



Laotian Warlord Grows Rich at U.S. Expense

WASHINGTON—

General Kouprasith Abhay, the Laotian warlord who controls the capital city of Vientiane, has become a millionaire by using American-armed troops to protect his logging operations.

The teak he cuts is delivered across the Mekong River to Thailand where it is sold for huge profits to the United States military establishment. He has supplemented his income, too, by supplying prostitutes at a U.S.-financed construction project.

His enterprise is dismayingly typical of the success stories of foreign satraps who have grown rich off U.S. aid.

The titillating details are told in a confidential field report to the Agency for International Development, which dispenses U.S. aid and provides a front for the Central Intelligence Agency in Laos. The facts have also been confirmed by my associate Les Whitten, who conducted an on-the-spot investigation in Vientiane.

The wily warlord, whose control of Vientiane makes him the real power behind Premier Souvanna Phouma, got the timber rights by having the Laotian Assembly falsely declare the land "unused." Actually, the land is occupied by hundreds of Lao peasants, who farm the highland rice plots that nestle among the teak forests.

Abhay's Private Army

General Abhay uses his soldiers not to fight the Communist Pathet Lao but to keep them out of his forests. His troops also cow the Lao peasants who had gone there ahead of him to cultivate rice. Those who object to his logging operations, conducted in the name of the Lao Timber Society, are driven off.

For in placid Laos, the man with the gun is the law—and Kouprasith Abhay has the guns, largely supplied, of course, by the U.S. for the purpose of fighting the Pathet Lao.

The general has tried delicately to keep his prostitution business quiet. But the AID field report alleges that he dispatched a dozen prostitutes to bring a little night life to Nam Ngum, 60 miles north of Vientiane, where the U.S. is helping to build a \$3 million dam.

The construction has brought a huge influx of workers, who provide the customers for Abhay's ladies of the night. To AID's horror, the ladies were housed in quarters next to AID's own leadership training building. When AID protested to Abhay's colonel-on-the-scene, he merely shrugged and disclaimed any connection with the women.

No Gab for Colonel

AID retaliated by cutting off the colonel's gasoline supplies, thus reducing his troops to riding bicycles. Rather than give up his own staff car for an undignified two-wheeler, the colonel capitulated. Still insisting that the women were beyond his jurisdiction, he ordered soldiers to tear down the offending house.

They promptly rebuilt it in another part of the village, and the construction men began coming down with venereal disease. Ab-

senteeism also increased sharply.

AID sent for penicillin and, with the cooperation of the Japanese contractors building the dam, set up a clinic. AID proposed to the colonel that the prostitutes be issued identification passes and be treated regularly.

To do so would have been a confession that prostitution was practiced in General Abhay's military domain. This would have offended the general's sensibilities and jeopardized the colonel's career. He flatly refused.

The disease finally became so rampant that the girls were chased away—still infected—to spread the disease throughout the country.