

CIA-Backed Thais in Laos Say They Are Regular Army

By D. E. Ronk
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VIENTIANE, Laos, Aug. 8
—Thai soldiers serving with the CIA-supported irregular forces in Laos say they are regular army troops of Thailand asked to accept special assignment in all Thai battalions.
Their assertion contradicts a Senate Foreign Relations

Committee staff report made public last week. The report, prepared by Committee staff members James G. Lowenstein and Richard M. Moose referred to Thai troops in Laos as "irregulars."

Heavily censored in most of its references to Thais serving in Laos, the report said the Thai fighting men "are recruited for service in Laos

from outside the regular Thai army."

Speaking to a reporter, several Thai soldiers said they were asked to accept an assignment in Laos after the advantages of such service were explained. They have the option of refusing, they said.

According to the Lowenstein-Moose report, "the CIA supervises and pays for the training of these irregulars in Thailand and provides their salary, allowances (including death benefits), and operational costs in Laos."

Their units are formed in Thailand with Thai commissioned and non-commissioned officers and are given special training for Laos.

They arrive in Laos aboard CIA-supported Air America planes from Udorn airbase in Northern Thailand. All orders, from the battalion level down, are issued by Thais, the soldiers said. Only at the very top, with Gen. Vang Pao, the Meo commander of Laos Military Region Two, and the CIA's Armee Clandestine, is there interference with the Thai chain of command, they said.

Vang Pao does not command the Thais, they said, but consults with Thai officers and the CIA "case officers" who actually make the decisions.

The Thai soldiers agree with press reports that there is at least one Thai general in Laos, using the code name Nai Caw. This is the equivalent of John Doe. The Thai troops say he is a lieutenant general.

Code names are frequently used by and for Thai troops in Laos. Reliable sources in Thailand say that until recently all wounded Thais treated in the U.S. hospital at Udorn Airbase were listed as John Doe One, Two, Three, etc. to hide their national origins.

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At present the troops say, there are 10 or 12 Thai battalions in Laos or about 4,800 men. Two Thai battalions are at Pakse, in southern Laos, and "about ten" in northern Laos, with headquarters at Long Cheng, the soldiers said.

Reliable sources in Bangkok say, moreover, that another Thai artillery battery has either just entered Laos or shortly will, accompanied by an American major. The U.S. officer is to advise them on the operation of unfamiliar equipment, believed to be aiming devices.

Official U.S. sources deny knowledge of such a unit, that an American officer has been given such an assignment, and that a new American officer has arrived or is expected, even on temporary duty.

The Bangkok sources say the officer will be traveling on a civilian passport and in civilian clothing.

A Thai soldier now stationed in Pakse outlined the sequence of events in his assignment to Laos. Returning to Thailand from duty in South Vietnam he said, he was sent for advance training in Thailand following a 30-day leave. He was told the training was for assignment to Cambodia, he said.

Following the training, he was told his assignment was changed to Laos, but that he could refuse to go and remain in Thailand.

After the pros and cons explained he decided to accept and became a volunteer.

Following formation of a "special battalion," he was sent to Udorn, then to Long Cheng. At Long Cheng, the unit was engaged in defense of that headquarters. The Thais fought in one "heavy" battle in a sector call "Skyline" by U.S. personnel.

Shortly before the fall of the Bolovens Plateau in southern Laos to North Vietnamese forces last May the Thai battalion was flown to Ubon Air Base in Thailand then to Pakse, where they were airlifted to the vicinity of Ba Houei Sai, on the Bolovens Plateau.

As a result of the Hanoi offensive, they withdrew to Pakse. The soldiers said they are not deeply involved in the current counter offensive to recapture the Bolovens, though some of them are used as forward air guides, relaying bombing targets from ground to air.

Recent visitors to Pakse say the Thai soldiers are very much in evidence in hotels and bars. They do not wear Thai army markings on their uniforms and the soldiers say they carry no identification, on orders from their officers.

Peace Advocates Rally in Japan

NAGASAKI, Japan, Aug. 8 (AP)—More than 10,000 peace advocates from seven countries rallied in an outdoor stadium here today and adopted a resolution calling for a prompt ban on nuclear bomb tests.

Gensuikyo, an antiwar organization affiliated with Japan's Communist Party, said 19 foreign delegates represented North Vietnam, North Korea, Ceylon, Cuba, South Vietnam and the United States.