

Refugees Tell of U.S. Bombing Laos

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Jack Anderson

REFUGEES too inarticulate, too simple to repeat the same lie, have sworn to this column that U.S. fighter-bombers have conducted systematic raids on villages in Laos, killing defenseless civilians, many of them children.

The stark simplicity of the refugees' stories, as told to my reporter Les Whitten, belies official testimony.

Bluff, blunt William Sullivan, a former Ambassador to Laos, now an Assistant Secretary of State, recently assured Senators that not only the Lao government but the U.S. Ambassador had to approve the targets before they were hit. He was supported by Colonel Robert Tyrrell, the Air Force Attache in Laos, who testified: "Villages even in the free drop zone would be restricted from bombing."

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WHITTEN asked Sullivan's successor, Ambassador G. McMurtrie Godley, whether villages had been bombed. "The answer is negative," said Godley. If any villages had been hit, he added after Whitten recounted the refugees' stories, it was "infrequent" and "accidental."

Whitten used all the skill of a veteran investigative reporter to trip up any refugees who might have been lying. But there was no mistaking the honest pain in their faces as they told how U.S. bombs, napalm and rockets had been dumped upon their villages.

They also attested that no Pathet Lao or North Vietnamese had been in their villages except in transit to buy at the market or to make brief propoganda speeches. Of several refugees interviewed by Whitten, only one had heard of a Pathet Lao soldier ever being injured in the raids. And this was merely a rumor.

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TYPICAL was the report of a 25-year-old refugee from Phong Savan, 150 miles from the Ho Chi Minh infiltration routes. There were no military facilities in his village, he said, "only a police station and a cooperative store that sold things. There were no Pathet Lao, no soldiers living there, only people.

"After 1964, many planes came. They dropped big bombs and napalm, ball-bearing bombs and rockets and . . ." he paused and said "ah-ah-ah-ah-ah" to indicate strafing.

"We had 100 houses in Phong Savan. By 1969, our houses were lost, only some posts standing out of the ground. We had 700 or 800 people in Phong Savan. Maybe 20 were killed and many injured.

"In June of 1968, my brother was killed. He was helping my father (a farmer) when the planes came at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. He was 19, but he did not get to the hole. There were chest wounds, and he died at three the next day. After that, my father cried all the time."