

Senators Told CIA Aids Laos

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Two investigators just back from Indochina told a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee in secret session yesterday that the CIA is covertly financing 4,800 Thai troops fighting in Northern Laos in support of the Laotian government.

Sen. Clifford P. Case (R-N.J.) told reporters after the meeting that the CIA had begun hiring Thais several years ago to fight in northern Laos, and was now apparently considerably increasing the number because, after years of war in Laos, "the pool of people available for military operations is shrinking rapidly."

These expenditures, however, have been kept secret from the public and are not revealed in budget and appropriations documents.

Case said that the report given to the subcommittee by staff members James Lowenstein and Richard Moose confirmed his own information, obtained here privately from government sources, that "there are 4,000 to 6,000 Thai troops in Laos and the U.S. government, through the CIA, is paying for them."

Case earlier had cited one newspaper report that for six or seven years there were only 1,000 Thai troops there but that number had jumped in the past year.

Senators and staff members at the meeting were reluctant to discuss the Lowenstein-Moose report because, according to Foreign Relations Committee Chairman J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.), government agencies had imposed as a condition of cooperation with the two investigators that the information they received be declassified by the Executive Branch before it could be made public.

4,800 Figure Cited

However, when asked how

many Thai troops were being financed by the CIA, Fulbright answered, "It's not very secret. I think it's 4,800." Other Senators present later confirmed the figure privately.

Fulbright said he expected the Committee to sponsor some proposals for changes in the basic CIA law, especially with regard to informing Congress about its activities.

Case, who had just received a reply from Secretary of State William P. Rogers to his earlier requests for in-

formation about the matter, said facts stated by Lowenstein and Moose in their report "indicate clearly to me that information contained in the State Department letter was incomplete and in certain respects inaccurate."

Subcommittee Chairman Stuart Symington (D-Mo.), Case and Fulbright all said it was extremely important that the Lowenstein-Moose report be declassified so that, as Case put, "we can lay the thing out for the American people so they can make the judgments" as to whether the nation should support such activities.

Symington refused to give any details on the cost of the Thai operation but said, "The money angle is surprising, it's on the high side."

Another source said, however, that the pay and allowances for the Thais would run to perhaps \$2000 a year per man—or about \$10 million for the 4,800 men plus costs for equipment, transportation and other items that could easily double, perhaps triple, the initial figure.

Case also said the report confirmed that while general U.S. air activities over northern Laos had been decreasing, U.S. B-52 bombing raids there had increased.

Additional Details Given

Other Senators present gave these added details:

- Meo tribesmen in the North operating from a center provided by the secret CIA base at Long Cheng, were so decimated that the Thai troops were needed to supply extra manpower.

- Total U.S. costs in Laos, not just for the Thais but for aid to the Laotian government and interdiction in the South, was so great that "\$100 million wouldn't touch it."

- The State Department has offered to have Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern and Pacific Affairs, brief the committee on Laos operations in secret session.

Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho) said, "The whole lurid tale of this covert war makes it obvious that, if Congress is to recover control over war and peace, it must make the CIA return to the role it was originally intended to fill, that of an intelligence agency collecting information. Covert operations of this kind will have to be taken away." He is sponsoring legislation to do just that.