

# Troops' Families Leave Laos CIA Base

12/23/71

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Special to The Washington Post

VIENTIANE, Dec. 22—

Frightened families of CIA-supported Meo irregulars at Long Cheng, one hundred miles north of here, have been walking south from the base since yesterday morning's attack by 20 North Vietnamese commandos and in the aftermath of serious military losses on the Plain of Jars 20 miles to the northeast.

Reports reaching Vientiane from knowledgeable U.S. sources also say Air America transport planes are ferrying important equipment and material from the Meo-CIA headquarters, flying it to safety at

Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Udorn, Thailand.

A hospital at the Long Cheng base, reportedly filled to overflowing by wounded from the Plain of Jars, has also been evacuated, the sources say, though it is unclear whether it is evacuation of old patients to make room for recently wounded or a general abandonment of the hospital.

Refugee movement from Long Cheng following the attack to the northeast is confirmed by informed U.S. sources who say they have no information on evacuation of the hospital or materiel. They note, however, that the situation at Long Cheng is con-

sidered "serious—though not desperate."

## 30,000 Residents

At its peak there are about 30,000 residents of Long Cheng, most of them dependents of Meo soldiers. About 35 Americans are believed to be stationed at the base.

Along with the sapper attack yesterday, which saw three government soldiers killed, nine wounded, two American planes damaged and two structures burned, Communist forces have occupied a hilltop position less than 15 miles east of Long Cheng, informed U.S. sources said.

Capture of the hilltop, called Phou Pha Xay, puts enemy forces within easy artillery range of Long Cheng. Announcement of the loss of Phou Pha Xay, which was part of the Long Cheng defensive system, occurred during the Communist rout of Meo and Thai troops from the plain, the sources say, and was not discovered until its defenders appeared at Long Cheng yesterday.

Communist consolidation of gains made last weekend continued through Monday night when Meo and Thai irregulars abandoned their two remaining fire support bases at Sting Ray and Cobra, west and south of the plain. Communists continued ferrying troops and artillery southward along the eastern edge of the plain toward passes leading to Long Cheng.

## Off the Plain

Meo and Thai irregulars are reported to be completely off the plain now, though contact with many units has not been made. No decision on where to establish new defensive positions about Long Cheng has been reached, informed sources say, since pro-government forces have not completed regrouping off the plain.

The deteriorated situation northeast of Long Cheng in more than a year, is given as

cause for evacuation of the base's civilian inhabitants.

Although weather over Northern Laos is now clearing, chance is given for pro-government forces to counter-attack onto the plain and little chance that Lao and American air forces could inflict meaningful casualties on Pathet Lao, North Vietnamese troops because they are dispersed.

## Saigon to Release

### 689 Political Prisoners

From News Dispatches

SAIGON, Dec. 22 (UPI)—The South Vietnamese government will release 689 civilians arrested on suspicion of Communist political activity and held without trials for up to two years on Christmas Day, a spokesman announced today.

The amnesty, however, will not affect Vietnam's two most famous political prisoners—Truong Dinh Dzu and Tran Ngoc Chau he said. Both were tried and convicted by military courts.

The spokesman said the prisoners were seized under the three-year-old Phoenix program, a joint U.S.-South Vietnamese anti-insurgency operation.

The Saigon command and U.S. spokesmen here reported little military action in South Vietnam, but fighting continued in Cambodia 48 miles north of Phnom Benh.

A Cambodian spokesman said a battle for the riverside village of Peam Chhkork entered its third day. North Vietnamese forces were so close to government front lines that allied warplanes were unable to bomb and strafe effectively.

The spokesman also revealed that Cambodia had no plans for a Christmas ceasefire similar to the 24-hour truce proclaimed by South Vietnam.

In addition to its truce the South Vietnamese government announced it will free 689 political prisoners in a Christmas amnesty.