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Laotian Says Key Base Imperiled by Desertions

VIENTIANE, Laos, Feb. 7 (UPI) — Desertions and the absence of the commanding general from his headquarters at Long Tieng have caused a serious deterioration in the defense of north-eastern Laos, a Laotian Government official said today.

North Vietnamese troops, he said, have virtually surrounded Long Tieng and appear to be preparing a major attack against the base. It serves both as headquarters for the army of Meo tribesmen led by Gen. Vang Pao and as a communications center for the United States Central Intelligence Agency.

The official, who asked not be named, said about half of the Meo civilians and many of the general's soldiers have fled the big base, 95 miles north of Vientiane, in the last several days. He said that the general has been in Bangkok, Thailand, since the middle of last week, reportedly seeking medical treatment for one of his wives.