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REPORT

AIR WAR IN NORTHERN LAOS

1 APRIL - 30 NOVEMBER 1971

DECLASSIFIED BY AF/HOH
IAW E.O. 13526
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APPROVED FOR
PUBLIC RELEASE

22 JUNE 1973

HQ PACAF

Directorate of Operations Analysis
CHECO/CORONA HARVEST DIVISION

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Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE JUN 1973		2. REPORT TYPE N/A		3. DATES COVERED -	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Air War In Northern Laos 1 April 30 November 1971				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Project CHECO 7th AF, DOAC				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release, distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT SAR	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 134	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

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The counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare environment of Southeast Asia has resulted in USAF airpower being employed to meet a multitude of requirements. These varied applications have involved the full spectrum of USAF aerospace vehicles, support equipment, and manpower. As a result, operational data and experiences have accumulated which should be collected, documented, and analyzed for current and future impact upon USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine.

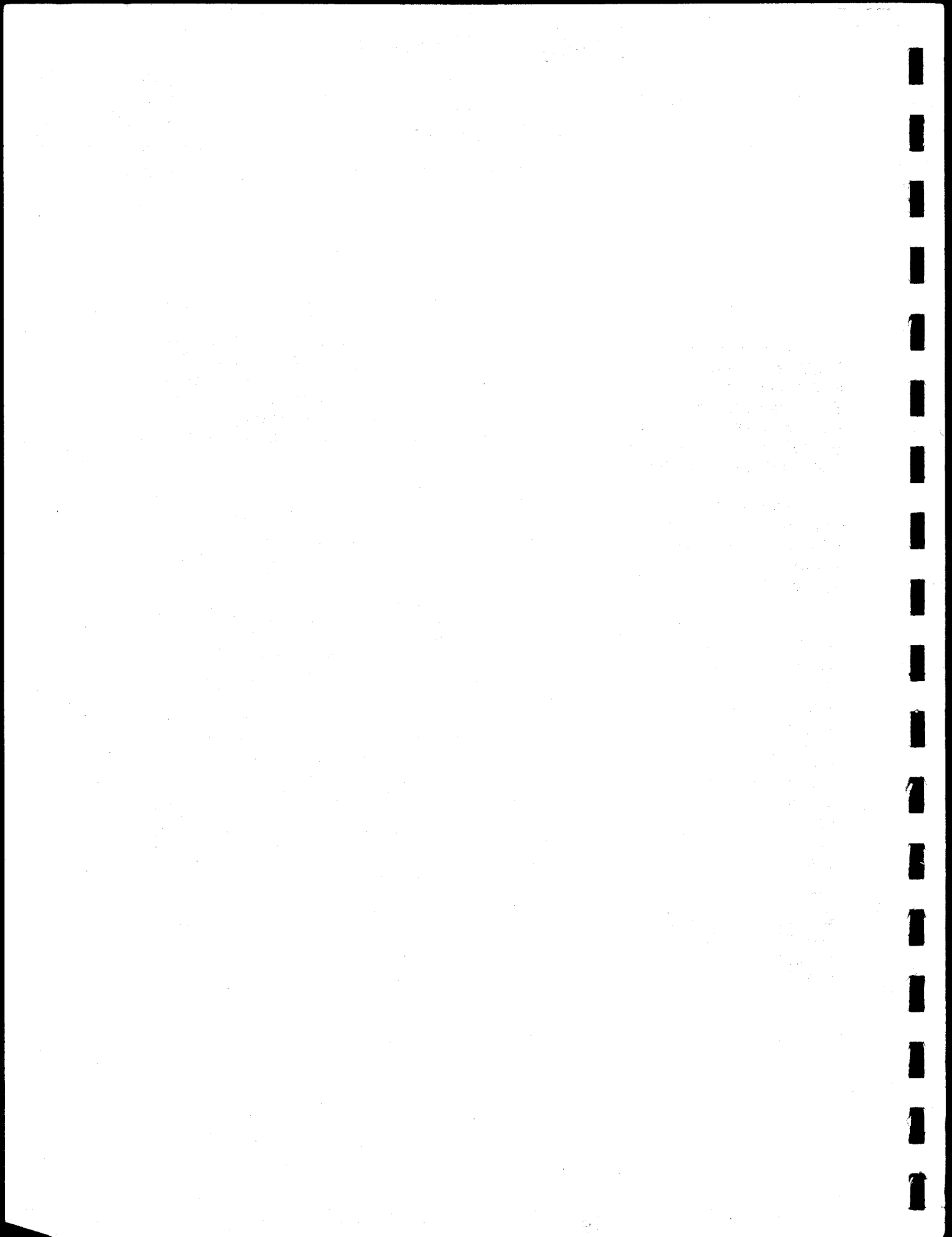
Fortunately, the value of collecting and documenting our SEA experiences was recognized at an early date. In 1962, Hq USAF directed CINCPACAF to establish an activity which would provide timely and analytical studies of USAF combat operations in SEA and would be primarily responsive to Air Staff requirements and direction.

Project CHECO, an acronym for Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations, was established to meet the Air Staff directive. Managed by Hq PACAF, with elements in Southeast Asia, Project CHECO provides a scholarly "on-going" historical examination, documentation, and reporting on USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine in PACOM. This CHECO report is part of the overall documentation and examination which is being accomplished. It is an authentic source for an assessment of the effectiveness of USAF airpower in PACOM when used in proper context. The reader must view the study in relation to the events and circumstances at the time of its preparation--recognizing that it was prepared on a contemporary basis which restricted perspective and that the author's research was limited to records available within his local headquarters area.

Robert E. Hiller

ROBERT E. HILLER
Director of Operations Analysis
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FOREWORD

(U) The Air War in Northern Laos is a continuing study which addresses USAF operations in that portion of Laos known as Barrel Roll. (See Figure 1.) The USAF role has primarily been to support the seasonal friendly campaigns. As the Wet Seasons began, the charismatic Meo war Lord, Maj Gen Vang Pao, traditionally drove inward in an attempt to capture the famed Plaine des Jarres area from Communist Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese troops. Alternatingly, Vang Pao's Dry Season campaigns were chiefly identified by his withdrawal from the Plaine to his headquarters at Long Tieng, his defense of the Long Tieng area, and his preparations for the next Wet Season offensive. This pattern manifested itself once again during the April to November 1971 Wet Season campaign which again saw this semi-annual see-saw battle for Barrel Roll territory.

(U) In organizing this study, the military regions in northern Laos were treated separately with a separate chronology for each area. This format was selected in preference to a strict chronological treatment of all of northern Laos as a whole because the regional variances of the 1971 Wet Season lent themselves to this approach. Likewise included in this study is a discussion of command and control relationships which, along with the various political constraints, greatly affected the role of USAF air power in supporting the Laotian allies.

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(U) This study makes no effort to indict any government's political role in military victory or defeat. As the military instrument is employed to achieve political objectives, the military leader ignores political consequences only at his own peril. This fact is as significant in USAF Barrel Roll operations as it has been throughout the Southeast Asia conflict.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

(U) Superficially, the situation in April 1971 appeared to be much the same as it had in the two previous years. The enemy offensive had once again reached its zenith as the dry season came to an end. In northern Laos it had already been halted, and the enemy was slowly beginning to contract his lines. In the south, the enemy advance continued but with decreasing momentum. The situation was still serious, but the crisis had passed and it was time for the friendly forces to begin making plans for their own offensive.

(S) Several subtle but decisive changes had taken place, however, which were to significantly alter the normal yearly course of events. In Washington, the mood was one of withdrawal and disengagement. Any offensive operations which might appear to be dragging the United States deeper into the war were viewed with the greatest concern. In Southeast Asia itself, the USAF had drawn down to the point where its ability to support offensive operations in Laos, while conducting an interdiction campaign against the infiltration routes into South Vietnam, was severely limited. At the same time, the ability of the Laotians to mount an offensive--or even to maintain defensive positions without U.S. air support--was nonexistent. In contrast to this diminished allied strength, the North Vietnamese were stronger than ever. Prior to 1969 their main supply bases had been located in North Vietnam, and each offensive had to be preceded by a long logistics build-up. During the two succeeding years, however, they had been able to

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establish secure, well-defended depots inside Laos. With supplies from these depots, they were able to maintain much larger forces in Laos throughout the wet season.

(S) Under these circumstances, it was imperative that friendly efforts be fully coordinated if there was to be any hope of saving Laos. Unfortunately, there was no systematic procedure to achieve such coordination. The absence of such a procedure resulted from two principal factors. First, a sufficiently high priority was not assigned to operations in Barrel Roll. Second, there was no effective organizational structure for directing joint operations and no provision for joint planning to effectively use the available, limited resources.

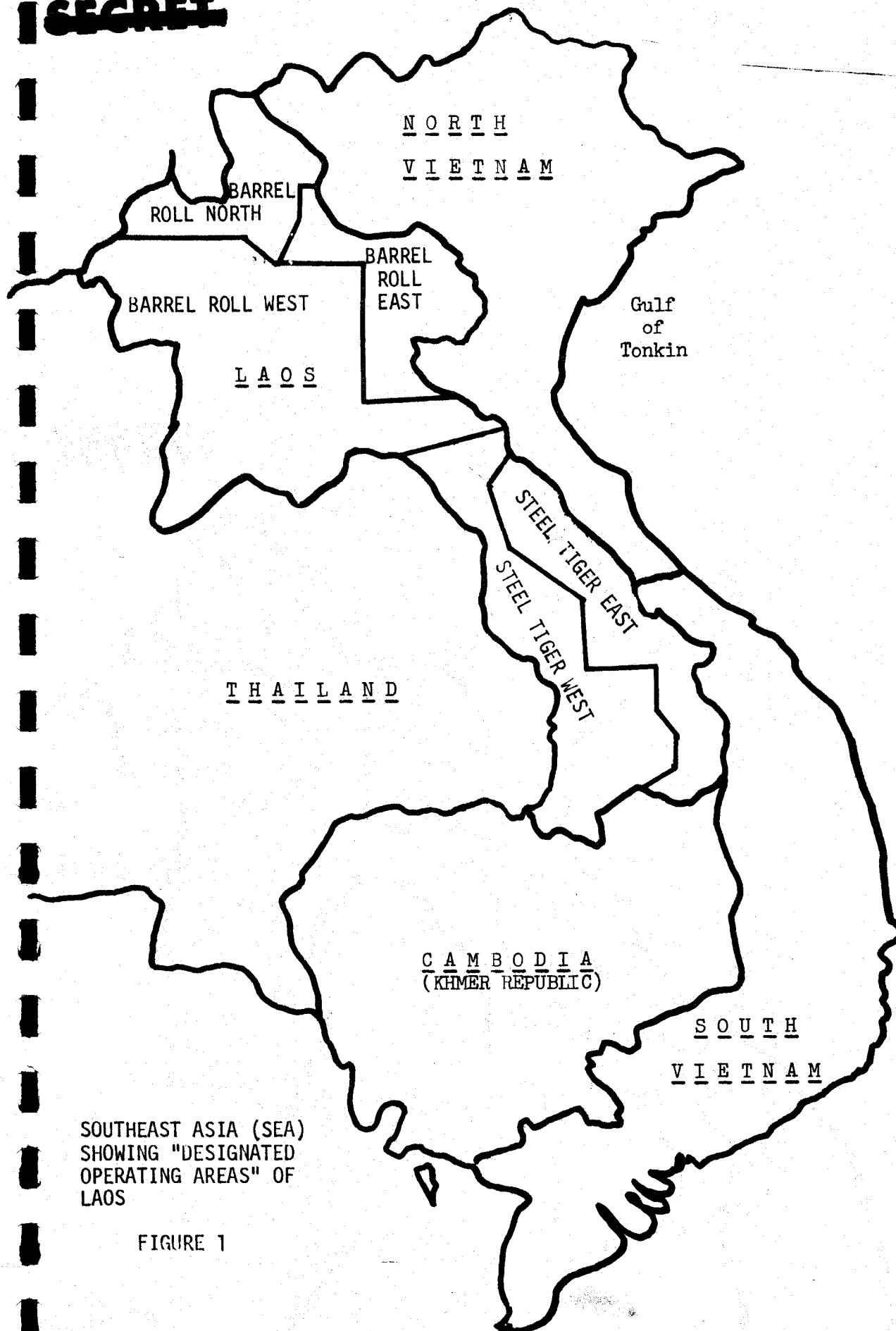
(U) Nevertheless, air power continued to play a dominant role in the conflict and what successes were achieved were due primarily to the effectiveness of air power. What might have been achieved had the air resources been fully exploited remains a matter of speculation.

Dual Nature of the War in Laos

(TS) Any discussion of USAF operations in Laos must begin with an understanding of the dual nature of the war in Laos, a war which consisted of the struggle for Laos as well as a spill-over of the war in South Vietnam (SVN). The struggle for South Vietnam resulted from the attempt by North Vietnam to unify all of Vietnam under the Hanoi regime, and involved Laotian territory (such as the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Steel Tiger East--see map, Figure 1) which was being used by the communists in their continuing effort to supply their troops in SVN. Primary responsibility for this facet

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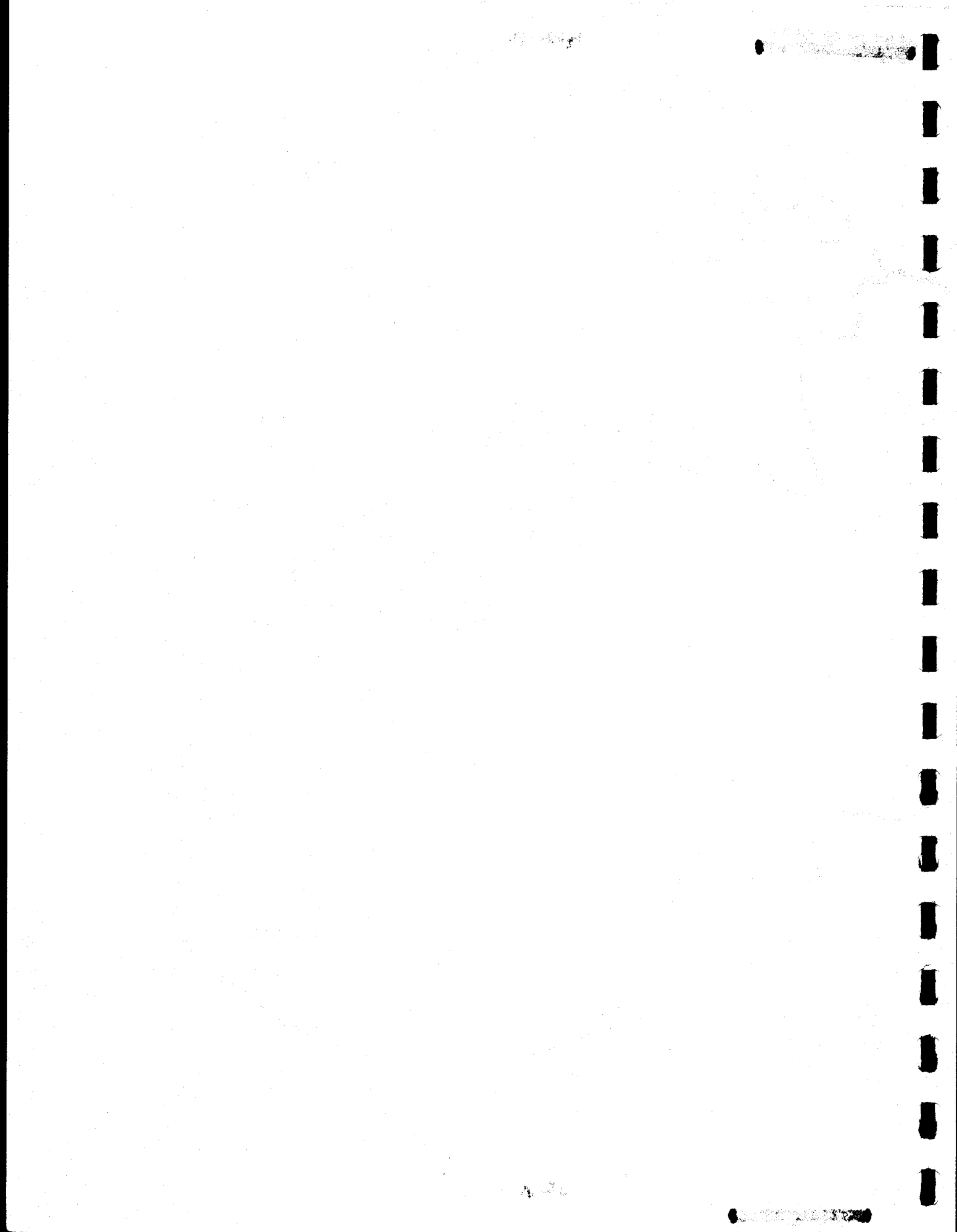
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SOUTHEAST ASIA (SEA)
SHOWING "DESIGNATED
OPERATING AREAS" OF
LAOS

FIGURE 1

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of the war rested with the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) and its air component, Seventh Air Force. Operations were conducted in accordance with the conventional principles of a unified command, with USAF's primary role being to conduct an interdiction campaign against the Ho Chi Minh Trail in accordance with the stated objectives, which were to²

. . . reduce the flow of men and materiel into [South Vietnam] . . . and to increase the cost to North Vietnam of continuing aggression and support of insurgencies in South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

(S) It is the other part of the war in Laos--the Barrel Roll war--that is the subject of this report. USAF participation in this struggle was primarily in the form of direct air support of indigenous ground forces. The Barrel Roll war stemmed from North Vietnam's long-term goal of establishing its hegemony over all of Southeast Asia.³ By 1971 this war encompassed all of northern and western Laos (Barrel Roll and Steel Tiger West). Ostensibly, American interest in this phase of the conflict was to stabilize the situation along the lines of the 1962 Geneva Accords; it has been characterized as "the war of Laos," as opposed to "the war in Laos."⁴ However, because of North Vietnamese aspirations, it might more accurately be called the war for Thailand. Inevitably, the two aspects of the war in Laos became intertwined, but in 1968 the U.S. Ambassador to Laos, William H. Sullivan, asserted, "We still must consider our interest in Laos . . . as the protection of the flank for Thailand."⁵

(TS) By Presidential directive, the Ambassador to Laos was responsible for the "overall direction, coordination and supervision" of U.S.

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As a result it was felt that the enemy logistics system in Laos would¹⁰ be much more active than in previous years. At the same time, Seventh Air Force believed that in northern and western Laos "it is probable that neither the enemy nor friendly forces will make any significant territorial gains beyond those made during the dry season."¹¹ Accordingly, OPLAN 730 established the following guidelines for sortie allocation: 70 percent¹² to Steel Tiger, and 10 percent each to Barrel Roll, Cambodia, and Vietnam. For Barrel Roll this meant a reduction of almost 50 percent, from 60 to approximately 32 sorties per day.

~~(S)~~ During the course of the campaign, the basic assumptions of OPLAN 730 proved incorrect. For example, truck traffic in Steel Tiger East dropped rapidly from a high of almost 2,500 trucks per day to an average of only 11 trucks per day during the latter part of the campaign.¹³ At the same time, materiel that was in the pipeline was placed in storage and most of the road maintenance crews returned to North Vietnam. As truck traffic diminished, the brunt of the Air Force effort shifted to interdiction points (IDPs) and storage areas. Under the combined effects of bombing and rain, the roads and IDPs were quickly reduced to quagmires. The campaign against storage areas at first produced satisfactory results: air strikes produced an average of 1.6 secondary fires or explosions per sortie in April.¹⁴ However, as the more lucrative targets were exhausted and weather hampered visual bombing, bomb damage assessments (BDA) fell to a low of 0.2 secondary fires or explosions per sortie in July.¹⁵

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(S) In the meantime, military activity in Barrel Roll and Steel Tiger West continued at a rapid pace. For one thing, friendly forces launched major ground offensives in Military Regions (MR) II and IV, but encountered unexpectedly stiff resistance and so required considerable air support. Second, the roads in northern and western Laos--especially in the Plaine des Jarres (PDJ) and Bolovens Plateau--were less affected by the rains than those in the mountainous areas to the east. Consequently, the enemy was able to continue his resupply efforts in these areas for a longer period and to resume them at an earlier date than in Steel Tiger East.¹⁶ At the same time, the enemy's storage facilities were not as dispersed or as well defended as in the eastern LOCs. As a result, the few sorties (typically six to 10 per day) which were directed against hard targets averaged three to five secondary explosions or fires per sortie.¹⁷ Despite this relatively high level of activity and the excellent BDA, no major adjustments in sortie allocation were made. This situation was frustrating to aircrews and planners alike since many of them considered it "splashing mud on trees" while more important and lucrative targets¹⁸ were not being struck due to "shortage of sortie availability."

Organization for the Barrel Roll War

(S) The second major matter of concern was in the organizational structure for the conduct of the Barrel Roll war. Instead of one single agency, there were three principal agencies involved in the support of military operations in Laos: the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane, Seventh Air Force, and Seventh/Thirteenth Air Force. In addition, the Military Assistance Command,

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Thailand (MACTHAI), the American Embassy in Bangkok, and the Deputy Chief, Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group, Thailand (DEPCHJUSMAGTHAI) were also involved to a lesser degree. This division of responsibility and resources made coordination difficult and joint planning virtually impossible.

(TS) Since the 1962 Geneva Convention prohibited the stationing of foreign troops in Laos, there was no unified command for the conduct of the Barrel Roll war. The former Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) was redesignated DEPCHJUSGMAGTHAI and moved to Bangkok where it continued to coordinate the Military Assistance Program (MAP) from outside Laos. Similarly, MACTHAI was limited to the improvement and modernization of the Royal Thai Government (RTG) forces. Responsibility for military operations in Laos passed to the U.S. Ambassador to Laos. Reporting directly to the Ambassador was the Air Attache (AIRA). To coordinate USAF and other U.S. military activities with the Royal Laotian Government (RLG) forces, the Ambassador was assisted by four principal agencies: the Offices of the Air and Army Attaches, CAS,* and the Requirements Officer of the U.S. Agency for International Development. First, there was the staff of the Air Attache, legally limited to seven personnel. However, they were augmented by 11 people from the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). Since this total staff of 18 was too small to provide the professional advice required by the Ambassador and to coordinate USAF-Royal Laotian Air Force (RLAF) operations, the Office of the U.S. Air Attache (OUSAIRA) was augmented by an additional 51 personnel from Det 9, 1131 Special Activities Squadron, Headquarters

*See pp. 11-12 for an explanation and discussion of CAS.

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Command. (These personnel were assigned on a one year PCS basis to perform normal staff and support functions.)¹⁹ Coordination of air-ground operations was achieved through the operation of five Air Operation Centers (AOCs) collocated with each of the five RLG military regional headquarters. These AOCs were manned by 21 personnel on six months TDY from the USAF Special Operations Force at Eglin AFB, Florida, under the "Palace Dog" program. Actual control of airstrikes in support of Laotian ground forces was the responsibility of 21 Raven Forward Air Controllers (FACs) (and Lao/Thai Forward Air Guides). The Raven FACs were assigned to Detachment 1, 56 Special Operations Wing (Det 1, 56 SOW), and were sent on six months TDY to Laos where they served under the operational control of AIRA. The Forward Air Guides (FAGs) were indigenous English-speaking* personnel who were given six days of training in air-ground procedures at Udorn RTAFB, and then were primarily assigned to each of Major General Vang Pao's CAS-supported Lao "Irregular" battalions.²⁰ An additional 18 maintenance men from Det 1, 56 SOW were also sent to Laos on six months TDY to assist the RLAF in maintaining MAP aircraft. Finally, three observers from the 10th Weather Squadron were assigned on six months TDY to Vientiane, thus giving OUSAIRA a total of 132 personnel. While in Laos, all of these people wore civilian clothes, and were addressed simply as "Mister." Their personal activities were severely restricted.²¹

(S) Even with this augmentation, however, OUSAIRA was inadequately manned to properly staff the full range of operations which it was called

*Other non-English speaking FAGs were assigned to regular Laotian battalions to control strikes by the RLAF.

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(75) Distribution was provided by the Airlift Support Section of the Embassy, which coordinated the operations of Embassy-assigned and contract aircraft. Generally, Air America and Continental Air Service provided the actual airlift. These resources were frequently inadequate and were augmented by USAF aircraft, especially the helicopters of the 21st Special Operations Squadron (21st SOS), controlled directly by the Deputy Commander, 7/13AF, and scheduled by his Special Activities Section (DOZ).²⁸

(8) Although all plans for military operations in Laos had to be approved by the Ambassador, his approval did not guarantee their full implementation. All requests for USAF support (except for the 21st SOS) had to be made to 7AF, where they were weighed against all other requirements. By 1971 a complex but workable structure had evolved for the allocation of these resources in Southeast Asia. The Commander, 7AF had operational control of all USAF resources in Southeast Asia; however, all USAF units in Thailand were assigned administratively and logistically to 13AF. The position of Deputy Commander, 7/13AF was established to resolve any interface problems which might result from this arrangement, and, at the same time, to serve as the coordinating link between 7AF and the Embassy in Vientiane.²⁹

(9) The Deputy Commander, 7/13AF neither established policy nor controlled the activities of USAF units in Thailand except as specifically delegated by the Commanders of the two parent Air Forces. As Deputy to the 13AF Commander, he advised 13AF on all administrative and logistics

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matters pertaining to Thai-based units and relayed and supervised 13AF instructions to the subordinate units. Serving simultaneously as Deputy to the 7AF Commander, he advised 7AF on operational matters relating to USAF operations in Thailand.³⁰

(5) Due to the proximity of 7/13AF (located at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base) to Embassy personnel in Vientiane and to the war in northern Laos, 7/13AF was primarily concerned with operations in Barrel Roll and Steel Tiger West. In practice, its advice was limited to operations in these areas.³¹

(5) As part of the overall phasedown in SEA, on 29 May 1971 the 7/13AF Headquarters was reduced to 88 people and the 7/13AF Tactical Air Control Center (TACC) was closed.³² Since none of the functions of 7/13AF were eliminated in this reorganization, the principal effect was simply to increase the workload on the remaining personnel. The loss of the TACC also deprived the Deputy Commander, 7/13AF of a central source of real time information and communications for monitoring operations in the Barrel Roll war. In an effort to offset these losses, provisions were made for the Tactical Unit Operations Center (TUOC) of the 432d Tactical Reconnaissance Wing (432 TRW) to assume a limited Command Post function for 7/13AF, but this plan was never fully implemented. Additional staff assistance was provided by the Commanders of the 1974 Communications Group, 621st Tactical Control Squadron and 10th Weather Squadron, who served simultaneously as Directors of Communications, Air Defense, and Weather, respectively. A Staff Judge Advocate and a small liaison office in Bangkok completed the 7/13AF structure.³³

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(S) On 1 July 1971, Major General DeWitt Searles replaced General Evans as Deputy Commander, 7/13AF, and a month later General John Lavelle replaced General Lucius Clay as 7AF Commander. During his tour, General Evans had developed a firm set of relationships with the Ambassador in Vientiane, G. McMurtrie Godley, and with General Clay. Overall, his relations with General Clay were quite good and he exercised considerable influence over the conduct of the war in northern Laos.³⁴ He had also coalesced his staff so that it reflected his own personality and operating methods. Although improvements were made in the relations between 7/13AF and the Embassy, significant areas of difference remained with CAS and OUSAIRA, especially in the areas of planning and coordination.

(S) General Searles promptly identified the unique relationship that he as 7/13AF Deputy Commander would be required to maintain with 7AF, 13AF, the Ambassador, CAS, and OUSAIRA. As he perceived the situation, his role would depend upon the confidence and rapport that he could establish with these agencies. His staff was responsive to his views and adept at translating ideas into concrete proposals acceptable to the Embassy and 7AF.

(S) General Searles also had to establish a good working relationship with his new boss, General Lavelle. Unlike General Clay, General Lavelle chose to exercise much more direct control over the Barrel Roll war and consequently reduced the freedom of action of his Deputy. Since the 7AF staff lacked the intimate familiarity of the 7/13AF people with the situation in Barrel Roll, thorough coordination became more important than ever.

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(S) As General Evans had taken steps to improve relationships with the Embassy, General Searles continued to build upon this foundation. His approach in this regard reflected his own assessment of the role of Deputy Commander. As General Searles saw the situation, his principal functions were to focus 7AF attention on the Barrel Roll war and to ensure that the Ambassador received all the air support that he required. It was his policy to accept CAS/AIRA plans--even when he had personal reservations as to their feasibility--and translate their requirements into specific proposals which would be acceptable to 7AF. He also sought to establish a level of personal confidence with the Ambassador through frequent personal contact. One of the primary vehicles for this was the Ambassador's weekly staff meeting, held in Vientiane. The Deputy Commander, 7/13AF, had a standing invitation to attend these meetings. Just as his predecessor General Evans had done, General Searles made a point of attending these meetings whenever possible. (Often this meant postponing other activities and arranging special transportation to Vientiane.) At these meetings, he was able to talk informally with the Ambassador and his staff and engage in an open exchange of views. Such an exchange was especially important since there was no formal relationship between the Ambassador and Deputy Commander and no procedure for joint planning.³⁵

Planning for the Barrel Roll War

(S) Since there was no unified command for the conduct of military operations in Laos, there was no joint planning in the accepted sense of the concept. The Ambassador, in consultation with his country team

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and the RLG, developed the overall political and military objectives and parameters. The Ambassador also had to give final approval to all large scale plans before they could be implemented. CAS, which for all intents and purposes controlled the ground war, developed a ground plan of operation with occasional inputs from ARMA and AIRA. For "security reasons," neither 7AF nor 7/13AF was included in this initial planning. Thus, the ground package was developed without the benefit of a realistic appraisal of what air support would be required and whether it would be available. Instead, CAS placed almost unlimited confidence in the Ambassador's ability to get the necessary air support. Within limits, this confidence was usually justified. Since the Ambassador was responsible for the overall conduct of military operations in Laos, he was in effect a theater commander. Even though he had no U.S. military forces directly under his command, he did have the option, which he exercised on occasion, of going directly to the Commander in Chief, Pacific Command (CINCPAC), the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), or the State Department to bring pressure on 7AF to provide the necessary resources.

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(S) When a CAS/Embassy plan had been developed and air support requirements established, the plan was supposed to be passed via AIRA to 7/13AF, where an air support package was prepared for submission to 7AF. Since 7AF was concerned with making maximum effective use of its limited resources, the degree of support was often dependent upon the completeness and timeliness of the 7/13AF proposal. However, several factors hampered 7/13AF in developing a comprehensive proposal. First

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was the limited size of the planning staff at 7/13AF. Of necessity, planning was done on a fragmented, ad hoc basis by several different sections within 7/13AF, with attendant problems in coordination and completeness. Second, requirements could be generated by CAS, AIRA, ARMA, or the RO, and these requirements were not always completely coordinated within the Embassy before being submitted to 7/13AF. In some cases, OUSAIRA was bypassed altogether when the "customer"* went directly to 7/13AF. At other times, the "customer" went directly to 7AF, bypassing the 7/13AF "middleman." Such incidents frequently placed OUSAIRA and 7/13AF in the untenable and embarrassing position of defending and requesting emergency support for poorly planned ground operations which it was generally assumed one or both organizations had coordinated and approved. This placed the Air Force in the position of either having to support the operation or being accused of allowing it to fail due to lack of support. To solve this problem, 7/13AF proposed that:

In other than routine targeting where ground forces of one country are involved with air forces of another country, there must be joint meetings and coordination prior to the finalization of support plans. In this case, the ground forces are under control of the US Embassy, and the air forces are under control of 7AF. As the 7AF agent for coordinating with the US Embassy it therefore follows that 7/13AF must be in the planning loop prior to the submission of air operations plans for Ambassadorial approval. To do otherwise would be unfair to the Ambassador, who is entitled to be aware of all pertinent factors before making his final decision. As noted in our previous joint operations, targets frequently compete with others of extreme priority, causing detailed justification to be of great importance.

*In the vernacular, "customer" referred to CAS.

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(S) For "security reasons" the CAS/AIRA could not accept this proposal. They reiterated their earlier position, that 7/13AF be provided with a detailed briefing of the completed Embassy plan "sufficiently in advance" to allow appropriate changes to or comments on the plan prior to its implementation.³⁸ Seventh/Thirteenth Air Force reluctantly accepted this position, although the definition of "sufficiently in advance" remained a constant source of friction. As generally understood, "sufficiently in advance" meant 48 hours, although 24 hours notice³⁹ was not uncommon, and upon occasion only a few hours notice was provided.

(S) This program was not new to General Searles. Previously, General⁴⁰ Evans had described such "short fuses" in a letter to the Ambassador:

The possibility exists that there have been instances in which 7AF has turned down requests for air due to the time factor involved. My staff here at Udorn on occasion has simply not had the time to research and staff the request, then make proper recommendations to 7AF in time to have the targets fragged the following day.

The problem was partially resolved by a 28 August 1971 message from the JCS requiring Washington's approval for support of any multi-battalion⁴¹ operation. It further stated that the complete plan be submitted to the JCS 10 days in advance of the operation. This message was motivated less by a desire for comprehensive planning, however, than by a concern that U.S. forces might become engaged in offensive operations which would embarrass the Administration's disengagement policy. Actually, this message created more problems than it solved. In the first place, it removed the decision making process from the on-scene commander and introduced a potentially

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dangerous time delay between planning and execution. Second, it did not really address the issue of joint planning at all; indeed, it created a chain of command which completely bypassed 7AF.

Barrel Roll Working Group

(S) Since there was no procedure for joint planning on a formal basis, mutual confidence and rapport on an informal level was absolutely essential if the system was to work at all. The prime source for this was the Barrel Roll Working Group, composed of representatives from the staffs of CAS, AIRA, 7/13AF, and 7AF. This group, which at first met at Tan Son Nhut and later at Udorn, discussed the overall level of activity, requirements, priorities, and available resources for the coming month. Although specific plans were not discussed and decisions were not binding upon any of the participants, the meetings did provide a common frame of reference for individual planning. From these meetings, 7/13AF developed a typical daily frag request for the following month, which was forwarded to 7AF for use in their own planning. The actual frag varied almost daily as requirements and available resources changed, but the monthly proposal at least served as a point of departure.⁴² The Working Group meetings were supplemented by a Barrel Roll Conference at the end of each month. Members of the Working Group met with representatives of the various wings to review the monthly proposal and to present problems and suggestions for consideration and possible resolution by the conferees. Although these meetings were a useful supplement to, they were not a substitute for, joint planning.

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(S) The absence of such planning may have been an unavoidable result of the organizational structure for the Barrel Roll war, but it placed the Air Force in a purely reactive role for which it was ill suited. General Evans previously had observed:

As long as the U.S. Ambassador has overall responsibility for military actions in Laos there seems little likelihood that significant improvements can be made in existing working relationships between 7/13AF, CAS and ARA, the three principal U.S. agencies coordinating military operations in Laos. However, the leveling influence of the Deputy Commander, 7/13AF is essential and is considered to have contributed significantly to whatever success was achieved in military operations in Laos during this reporting period.

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CHAPTER II

THE SITUATION

The Enemy Offensive Reaches Its Zenith (See Map, Figure 2.)

(73) In the northern-most Military Region (MR I), the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) 335th Regiment and the Pathet Lao (PL) 409th Battalion (Bn) had driven to within three kilometers of the royal capital of Luang Prabang before being halted.⁴⁴ By 1 April 1971, they had already begun to withdraw from this exposed position leaving only a light screening force about seven kilometers north of the capital while the main force withdrew to fortified positions 30 kilometers north of the city. In the meantime, the NVA had been busy developing and stocking a series of supply depots in the upper Nam Ou valley. This area traditionally had been an NVA/PL sanctuary, and the enemy was taking advantage of this to develop bases from which he would be able to resume his offensive at an early date.

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An Embassy message of 29 July commented:

NVA supply lines along the Nam Ou valley remain secure in enemy hands and have not been seriously disrupted. Transportation activities appear to be assuming considerable attention which suggests that logistical related functions will remain a major objective during the remainder of the rainy season.

Farther to the west, the PL 408th Bn had succeeded in eliminating almost all of the friendly outposts on the north and west bank of the Mekong River between Luang Prabang and Ban Houei Sai. Smaller units were operating across the Mekong in Sayaboury Province, where they were in contact with the Thai Communist Terrorists (CT).

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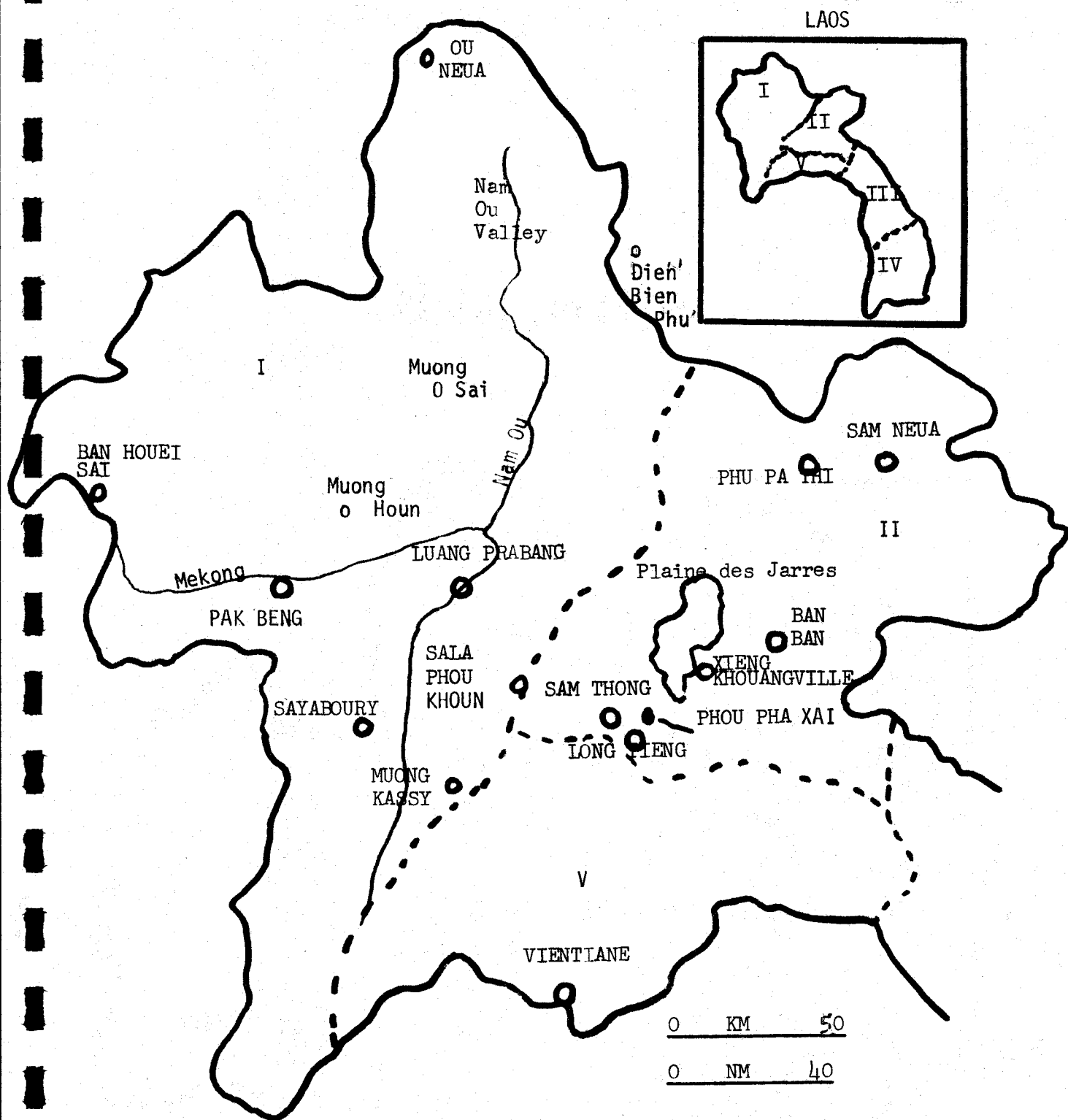
(S) To the north, some 15,000 Chinese were completing a road network linking China with Route 19 extending from Dien Bien Phu to Muong Sai. From there, the Chinese had pushed their road down the Nam Beng valley to a point just south of Muong Houn and had surveying traces all the way to Pak Beng on the Mekong. This road, aimed straight at Thailand's Nan and Chiang Rai Provinces, was causing increased concern among Royal Thai Government (RTG) officials since these two provinces were experiencing the highest levels of CT activity. The Chinese had also begun work on spur roads leading toward Luang Prabang. The entire road net was heavily defended; along these routes the enemy had deployed nearly 400 antiaircraft artillery (AAA) guns, of which 150 were 57/85mm and six were 100mm.⁴⁶ These guns were supported by four acquisition and 26 fire control radars. Prior to 1970, regular civilian overflights of the road had been unopposed, but in November 1970 an Air Laos C-47 had been hit near Muong Houn. Thereafter, heavy AAA fire was directed against any aircraft which came near the road.

(S) To the east of Luang Prabang, MR II, containing the vital PDJ/Long Tieng area, had been the scene of the heaviest fighting. Some 10,000 to 12,000 enemy troops from two NVA divisions had driven Vang Pao and his Meo Irregulars back into Long Tieng during the 1970-1971 dry season and then held positions along Skyline Ridge overlooking the Meo stronghold. (See map, Figure 3.) The enemy had been halted there by a combination of intense aerial bombardment and the timely arrival of reinforcements from other military regions, including 12 Thai Irregular battalions and a Thai artillery⁴⁷ battalion. Although the thrust had been blunted, the enemy still held

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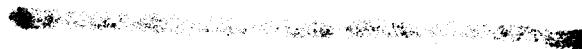
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BARREL ROLL

FIGURE 2

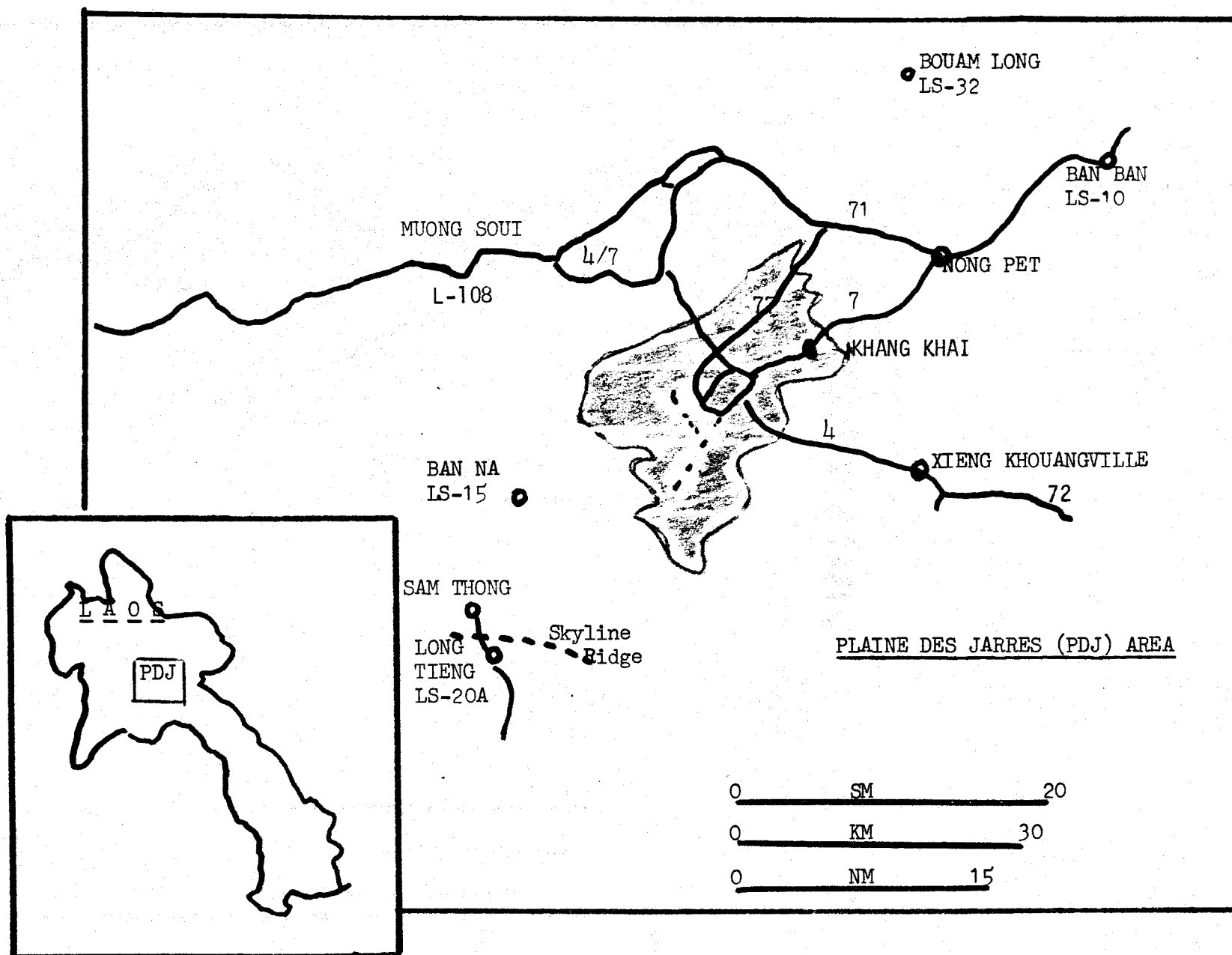
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FIGURE 3

PDJ



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Ban Na (LS-15*) under siege and had strong forces masking the Bouam Long (LS-32) complex. On 6 April 1971, the friendly forces finally abandoned LS-15, but almost simultaneously the enemy began a gradual withdrawal to the east. For the next six weeks, however, skirmishing continued as both sides paused to regroup. While attention had been focused on the siege of Long Tieng, the enemy had been busy along the LOCs leading into the PDJ, especially Routes 7 and 72. In previous years, the enemy had been hampered by the absence of any suitable forward supply area. In 1969, this logistic weakness had been partly responsible for Vang Pao's successful "About Face" operations, and in the two succeeding campaigns it had been largely responsible for the NVA's inability to take Long Tieng. In 1971, with every available sortie focused on the defense of the Meo stronghold, the NVA took advantage of their relative freedom along the LOCs to develop large, well-defended supply bases at Ban Ban and Xieng Khouangville. Intermediate depots were established at Nong Pet and in the caves along the Ban Tham valley. From there, supplies were broken into smaller units and moved to forward storage areas along the northern and southeastern PDJ, including the Chinese Cultural Center at Khang Khai which was off limits to allied bombing. Enemy activity did not go unnoticed and a CAS official noted:

Along the LOCs in general, supplies are being seen all over. Tiger FAC photography shows lots of it. In general, it appears the enemy will continue fighting into the wet season and will not draw back with the rains.

*Lima Site 15.

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(S) As if to emphasize this point, a series of air strikes against the Ban Ban storage area in late March 1971 produced over 4,000 large secondary explosions and numerous smaller explosions and fires. A single follow-up strike on 18 April produced an additional 1,100 explosions. Later, on 30 April, a flight of F-4s using Laser Guided Bombs (LGBs) produced another 4,000 secondary explosions from a storage area southwest of the PDJ.⁴⁹

(S) The Embassy emphasized the importance of these supplies to the future of enemy operations:⁵⁰

Enemy rainy season objectives and intentions in MR II area, as they have been in the past, concentrated on two major goals: (1) the prevention of RLG forces from further expansion and (2) the protection of rear logistical bases during the past dry season. For all intents and purposes the control of lines of communications and the continued support of logistical bases has been, is and will continue to be the key factor to the enemy's past, present and future success in maintaining an offensive or defensive posture in MR II. For these reasons, it is expected that the enemy will make a maximum effort to defend his traditional sanctuaries which are at this time seriously threatened. It is equally apparent that given the luxury of these facilities, the enemy can, with available manpower, maintain a defensive posture near the Plain of Jars during the remaining months of the rainy season.

(S) Farther to the south, MR III had seen the highest level of military activity in history as Lam Son 719 from the east and the CAS-supported irregular operation Desert Rat from the west brought large forces into the area for the first time. By April, the Lam Son forces had returned to Vietnam, and the Desert Rat task force was back in Muong Phalane. The

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latter force rested and reorganized, leaving just three battalions to hold the town. However, as the Lam Son and Desert Rat operations receded, the weather remained fairly good, and the enemy moved to fill the vacuum. On 2 May, they took Muong Phalane and pushed on to Dong Hene, which was abandoned 17 May. The friendly forces continued to fall back to the outskirts of Seno where the timely arrival of Thai Irregulars, hastily transferred from MR II, finally stiffened the line.⁵¹

(S) The situation in southern Laos (MR IV) was much the same. Following a thrust by friendly forces into the enemy-held portions of the eastern Bolovens Plateau, the enemy had counter-attacked and driven the RLG forces back into Paksong. Despite a vigorous defense, the town fell on 16 May. Following an abortive counter-attack, the friendly forces abandoned the plateau completely and fell back to Pakse. For about the next two months the situation remained stable. During this time the enemy began withdrawing forces to the Toumlane Valley, leaving only a few other scattered units (including the crack NVA 9th Regiment) on the Bolovens.

(S) Despite the vigorous resistance that the government forces had offered, the loss of this area in each of two consecutive years led to the replacement in late May 1971 of Maj Gen Phasouk, the Regional commander, with Colonel (later Brigadier General) Soutchay, who had established his reputation in MR I. Due to his family connections, General Phasouk was promoted to the largely ceremonial post of Chief of Staff of the Royal Army, but the action did show the government's concern for the area and General Soutchay was under no illusions as to what was expected of him.⁵²

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(S) Only around the administrative capital of Vientiane in MR V had action been light. There, some 14,000 friendly forces controlled the Nam Ngum Valley, while approximately 1,000 PL controlled the hills to the north and west.⁵³

Plans for the 1971 Wet Season Offensive

(S) Having stopped the enemy drive by mid-April 1971, U.S. and Laotian officials were faced with the question of what further action they should take. Conventional military logic seemed to call for an immediate counter-offensive. However, the conflict in Laos rarely followed the lines of classic military strategy, and its course was often determined by the larger political issues involved.

(TS) In Washington, the American policy of disengagement and reducing casualties dictated that there be no major efforts to retake lost territory.⁵⁴ This view was reflected in a MACV Concept Paper of 20 August 1970.

Although this document recognized that American objectives in Laos were "to maintain a neutral buffer state in Laos between Thailand and North Vietnam/China" and that "the enemy has the capability to take over all of Laos and Cambodia, should he desire to do so," it tended to put greater significance on the loss of Cambodia than of Laos.⁵⁵

Loss of Cambodia would make the population centers in southern Thailand, around Bangkok, most vulnerable to NVA/VC [Viet Cong] infiltration, terrorism and subversion. The NVA/VC would also have an almost clear path to attack Bangkok causing either the fall of Thailand or Thai disengagement from RVN [Republic of Vietnam] and Laos, and withdrawal from support of U.S. aims in SEAsia. The loss of Laos on the other

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hand might cause complications but would not threaten the major population centers of RVN, Thailand or Cambodia; and, even though the loss of Laos provided the NVA/VC free use of the logistic routes in Laos, combined operations by Thai/RVN/Cambodian forces could still effectively prevent North Vietnamese hegemony over all of SEAsia.

Consequently, "no significant new initiatives are envisioned to secure the independence and territorial integrity of Laos." ⁵⁶ Instead, MACV planned to:

- a. Support, as feasible, at present levels, Laotian efforts to contain NVA/PL forces.
- b. Encourage and support, as feasible, Thai operations in Laos.
- c. Support third country military and economic support to Laos.
- d. Limit large scale ground/air operations in Laos to reduce the possibility of Chicom [Chinese Communist] intervention.

MACV did intend, however, that, "unconventional warfare operations and U.S. air interdiction would continue in Laos." ⁵⁷

(TS) However, the war in Laos had long since ceased to be an unconventional war and had become instead a mobile conventional war employing regular forces. In addition, the MACV position was directly contrary to the Thai position, which was that Laos rather than Cambodia was fundamental to the defense of Thailand since the loss of Laos would open infiltration routes into northern and northeastern Thailand where according to the Thais CT activity was already at a high level.

(TS) According to the Washington view, friendly forces should concentrate on providing close-in defense of the populated areas of the Mekong basin in order to block any enemy move into Thailand. ⁵⁸ It was also

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recognized that the RLG would have to clear the approaches to Luang Prabang and the ridge lines in front of Long Tieng. Beyond that, it was felt that friendly efforts during the remainder of the wet season should be devoted to building up the Laotian forces and to preparing strong defense positions southwest of the PDJ in anticipation of a renewed enemy drive during the following dry season. No major effort to recapture the PDJ or Bolovens Plateau was planned.

(TS) Regardless of how comfortable this plan was to Washington, it simply did not give sufficient weight to the military or political realities of Laos. On purely military grounds, the MACV strategy was questionable. Given the luxury of his forward supply bases the enemy would be able to gather materiel and strength to launch an offensive at an early date, making a prolonged defense of Long Tieng impossible. The Embassy recognized this situation in this 29 July message:

Enemy capabilities to launch major offensives or counterattacks will be limited as long as the rain limits his logistic capabilities; and the RLG can and must use this period to recoup its losses and prepare forward defensive positions against the enemy's next dry season offensive.

Nor did the strategy take into full account the political situation within Laos. For years, the focus of military operations in Laos had been in MR II; the powerful families of southern Laos were chafing under what they felt was a policy of neglect of their region. Now, with the loss of the Bolovens for the second time in as many years, the southerners were clamoring for some indication of government support. Since these families provided the principal political support for Souvanna Phouma,

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a major effort in MR IV was clearly in order, for political reasons if for no other. The RLG was also under increasing pressure from the Thai government to cooperate with Thai efforts to stem enemy infiltration into northern Thailand. Since the Royal Thai Government was providing ever increasing amounts of support to the war in Laos, this request had to be honored. Furthermore, to stabilize the situation along the 1962 Geneva Convention lines would require an offensive to retake territory lost since that time. It was felt that any gains scored during the wet season would not only relieve political and military pressure on the government but would also strengthen the RLG's position in any negotiations with the PL for a return to the 1962 Geneva Accords. As the Embassy emphasized:

The RLG's negotiating position this year is likely to be stronger than it will be next year. There is every reason therefore to encourage the Primin [Prime Minister] and his cabinet to coordinate their diplomatic and military strategy and to exploit whatever gains friendly forces can make during the current wet season in negotiations with the other sides.

As one of the results of these considerations, and since the Prime Minister and the King wanted more positive action, Vang Pao was ordered to recapture as much territory as possible in MR II.

(S) Unfortunately, there were as many problems with the Embassy/RLG strategy as with the Washington strategy. First and foremost was the obvious variance between American and Laotian national policy. At no time were political and military representatives of the two governments brought together to develop a joint statement of objectives, much less to conduct a combined campaign. This situation may have been an

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inevitable consequence of the political nature of the war in Laos, but⁶²
it had a clearly debilitating effect on military operations.

(S) Second, the RLG had never been noted for its ability to coordinate political/military operations because of the structure of the government and the semi-feudal nature of the armed forces. Further, since the enemy realized that the government would be weaker the following year, the enemy was not at all inclined to negotiate. Souvanna Phouma did arrange for preliminary talks with Souk Vansauk, the nominal transportation minister in the "coalition"* government and senior PL representative in Vientiane. These talks got underway on 10 May and continued until the middle of July, but neither side was willing to make concessions and the talks finally broke⁶³ down.

(TS) The final problem was the reduction in available airpower to⁶⁴
support any kind of military action. The Embassy noted that:

It seems clear that the coming year will be a crucial one in the long history of the Indo China war. The continued withdrawal of US forces from South Vietnam and reduced levels of available US air support will affect Laos both directly and indirectly.

From a high of 220 USAF sorties on a single day in 1968, U.S. air support for the Barrel Roll war was scheduled to drop to 32 per day after 1 July 1971⁶⁵ under OPLAN 730.** The impact of this reduced rate was discussed by the⁶⁶ Embassy in their 29 July message to the Secretary of State:

*For a discussion of the tripartite, coalition government, see Project CHECO report, MAP Aid to Laos, 1959-1972.

**See page 7, above.

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As in the past years, RLAF and US air support will continue to play a significant role in Lao Government efforts to withstand North Vietnamese pressure. However, in the months ahead, US air support will be on the decline, as of 1 July reductions in the level of USAF sorties throughout Indo China mean that northern Laos can count on no more than 25 to 30 strike sorties per day. Consequently, the RLAF will be forced to carry a greater share of the air support burden. Steps have already been taken to increase the RLAF sortie rate through the acquisition of more aircraft and a comparable increase in pilot training quotas. This increase in the RLAF's strike capability will be developed on an incremental basis and will not be completed until we enter the forthcoming dry season. During the current wet season campaign RLAF will maintain the capability of flying up to 3,000 sorties per month. Already in July a combination of bad weather and reduced USAF capabilities has resulted in more Lao than USAF sorties throughout Laos on at least one occasion.

Regardless of the increased RLAF capability, the loss of US air support cannot be adequately compensated for on a sortie-by-sortie basis. US Tacair provides capabilities beyond those attainable by the RLAF. Foremost are the ordnance load capabilities both in weight and type, time on target, survivability in high threat areas, responsiveness, range and speed, and command and control. These are important considerations relative to support of MR II operations and also affect the effectiveness of air support available for planned operations in southern Laos during the current period.

(S) Under these circumstances, it was imperative that air/ground operations be closely coordinated to insure the maximum effectiveness of air power. The Embassy believed that coordination could be best achieved by "dedicating" the sorties to the Raven FACs and allowing them to select the targets and effect air/ground coordination. However,

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dedicating sorties was a violation of the Air Force doctrine of centralized command and control, since it effectively took those sorties out of the commander's control and further reduced the Air Force to a purely reactive role. Understandably, 7AF was reluctant to issue a "blank check" for a war over which it had no control. The Embassy never fully appreciated 7AF's position and hence made no provisions for joint planning to insure adequate and effective air support. This situation placed 7/13AF in a difficult position in its liaison role. Under General Evans it tended to lean toward the 7AF viewpoint, while under General Searles the Embassy viewpoint was normally supported.

Order of Battle

~~(73)~~ The RLG Armed Forces, which would have to bear the brunt of any military action, totaled approximately 95,000 men. (See Figure 4.) This force was composed principally of the 37,000 man Forces Armee Royal (FAR)/Forces Armee Neutralist (FAN), 33,000 Irregular, and 2,500 Royal Laotian Air Force (RLAF) plus additional support troops.^{67*} Regular forces were organized into battalions of six companies, with an authorized strength of 666 men per battalion. In practice, however, assigned strength varied between 525 and 600. Irregular forces were organized into battalions of three companies with an authorized strength of 325. (Smaller, independent units had also been organized). A MACV estimate of⁶⁸ RLG forces concluded:

*Sources cited conflict in their estimates of troop strength. Numbers given here and in Figure 4 must be regarded as approximations.

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The Laotian forces suffer from inadequate training and education, dependence on foreign assistance to train and maintain forces, lack of will to fight and lack of logistic capability for sustained operations. These forces are content to occupy company or battalion size defensive positions.

Although there is a program to train and upgrade six battalions annually, no expansion and little overall improvement in offensive combat effectiveness can be expected prior to October 1972 or later.

FIGURE 4

ORDER OF BATTLE

	<u>FAR/FAN</u>	<u>IRREGULAR</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>NVA/PL</u>
MR I	7,700	5,000	12,700	17,000
MR II	2,000	16,000	18,000	21,000
MR III	7,500	5,000	12,500	8,000
MR IV	5,800	7,000	12,800	11,000
MR V	<u>14,000</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>14,000</u>	<u>1,000</u>
TOTAL	37,000*	33,000	70,000*	58,000**

*Not shown are an additional 22,000 service and support troops, 2500 RLAF, and 500 Navy.

**This figure does not include 45,000 NVA engaged along the LOCs of Steel Tiger East nor 15,000 Chinese in MR I.

SOURCES: (S) CAS Enemy Order of Battle, 15 May 1971

(C) ARMA Order of Battle, Friendly Forces, Laos, 25 May 1971

(S) 7/13 Intelligence Briefings, 12 September 1971

(S) BRWG Minutes, April-October 1971

(S) JANAF Summaries, April-October 1971

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In fairness to the Laotians, However, it should be pointed out that the 95,000 man armed force represented four percent of the total population at a time when the U.S. had less than one and a half percent of its population under arms. In addition, 75 percent of the Laotian national budget was devoted to military expenditure.⁶⁹

Historical/Political Constraints and Their Impact on the Military Situation

~~(S)~~ The Laotians were basically a peaceful people who were content to live in harmony with their neighbors. However, in the turmoil of post World War II international politics and decolonization, they had been drawn into a war which they neither wanted nor understood and whose overall course they were powerless to influence. In addition, two decades of constant warfare had disrupted the fragile social and economic fabric of the nation. Nevertheless, after a slow and shaky start, the Laotians had begun to make some notable improvements in the last few years.

~~(S)~~ Partly because Laos was an artificial creation of the French, one of the fundamental problems facing the Laotian Armed Forces stemmed from the fact that, historically, family and regional ties had been stronger than any sense of nationalism. The population of 2.5 million included only 1.5 million Lao (while another 7.15 million Lao lived in Thailand). Even when Laos became nominally independent in 1953, these factors prevented the development of a true national government. The coups of the early 1960s and the 1962 establishment of the tripartite government--with its subsequent collapse--simply emphasized the factionalized nature of Lao society and of its military forces. Within each of the five military

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regions, the regional commander was most likely to be from one of the prominent local families, and he ruled almost as a feudal prince. The situation was further complicated by the existence of a FAN as well as a FAR commander in each region. Each commander ran his recruiting program and paid his own troops. Since each commander was allocated money on the basis of his troop strength, there was considerable padding of rolls, kickbacks, and diversion of funds; thus, the actual pay of the soldiers varied considerably from region to region.⁷⁰

(S) Basic and small-unit training were also conducted within each region, and the quality of this training varied widely due to a general lack of facilities, trained instructors, and uniform standards of performance.⁷¹ Some large-unit training was conducted in Thailand, where the recruits were organized into companies, battalions, and mobile groups. However, each battalion or group was composed of soldiers from a single military region--and often from a specific district or town. Upon completion of training, they were returned to their own region where the local commander resisted any attempt to use them outside his own area. Although the system of out-country training did permit standardization and supervision for large-unit training, it was costly and complicated to move units into and out of Thailand and it did nothing to develop a sense of national unity among the Armed Forces.⁷²

(S) Under the threat of complete North Vietnamese domination, especially after the 1969 and 1970 campaigns, the RLG finally began to take steps to break down the parochial regionalism. Prior to 1970,

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Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma also simultaneously held the posts of Minister of Defense and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Since the duties of the Prime Minister's office required his full attention, the military was left without a civilian voice in cabinet level discussions. Even the Minister of Foreign Affairs had a "delegate" or deputy, who was the de facto head of the department and cabinet representative. On 20 May 1970, to correct this situation, Souvanna appointed Sisouk na Champassak as his "delegate" for the Ministry of Defense.⁷³ Sisouk provided the strong personal leadership required and, with a group of reform-minded officers, he began a major overhaul of the Armed Forces.

(S) One of his first moves, taken in August, was to reorganize the FAR General Staff, streamlining administrative procedures and bringing the FAN directly under the control of the General Staff. At the same time, the General Staff was moved into a new permanent headquarters collocated with the Ministry of Defense. Thus, the General Staff and the Ministry of Defense could be in constant contact and lend mutual support to one another in dealings with the regional commanders.⁷⁴ Together, these moves represented a significant victory for the nationalist-minded reformers over regional interests, and thereafter the national military leadership was able to act more decisively in times of crisis.

(S) The first test came in February 1971 with the NVA attack on Long Tieng. In this crisis, the General Staff prepared a plan to assemble a large relief force from the other military regions and dispatch it to MR II. Representatives from the General Staff were to accompany this force

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and assist in planning its deployment. However, MR II Commander Vang Pao, while he wanted the reinforcements, would not permit any FAR interference in his operations because he felt FAR leadership was incompetent and unsympathetic to his Meo people. For their part, the FAR were unwilling to turn over their units to be "decimated" as a result of what they felt was poor staff work on the part of Vang Pao and his CAS advisors. ⁷⁵ As a result of these considerations, the regular contingent of the relief force dispatched to Long Tieng consisted of two FAN battalions from MR V. These troops, with Irregular reinforcements from other areas, helped to stem the tide.

(S) A more successful test of the General Staff approach came in March, when FAR units were shifted from MR III to MR V to stop the NVA drive on Luang Prabang. A further display of national unity occurred following the loss of the Bolovens Plateau when Sisouk--himself a southerner--replaced General Phasouk with a northerner, General Soutchay.

(S) However, it became clear from these operations that simply "lending" the forces of one military region to another was not the answer. What was needed was a national reserve force directly responsive to the General Staff. An early attempt to create such a force had floundered in 1970, but in March 1971 the program was revived and renamed the National Strike Force (NSF). Initially, it was composed of five battalions, and was gradually built up during the wet season; however, it was not ready to go into action until the 1971 dry season campaign.

(S) Another move to break down regionalism occurred when the National Training Center (NTC) opened at Phou Khao Khouai in February

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1971. This center, located 30 miles from Vientiane, was designed to provide both basic and large-unit training. However, the initial training cycle was interrupted by the crises of the late spring, when every available man was rushed to the front to stem the enemy advance. As the wet season brought a reduction in the level of combat activity, training was resumed; however, the effectiveness of the NTC could not be measured until the following dry season.

~~(S)~~ In spite of these reforms, many basic problems remained unsolved, and Laos was running out of both time and manpower. For one thing, regional and family interests continued to override national interests, and many politicians from the cities of the Mekong Valley were more concerned with "business as usual" than with difficulties being faced by their countrymen fighting a few miles away.⁷⁷

A second problem was that after 20 years of warfare Laos was simply running out of men for its military forces. In the absence of conscription, the military had to depend upon other inducements, and military compensation was not likely to attract many young men. The base pay of a recruit (\$8.00 per month) was less than that received by a convict in jail (\$9.00 per month).⁷⁸ For the recruit, however, even this amount was uncertain, since there was no central accounting and finance system. It was small wonder then that the men would supplement their income through "moonlighting" or various illegal activities. An extensive study undertaken by ARMA in 1969 proposed a number of improvements, but no action was forthcoming.⁷⁹ The military also had little to offer in other respects. An ARMA report noted:⁸⁰

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What is at issue is that in every way--security, creature comforts as well as monetary compensation--there is a great disparity in the relative well being of the soldier versus his civilian counter-part.

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This report concluded:

The military profession holds no adventure or glamor for the bright young men in the community. Thus, where a military career is unpopular for the general populace, it is unthinkable for most potential leaders.

Under these circumstances, it was not surprising that the FAR and FAN were content to perform limited garrison duty.

(S) In the meantime, the brunt of the fighting was being borne by the 33,000 Irregulars who were organized, trained, equipped, paid, and controlled by CAS. By far the largest number of these Irregulars were stationed in MR II, with smaller numbers scattered throughout the remainder of the country. The Irregulars were recruited primarily from various tribal groups--most notably the Meo--who inhabited the mountains of northern and eastern Laos, as well as Burma, Thailand, China, and Vietnam. These tribes, constituting approximately one million of Laos' population of two and one half million, were widely scattered. Except for a common dislike for the ethnic Lao (who inhabited the lowlands and the fertile Mekong Valley), these tribes were completely lacking in unity.

(S) Of these groups, the largest and militarily most effective were the 150,000 Meo who followed the charismatic Vang Pao. (This number included whole families and represented only a fraction of the total Meo population.) Beginning in 1945, Vang Pao had gradually emerged as the

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leader of a small band of Meo who conducted guerrilla warfare against the PL and NVA. By 1969, this force had grown to an army of 20,000 fighters. Although Vang Pao held a commission in the Laotian army, his position among the Meo was that of a War Chief. He depended upon personal magnetism and personal intermarriage (he reportedly has eight wives) with many important families to secure a military following, but allowed political control of the group to rest with a Council of Elders.

(S) In the chaos that followed the collapse of the Tripartite Government in 1964, this group appeared to be the only effective anti-communist force in the country, and the U.S. decided to place their primary reliance upon them. Under the auspices of the CIA, the Meo were organized into Special Guerrilla Units (SGUs) and provided with American arms and equipment. Since regular U.S. "advisors" were not permitted in Laos, CAS "case officers" were assigned to each of the units as well as to Vang Pao's headquarters at Long Tieng to advise and assist with training and the use of American equipment. CAS also supplemented the regular pay of Vang Pao's soldiers with a stipend and provided rice and other supplies to the families of the guerrillas. Loyalty was ensured because these troops were regularly paid and could be reasonably assured that their families would be provided for in their absence.

(S) Although Vang Pao was subsequently promoted to Major General and appointed commander of MR II, his relationship with the FAR was

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never cordial. This stemmed in part from a natural antipathy on the part of the Lao for the Meo "savages" and in part from jealousy of Vang Pao's proven fighting ability. Relations were further strained by the fact that American aid and support were directed toward the Irregulars at the expense of the FAR/FAN. For his part, Vang Pao had little regard for the poor fighting quality of the regular forces and for the ineptitude of their leaders. Nevertheless, he served the government faithfully. ⁸²

(S) Prior to 1969, the Meo operated strictly as guerrillas conducting hit-and-run raids behind enemy lines. After 1969, however, they were reorganized into Guerrilla Battalions (BGs) of approximately 300 men each (three companies of 100 men), and into Mobile Groups (GMs) of three to six battalions. (In addition, numerous smaller independent units continued to exist.) In the Wet Season campaign these units fought the NVA in a conventional manner and their ranks were decimated. By 1971, many families were down to the last surviving male (who was often a youth of 13 or 14), and survival of the tribe was becoming a major concern. Under these circumstances, the Council of Elders began to seriously consider moving the entire tribe to a safer location in Sayaboury or even into Thailand. ⁸³

(S) In order to fill the depleted ranks and to expand operations, CAS began to recruit from other tribal groups and even from among the ethnic Lao. Thus, there were at least three separate recruiting programs in each military region: the FAR, FAN, and Irregulars. (In addition, since the PL were legally recognized as a part of the government, they were likely recruiting also.) In general, the lower pay of the FAR/FAN

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was offset by the relative security of garrison duty, while the better pay, training, equipment, and glamor of the Irregulars was offset by the higher risk involved in offensive operations.

(S) In recruiting the Irregulars, CAS recognized and accepted the ethnic animosities, and each battalion was composed of a single ethnic group. As long as they were stationed in a particular military region, these irregular units came under the operational control of the respective MR Commander through a Deputy for Guerrilla Warfare, who in turn was advised by a staff of CAS case officers. The general pattern was for the Irregulars to be used for offensive operations; then, when an area had been secured, FAN or FAR units were moved in to garrison it while the Irregulars moved on to other operations. Since these units were paid and controlled by CAS, they could be shifted from one region to another without consulting the region commander or the FAR General Staff, although troops from one region were less inclined to risk their life in some "foreign" land than in defense of their own home.⁸⁴

(U) When these expanded recruiting efforts failed to produce enough suitable fighting men, the Laotian and American governments asked Thailand for assistance. The Thais had always considered that their first line of defense lay east of the Mekong. In addition, the Lao were ethnically related to the Thais, and Laos had historically been a part of Thailand. As early as 1969, regular units of the Thai army had been sent to Laos to stem the NVA drive on Muong Soui and Long Tieng.⁸⁵

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(U) However, this open involvement ran the risk of international complications, and the Thai units were withdrawn. Instead, volunteers were recruited from among Royal Thai Army (RTA) personnel for service in Laos.

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As Deputy Prime Minister Prapass Charusathiasa of Thailand stated:

We are brother races. A Laotian living in Korat goes home to fight. He is not a Thai Army soldier sent to fight there.

Of course, the RTG had better reasons than that for encouraging volunteers. For one thing, it provided the RTA with valuable experience, which might be useful one day if an open confrontation with North Vietnam became necessary. In addition, the U.S. provided all of the equipment for the troops serving in Laos and also provided Thailand with enough aid and equipment to replace units serving in Laos on a one-for-one basis. (A similar arrangement had been made with the Koreans for sending troops to Vietnam.) Thus, in effect, Thailand was able to increase its armed forces without any added expense to the Thai government. As an added inducement, the United States assured the Thais that their wounded would be guaranteed prompt medical evacuation (medevac).

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The latter point was to have particular significance in subsequent air operations and plans for redeployment, since it committed helicopters and their A-1 escorts to medevac missions.

(U) Arrangements for the actual recruiting of Thais were made at the Ambassadorial level in Bangkok. These arrangements were then translated into quotas which were assigned to the various RTA units. It was then up to the unit commander to fill the quota. Most frequently, squads,

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platoons, or whole companies volunteered as a unit. These volunteers were then sent to a CAS training center at Koke Kathiem, where they were organized into battalions and Mobile Groups.⁸⁸ While serving in Laos, these troops received regular pay, benefits, longevity, promotions, and a substantial pay supplement. There appears to have been no problem in securing genuine volunteers; by April 1971, there were at least 12 battalions serving in Laos, and they had seen some of the toughest fighting in the defense of Long Tieng,⁸⁹ with one battalion taking over 60 percent casualties. After the enemy offensive had been halted, they were redeployed, with eight battalions remaining in MR II, two going to MR I, and two to MR IV.⁹⁰

(S) Primary air support for friendly forces was provided by the 2,500 man Royal Laotian Air Force. This force was organized into four Air Base Wings stationed at Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Savannakhet, and Pakse. Each Wing contained a single composite tactical air squadron as follows:⁹¹

	<u>C-47*</u>	<u>AC-47</u>	<u>T-28*</u>	<u>H-34*</u>	<u>O-1</u>
Luang Prabang	2	1	6	2	1
Vientiane	7	5	16	4	8
Savannakhet	3	2	6	2	5
Pakse	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>
TOTAL AIRCRAFT	14	10	36	11	17

*Five additional C-47s, 21 T-28s, and four H-34s were stationed at Udorn RTAFB where they were used by Det 1, 56 SOW to train Laotian aircrews.

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(TS) In addition, a Mobile Strike Squadron--drawn principally from aircraft stationed at Vientiane--operated out of Long Tieng. These units were advised and directed by the five AOCs manned by AIRA "Palace Dog" personnel. On-site maintenance was handled by the RLAF with the assistance of "Waterpump" mechanics from Det 1, 56 SOW, while major maintenance was performed by Air America at Udorn RTAFB.⁹² Although small in number, the RLAF had already earned several distinctions in the records of air warfare. It was not uncommon for the 35 T-28s to fly three or four missions per aircraft per day, and many pilots flew over 1,000 missions a year. Naturally, this took both a physical and mental toll of the pilots. Nevertheless, morale was among the highest in the world, and when it came to accurate delivery of ordnance, the RLAF was unexcelled. Organization,⁹³ however, was an RLAF weak point, as an AIRA advisor commented:

The RLAF is a "gaggle" of trained, capable and experienced pilots whose lack of effective organization makes them dependent on U.S. direction and assistance.

Enemy Organization

(S) Opposing the friendly forces were 32,000 PL and 26,000 NVA (another 45,000 NVA were engaged in activities along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Steel Tiger).⁹⁴ The PL, with their headquarters at Sam Neua, were divided into regional commands. The Xieng Khouang Region included all of northern Laos, while the South Laos Region was roughly equivalent to the Steel Tiger area.⁹⁵ Each region was further subdivided into provinces corresponding to the administrative divisions of the country.

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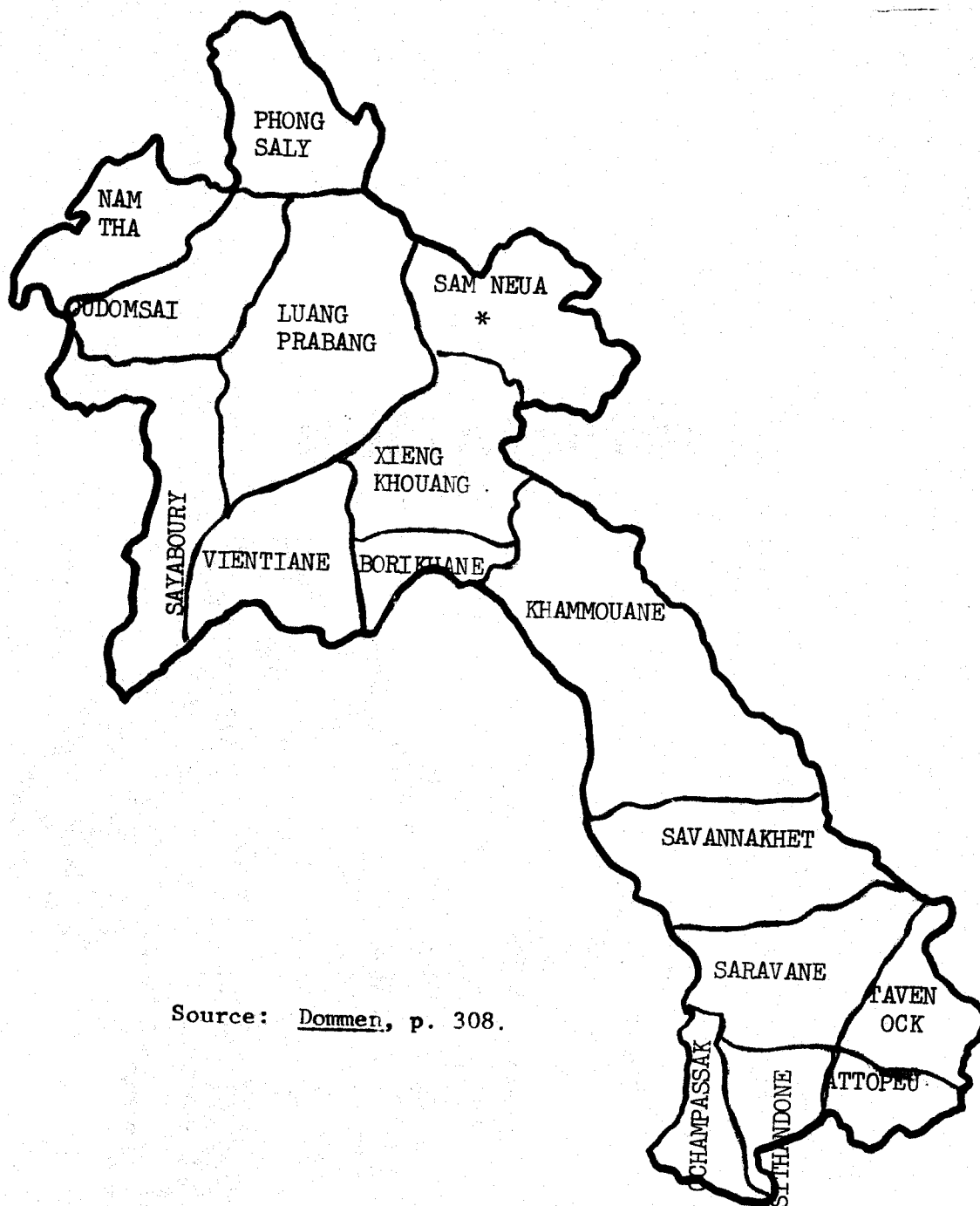
(See map, Figure 5.) Like the FAR/FAN, the PL were normally recruited and trained locally, and operated principally within their own province. In general, PL units were kept separate from the NVA forces, but combined NVA/PL battalions were organized in a number of areas. Regardless of the formal organization, the PL were, in fact, controlled by the NVA, and this occasionally caused some friction between the two forces.

(8) A case in point is the incident involving the death of General Phouma Douangmala, the PL commander of the South Laos Military Region.⁹⁶ Phouma was something of a local Robin Hood figure who was noted for his Lao nationalism and resistance to NVA domination. With his three PL battalions (11th, 12th, and 25th), he would normally enter a village, kill a few pigs, and throw a party for the villagers. After much eating, drinking, and camaraderie, he would give a speech or show a propaganda film and then move on to another village. In this manner, he gained real popularity and became one of the most effective PL leaders in the country--too effective, in fact, for the NVA. Sometime in November 1970, Phouma was wounded in a clash with government forces. Although his wounds were minor, the NVA insisted that he be transferred to one of their own hospitals, where he died.⁹⁷ Since a number of other PL officials had met violent deaths at the hands of a special NVA unit formed to ensure PL adherence to the party line, Phouma's followers blamed the NVA for his death. After several months of "agonizing reappraisal" and careful maneuvering to avoid arousing NVA suspicions, one of Phouma's battalion commanders switched loyalty to the RLG on 23 March 1971 and gave the

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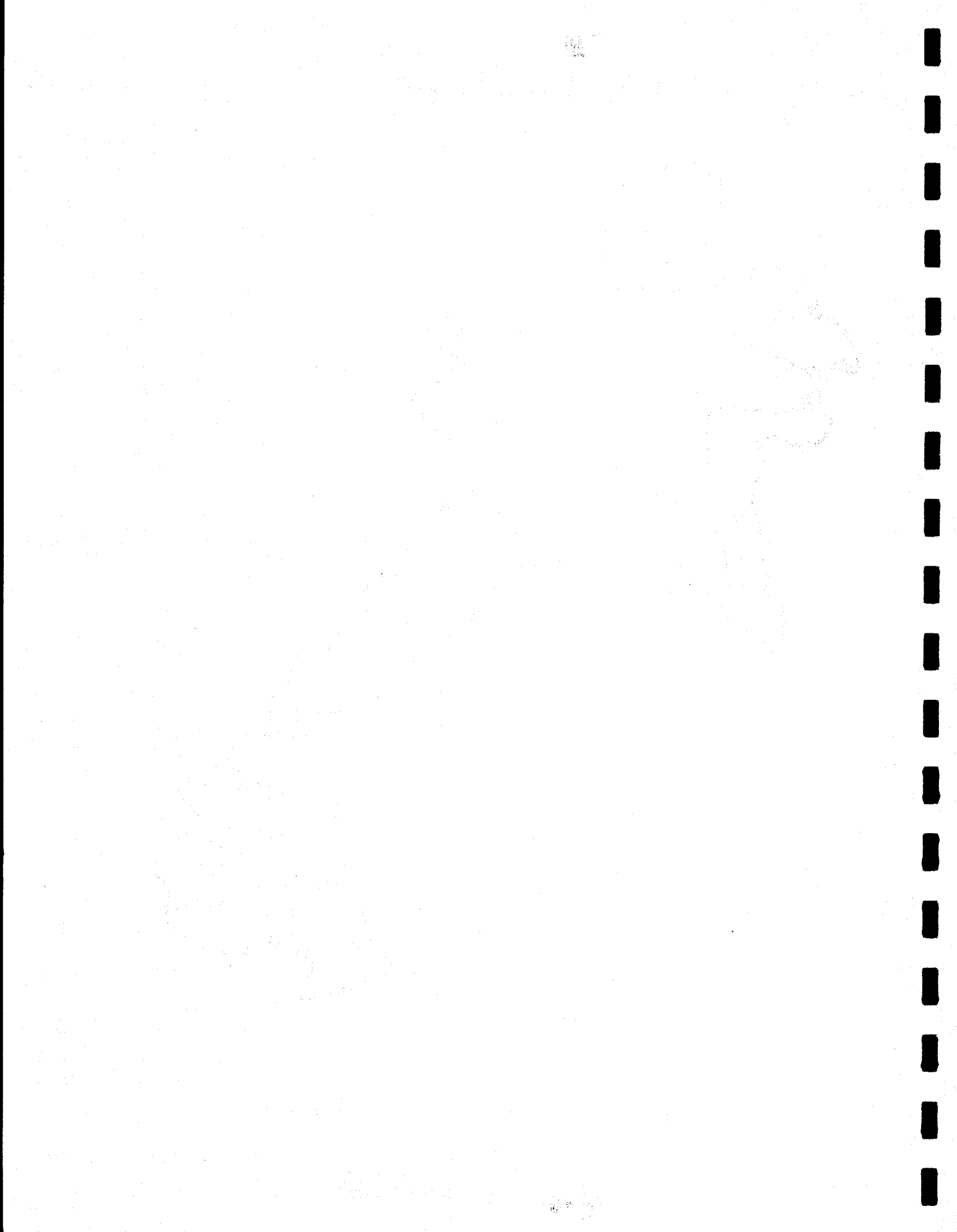


Source: Dommen, p. 308.

Pathet Lao Administrative Subdivisions-Laos

FIGURE 5

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location of an NVA regiment operating in his area. Three days later, a massive air strike by 20 USAF and 23 RLAF aircraft virtually eliminated this unit. In the weeks that followed, most of the 11th, 12th, and 25th PL battalions rallied to the government and returned to the field to fight the NVA.

USAF Support

(TS) USAF support for the Barrel Roll War took two principal forms-- helicopter airlift of CAS/AMEMBASSY ground operations and direct air support of Laotian forces in contact with the enemy. Aircraft support came principally from the 432 TRW at Udorn and the 56 SOW at Nakhon Phanom. In addition, aircraft from other units, primarily the 8 TFW at Ubon and the 388 TFW at Korat, flew in the area as the situation required. (See Figure 6.) The 432 TRW and 56 SOW also took part in operations in Steel Tiger and North Vietnam.⁹⁸ Helicopter airlift operations were controlled directly by the Deputy Commander, 7/13AF, and carried out through the 7/13AF Special Activities Division (DOZ) by the 21 SOS at NKP. These operations included two separate programs. The first of these were small infiltration and exfiltration missions in which special CAS ground teams were airlifted deep into enemy-held territory to conduct intelligence collection, harassment, interdiction, and other clandestine operations. These missions were normally carried out by Air America resources, with USAF providing A-1 escort and back-up helicopter support. However, 7/13AF was frequently called on to provide both primary airlift

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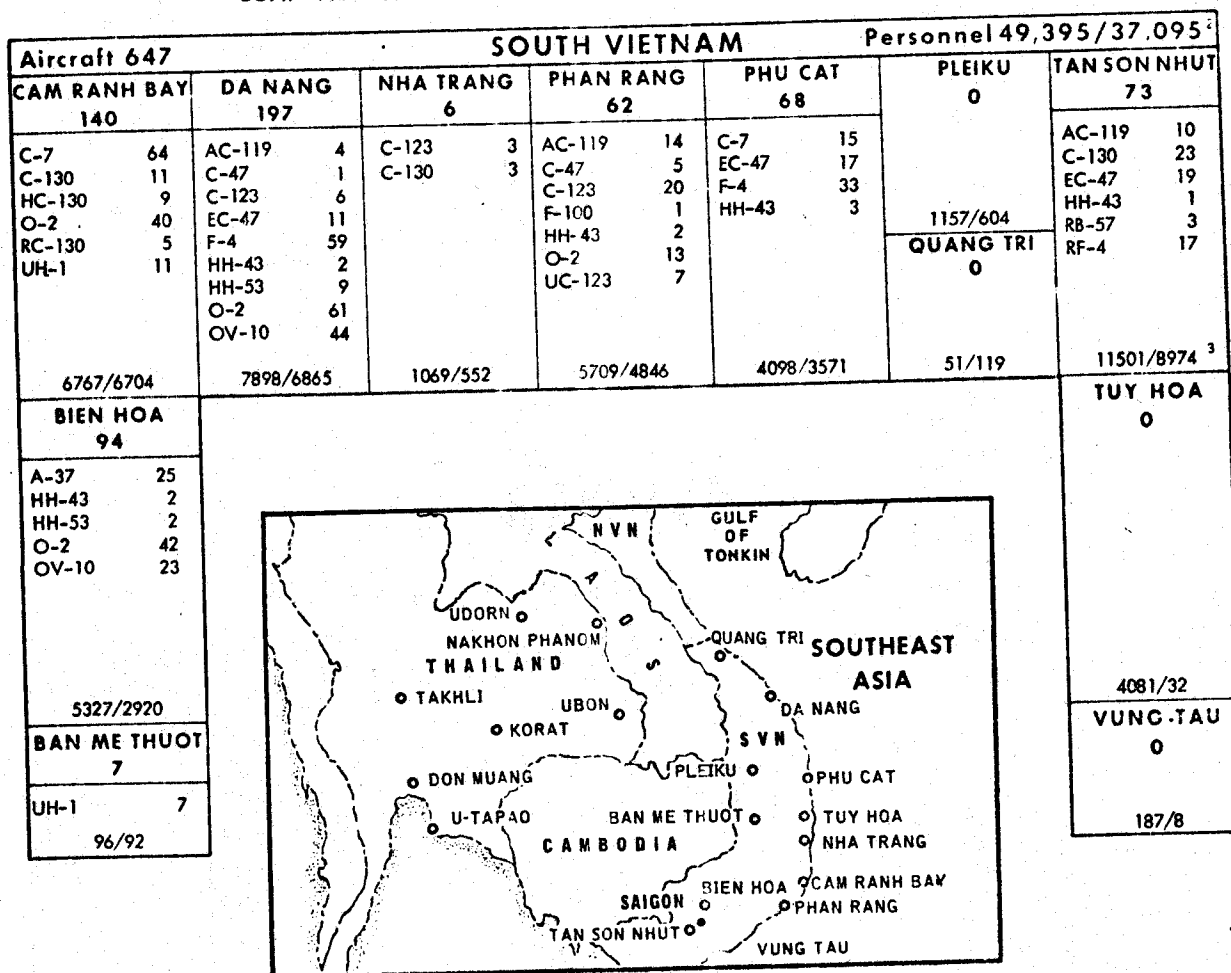
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USAF AIRCRAFT DEPLOYMENT IN SEA AS OF 31 JUL 71



THAILAND							Personnel 29,320/25,690 ²	
Aircraft 415	DON MUANG	KORAT	NAKHON PHANOM	TAKHLI	UBON	UDORN	U-TAPAO	
	0	74	101	0	90	61	89	
		EB-66 15 EC-121 9 F-4 35 F-105 13 HH-43 2	A-1 24 AC-119 5 CH-3 7 CH-53 7 EC-47 5 HH-43 2 HH-53 8 O-2 12 OV-10 14 QU-22 17		A-1 2 AC-130 8 B-57 9 F-4 63 HH-43 2 HH-53 2 OV-10 4	C-130 6 F-4 32 HH-43 2 RF-4 21	B-52 46 C-130 6 DC-130 2 HH-43 2 KC-135 32 U-2 1	
	1277/972 ⁴	4454/4411	3834/3975	4179/17	3964/5009	5939/5216	5381/5769	

¹ Transient, administrative support, and weather recon aircraft not included.

² Total country assigned military as of 30 Jun 70/30 Jun 71.

Personnel data for major locations shown below aircraft data.

³ Includes personnel assigned to Saigon.

⁴ Includes personnel assigned to Bangkok.

SOURCE: USAF MANAGEMENT SUMMARY SEA
19 October 1971

FIGURE 6

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and escort. When such a mission arose (either a primary or back-up), CAS would notify DOZ approximately 48 hours in advance and provide all necessary information.⁹⁹ CAS also provided pertinent photo/intelligence information to 56 SOW, arranged for some facilities, provided communication facilities, and prepositioned JP-4 jet fuel to support the operation. DOZ then collated this information with other mission requirements, determined the helicopter and escort requirements, and fragged the helicopters. (7AF fragged the A-1 escorts, if required). The 21 SOS scheduled the aircraft and crews, appointed a mission commander, and performed the actual mission planning. Normally, the helicopters operated in pairs. The usual pattern was for troops and their support equipment to be loaded aboard one helicopter while the second aircraft served as backup and, if necessary, conducted search and rescue (SAR). In this fashion, the second helicopter could act as prime recovery ship if the first encountered any problems. Escort was provided any time the path of flight took the aircraft over an area where enemy ground fire could be expected, or when the helicopter landing zone (HLZ) was in an area of known or suspected enemy activity. In the event that 7AF did not frag the required escorts, the mission¹⁰⁰ was usually cancelled. Overall, these operations went very smoothly.

(TS) The second type of USAF helicopter support was larger in scale than the first. Helicopter missions required to airlift FAR or Irregular ground forces into battle, although less frequent, necessitated more USAF resources and encountered greater difficulty in planning and execution. In general, the procedure for these missions followed

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the same pattern as the infiltration operations discussed above, varying principally in size and scope. Missions were often multi-battalion operations involving several shuttles by a large number of helicopters. Extensive TACAIR support was often required in addition to the normal A-1 escort. Since these operations required far more coordination than the smaller CAS/team missions, 7/13AF wanted to be included in the planning phase.¹⁰¹ Again, as previously noted, CAS and AMEMBASSY rejected this request for "security reasons." The only restriction placed upon helicopter support was a 500-hour per month flying time limitation, which never proved to be a constraint.

(TS) The second major form of USAF support for the Barrel Roll war was directed air support of Regular and Irregular Laotian forces in contact with the enemy.¹⁰² As with helicopter support, direct air support was primarily the responsibility of the RLAF. However, the RLAF was limited both in numbers and in capability. For one thing, the T-28s had limited ordnance capability, limited range, and were extremely vulnerable to AAA. Consequently, their operations were limited to troops-in-contact (TIC) situations and to low threat areas where their lighter bomb load could be effective and where they could expect to encounter nothing larger than small arms fire. The more heavily defended targets, and those requiring heavier ordnance, were left primarily to the USAF. This support involved strike aircraft, reconnaissance aircraft, and forward air controllers (FACs), and consisted of both pre-planned and immediate targets. Pre-planned strikes for close

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air support were generated and validated by AIRA based upon inputs from the field, and submitted to 7/13AF where they were consolidated and passed to 7AF. Immediate air requests within the Raven Control Box* were supported by divers from other missions. Often, Quick Reaction Force (QRF) strike aircraft on ground alert were used. These requests were passed by the FAC/FAG to the Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center (ABCCC), which relayed the request to the 7AF Command Post (Blue Chip). In all of these cases, Embassy validating procedures were followed, and approval of Blue Chip was received through the ABCCC.

(S) Seventh/Thirteenth Air Force could also generate pre-planned and immediate targets in the Special Operating Areas (SOA--a designated free-fire area which contained no friendly troops) based upon photo or visual reconnaissance, provided that they met Embassy-established criteria. These targets were fraged in the same manner as the AIRA requests. In addition, USAF FACs could generate immediate air requests against lucrative targets. Again, Embassy validating and USAF divert procedures were followed.

(S) The biggest problem was how to distribute the limited resources allotted to the Barrel Roll among these different missions. Within the Raven Box, the ground situation was constantly shifting and pre-planned targets were rare. Since getting divers or QRF aircraft on-scene in time to handle immediate requests was uncertain, AIRA preferred

*A defined geographical area approximately 15 to 30 KM north and east of Long Tieng within which all USAF strikes were controlled by Raven FACs.

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to have F-4s and A-1s dedicated to the Ravens in order to have a continuous air cap over the battle area. Since the SOAs were rich in hard targets as well as in fleeting targets, 7/13AF preferred to see the weight of effort directed to these areas. Seventh Air Force preferred not to dedicate resources since, in effect, control of these sorties was lost. Consequently, 7AF¹⁰³ warned both parties that except for the helicopter support:

There is no specific level of air assets routinely available to the American Embassy Vientiane and CAS Udorn for the support of operations in Laos. Additional MACV air assets are provided to support operations in Laos on an "as requested" "as available" basis, with the number of sorties and percentage of overall air effort adjusted weekly as the SEAsia war picture changes. Under the single air manager concept, this headquarters retains the flexibility to shift the weight of effort as the military situation dictates.

(S) USAF was also involved in support for Laos in a number of other ways. The Waterpump/MAP program has already been mentioned (page 48). Medevac and air rescue, including support of Joint Personnel Recovery Center (JPRC) operations, also required considerable resources. Psychological warfare, civic action, local base defense, and logistic support of isolated Tacan* sites in Thailand and Laos rounded out the range of USAF activities. In addition, the US Army provided a significant amount of air support with its OV-1s and CH-54 "Flying Cranes." As support is often a nebulous concept that must be placed in the context of operational reality, the following chapter will address the trials, successes and failures of USAF support against a background of the ground campaigns.

*Tactical Air Navigation

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CHAPTER III

OPERATIONS

Military Region I

(S) Having halted the enemy drive on the royal capital by 30 March 1971, government forces were prepared to go on the offensive to clear the enemy from the approaches to Luang Prabang and, if possible, break into the NVA supply bases in the upper Nam Ou Valley. At the same time, a joint operation with the Thais was planned in Sayaboury province to disrupt Thai Communist (CT) base camps and lines of infiltration. ¹⁰⁴ The Sayaboury operation, code named "Phalat," was launched on 2 April by a single Thai Irregular battalion. Handicapped by an absence of artillery or air support, ¹⁰⁵ the operation was a failure. Concurrently, on the Thai side of the border, a much larger force--consisting of two regimental combat teams (RCTs), two artillery batteries, an airborne battalion, and RTAF support--began a sweep of the border area. Contact was light and sporadic as the CT chose to drift back into Laos rather than engage this force. Nevertheless, in three weeks of operations, the Thais did manage to destroy several base camps and disrupt the enemy's lines of supply.

(S) In Luang Prabang, the 3,600 defenders were reinforced with five battalions from other military regions. Organized into three Tactical Groups (regiments), the combined force of 4,900 launched an offensive on 8 April with the support of an armored car platoon and gunboats of the Lao River Flotilla (LRF). Since the enemy had already withdrawn, leaving only a light screening force behind, this drive met little opposition.

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Nevertheless, progress was slow as the friendlies conducted cautious probes and sweeps to be sure that no enemy troops were left in the area. By 21 April, this force had retaken the King's farm and reached the Nam Suong River, located approximately 13 kilometers north of the capital. Here they rested and regrouped for about a week. Additional reinforcements brought the force up to 5,900 men. When the drive resumed on the 29th, enemy resistance increased in defense of his forward supply areas. Progress continued, however, until the middle of May when the government force reached the enemy's main line of resistance some 20 to 25 KM north and east of Luang Prabang. After two days of bombardment by the RLAF and strong probes by the ground forces had failed to dislodge the enemy, the friendly force disengaged and began to secure its own position. Throughout the operations, air support came primarily from the RLAF: seven T-28s and AC-47s flew over 1,600 sorties, or an average of more than 40 sorties per day. USAF support was limited to a few F-4s which delivered special ordnance not available to the RLAF. These strikes consisted mainly of seeding enemy supply routes with CBU-42s, dropping wide area anti-personnel mines (WAAPM), and bombing cave storage areas with LGBs. ¹⁰⁶

(S) On 17 May 1971, overcast weather prevented further air strikes. Correspondingly, the ground action also fell off to minor skirmishes and patrolling. ¹⁰⁷ In September, as the weather cleared, operations resumed. In Sayaboury, three Irregular battalions launched "Operation Sourasai Montry" (later changed to "Somlar") with the support of four T-28s. Compared to "Phalat," "Somlar" went very smoothly, and although it encountered stronger

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resistance, the friendly forces were able to retake most of the strong points along the Mekong. Refugees from the area who had earlier fled to Thailand began to return to their homes. Since this operation was beyond the range of the T-28s stationed at Luang Prabang, a shuttle technique was employed in which the T-28s took off from Luang Prabang, dropped their bombs, and recovered at Ban Houei Sai. After flying one to two strikes from Ban Houei Sai, they flew a final strike on their way back to Luang Prabang. Following the conclusion of "Somlar" on 2 October 1971, action continued light and sporadic for the remainder of the wet season.¹⁰⁸

~~(S)~~ North of Luang Prabang, the receding Nam Ou River revealed a large number of previously camouflaged cave storage areas. Increased boat traffic on the Nam Ou, along with a general increase in enemy activity, indicated that the NVA 335th Regiment had returned from North Vietnam and was preparing for an offensive. To forestall the offensive and break into the NVA supply bases, the RLG launched "Operation Tham Thiny" with five FAR battalions on 21 September. This force immediately encountered and was quickly halted by the 335th Regiment.

~~(S)~~ Meanwhile, RLAF and USAF aircraft struck at the river traffic and storage areas. The enemy countered by moving at dawn and dusk, when visibility was poor and there were few sorties fraggged. They also hugged the river banks in order to put in at any of the numerous villages along the river, since friendly aircraft were restricted from bombing within 500 meters of a village. Phase II of the operation (renamed "Sy Thit") began

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on 2 November with the addition of two Irregular battalions, but again no significant progress was made. It did appear, however, that this show of RLG strength upset the enemy's timetable. A CAS official summarized the situation by saying that although the enemy continued to pose a threat to Luang Prabang, the capital had gained some breathing room. He added that to the west most of the positions along the Mekong had been retaken, and although Sayaboury was still contested the enemy no longer had a "free pass" in the area.¹⁰⁹ Thus, the situation at the end of the wet season was virtually identical to that which existed 12 months earlier.

Military Region II

(S) As usual, the most extensive Laotian military operations and the preponderance of USAF support were concentrated in MR II, where Vang Pao had once again halted the enemy on the doorsteps of Long Tieng. During the height of the siege of Long Tieng, the USAF had provided a total of 60 strike sorties per day.¹¹⁰ Normally, these sorties consisted of 40 F-4s and four A-1s fragged to the Ravens for use against TICs and troop concentrations (TPCs) inside the Raven Box. When weather or lack of a suitable target precluded their use in this role, they could be diverted to special IFR bombing boxes using Loran or Combat Skyspot. Two additional F-4s were loaded with LGBs for use against AAA, and another four F-4s were held as a QRF in the event that additional targets became available. At night, four AC-119s were fragged and an occasional AC-130 diverted to support TICs. These gunships were required to remain within 25 nautical miles (NM), 10 minutes flying time, of Long Tieng in order to respond rapidly to the

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ground situation, and were thus prohibited from ranging farther afield in a search for trucks. Six F-4s were also held on QRF each night for use if the situation required. In addition, OV-10 "Nail" and F-4 "Laredo" FACs, RF-4 "Bullwhip" photo reconnaissance, and C-123 "Candlestick" flare ships were provided.¹¹¹ In spite of weather, maintenance problems, and divers to other missions, an average of 52 F-4 and A-1 sorties per day were effective. Of these, 45 percent struck visually under Raven control; another 10 percent struck at night under gunship or flare ship control; approximately 40 percent dropped their bombs with Loran; and the remaining five percent struck supply areas behind enemy lines. During the hours of darkness, an average of three gunships were effective. These supported 119 ground actions and destroyed or damaged 29 trucks. During the siege of Long Tieng, the RLAF added over 1,000 sorties.¹¹²

(TS) With the fighting already somewhat stabilized between 7 and 14 April, the weather closed in, providing a temporary lull in fighting. For both emotional and military reasons, Vang Pao was determined to conduct an offensive. He realized that his position in front of Long Tieng was untenable, and that his forces could not withstand a prolonged siege--especially with the prospects of reduced air support in the offing. He also recognized that the PDJ itself was basically indefensible. Therefore, his plan was to sweep across the PDJ and establish strong positions to the east, from which he could raid the enemy supply depot at Ban Ban. This strategy was explained by the Embassy:¹¹³

In MR II General Vang Pao has been ordered by the King and Primin [Prime Minister] to gain control of as much

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territory as possible in Xieng Khouang and Houa Phan (Sam Neua) provinces. Vang Pao does not have the forces needed to drive the enemy out of these provinces. His aim, however, is to gain control of the entire Plain of Jars and to secure its defense by controlling the high points to the north and east. He would also like to cut Route 7 in the vicinity of Nong Pet and Route 4 as far east as Xieng Khouangville to hamper the enemy's ability to mount counterattacks. (See map, Figure 7.)

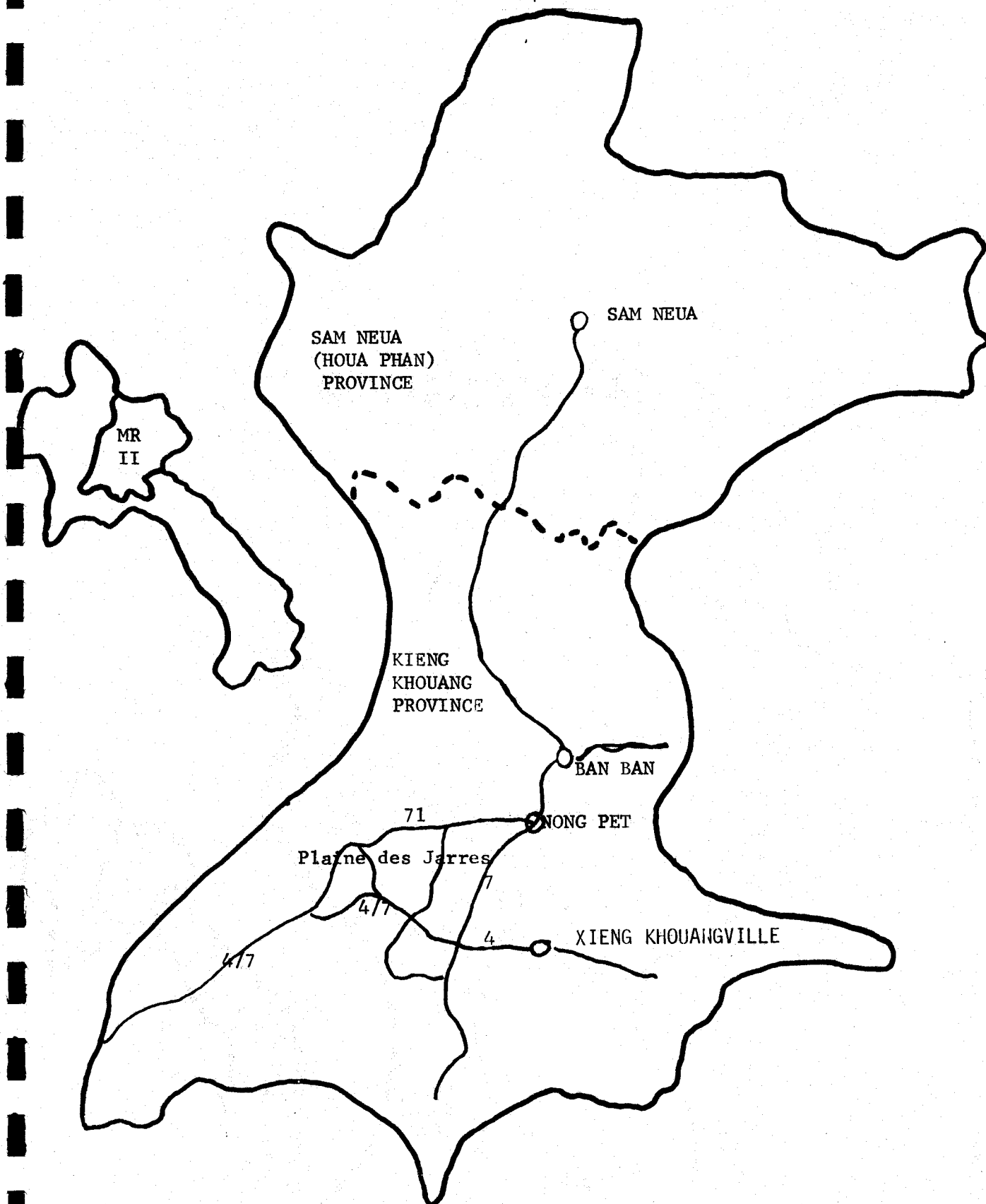
Vang Pao realized that even these positions could not be held indefinitely, but that they would give him room to fight a series of delaying actions as he fell back across the Plain. This was essentially the same strategy which he had employed in the two previous campaigns. Yet this year there was a note of urgency since anything that was to be accomplished would have to be done before 1 July, when the level of American air support was to be reduced from 60 to 32 sorties per day.

(78) There were, however, two major problems with Vang Pao's plan. First, the enemy was stronger than ever before, having well-developed supply bases in and around the PDJ. Second, Vang Pao's plans rested largely upon American support, and Washington's policy was not to support any offensive moves.

(87) General Evans doubted Vang Pao's ability to achieve his objectives in view of the projected reductions in air support; he thus favored an air campaign against the enemy's supply areas. In support of such a campaign, General Evans proposed that Vang Pao secure strong defensive positions in the hills to the north, southeast, and southwest of the PDJ. From these positions he could dominate the Plain, and deny

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Military Region II

FIGURE 7

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the enemy its use without actually occupying it. At the same time he could perform ground reconnaissance on the Plain and into the Xieng Khouangville¹¹⁶ and Ban Ban areas to identify supply caches for strikes by aircraft. However, General Evans could only advise, and his recommendation was not followed.

(TS) The Embassy was in an awkward position. On the one hand, it reflected the Washington policy of no offensive; but on the other, it approved Vang Pao's plan to launch an offensive. At the same time, Ambassador Godley assured General Evans that if Vang Pao did launch an offensive, he would be "off on his own."¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, the Embassy insisted upon air support once the offensive got underway and warned that, if necessary, it would go to Washington and bring pressure to bear in order to get that support.¹¹⁸ With or without American support, Vang Pao was going on the offensive, and the Embassy believed that under those circumstances America's best interests were served by supporting him.* This was precisely the policy that the United States had followed in the past.

(TS) The Embassy's view was not shared by 7AF or MACV, as was made clear by the MACV Concept Paper and OPLAN 730.¹¹⁹ Operations in northern Laos were considered to be a diversion from the principal area of concern--Steel Tiger East. OPLAN 730 was based on the assumption

*It should be noted that Vang Pao and his Meo forces were essentially mercenaries in that they were hired, paid, trained, equipped, and supported to fight a war in behalf of U.S. interests. They were not, however, soldiers of fortune: each Meo had a personal stake in keeping the NVA enemy from his door. Vang Pao, acting in accordance with national interests as articulated by the King and Prime Minister and his own interests as a Meo, declared his intention to carry out his plan on the PDJ with or without U.S. assistance.

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that there would be no offensive in Barrel Roll, thus permitting a reduction in the sortie allocation to that area. However, General Clay deferred to his Deputy at Udorn to recommend the required level of air support. As usual, this placed 7/13AF squarely in the middle, trying to reconcile two irreconcilable positions without having any authority of its own.¹²⁰ Like the Embassy, 7/13AF was constrained to operate within the limits set by higher authority, yet at the same time tasked to provide the most effective air support possible to any operations in Barrel Roll.

(S) This complete dichotomy between policy and strategy was reflected in the meetings of the Barrel Roll Working Group during the spring and early summer. On 30 April, 7/13AF proposed a reduction to 40 sorties per day and a shift in emphasis from the Raven Box to the SOAs. They called for 12 F-4s and four A-1s to supplement the RLAF in support of ground action, while an additional four F-4s were held on QRF. Two more F-4s were scheduled for AAA suppression. If mining or seeding was required, these sorties would be taken from the Raven allocation. To strike at the enemy's supplies and LOCs, the proposal called for eight F-4s per day and four gunships at night. The gunships would continue to seek TICs as their primary mission, but would be released from the 10 minute "tether" in order to search for trucks along the LOCs when there were no TIC situations. Since "truck hunting" would take them into areas of heavy AAA, the proposal called for six F-4 escorts carrying flack suppression ordnance, normally napalm and CBUs. C-123 Flareships

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(Candlesticks), slow OV-10 FACs (Nails), fast F-4 FACs (Laredos), and RF-4 photo recon (Bullwhip) missions were also to be flown. ¹²¹ This proposal led to a heated discussion within the working group which pointed up the divergence of views and the absence of joint planning. The representatives from the Wings were unanimous in wanting to shift even greater weight against the storage areas, since they felt that their aircraft could be used more effectively against these targets. They urged leaving the TICs to the RLAF T-28s and AC-47s, which were better suited for that mission. AIRA recognized the desire of the gun-¹²² ship crews to go "truck hunting," but pointed out that:

An enemy mortar can do progressively more damage the further away, time-wise, the gunship flies from the potential TIC environment. At present, 10 minutes flying time is authorized.

CAS felt that the whole proposal was "premature" since the enemy drive

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retained the "tether" on the gunships. ¹²⁴ Seventh Air Force accepted this plan, and fraggged the requested aircraft. Of these, a daily average of 51 F-4/A-1 sorties and 4.5 gunship sorties were effective. ¹²⁵ Seventy-five percent of the fighter sorties struck in support of ground action during April, while the remaining 25 percent were diverted into the SOAs. That same month the gunships supported 135 ground actions and destroyed or damaged 58 trucks.

~~(S)~~ A month later, 7AF agreed to continue the 60 sorties per day until July, but the basic disagreement over joint planning and sortie allocation remained. CAS insisted that the bulk of the sorties go to the Ravens since the enemy offensive would be followed immediately by a friendly counter-offensive, with friendly units being heli-lifted ¹²⁶ behind the enemy to block their retreat. When the 7/13AF Director of Operations interjected that "we've got to know these things," the only answer was a reassurance that 7/13AF would be informed "sufficiently in advance." ¹²⁷ Later, when asked what the objectives of the proposed offensive were and how far it would go, the answer was a restatement of ¹²⁸ the Embassy goals:

1. Protect Souvanna Phouma's government by stabilizing the military situation along the lines of the 1962 Accords.
2. Inflict maximum damage on NVA forces occupying and transiting Laos; and
3. Document how the U.S. helped defend a country without the infusion of massive American manpower.

While these were sound objectives, it was pointed out that this was hardly the basis for planning a coherent air campaign.

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(b) The Wings still favored shifting the weight of effort to the LOC/storage areas in order to "hit the enemy on the way out, before he can get established in secure areas."¹²⁹ Such a program included pre-planned hard targets as well as perishable targets of opportunity, and required more Nail and Laredo FACs "to be there when the targets came up."¹³⁰ Since the enemy had perceived that air strikes against LOCs were restricted to targets within 200 meters of a motorable road, they had adopted the simple expedient of stacking supplies in the open just beyond this limit. The Wings wanted the Rules of Engagement (ROE) changed to move the existing limits out to 500 or 1,000 meters, and preferably to 2,000 meters. The 388th TFW also proposed a comprehensive program to cut, mine, and seed the three principal interdiction points (IDPs) leading into the PDJ. Under this proposal, gunships--and F-4s, if needed--would be used at night to harass enemy repair efforts. Such a program would require 12 to 16 sorties per day for an indefinite period against each IDP, and would also require a change in ROE to permit the use of WAAPM. However, AIRA reminded the BRWG that "AIRA is not in the route structure business" and¹³¹ that such a program would take too many sorties away from the Ravens. Furthermore, requests for seeding and strikes beyond the 200 meter limit would be considered on an individual basis.

(c) As a result of these discussions, it was finally agreed that the previous month's proposal would be continued, except that four sorties per day would be shifted from the Ravens to hard targets.¹³² This frag request then became standard for the last two months of the fiscal year, and 7AF generally fragged the sorties requested.

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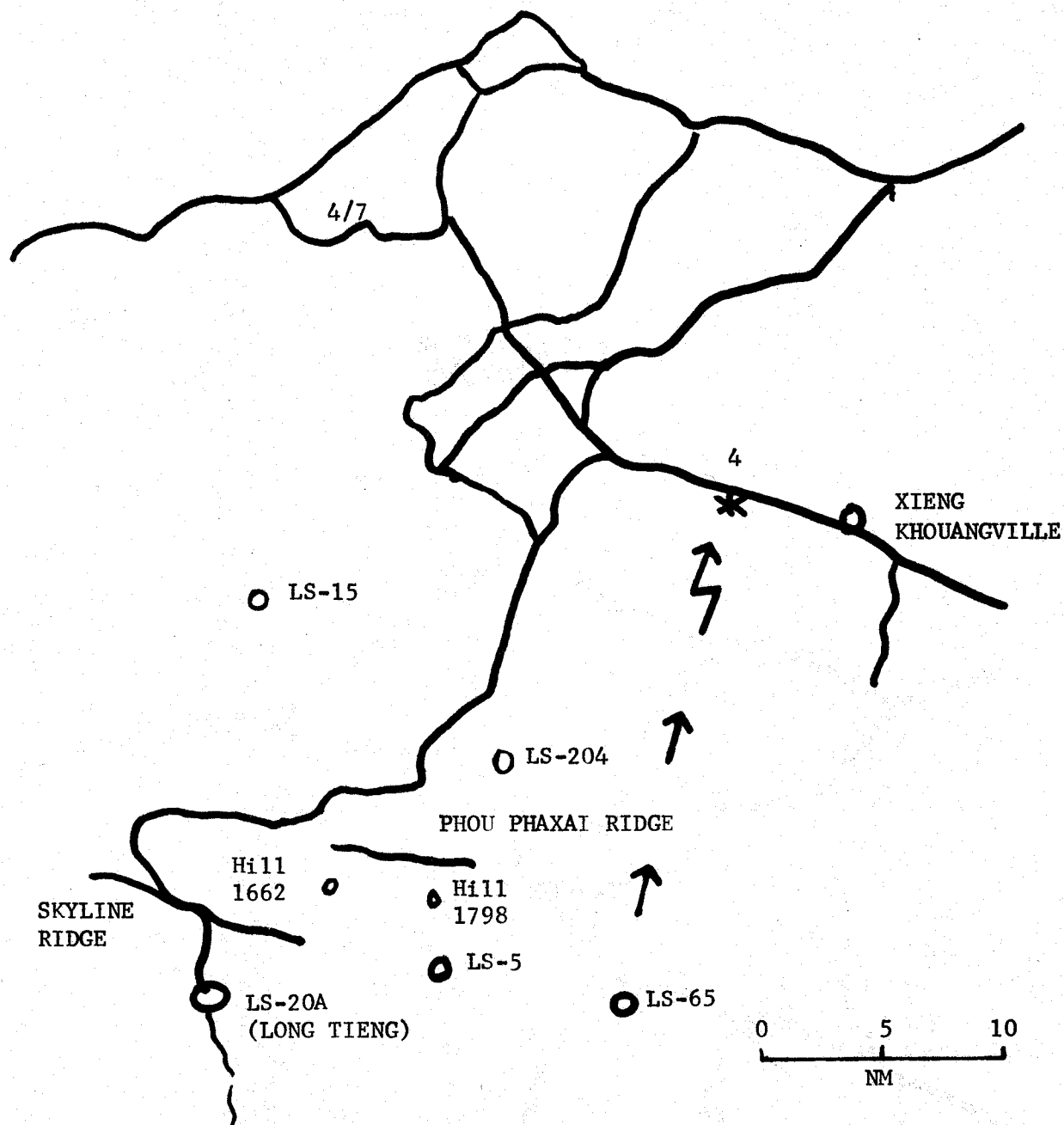
~~(S)~~ Meanwhile, Vang Pao was not waiting for anyone. As soon as the weather cleared on 15 April, he launched a counterattack to clear Skyline Ridge and Hill 1662.¹³³ In spite of strong enemy resistance, Skyline Ridge was cleared by the 18th, but the attack on Hill 1662 was repulsed. The line then remained static for the next five days during which Vang Pao launched one of those surprise moves for which he was famous. On 18 April 1971, a single battalion was airlifted to Pha Phai (LS-65), east of the PDJ. From there, the group moved overland to interdict Route 4 between Xieng Khouangville and the PDJ. (See map, Figure 8.) Although the raiders staged several spectacular ambushes, they were not reinforced and were eventually forced back into LS-65, from which they continued to launch¹³⁴ occasional raids.

~~(S)~~ On the 23rd of April, Vang Pao's force from LS-5 initiated an attack on Phou Phaxai, which was beaten off. The enemy then launched a counterattack which drove the friendly forces off Phou Long Mat. This position was retaken on the 27th, and although the enemy still held Hills 1662, 1798, and the Phou Phaxai ridge, the situation was deemed safe enough for Vang Pao to move his wives back into Long Tieng. The Raven FACs also returned to remain overnight, but the T-28s continued to operate out of¹³⁵ Vientiane.

~~(S)~~ Since frontal attacks had failed to dislodge the enemy from his positions southwest of the PDJ, troops were airlifted from LS-5 to the Khang Kho area (LS-204) on 1 May. They were to secure the site and prepare for a thrust directly onto the PDJ to cut the enemy's LOCs and

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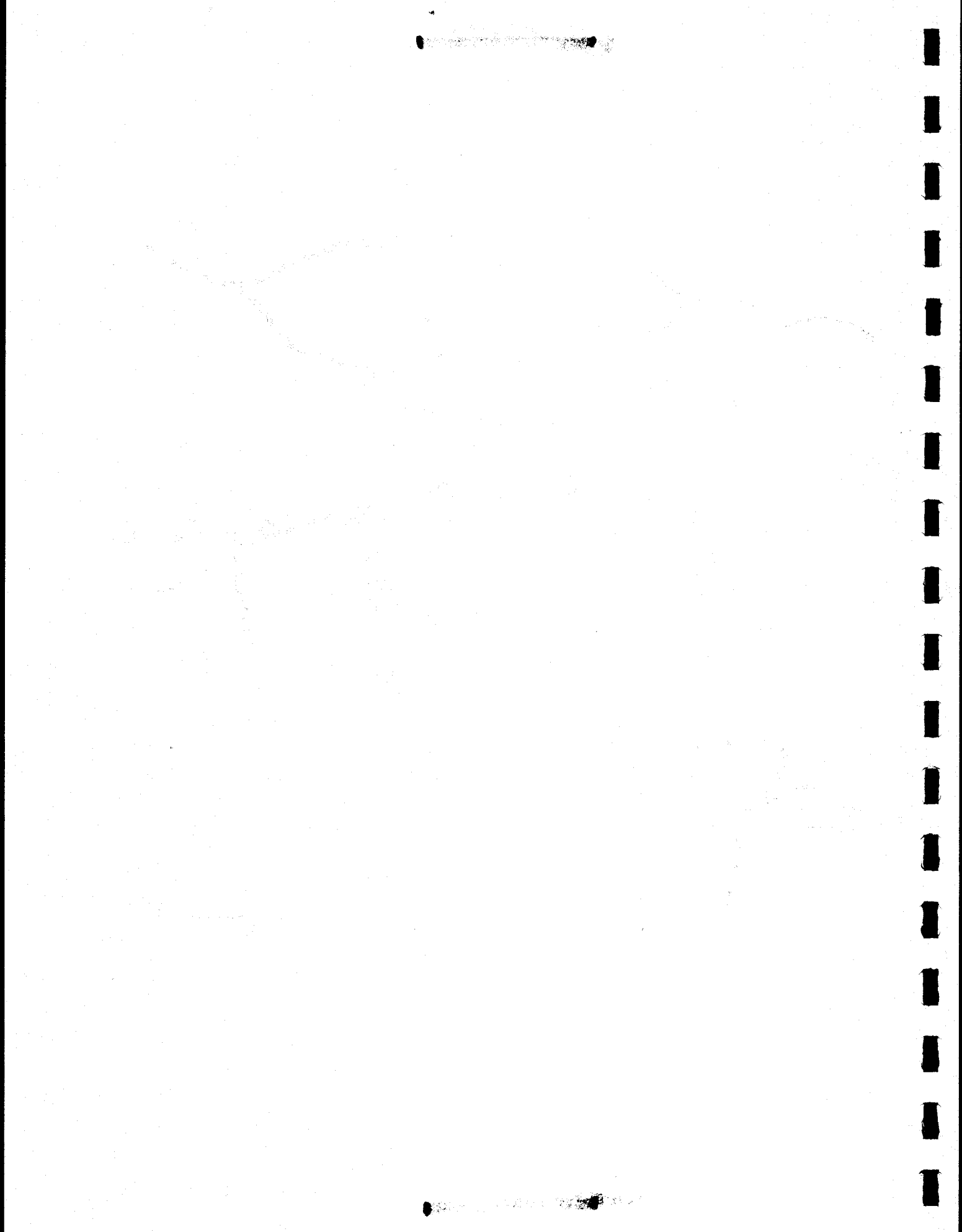
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Plaine Des Jarres - Souther Portion of MR II

FIGURE 8

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force him to withdraw. By 3 May, LS-204 was secure and the remainder
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of GM 21 was brought in as reinforcements.

(TS) However, the enemy was not intimidated by this move and clung to his positions. Determined to remain in the Long Tieng sector, they brought in helicopters to resupply these forces. Although the NVA restricted their helicopter operations to the hours of darkness in order to minimize detection, several enemy helicopters were noted in flight during the early part of May, and an AC-119 actually observed one land near LS-15 on 13 May. However, it was not until 10 days later that permission was received to engage the NVA helicopters. By that time, though, they had discontinued forward operations, and thereafter remained well clear of areas where
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allied aircraft were known to operate.

(S) Gradually, the cumulative effects of air strikes, ground attacks, and rain began to have their effect on the enemy. First, he was forced off Hill 1662, then Hill 1798; on 17 May, Phou Phaxai was occupied by friendly forces without a fight. Although the enemy still held Ban Na and remained in strength southwest of the PDJ, the initiative had clearly passed to Vang Pao. With the immediate threat to Long Tieng removed, most of the reinforcements which had been sent to MR II were redeployed, and Vang Pao's attack faltered as he tried to realign his forces for a resumption of the offensive.

(S) Meanwhile, the enemy had not been idle. NVA replacements brought the enemy force to a total of 2,500 men which were pitted against the defenders and their families at Bouam Long.* However, Bouam Long was

*See Figure 3, Page 25.

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located on a nearly inaccessible mountain whose approaches were protected by a series of smaller sites. In addition, the defenders, who had lived on the mountain all of their lives, believed that the mountain was sacred, and they were determined to live and die on its slopes.

(S) The NVA attack on Bouam Long began on 20 May under the cover of bad weather, and reached its climax three days later. During this crisis, Vang Pao dispatched aid by air, bringing the number of defenders to 1,200. At the same time, USAF added a new dimension to the action with the introduction of a single PAVE MACE. This device enabled a gunship to locate enemy positions through the use of a ground beacon set by ground observers. Using this device, USAF gunships were able to pour their deadly fire into the enemy ranks regardless of the weather or visual conditions. By the end of the month, the NVA withdrew to North Vietnam to rest and refit. This withdrawal left three PL battalions to screen Bouam Long, and prevent a breakout of friendly forces into the PDJ or LOCs.

(TS) At this point, Vang Pao decided to ignore the 3,000 NVA who were still in the Long Tieng area, and struck directly for the PDJ. On 3 June, a combined force of 700 men moved out of LS-204 for the PDJ, arriving at the southern tip of the Plain the following day. From there, the force began to move up to the western edge of the Plain toward Phou Seu. Although his move was characterized as a "defensive" maneuver, intended to force the enemy to withdraw from Long Tieng as well as relieve pressure on LS-32, it did, in fact, herald the beginning

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of a major offensive to secure the entire PDJ. In a sense, Vang Pao was simply applying the adage that "the best defense is a good offense." Bad weather hampered progress between 4 and 10 June, but the next day the weather cleared, and 150 reinforcements were airlifted in to get the offensive moving again. As the friendly forces moved slowly forward, the extent of the enemy supply buildup became evident. During the first week of the operation, Vang Pao's forces captured nearly 800 tons of supplies--enough to support the enemy in the PDJ area for three months.¹³⁸ And this was only a forward supply cache!

(S) On 15 June, a CAS functionary summed up the operation to date¹³⁹ and gave an indication of what lay ahead for the remainder of 1971:

At Long Tieng it's time for Vang Pao to move out--and he has!...Friendlies are now astride an enemy supply corridor. The enemy will have to react.... In the southern PDJ, 3,000 100 kilo bags of rice have been taken by friendlies. Also 1,228 rounds of 82mm mortar shells, medical supplies, small arms caches, a bomb-damaged 85mm field gun, and a 122mm field gun. Overall objective is to get the enemy back from the doorstep of Long Tieng before the next enemy dry season offensive. At LS-32 three enemy battalions outnumber the defenders about two to one. The friendlies are well dug-in and have a strong will to defend the site. Why the enemy has drawn forces from the PDJ to LS-32 is not known, but Vang Pao's presence on the southern PDJ may cause the enemy to position LS-32 forces back again to the PDJ. Vang Pao has the initiative. He can strike toward Xieng Khouangville or the PDJ. The latter would cause consternation in Washington. Friendly activities in general will increase now and will require more, not less, air support.

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(18) The NVA, however, instead of withdrawing from the Long Tieng area as expected, renewed their own attack. This attack did capture Phou Phaxai on 15 June, but the ridge was retaken five days later.¹⁴⁰ With Vang Pao now squarely across their rear, the enemy at last began to withdraw from the Long Tieng area on 29 June. On the same day, following a two-week see-saw battle, friendly forces finally secured Phou Seu. While small harassing forces, mainly PL, remained around Long Tieng, the NVA abandoned Ban Na and their remaining positions southwest of the PDJ and withdrew to defend the supply areas in the northern and eastern PDJ. The enemy also made one final attempt to take Bouam Long and did manage to capture LS-6 (some 15 KM northwest of Bouam Long) on 29 June, but was forced to give up the position. By 3 July the siege of LS-32 was over,¹⁴¹ and Vang Pao's weary army was victorious.

(19) With the rear areas secure, the Bouam Long force was free to maneuver, and Vang Pao was ready to begin the second phase of his offensive. This phase was intended to carry him across the PDJ and into the hills beyond. The maneuver would again consist of a three-pronged attack, and if successful, would give Vang Pao control of the northern and eastern approaches to the PDJ and put him in a position to threaten Nong Pet and Ban Ban.¹⁴² As the Embassy explained:

If Irregular offensive maneuvers against these storage facilities are successful or create an atmosphere of insecurity among the NVA rear echelon, the NVA will be forced to withdraw some units from the PDJ to reinforce their rear areas in the Ban Ban/Nong Pet region.

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Vang Pao's success had been due largely to the continued high level of air support and to the mobility afforded him by the use of helicopters, both Air America and USAF. During the first phase of his advance, 7AF had fragged an average of 55 strike sorties per day (of the 60 requested by 7/13AF). Weather, maintenance, and diversions reduced the number of effective sorties to 45, of which approximately 50 percent were in direct support of Vang Pao's advance. Another 20 percent expended IFR, while 20 percent struck LOCs and storage areas. The remaining 10 percent were¹⁴³ gunship escorts. The RLAF continued to provide another 35 sorties per day with 10 T-28s. Although small in number, this combined air effort had produced excellent results. For one thing, the limited area of operation contained 20,000 enemy troops. In addition, as long as the friendly forces were moving, they developed numerous targets by forcing the enemy to react, thus exposing himself to air strikes. Thus the ground forces flushed the quarry for air strikes, and airpower made further advances possible.

(8) Vang Pao's hopes for success in phase two of his offensive depended in large measure on sustained air support. Here, however, two problems were encountered. The first was in the realms of policy and coordination. This was brought out clearly by General Evans in a message¹⁴⁴ to General Clay:

Request this Hq be informed as to current plans and objectives for MR II wet season operations which will involve the commitment of USAF resources. There has been a complete lack of coordination of the PDJ operation with 7/13AF

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or your headquarters. I intend to discuss subject with Ambassador Godley tomorrow on my farewell visit to Vientiane, but will have to leave follow-up action to General Searles. In view of the current policy to wind down the war and decommit air and ground resources wherever possible, I feel the wisdom of a major ground effort by Vang Pao at this time should be questioned. In addition, the continuing use of USAF strike sorties in support of this operation is not in accord with Ambassador Godley's statement to me that Vang Pao was off on his own.

~~(S)~~ The second problem was the reduced sortie allocation scheduled to go into effect on 1 July. On 15 June 1971, 7AF representative to the Barrel Roll Working Group reaffirmed that the 32 strike sorties per day as outlined in OPLAN 730 would hold firm for the remainder of the campaign. Activity along the Ho Chi Minh Trail was declining rapidly while Vang Pao was already well into the PDJ. It became obvious that he could not remain there; he had to either go forward or retreat. After lengthy discussion, the Barrel Roll Working Group agreed that Vang Pao would need 24 to 28 sorties per day--in addition to the RLAF sorties--to support his advance. Since this would leave virtually nothing with which to strike storage areas (the 7/13AF targeting section had already identified over 200 lucrative storage area targets), the Group decided to state the Raven requirement as primary in its proposal to 7AF and then ask for additional sorties to strike hard targets. The resulting proposal called for 39 strike sorties per day--26 F-4s and four A-1s to the Ravens, four F-4s to hard targets, and five gunships per night.

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(S) Since the enemy AAA threat had decreased with the rainy season, and since the gunships would generally be supporting TICs which were normally outside the AAA high threat areas, escorts and flak suppression flights were deemed unnecessary. The proposal also recommended that none of the fighters be placed on QRF. If the aircraft could not strike as fragged, they would bomb the storage areas IFR or be diverted to targets of opportunity. Under the existing circumstances, the Group considered this proposal to be modest and reasonable. However, 7AF was unconvinced by the Group's reasoning and fragged an average of 33 sorties per day--20 F-4s and four A-1s* to the Ravens, four F-4s to hard targets, and five gunships.¹⁴⁶ Since 7AF desired that every sortie produce the maximum effect, it was decided to hold one half of the fighters on QRF when weather limited the availability of good targets. As a result, over one third of the fragged sorties were cancelled due to weather, and the few remaining sorties did not have a significant effect on operations.

(S) With or without air support, Vang Pao was determined to resume his advance. On 1 July, the eastern task force moved out from Phou Teung and crossed Route 4. At the same time, three battalions from the center task force were airlifted into the vicinity of Xieng Khouang airstrip (L-22). Six days later, another three battalions were airlifted from Phou Seu into the vicinity of Phou Keng, and by the 8th this force was at the base of the mountain. To support these

*Actually fragged as medevac escort. A-1 support was not always available to the Ravens.

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attacks, Vang Pao brought his artillery* forward, and established a "Mustang" battery consisting of two 105mm and four 155mm howitzers just forward of the Finger Ridge.¹⁴⁷

(S) While Vang Pao's aims appeared open-ended, in reality a very definite limit had been set by a combination of political restraints, reduced air and helicopter support, and unexpected resistance from the enemy. Since Vang Pao was now threatening the intermediate storage depots, the enemy returned two regiments to the PDJ and increased the use of PT-76 tanks to harass friendly forces. In general, the tanks were used as mobile artillery rather than assault vehicles. The enemy also showed a preference for attacks by fire (ABFs) rather than TICs which exposed his troops to air strikes. While this combination slowed Vang Pao's drive, it also showed the NVA's determination to protect his rear areas. That the NVA was able to bring these reinforcements into the theater during the height of the rainy season also showed the importance of a comprehensive interdiction campaign to complement the ground campaign.¹⁴⁸

(S) The first friendly force to encounter this renewed resistance was the eastern task force, which was driven back across Route 4. On 12 July, this force was redirected down Route 4 toward Xieng Khouangville, and actually reached a point 10 KM from the town before it was halted. In the center, L-22 was captured on the 17th but lost three days later. During the remainder of July and August, the battle swayed back and forth

*Artillery was an added dimension of Vang Pao's capabilities. It was not included in the original plan of action, but its addition resulted in a diminished air requirement.

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before the friendlies were able to secure the airfield. The western task force was also meeting stiff resistance in its attempt to take Phou Keng, but succeeded in taking both Phou Keng and Phou San on 29 July when enemy forces were temporarily diverted.

(S) However, Vang Pao's drive had reached its zenith. On 12 August the enemy launched a counterattack on the force near Xieng Khouangville, and by the 16th had driven the Meo irregulars back to Phou Teung. The enemy also recaptured Phou San on 29 August. Thereafter, battle lines stabilized along Route 4/7 from Phou Keng to L-22 and Phou Teung, with Vang Pao looking for further enemy advances. 149

(S) At this point, Vang Pao was in a very vulnerable position. Stalled in the middle of the Plain, he could not advance and would not retreat. He could only wait for the enemy offensive which he knew must come. Just how long such an offensive could be delayed depended almost entirely on the USAF and how it used the 32 strike sorties allocated to the Barrel Roll. This question was addressed at the July meeting of the Barrel Roll Working Group. Since the ground forces were no longer advancing, they were not developing targets for air strikes. At the same time, the enemy was free to move, choosing his time and place, and making maximum use of camouflage to hide this movement from aerial observation. Under these circumstances, the Wings--and now 7/13AF--favored a definite shift to the SOAs in order to slow the enemy buildup. The 7/13AF target list was approaching the 300 mark, and the enemy was bringing in more supplies every day. Some

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of the supplies were placed in the existing storage sites, but new areas were constantly being developed. One of the enemy's favorite devices was to dig deep bunkers, fill them with supplies, and then cover them with dirt and bags. Once covered, they were almost impossible to detect from the air, and nothing short of a direct hit with a delayed-action 2,000 pound bomb would break them open. Another device was to store supplies in small quantities in existing bomb craters in the apparent belief that lightning never strikes twice in the same place. This was, of course, a fallacy, but going after these supplies in dribblets consumed a lot of aircraft, and each new bomb crater was just one more place to store supplies. In spite of the obvious need to destroy these caches before they could be used against Vang Pao, CAS and AIRA remained firm in their position that the major weight of air effort go into the Raven Box. As the friendly forces had advanced, this box had been gradually extended until it included the entire PDJ.

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(S) An alternative was proposed by the ABCCC and supported by most of the Wings: most or all of the aircraft were to be fraggd to the ABCCC, since it was the closest control agency to the scene of action. As the extension of Blue Chip, it could then direct the aircraft as needed. Such a plan obviously contained the greatest flexibility, but was opposed by 7AF as well as by CAS and AIRA. Seventh Air Force considered the ABCCC a radio relay platform, and had no intention of delegating any real authority to it. At the same time, CAS and AIRA feared that under this system there would be a tendency to "hunt BDA" in the

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SOAs at the expense of the Ravens. They much preferred dedicated sorties. The result was a counter proposal which called for 36 sorties: 16 F-4s and four A-1s to support the Raven, six F-4s to hard targets, six more F-4s to targets of opportunity, and four gunships at night. Seventh Air Force acquiesced in the proposal and recommended that one half of the ¹⁵¹ sorties be placed on QRF. This became the standard frag for the remainder of the wet season.

(S) Since the 20 Raven-support sorties per day were inadequate for either offensive or defensive operations by the friendly ground forces, on 28 August AIRA formally submitted a request to 7/13AF to increase the ¹⁵² requested support to the Ravens. The urgency of this request was even more apparent three days later. In a message requesting increased F-4 support for Raven FACs in MR IV, where friendly forces were trying desperately to recapture Paksong, AIRA stated, "request these sorties not, repeat not, ¹⁵³ be taken from Barrel Roll assets." General Searles also made an appeal to 7AF for more sorties, and submitted a detailed estimate of the situation ¹⁵⁴ to support his request. This request noted:

We have been told that friendly forces were being restrained by political considerations while the enemy is preparing for an October offensive.

¹⁵⁵

In the absence of any friendly offensive:

The enemy will continue to be reinforced and will gain the offensive as the wet season draws to a close. Determined attempts will be made to dislodge friendly forces in the northwest and southeast portions of the PDJ and force them to withdraw to the south. This will put

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pressure on the high ground positions of Phou Teung and Phou Keng. Friendly forces will be on the defensive and will attempt to hold their present positions relying on strong support from artillery and Tacair. While friendly forces are stronger than they have been in the past due to the presence of new battalions and artillery support, it remains to be seen whether an all-out defense of friendly positions will be undertaken. This headquarters estimates that friendly forces will be withdrawn if severe personnel losses appear imminent.

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As for the existing level of sorties, the message stated:

This number of sorties provides the minimum support required during the next 30 days, and is consistent with the sortie requirements agreed on by AIRA, CAS, 7/13AF and your 7AF representative in the September Barrel Roll Operations Proposal, 30 August 1971. Additional sorties, if made available, can be effectively utilized against lucrative storage areas in the Ban Ban valley and Route 73. These storage areas are supporting the enemy operations, and, if struck before the dry season, will degrade the enemy offensive potential. Up to eight additional F-4 sorties per day against these hard targets can be utilized for a 10 day period starting on or after 18 September 1971, depending on other priority air requirements of the Bolovens at that time. This would provide a maximum of 40 F-4 sorties per day. Normally 20 sorties for hard targets and 20 sorties for Raven control. When these additional sorties are fragged, a minimum of three Laredo FACs and two Nail FACs should also be fragged to fully exploit the targets [sic] when warranted. The additional sorties will be requested on a daily basis through the 7AF Frag Shop, depending upon forecast weather, the tactical situation and the results of previous strikes. Primary delivery of ordnance will be VFR however the majority of the targets will also be validated for all weather IFR delivery. This request will be made with the understanding that all sorties dedicated to hard targets may be diverted to the Raven FACs in support of troops in contact.

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(TS) It was felt that this modest increase of eight F-4s per day would not seriously degrade the effort in Steel Tiger (then receiving an average of 250 sorties per day), but would almost double the ordnance available to halt the enemy buildup in Barrel Roll. The 7/13AF Deputy Commander's request came at a time when enemy activity in Steel Tiger was insignificant, while the buildup in Barrel Roll was already well under way.

(TS) General Searles also asked for an increase in night support
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from four to eight gunships per night:

Four AC-119K and four AC-130 gunships are requested to provide coverage for TIC/TPC situations, truck hunting and other targets of opportunity. Two AC-130 gunships should be dedicated for late afternoon coverage of the PDJ. All gunships should be fragged primarily to TIC support; however, one per night may be selected for armed reconnaissance of the LOCs when the ground situation permits. If the ground situation becomes critical, additional gunship support will be requested. All AC-130s should operate principally using Pave Mace concept with Forward Air Guides (FAGs) or other target acquisition systems.

(S) On 13 September, in an effort to get more sorties, AIRA added another direct plea to 7AF to consider interdiction in the Barrel Roll
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on an equal footing with Steel Tiger East. However, no action was taken on either request.

(S) The remainder of the wet season saw little activity in MR II. During the week ending 20 September, Irregulars maintained their tenuous hold on key positions on the PDJ. On the night of 15/16 September, probably fewer than 100 NVA, supported by mortar and

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recoilless rifle fire, dispersed a 400-man Group Mobile force occupying three high ground positions in the foothills north of the PDJ. After brief exchanges of fire, the Irregulars evacuated these outposts, but the NVA made no attempt to occupy the abandoned posts. In a weekly summary, CAS commented:

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Apparently, enemy is concentrating forces against the Irregulars on the northern PDJ. Coordinated artillery missions and the effective employment of Tacair has kept NVA off balance and incapable of massing for attacks on a broad front across the northern PDJ.

By 15 October, PDJ clearing operations were begun when 187 FAR troops were airlifted to L-106. While rallier reports indicated that LS-32 might be the first enemy objective of the dry season campaign, 160 only minor sporadic fights continued throughout the PDJ through November 1971, with little advantage gained by either side.

(TS) The close of the wet season left the RLG forces in a typically ambivalent situation. Their units held the approaches to Luang Prabang and controlled the PDJ in the north and Paksong and other centers in South Laos. But in both sections of the country NVA forces were poised to make a comeback. In its analysis of the forthcoming dry season campaign, 1971-161 72, the American Embassy in Vientiane stated:

On the military side, of course, the NVN will be attempting to maintain a massive logistical base in south Laos in preparation for whatever moves Hanoi may undertake next year. These factors lend a political dimension to the conclusion that the current dry season will be the most critical so far faced by the RLG, a conclusion

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already indicated by reports of massive NVA build-ups east of the PDJ, and by the unfavorable RLG position in MR III.

~~(TS)~~ On the asset side, the RLG ended the wet season with far better positions and a wider cushion of terrain (everywhere except MR III) than had been the case the previous year. In Barrel Roll, government troops had been successful in regaining the PDJ, Muong Soui, and the lower Nam Ou Valley in Luang Prabang. Moreover, the morale and capabilities of the FAR had been improved, as had the leadership and troop performance of the Thai volunteers and Lao irregulars. In MR I, younger, more vigorous, and more capable officers had either assumed command themselves or had moved into positions of primary tactical influence. Moreover, the reorganization ^{had} begun a process of breaking down regional parochialism and fostering national cooperation.

~~(TS)~~ Another asset was the accomplishment of the national training center at Phou Khao Khouai which regularly produced adequately trained infantry and artillery personnel. About 1,100 recruits, two infantry companies, and one 4.2 inch mortar battery had already been trained with many more programmed by the end of FY 72.

~~(TS)~~ On the liability side in FAR/FAN, the most significant problem was that of manpower losses. These could not be made up with the inadequate recruiting system, pay scales, and medical facilities then in existence. At the close of the wet season, there was little hope that FAR units would have any sizeable increase in unit strength.

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(TS) For the Irregulars, the primary gain was the increased deployment of the Thai volunteers. Since the Irregulars were the favored forces for U.S. support, their primary problems lay not in the material realm but in the area of morale. Several months previously the Meo civilian leaders came en masse to see Vang Pao to petition him to initiate a Meo civilian exodus from the MR II region. The Meo leaders had witnessed Vang Pao's successful drive across the PDJ come to a halt, and the Meo troops ordered to take up fixed positions. Vang Pao took their petition to Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, who succeeded in convincing these leaders to await the early dry season before pressing for a Meo withdrawal. According to the Embassy:

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If the Meo suffer severe losses in the PDJ campaign this year, or if Bouam Long falls to the NVA, massive refugee movements will be generated from north of the PDJ, the Long Tieng area, and the Ban Xon Valley, and impetus behind the Meo desire to pull out of the war completely will grow significantly. If the civilians began to leave Bouam Long, Muong Moc, Long Tieng, or Ban Xon, heading west, it would be difficult if not impossible for Vang Pao to prevent his troops from joining their dependents in a mass exodus from MR II.

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CHAPTER IV

STATUS AS OF 1 DECEMBER 1971*

Military Region I: Enemy Strength/Capabilities

(TS) The focal point of enemy interest in MR I had been the royal capital Luang Prabang which had been severely threatened in March/April. At the end of the wet season, there were in MR I approximately 2,000 PL and NVA combat-experienced troops with good knowledge of the terrain. These forces could be used to embarrass the RLG by threatening Luang Prabang and neutralizing its airstrip. In the Sayaboury area, the Pathet Lao had about 1,000 troops in six battalions. These forces, however, did not pose an immediate threat to the Thai volunteer battalions operating in the province. At least 14,000 to 15,000 Chinese personnel were believed engaged in construction and defense of the China Road. Aerial photography disclosed that road construction had resumed in late August after more than a year of inactivity, and a motorable trail had been extended along Route 46 as far southwest as a point 20 KM from the Mekong River.

Military Region I: Friendly Strength/Capabilities

(TS) In defending Luang Prabang, FAR/FAN units remained in the immediate area with FAK elements in the vicinity of Ban Houei Sai, Hong Sa, Sayaboury, and Pak Lay. Although Irregulars were scattered

*The data for this chapter is extracted from the 1971/1972 Dry Season Plan (TS), from AMEMBASSY, Vtn, to SEC of State, dtd 8 Dec 71. All quotations from Ambassador Godley are extracted from this plan.

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throughout MR I, most were being directed into MR II for the forthcoming defense of the PDJ during dry season operations. Friendly units in the region included 12 FAR battalions, two FAN battalions, 16 Lao irregular battalions, and three Thai irregular battalions for a total of 23 battalions or about 13,200 troops.

Military Region II: Enemy Strength/Capabilities

(TS) Except for a brief period during Typhoon Hester near the end of October, enemy supply activity along Route 7 had steadily and dramatically increased since the rains ended. Large numbers of trucks were destroyed/damaged in the Ban Ban Valley around Nong Pet and in the Khang Khai/Phong Savan area, testifying to this activity. As the wet season ended, all indicators pointed to an early, strong enemy effort to regain the PDJ and then to threaten MR II headquarters at Long Tieng as seriously as they had previously done. An estimated 50 enemy battalions (37 infantry) with a total strength of 12,200 troops were believed deployed in Xieng Khouang and Houa Phan provinces. Of these, NVA battalions numbered 27 and their overall strength was nearly 8,000; the remainder were Pathet Lao units. An estimated 15 NVA infantry battalions were deployed along the northern, eastern, and southeastern flanks of the PDJ and at least one NVA battalion was positioned south of the Bouam Long enclave. Intelligence suggested that this force was being massively reinforced with men and materiel, including antiaircraft weapons and a new artillery weapon larger than any previously deployed by either side. The PDJ was threatened by NVA forces, estimated at three ~~battalions~~ divisions, in a semi-circular battle line.

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(T8) Government forces reoccupied the strategic town of Muong Soui on 24 September. Elements of four "Patriotic Neutralist" (Deuanist) infantry battalions and one PL artillery battalion with an overall estimated strength of 1,600 men had been identified in the Muong Soui area. On 30 October Deuanist ralliers indicated an attack on Muong Soui was imminent and that the enemy forces were waiting food resupply before beginning an offensive. The morale of PL and Deuanists in this area was reported to be low, but control of the Muong Soui sector would be valuable to the enemy since it would provide him an avenue to outflank Long Tieng from the north. Therefore, in late November, the enemy took Muong Soui.

Military Region II: Friendly Strength/Capabilities

(75) As the wet season ended, Maj Gen Vang Pao's forces were considerably outnumbered as they attempted to hold the PDJ and defend Long Tieng. These forces included: 19 battalions of Lao irregulars numbering some 5,139 men; 10 battalions of Thai volunteers (eight infantry, two artillery) with a total strength of 3,095 troops; and four battalions of FAR infantry, a mere 645 men. A company of highly effective commando raiders was assigned to Long Tieng. It was anticipated that the enemy offensive would commence in mid-January 1972 and all Vang Pao could do was plan for the redeployment of forces from other regions should their assistance become necessary. He did, however, possess an advantage that his enemy was denied: airpower.

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Military Region V: Enemy Strength/Capabilities

(TS) Enemy units consisted mainly of small, local guerrilla (home guard) elements. After the RLG had reoccupied Muong Soui, the enemy withdrew several of the battalion-size forces that threatened the region. With the withdrawal of enemy units in the Sala Phou Khoun area, west of Muong Soui, total enemy strength was estimated at 1,500. The NVA/PL still maintained the capability to mass troops and attack and seize selected, isolated friendly positions in the region. However, friendly air superiority and the long enemy lines of communication and supply rendered it impossible for the enemy to hold seized positions. Paksane was the most active area of enemy interest. Enemy morale there was judged to be good because of rainy season successes in the Ban Nalong area.

(TS) Along Route 13 from Vientiane to Luang Prabang, the enemy possessed the capability to mount occasional ambushes and harassing attacks. In August and September, enemy units were forced to withdraw from the Sala Phou Khoun-Xieng Dat area with the loss of large quantities of supplies. Although there were reports of attempts to damage the Nam Ngum dam, they were viewed chiefly as propaganda and as an effort to tie down RLG security forces.

Military Region V: Friendly Strength/Capabilities

(TS) As the wet season drew to a close there were 14 infantry battalions, two armor battalions, one field artillery battalion, and

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two separate commando companies with a total friendly strength of 5,600 men. The total present for duty strength, however, was approximately 67 percent of the authorized strength. Combat units were deployed throughout the region in a defensive posture and many of these units were poorly motivated.

(TS) FAR morale within MR V was fairly good, based primarily on the success of "Operation Golden Mountain" which, with the aid of MR II irregulars, resulted in the recapture of Muong Soui. The return of these troops from Muong Soui added to friendly strength in MR V.

(TS) In summary, the lineup of forces in northern Laos was as follows:

<u>REGION</u>	<u>ENEMY</u>	<u>FRIENDLY</u>
MR I	3,000	13,200
MR II	12,000	8,900
MR V	<u>1,500</u>	<u>5,600</u>
TOTALS	<u>16,500</u>	<u>27,700</u>
TOTALS FOR ALL OF LAOS:	96,700	60,700

Based upon these figures, 17 percent of the enemy troops in Laos were in the northern part of the country, while of the friendly troops in Laos 46 percent were in that area.

Tacair Sorties

(TS) The employment of TACAIR (both U.S. and Lao) in north and south Laos differed due to the separate operating concepts in effect

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in these two areas. The daily tactical air requirements were determined by specific campaign and by specific objective. At the close of the wet season, the RLG sought a total of 133 sorties per 24-hour period: 43 U.S. and 90 RLAF. As discussed previously, this was an increase in the number determined available by the Barrel Roll Working Group. Although keyed to current operations, the sortie requirement anticipated the dry season activity even though the possibility of large scale enemy action was not included. In the event of greatly increased enemy initiatives, the requirement for TACAIR could have easily doubled. The RLAF had the capability for a two to three month surge, but this was contingent on increased funding for munitions.

RLAF Air Order of Battle

(TS) At the close of the 1971 wet season, the fleet of T-28s and AC-47s was in good shape. Three thousand T-28 sorties per month were being flown, and the RLAF could surge up to 4000 if additional funds were made available for air munitions. There were 45 T-28 and 10 AC-47 aircraft in-country. Although the AC-47s would remain the same, it was hoped that the T-28 fleet would be increased to 60 aircraft by the anticipated mid-January enemy offensive of the PDJ. The AC-47s were programmed for 225 sorties per month, with a surge capability of 350 sorties, again dependent upon munitions funding.

(TS) The subject of budgetary constraints had always played an important role in the war and strongly affected programming. Experience showed that Irregular as well as FAR morale and resolve to hold

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positions dropped sharply when sufficient ammunition to "fire at will" was not provided. Sortie limitations on the T-28 and AC-47 missions were geared towards available funds. In an effort to make more efficient use of available resources, approximately 80 percent of the T-28 sorties were flown under FAC control, reducing potential expenditure of munitions on marginal targets. Ordnance expenditures were more tightly controlled, including configuration of ordnance loads to target distributions. Thus, whenever possible, aircraft were armed with lower cost munitions such as iron bombs and cheaper CBUs rather than the more expensive variety. Under the regulations in effect, the latter could only be expended with AIRA approval. This provision had sharply reduced the rate of CBU usage since September 1st. AIRA and RO also started forcing a restrained 7.62mm mini-gun expenditure rate for the RLAF AC-47s, and in so doing anticipated a reduction from a high of seven million rounds per month to a projected 4.9 million rounds per month. The purpose of these limitations was to generate a "bank" of ordnance and sorties which could be drawn upon during peak combat periods for the future. By year's end a slight savings had been accumulated in T-28 sorties for this purpose. During the 1 July-1 November period, 12,350 T-28 sorties were flown of the 13,100 authorized by the U.S. secretary of Defense.

(TS) An increased effort was likewise underway to get all field representatives to reduce sortie rates in support of friendly positions within artillery range. If hard targets were identified, air strikes would be efficiently launched. However, the process of accustoming Lao field commanders to use their artillery resources more effectively rather than "call for air" was a slow one.

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The Political-Military Interface

(TS) The prospects for productive negotiations seemed to vary with the passage of time. As Ambassador Godley reported:

The desultory exchange of letters begun in 1970 between Pathet Lao Chairman Prince Souphanouvong and RLG Prime Minister Prince Souvanna Phouma continued at a somewhat more rapid pace, and Souphanouvong's special envoy Prince Souk Vongsak returned to Vientiane on May 12. Although both sides agreed that the eventual sites for Lao internal talks should alternate between Vientiane and the PDJ, this did not constitute meaningful progress in light of failure to agree on preconditions for talks.

On 18 August 1971, Souvanna proposed a ceasefire in northeastern Laos with the neutralization of the PDJ under ICC supervision. But the Pathet Lao would not negotiate until there was a bombing halt and ceasefire. The Ambassador continued:

After Vang Pao's forces successfully reoccupied the PDJ, Souphanouvong's letters became even more obtuse and vituperative. Souk Vongsak departed Vientiane on August 6 for "consultation" at Pathet Lao headquarters in Sam Neua, and has not returned to Vientiane. Efforts to promote negotiations between the RLG and Pathet Lao thus appear to remain on dead center.

(TS) In supporting Souvanna's neutralization proposal, the United States hoped for a standstill. This would have allowed continuance of Ho Chi Minh Trail interdiction, relieved NVA pressure on the RLG in the PDJ and Luang Prabang areas, and enabled the United States to redeploy increasingly scarce resources to south Laos. A "sweetener" or "add-on" package was offered the RLG forces in order to make such a ceasefire self-enforcing. This "add-on"

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package included new weapons systems (especially the expanded use of 105 and 155mm howitzers), gunship helicopters (UH-1s flown by Thai aircrews--code name White Horse--detached from the RTAF and paid in the same manner as Thai irregulars), and an increase in Thai and Lao Irregular force levels. It was hoped that the munitions savings from a ceasefire would offset the cost of the proposed measures.

(TS) However, judging from communist propaganda, from Souk Vongsak's meetings with Souvanna, and from various encounters with communist representatives in Vientiane, neither the Pathet Lao nor the NVN evinced interest in Souvanna's proposal. All indications were that neither PL headquarters nor Hanoi had given any consideration to Souvanna's proposals and viewed the whole Souvanna-Souphanouvong exchange as nothing more than a convenient propaganda exercise. The Ambassador further stated:

A November 24 letter from Souphanouvong was stridently belligerent and vitrolitic, leaving no margin for compromise and setting the stage for a dry season offensive. We judge that there are no prospects for meaningful internal Lao talks, or a military standstill in north Laos, during the present dry season, and in fact we suspect that any hopes for such developments must await either a Vietnam settlement or the 1972 U.S. presidential elections, whichever comes earlier.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

(S) To date, the most encompassing description of USAF 1971 operations in northern Laos would be "insufficient airpower which lacked strong centralized direction." This was not criticism directed at any person or organization, but a statement of the reality of Laotian operations. The United States was constrained by the political and military nature of the war for Laos and at the time of this writing it appears doubtful that radical change will occur in the future.

(S) In understanding the problems that existed, it was first necessary to accept Laos as a secondary theater of operations. In view of the limited resources available and the many demands on 7AF for higher priority missions, there was not going to be enough airpower available to support Laos in the manner which would insure success. In 1968, USAF airstrikes in Barrel Roll reached a maximum of 220 per day.¹⁶⁴ Although COMUSMACV policy was to give air priority to RVN, Ambassador Godley felt that both wars were intertwined and should the Barrel Roll area be allowed to fall, the United States would be in serious trouble with the Ho Chi Minh Trail interdiction campaign.¹⁶⁵ The 200-plus strike sorties daily dedicated to northern Laos during Vang Pao's Operation About Face in 1969 represented the majority of all available out-country TACAIR. With the onset of the dry season in November 1969, however, the number of Barrel Roll sorties began to drop as enemy truck activity resumed on the Trail. Once again, Steel Tiger¹⁶⁶ East became the focus for air operations in Laos.

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(S) By the end of the 1971 campaign, military planners in Vientiane considered themselves fortunate to get 30 sorties a day for the Barrel Roll. Regardless of how efficiently airpower was applied, 30 sorties would not accomplish what 200 sorties had done. Whether or not 7AF priorities were properly placed is not the subject of this report. That question is one of political considerations and is, at best, moot. As long as the Administration had designated South Vietnam to receive top priority, 7AF continued--and rightly so--to schedule USAF air resources accordingly.

(S) The problem was even more intricate when discussing control of USAF air in Laos. It was highly significant that, with small exceptions, USAF did not control the employment of its resources. Again, this was due to the political considerations stemming from U.S. national policy and the U.S. view of the 1962 Geneva Accords. In Laos, there was no unified military command for the conduct of the war as there was in RVN. In addition to his normal politico/diplomatic functions, the U.S. Ambassador to Laos, G. McMurtrie Godley, was responsible for the conduct of all U.S. military operations which occurred in Laos. This was by Presidential directive. In short, Sir Douglas Haig's observation applies: "We fight the way we have to, not the way we would like to."

(S) This does not mean that the American Embassy, Vientiane, could not have been better organized to conduct its military functions. With the appointment of Brig Gen John W. Vessy, Jr., USA, as Deputy Chief (DEPCH), JUSMAGTHAI, and his subsequent move to Udorn RTAFB on 15 November 1971, logistical support for the FAR, FAN, and Irregulars would no doubt

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receive increased organizational emphasis. As senior military advisor to the Ambassador, DEPCH would now be in a position to provide a continuity that was heretofore lacking, especially in logistics matters. ¹⁶⁷

(S) The greatest potential for friction in command relationships still lay between CAS/Embassy and 7AF. CAS/Embassy would have liked 7AF to give them a blank check for air support--or more appropriately--a line of credit of "X" number of sorties per day to use as they saw fit. Seventh AF felt that Embassy personnel were not adequately staffed to use this air most effectively. The position always maintained by 7AF was essentially as follows: "You tell us what you want hit and we will decide how, when, and with how much. In addition, before you plan anything, let us know and we will decide if it is feasible." While it was this position that prevailed, CAS maintained that security considerations required that plans be formulated without widespread coordination, and that only upon completion would these plans be shown to 7AF sufficiently in advance for evaluation. "Sufficiently in advance" had generally meant 24 to 48 hours prior to execution, and 7AF maintained that this was inadequate.

(S) Friction in command relationships had, at times, manifested itself in more concrete ways. CAS launched operations without proper air support, or they ran into problems with routine ground operations. In either case, the results were the same: they would immediately request TACAIR to salvage the operation. If 7AF responded, the outcome was generally predictable. If 7AF did not respond, then CAS blamed the failure of their operation on the lack of USAF support. ¹⁶⁸ This type of political

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maneuvering placed 7/13AF squarely in the middle. The Deputy Commander, 7/13AF, was committed on the one hand to assisting the Ambassador in every way possible. On the other hand, he was responsible to his superiors at 7AF and did not want to forward unrealistic or ill-conceived plans. In this situation, the lack of decision-making authority was most keenly felt by 7/13AF. The degree of influence carried by the Deputy Commander's recommendations rested solely upon the rapport he possessed with the Commander, 7AF.

(S) During the tenure of General Evans, 7/13AF tended to make recommendations in consonance with 7AF views. As Commander of 7AF, General Clay gave General Evans considerable latitude in his advisory role. Conversely, General Searles sought to establish a closer relationship with the Ambassador and often favored CAS/Embassy in its endeavors. By November 1971, General Searles and his Staff were being invited to attend the Tuesday afternoon tactical briefings conducted by CAS Udorn.¹⁶⁹ Under General Lavelle's command of 7AF, General Searles was given only limited authority. With General Vogt as Commander of 7AF, however, the Deputy Commander, 7/13AF, had been given increased discretionary powers. An over-simplified summary follows: the Embassy had the responsibility, but no resources; 7AF had the resources, but not the responsibility; and 7/13AF had neither the resources nor the responsibility--but served as a bridge between Saigon and Vientiane.

(S) Another potential for conflict, although less dramatic, lay in the relationship between the Deputy Commander, 7/13AF, and the

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Air Attache, Vientiane. Although 7/13AF was the bridge between 7AF and the Embassy, AIRA was the senior USAF advisor to the Ambassador. And here again, the lack of formal command relationships meant that the role of Deputy Commander to AIRA was an advisory one only. To be truly effective in seeking a common objective, these two individuals relied upon a cordial working relationship. A significant clash of personalities in the individuals who held these respective positions could have been highly detrimental in achieving U.S. objectives in Laos.

(S) Despite the many limitations and handicaps imposed on air operations in northern Laos--the rules of engagement and the political constraints--the success achieved in Laos had been due to airpower. Although the Communists continued to make steady gains, the inroads were confined mostly to semi-annual exchanges of territory. The NVA and Pathet Lao forces had recruited few followers among the Lao, Hmo, and Thai inhabitants of northern Laos. USAF success in the Barrel Roll had to be measured against its objectives, both political and military: to maintain not a rightist or pro-Western, but a neutral Laos in accordance with the Geneva Agreements of 1962. Understanding the overall SEAsian conflict in terms of its application to Laos is essential to an understanding of the success of USAF operations in securing U.S. objectives.

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GLOSSARY

AAA	Antiaircraft Artillery
ABCCC	Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center
ABF	Attacks By Fire
AIRA	Air Attache
AOC	Air Operation Center
ARMA	Army Attache
BDA	Battle Damage Assessment
Bn	Battalion
BRWG	Barrel Roll Working Group
CAS	Controlled American Source
CBU	Cluster Bomb Units
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CP	Command Post
CT	Thai Communist; also, Communist Terrorist
DEPCHIEF	Deputy Chief, JUSMAG Thailand
DOZ	7/13 Special Activities Section
FAC	Forward Air Controller
FAG	Forward Air Guide
FAN	Forces Armee Neutralist
FAR	Forces Armee Royale
GM	Groupes Mobile
HLZ	Helicopter Landing Zone
IDP	Interdiction Point
IFR	Instrument Flight Rules
JPRC	Joint Personnel Recovery Center
JUSMAGTHAI	Joint United States Military Advisory Group, Thailand
LGB	Laser Guided Bomb
LOC	Lines of Communication
LRF	Lao River Flotilla
LS	Lima Site (Lima Airfields--designated L followed by a number) (Lima STOL Site--designated LS followed by a number)

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MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MACTHAI	Military Assistance Command, Thailand
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MAP	Military Assistance Program
MR	Military Region
NSF	National Strike Force
NTC	National Training Center
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
OUSAIRA	Office of the U.S. Air Attache
OUSARMA	Office of the U.S. Army Attache
PDJ	Plaine des Jarres
PL	Pathet Lao
QRF	Quick Reaction Force
RCT	Regimental Combat Teams
RLAF	Royal Laotian Air Force
RLG	Royal Lao Government
RO	Requirement Office, U.S. Agency for International Development
ROE	Rules of Engagement
RTA	Royal Thai Army
RTAF	Royal Thai Air Force
RTAFB	Royal Thai Air Force Base
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
SAR	Search and Rescue
SGU	Special Guerrilla Unit
SOA	Special Operating Area
SOS	Special Operations Squadron
SOW	Special Operations Wing
TACAIR	Tactical Air (Support/Power)
TACC	Tactical Air Control Center
TFW	Tactical Fighter Wing
TIC	Troops in Contact
TPC	Troop Concentration
TRS	Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron
TRW	Tactical Reconnaissance Wing
TUOC	Tactical Unit Operations Center
UE	Unit Equipment (Authorized)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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VFR

Visual Flight Rules

WAAPM

Wide Area Anti-Personnel Mine

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