

HANOI MEN IN LAOS BEYOND DEADLINE

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Still on Hand but Hiding, in
Violation of Pact, Says
Defense Minister

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VIENTIANE, Laos, Tuesday, June 4—The deadline for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Laos passed today with a considerable number of North Vietnamese soldiers reported still in the country.

"They have withdrawn into the scenery but not back home," said the Defense Minister, Sisouk na Champassak, yesterday.

Political timetables have never been sacrosanct in Laos, but according to the cease-fire agreement signed on Feb. 21, 1973, "foreign military personnel" were obliged to leave the country "within a period of no longer than 60 days" after the formation of a coalition government.

The coalition, bringing together the Communist directed Pathet Lao, neutralists and rightists, was installed by King Savang Vatthana on April 4 at the royal capital of Luang Prabang.

The Defense Minister, a rightist in the coalition, said in an interview that "the exact figure" for the number of North Vietnamese troops in Laos was

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unknown, in part because some units had pulled back from relatively visible positions.

Generally, Western analysts are unable to agree on a firm figure for the North Vietnamese here, and offer estimates ranging from 30,000 to as many as 55,000.

Various reasons are given for the fluidity of the estimates: Tactical pullbacks by the North Vietnamese around the Plain of Jars and on the Plateau des Bolovens; the constant movement of men on the old Ho Chi Minh trail network, which is now a well-organized road system; the shuttling of troops in and out of the Central Highlands of South Vietnam and, finally, the paucity of hard intelligence information in peacetime.

17,500 at War's Peak

There is general agreement that North Vietnamese units brought in to face Vientiane Government forces have been thinned out and, at least in the front lines, replaced by Pathet Lao units. An American ana-

Air America to End Flights From Thailand by June 30

BANGKOK, Thailand, June 3 (AP) — Air America, an airline funded by the United States Central Intelligence Agency, will cease flying from Thailand by June 30, it was announced today.

Thai student groups yesterday called for official investigation of the airline, saying that it had not paid \$2-million in taxes it owed the Government. Air America officials replied that they had not violated Thai law.

The airline carried United States Government personnel and a number of international organizations working in Indochina. The American and Thai governments announced jointly that some of the aircraft maintenance services done by Air America at the Udon airbase in northern Thailand would be turned over to Thai Airways Aircraft Maintenance Company, Ltd., which is American and Thai-owned.

lyst said that at the height of the war, while 17,500 North Vietnamese troops confronted Government units, now they are down to 5,000 to 9,000.

Laos was always important to Hanoi for the prosecution of the war in South Vietnam. But even in the southern panhandle of Laos, North Vietnamese troops have done most of the fighting and occupying of territory. On a strip of Route 13, for example, south of Pak-sane, the North Vietnamese hold Laotian territory on the Mekong River border with Thailand.

In addition to the North Vietnamese an uncertain number of Chinese soldiers and workers reportedly remain in northwestern Laos, stretched out along a road network that descends from Yunnan Province to Pak Benz just north of the Thai border. The estimates for the Chinese vary from as few as 3,000 to as many as 30,000 but most analysts believe that with the road system nearing completion, the Chinese are scaling down their number as well as their anti-aircraft defenses.

Presences Unacknowledged

The Chinese have never acknowledged their presence in Laos. Officially, the North Vietnamese deny that they have troops in the country. However, individual Pathet Lao leaders have on occasion differentiated between "friendly" and "unfriendly" foreign troops.

North Vietnam is not mentioned by name as a foreign power in the cease-fire agreement, which was originally drafted by the Pathet Lao. But the United States and Thailand are.

American and Thai spokesmen say that the last Thai mercenaries were withdrawn on May 22. The Thai irregulars—who in 1972 numbered 21,400—were officially called "volunteers" and were supported by the United States Cen-

tral Intelligence Agency at a cost of \$100-million a year.

Sot Petrasay, the Pathet Lao Minister of Economy and co-chairman of the Commission to Oversee the Peace, said at a recent reception that a number of Thai and American paramilitary personnel had simply been "camouflaged" and not withdrawn.

American officials here react with a mixture of weariness and indignation at such charges—"really too tiresome," said a ranking official—as they say that they feel they have adhered strictly to the provisions of the agreement.

However, American planes are still believed to be flying reconnaissance missions over Laos in violation of the accord, which bans "espionage by air and ground means." American spokesmen reply with "no comment" to questions asked about such flights, though Americans in Thailand acknowledged earlier this year that reconnaissance flights were being flown over Laos from the Udon base.

Officially, the embassy here says that the number of Americans has been reduced from 1,100 at the cease-fire to 472 now. That figure includes 37 contractors, a 30-man Defense Attaché's office and 19 Marine guards. Air America, the fabled C.I.A.-subsidized airline, has pulled out of Laos, as have the paramilitary C.I.A. advisers in the agency who masterminded the "secret war," according to the embassy.

Civilian Pilot Still Held

The Americans are particularly unhappy that the Pathet Lao has not yet released Emmet James Kay, an American civilian pilot for Continental Air Services, whose plane crash-landed in northwestern Laos on May 7, 1973.

Mr. Kay, who is reportedly being treated well in the Pathet

Lao headquarters town of Sam Neua, is the only American known to be held by the Pathet Lao, though some 1,100 pilots and others are officially counted as "missing in action" over Laos.

The cease-fire agreement calls for the return of "all persons regardless of nationality that were captured during the war" within 60 days after the formation of the coalition government.

Mr. Sot Petrasay said that Mr. Kay was "a special case" since he was captured after the cease-fire and thus, technically, not "during the war." "It is a question to study," he said. "But we are not going to keep him forever."