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INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Laos

A - C

Journal of American Studies 44, no. 12 (1964): 49-59. [Petersen]

Journal of American Studies 22 (May 1972): 43-47. [Petersen]

Journal of American Studies: A Case Study -- the CIA in Laos, 1962-1972." In *The CIA in Laos*, 46-78. New York: Grossman, 1976.

... work within which it is contained remain suspect as a
 ... Soviet or East German disinformation effort.

► Burchett, Wilfred G. *The Furtive War: The United States in Vietnam and Laos*. New York: International Publishers, 1963.

Clark comment: The author was a pro-communist Australian journalist. As expected, the book portrays the war in Laos from a strongly anti-U.S., anti-CIA slant, a view not per se damning; but Burchett has the nasty habit of bending even well-established facts to fit his particular world view.

► Castle, Timothy N. *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam: U.S. Military Aid to the Royal Lao Government, 1955-1975*. New York: Columbia University, 1993.

Surveillant 3.4 suggests that this book "will undoubtedly be the standard work on U.S. covert activity in Laos." It is a "very complete and balanced account" and is "scholarly, well-researched and attractive[ly] written."

Wirtz, I&NS 11.4, says that Castle's "concise outline of the secret war in Laos ... makes a welcome addition to the history of the Vietnam War."

In the same vein, **Ford, I&NS** 10.2, finds that Castle's "extensive research and ... synthesis of an impressive amount of primary source material" helps to untangle "the web of American bureaucracy and politics." The author details "the evolution and management of US military involvement in Laos.... Meticulously researched and presented, this book provides a glimpse into the murky world of covert military and intelligence operations and fills a glaring gap in the history of the wars in Indochina."

Tovar, IJ&C 8.3 ("B. Hugh Tovar was the CIA's senior representative in Laos from September 1970 until May 1973."), sees *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam* as "the best documented book on the Laos war yet to appear. Concise and readable, it raises many issues of importance to an understanding of the Laos sector of the Indochina conflict. On certain of those issues, however, the author and I are in substantial disagreement."

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Laos

A - C

▶ Black, Edwin F. "Laos: A Case Study." *Military Review* 44, no. 12 (1964): 49-59. [Petersen]

▶ Booth, Walter B. "Allies or Hirelings." *Army* 22 (May 1972): 43-47. [Petersen]

▶ Branfman, Fred. "The President's Secret Army: A Case Study -- the CIA in Laos, 1962-1972." In *The CIA File*, eds. Robert L. Borosage and John D. Marks, 46-78. New York: Grossman, 1976.

Clark comment: This article and the book within which it is contained remain suspect as a Soviet or East German disinformation effort.

▶ Burchett, Wilfred G. *The Furtive War: The United States in Vietnam and Laos*. New York: International Publishers, 1963.

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▶ Castle, Timothy N. *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam: U.S. Military Aid to the Royal Lao Government, 1955-1975*. New York: Columbia University, 1993.

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Tovar describes one area of disagreement as Castle's adopting of the position of senior U.S. military officers about the management of the war. In particular, Tovar argues, the CIA station chief did not "control" air operations in Laos. The "only sector of air resources in Laos which can rightfully be described as controlled by CIA" was the war-related operations of the Air America and Continental Air Service contractors. In addition, the CIA's field units worked closely with -- but did not control -- the Air Force's Forward Air Controllers, the Raven FACs. Tovar relates how, clearly more frequently than he and the ambassador would have liked, the experience was more one of begging for what U.S. air support they believed was necessary.

For Tovar, a "major weakness in *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam* is its failure to give adequate treatment to the war in regions of Laos other than Military Region II." But he softens that criticism by noting the implication of the book's subtitle -- that it is not a "[s]trictly speaking ... a history of the war." Overall, this book "is a very good reconstruction of a complex and not readily intelligible piece of American history."

▶ Castle, Timothy N. *One Day Too Long: Top Secret Site 85 and the Bombing of North Vietnam*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Clark comment: I wonder whether there is any more story to tell about Site 85 than has already been in James C. Linder, "The War in Laos: The Fall of Lima Site 85," *Studies in Intelligence* 38, no. 5 (1995): 79-88?

Wirtz, *IJI&C* 12.4, notes that Site 85 "was an Air Force effort to conduct a clandestine operation deep in the enemy's rear that reflected the service's inexperience with this kind of activity.... Castle suggests ... that organizational imperatives, as much as the need to increase military effectiveness, drove the Air Force to deploy its radar in Laos." Regrettably, to the reviewer, Castle's "narrative deteriorates into a diatribe against incompetent officers..., bureaucratic inertia and obfuscation, and greedy Vietnamese and Laotian officials."

For **De Groot, *I&NS* 16.1,** the author tells "a fascinating story, but ... seems to have been carried away by its dramatic potential.... The book is impressively well researched, but in truth this often means that a good story gets smothered in unnecessary detail. A tale suited to a long article in a military history journal is transformed into an often tedious book of nearly 400 pages."

▶ Conboy, Kenneth, with James Morrison. *Shadow War: The CIA's Secret War in Laos*. Boulder, CO: Paladin Press, 1995.

Tovar, *IJI&C* 8.4, believes that the ground war in Laos "has rarely been understood and never explained adequately.... *Shadow War* represents an enormous step toward redressing that situation.... Conboy and Morrison provide a wealth of detail and perspective beyond anything produced to date." The book's "glossary of terms unique to the Laos war is the best of its kind in existence." Conboy "does not appear to be trying to prove anything.... His aim is simply to 'tell it like it was.'"

For ***Surveillant* 4.4/5,** Conboy and Morrison "reveal the real face of war through a grunt's-eye view as opposed to a big picture, foreign policy approach.... Highly recommended."

► Cross, John P. *First In, Last Out: An Unconventional British Officer in Indo-China*. London: Brassey's, 1992.

Tonnesson, *I&NS* 10.3, notes that Cross served with the Gurkhas who suppressed the revolution in southern Vietnam in 1945. From 1972-1976, he was the British defense attaché in Vientiane. The first part of the book "adds nothing to our understanding of what happened in Indochina in 1945-46." The second part provides an "at times fascinating ... account of the atmosphere within the ... international community of Vientiane.... Cross has some arresting episodes ... to recount, but they are drowned in the author's unrelenting attempts to satisfy his own vanity.... The normal reader is likely to be ... disgusted by the author's frenetic self-praise." It is likely that, when they become available, Cross' reports from Vientiane "will be valuable sources.... But if you do not have to read the book, don't."

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