

# U.S. Involvement in Laos Is Virtually Over

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The station chief has left; the USAID compound is nearly deserted and under Pathet Lao control; Kilometer 6 has become a Pathet Lao military camp and the officers of Long Tieng air base have gone over to the Pathet Lao.

In the special language of the American involvement in Laos, these incidental facts mean that the involvement, which began in the nineteen-fifties, has ended in defeat.

The station chief was the chief local representative of the Central Intelligence Agency. The agency directed, paid and supplied an irregular army made up of Laotian tribesmen and Thai volunteers that was the principal fighting force against the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces in Laos.

The United States Agency for International Development was the disbursing agency for economic assistance. Because Laos had almost no other revenues, the aid agency was deeply involved in almost all Laotian economic and social activities, and the compound here became the seat of what many Laotians and foreigners considered a parallel government of Laos.

Kilometer 6 was a suburban settlement where Americans and their families lived a kind of Levittown life that seemed further removed from Laos than the 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) that separated it from Vientiane.

Long Tieng, in the mountains north of here, was the forward headquarters of the C.I.A.'s clandestine army. From Long Tieng, Maj. Gen. Vang Pao and a sizable establishment of American intelligence agents conducted the principal ground

campaigns of the Laotian war in conjunction with the United States Air Force—holding, losing or recapturing the strategic Plain of Jars with the changing seasons.

Today the American embassy said the station chief was gone for good, not as in the past, when he often left Vientiane to spend a day or two at Long Tieng supervising the war, or meeting in Saigon, Bangkok, or Udon, Thailand, with the local station chiefs to plan combined operations.

Perhaps among the 35 officials and secretaries remaining at the once bustling American embassy, there are agents of the C.I.A.—people still go up and down the stairs leading to the second floor, where the agency's offices occupy as much space as do those of the State Department section of the embassy. But, the embassy indicated, there is no one of stature remaining.

## U.S. Aid Ends June 30

At the aid compound, two men and a woman are winding up the American presence. They do so under an agreement between the embassy and a Pathet Lao-instigated protest group of Laotian employees under which all aid activities must end June 30 and American aid officials leave Laos.

The agreement was signed under duress, after protesters and students had occupied the compound and held four Marine guards hostage. One of the remaining Americans said ruefully that he hoped they would be allowed to take out their three American flags because all property is being claimed in the name of the Laotian people.

Pathet Lao and student guards unsmilingly search cars leaving the compound on suspicion of smuggling out commissary supplies, office equipment

or files, the windowless buildings, including those of the defense attache, are scrawled over with English inscriptions featuring the words "God-damn" and C.I.A."

This afternoon, Michael A. Royal, an American employe, was prevented at Vientiane airport from leaving Laos. Authorities said his work was not finished. The embassy said almost all employes had been paid and those remaining would be paid. It has protested against the action.

## U.S. Furniture Seized

A number of Pathet Lao soldiers milled about the main gate to Kilometer 6 and barred the entrance. A student inside explained that the former American suburb had been turned into a Pathet Lao camp. He said the furniture and refrigerators of the former tenants remained and would not be returned to them.

Today's daily bulletin of the government press agency, which now expresses the Pathet Lao view, announced that the provincial headquarters of the Pathet Lao forces in Xieng Khouang had offered an evening of merrymaking to more than 60 Laotian air force officers and noncommissioned officers of the Long Tieng air base to mark their joining the Pathet Lao.

"The ceremony took place in an atmosphere of extreme cordiality," the bulletin remarked.

The reported defection went beyond the usual items of military unrest in the bulletin. Normally, officers and men of the

Laotian armed forces are reported to limit their "uprisings" to demanding and obtaining the removal of "reactionary" commanders.

General Vang Pao and thousands of his followers of the Meo tribe fled from Long Tieng last month in planes, presumably American, and on foot. Yesterday, the general left Bagkok for asylum in the United States.

## 1,200 Down to 75

About 75 Americans remain in official jobs in Laos, where there were about 1,200 officials, their dependents and many others until fighting ended in 1973. Their principal occupation these days is packing their own effects and those of colleagues who have already left.

The embassy parking areas look like used car lots, but in the present mood of Laos, there are few buyers.

The defense attache, Brig. Gen. Roswell E. Round Jr., now has a staff of four officers. They have been told by the Defense Ministry that they must have special permission for visits to any military installation. Permissions have requested. None has been granted.

Until 1973, officers of the Laotian army who were interested in the course of the war, could turn to more than 200 American attaches, whose sources of information were far better than those of the Laotian General Staff.

A new American Ambassador, Galen L. Stone, has just been confirmed by the Senate. The betting here is even on whether Mr. Stone will ever see Laos.