

NY Times JAN 20 1972  
**C.I.A.-Aided Laos Base Hit Hard**

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Special to The New York Times

**LONG TIENG, Laos, Jan. 19**—The long-secret military base maintained here by the United States Central Intelligence Agency to help Laotian irregulars battle the North Vietnamese is badly damaged and has been put out of effective action by the Communists even though the Laotians have re-occupied most of a high ridge that commands it.

The United States and Laotian Governments lifted a 10-year veil of secrecy from the base and allowed a group of newsmen to charter a helicopter today to land on it and observe military operations.

Long Tieng came under heavy attack on Dec. 31 by a North Vietnamese force of 6,000 to 9,000 men.

The base consists of a mile-long paved runway, with re-loading facilities and stores of bombs for the small Laotian T-28 bombers, a complex of communications buildings at either end and a large cluster of villages that housed 30,000 civilians before the attack began and they fled. By Jan. 12 all this was in imminent danger of falling to the largest North Vietnamese attack ever launched against it.

By that time the C.I.A. and the Laotians had moved most of their electronic and recon-

naissance equipment from the base.

Since then, however, a force of about 6,000 Laotians has re-taken most of a key position on what is known as Skyline Ridge, overlooking the base from the north. Included in the force are perhaps 2,000 of the Meo tribesmen for whose clandestine operations the base was originally built and 1,000 Thai "volunteers," in addition to regular Laotian troops.

Despite the advance atop the ridge, the helicopter that carried reporters and some United States officials to the central part of it came under mortar

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**Official Explains Change**

A ranking American official, asked to explain why reporters were suddenly given a guided tour, replied: "This is a North Vietnamese invasion of Laos, and there's no point in keeping you people from seeing it for yourselves. This year they've brought in a lot more troops, heavier equipment, and showed more determination than they ever have before—for what political objective I just don't know."

Both the Americans and the Laotians here—the Laotians have made the defense of the spectacularly beautiful mountain valley their primary effort by bringing troops from all over the country—expect the North Vietnamese drive to intensify.

In the steep, trackless jungled hills to the north the North Vietnamese are believed to have moved 6,000 to 9,000 first-line combat troops across the Plaine des Jarres. They have used powerful artillery with a 20-mile range to commanding advantage.

**Usable but Cluttered**

The attacks have halted in the past two days, but fear of them prevents the Air America planes from landing on the airstrip, which is still usable but cluttered with ordinance for the T-28's, which now operate from Vientiane.

Some of them were dropping cluster bombs—antipersonnel devices that break into small bomblets and explode like fire-crackers—on remaining Communist positions at the southern end of the valley.

The North Vietnamese have also been harassing the Laotian forces that have been driving them out of bunkers on the ridge by firing mortars at them, mostly at night.

Two mortar rounds aimed at a helicopter landing position wounded three Laotian soldiers; 28 have been killed and almost 70 wounded in the action there this week.

One of the wounded was a boy who was struck in the head by a piece of shrapnel. He said he was 14 years old but was part of the regular Laotian armed forces. He was flown out in a helicopter.

A sergeant dug in. "No sleep much at night," he said.

**C.I.A.-AIDED BASE  
IN LAOS HIT HARD**

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attack from North Vietnamese troops only a mile away. Sporadic sniper fire ricocheted in the deserted streets of Long Tieng and made it unsafe for planes to land there.

High-ranking American officials, who acceded to requests for the visit to the base on condition that they not be identified, said the Laotians had suffered at least 600 killed,



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wounded or missing in the continuing conflict around the base.

Maj. Gen. Vang Pao, commander of the military region and of the Meos in the C.I.A.-supported irregular forces, was ebullient today as he was calling in American and Laotian air strikes on North Vietnamese positions on the craggy limestone pinnacles that dominate the eastern end of the base.

He quoted casualty statistics that appeared to be wildly optimistic—8,000 of the enemy killed—but he is usually either elated or despondent. American officials said they estimated that North Vietnamese casualties had been heavy and might have reached 600 to 700 killed in the current fighting, the heaviest in Indochina at the moment.

At the general's headquarters on a hill overlooking the south side of the Long Tieng complex, a handful of young Americans in civilian clothes were planning B-52 raids on the Communist positions around the base.

A visitor on a wide-ranging tour encountered no Americans in ground combat anywhere on or near the base. But the skies were filled with American planes—cargo aircraft dropping arms and food by parachute, and helicopters—all operated for the C.I.A. and the Laotians by the charter line Air America—plus occasional United States Air Force jet bombers from Thailand.