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Dear Jim:

Dr. Hamilton-Merritt sent me copy of your review of her book. I have asked Priscilla to set aside for the archives correspondence that I have had with her. We will send it when the issue seems to be sufficiently historic rather than current.

Sincerely,

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donment, and ultimate betrayal, sheds no honor upon the United States. For that very reason, it is a topic most worthy of public and academic scrutiny.

Now a college professor with a Ph.D. in Southeast Asian studies, Hamilton-Merritt was a correspondent in Indochina in the 1960s and was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for her war photography. This combination of practical, on-the-ground experience and academic training has resulted in a work that meets the highest academic standards yet passionately conveys the plight of the proud Hmong people. Dealing with Laos presents significant difficulties; United States government documentation remains wrapped in secrecy. Hamilton-Merritt compensated for this by conducting more than one thousand interviews with participants: Hmong, Lao, former CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and State Department officials, and a wide range of others.

The book opens with the Hmong support of the French both during the World War II struggle against the Japanese and, later, against the Viet Minh. A major portion of the work narrates events of the 1960s and early 1970s, when the Hmong, under the leadership of Gen. Vang Pao and clandestinely supported by the United States, fought the growing North Vietnamese domination of Laos. Hamilton-Merritt recounts the achievements of the Hmong as well as those of a number of colorful American participants in the struggle, and she highlights the self-sacrificing role Hmong played in rescuing downed American pilots.

The account in *Tragic Mountains* of the fate of the Hmong following the American abandonment of Indochina in 1975 is particularly important. Hamilton-Merritt carefully documents the efforts of the Communist Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) to exterminate the Hmong. She documents the systematic use of chemical-biological toxins—"Yellow Rain"—against the Hmong, and the American government's official indifference to the fate of these loyal friends. Such official indifference continues today with United States government acquiescence in the policy of forced repatriation of Hmong from Thai refugee camps to the LPDR, where, unprotected by the

United Nations, they face certain torture and death. As one forced repatriate recorded in 1991:

We are on the death road now . . . the authorities shall force us to go to Laos tomorrow. . . . We will die soon. So you must remember us. We were born in the wrong world and at the wrong time. . . . Our lives are over. We shall die when we arrive in Laos. . . . We are sorry. We cry now. Goodbye and good luck to all of you in America.

Tragic Mountains is an absolutely gripping, haunting, compelling book. It offers a grave indictment of American policy toward the Hmong since 1975. It should be required reading for anyone seeking to understand Indochina, past or present. Further, every CIA and State Department official and government policy maker should be required to read this book; it offers a stark reminder that neither foreign policy expedients nor public apathy can absolve this nation of a moral responsibility for the well-being of those we encouraged to fight the Communists in Indochina.

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Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992. By Jane Hamilton-Merritt. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993. xxviii, 580 pp. \$29.95, ISBN 0-253-32731-8.)

In this important work, Dr. Jane Hamilton-Merritt traces the support rendered to the United States by the Hmong people of Laos during the decades-long struggle for the soul of Indochina that we speciously call the *Vietnam War*. The result of fourteen years of meticulous research, Hamilton-Merritt's book pushes back the veil of official secrecy that has surrounded the "secret war" in Laos. The picture that emerges, one of exploitation, aban-

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Admiral Banzholt - JUL 2 1994
Thought you would be interested.
Best
Jane Hamilton-Merritt