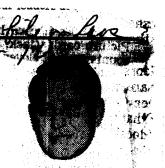
The 'Hidden War' Devastating Laos



T AN ALL-DAY session so secret that no transcript was kept, Ambassador McMurtire Godley told the Senate Forgin Relations Committee last week that could foresee no end to the "hidden r" in Laos.

This remote Buddhist kingdom has a devastated by a war no one wants to hition. Any acknowledgment would be a clomatic embarrassment to Washington, scow and Hanoi alike, all bound by a 32 Geneva Pact to uphold Laotian neuality.

Yet Godley reported behind closed ors that the fighting already has made ugees of 700,000 luckless Laotians.

He also admitted that the U.S. is fincing this unpublicized, unhappy war to tune of \$500 million a year. An agreed Senator Frank Church (Demaho) pointed out that the cost of deuction in Laos was close to \$500 per pita — five times the \$90 per capita inme that the people live on.

* * *

HE HEARING opened with a 30-minute hassle over the secrecy rections. Chairman William Fulbright m.-Ark.) and Senator Stuart Syming-(Dem.-Mo.) protested vigorously. This ld set a precedent, they contended, would erode the committee's right to stion U.S. officials.

co-overvore styrn to secrecy,

paying almost all the bills, military and civil alike, in Laos. Between \$25 millions and \$35 million, he said, goes to support the Royal Lao Government. This helps to cover even the palace expenses of King Savang Vatthana.

Jack Anderson

The huge American military investment gives Godley the right, he explained, to veto any military operations.

Senator Church recalled an amendment he and Senator John Cooper (Rep.-Ky.) had pushed through Congress last year; barring the use of American ground troops in Laos. He asked Godley whether the amendment had been violated.

The Ambassador replied that no ground troops had been introduced.

TULBRIGHT asked for the number of refugees the war had "generated" it Laos and got the 700,000 figure out & Godley. When Senators expressed their shock, the Ambassador said he regretted the heavy suffering of the Laotian people, but claimed this saved American lives it South Vietnam. It was "better," he said for the Laotians than the Americans take the "punishment."

Senators who listened all day to Godle said he was fired up with enthusiasm. On Senator described him as "exhilarated over the experience of running the war it Laos. Another called him a "backstag generalissimo"; still another said "frank and friend!"

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