Indochina War Refugee Movements in Laos, 1954–1975: A Chronological Overview Citing New Primary Sources

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Abstract

This paper outlines the history of the relief and resettlement assistance program established by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to assist civilians displaced during the Second Indochina War in Laos. Many of the primary source materials cited in this paper can be found in a digitized collection of reports and documents that was recently made available in the University of Wisconsin's Southeast Asian Images & Texts (SEAiT) digital collection.

A fundamentally humanitarian undertaking, the USAID refugee program ultimately became a significant part of a larger, integrated political-military engagement, in which the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) played a significant role. The objective of this paper is to summarize the complexities of the USAID refugee program as it developed from January 1955, when the American embassy was opened in Vientiane, until the Second Indochina War came to an end and USAID was evicted from Laos in June 1975, the year in which the Lao Democratic People's Republic (Lao PDR) was established.

Viewed in historical and geographical contexts, population shifts within the hinterlands of Laos, which peaked during the war, continue into the present post-conflict period. This has been due in part to more recent interactions and struggles prompted by "political memories" of the Second Indochina War alignments, which have led, to an extent, to post-1975, anti-Lao PDR insurgencies and land (re)allocations that address security concerns and accommodate both foreign land-based investments and cross-border migrations.

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Introduction

Landlocked Laos has historically been a buffer zone surrounded by China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Burma, with much of the perimeter being mountainous terrain inhabited by a "heterogeneous population [which] reflects [the country's] position on an ethnic watershed" (Halpern and Kunstadter 1990: 1). Geographically similar in size to the US state of Utah, the country's four main linguistic families are Tai-Kadai, Hmong-Iu Mien, Mon-Khmer and Tibetan-Burma, within which there are 47 official ethnolinguistic groups (Goudineau 2003: 14). During the course of history there were frequent struggles between confrontational Siam, Annam and China to control the Lao hinterlands bordered by Tai domains, which fell under a system of "multiple tributes" and which maintained their semi-autonomous existence long before the arrival of the colonial French in the latter part of the 19th century (Brocheux and Hemery 2011: 64).

During the 19th century, various ethnic groups (especially Hmong-Iu Mien and Tibetan-Burma language speakers) migrated from southern China to escape domination that threatened their cultural independence and freedom. There was also an increase in borderland confrontations—for example, the rebellious Chinese Haw and Black Flags who thrived on pillage and extortion—that led to significant population shifts (mostly involuntary) from neighboring domains into the sparsely inhabited highlands of northern Laos (Grabowsky and Wichasin 2008: 5; Lee 1982: 199).

Many of these displaced people who relocated throughout Laos brought with them "a heritage of defeat," following failed revolts to preserve their autonomy from expanding neighboring entities (Scott 2009: 23). Furthermore, as Annamese control over its sphere of influence in northeastern Laos weakened, thousands of Tai Phouan people (possibly three-quarters of the Tai population) were deported from the plateau of northeastern Laos (Plain of Jars) into northeastern Thailand by aggressive Siam seeking to fill the geographical vacuum (Smuckarn and Breazeale 1988: 3).

Most of the highland minorities in Laos relied on shifting agriculture and relocated every few decades, never residing for long in static communities. With an estimated population in 1960 of approximately 1.9 million (about half of whom were from minority ethnic groups), Laos remained a sparsely populated country with a density of about 7.3 people per square kilometer. As of 1959, the average village population for an estimated 10,000 villages in Laos was in the range of 190 people (Halpern 1961: 4, 8, 10).

Laos owes its present boundary alignments to the French (notably Auguste Pavie), who effectively unified the royal principality of Luang Prabang and the ancient states of Vientiane, Xieng Khouang (annexed by Annam in 1832) and Champassak (Bassac), as well as segments of the northern borderland Tai principalities of Chiang Khaeng, the confederations of Sipsong Panna and Sipsong Chau Tai, and Siam-occupied territories along the Mekong River (Brocheux and Hemery 2011: 64). However, the distribution of the country's ethnic groups did not correspond to defined international boundaries, and the dispersed minorities were never successfully integrated, effectively remaining stateless. Both during and after the French colonial period, non-Lao "rebellions exploded when [external forces] threatened the internal equilibrium of the

highland societies, and their traditional systems of relationships…" (Brocheux and Hemery 2011: 284).

The politically dominant ethnic group in Laos, the Lao, primarily populated valleys formed by the Mekong River and its tributaries. The 'uncontrolled' highlands served as buffer zones for the lowlanders, who were established in the valleys. For the lowland people, the mountains were recognized as effective barriers to large-scale movements of population except when the area was under warfare pressure, as it was during the Second Indochina War (also referred to as the Vietnam War) (Solomon 1969: 16-17).

The First Indochina War, which, like its successor, encompassed the colonial states of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, ended with the 1954 defeat of Indochina's French colonialists by the Viet Minh.[2] While the French were often viewed as protectors of the Lao from the incursions by neighboring countries, the political vacuum they left behind led to internal and regional political rivalries, and ultimately to a Cold War-era confrontation known as the "Secret War." The ensuing conflict pitted communist North Vietnamese forces (who sought to gain control over South Vietnam and assert their influence over Laos) against the military might of the United States and its Thai allies (who sought to stop Communist aggression and assert their influence regionally) in the context of a domestic civil war waged locally in Laos between the western-backed Royal Lao Government (RLG) and the communist Neo Lao Hak Xat (NLHX).[3]

Caught in between were the tribal minorities scattered along the borderlands, who chose to take up arms (with opposing factions receiving support from either the United States and Thailand or the North Vietnamese and China) to protect their space, and when overrun, fight to recover it. Because Laos was thinly populated, each conflicting side was able to maintain mostly ethnic guerrilla bases behind enemy lines. Geographical control was nebulous insofar as battlefields comprised vast areas of no-man's-land, where any platoon that marched through could claim control (Langer and Zasloff 1970: 1-2).

From 1954 onward, gradually escalating conflicts led to the displacement of nearly 25 percent of the population of Laos, the largest cohort of which were highland minorities caught in the middle of battlegrounds that served as buffer zones between Thailand on the one hand, and China and Vietnam, on the other. As the buffer zones deteriorated, the burden of the war shifted toward lowland Laos, situated in the valleys of the Mekong watershed.

To date, little has been written about the plight of civilians displaced by the Second Indochina War. The objective of this essay is to provide readers with a brief chronological overview of key events that led to the uprooting of at least one quarter of the country's population (estimated to be 3.2 million by the early 1970s), the

[2] The League for the Independence of Vietnam, or Viet Minh, was set up by the Indochinese Communist Party to serve as a broad front organization for the communist-directed independence and reform movement in Vietnam (Stuart-Fox and Kooyman 1992: 164)

[3] The organization formed in January 1956 to act as the broad political front of the Pathet Lao (PL), the latter being a political designation applied to the anti-French guerrilla movement allied to the Viet Minh, and to the Lao Communist movement in general (Stuart-Fox and Kooyman 1992: 75, 103).

circumstances of their displacement, and the relief and resettlement programs launched to assist them by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)[4] in conjunction with the Royal Lao Government's Ministry of Social Welfare. A common goal was to provide "at best a temporary solution to the problems of [in particular] the displaced minority and tribal populations" (Halpern 1990: 20). In some areas of Laos, especially the mountainous homelands of ethnic minorities, the USAID refugee relief program that evolved during the course of the war was, in fact, a very significant part of a larger integrated political-military war effort.

Much of the primary source material cited in this essay can be found in the University of Wisconsin-Madison Southeast Asian Images and Texts (SEAiT) digital collection entitled "Indochina War Refugees in Laos, 1954-1975," which has digitized and made accessible more than 2,500 relevant primary-source documents and reports.[5] It is hoped that this paper will serve as a platform for further research into other aspects of the impact of the Second Indochina War on the population of Laos—especially ethnic minorities—well into the present post-conflict period. A historical pattern of population shifts continues, both within Laos and cross-borders (albeit to a lesser degree than during wartime), land allocation matters continue to be prominent issues, and the country continues to be geographically situated between competing economic and political powers that have long sought to expand their respective spheres of influence (presently by peaceful means) over the hinterlands of Laos.

The Demise of French Indochina

Prior to the May 1954 fall of Dien Bien Phu,[6] which marked the end of the First Indochina War, the Viet Minh launched a two-pronged invasion of northern Laos in April 1953, an action "important to its claim to power." The Vietnamese "presence in Laos [was] of crucial importance in maintaining and consolidating the Pathet Lao's control over large areas of Laos" (Langer and Zasloff 1968: 4). One prong was directed toward Houaphanh (also known as Sam Neua) and Xieng Khouang Provinces, and the other prong penetrated Laos from Dien Bien Phu and moved down the Nam Ou valley, where both prongs converged within striking distance of the royal capital, Luang Prabang. Later, in December 1953, a second threat materialized in central Laos where the Viet Minh briefly occupied Thakhek.

Following French counterattacks, the Viet Minh withdrew to the hills of southern Laos, where they made a special effort to gain the support of borderland mountain tribes (Dommen 1964: 40–42; Toye 1968: 89). The victims left behind by the Viet Minh were civilians who fled the onslaught for safe havens near provincial capitals. Assistance was provided to them primarily by local charitable organizations, including the Lao Women's Association (Agence Lao Presse 1954: 6, 17, 21, 31), as well as by the

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[4] Known as USOM (United States Operations Mission) until 1961, the acronym USAID will be used in this essay.

[5] http://uwdc.library.wisc.edu/collections/SEAiT/USAIDLaos

[6] A Tai-populated mountain valley in North Vietnam near the Lao border, historically a caravan trade center that was mistakenly regarded by the French as a strategic transit hub for Viet Minh forces.

United States. On May 9, 1953, US Secretary of State Dulles, a staunch anti-communist, "indicated that funds were being made available to ease refugee problems" (FRUS 1981: Document 0275, 366).

In the meantime, on October 22, 1953, France granted full independence to Laos in the Franco-Laos Treaty (Dommen 1985: 42), which included a mutual defense pact that obligated the French to improve the defense of Laos's border against Viet Minh incursions (Morgan 2010: 185).

Immediately following the loss of Dien Bien Phu, the settlement of the First Indochina War was negotiated at the Geneva Conference and an agreement was signed in July 1954. The Viet Minh divisions in Laos, recruited from among minority tribespeople who inhabited the mountain areas under Viet Minh control (Dommen 1985: 45), were to withdraw. The Geneva agreement also provided for the regrouping of the Viet Minh-backed Pathet Lao (PL) in the provinces of Phongsaly and Houaphanh, one condition being that national elections be held within two years, leading to the reintegration of these two PL areas into the Kingdom of Laos.

Uncertainty prompted groups of people who did not wish to live in PL-controlled areas to move southward. While many Lao people fled to Vientiane, other minorities (including the Tai Dam, or Black Tai, from North Vietnamese borderlands) relocated to the mountainous regions of Luang Prabang and Xieng Khouang Provinces, with meager assistance from villagers, local organizations and the RLG. A limited amount of US government-sponsored relief was provided through private humanitarian organizations (Yost 1954: 2; Yost 1955: 4–6).

American Mission Opens in Laos

United States aid to Laos began in 1951 and was furnished as part of an economic and technical assistance program (administered from Saigon) for the three Associated States of Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) on a unified basis (United States Operation Mission 1957: 8; US House 1958: 2). In November 1954, the first US ambassador to Laos, Charles W. Yost, was appointed, and in January 1955 the United States initiated separate and expanded assistance to each of the three countries (US House 1958: 2). Accordingly, the United States began supplying direct assistance to Laos through supporting agencies that included USAID, which provided economic and technical assistance; the Program Evaluation Office (PEO), which oversaw military budget support and assistance (Conboy 1995: 17; Stevenson 1972: 150)[7]; the United States Information Service (USIS); and the CIA. In addition to collecting intelligence, countering subversion, and providing arms to anti-communist guerrillas, the CIA played a key role in the internal political affairs of Laos (e.g., selecting and supporting anti-communist leaders) (Rust 2012: 4). During the years that followed, the United States fully supported (with third country assistance) the entire Laotian economy, including the Lao military, with the objective of assisting Laos to become a neutralized, stable and

[7] Beginning in April 1961, civilian-garbed PEO staff effectively became MAAG personnel by donning military uniforms.

independent state and to prevent it from coming under Communist control (USAID 1962a: 115–116).

The first large-scale US government-sponsored relief initiative was conducted during the second half of 1955 and consisted of some 200 missions by Civil Air Transport's C-46 airplanes, airdropping 1,000 tons of rice and salt to about 26 reception areas in the famine-stricken Phongsaly and Houaphanh Provinces (Moore 1995: 110; Rust 2012: 36; Anonymous 1955: 4–6). These relief flights marked the beginning of direct assistance by the United States to ethnic minorities in the mountainous borderlands, whose political and military potential was gaining recognition (Rust 2012: 37).

US Civic Action Programs

In August 1956, the US ambassador to Laos, J. Graham Parsons, recommended the implementation of a clandestine program that would strengthen the ability of the RLG to resist subversion and penetration by the PL (Rust 2012: 49). Shortly thereafter, in September, the CIA station chief in Vientiane proposed to the US ambassador that a Refugee and Relief Rehabilitation program should be set up in Houaphanh and Phongsaly. "We feel [that a] bold, dramatic move of this type has not only humanitarian aspects in relieving the suffering of the people, but also should be of immense propaganda value to the government in supporting its position and detracting from the PL attacks on the Royal Regime" (Rust 2012: 49–50).

While there is no indication that the proposal was implemented, a US Mission-sponsored civic action/rural development operation, pioneered in late 1956 by Lao General Ouan Rathikoune, was organized by the RLG in 1957, initially as a civilian operation under the name National Committee of Civic Action, in Phongsaly and Houaphanh Provinces. However, due to operational difficulties, as well as to the Communist occupation of key portions of the two provinces, this initial program was terminated in 1959 (Conboy 1995: 27; Wing et al. 1964: B60; Phillips 2008: 95–98). Because of their political implications, subsequent civic action program initiatives received only indirect support from USAID in the form of commodities. The USAID position tended to be that the civic-action program as instituted was a military problem (Wing et al. 1964: B22, E16–E17).

One of the first humanitarian organizations to enter Laos under contract with USAID was International Voluntary Services (IVS)—a precursor to the Peace Corps—"a non-profit organization formed in 1953 to promote 'people-to-people' cooperation in improving health, productivity and living standards and fostering better understanding among peoples" (International Voluntary Services 2003: 1). The initial IVS program in Laos commenced in March 1956 as the 'Xieng Khouang Development Project' based in Phonsavanh on the Plain of Jars. An important objective was to provide rural development assistance to an area that was "overrun by the Viet Minh [in 1953] who destroyed livestock and buildings" (Rolston, n.d.: 1). One of the key elements of IVS's Xieng Khouang community-development program was "to aid in the resettlement of a war-torn area by assisting and encouraging refugees and tribal people to seek a settled life" (Bowman 1959: 1).

Air Logistics Support

After long, drawn-out negotiations following the 1954 Geneva agreement, the competing political factions in Laos formed a coalition government in late 1957, and Laos was finally at peace for the first time since World War II. Leading up to the April 1958 elections, US agencies in Laos began a high-impact village aid program, codenamed Operation Booster Shot (FRUS 1992: Docs. 169, 171, 14 March 1958), which airlifted 1,135 tons of food, supplies and equipment and airdropped 300 tons to over fifty locations. Although it was a one-off aid project, the operation highlighted just how vital the role of air transport would be to future military and civil operations in Laos (Anthony and Sexton 1993: 26–27; US House 1959: 46).

From 1955 until 1974, air transportation services (provided initially by Civil Air Transport (CAT) and later by its direct descendent, the CIA-owned Air America, by Bird and Sons, and by Continental Air Services, Inc. [CASI]) were to become key players in the emerging refugee relief program. Without the services provided by the airlines—airdrops of food and essential commodities—a successful refugee relief program would not have been possible (Leary 1999; Leeker 2013).

Failed Coalition Sparks Fighting and Refugee Movements

Following the 1958 election, which the PL won, the coalition government fell apart, because the rightists and the United States refused to recognize the results, and the PL returned to guerrilla warfare in their historic strongholds of Houaphanh and Phongsaly Provinces. The ensuing period of armed struggle—marked also by Viet Minh incursions in eastern Savannakhet Province, and later into Houaphanh—and political maneuvering was to last until 1964 (Brown 1982: 18–21).

During the period 1954–1958, as many as 27,000 civilians—mostly highland peoples from northern Laos as well as Tai Dam from the Lai Chau and Dien Bien Phu borderlands of North Vietnam—were displaced and received assistance from humanitarian organizations such as CARE (Meeker 1956), Catholic Relief Services, Operation Brotherhood (Balitang Laos 1964–1966; Bernad and Fuentecilla 2004; Flores 2010), Laos Mission of the Christian and Missionary Alliance 1953–1969 (Laos Mission), and the Missionary Oblates of Mary the Immaculate (OMI) (Sion 1969; USAID 1971b: 1191).

Furthermore, in early 1959 there was an influx of some 14,000 Yao (Iu Mien), Hmong, and Lue refugees from Yunnan Province into the Nam Tha and Muang Sing areas of northwestern Laos. They sought to escape conditions in Communist China. Like many others, these “cross-border,” or “border-crossing” people (Lee and Tapp 2010: 125) relied mainly on their own initiative and the hospitality of fellow tribesmen (Fall 1969: 96).

Between 1954 and 1959, North Vietnamese aid to the PL continued in a low-key manner. However, beginning in 1959, the Communists pursued a more aggressive policy (Langer and Zasloff 1968: 4–5). When fighting accelerated in mid-1959, US government inter-agency staff members were assigned to assist the RLG as they coped with the problems and human needs of some 40,000 refugees—mostly Hmong and Lao Theung (Khmu) in northeastern Laos—who had fled their homes (USAID 1969: 13;

USAID 1971a: 1191). This unfavorable situation prompted a series of cooperative programs between the two governments involving organization, development of procedures, and material assistance to displaced people, many of whom were the families (referred to in this paper as dependents) of the paramilitary forces (US Senate 1970: 67). A Mission report indicates that USAID funding for refugees began in late October 1959 (Chandler 1969: 790).

Early Formation of Paramilitary Units

A sizeable number of the tribal refugees, particularly in northern Laos, but also in the south, were originally the dependents of partisan paramilitary militias that were recruited in tribal areas on a countrywide basis by French intelligence in 1950. Building upon their close relationship with the Hmong, led by Touby Lyfoung (Stuart-Fox and Kooyman 1992: 157), the French formed commando units—intended to create insecurity behind Viet Minh lines—known as the Groupement de Commandos Mixtes Aeroportes (GCMA) in Xieng Khouang, Houaphanh and Phongsaly Provinces, in the north, while smaller GCMA programs were organized in the south (Muelle and Deroo 1992: 57–72; Fall 1968: 58).

In 1955, after the first Indochina War came to an end, these guerrilla units were absorbed into special Royal Lao Army (RLA) paramilitary units known as Auto-Defense de Choc (ADC) (Conboy 1995: 6–7, 16, 23). The principal advocate of this type of guerrilla force since early 1955 had been Crown Prince Savang Vatthana. ADC units (operating as an alternative to major offensive action by the RLA) were engaged in remote villages located deep in contested mountain areas and their activities revolved around villages or groups of villages, with the objective of preventing the PL and Viet Minh from overrunning not only the mountainous areas of Laos, but more importantly, the ethnic Lao-dominated rich riparian plains of the Mekong (FRUS 1990, January 10, 1956: Doc. 336).

In May 1955, US Ambassador Yost met with Hmong leader Touby Lyfoung and the Governor of Xieng Khouang Province, Chao Saykham, who indicated that their partisans in Houaphanh would be willing to participate in guerrilla action but that careful preparation and clear instructions from the RLG would be required (FRUS 1990, May 31, 1955: Doc. 297). Although the CIA began to discreetly support upland people as early as 1955 (FRUS 1990, February 13, 1956: Doc. 344; Conboy 1995: 16), beginning in mid-1959, the PEO and select US Army Special Forces known as “White Star” mobile training teams, which operated under the supervision of PEO (Wing et al. 1964: C21; Conboy 1995: 64–65), actively began to expand the ADC militia network and provide civic action support (Wing et al. 1964: B21; Chandler 1969: 789; Paddock 1961).

To free menfolk from the need to work in the fields while devoting their time to militia-related activities, it was necessary to provide their families with food and other basic household necessities. As the intensity of fighting increased, and as the ADC units and their dependents—all of whom were destined to become refugees—were displaced, the demand for essential relief support via airdrops increased.

Kong Le Coup, the Turning Point for USAID Program

In August 1960, Neutralist Captain Kong Le staged a coup d'etat and gained control of Vientiane, only to be removed by US-backed Gen. Phoumi Nosavan in December 1960, with Thai support, following the Battle of Vientiane, during which some 8,000 people were left in need of assistance. Essential public services had been damaged or disrupted due to the fighting. To cope with these problems, a group of essential USAID personnel remained in Vientiane after the battle (the Mission was divided between Vientiane and Bangkok until July 1962) and began refugee relief operations (USAID 1963a: 2; Wing et al. 1964: E21–E22; Chandler 1969: 790).

Kong Le entered into an alliance with the PL (which subsequently deteriorated after the July 1962 Geneva Accords), and retreated to the Plain of Jars via Vang Vieng and Muang Kasy (leaving behind a trail of displaced civilians) with logistical support from the Soviet Union. The count of civilians displaced by this increasingly destructive conflict, which expanded to Houaphanh Province, the Ban Ban area of Xieng Khouang, and to Xieng Khouangville (the provincial capital), grew to 90,000 (USAID 1971b: 1191). It became obvious in early January 1961 that refugee and relief operations would be necessary for the foreseeable future and that there was a need to strengthen the RLG and American presence in nearly all accessible areas in Laos (USAID 1962a: 123).

US Provides Support to Hmong Leader Vang Pao

Stuart Methven, a CIA case officer, became the "civic action contact with the Hmong" (Hillmer 2010: 82). His primary contact was a former GCMA company commander, Vang Pao (Stuart-Fox and Kooyman 1992: 161), who transitioned to the RLA in 1955 and was based on the Plain of Jars in 1959. Methven met Captain Vang Pao in early 1959 in Ban Ban and explored ways to work with the Hmong to set up an effective paramilitary program. However, Vang Pao's first priority was his people, who had become victims of adverse weather conditions that had wiped out their crops of rice and opium, both of which were critical elements of their integrated highland economy. Opium was the principal, if not the only, source of cash for the average rural Hmong family (Yang Dao 1993: 77) and was commonly used by the Hmong to barter for livestock, blankets and cooking oil.

Desperately in need of assistance, Methven arranged for airdrops of blankets and four tons of triple-sacked rice to Vang Pao's people in his hometown, Nong Het. However, according to Methven, "before saying goodbye Vang Pao took me aside, reminding me 'not to forget the guns.' Vang Pao eventually got his guns, enough to arm the largest 'clandestine army in history" (Methven 2008: 63–75).

On January 2, 1961, after being evacuated to Bangkok from the Plain of Jars following the Kong Le coup, US Military attachés in Bangkok sent in a joint message

reporting an interview with two American [USAID] personnel, a Meo [Hmong][8], and a Chinese who had been evacuated December 30. The interview "concentrated on a suggestion made by one of the evacuees that the Meos [Hmong] and Black Thai [Tai Dam] in that area would combat the Pathet Lao if they were trained and supplied. The message concluded by recommending that the proposal be given serious consideration" (US Department of Defense 1963: 126–128; Jacobs 2012: 199).

At nearly the same time, a Christian missionary who spent a great deal of time with the Hmong over close to a twenty-year period, and who spoke their language, recalled that a group of Hmong he used to visit in Houaphanh Province—before he escaped from the PL in September 1960—walked all the way to Vientiane to ask Americans for ammunition and rifles so they could start recovering the villages they had fled after being overrun by communist forces.[9]

While this idea of partnering with the Hmong and Black Thai was not new, beginning in January 1961 the PEO was authorized to channel US Department of Defense (DoD) funding through the CIA (James William "Bill" Lair was the CIA's chief military advisor at the time) to arm the first 2,000 Hmong and organize them on an ADC basis (Conboy 1995: 61), perhaps understanding that highland minorities likely thought of their situation "solely in terms of their own ridgelines" (Shaplen 1965: 362). The Hmong, who "generally have a very strong attachment to their native lands" (Lee and Tapp 2010: 125) and had "long fought for recognition of their rights" (Yang Dao 1993: 29), rallied behind Vang Pao, who was able to support them with substantial aid from the Americans. The Hmong who backed Vang Pao had long been alienated from the Communists owing to historical internal clan disputes (Yang Dao 1993: 39–40). Touby Lyfoung's uncle, Faydang Lobliayao, was the leader of Pathet Lao's Hmong guerrillas (Yang Dao 1993: 24).

In March 1961, the CIA dispatched a special contingent to seek greater support from the Hmong leadership to bolster the recruitment and training of Xieng Khouang ADC units—with assistance from Thai Police Aerial Reinforcement Unit (PARU) military teams (Conboy 1995: 59–61)—to ensure the RLG's ability to claim control of the highlands of northern Laos (Wing et al. 1964: B21; Castle 1993: 38; The White House 1961: No. 29). However, as time passed and the war intensified, the effectiveness of ADC was seen to have reached its limits, and the militias were increasingly regarded by Vang Pao and the CIA as "farmers with rifles, a part-time militia," characterized as being adept at defending themselves but not inclined to leave their villages and families and go on the offensive (Warner 1996: 114). Accordingly, Special Guerrilla Units (SGUs) were also recruited as 'enhanced ADCs' for offensive-type missions and were subject to deployment anywhere. Their dependents, from whom they were separated, were allowed to resettle in secure locations for safety (Conboy 1995: 89).

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[8] During the time frame under review, the Hmong people were commonly referred to as "Meo" people, or the "Lao Soung," the Iu Mien people as "Yao" or "Lao Soung," and the Khmu people as the "Kha" or "Lao Theung."

[9] Based on an interview with Father Lucien Bouchard (OMI) in December 2013.

Hmong Refugees and Paramilitary Dependents

Two months later, in May 1961, a fact-finding USAID team met with Vang Pao, who was by then a lieutenant colonel (Conboy 1995: 60), at the Pa Dong outpost, the first military base for the Hmong resistance (Hillmer 2010: 85; Warner 1996: 52–58), to assess the overall needs of refugees at various Xieng Khouang relocation centers (Chadbourn 1961: 3, 6). Despite a cease-fire agreement reached by the warring factions in May 1961, shortly thereafter a combined PL and Neutralist force captured Pa Dong and several thousand refugees, mostly Hmong, who had already been displaced by earlier Communist maneuvers, and evacuated them mainly to Pha Khao, the new command post. However, several hundred refugees moved on to Vientiane. The Hmong ultimately moved to Long Tieng (Wing et al. 1964: D35; USAID 1962: 158), which was subsequently established as the CIA's paramilitary headquarters in about August 1962 (Leeker 2013; Conboy 1995: 90–91; Wing et al. 1964: D35; Ahern 2006: 88–89). In October 1962, neighboring Sam Thong, which had served as a base for White Star teams, became the headquarters for USAID's northeastern Laos operations (Conboy 1995: 90).

Also in May, a member of the US National Security Council stated that "it was…necessary to airlift food to the Meo [Hmong] because of the absence of many men during the recently completed planting season which adversely affected the Meo food supply" (FRUS 1997, May 9, 1961: Doc. 153). By that time 6,900 Hmong had been armed (FRUS 1997, May 9, 1961: Doc. 153). In about July 1961, Brig. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale, the Pentagon expert on guerrilla warfare, stated:

> As Meo [Hmong] villages are overrun by communist forces and as men leave food-raising duties to serve as guerrillas, a problem is growing over the care and feeding of non-combat Meos. CIA has given some rice and clothing to relieve this problem. Consideration needs to be given to organized relief, a mission of an ICA [International Cooperation Administration, USAID's predecessor] nature, to the handling of Meo refugees and their rehabilitation. (Gravel 1971: 646)

With mounting concerns about future relocation sites for refugees, in 1961, US Ambassador Winthrop Brown foresaw an eventual Hmong migration as "perhaps the only escape from extermination." It was the ambassador's opinion that the United States should try to persuade the Hmong to settle in the mountains of the Annamite Chain (which runs along the border with both North and South Vietnam). It would be in that strategic zone where they would find relative safety and they would also serve as an "effective screen" against North Vietnamese probes, infiltration, and subversion into both Laos and South Vietnam (Ahern 2006: 83–84).

In August 1961, the US Country Team in Laos[10] submitted its recommendations for future Hmong operations under several possible conditions, which included:

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[10] Coordinated by the US ambassador, Country Team members included the chiefs of USAID, USIS, CIA, PEO/MAAG, and the Military Attaché.

- The US would guarantee the Meo [Hmong] that, if [a] new [coalition] government [with adequate safeguards against a Communist takeover] persecuted them, the US would, at the minimum, support their evacuation and resettlement….In the meantime, the [USAID] relief program for the Meo would be continued.
- [If a coalition government unsatisfactory to the US is formed] the US should continue whatever assistance was necessary for the evacuation of those Meo who wished to leave Laos…[or] to either support the Meo in their present locations or to resettle them in southern Laos. (Joint Chiefs 1962: 126–127)

Indeed, in the event of a cease-fire breakdown, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed (in July 1961), as a contingency plan, action to secure the Mekong population centers from Vientiane to Pakse, to hold Xayaboury Province up to and including Luang Prabang, and to expel Communists from southern Laos. The net result would, in effect, be the partition of Laos, leaving most of northern Laos under the control of antigovernment forces (Rust 2014: 40).

On several occasions over the years, the option of relocating the Hmong to the secure Xayaboury Province along the mountainous border with Thailand was also discussed as the war took its toll on the Hmong people (Ahern 2006: 84; FRUS 2000, March 14, 1968: Doc. 343; Conboy 1995: 254; Warner 1996: 33, 249–250, 308–309; Buell 1969: 206–212).

Joint Mobile Task Force Assists Refugees

One outcome of the 1960–61 refugee crises was USAID's decision to reorganize and form a joint mobile task force that provided the necessary flexibility to launch a relief and rehabilitation program to help the RLG support the nearly 50,000 multi-ethnic refugees who had been uprooted by then in northeastern Laos (Tobler 1961: 1; Wing et al. 1964: E33–E34; USAID 1962: 124). In August 1961, some 6,000-10,000 refugees (many from Houaphanh) (USAID 1963b) also relocated to the Vientiane area along the Mekong; a year later (August 1962) their number had increased to 30,000–35,000 people (Agence Lao Presse 1962: 5). Beginning in 1962, there were additional population displacements elsewhere in northern, central, and southern Laos (US State Department 1962: 79; Conboy 1995: 70–73; Agence Lao Presse 1962: 5–6; USAID 1962b: 5). When an area could not be successfully defended, villagers retreated and regrouped.

In response to these movements, great quantities of relief supplies (blankets, medicines, and kitchen utensils) were purchased and airlifted from Bangkok to Vientiane and other major provincial cities. These commodities included relief supplies provided by humanitarian organizations, including CARE and the Christian Missionary Alliance (USAID 1962a: 127), and Catholic Relief Service (US Senate 1970: 4). As demand grew, the airlift was expanded to include US Food for Peace (PL-480) commodities, rice, salt, and iron bars and flights were made to transport them to villages in the interior (USAID 1963a: 2–3).

Members of the joint task force began to effectively work together on a cooperative interagency basis (Wing et al. 1964: E33). One of the major contributors to

the task force was IVS, which, as noted above, had been in rural Laos since 1956. Usually arriving by small planes and helicopters on crude airstrips carved out of rugged mountaintops by the villagers, team partners then frequently walked long distances to remote villages and settlement sites to evaluate refugee needs and to organize a system of distribution and control of relief supplies mostly delivered by air (USAID 1962a: 134). Without the cooperation of other agencies engaged in similar activities in Laos, the USAID refugee program could never have matured or developed as it did (USAID 1962b: 5).

One of the early figures in the refugee program was Edgar 'Pop' Buell, an Indiana farmer who, at age 47, went to Laos in June 1960 and served with IVS in Xieng Khouang until he joined USAID in mid-1962 (Schanche 1970; Jacobs 2012: 194–208). Prior to October 1962, the USAID refugee relief staff consisted only of Pop Buell and one Lao assistant who worked in areas of greatest refugee concentration; namely, 25 locations in Xieng Khouang, the nearby fringes of Luang Prabang Province, and Houaphanh, with the largest location accommodating 7,000 people. Beginning in October, Pop and his assistant were supplemented by two IVS assistants (USAID 1962b: 5–8; Buell 1962).

The refugee program received another boost with the arrival in June 1963 of Charles (Jigs) Weldon, MD (known by many as Doc Weldon), a country doctor from Louisiana who proactively took over USAID's public health program. Almost immediately, Dr. Weldon was sought after by Pop Buell to make primary health care available to refugees, a humanitarian undertaking that both Weldon and his wife, Patricia McCreedy, also a medical doctor, passionately pursued as key personnel in the refugee program (Weldon 1999: 51; Ramsey et al. 1976: 2100–2111).

By October 1962, it was estimated that USAID had under its care a maximum of 60,000 refugees, 75 percent of whom were Hmong (USAID 1962b: 5). Other agencies, including the US Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), the agency that replaced the civilian-manned PEO in April 1961 (Wing et al. 1964: B18), had airdropped rice and salt to an additional 80,000 to 90,000 refugees (USAID 1963a: 2; USAID 1962b: 5). With a combined total of some 150,000 refugees and dependents, the relief load required about 40 tons of rice per day, most of which was airdropped to as many as 200 widely scattered village locations (USAID 1962b: 8).

Political efforts to create a neutralized Laos continued, and in accordance with the July 1962 Geneva Accords (which followed the May 1961 cease-fire), MAAG military advisers, US White Star teams, and other foreign troops (including the North Vietnamese) were ordered to withdraw from Laos by October 1962. Accordingly, the refugees and dependents supported by MAAG were added to the rolls of refugees already being supported by USAID.

USAID and RLG Formalize Refugee Program

During his visit to Washington in July 1962, the Prime Minister of Laos, Souvanna Phouma, officially requested aid for refugees (FRUS 1994, July 28, 1962: Doc. 415; Rust 2014: 165), and a formal agreement was subsequently signed by USAID/Laos and the Ministry of Social Welfare in October (USAID 1962a: 161; Stevenson 1972: 183–197). The refugee relief program was recognized not only as a humanitarian effort, but also for its contribution to political and social stability within Laos (Brady 1969: 832).

Under this agreement, and in view of the pending withdrawal of logistical support provided until then by MAAG (USAID 1962a: 116), the USAID workload increased considerably. It was reported that by the end of 1962, air supply to refugees involved fourteen aircraft making over 1,000 flights per month, carrying about 1,500 tons of cargo (USAID 1962a: 162).

The Refugee Relief and Resettlement program that emerged was a humanitarian effort designed to deal with a constantly fluctuating refugee problem. The fluctuations in the number of refugees receiving assistance depended on such factors as enemy pressure, rice harvests, and natural disasters. The Laos refugee program was fundamentally divided into four categories of support: “Relief Assistance,” full relief, and partial relief for refugees who were once receiving full relief but had managed to become partially self-sufficient; “Relocation Assistance” for refugees who moved, or were moved to safer areas; “Assistance to Paramilitary and Their Dependents,” and “Resettlement Assistance” for displaced people who agreed to be permanently resettled in areas provided by the RLG (Brady 1969: 832–834).

Overall, as Knott (1973: 1599) reported, the United States provided the following assistance to refugees in Laos:

- On an emergency basis in refugee movements created by or in anticipation of military action, providing help in evacuating people if required, and emergency medical care and food supply.
- In relocating refugees, providing transportation to relocation sites, food, water supply, shelter materials and medical care.
- In providing basic facilities (schools, dispensaries, roads, wells) to bring refugee groups to an economic and social level equal to that of the non-refugees in the area.

As USAID and the Ministry of Social Welfare of the RLG embarked on a mission to provide assistance to refugees as long as there was a need, they could not have realized that over the next six years, attempts to seek peace would be shattered and there would be seasonal increases in the refugee population in northern Laos and an inexorable displacement of population gradually retreating through the mountains toward RLG-controlled areas along the country’s vital artery, the Mekong valley (US Senate 1971: 45).

Refugee Displacements Swell

In October 1962, the US Mission was faced with a refugee relief program that included between 140,000 and 150,000 people. However, Souvanna Phouma’s fragile coalition created earlier in the year between the PL and the Neutralists began to fall apart in the autumn of 1962 after the July Geneva Conference (Rust 2012: 266), and fighting erupted on the Plain of Jars as Neutralist Kong Le (who had parted ways with the PL) retreated in May 1964 (with US support) to more defensible locations in the Muang Soui area on the Plain’s western fringe (Dommen 1985: 87). The intensified fighting led to the displacement of even more refugees (USAID 1963a: 2; Stevenson 1972: 54).

Amid concerns that the Geneva Accords might break down, American intelligence indicated that "it is essential that we establish as rapidly as possible a sound international political basis for continued supply of food to the Meo…. The goal should eventually be that the subject of air supply to the Meo becomes a fitting subject for discussion under the Geneva Accords." (FRUS 1994, January 15, 1963: Doc. 440).

From that point onward, the situation moved steadily toward open hostilities (Blaufarb 1972: 23). On June 25, 1963, President Kennedy authorized the CIA to strengthen the capabilities of the Hmong and other similar programs in central and southern Laos (known as the Panhandle) and take up new responsibility for the security of the Mekong valley (Ahern 2006: 161–162). It appeared that the planned expansion of military operations on the part of the RLG to regain areas lost after the signing of the Geneva Accords and enlarge its sphere of influence would create new refugees (USAID 1963a: 4).

Full-scale fighting broke out in Laos in March 1964 when North Vietnamese and PL forces attacked across the Plain of Jars, and by mid-May took control of this area of strategic military value because of its command of vital road communications in northern Laos. Complicated by an attempted right-wing coup d'etat on April 19, this action brought an end to the recently formed shaky coalition government (Benson 2014).

Bombing Commences

Beginning with the rainy season of 1964, the shooting war in Laos followed a relatively stable pattern and a definite annual rhythm until 1967, when a period in which the Communists advanced during the dry season and retreated during the rainy season began. It was also at this time, in late-1964, that low-key US Air Force bombing missions began and gradually escalated during the following years, targeting North Vietnamese supply routes to South Vietnam through the Lao Panhandle along the Ho Chi Minh trail and its transport routes to the Plain of Jars area in Laos (Anthony and Sexton 1993: 111).

Acknowledging that refugees in Laos, as in any other theater of war, were caused primarily by the high level of violence, the deputy assistant secretary of defense, Dennis Doolin, testified before the Senate in 1970 that

> our air operations [in Laos] are controlled by the US Ambassador in Laos [in consultation with the RLG]. Furthermore, our air operations are conducted [mostly in sparsely populated areas] in accord with a policy of avoiding civilian casualties and hardships. In addition to targeting controls by the Ambassador, our air activities are governed by strict Rules of Engagement and Operations Authorities designed to minimize civilian casualties. (US Senate 1970: 48)

Inevitably, there were many instances when civilians fled due to the fear of bombing, and there were people who were inadvertently killed due to bombing errors. However, bombing was not the sole cause of population displacement; other factors, virtually all of which are directly attributable to the war, are briefly reviewed later in this paper.

Paramilitary Operations Expand

Between 1964 and 1967, the CIA expanded its presence in Laos beyond Long Tieng in Xieng Khouang Province to include training and support bases in Houa Khong, Xayaboury, and Luang Prabang Provinces in northern Laos, and various locations in the Panhandle by recruiting mostly highland ethnic minorities (Conboy 1995: 135–136, 164–165; Blaufarb 1972: 53–54). By October 31, 1968, the paramilitary forces in Laos comprised 39,000 tribal guerrillas of multiple ethnicities (FRUS 2000, October 31, 1968: Doc. 389[11]; Kuhn 1995: 31–32; Yang Dao 1993: 40–41[12]).

Hmong villages (like those of other ethnic minorities) had a good measure of autonomy, and "the village chief [was] more than just a representative of the village; he [was] an honored leader on the local scene…. He [had] authority in emergencies. During the Communist occupation, he was responsible for the evacuation of his village and its defense" (Barney 1957: 20). Accordingly, the enlistment of ADC guerrilla fighters to protect their respective villages involved a decision by an entire village to follow the course of its tribal leader, and a "commitment thereupon by the US to support the village if it was forced by enemy action to evacuate its home area." The support would take the form of emergency action if there was a need to evacuate the villages to a suitable location well out of the combat zone, where they would remain refugees until they were able to produce rice crops. The knowledge that their families would be cared for in such emergencies was a factor in persuading the tribesmen to join the irregulars (Blaufarb 1972: 59–60).

Moral Obligation

Over time, many of these targeted, isolated villages were overrun by invading forces and their inhabitants had no option but to flee and regroup in more secure outposts. Ultimately, with their backs finally against the wall with no place to run, instances arose where air evacuation was necessary.

From a humanitarian point of view, it was mandatory that the displaced families of paramilitary guerrillas be given the opportunity to make new homes for themselves. According to Ambassador Winthrop G. Brown, the United States had a "moral obligation to [sustain] these loyal supporters" who, under the direction of US advisors, had contributed to the fight against Communist military aggression (USAID 1963a: 2–3; FRUS 1997, February 25, 1962: Note 1219). It was stated that "without the USAID/RLG efforts under this [refugee relief] project there would be little incentive for the tribal people to continue their sacrifice. We provide immediate relief assistance to tribal and

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[11] The guerrilla forces included Northwest Tribal Guerrillas (Yao and others), 7,000; North central Tribal Guerrillas (Luang Prabang and Phongsaly Provinces), 2,000; Hmong Tribal Guerrillas, 22,000; Central Laos Tribal Guerrillas (Lao), 4,000; and South Laos Tribal Guerrillas (Lao and Mon-Khmer), 4,000 (FRUS 2000, October 31, 1968: Doc. 389).

[12] As of 1969, Hmong comprised only about 60 percent of troops under the command of Gen. Vang Pao.

Lao ethnic groups caught in the maelstrom of ideological differences. This humanitarian effort is coupled with support for the families of paramilitary. It is essential that paramilitary forces be assured that relief assistance will continue to be on hand if it is expected that they will continue their resistance to aggression" (Chandler 1969: 794).

Overall, between 1961 and 1973, it was estimated that as many as 60 percent of the refugees supported in northern Laos were paramilitary dependents, whose USAID support was filtered through the US DoD (USAID 1971a: 74; Brady 1969: 833; Ramsey et al. 1976: 2267). Most paramilitary dependents in the Panhandle were not supported by USAID unless they had been displaced.

USAID's Refugee Operations Officers

Augmented by local USAID staff members and Ministry of Social Welfare personnel, five American USAID advisors coordinated the support program for 150,000 refugees in 1964 (Mann 1964: 178–179). By 1967, the number increased to ten USAID refugee operations officers coordinating support for 250,000 refugees (Mendenhall 1966: 216). Most were assigned to locations in northern Laos, including Luang Prabang and Ban Houei Sai. Sam Thong in Xieng Khouang Province was the USAID base in northeastern Laos from which the greatest number of refugees was supported. A new high of 317,000 refugees (including about 43,000 receiving rehabilitation support) was reached in June 1971 (O'Connor 1972: 1376), and by 1972 the number of operations officers had escalated to 23 full-time Americans devoted to refugee affairs countrywide, as well as about 34 other USAID personnel who devoted either all or part of their time to refugee work (US Senate 1972: 1378).[13]

USAID's refugee operations officers—many of whom were former IVS or Peace Corps volunteers who spoke Lao, were sensitive to the cultural environments in which they worked, accepted operational risks, and were dedicated to their mission—worked on a partnership basis with their Ministry of Social Welfare counterparts and local authorities to maintain up-to-date status reports on refugee populations, locations, and needs, as well as to provide daily schedules and devise systems and procedures for coordinating and facilitating the delivery of emergency relief supplies and services. There was also close collaboration with the USAID Public Health Division, which provided medical support as an important component of the refugee relief effort (Blaufarb 1972: 61).

Contingent on the unpredictable intensity of military operations from 1964 to the 1968 dry season, the total number of refugees receiving full or partial support generally averaged 150,000 people countrywide (as of 1964, 94 percent of the refugees, 62 percent of whom were Hmong, were located throughout northern Laos), with the numbers dipping after the harvest season when those refugees who were able to grow rice became self-sufficient. It was not unusual, however, for refugees to be upended

[13] While there were some "undercover" CIA operatives in Laos classified as Office of Refugee Affairs employees, they were, in reality, direct-hire CIA employees and were not employed by, nor were they directly involved with, USAID's refugee relief program.

before harvest time, often repeatedly over the years and therefore never permanently resettled (Mann 1964: 063–3).

Causes of Population Displacement

The movement of refugees was usually subject to a decision-making process that was based on the movement's magnitude, immediate cause, and timing. When danger from enemy action was imminent, a decision was usually made on the spot by the lowest echelon of leadership. If the number of refugees was in the 1,000 plus range, the provincial governor and/or the region's military commander made the decision. In situations of particularly large movements, and where impending danger could be predicted sufficiently in advance, the decision would be made by the highest levels of government (US Senate 1970: 70).

In addition to exposure to, or the fear of, local combat activity and/or bombing, there were a wide range of considerations that prompted civilians to move either before or after living in PL-controlled territory. These included heavy rice taxes, compulsory long-distance porterage duty, tight movement controls, conscription for labor or fighting, and separation of families imposed by the PL and North Vietnamese. Others fled because of their ties with the RLG. Some wished to join family members in secure areas. In some instances, civilians were ordered to move by the RLG in order to remove them from the path of battle. More than 500 first-hand countrywide accounts of what prompted refugees to move can be reviewed in the digital collection, referenced below, of refugee interviews that are organized on a region-by-region basis.[14]

From a strategic standpoint, "encouraging civilians in enemy-held territory to abandon their villages and take refuge in government strongholds became a US policy goal in mid-1965; the rationale was the prospect of denying to the Communists the forced labor on which they relied to support dry-season offensive operations….This effort was to rely on positive incentives…" and not coercive methods (Ahern 2006: 238). In reality many people, especially minority groups, walked out or escaped on their own accord to save their lives and/or reposition themselves to fight in an attempt to recover their lost villages and farmlands.

RLG Temporarily Gains Ground

In 1966 and 1967, after losing key areas, the RLA regained some ground in Houaphanh Province that included locations within a few miles of the town of Sam Neua and fringe areas of both northern and eastern Luang Prabang and northern Xieng Khouang Provinces. One significant accomplishment was the capturing of the Nam Bak (also spelled Nam Bac) valley by the RLA in August 1966 for the first time since 1960, thereby improving the defenses of the royal capital by establishing an operational base to be used as a springboard for regional guerrilla operations (Conboy 1995: 163–164, 179; USAID 1966a: 264–265; USAIDb 1966: 269). In southern Laos, a concerted social,

[14] http://uwdc.library.wisc.edu/collections/SEAiT/USAIDLaos. Browse sub-collections of refugee interviews.

economic, and security program (known as the Sedone Valley, or "Wapi" Project, a joint USAID/CIA undertaking) (Blaufarb 1972: 58–59) was launched in mid-1965, and by the fall of 1967 most of the Sedone valley had been secured by the RLG (American Embassy 1968: 742). Many of the gains, however, were destined to be temporary ones.

Downturn Leads to Refugee Evacuations

A turning point in the war may have occurred during the dry seasons of 1968 and 1969, when the North Vietnamese significantly stepped up their military activities and refugees sought to flee the increasingly volatile areas—often before they could harvest their rice crops—to more secure locations away from the war zone. On October 20, 1969, US Ambassador William H. Sullivan testified that

> in 1968 the Communist offensives were primarily directed toward clearing out Sam Neua [Houaphanh] Province of governmental forces…and the thing they did that was different in 1968 from previous years is that they pushed out the local population as well.
> (US Senate 1969: 490–491)

By spring of 1969, the North Vietnamese had captured almost all of the RLG outposts in Houaphanh Province (including strategic Phu Pha Thi on March 11, 1968) (Conboy 1995: 188–196), and in the northern and eastern fringes of the Plain of Jars. Northern Luang Prabang Province was similarly affected. Thousands of people were displaced, and the number countrywide doubled to more than 260,000, with nearly 90 percent located in northern Laos (Brady 1969: 831). The USAID effort during this period could be described as trying to keep one step ahead of the flood of refugees (US Senate 1973: 56).

Until the late 1960s, the refugee program had largely been a matter of providing temporary help to people who were continuously displaced from one mountain to the next. No major resettlement effort was involved. It was the airlift evacuation of refugees from several important and increasingly insecure outposts in northeastern Laos between 1968 and 1970 that introduced a new phase of refugee resettlement activity.

The demise of the RLG's presence in Houaphanh Province serves as an example. In March 1968, some 8,000 to 10,000 refugees were airlifted from the Phou Louei[15] area to the Long Tieng area (via Na Khang and Muang Hiem) following the loss of nearby Phou Pha Thi (the site of a US Air Force tactical air navigation system) (Kuhn 1968: 55–56, 94; Kuhn 1995: 90–92; USAID 1968: 6). In January 1969, large capacity US Air Force (USAF) Pony Express helicopters transported about 8,000 refugees from Houay Hin Sa to Houay Tong Kho (Conboy 1995: 207; Thomas 1969: 1). One year later, in January 1970, approximately 9,000 refugees were airlifted by US Air Force (USAF) helicopters from Houay Tong Kho to Ban Xon. With no place else to go, many of these Houaphanh people, who had been fighting since the 1950s to remain free of the PL and North Vietnamese, were evacuated to Xieng Khouang Province by air (Conboy 1995: 251; Buell 1970: 296). Shortly thereafter, Gen. Vang Pao withdrew the last remaining

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[15] Phou Louei, Phou Loi, or Point Alpha, was also referred to as DZ-056, Alpha Pad.

ADC unit from Houay Tong Kho, the RLG's last operational outpost in Houaphanh (Conboy 1995: 259).

About the same time, approximately 15,000 civilians (mostly Tai Phouan) were airlifted from the outlying areas of the Plain of Jars to the Vientiane Plain in February 1970 (MacQueen 1970: 118–127; Central Intelligence Agency 1970: 1–2; USAID ca. 1972: 121–128). Plans to resettle these refugees on the Plain of Jars went awry when it became evident that the North Vietnamese were poised to retake the Plain, thus putting the lives of the refugees in danger by placing them in the face of a cross-fire between warring factions.

Cornered Soldiers Retreat with Families

Not only were all of these air evacuations new and complex logistical operations, they were tactically significant insofar as there was little remaining incentive for indigenous paramilitary forces to defend highland territories where their villages had been destroyed mostly by powerful, invading North Vietnamese forces and from which their families had fled overland and/or were evacuated by air.

In March 1969, Na Khang, the center of support for the Houaphanh area since 1965, was overrun (Ahern 2006: 235; Conboy 1995: 209). Small enclaves north of Nong Het (near the Vietnamese border) held out until mid-1970 when they were overrun. A few hundred civilians were evacuated, but by that time the refugee program in Houaphanh Province was effectively dead (Ramsey et al. 1976: 2120).

By mid-1970, two key RLG strongholds along the southern edge of Xieng Khouang Province—Long Tieng and Ban Xon (the latter replaced Sam Thong as the refugee support base for northeast Laos after it was overrun in March 1970)—effectively became the front line militarily as well as becoming home to thousands of refugees (including many from Houaphanh), with only two RLG enclaves (Bouam Long and Phu Cum) remaining north of the Plain of Jars (Ramsey et al. 1976: 2122). The Communist's offensive military activity had effectively driven refugees into a corner with twice as many refugees (as of April 1971) receiving emergency relief than were supported at any given time since 1963 over an expanse of territory ten times as great (Ramsey 1971: 1037). In this congested area, population density reached 98 people per square kilometer (up from about 7.3 pre-war 1958 countrywide average), a landscape that would not support shifting cultivation (Ramsey 1973: 115; Halpern 1961: 4). [see Maps Appendix: "Refugee Flow in Northeastern Laos" Figure 2.]

The outcome of these events essentially marked the transition point of the war in northern Laos from paramilitary guerrilla warfare (wherein the mission of ADC units was to defend their villages, harass the enemy, and collect basic intelligence) (Wing et al. 1964: D35) into more conventional SGU offensive warfare to help defend the Plain of Jars.[16] The evacuations furthered the disintegration of the traditional paramilitary and

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[16] The Plain of Jars was strategically important because via east-west Route 7 it provided direct access to Sala Phou Khoun, located at the intersection of Route 7 and north-south Route 13 which led to Luang Prabang and Vientiane.

civilian relationships, a divergence from the past when civilians, including their soldiers' families, lived together in the vicinity of remote outposts and had been an integral part of the overall plan (Ramsey et al. 1976: 2122).

Other areas of northern Laos were also faring poorly. Nam Bak, an important RLG stronghold in Luang Prabang Province, fell in January 1968 (Castle 1999: 81–85), and by April 1970, areas to the east of the Nam Tha River, including the Nam Houn and Nam Beng valleys, had been lost over time—as were the last RLG positions on the upper Mekong (Mokkachok, also known as Ban Nong Tong; and Pak Tha). These actions marked the end of RLG-controlled areas throughout most of Luang Prabang Province and precipitated additional population movements (Conboy 1995: 316). The royal capital was almost encircled—and continued to be so until the 1973 cease-fire—with a record high of 48,000 people on the area's support rolls in a congested area (Ramsey et al. 1976: 2122).

China was a beneficiary of the RLG's losses in northwestern Laos insofar as the Chinese could proceed unimpeded with their road-building projects (which commenced as early as 1962) "laden with strategic and tactical considerations" directed southward toward the Mekong River and Thailand (Godley and St. Goar 1991: 285).

Population Displacements Shift Southward

Prior to 1969, there were relatively few significant population displacements in central and southern Laos, with the exception of some in Attapeu Province (Baird 2010). Beginning in mid-1969, the relative peace enjoyed by the inhabitants of this region came to an end as both the RLG and the South Vietnamese attempted with greater effort to interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail—the North Vietnamese supply corridor through Laos, to Cambodia and South Vietnam, which began in May 1959 (Conboy 1995: 115). In response, the North Vietnamese moved farther west of the Vietnamese border and the Ho Chi Minh Trail, toward the Mekong River, in an effort to create a buffer zone that would protect their vital supply routes, an encroachment that disrupted life in the largely undisturbed, populated areas of central and southern Laos.

For the next several years, the flow of refugees throughout the Panhandle was contingent upon the seesawing military operations. As the Communists pushed relentlessly westward, important towns fell, including Muang Phine, Muang Phalane, Dong Hene and Kengkok in Savannakhet Province; Nam Thorne, in Khammouane Province; the provincial capitals Saravane, Attapeu and Khong Sedone; and the provincial towns of Thateng, Houay Kong and Paksong on the Bolovens Plateau. By early 1973, the relief rolls in southern Laos reached their highest level at 52,000, including 10,000 Saravane people who had been recently driven from their villages. Conflict in these areas mainly took place between 1970 and 1972, but skirmishes due to cease-fire violations continued intermittently at many of the locations, which changed hands more than once, up to and even after the cease-fire in February 1973 (Ramsey et al. 1976: 2122–2124, 2184; Sams et al. 1969: 108–122; Conboy 1995: 286–287, 349–352, 395–397).

From June 1970 to April 1972, USAID and the Ministry of Social Welfare supported an annual average of 281,000 refugees countrywide. On September 1, 1970, the director of USAID/Laos, Charles Mann, stated that "because of the non-deferrable,

life or death nature of requirements, relief assistance to refugees will normally receive the highest priority within all USAID projects and supporting services in claims on material and human resources" (Mann 1970: 1004). In June 1971, the numbers hit a new high of 317,000 [see Maps Appendix: "Refugee Locations (April 1971)", Figure 3]. However, the total steadily decreased to 238,000 (a 25 percent decrease) by February 1972, due largely to the success some refugees had in planting and harvesting enough rice to become at least temporarily self-sufficient (US Senate 1972: 33).

Refugee Resettlement Program

While the first resettlement need emerged at the end of 1961—the initial movement took place in 1962, when Hmong refugees from various locations were resettled in the Muang Phieng area of Xayaboury Province (USAID 1962b: 7; USAID 1962a: 138)—the Refugee Resettlement Program formally began in January 1964 when the RLG requested and received implementation assistance from the United Nations. On March 16, 1966, a program agreement was signed between the RLG and USAID whereby USAID agreed to fully support the National Resettlement Program (Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation 1980: 104–105). The program escalated in 1968, when large-scale refugee movements (briefly described above) began as fighting intensified (Ramsey et al. 1976: 2127–2132). In most cases, resettlement assistance was an integrated undertaking that included clearing new villages on land allocated by the RLG, building houses, roads, schools and dispensaries, drilling wells, preparing land for planting, giving the settlers seed, tools, insecticides, fertilizers and special agricultural training (O'Connor 1972: 1378). Brief descriptions of the main resettlement projects (the largest of which was the Vientiane Plain program for mostly Tai Phouan refugees from the Plain of Jars) can be found in the Appendices. [see Appendix 1: "Resettlement Projects in Laos,"].

Post Cease-Fire Refugee Support

With the exception of the periods just prior to and immediately following the February 1973 cease-fire, there was an increase in hostilities as the competing factions sought to expand and consolidate territory under their control. As a result, 118,000 new refugees were added to the rolls, and by October 31, 1973, a record number of 378,801 refugees throughout all of Laos were receiving food support (Shepley 1973: 1760). A good harvest followed, however, and by December 7, 1973, this number was reduced to 161,800 (Shepley 1973: 1760). Thereafter, virtually all short-term relief activities were discontinued, since few new refugees were generated (Wiseman 1975: 1935).

On December 8, 1972, it was announced by the US Mission in Laos that the project title of Refugee Relief and Resettlement would be renamed Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation to better reflect, and more effectively respond to, the changing political, security and economic environment when planning for the future direction of these projects (Richardson and Ramsey 1972: 2).

Assistance to refugees was subsequently modified to encompass two broad categories designated as "Food Support" and "Rehabilitation Support" (e.g., shelter, educational assistance and medical assistance). These two categories were, in turn,

subdivided to reflect the status of the refugee groups that received assistance: those refugees who were fully dependent on food and rehabilitation assistance, those who were partially dependent on food and rehabilitation assistance and those who received rehabilitation assistance only (USAID 1971c: 164–182).

US Begins to Withdraw

As of November 10, 1972, which was during the time leading up to the February 1973 cease-fire, all Lao and other ethnic irregular units organized by the CIA, commonly known as Special Guerrilla Units (SGUs), assumed the new name of Lao Irregular Forces (LIFs) in anticipation of demands by PL negotiators that all irregulars be demobilized prior to the formation of a coalition government (Conboy 1995: 403). The next step was initiated in 1974, as the CIA was phasing out its in-country advisors (all foreign military personnel not assigned to diplomatic status were required to leave Laos by June 4, 1974) (Castle 1993: 124). LIF troops were reduced in size and integrated into the RLA (Castle 1993: 410).

For the most part, dependents of the former paramilitary units in northern Laos that were integrated into the regular Lao army had been in refugee status for several years, and the cost of their food rationing, as noted above, was funded by the US Department of Defense (DoD). However, the DoD funding was scheduled to cease beginning July 1, 1974, which raised the question of how to deal with the hardships most of the estimated 95,000 dependents (about 46 percent of the people receiving food support in northern Laos as of June 30, 1973) would be subject to at that point. The option that prevailed was the reclassification of eligible dependents (27 percent of the 353,300 people receiving food support countrywide) as refugees who, like all other refugees, were served notice to start taking steps to support themselves (Williamson 1973: 30–33; Mann 1973: 129).

Terminal Phase of USAID Refugee Program

In April 1974, the Provisional Government of National Union (PGNU) was formed, and the terminal phase of direct USAID operational involvement in the refugee program began in mid-1974, when a representative from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) arrived in Laos and surveys were conducted in preparation for the eventual return of the refugees to their original villages (Ramsey et al. 1976: 2133). During the same period, the United States began to phase out its expansive military support network. By June 1974, Air America was no longer permitted to fly within Laos, but this did not negatively impact food delivery to refugees because overland routes began to open up (Conboy 1995: 412; Leary 1999).

By November 15, 1974, USAID was providing assistance to a total of 120,000 refugees (103,000 in feeding programs and 40,000 in resettlement programs, of which 23,000 were also in feeding programs). One year earlier, USAID was providing similar assistance to 378,000 people, with the decline directly attributable to efforts by refugees to take advantage of the previous two years of relative peace and increase their agricultural productivity. Unusually good weather helped to produce an exceptional harvest, which allowed USAID to revise its feeding policy. Except for special

cases, the distribution of rice was terminated as of December 1, 1974. All in all, by December 1974, most refugees were reported to have been adequately provided with agricultural equipment and seeds and with basic public facilities such as dispensaries, schools, roads, and potable water (Ramsey 1974: 74).

By late 1974, the Ministry of Social Welfare estimated that about 776,000 people—about 24 percent out of a total estimated population of 3.2 million (of which an estimated 750,000 people lived in PL controlled areas[17]) (US Senate 1973: 61)—were displaced during the war and were living in pre-cease-fire, RLG-controlled areas other than their original villages (Ramsey 1974: 74). The number of displaced people living in PL-controlled areas was unknown. The Ministry also estimated that 250,000 refugees on the Vientiane side desired to return to home areas on the PL side. However, no guidelines beyond the general language of the September 1973 Protocol had emerged by then to facilitate such moves, and the PGNU had only just begun to formulate some general plans (Ramsey 1974: 75).

In the meantime, by December 1974, at least 82,000 people returned, of their own accord, to their original home villages. Approximately 75,000 people moved to areas within the Vientiane side, while 7,000 people returned to the PL side (Ramsey 1974: 75). In March and April 1975, a group of mostly Tai Phouan refugees returned to the PL-controlled Plain of Jars from the Vientiane Plain via U.N. assisted airlifts, and by the late summer of 1975, a total of about 25,000 refugees had returned to both the Plain of Jars and northern Borikhane Province (Ramsey et al. 1976: 2198).

Perhaps the most significant disincentive faced by refugees contemplating a return to their homes in areas controlled by the PL was the widespread stigmatization of families because of the past association of a male member with the RLG and CIA-funded ADC/SGU military forces. This dilemma was magnified by the fact that many of these people could not be supported by normal cultivation in the areas to which they fled owing to land shortages, the lack of material assistance, taxation and restrictions on private animal raising, susceptibility to disease and, in general, the absence of economic autonomy and re-acceptance of paramilitary veterans by the Pathet Lao (Brown and Zasloff 1974: 43–45). Over time, refugees returning to former battle zone areas and areas adjacent to supply routes used by communist forces (including the Ho Chi Minh Trail) were also faced with the threat of unexploded bombs and other ordnance (UXOs).

The last massive evacuation of refugees took place during a three-day airlift of 3,000–3,500[18] Hmong from Long Tieng to Nam Phong in Thailand, which culminated on May 14, 1975 when the last planes departed Long Tieng, one with Maj. Gen. Vang Pao on board. It was estimated that some 14,000 refugees were left behind (Conboy 1995: 415; Hillmer 2010: 162–168; Yang Dao 1993: 155–156). Others were left unsupported at remaining remote outposts such as Bouam Long, which was located north of the Plain of Jars. Although thousands more subsequently escaped to Thailand, it was "a time of enormous confusion." On May 29, a "terrible and unforgotten massacre took place

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[17] Of the estimated 750,000 people who lived in PL-controlled areas, about 500,000 lived in northern Laos, 130,000 in central Laos, and 120,000 in southern Laos (US Senate 1972: 61).

[18] MacAlan Thompson, *pers. comm.*, January 28, 2014.

[when PL] soldiers fired openly on a crowd of several thousand Hmong refugees at Hin Heup Bridge across the [Nam Lik] River, the point of access to Vientiane" (Lee and Tapp 2010: 15). While many Hmong felt betrayed by Vang Pao, others still trusted him and believed that at the end of the day he would come to their rescue.

On May 27, 1975, an agreement was signed between the PGNU and the American Charge d'Affaires (the US ambassador had departed in April) that the USAID Mission would be terminated by June 30. Termination was completed on June 26, when the acting USAID director left Vientiane and an Embassy Diplomatic Note to that effect was delivered to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ramsey et al. 1976: 1953). At the time of USAID's departure "virtually all refugees [ca. 143,000] had achieved a degree of physical well-being and economic self-sufficiency that enabled them to be dropped from the refugee rolls" (Wiseman 1975: 1940; Ramsey 1974: 74).

Statistical Summary

During the period from FY 1962–FY 1973 (through June 30, 1973), USAID delivered 322,797 metric tons (MT) of rice, 38,946 MT of US Food for Peace PL-480 agricultural commodities, and 74,295 cases of canned meat to refugees. Of these commodities, 176,773 MT were delivered by air (as of June 30, 1973) to 204 drop-zone sites and 118 airfield sites. The number of refugee recipients averaged nearly 115,000 during the period 1963–1968, and from 1969 to 1972, the number averaged 225,000 people.[19] The total cost of the Refugee Relief and Resettlement Project alone (FY 1962–FY 1973) was $56,982,000 (excluding other projects such as education, public health and air transportation), with an average for the three-year period FY 1970–FY 1973 of $18,000,000. With respect to medical assistance, the average annual patient treatments totaled 1,400,000 refugees who were (as of June 30, 1973) served at 150 dispensaries and two hospitals (Knott 1973: 1599–1600).

Days after leaving Laos, USAID's acting director, Gordon Ramsey, was asked: "After all these years, all the expenses [incurred by USAID/Laos, of which the refugee program was a priority component] and now to have it all end so ingloriously, was it worthwhile?" Mr. Ramsey's response was, "I think we've done a hell of a lot of good things for this country. Maybe we did them wrong, but the results are here." (Simons 1975: A18)

Post-1975 Flight from Laos

Although refugee movements within Laos during the post-June 1975 era are not covered in this paper, nearly 10 percent of the population of Laos, some 300,000 people—mostly Hmong and Lao, but also Khmu, Iu Mien, Tai Dam, and other ethnic minorities—made the decision to become international refugees and face the challenges of beginning a new life in countries around the world. Their exodus took place both during and after the period in which the PL took steps to officially take over

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[19] These numbers vary somewhat from averages noted earlier in this paper.

and form the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) in December 1975, thereby marking the end of the Kingdom of Laos.

Conclusions

"Political memories" based on violent wartime recollections are "important for understanding social relations and interactions" between people of opposing factions that emerge during the postwar period (Baird 2014: 65). In Laos, issues relating to "political memories" prompted the Lao PDR to send about 40,000 people formerly affiliated with the RLG (including members of the royal family) for 're-education' (Baird 2014: 65). Of this number, select individuals were sent to remote concentration camps. "Political memories" were another factor that led to post-1975 insurgencies by anti-communist elements in select areas of Laos that continued into the 2000s.

As noted above, these "political memories" stigmatized that group of refugees aligned with elements of the RLA and RLG more generally, as they contemplated returning to their homes in PL-controlled areas. While many of the people uprooted by the war returned to the land from which they fled, some people, for security reasons, including Hmong and other ethnic groups—especially those who fought against Communism—were resettled by the Lao PDR away from the remote areas where some fought to recover their land from the Communists during the war (Baird and Le Billon 2012: 295).

While the Lao PDR's Constitution defines Laos as a multiethnic state that seeks to create unity, post-war land allocation has been an important consideration for those who were displaced, mostly subsistence farmers. "Land is a unique, valuable, and immovable resource…[and is] therefore a very strategic socio-economic asset…" (USAID 2005: 2). For those whose political alignment was with the RLG during the war, "memories of a war that supposedly ended in 1975…are contributing to shaping contemporary rural landscapes in Laos" (Baird and Le Billon 2012: 291).

Indications are that "post-conflict settings often see dramatic shifts in political power, attempts to settle 'old scores,' and/or the establishment of new land laws" (USAID 2005: 6), which can be important in shaping the policies of land allocation and power relations. "Spoken of in the shadows, these political memories continue to stigmatize and incapacitate those [in Laos] on the 'wrong side…'" (Baird and Le Billon 2012: 291, 298).

Within Laos, population displacement continues to this day to clear the way for large-scale land concessions and farmland acquisitions (often referred to as 'land-grabbing') and so accommodate land-based economic projects initiated mostly by foreign investors (notably Vietnam, Thailand, Japan and China). At the same time, Hmong and Khmu "are being encouraged, coerced, possibly even forced, to move down to lowland areas where there are more economic opportunities, productive agriculture and better access to government services such as education and health" (IFAD 2012: 21). Many ethnic minority people (as well as ethnic Lao) have also migrated to Thailand in search of economic opportunities (IFAD 2012: 16).

A further complication faced by resettled refugees—regardless of the basis for their "political memories"—is their exposure to those former battlegrounds that are littered with UXOs. A Lao PDR government survey indicates that some 50,000 people

were UXO "victims" during the period from 1964 to mid-2008 (Sisawath et al. 2008: 20; Coates and Redfern 2014: 7).

We have seen how thousands of civilians were torn away from their territories in the course of the Second Indochina War and how the impact has carried over into the post-conflict period. The victims of this war—especially ethnic minorities—suffered severely from the negative social, economic and political effects wrought by their displacement. "Land is often a significant factor in widespread violence," and, especially for those refugees who remained in Laos, land "is also a critical element in peace-building and economic reconstruction in post-conflict situations" (USAID 2005: 2), a seemingly cyclical phenomenon that has plagued the people of Laos for centuries.

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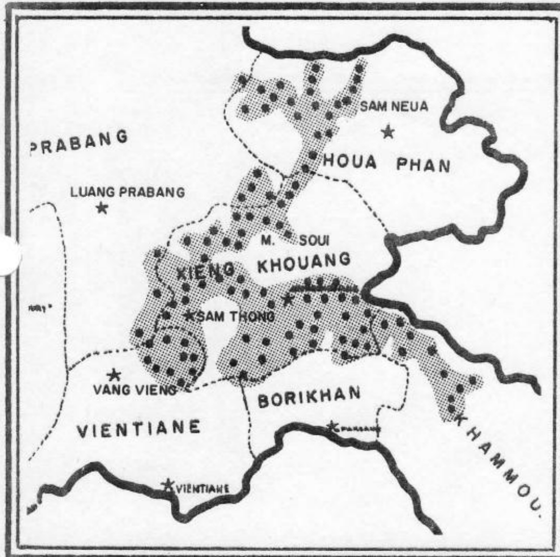
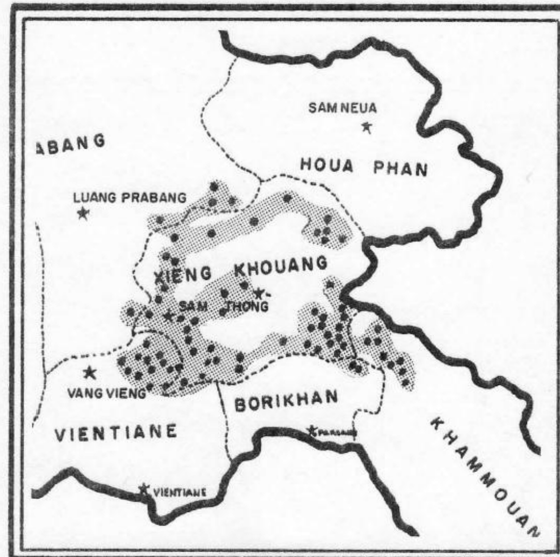
Maps Appendix:

Figure 1. Laos in the 1960s

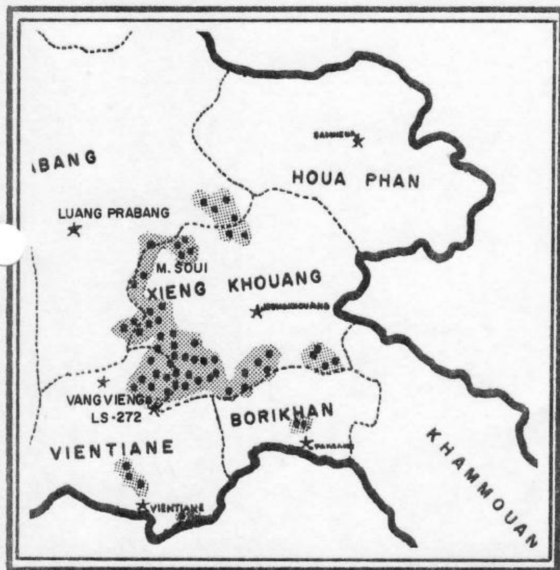
NORTH VIETNAMESE ATTACKS IN NORTHEASTERN LAOS HAVE FORCED THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE OUT OF THEIR TRADITIONAL HOMELANDS INTO SAFE HAVEN AREAS.



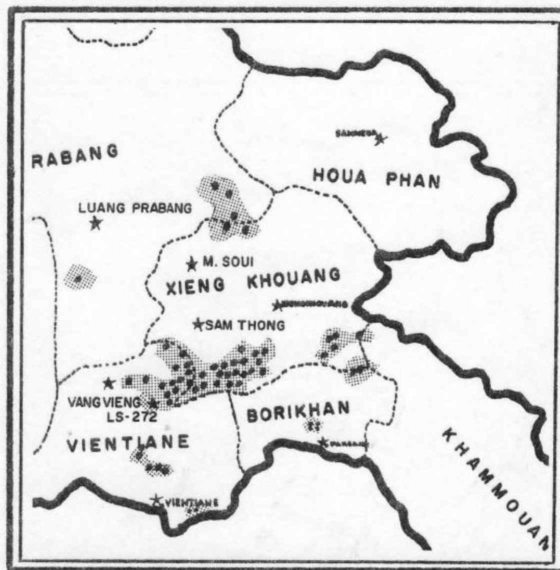
REFUGEE LOCATIONS
FROM 1963 TO 1968



REFUGEE LOCATIONS
FROM 1968 TO 1970



REFUGEE LOCATIONS
FROM 1970 TO 1971



REFUGEE LOCATIONS
FROM 1971 TO PRESENT

Figure 2. Refugee Flow in Northeastern Laos 1963–1972

Refugee Locations (April 1971)

CHINA
NORTH VIETNAM
BURMA
THAILAND
CAMBODIA
LUANG PRABANG 33,348
XIENG KHOUANG 153,156
BAN HOUEI SAI AREA 16,253
SAYABOURY 5,671
PAKSANE 10,297
VANG VIENG AREA 6,957
VIENTIANE PLAIN 27,344
THAKHEK 72
SAVANNAKHET 6,057
SEDONE & WAPIKHAMTHONG 6,564
SITHANDONE 1,143
DATE: APRIL 9, 1971
266,862 TOTAL REFUGEES RECEIVING FULL SUPPORT

Figure 3. Refugee Locations (April 1971)

Appendix 1. Resettlement Projects in Laos (based on Ramsey 1976: 2127–2131)

1) Houay Nam Phak – Approved in 1968, the first integrated relocation project was located in Houay Nam Phak, 25 km south of Pakse. Prompted by poor security conditions on the Bolovens Plateau, refugees began to move into Houay Nam Phak in April 1969. Some 1,400 refugees were relocated in this project.
2) Paksane – A number of relocation villages constructed in the vicinity of Paksane accommodated refugees who fled south from the southern fringe areas of the Plain of Jars during the heavy fighting of 1970. About 75 percent of these people were Lao and tribal Tai (Tai Dam and Tai Daeng), and 25 percent were Hmong and Lao Theung.
3) Seno – In late 1969 nearly 3,000 civilians were evacuated prior to the battle for the strategic town of Muang Phine and were relocated to the Seno Military Camp east of Savannakhet.
4) Vientiane Plain – The initial settlers were Tai Phouan airlifted from the Plain of Jars in February 1970. Later, in 1971, several thousand other refugees fled from the Long Tieng area to the relative safety of the Vientiane. In all, 27,000 refugees were resettled in 27 specially constructed villages on the Vientiane Plain.
5) Thasano – In July 1971 a large tract of land was allocated as a site for relocating refugees from the Muong Phalane area in Savannakhet Province. Shortly thereafter, an extension was added for refugees from the Dong Hene area, and the project eventually included 11,500 refugees.
6) Hin Heup – After the Vietnamese captured the Plain of Jars in December 1971 and subsequent pressure was placed on the Long Tieng area in 1972, a large group of 6,000 refugees, originally from Houaphanh Province, relocated to the northern reaches of the Vientiane Plain near the Nam Lik River.
7) Long Nam Khan – With the presence of some 40,000 already in the vicinity of Luang Prabang city, in late 1971 it was decided to relocate an additional several thousand Laos Theung from northern Luang Prabang Province to an 86,000-acre area of land between Xieng Nguen and Muang Nane.
8) Phu Ba Chiang – In October 1971, work began developing a relocation area in a forest preserve at the foot of Phu Ba Chiang in the greater Pakse area. However, owing to security issues, the work was temporarily suspended.
9) Tha Khek-Khammouane Province – The relocation efforts in this area were focused on assisting several thousand civilians who fled following the attack on Nam Thorne on October 28, 1972. Many of the refugees had originally been relocated from the Kham Keut area in the early 1960s. Owing to the poor agricultural conditions in the area, many of these people migrated north to the Paksane area.
10) Houay Nam Ngam – Officially designated as a relocation project in early 1974, Houay Nam Ngam, situated between Ban Houei Sai and Ton Pheung, was set up to handle the large influx of refugees generated by the PL and North Vietnamese push on Houa Khong Province in late 1972 and 1973. Important locations that were overrun during this period included Vieng Phu Kha, Nam Yu, and Muang Meung.

11) Ban Xon – Although never designated as an official relocation site, several projects were undertaken to accommodate the many refugees from Xieng Khouang Province who relocate in this area, which served as USAID's operations center for northeastern Laos following the fall of Sam Thong in March 1970.

Appendix 2. Online Maps of Laos

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MR4 Maps. http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/SEAiT.MR4Maps, last accessed January 17, 2014.

MR5 Maps. http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/SEAiT.MR5Maps, last accessed January 17, 2014.