

FIGHTING GOES ON AFTER LAOS TRUCE

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Efforts to Start Organizing
Peace-Keeping Machinery
Have Yet to Be Reported
NYTimes

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Special to The New York Times

VIENTIANE, Laos, Friday, Feb. 23—A cease-fire officially took effect throughout Laos yesterday, but heavy fighting was still reported in many parts of the country, some of it near Vientiane itself.

During the day no progress was reported in even making a start at organizing peace-keeping machinery in this country, which has been at war for more than two decades.

Nevertheless, military sources reported that all Laotian irregular troops were placed under the command of the regular army after the cease-fire. The development was evidently related to plans for phasing out clandestine American military involvement here.

Many of these irregular units, considered by far the most effective in Laos, have for years been paid, supplied and commanded by officials of the American Central Intelligence Agency.

Yesterday morning the United States Air Force command and control aircraft that directs American air strikes over Laos left its station. Before flying off to Thailand, the pilot of the

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saying, "Good-by and see you next war."

But apart from the cessation of bombing, United States activities supporting the Vientiane Government were continuing normally.

As far as could be ascertained, there are no plans for withdrawing any Americans from Laos yet, particularly since there will be no obligation to do so until 60 days after a provisional government is formed. Even then only Central Intelligence Agency officers commanding troops and other paramilitary personnel would probably be involved.

Air America Still Busy

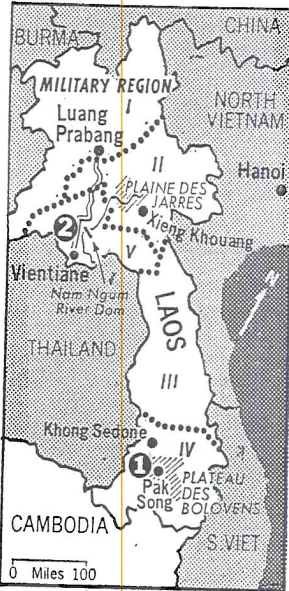
An official of Air America, the paramilitary commercial airline supporting the operations of the C.I.A. and other American activities here, said the line was working as hard as usual, with no immediate prospects that things would slow down. A warning has been issued to pilots, he said, that in view of the "fragile nature" of the cease-fire and the absence of supporting American combat planes, special precautions should be taken to avoid ground fire.

Yesterday the Government generals commanding the five military zones into which Laos is divided held an emergency meeting to discuss their anxieties about the accord signed Tuesday, and there were more military meetings yesterday afternoon to assess the situation.

One highly placed Western Diplomatic source said, "If the present fighting is being initiated and continues to be initiated by the Communists, it wouldn't surprise me to see the Americans resume bombing."

As reports from a variety of military sources trickled into the capital, it appeared that the heaviest fighting since the cease-fire was in the south, particularly near Pak Song at the edge of the Plaine des Bolovens, which has changed hands several times recently.

Heavy fighting was also reported only about 25 miles north of Vientiane for control of a road leading to the important Nam Ngum Dam, and Gov-



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Battles were reported at Pak Song (1) and north of Vientiane (2).

ernment troops were said to be facing strong opposition.

Another point of conflict in the south was said to be near Khong Sedone, a large town near the southwestern border with Thailand. Khong Sedone was captured briefly by Communist forces three months ago, but they have since been driven off.

In Xieng Khouang Province, most of which is held by the Communists, a battalion of irregular Government troops two miles south of the town of Xieng Khouang reportedly was overrun by two battalions of North Vietnamese troops. The Government position, at the village of Phu Kabo, was one of the few pockets of Government resistance left in the province.

Students Demonstrate

In Vientiane itself, about 100 high school students demonstrated briefly yesterday, shouting praise for the cease-fire and waving banners saying, "may this cease-fire be the last one." No signs or slogans were posted around the city, and only the usual number of Laotian flags were seen at Government buildings.

Elsewhere the red, white and blue flag of the communist-led Pathet Lao was being hoisted. Beginning at 6 A.M. yester-

day the big refugee camp at Hat Dua on Route 13 north of here was said to have displayed hundreds of Pathet Lao flags.

Some 10,000 refugees are said to be living in the area, some for as long as two years. They have been receiving some Government and American assistance, but one source familiar with the situation said: "We weren't too surprised by the Pathet Lao flags since most of those refugees have relatives with the Pathet Lao."

Pathet Lao Shows Flag

One purpose of the show of flags may have been to demonstrate the Pathet Lao presence on the west side of the Nam Ngum River. They already clearly control much of the area along the east bank.

During the last three months of negotiations, the Pathet Lao has repeatedly called the refugee sites concentration camps, and one section of the accord signed yesterday, reflecting this allegation, states that all refugees must be permitted to return to their homes.

Late yesterday the spokesman for the armed forces, Maj. Gen. Thongphanh Knoksy, said the Government would issue a declaration today condemning Communist violations that he alleged had taken place during the first 24 hours of the cease-fire. He declined to specify, but other army sources said the situation was serious.

Strict Observance Urged

An order of the day issued to the armed forces called for strict observance of the cease-fire and expressed the hope that the military casualties of many years of war had not been in vain. It warned that "a cease-fire is not peace" and called for vigilance "to keep our territory intact."

The Pathet Lao could not be reached for comment. In an interview, Maj. Gen. Bounthieng Venevongsos, who has been designated as the chief Government delegate to a mixed military subcommission, said his Pathet Lao counterpart had not been named yet.

He said he had had no contact with the Communists and was awaiting instructions from the mixed commission, which itself has yet to make its existence known.

The general expressed grave

misgivings about the prospects for peace.

"Everything now depends on the withdrawal of the North Vietnamese," he said. "The accord gives them 60 days to withdraw following creation of a provisional coalition Government, which is supposed to come into being in 30 days. But what if the negotiations to form a coalition government fail? The last time we negotiated for a provisional coalition government, in 1961, it took us six months to reach agreement. This time it could take years. Who knows?"

At another level in the peace-keeping machinery, the old International Control Commission awaited instructions from the Pathet Lao and the Government.

"Obviously, we can do nothing until the two sides decide what they want to do," said a commission member, "and in that respect, we have much less to work with than the commission in Vietnam, whose functions were fairly specifically defined by the Paris agreement. All we have is the remains of the 1962 Geneva accord, which is little more than ancient history."

Military Future in Question

A big question now is what will become of the Laotian military forces. There are some 74,000 men in the regular army and about 36,000 irregular and paramilitary troops. The latter include an estimated 6,000 Thai mercenaries paid and supplied by the United States.

In many areas the burden of war has fallen exclusively to the irregular units. This is particularly true of the Meo tribal units commanded by Maj. Gen. Vang Pao, operating deep in Communist territory and es-



Laotian students demonstrating in Vientiane yesterday with banners urging that the cease-fire be permanent

Associated Press

pecially around the Plane des Jarres. The Meo troops, among others, have been supplied from the main C.I.A. advance supply depot and airbase at Long Tieng in the northeast.

One reason for the effectiveness of the irregulars has been the discipline and training imposed by the American leadership. Another is the fact that they have received much higher pay than do the regulars. Finally, the Americans have largely eliminated the kind of corruption that is rampant in

regular army units, where commanders often siphon off funds from the troop payroll. The Americans have insisted on paying the irregulars personally and individually.

Threat to Effectiveness It is feared that the removal of American leadership in the fighting forces will seriously weaken their effectiveness. If the big base at Long Tieng is maintained, General Vang Pao presumably will remain in command. His forces, often operating as guerrillas, have at-

HONOLULU, Feb. 22 (UPI)—The United States command

U.S. Halts Bombing

tempted to harass and disrupt Communist occupation of the Plaines des Jarres and the surrounding mountains. Such guerrilla operations presumably could continue.

But in the last few weeks his irregulars have had to rely heavily on saturation bombing by B-52's and American tactical aircraft, which are no longer at their disposal.

DO NOT FORGET 'THE NEEDLEST'

There would be no American raids so long as the cease-fire remained in effect.