

# 12 Americans Freed in Laos, More Leaving

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VIENTIANE, May 22—Twelve U.S. Agency for International Development personnel and dependents, held by pro-Communist students for more than a week in the southern Laos town of Savannakhet, were released to-night and flown to Thailand along with other Americans and foreigners, a U.S. embassy spokesman announced.

The spokesman also said that the first of "hundreds" of AID personnel and their dependents to be evacuated from Vientiane would leave here Friday.

The agency's headquarters compound here is being occupied by anti-American demonstrators who demand that AID be removed from Laos. Two U.S. Marine guards and a civilian contractor have been inside the compound since it was seized.

According to the spokesman, the Laotian government notified the embassy earlier today that it will renegotiate the 1951 agreement on U.S. economic assistance to Laos. Under the terms of the agreement, reached when Laos was still a French dependency, 90 days' notice is required for either party to cancel the agreement.

The evacuation of AID people from Savannakhet marked the closure of the agency's last office outside the capital. The main office in Vientiane is technically open, although it was seized by several hundred leftist students and other demonstrators yesterday morning.

Two C-47 transport planes attached to the embassy's defense attache office flew to Savannakhet this evening and took 18 Americans, including the AID staff members, and a number of Japanese, British and European nationals to the U.S. air base at Udorn, in neighboring Thailand.

The release of the AID per-

sonnel, who had been held under loose house arrest since May 14, was arranged by members of a Laotian negotiating team. The team comprised members of the Communist Pathet Lao and the rapidly fading rightist element of the country's coalition government.

The embassy spokesman said the evacuees were allowed to take only hand baggage, but added that the Laotian authorities might permit their other possessions to be packed and shipped out of the country.

The "super-accelerated reduction" of AID personnel and their dependents from Vientiane, the spokesman said, is to begin Friday morning aboard a Caravelle jet chartered from Royal Air Laos.

It was not known how many persons would be aboard, as only those with passports would be allowed out of the country.

"A number of AID people have their passports in the AID compound and they cannot get to them," a spokesman explained to correspondents at the Lane Xang, Vientiane's main tourist hotel.

It was expected, however, that about 80 passengers would be on the first flight. "In the next month or so," the spokesman said, "hundreds of AID people will leave." The agency is reported to have 170 officials here. With dependents, they total 500 people.

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In addition, there are about 300 to 400 employees and their families attached to the embassy, the U.S. Information Service and the defense attache's office. Although there are not said to be any plans to reduce the size of the embassy and USIS staffs yet, the spokesman said, the 30 military personnel in the attache's office are to be cut back sharply.

"Their sole purpose is to administer the distribution of military aid, and they obviously won't all be needed any more," the spokesman said. U.S. military aid to the rightist side of the coalition government is presently set at \$30 million a year.

With the Communist Pathet Lao on the verge of taking full control of the coalition, the role of the right-wing military forces will soon be eliminated.

So far, both the Pathet Lao and neutralist Premier Souvanna Phouma insist that the coalition must be maintained at any cost. But by now it has become clear that it will be a coalition in name only, with the Communist side ceding at most a nominal role to the rightists.

What the U.S. role will be in this sort of government is not yet known. Negotiations on the future of AID are expected to clarify this.

What the Pathet Lao appear to have in mind is the continuation of U.S. economic aid and possibly even military assistance, but channeled directly from the U.S. government to the coalition. U.S. AID has long been synonymous among leftists in Laos with the Central Intelligence Agency, which for years ran the "secret" part of the anti-Communist war here.

However, whether the United States will be willing, or is able, to provide assistance without AID supervision seemed doubtful.

Asked whether all AID personnel in Vientiane would eventually be evacuated, the embassy spokesman said, "That depends on the outcome of the negotiations. If aid is going to continue, there will have to be at least some supervision."