



Exterior view of AAM Dining Hall



Mr. Thongsar Bouapha stands beside welcome sign at our Sam Thong facility in Northern Laos. Sign is self-explanatory.



Mr. William C. Yarbrough, AAM's SZ, Sam Thong, Northern Laos.



Exterior view of Quonset hut



Building, of Quonset hut consisting of Manager's office at left end and right in front of hangar.



An AAM Caribou takes off from Sam Thong's 2,200 ft. strip past a pair of parked UH-34s.



SAM THONG STATION

by: William C. Yarbrough,
SZ/Sam Thong

Sam Thong, Northern Laos, one of Air America's most remote and inaccessible up-country bases, is possibly the busiest dirt-strip airfield in Southeast Asia, if not in the whole world.

The strip, whose elevation is 3,800 feet, handles an average of 125 landings and take-offs a day, seven days a week the year round, weather permitting.

Air America established this forward operating base, in support of various United States civilian aid programs, four years ago. The existing short strip was lengthened to a 2,200 foot dirt runway capable of handling Caribous and C-123s as well as helicopters, Helios and Porters.

Much of the activity in Sam Thong is related to refugee relief movements which are mounting daily as Communist troops increase their pressure in many sections of north, central and eastern Laos; Sam Thong also assists larger aircraft in air drops of various commodities to thousands of refugees in flight from enemy forces.

The base supplies up to 70,000 gallons of fuel each month to aircraft flying in the area. Operations continue from dawn to dusk throughout the year whether it is dusty or muddy — or both.

Next to a 110 bed hospital jointly operated by USAID and the Lao Government, AAM's are the most prominent facilities in Sam Thong. They include an open maintenance hangar, a Quonset hut Operations building, transient billets with 28 beds, toilets, hot water bathing facilities, a laundry plus a dining room and recreation lounge.

The village, whose name inexplicably means "Three Golds" in the language of the Meo tribesmen who live along the lonely ridges and peaks of the Annamite mountain range running down from Mongolia through China and Southeast Asia, did not exist until seven years ago. Then Major (now Lieutenant General) Vang Pao determined the location of what is now known as Sam Thong, in a narrow hidden valley high up in the mountains 77 miles north and slightly east of Vientiane.

Sam Thong is surrounded by lofty sky-piercing pinnacles and karsts which present a rugged and awesome spectacle. The rough terrain is often mist-shrouded and calls to mind ancient Chinese brush paintings of tree-clad mountains in bizarre and dreamlike shapes. One such karst is a Sam Thong landmark. Its timbered slopes rise precipitously to a height of about 500 feet; it is just southwest of the site's landing strip.