

LAOS LEFTIST SAYS HE HEADS FORCES

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Rightist Generals Reported Fleeing as Pro-Communist Orders Planes Grounded NYTimes

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VIENTIANE, Laos, May 12—

A pro-Communist general announced today that he had become the new Defense Minister of Laos. He issued orders grounding the air force and forbidding all movement of troops or military equipment.

Gen. Khamouan Boupha, who had been the Deputy Defense Minister, was named late last night by the Premier, Prince Souvanna Phouma, "to take charge of the national armed forces throughout the kingdom."

The statement stopped short, however, of actually appointing the general as Defense Minister to replace Sisouk Na Champassak, the right-wing official who resigned on Friday and is now understood to have fled the country.

Flight of Generals Reported

Both the Pathet Lao and the right-wing element that formed the coalition Government a year ago had their own armed forces. But, according to Western military observers, the rightist forces have largely disintegrated in the last several days, and four or five key generals have left the country.

Others reportedly fled during the day as it became increasingly clear that the Pathet Lao would soon be running the country in fact, if not in name.

In the wake of Gen. Khamouan Boupha's statements, made in broadcasts, several

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key units that had been under the command of the right-wing faction, made it clear that they would be at least sympathetic to the Pathet Lao leadership. These units announced that they had declared their independence of the so-called Vientiane command and that they would only obey orders from the Premier.

Premier Asks Loyalty

With Vientiane swept by rumors, Prince Souvanna Phouma went on the radio at noon to appeal for "loyalty and cooperation." He asked those whom he termed "opportunists" to support the present Government.

Earlier in the day, an aide to the Premier, on being asked as he emerged from the Presidential Palace with Gen. Khamouan Boupha had yet been named Defense Minister, replied, "No."

He then paused, and added: "Not yet."

Within half an hour of the Premier's broadcast, the general made this statement over the radio:

"Upon the resignation of Sisouk, I have been appointed."

One Western military attaché reported that late last week, as

the most powerful right-wing ministers resigned from the coalition, a group of generals claiming to represent the bulk of the 40 or so right-wing general officers told the Premier that they, too, were prepared to resign whenever he wanted them to.

The Premier was said to have replied only, "Thank you."

Embassies Show Concern

With the gain in Pathet Lao influence, the Australian Embassy disclosed that it was beginning to send its dependents out of the country.

American Embassy sources said the embassy had received detailed evacuation-procedure instructions from Washington and had begun to eliminate nonessential documents from its files. There are now about 1,100 Americans in Laos, including 330 embassy staff officials and 490 dependents.

The coalition Government, which until now has been made up equally of right-wing Vientiane Government and Communist-led Pathet Lao members, and headed by the neutralist Souvanna Phouma, is now 13 months old and has weathered several previous crises.

But the recent Communist take-overs in neighboring Cam-

bodia and South Vietnam have had a powerful effect here.

Through it all, the quality of life for some in Vientiane has undergone few major changes. The French community and visiting diplomats and journalists still sun themselves at lunchtime around the pool-veranda of the Lane Xang Hotel.

Inflation has skyrocketed, however. Some estimates have the cost of living rising in the last month as much as 50 to 55 per cent.

Many of the leading Chinese and Vietnamese merchants and their families, however, have fled the capital. "There is a new fear here," said a Frenchman, who has spent nearly his entire life here. "But," he added, "it is a fear of change in this country which never changes, and of course the fear of the unknown."

General Reported in Thailand

BANGKOK, Thailand, May 12 (AP) — Gen. Vang Pao, who headed the private army of Meo tribesmen trained and financed by the United States Central Intelligence Agency to fight for the Souvanna Phouma Government in the Laotian war, has fled to Thailand, Pre-

mier Kukrit Pramoj told newsmen today.

The Premier said the general, who resigned his command of the Royal Laotian Army's Region II last week as the Pathet Lao moved into the dominant position in the Government, crossed the Mekong River into Thailand with his family and a dozen military aides on Friday.

He and his men were disarmed and have been restricted to Udorn Province, in northeast Thailand south of Vientiane, the Premier said. The Thai Government has said that it will not grant asylum to any political refugees from Laos, Cambodia or Vietnam because it wants good relations with new governments in neighboring countries.

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