientiane had the overall authority for validating targets to be attacked by US aircraft. Validation of only a few and very routine type targets had, at various times, been delegated to the Air Attache in Vientiane, who served as the Ambassador's Air Operations Officer. But in the majority of cases, the Ambassador closely retained and meticulously exercised his target validation authority. Lao observers and selected english speaking FAGs flew with the US FACs and selected targets. After the targets had been selected and validated by the Ambassador and his staff, the commander of 7th AF (the organization changed over the war years) determined the aircraft which would do the job.

SKY WARRIORS

I'VE BEEN ASKED TO SPEAK TO YOU ABOUT THE HMONG OF LAOS. YOU'VE JUST WATCHED A FILM WHICH SHOWS THE BEGINNING OF WHAT I WOULD CALL THE U.S. - HMONG ALLIANCE. FOR POLITICAL REASONS AT THE TIME, NO AMERICANS WERE FILMED WITH THE HMONG. AMERICANS WERE, HOWEVER, VERY MUCH A PART OF WHAT HAS BECOME KNOWN AS THE "SECRET ARMY" OF LAOS. THESE AMERICAN ADVISORS BECAME KNOWN COLLECTIVELY AS "SKY" BY THEIR HMONG SOLDIERS. I HAVE, THEREFORE, CHOSEN TO CALL MY TALK ON THE WARTIME ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE HMONG AND THE UNITED STATES IN LAOS - "SKY WARRIORS"- FOR THOSE WARRIORS OF THE MOUNTAINS WHO FOUGHT FOR "SKY" AND THE UNITED STATES.

BEFORE I GO ANY FURTHER, I MUST ACKNOWLEDGE THE ASSISTANCE OF SEVERAL PEOPLE IN MY STUDY OF THE HMONG. THE FILM YOU'VE SEEN TONIGHT WAS MADE AVAILABLE BY A GOOD FRIEND OF MINE, LT COL DEAN MONTAYNE. AS A YOUNG AIR FORCE OFFICER, DEAN WAS AN ADVISOR TO THE LAO MILITARY. ANOTHER AIR FORCE OFFICER, DON CHERRY, WAS AN ADVISOR TO GENERAL VANG PAO. MUCH OF THE SPECIALIZED MATERIAL I POSSESS ON THE HMONG CAME AS A RESULT OF THE EFFORTS OF THESE TWO FINE MEN. I MUST ALSO THANK THE HMONG AND LAO COMMUNITY OF SAN DIEGO AND SANTA ANNA, CALIFORNIA WHO HAVE SHARED WITH ME THEIR OFTEN PAINFUL MEMORIES. LASTLY, I WANT TO EXPRESS MY THANKS AND ADMIRATION TO GENERAL VANG PAO AND HIS DAUGHTER IN LAW, MAY JOUA. INTERVIEWS WITH GENERAL VANG PAO AND HIS FAMILY CONVINCED ME THE STORY OF THE HMONG NEEDED TO BE TOLD.

TONIGHT, I'LL TALK BRIEFLY ABOUT THE EARLY YEARS OF THE U.S. - HMONG ALLIANCE, WHAT ACTIVITIES THE HMONG WERE INVOLVED WITH DURING THE WAR, THE EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE FALL OF THE ROYAL LAO GOVERNMENT IN 1975, AND THEN I'LL TURN TO WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE HMONG SINCE 1975. AS A NOTE OF CLARIFICATION, WHEN I TALK

ABOUT THE HMONG WHO FOUGHT FOR THE UNITED STATES I AM SPEAKING OF THOSE HMONG CLANS WHO FOLLOWED VANG PAO AND TOUBY LY FOUNG. A PROMINENT HMONG OF THE LO CLAN AND RIVAL OF TOUBY, FAYDANG, LED HIS FOLLOWERS TO THE COMMUNIST SIDE IN THE MID 1940'S AND IN 1975, FAYDANG BECAME A MEMBER OF THE COMMUNIST LAO GOVERNMENT.

FOLLOWING MY PREPARED REMARKS, I HAVE SOME SLIDES OF LAOS AND THAILAND WHICH RANGE FROM THE MID-1960'S TO LATE 1984, WHEN I MADE MY LAST TRIP TO THE LAO AND HMONG REFUGEE CAMPS OF THAILAND. FOLLOWING THE SLIDES I WOULD BE HAPPY TO TRY AND ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT HAVE.

WHY AND HOW DID THE UNITED STATES AND THE HMONG JOIN IN A MILITARY ALLIANCE? FROM THE U.S. POINT OF VIEW LAOS WAS A KEY PART OF WHAT BECAME KNOWN AS THE "DOMINOE THEORY." IN THE WORDS OF ONE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL, "LAOS WAS A FINGER THRUST RIGHT INTO THE HEART OF SOUTHEAST ASIA." IN THE WAKE OF THE 1954 VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST VICTORY OVER THE FRENCH AT THE BATTLE OF DIEN BIEN PHU, THE U.S. WAS VERY WORRIED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF SOUTHEAST ASIA. IN JULY OF 1955, THE U.S. PLEDGED TO PROMOTE THE "EFFECTIVE DEFENSE OF THE KINGDOM OF LAOS." AND SO, BY 1959, U.S. FUNDING HAD CREATED A 25,000 MAN ARMY. AN ARMY RECRUITED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY FROM THE LAO LUM, THE LOWLAND LAO, IT WAS LARGELY AN INEFFECTIVE FORCE WHICH MOST BELIEVED WOULD NOT STAND AND FIGHT. AT THIS SAME TIME THE U.S. HAD ALSO SENT A LARGE NUMBER OF U.S. ARMY ADVISORS INTO LAOS. THE U.S. CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY WAS ALSO AT WORK SUPPORTING THE ANTI-COMMUNIST LAO GENERAL PHOUMI NOSAVAN. HOWEVER, A CONTINUING POLITICAL CRISIS BETWEEN RIGHT-WING, NEUTRALIST, AND COMMUNIST PATHET LAO FACTIONS EVENTUALLY ENGULFED LAOS IN A CIVIL WAR. THE SITUATION REMAINED CHAOTIC UNTIL THE GENEVA AGREEMENTS OF 1962 AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW CO-ALITION GOVERNMENT IN LAOS. UNDER THE GENEVA AGREEMENTS THE U.S. PULLED ALL MILITARY PERSONNEL OUT OF LAOS. THE VIETNAMESE FORCES, SAID TO NUMBER SOME 10,000 AT THE

TIME OF THE CEASEFIRE, CONTINUED TO REMAIN IN LAOS. AS A RESULT OF THIS COMMUNIST PRESENCE, IN SEPTEMBER 1962, PRIME MINISTER SOUVANNA PHOUMA REQUESTED A RETURN OF U.S. MILITARY SUPPORT. U.S. MILITARY ADVISORS AND CIA FIELD OFFICERS RETURNED TO LAOS AND REMAINED FOR THE NEXT ELEVEN YEARS.

ALMOST IMMEDIATELY THE U.S. REALIZED THAT THE LOWLAND LAO ARMY WAS NO MATCH FOR THE NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS OPERATING IN NORTHEASTERN LAOS. THE U.S. HAD, HOWEVER, FOUND A GROUP OF STUBBORN, INDEPENDENT, AND AGGRESSIVE PEOPLE WHO WOULD FIGHT. BUT, THEY WOULD NOT OPERATE AS A CONVENTIONAL ARMY. WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE UNITED STATES THIS NEW FORCE WOULD FIGHT AS GUERRILLAS TO COUNTER NORTH VIETNAMESE MOVEMENTS ALONG THE "HO CHI MINH TRAIL." THE U.S. - HMONG ALLIANCE WAS BORN.

TO LEAD THIS FORCE THE U.S. SELECTED A YOUNG HMONG OFFICER OF THE ROYAL LAO ARMY. HE WAS VANG PAO, FROM THE VILLAGE OF NONG HET NEAR THE LAO-VIETNAMESE BORDER AND HE HAD BEEN FIGHTING THE COMMUNISTS SINCE 1945. IN 1961, AS YOU SAW IN THE FILM, VANG PAO AND HIS MEN FOUGHT THE COMMUNIST FORCES AT PHA DONG. BY MID-1962 VANG PAO, WITH U.S. ASSISTANCE, HAD BUILT TWO BASES FOR HIS NEW ARMY; SAM THONG, PRIMARILY A REFUGEE CENTER; AND LONG TIENG, THE MILITARY OPERATIONS HEADQUARTERS FOR THIS NEW "SECRET ARMY." VANG PAO AND HIS MEN ALSO RECEIVED TRAINING FROM U.S. AND THAI SOURCES. A GROUP OF 750 HMONG WERE FLOWN TO A SPECIAL TRAINING CAMP IN THAILAND WHERE THEY RECEIVED SPECIALIZED INSTRUCTION IN MODERN WEAPONS, RADIOS, AND GUERRILLA WARFARE TACTICS. THESE 750 MEN BECAME THE CORE OF THE NEW ARMY AND RETURNED TO LAOS TO TRAIN OTHER HMONG. A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF ETHNIC LAO, THAI ADVISORS ALSO ACCOMPANIED THE HMONG AND REMAINED IN LAOS AS PART OF THE NEW ARMY.

IN THE COMING MONTHS AND YEARS MANY OF THESE YOUNG MEN WOULD BE AIRLIFTED INTO

COMMUNIST CONTROLLED AREAS OF NORTHEASTERN LAOS. THE MISSION OF THESE TEN TO TWELVE MAN TEAMS WAS TO OBSERVE AND HARASS ENEMY UNITS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE AND, ONLY WHEN REINFORCED, TO ENGAGE IN SET BATTLES. OTHER HMONG SOLDIERS WERE SENT TO THEIR HOME VILLAGES TO ACT AS AREA DEFENSE FORCES. ALL OF THESE UNITS REPORTED BY RADIO BACK TO LONG TIENG ON A DAILY BASIS. IN TURN, AMERICAN CIA ADVISORS AT LONG TIENG AND OTHER SCATTERED SITES THROUGHOUT NORTHEASTERN LAOS COLLECTED THIS INTELLIGENCE AND DIRECTED THE WAR.

IN LATER YEARS, COVERT ACTIVITY WAS ALSO CONDUCTED INSIDE NORTH VIETNAM. U.S. AIR FORCE CH-3 "JOLLY GREEN GIANT" HELICOPTERS WERE USED TO FLY HMONG "ROADWATCH" TEAMS TO POINTS NEAR THE LAO-VIETNAMESE BORDER. THE HMONG UNITS THEN CROSSED INTO NORTH VIETNAM TO CONDUCT SURVEILLANCE OF SUPPLY ROUTES CARRYING WAR MATERIALS TO LAOS AND SOUTH VIETNAM. RADIO CONTACT WITH THE HMONG WAS MAINTAINED BY USAF C-130 COMMUNICATIONS AIRCRAFT, ORBITING AT HIGH ALTITUDE ABOVE VIETNAM, WHICH RELAYED ANY RADIO TRANSMISSIONS TO LONG TIENG. LOGISTIC PROBLEMS WERE GREAT AND IN THE EARLY YEARS THE U.S. CONTRACTED WITH A COMPANY CALLED AIR AMERICA TO PROVIDE MAINTENANCE SUPPORT TO THE ROYAL LAO AIR FORCE. WITH THE FORMATION OF THE NEW ARMY AIR AMERICA WAS SOON TRANSPORTING GUNS, MORTARS, AMMUNITION, RICE, EVEN LIVE CHICKENS AND PIGS TO HMONG VILLAGES AND MILITARY UNITS. STOL AIRCRAFT AND HELICOPTERS CARRIED THESE SUPPLIES TO PRIMITIVE LANDING STRIPS CARVED OUT ALONG-SIDE MOUNTAIN CLIFFS. WHEN ENEMY ACTIVITY PRECLUDED AIRCRAFT LANDINGS, PARACHUTE DROPS WERE MADE TO THE HMONG.

AIR AMERICA AND THE HMONG WERE ALSO INVOLVED IN ANOTHER VERY IMPORTANT TASK. A MISSION WHICH IS NOT WIDELY KNOWN EXCEPT WITHIN THE CIA AND SOME UNITS OF THE U.S. MILITARY. PRIOR TO 1965, THERE WAS LITTLE OR NO AIR RESCUE CAPABILITY IN LAOS FOR DOWNED AIRCREWS RETURNING FROM MISSIONS OVER NORTH VIETNAM AND LAOS. EVEN THOUGH AIR AMERICA AIRCRAFT WERE NOT ARMED, THEY FREQUENTLY PARTICIPATED IN

THE RECOVERY OF DOWNED PILOTS AND AIRCREW MEMBERS. OFTEN THIS MEANT FLYING DEEP INTO ENEMY CONTROLLED TERRITORY. A JOINT HMONG U.S. OPERATION CALLED "FRESH BREEZE" WAS CONDUCTED DURING 1964 AND 1965, AND WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RESCUE OF MORE THAN THIRTY U.S. SERVICEMEN. THERE ARE MANY MORE AMERICANS WHO OWE THEIR LIVES TO THE HMONG SOLDIERS.

THE HMONG ARMY VERY QUICKLY BECAME A PAINFUL THORN IN THE SIDE OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE AND THEIR PATHET LAO ALLIES. ALTHOUGH THE HMONG INFREQUENTLY ENGAGED LARGE ENEMY UNITS, INTELLIGENCE FROM "ROADWATCH" TEAMS OFTEN BROUGHT HEAVY BOMBARDMENT UPON THE COMMUNIST FORCES FROM U.S. AND LAO AIRCRAFT. FOR THESE REASONS THE HMONG BECAME IMPLACABLE ENEMIES TO THE COMMUNISTS. AND, AS WE SHALL SOON DISCUSS, THE HMONG HAVE PAID A SEVERE PRICE FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE TO THE U.S. WHY THEN DID THE HMONG AGREE TO BECOME PART OF THIS U.S. BACKED ARMY? THERE ARE MANY VIEWS ON THIS. I WILL GIVE YOU MY OWN. VANG PAO, THE CONDUIT FOR U.S. MILITARY AND CIA AID, RECRUITED HIS SOLDIERS ON THE PROMISE THEIR FAMILIES WOULD BE ADEQUATELY CARED FOR. I BELIEVE "ADEQUATELY CARED FOR" MEANT NOT ONLY THE IMMEDIATE NEEDS OF HIS PEOPLE BUT THEIR LONG TERM FUTURE IN LAOS. IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT THE LOWLAND LAO HAVE NEVER CARED MUCH FOR THE HMONG, VIEWING THEM AS ILLITERATE SAVAGES. I THINK VANG PAO BELIEVED THAT ONCE THE COMMUNISTS HAD BEEN DEFEATED THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD ASSIST THE HMONG IN ACHIEVING SOME DEGREE OF AUTONOMY WITHIN THE LAO KINGDOM. HOWEVER, UNLIKE SOME OTHERS, I DON'T BELIEVE VANG PAO WAS EVER SERIOUS ABOUT CREATING AN INDEPENDENT HMONG NATION. IN ANY CASE, THE LOVE, TRUST, AND RESPECT THE HMONG HAD FOR VANG PAO LED THEM TO PLACE THEIR LIVES IN THE SERVICE OF THE UNITED STATES. CLEARLY, VANG PAO BELIEVED THE HMONG WOULD BE REPAID FOR THEIR SACRIFICES.

AS AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM INCREASED, THE WAR IN LAOS BECAME SOMEWHAT OF A SIDESHOW. INFREQUENTLY REPORTS REACHED THE UNITED STATES OF SECRET ARMIES AND

AIRLINES SUPPORTING AN UNKNOWN WAR IN A LITTLE KNOWN COUNTRY. THE UNITED STATES WAS INDEED AT WAR, BUT BY PROXY. VANG PAO AND HIS FORCES CONTINUED TO HARASS NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS AND, WITH THE MUSCLE OF U.S. AIRPOWER, HAD PLACED A VIRTUAL STRANGLE-HOLD ON COMMUNIST TRAFFIC ATTEMPTING TO MOVE ALONG VITAL ROUTE SEVEN. FROM 1965 TO 1972, THE WAR IN NORTHEASTERN LAOS TOOK THE FORM OF SEASONAL MILITARY OFFENSIVES. TYPICALLY THE PATHET LAO AND NORTH VIETNAMESE FORCES CONDUCTED SERIOUS MILITARY OPERATIONS DURING THE NOVEMBER TO MAY DRY SEASON. FROM JUNE TO OCTOBER, THE WET SEASON, VANG PAO'S FORCES WOULD ATTEMPT TO RETAKE ANY TERRITORY LOST TO THE COMMUNISTS. THE POSITION OF THE COMMUNISTS REMAINED GENERALLY STRONG, PRIMARILY DUE TO THEIR CONTROL OF THE PLAIN OF JARS.

BEFORE I TURN TO THE FINAL YEARS OF THE SECRET ARMY, I WOULD LIKE TO RECOUNT AN EPISODE WHICH OCCURRED IN AUGUST 1966. INCREASED PATHET LAO/NORTH VIETNAMESE ACTIVITY HAD FORCED NEARLY SIX THOUSAND HMONG AND LAO THEUNG VILLAGERS TO FLEE THEIR HOMES NORTHEAST OF THE PLAIN OF JARS. THE HILL PEOPLE WERE HEADED FOR A REFUGEE CAMP WHEN THEY STOPPED TO REST IN A VALLEY LOCATED NEAR THE VILLAGE OF PHA KA. IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT AN ESTIMATED FOUR HUNDRED NORTH VIETNAMESE SOLDIERS SET UPON THE DAZED MOUNTAIN PEOPLE WITH HAND GRENADES, AUTOMATIC WEAPONS, AND EVEN KNIVES. WOMEN AND GIRLS WERE RAPED AND DISEMBOWELED. PARENTS KILLED THEIR YOUNG BY FEEDING THEM PIECES OF RAW OPIUM TO AVOID HAVING THEM CLUBBED TO DEATH BY THE VIETNAMESE. OLD WOMEN AND MEN WERE SHOT IN THE LEGS AND LEFT TO DIE. THE VIETNAMESE SLAUGHTERED THIRTEEN HUNDRED HUMAN BEINGS IN AN ACTION DEVOID OF ANY MILITARY VALUE. THE MOUNTAIN TRIBES HAD COME TO KNOW THE PRICE OF ALLIANCE WITH AMERICA. AND, WE KNOW TODAY THAT THIS MASSACRE WAS ONLY A SAMPLE OF HOW THE COMMUNISTS WERE TO TREAT THE HMONG.

BY EARLY 1973, THE HMONG FORCES WERE SET AT BETWEEN TWENTY-FOUR AND TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND MEN. CASUALTIES IN THE PAST TWO YEARS HAD BEEN SEVERE; MORE THAN FIVE

THOUSAND MEN KILLED. AS A RESULT OF THESE LOSSES THE CIA RECRUITED MORE THAN TWENTY THOUSAND THAI MERCENARIES FOR DUTY IN LAOS. THE U.S. WAS CONTINUING THE PROXY WAR STRATEGY. IN EARLY NOVEMBER 1972, AS THE VIETNAMESE ARMY PREPARED FOR AN ASSAULT ON VANG PAO'S HEADQUARTERS AT LONG TIENG, IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT SOUVANNA PHOUMA WAS GOING TO MEET WITH A PATHET LAO SPOKESMAN. THE COMMUNIST FORCES, ANTICIPATING AN IN-PLACE CEASEFIRE, WERE ORDERED TO CAPTURE THE REMAINING GOVERNMENT OUTPOSTS ALONG THE NORTHERN EDGES OF THE PLAIN OF JARS. THE ATTACK AGAINST LONG TIENG DID NOT MATERIALIZE. ON 23 JANUARY 1973, THE UNITED STATES AND VIETNAM REACHED AN AGREEMENT TO END THE WAR IN VIETNAM. THE ROYAL LAO GOVERNMENT, SENSING THE BALANCE OF POWER IN SOUTHEAST ASIA WAS TO BE RADICALLY ALTERED, CAME TO TERMS WITH THE PATHET LAO COMMUNISTS. A CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT FOR LAOS WAS SIGNED ON 21 FEBRUARY 1973.

THE CEASEFIRE IN LAOS REQUIRED THE WITHDRAWAL OF ALL FOREIGN TROOPS AND ALL U.S. MILITARY ACTIVITY, BOTH OVERT AND COVERT, ENDED IN MID-APRIL 1973. WHAT OF THE HMONG? A NEW PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNION (PGNU) WAS DOMINATED BY THE PATHET LAO. ONCE AMERICAN SUPPORT WAS WITHDRAWN VIENTIANE RELEGATED THE HMONG TO THE STATUS OF STEP-CHILDREN. UNDER THE TERMS OF THE AGREEMENT THE HMONG SOLDIERS WERE TO BE INTEGRATED INTO THE REGULAR ARMY. VANG PAO RESISTED THE COMMUNISTS AND FOLLOWING A NUMBER OF CLASSES THE HMONG GENERAL DECIDED TO CONFRONT SOUVANNA PHOUMA. ON 6 MAY, THE PRIME MINISTER ADVISED VANG PAO TO GIVE UP THE FIGHT. IN A RAGE VANG PAO RIPPED THE INSIGNIA OF A MAJOR GENERAL FROM HIS UNIFORM AND THREW IT ON SOUVANNA PHOUMA'S DESK AND RESIGNED. THE PRIME MINISTER IS QUOTED AS SAYING "THE HMONG HAD SERVED HIS PURPOSES WELL, BUT IT WAS A PITY THAT PEACE IN THE COUNTRY HAD TO BE ACHIEVED AT THE EXPENSE OF THEIR EXTINCTION." DURING FIFTEEN YEARS OF WAR THE HMONG HAD SUFFERED 30,000 DEAD, OUT OF A POPULATION OF ABOUT 300,000. THE HMONG DESERVED BETTER FROM THE LOWLAND LAO THEY HAD DIED TO PROTECT. WHEN VANG PAO FLEW FROM LONG TIENG TO THE

SAFETY OF THAILAND ON 14 MAY 1975, THE "SKY WARRIORS" WERE NO MORE. AND THE DEEP COMMUNIST HATRED FOR THE HMONG WAS ABOUT TO DESCEND UPON VANG PAO'S SUPPORTERS.

TIME TONIGHT DOES NOT PERMIT ME TO RECOUNT IN DETAIL THE EXODUS OF THE HMONG TO REFUGE IN THAILAND. I WILL, HOWEVER, DURING MY SLIDE PRESENTATION, SHOW YOU THE MAJOR HMONG AND LAO REFUGEE CAMPS IN THAILAND. BRIEFLY THOUGH, I WOULD LIKE TO MENTION THAT BY 1985, TEN YEARS AFTER THE LAO MONARCHY HAD BEEN ABOLISHED, AND THE LAO COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT ESTABLISHED, MORE THAN 133,000 HMONG AND OTHER LAO HIGHLANDERS HAD FLED LAOS. ANOTHER 177,000 ETHNIC LAO HAD ALSO CROSSED THE MEKONG BY 1985. OF THESE, ABOUT 150,00 HAVE SETTLED IN THE UNITED STATES.

WHY DID THEY LEAVE, INDEED, WHY ARE THERE STILL LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE LEAVING LAOS? MY OWN RECENT EXPERIENCES IN THE CAMPS INDICATE THAT THERE ARE NOW AT LEAST TWO DIFFERENT TYPES OF REFUGEES FLEEING LAOS. MANY OF THE LOWLAND LAO ARE PRIMARILY ECONOMIC REFUGEES LOOKING FOR A BETTER LIFE. FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS I HAVE BEEN IN THE CAMPS ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS AND SPOKEN WITH MANY YOUNG LAO WHO HAD CROSSED INTO THAILAND TO ESCAPE MILITARY SERVICE AND A VERY AUSTERE LIFE. SOME VERY YOUNG TEENAGERS HAD COME TO THAILAND ALMOST AS A LARK. ON THE OTHER HAND THERE ARE THOSE WHO ARE ESCAPING PERSECUTION; FORMER OFFICIALS AND MILITARY OFFICERS IN THE ROYAL LAO GOVERNMENT. MANY I SAW HAD RECENTLY BEEN RELEASED FROM "SEMINAR", THE LAO GULAG NEAR THE VIETNAMESE BORDER. BUT, AS I SAY, RECENTLY THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN A HIGH NUMBER OF LOWLAND LAO REFUGEES WHO HAVE LEFT LAOS FOR ECONOMIC REASONS. THEY HAVE ONLY INCREASED THE STRAIN ON REFUGEE SERVICES AND IN FACT HAVE CAUSED THE THAI GOVERNMENT TO CRACK DOWN ON ALL LAO REFUGEES.

BUT, WHAT OF THE HMONG? FOLLOWING THE DEPARTURE OF VANG PAO, THE VIETNAMESE AND

PATHET LAO ALMOST IMMEDIATELY SET ABOUT TO ERADICATE THE HMONG. IT IS NO SECRET THE COMMUNISTS UNDERTOOK A POLICY OF GENOCIDE WITH REGARD TO THE SUPPORTERS OF VANG PAO. ACCORDING TO A 1975, PATHET LAO NEWS AGENCY REPORT, THE HMONG QUOTE "MUST BE EXTERMINATED DOWN TO THE ROOT OF THE TRIBE." ENQUOTE. THE MOST HORRIFYING ASPECT OF THIS CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN THE USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS. SINCE 1976, THERE HAVE BEEN PERSISTENT REPORTS OF LOW FLYING AIRCRAFT, PARTICULARLY IN THE MOUNTAIN AREA OF PHU BIA, DROPPING CHEMICALS ON HMONG VILLAGES. THE RESULT IS CONTAMINATION OF THE FOOD SUPPLY, WITH EVENTUAL DEATH FOR PEOPLE AND ANIMALS SEVERELY EXPOSED. AS RECOUNTED TO ME BY SOME WHO HAVE WITNESSED THE CHEMICAL DROPS, DEATH OFTEN TOOK ONE TO THREE PAIN-FILLED DAYS. SINCE 1975, THE COMMUNIST LAO GOVERNMENT HAS ALSO OFTEN ATTACKED THE HMONG EVEN AS THEY ATTEMPT TO CROSS INTO THAILAND. ON NUMEROUS OCCASSIONS MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN HAVE BEEN SLAUGHTERED IN RIVER AMBUSHES.

MANY OF THE HMONG WHO HAVE REMAINED UNDER GOVERNMENT CONTROL HAVE BEEN ORDERED INTO LOWLAND AREAS WHERE THEY SUFFER FROM MALNUTRITION AND ARE SUSCEPTIBLE TO DISEASE, AND FORCED TO ENGAGE IN COOPERATIVE FARMING. DISCIPLINE UNDER THE CURRENT REGIME IS SEVERE AND CONSISTENT OFFENDERS ARE SENT TO LABOR CAMPS OR WORSE.

AS WE ALL KNOW TOO WELL, THERE IS NO HAPPY ENDING TO THIS ALLIANCE AGAINST COMMUNISM BETWEEN A SUPER POWER AND A SIMPLE MOUNTAIN PEOPLE. REVENGE IS OFTEN CITED AS THE REASON WHY THE COMMUNISTS WANT TO DESTROY THE HMONG. IT ALSO SEEMS REASONABLE TO BELIEVE THE LAO GOVERNMENT AND THEIR VIETNAMESE ALLIES RECOGNIZE THE HMONG WILL NEVER WILLINGLY BE PLACED IN A SOCIALIST SOCIETY AND COULD BE COUNTED UPON TO CONTINUALLY REVOLT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. THIS FIERCE, INDEPENDENT SPIRIT HAS ALWAYS PLACED THEM IN DISFAVOR WITH THOSE WHO WOULD ATTEMPT TO CHANGE THEIR MOUNTAIN LIFE-STYLE. THE HMONG CAN NO LONGER MOVE FROM

MOUNTAIN TO MOUNTAIN, CLEARING THE TREES, PLANTING THEIR POPPIES, AND PRESIDING AS "KINGS OF THE MOUNTAINS." HMONG CAN BE TRANSLATED AS "FREE" AND THERE ARE NO FREE PEOPLE IN TODAY'S LAOS, LEAST OF ALL THE HMONG. TRAGICALLY, THE HMONG HAVE BECOME A DEAD RACE IN LAOS.

THE PRESENT REFUGEE SITUATION IN THAILAND IS VERY VOLATILE. IN MID-MARCH A DIPLOMATIC STORM ERUPTED BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THAILAND WHEN THE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT CRITICIZED THE THAI GOVERNMENT'S FORCED RETURN TO LAOS OF THIRTY-EIGHT HMONG. MANY THAI NEWSPAPERS SEVERELY ATTACKED THE UNITED STATES FOR WHAT THE THAI CONSIDER TO BE AN UNWARRANTED INTRUSION INTO THEIR AFFAIRS. WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE OF THIS THAI ACTION AND THE U.S. PROTEST? FIRST, AS MOST OF YOU KNOW THAILAND HAS SHOULDERED A TREMENDOUS REFUGEE BURDEN SINCE THE FALL OF VIETNAM, CAMBODIA, AND LAOS IN 1975. AS A COUNTRY OF FIRST ASYLUM THE THAI HAVE PROVIDED TEMPORARY REFUGE FOR MORE THAN 551,000 PEOPLE WHO WERE EVENTUALLY RESETTLED IN THIRD COUNTRIES. OF THIS NUMBER, MORE THAN 225,00 HAVE BEEN REFUGEES FROM LAOS. MANY OF YOU IN THIS ROOM ARE PART OF THIS NUMBER. WHILE THERE HAS BEEN SOME CORRUPTION INVOLVED IN THE MANAGEMENT OF VARIOUS REFUGEE PROGRAMS, AND SMUGGLING IN AND NEAR REFUGEE CAMPS IS BIG BUSINESS, I THINK ON THE WHOLE THE THAI HAVE BEEN SYMPATHETIC TO REFUGEES. I BELIEVE THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE WITH REGARD TO REFUGEES FROM LAOS. HOWEVER, I SHOULD REMIND YOU, AS THE THAI TAKE PAINS TO REMIND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, THAT TWELVE YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE THE FIRST SERIOUS REFUGEE FLOW INTO THAILAND. TODAY, THERE ARE STILL SOME 120,000 REFUGEES IN THAILAND. THERE ARE ALMOST 60,000 LOWLAND AND HILLTRIBE LAO IN THESE CAMPS. SOME OF THESE PEOPLE MAY BE MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS. HOWEVER, TO PARAPHRASE A WORN OUT CLICHE, THE THAI WANT TO SEE "THE END OF THE TUNNEL." THE THAI KNOW THAT IF THEY CONTINUE TO ACCEPT REFUGEES ONLY MORE WILL APPEAR. AND SO, BY RETURNING SOME OF THE HMONG TO LAOS, THE THAI MAY BE ATTEMPTING TO SEND A COUPLE OF SIGNALS. THEY DON'T

WANT THE UNITED STATES AND THE REST OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO FORGET THE HMONG AND REDUCE EFFORTS TO RESETTLE THESE PEOPLE. AND, I BELIEVE THEY WANT TO SEND NOTICE TO POTENTIAL BORDER CROSSERS THAT THAI ACCEPTANCE OF REFUGEES, NO MATTER FOR WHAT PERIOD OF TIME, IS NOT OPEN ENDED. MANY LAO HAVE TRIED TO USE THAILAND AS A "TRAVEL AGENT." A MEANS BY WHICH TO ESCAPE AN UNCOMFORTABLE LIFE. THE THAI CANNOT ACCEPT THIS. ON THE OTHER HAND, I SINCERELY BELIEVE THERE ARE LAO, BOTH LOWLAND AND HILLTRIBE WHO ARE AT RISK IN A COMMUNIST LAOS. THE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT, IN THEIR CRITICISM OF THE THAI, HAS DEMONSTRATED U.S. CONCERN FOR THE HMONG. IS THIS THE ONLY ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM?

I DON'T THINK SO. THE AMERICAN PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW THE STORY OF THE HMONG, WHY THE HMONG IN MY OPINION SHOULD BE GIVEN SOME PRIORITY IN THIRD COUNTRY RE-SETTLEMENT. THE THAI MUST BE ASSURED THAT ANY REFUGEES THEY ACCEPT WILL NOT BECOME A PERMANENT BURDEN. I URGE ALL OF YOU WHO ARE CONCERNED WITH THE PLIGHT OF THE LAO REFUGEES TO MAKE YOUR SENTIMENTS KNOWN IN CONGRESS. FORTUNATELY, THERE ARE MANY CONGRESSMEN AND SENATORS WHO HAVE TAKEN A STRONG INTEREST IN THIS PROBLEM. LET THEM KNOW YOU CARE.

ANOTHER SOLUTION MAY BE BETTER RELATIONS BETWEEN THAILAND AND LAOS AND LAOS AND THE UNITED STATES. IN LATE MARCH THE LAO DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER HELD TALKS IN BANGKOK WITH SENIOR THAI LEADERS. WHILE THERE WAS A GREAT DEAL OF RHETORIC, SOMETIMES HOSTILE, THERE REMAINS ROOM FOR POSITIVE DIALOGUE. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND LAOS HAVE ALSO IMPROVED. THE LAO HAVE ALLOWED THE UNITED STATES TO EXCAVATE SEVERAL AIRCRAFT CRASH SITES FROM THE WAR AND I AM VERY HOPEFUL THAT THE UNITED STATES AND LAOS WILL CONTINUE TO WORK ON THE MIA ISSUE. OVERALL, I LOOK FORWARD TO IMPROVED RELATIONS. AND, WITH INCREASING GOODWILL, WE CAN HOPE FOR BETTER TREATMENT OF THE HMONG IN THEIR HOMELAND.

IN CONCLUSION, THE HMONG, LOCATED HIGH IN THE STRATEGIC MOUNTAINS OF NORTHEASTERN LAOS, WERE IDEALLY SUITED AS GUERILLA FIGHTERS. THEY WERE A RUGGED, NOMADIC PEOPLE DISDAINFUL OF THEIR LESS RESOLUTE LOWLAND NEIGHBORS, AND FIERCELY PROUD OF THEIR HISTORIC INDEPENDENCE. THE UNITED STATES, THROUGH U.S. MILITARY AND CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY OPERATIVES, WAS QUICK TO EXPLOIT THE HMONG AS A TRULY EFFECTIVE FIGHTING FORCE. COMBINED WITH TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN TECHNOLOGY, THIS ARMY WENT TO WAR IN LAOS. SADLY, IT WAS A WAR THAT ULTIMATELY THE UNITED STATES AND THE ROYAL LAO GOVERNMENT LACKED THE WILL TO PURSUE AND WIN.

IT REMAINS TO GET THE WORD OUT. AS ONE OF THE LESSER KNOWN INDOCHINESE REFUGEE GROUPS, THE HMONG ARE OFTEN OVERSHADOWED BY THE MORE NUMEROUS, AND PREDOMINATELY BETTER EDUCATED, VIETNAMESE. IT HAS BECOME SOMEWHAT FASHIONABLE TO REFER TO THE "BOAT PEOPLE," WITH MANY AMERICANS NOT REALIZING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE VIETNAMESE, KHMER, LOWLAND LAO, HILLTRIBES AND SO ON. THE HMONG ARE NOT THE SAME. THEY POSSESS A LONG AND COURAGEOUS HISTORY OF SELF DETERMINATION. THEIR DECISION TO FIGHT THE PATHET LAO AND VIETNAMESE WAS, IN HINDSIGHT, PERHAPS POORLY MADE. YET FEW WOULD ARGUE THAT THE HMONG WAY OF LIFE IS COMPATIBLE WITH A COMMUNIST SOCIETY. HAD THE UNITED STATES NOT INTERVENED IN LAOS AND FOUNDED, DIRECTED, AND SUPPORTED THE SECRET ARMY, THE HMONG WOULD HAVE FOUGHT A GUERILLA WAR WITH FLINTLOCKS INSTEAD OF CARBINES. THE END RESULT WOULD HAVE BEEN MUCH THE SAME. HOWEVER, THE FACT REMAINS THE UNITED STATES DID OFFER TO CARE FOR THE HMONG. THIS OBLIGATION IS PAST DUE. THANK YOU.