

# What the CIA Is Doing In South Laos Provinces

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## Pakse, Laos

It has become apparent that the Central Intelligence Agency is taking advantage of its traditionally close relationship with right-wing Prince Boun Oum, the modern-day feudal lord of Southern Laos, to carry on clandestine operations in that part of the kingdom.

The Champassak family which Boun Oum heads, and not the Souvanna Phouma government in Vientiane, wields power in the southern provinces, and the Prince is more than happy to accommodate the CIA's needs. In return for the freedom to carry on their activities, the CIA is paying Boun Oum a regular compensation of unknown size.

As part of the arrangement the CIA chartered airline, Air America, several years ago donated a small fleet of aircraft, including both Dakotas and helicopters, to the Prince, according to authoritative sources here. The CIA has used the planes in Southern Laos under the cover of the name "Boun Oum Airlines." In return Boun Oum has received a substantial income for "leasing" the aircraft to Air America.

## FLIGHTS

The aircraft have been used primarily to fly from Pakse and other towns in Southern Laos to the training bases in the region, according to these sources. Late last year it was revealed that one of the CIA operations in Southern Laos is the training of 1500 Cambodian soldiers, in order to evade Congressional restrictions on United States operations in Cambodia.

Boun Oum is indebted to both France and the United States for support in his past bids for national power in the foreign-manipulated politics of Laos. The French named him vice regent of the kingdom in 1947, making him the second-ranking figure behind the king. In 1948, he formed a government with French support and signed an agreement with France in 1949 preserving a predominant French role in Laos.

## New Pre-Trial Hearings For Medina

Ft. PMcPherson, Ga.

The initial pre-trial hearing in another of a series of preliminary hearings for Captain Ernest L. Medina will be May 24, the Army announced yesterday.

Medina, who was Lieutenant William L. Calley Jr.'s commanding officer at My Lai during the 1968 Americal Division raid on the village, is charged with premeditated murder of 102 unidentified Vietnamese and assault with a dangerous weapon.

The pre-trial hearings are held under provisions of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. They are necessary before any recommendation can be made as to whether Medina will be tried.

Several hearings for Medina were held last year after he was charged in the spring, but the Army asked for new hearings to examine certain unspecified new evidence.

Associated Press

In 1960, the United States through the CIA, supported the right-wing army of General Nosavan based in Southern Laos which marched north and drove the neutralist government from Vientiane. Boun Oum was named prime minister of the new pro-U.S. government, which then received U.S. arms and advisers in its civil war against neutralist and Pathet Lao forces.

## FAILURE

After the Geneva settlement of 1962, which followed

the Prince. Even the chief of the veterinary service for the province is married to one of his nieces.

National Assembly deputies for Southern Laos are hand-picked by Boun Oum and include both family members and wealthy businessmen who enjoy the family's patronage. Sedone province is typical: the four-man delegation is led by Boun Oum's brother, who was once vice president of the Assembly, and includes two of the richest businessmen in Laos.

## PROFITS

Although Boun Oum's power has not been based on a commercial empire, it has facilitated his accumulation of substantial commercial interests, apart from his airline and the profits from buildings rented to Americans in Vientiane. These include cement and pig iron factories in Thakkek, a tin mine which accounts for perhaps one fourth of the country's total production, saw mills in Sedone and Savannakhet, and substantial forests and agricultural land.

No one claims to know how wealthy Boun Oum is, but these commercial ventures constitute only a part of his income, which also includes tribute from the many officials who owe their jobs to his sponsorship, as well as income from his relationship with the Americans.

The most spectacular symbol of Boun Oum's dynasty in Southern Laos is the enormous palace now being constructed in Pakse, at a cost estimated by one of his assistants at \$800,000,000. The palace, a blend of Lao and French colonial architecture, was begun two years ago and is not expected to be completed for two more years.

Dispatch News International

the failure of Boun Oum's right-wing forces to defeat the neutralist Pathet-Lao allies, he had to settle for a vice premiership and the title of "inspector general of the kingdom." Nevertheless Boun Oum's close links with the CIA have remained intact, as has his tight control over Southern Laos.

Military leadership in Southern Laos, for example, is a Champassak family prerogative, which is shared only partially with the powerful Insisiengmay family to which Boun Oum is linked through his wife. Generals in both third and fourth military regions are related to the Champassaks by marriage, as is the deputy commander for the third region.

The civil government in Southern Laos is also essentially a family affair. Province governments are laced with officials related to Boun Oum either directly or through marriage. For example, the governor of Sedone province, centered in Pakse, is a half-brother of