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MICHAEL REED
JOURNALIST

THE CONFLICT IN LAOS (1960-75)
WILLIAM MORROW & CO./PUBLISHERS

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Dear Mr. Lawrence:

As you'll recall, we talked about your days in Laos several weeks ago. Thanks for taking the time to speak with me before I left the D.C. area. At long last, I have enclosed a draft of my notes from our conversation. I'm sorry it's taken me so long to get this to you, but my life has been pretty hectic since I moved back to California.

If you can find the time, please scan through this transcript and make sure all important facts and quotes are correct. Don't panic if you see bits and pieces of misinformation. You may also find a number of sentences with "garbled" words, names or phrases that I couldn't quite discern from the recording. In either case, please correct any especially hideous mistakes and send me a copy of those pages - or even the entire transcript, if necessary.

Feel free to write in any additional thoughts, clarifications or comments that come to mind. If you really feel ambitious, the transcript may contain some brief questions that occurred to me while I was compiling it. Most of these questions [which are denoted by brackets] can be answered in a word or two.

Alas, you will probably discover a number of dropped words and other such errors. Unfortunately, I just don't have the time to edit these damn transcripts very much. (After them pounding out on my word processor, I can barely stand to look at them, much less edit them.)

If you don't mind, I will probably donate a copy of this transcript to the Air America/CAT Museum in Dallas several years after my book comes out. Until then, I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't give this transcript to any of my potential competitors until I release it myself. (I'd rather not do their work for them, if you know what I mean.)

Of course, I'd also appreciate hearing about any other good sources that you're still in touch with. Thanks again for your assistance, and for your interest in my project. Good luck - and Happy New Year!

Cheers,
Mike Reed

The following notes were compiled from an interview with Mr. Vinton Lawrence, a former CIA officer who served in Laos during the early 1960s. He was interviewed by Michael Reed in Washington, D.C., on October 7, 1991.

Mr. Vinton Lawrence was born in 1939 in New York City, where his father worked as an investment counsellor. As he recalls, Lawrence decided to join the Central Intelligence Agency soon after college. "I graduated from Princeton University in 1960 with a degree in Art History. I was going to get drafted, and I had a two- or three-year military obligation. I was asked by a recruiter at the university whether or not I would be interested in joining the CIA."

Q: " Did the recruiter give you any idea of what the job would entail?"

A: "They had no idea. Even the Agency didn't know, because I went through Agency training..."

Q: "At Camp Peary [Virginia]?"

A: "Yes. I went through the Agency's paramilitary training program in late 1961, and even then I didn't know where I was going. I came out of training in the latter part of 1961, and I didn't even know I was going to Laos until about three weeks before I left. So I didn't that until early 1962, and I arrived in Vientiane in February 1962."

Q: "What did they say about your posting there?"

A: "They said nothing. They just sent us out to Laos; the

people who were running the program would deploy us. They were desperate for help, and it was clear that we were going to be used as the people in the field saw fit. In general, we were young foreign-intelligence officers who were trained, theoretically, in across-the-board activities, including paramilitary work."

Q: "Was the paramilitary program already established at Camp Peary by that time?"

A: "They were working at it. The Agency had just decided that they needed that kind of capacity, so they had established a paramilitary program that was still evolving when we got there. They weren't training us to be super guerrilla fighters; they wanted us to be familiar with weapons, and techniques, and the nominclature of warfare."

Q: "Was it a Special Forces type of thing?"

A: "It was a Special Forces type of thing, except that you always knew that you weren't going to be a Special Forces type of person. We had a lot of fun; it was great run. I can't remember too many details. We were in the first class, and we were very unruly. I think we had about 20 people, but I have no real idea. I remember that we had a wonderful time. We staged a mock coup and took over the base - and we got into real trouble. The military guys were not very pleased. We worked hard, but there was an element of enjoyment about it. They were not trying make us into a Special Forces unit. They were trying to make us into officers who had an appreciation of what the Special Forces people did and what unconventional warfare was all about."

ARRIVES IN LAOS, FEBRUARY 1962

"I got to Laos in February of 1962, and I lived in Vientiane until October of 1962. I went upcountry almost daily, so I spent some time upcountry. I spent spent a lot of time with Vang Pao because I spoke French. At that time, Vang Pao's English was marginal bordering on non-existent. He was working out of Pha Khou at that time. He had left the plains [Plaine des Jarres], left Pa Dong, and he was in Pha Khou, which is about 15 miles southeast of Long Tieng. I was one of the founding fathers of Long Tieng. I went in there with Pop Buell in the summer of 1962, and there was practically nobody there. It was absolutely empty. There was nothing. There was a little Helio landing strip, but that was it."

When Lawrence arrived in Vientiane, Bill Lair and his assistant, Pat Landry, were still running the CIA's paramilitary program in Laos. "Those guys ran it. I think Jack [Shirley] was doing some training in Thailand."

Q: "Working with the Thai PARUs [Police Aerial Resupply Units]?"

A: "Yes. I met him, and I think that's where he was. I'm not exactly sure."

Q: "What were your initial instructions from Bill Lair when you got there? What did he say about the operation in Laos?"

A: "It was a pretty desperate situation. They had just stabilized the front around Pha Khao, and they were trying to expand around the Plaine Des Jarres. I honestly forget what they thought I was originally going to do. I think they sent us out and we all sort of did the same thing. Then they kind of got word back as to who was good at doing what, because they didn't

know who we were. I think it was the first time they had ever sent young officers like myself into a situation like that. We were regular, foreign-intelligence types and not paramilitary people."

Q: "Can give me a quick rundown on your day-to-day activities? Would you be upcountry all the time?"

A: "No, it would vary. It would vary on weather, it would vary on operations. In general, during the first six months I was there, I used to go up and spend a couple of nights upcountry and then come back. I was primarily trying to help them organize their G-2 capability, their intelligence capability. I would fly up there, talk to people, and find out what kinds of roadwatch operations they had going on, or what kind of penetrations they had, say, going into the Plaine des Jarres. Then I would work with my counterpart to try to structure it so that we could all use that information."

Q: "Was Tony Poe up there by this time?"

A: "Tony was up there and back. We were all up there and back initially. It's a little bit of a blurr exactly what Tony's sphere of operations was at that point."

Q: "What do you recall about the military and political situation when you got there?"

A: "It was pretty chaotic. One of the things that I did was...I used to run all their maps and order-of-battle stuff, so after a couple of months, I pretty much knew where everybody was. That helped me a lot later on, because I have a good topographical memory. I knew where everything was."

Q: "I talked to a White Star guy who was involved with order-of-battle stuff, too. He said there was a basement command post in Vientiane. Do you recall that?"

A: "They were all over the place. There wasn't any command center. Bill and Pat ran a very informal operation. I'm sure there was an office where theoretically they had a headquarters with maps and all that. It was pretty low key, and it sure wasn't a straight military operation. After awhile, we just walked around with everything in our heads. That was one of our main purposes: to keep the whole operation very small and low key. We just knew who to go to if we needed one thing or another."

MEETING VANG PAO

Speaking about his initial impressions of Vang Pao: "Vang Pao was a very impressive man. He was an extraordinarily charismatic individual, and uncommonly energetic. He was extremely honest at that point. He was very smart in both a political and military sense. He knew what his strengths were and what his weaknesses were; correspondingly, he knew the strengths and weaknesses of the Vietnamese or the Pathet Lao or Kong Le. He had a very good assessment of what he could do and what he couldn't do given certain forces against him. So in that sense, he was a marvelous commander and a wonderful person to work with. He and I became very, very close friends."

Q: "Did he have any shortcomings that stood in your way?"

A: "There were shortcomings in the sense that he was suspicious of the Lao, for good reasons. Vang Pao was pretty hot tempered, and he was impetuous. I would say that's about it."

Q: "Any anecdotes about him that stand out in your mind?"

A: "Yes. Later on, I used to travel with him all the time. He and I very quickly established relationship largely because I could speak French with him and we could communicate. I ended up spending a lot of time with him fairly soon. The most impressive thing I ever saw Vang Pao do was to get off a plane in Phong Saly Province and watch him deal with what could only be called extremely primitive Hmong people. These people were not like the Xieng Khouang Hmong. These had never seen a white person, and they had never seen an airplane up close. They were dressed like regular Hmong in black costumes.

"By that time, I understood enough Hmong to be able to follow him when he spoke. I also spoke Lao as well; I never spoke Hmong, but I could understand it. Vang Pao spoke to these very primitive people in terms of animal analogies that they could understand. He told them that if they sided with the communists, it would be like sleeping with a tiger. Vang Pao used all this wonderfully colorful language that helped focus their political allegiance and make them understand that their future lay with him. He knew that the Hmong would fight for their own villages, but he had to get them to sacrifice for the village on the other side of the mountain - which might be a village that they'd been in a blood feud with for the past 50 years. In other words, Vang Pao's main job was to get the Hmong to see what they were fighting for as a province, or a race, or as a country. And he was extraordinarily successfu. His ability to motivate people was truly something to watch, largely because he could speak their language and use their words."

Q: "Of course, the central government in Vientiane had all sorts of problems when dealing with the tribal groups, primarily because the Lao didn't really like the tribals. Did you see that?"

A: "Oh, yeah. The Lao were deeply suspicious of the Hmong - and deeply suspicious of us. That's why we as an organization tried very hard to push Vang Pao into aligning himself with the King, and that wasn't very hard to do. Vang Pao was smart enough to know that his only way of circumventing the petty political infighting in Vientiane was to establish a direct relationship with the King. He also knew that there was a strong historical precedent for that relationship, because the Xieng Khouang Hmong had been [periodically?] protecting the King ever since the 1890s."

Q: "Yeah, it's fascinating how Xieng Khouang existed in between all these different kingdoms and everything else."

A: "Yes. So the King was predisposed toward Vang Pao and the Hmong, and we just helped that relationship along. That was the way Vang Pao could by-pass all the petty stuff that was going on in Vientiane. The Lao were very suspicious that the Hmong were trying to carve out some kind of autonomous state in Xieng Khouang Province."

Q: "That's a good point, and it's come up quite a bit, for instance, in the Air Force's historical records. There was a lot of speculation about whether or not Vang Pao's long-term goal was to have an autonomous state up there."

VANG PAO AND THE KING

A: "Vang Pao already had autonomy up there. He didn't

really need any more autonomy than he already had - and he didn't want any more than that. As I understand it, in the latter part of the 19th century, the King had given the Hmong, in effect, a certain amount of autonomy within Xieng Khouang. They had their own leaders, for instance. I think the provincial governor was a Lao but his deputy was a Hmong. But for all intents and purposes, the Hmong were autonomous and were very independent. So they were in fine shape in Xieng Khouang, and they had prospered very well. And Vang Pao knew very well that autonomy was out of the question. His people didn't have the brains and the background to be autonomous. So as far as Vang Pao was concerned, there was never any question that they had to work out some kind of arrangement with the Lao. The only thing Vang Pao wanted was to keep the Lao from shitting on his people like they had for many, many years."

Q: "Yeah, that seems to be a running problem in this whole deal."

A: "It was a running sore. That happened a lot."

Q: "What do recall about his relations with Souvanna Phouma?"

A: "Vang Pao sort of put all the Lao into a great big pot, and he didn't trust any of them. He trusted Souvanna more so than most. Vang Pao thought that Souvanna was actually a pretty decent guy, but he didn't think that Souvanna was a very strong person - and that he would stand up to the other side. He thought he would waffle. Like a lot of Hmong...The fact that Souvanna was a prince didn't hurt. While Vang Pao would say nice things about Souvanna, I suspect that he didn't expect

Souvanna to ever help him very much."

VANG PAO AND KONG LE

Speaking about early relations between Vang Pao and Kong Le: "We periodically tried to get Vang Pao to put feelers out to Kong Le, and he did. He felt that Kong Le wasn't a bad officer, but he didn't have much to say about a lot of the other Neutralist officers. He thought Kong Le himself was pretty good, or had the potential of being good. After the 1962 Accords, Kong Le was in a pretty dicey spot because he was kind of pushed way over to the west side of the Plaine des Jarres. He was sort of squeezed into one place."

Q: "Yeah, after the Accords, he was sort of running a peace-keeping force on the PDJ."

A: "Yeah. Kong Le kept being pushed toward the west very slowly, and his area of operations kept getting smaller and smaller. After awhile, then there was some actual contact between the Hmong and Kong Le's people. That was in 1963."

Q: "During the first part of your tour, say from February 1962 to the Accords in July 1962, are there any battles or skirmishes that stand out in your mind?"

A: "No. I'm sure there were, but I don't think there was much going on militarily. I don't recall very many."

AIR AMERICA

Q: "What do you recall about Air America during the early days?"

A: "I lived with one guy - Bill Andresevic. They were just fabulously fine pilots, and very good friends."

Q: "Did they do any specifically good missions or jobs that stand out in your mind?"

A: "No. Basically, I got in a plane in Vientiane and I'd go up whereever I was going, and then I'd come back. We would talk, and a I got to know some of the guys and see them at night or whenever. I don't think it was a particularly active period. They were negotiating, and there was something of a standdown."

DACHAR THE PARU

Speaking about Dachar, a legendary PARU officer: "Dachar was one of the top PARU leaders. He was an extraordinary man; he was a terribly close friend. Dachar was a muslim, and he was deeply religious. He was extremely knowledgable in weapons and training. He got along wonderfully with the people. He was just a fine officer."

Q: "Do you recall any experiences with him? I think he worked mostly at that little base called `Agony.'"

A: "He moved all over the place. He was at Agony; later on he was on some hilltop south of the Plaine des Jarres that got run over and hit by the North Vietnamese. That was later on in 1965. He hit in the jungle for three days. We all thought Dachar was dead, and then he turned up someplace else."

Q: "Yeah, Ed Dearborn told me that he hid in the garbage dump once when U.S. planes..."

A: "I think that was it."

Q: "...and trying to hit the Vietnamese. He hid out there and in the jungle and everything else."

A: "That may well be. Dachar was up north a lot in Sam

Neua. I was very impressed by all the Thais. I can't remember a lot of their names. My closest friend was a guy named Capt. Macorn [sp?], who subsequently ran the Thai unit at Long Tieng. He and Dachar were the ones I remember the most. They were sort of the senior officers."

[Any more stories, recollections, etc., of Capt. Macorn?]

Q: "How many PARU guys did they have up there at that time?"

A: "Not many."

Q: "A dozen? Two dozen?"

A: "Maybe, yeah. There was one unit with Vang Pao training the troops. Then there was maybe one or two doing training elsewhere. So there was a dozen maybe. Maybe two dozen at most, but I wouldn't think so.

Q: "Was there anything going on down south at that time?"

A: "I had no idea what was going on down there. I knew they were operating down south, but I've got no idea what it was."

Q: "What do you want the reader to know about the Thai role during this period?"

A: "They basically made it possible for the Americans to be, in effect, almost not visiable. If we didn't have the Thais working with us, there would have been a much greater exposure and commitment by the U.S. in Laos. There's just no question about it. I think the Thais were the equal of any Special Forces unit. In fact, the PARUs were probably better than the Special Forces because everything that they had learned - all the training and knowledge and that they developed - was peculiar specifically to Laos. And they were able to operate with much greater freedom than if a bunch of us white guys were running

around up there. The Thais were very, very good."

Q: "Would they have just a usual MTT - military training team - type unit. You know, a weapons guy, a medic, a radio guy."

A: "There was about four Thai guys on a team, and they were all cross-trained in different skills. If I'm not mistaken, we modeled the Hmong's teams on the PARU teams, they were SOT teams. I think they only had four; you had a team leader and three other guys. You had a team leader and a radio operator, and then the other two did everything else. They did refugee relief, demolitions, civic action, everything. So they were all theoretically cross-trained. I think we took that directly from the Thai model, and it was superb. If it hadn't been for the Thais, the Hmong program wouldn't have flown - period."

[Questions: What does SOT stand for? [ ] And did Vang Pao, CIA or PARU ever develop small PARU-type teams of ethnic-Hmong who helped train the Hmong ADC units? Y/N]

Lawrence couldn't recall an incident allegedly described by a former White Star advisor who said that a C-47, possibly an Air America plane flying toward North Vietnam, crashed in northern Laos with a loadful of Thai paratroopers. "Thai paratroops in Sam Neua in 1961? I don't think it happened."

CIA STRUCTURE IN LAOS, BEFORE GENEVA

Q: "What was the Agency's general structure up there [in northern Laos] up through the 1962 Geneva Accords? Did you have you and maybe Tony Poe up there?"

A: "There was at least two or three other guys up there. Long Tieng didn't even exist during this period. It didn't exist until basically October of 1962. So it

was all run out of Pha Khou or Bouam Long or some of the other bigger places in the north. There was some stuff going on up in Sam Neua. We were trying to arm people in Sam Neua, and we were trying to find out what was going on up there. I can't recall which Americans were doing which; I may never have known. There couldn't have been more than four."

[Who were the other guys? And do you have any more information, anecdotes, etc. regarding the Agency's early efforts in Sam Neua?]

Q: "What was the command system? Was one guy in command?"

A: "No. We just talked things over with Pat and Bill. We told them what we wanted to do, and they said yes or no. Then we'd go down to the airport, get a plane and a pilot from whoever was running the air ops out of Wattay, and fly up there. When we came back, we told Bill or Pat what we saw, what we did, and what the situation was. Then we just wrote up a report."

Q: "What was your typical day like?"

A: "I can't remember. I think we left around 6:00 or 6:15, so we had to be up real early and got out of there whenever we could. It all depended upon the season, and whether or not you were going to stay upcountry or not. Then you'd arrange for someone to come back and pick you up when you wanted to come back. My memory of all that is hazy."

Q: "But it during that period [2/62 to 7/62], it was a fairly static situation."

A: "Yes it was."

Q: "As far as your day-to-day activities, would you be mostly going out to different bases? Or would you be collecting intelligence?"

A: "Most of the time, I just spent a lot of time with Vang Pao. I would stay with him for a couple of days and then come back. I suspect that I was sort of like a courier in many ways."

Q: "What were you telling him as far as..."

A: " I wasn't telling him anything. [laughs] I was a 21-year-old kid, so I wasn't about the tell him a whole lot."

Q: "How would you explain our relationship with him?"

A: "Our relationship was largely finding out what Vang Pao thought he could do in northern Laos. We wanted to know how many people he thought he could arm and where those people were. Then we had to help train them, deliver the arms to them, all that stuff. So we had to get everything cleared, and find out what kind of ammunition they needed, etc., etc. And we did a lot of training."

CHINA AND THE CHINESE ROAD

Q: "Of course, the Chinese were building their road up there during much of the [Vietnam] war. Was there much of a Chinese presence up there in the 1962 period?"

A: "My knowledge of the Chinese was just about what you said. We knew the Chinese were building a road in northern Laos, and we knew that it was heading our way - but that's all we knew. They were working on it and heading south. Everybody was afraid because we didn't know why they were building it, or what was going to happen next."

Q: "At that time, what was the current thought as to their intentions?"

A: "Their intensions were....They were going to nip off

Phong Saly Province and straighten out their border."

Q: "Later on, as the Thais faced their own insurgency up here [in northeast Thailand], there was some talk that it was all tied in..."

A: "Oh, all of it was tied in. It's all just one big mass [of land] where the border doesn't mean a whole hell of a lot. Everyone was sort of milling around up there trying to see what they could do."

COMMUNIST RELATIONS

Q: "What was the general consensus as far as the relationship between the Chinese, the North Vietnamese and the Pathet Lao?"

A: "We never thought the Pathet Lao was on par with either the Vietnamese or the Chinese. Of the two, the Hmong disliked the North Vietnamese more because they felt that the Vietnamese were tougher. The Hmong had also suffered at the hands of the North Vietnamese."

KOUMINTANG FORCES IN LAOS

Q: "One White Star guy who was in Luang Prabang said that there was a Nationalist Chinese unit working up there - B.P. 111."

A: "You'll have to talk to someone else about because all I know is heresay. There was a lot of rumors and talk about the remnants of Nationalist Chinsese troops either on the border with Burma and Laos, China and Laos, or China and Burma. I don't know what they did, other than run dope. That's what we understood to be the case, but I don't know that for a fact. I'm sure it's true, actually."

Q: "Yeah, that's pretty well documented. Since we're on that topic, my view is that opium and all that stuff is inherent to this area, and was there long before we ever got there. But it seems to me that Air America got blamed for a lot of this stuff [smuggling], and I haven't seen any evidence myself that they were doing it."

A: "I never saw any Air America pilot knowingly allow someone on board who was carrying opium, but I have no doubt in my mind that Air America planes carried opium. They would land and have 500 scruffy, stinking people waiting at the airstrip, wanting to go somewhere. Many of those people carried huge sacks with them, and I have no doubt that there was opium in some of those sacks. It was not Air America's job to search through everybody's luggage, and we never asked them to do it.

"I should also point out.....The Hmong's major opium-growing region was the contested area between the Plaine des Jarres and where the Hmong lived up there in the hills. They grew opium, and I'm sure Vang Pao knew about it. But there wasn't much of it, because most of the best opium areas were not being cultivated any longer. So the Hmong didn't grow nearly as much of it as when they were living in a relatively calm and peaceful period up there. Vang Pao stored opium under his house in Long Tieng, but he never touched it. He just kept it there so that if we suddenly withdrew our support and pulled out, he would have something to sell to keep his operation going. I used to get messages from headquarters every month about it, because they were obviously very concerned about any possible links to the

drug trade. So I'd fly up there and see all this opium under his house. [laughs] But he just left it there, so we never did anything about it."

Q: "That's an interesting point. He was still developing a relationship with the United States; he probably wasn't sure how long we were going to be there."

A: "We kept telling him, `Our whole approach is to keep the American presence in Laos as small as possible so that we can get out pretty quickly and not leave you high and dry.' That was the whole thesis of why the Agency was a better outfit to run the Hmong program than the military. The military has to do things their way; and `their way' basically meant replacing me in Long Tieng with 500 officers. You can't get out easily if you have 500 people there. That's nothing against the military, but they have their own way of doing things."

Q: "How would you explain to the reader about the fact that opium was being grown up there?"

A: "Your opium, first of all....Opium grows best in northwest Laos, not in the Hmong's area around the Plaine des Jarres. The best opium-growing region of Xieng Khouang Province was around Nong Het, which was entirely controlled by the North Vietnamese. So the Hmong didn't even control the best land in their own area for cultivating opium. That's not to say that the Hmong didn't grow opium, but their area was not the best place for growing it.

"The Hmong would say that the Nong Het area was basically where their heaven was. It was the high plateau region east of

the Plaine des Jarres where all the important Hmong came from. It was extraordinarily rich agriculturally. Vang Pao used to say that it was much more econonmical for his people to grow cattle. And they raised a lot of cattle in Nong Het.

"Vang Pao had no desire to perpetuate the opium trade because he did not want his own people to become addicted, primarily because they made lousy soldiers. He did not smoke it. He didn't touch the stuff, and he got very angry at any of his people who did. I remember one particular case where he was just furious at a young officer, who he thought was very good, when he caught him smoking opium. He just felt that it didn't make any sense at all. He hit the son of a bitch. He just knocked him around. I don't know if it did any good. Vang Pao himself was very clean that way. Vang Pao had no desire to perpetuate opium cultivation because he didn't think it was a very good cash crop - which it's not. It is profitable down the line, but it's not very profitable to the guy who is actually growing it. And it is very deleterious to the land. It takes a lot out of the soil. And there was no reason for Vang Pao to trade in opium. He knew perfectly well that there would be hell
to pay if we caught him at it, because we all made it very clear what our position was. Secondly, he didn't need to trade in opium because he just didn't need any money. If he was going to do it, what would he use the money for? He didn't have bank accounts in Switzerland, or Paris, or any place else. He had no expenses whatsoever. He was pretty absteemious personnally; he would give people whatever money he had. So he wasn't hurting for money. If he was going to deal in opium, he had to have a

reason to do it, but nobody has ever been able to provide me with any explanation of why he would want to do it for."

Q: "I agree with that. When you look at the finanical figures as far as U.S. aid for the Hmong, there was no reason from him to do it. I agree with that. But it seems that the Koumintang were doing it, as you mentioned."

A: "Yeah."

Q: "Now, according to the Air Force's historical records, it all seems that the Laotian General Staff was using some of the RLAF C-47s for smuggling up there in the Golden Triangle area."

A: "Yeah, up in Houei Sai and places like that."

Q: "Exactly."

A: "That's what I heard, too, but I have no confirmation of that at all."

Q: "The Air Force covers that pretty well because their people [the Air Commandos] were supporting the RLAF. So it sounds like Air America got blamed for some of that. That's what I've seen, and I'm not making any more of it than it is."

POST-ACCORDS PERIOD

Speaking about when the Geneva Accords went into effect in October 1962: "The Agency was given authorization to keep two people incountry. That was myself and Tony Poe. All the White Star people and other military people left."

Lawrence noted that the CIA new paramilitary command post in Nong Khai was a small house, despite reports that it was a small mansion. He also noted that Vang Pao's big white house at Long Tieng hadn't been built yet, but that V.P. did have a large house

at the time.

ROADWATCH TEAMS

Speaking about the post-Accords roadwatch effort: "The roadwatch program suddenly got a great emphasis because we had a complete standdown on everything else. We got no ammunition, no guns, no nothing. I think the tacit understanding was that we would have to prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the North Vietnamese had never left, and that they were still there in maneuver-sized units. We had to prove that they were there before we would have any hope of having anything lifted. That gave us a particular impetus to organize the roadwatch teams and put them along Route 7. We also inserted them into Sam Neua, principally along Route 7. So we had roadwatch teams coming in from north and south, which I had a lot to do with."

Q: "Can you recall about how many teams he [Vang Pao] had?"

A: "I would guess that he had at least two coming in from the south - one from Tha Noi [sp?] and one from some other place that I can't remember. He had at least several teams coming in from the north. We pretty well blanketed the Route 7 area up there. I think we started picking up the road...I know that we had units both east and west of Ban Ban; they used to come in this way, that way, and come down from the top. We had a very effective coverage of Route 7 coming in from the east. We were able to document, I think beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the Vietnamese were bringing in huge amounts of supplies. They just never stopped."

Q: "When the Accords were signed, what do you recall about

talking with Vang Pao and getting his views about what was going to happen next?"

A: "Vang Pao was very upset and worried. We wanted to try to adhere to the Accords to the best of our ability. He would cry on my shoulder and say, `Mssr. Vin, this will not work. My people are all going to be killed.' And I'd say, `No, they won't.' He would try to float by from one crisis after another. The situation was desperate, and I was in the unhappy position of having to say: `Sorry, but it ain't desperate enough.' We were able, I don't know where or when...I know of at least one or two special ammunition drops to places that were, I would guess, sort of north of the Plaine des Jarres, or very close to the plaine. They were always being hit by the other side. During the 18 months from the fall of 1962 to the spring of 1964, we did not get a whole lot of support. We were able to get it on a very, very limited basis."

Q: "One of your superiors mentioned that the Hmong had about 30-day's worth of ammunition for defensive purposes."

A: "That's about right."

Q: "How did Vang Pao and Kong Le get along after the Accords, since they were on opposite sides earlier? I heard there was friction."

A: "There was a lot of friction. It was hard to figure out it was Kong Le or just the people around him. Vang Pao felt very strongly that Kong Le was an honest and impressive officer. But Kong Le had some real dingbats around him who innervaded and sapped his operation and just sucked it dry."

SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

Continued: "Vang Pao felt that Kong Le was a cut above that, and that he was a very idealist person. But he still had to deal with the effects of Kong Le's people, and that wasn't very good. It wasn't until later on, when Vang Pao and Kong Le met face to face, that they actually got along quite well. Vang Pao just didn't trust the Neutralist troops at all for the longest period of time, because he didn't trust the people around Kong Le."

Q: "Do you recall anything about the week of Oct. 7, 1962, when all U.S. personnel were supposed to leave Laos?"

A: "I wasn't there. I actually came home because I was in the military, and I had to get out of the military. You can't get out of the military overseas. I was actually assigned to the military, and I was then being paid by the military. So I had to come home and, in effect, resign my commission because I couldn't do that overseas. I think I got a week or 10 days; I got back sometime in October. When I came back, I didn't go through Vientiane. In fact, I never officially reappeared in the country."

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM, 1962-64

Q: "When you came back, were you working out of Udorn?"

A: "I would go to Udorn, then I would fly from there to Long Tieng. I never went back to Vientiane for four years."

Q: "What do you recall about the period between the 1962 Accords and the 1964 spring offensive? What do you recall about holding the Accords together during that period?"

A: "It wasn't hard to uphold the Accords, because we didn't have anything to break the Accords with. [smiles] It was a fascinating time for me because I had time to do things other

than run around and pick up bodies. We were obviously worried about inspections by the I.C.C. [International Control Commission]. We were expected to keep our heads down whenever the I.C.C. people flew around, but they couldn't land where we were. Normally, they'd fly right over us. But I think we were quite legitimate in terms of upholding the spirit of the Accords. We collected intelligence, we trained the Hmong to the extent that we could train, and we expanded the operation to the extent that we could expand. We didn't have any weapons to give to the people, but we sort of set up much of a paramilitary infrastructure on the theory that the ceasefire wasn't going to last. It was very clear that the other side did not honor the Geneva agreement in the slightest. It was not very pleasant being with Vang Pao at times. He was quite sure that we would not support him when push came to shove. It was not much fun. We personnally got along very well but...Vang Pao was not at all convinced that America would come to his aid when and if his people were attacked. It was just a constant issue once I returned to Long Tieng. I ate with him three meals a day, and I was with him every night during his conferences with his zone commanders. I spent my time learning everybody's names and everything else that I possibly could about the history of the Hmong, where they came from, who the families were, everything I could. I sat there every night and listened to Vang Pao talk."

LIFE IN LONG TIENG

On a more humorous note, Lawrence mentioned some of the interesting facts about being a young American living in Long

Tieng. As he recalls: "The problem with being an American was that they always wanted to set you up with women. [smiles] If you were smart, you had nothing to do with it. There was that, along with all the normal stresses and strains of being a young man in an odd environment. You could look but you can't touch. There was an awful lot of drinking. It was hard on people. It was particularly hard on Tony because he was not someone who usually liked to sit on his heels."

TONY POE

Q: "What do you recall about Tony Poe?"

A: "Tony was the kind of guy who liked action. This was not a happy time for him, because it was mostly a war of words. I spent most of my time listening, and writing, and talking to people. I learned a lot about their religion, their medicinal plants, their society, their kinship relationships. It was like I was working on an anthropolitical doctorate. And that wasn't what Tony was interested in. He was much more of an operational person, so it was hard on Tony."

Q: "One of your superiors said that Tony felt that, during some skirmishes in 1963, the Hmong should have been able to defend themselves and shoot it out a little more that they were allowed to do. Is that accurate?"

A: "Yeah. Tony was always chomping at the bit that way. He always thought that the peace accords was a sham, and he wondered why we just couldn't chuck the whole thing get moving again. That was his basic theory, and it wasn't a bad theory. Tony was his own worst enemy in some ways. Tony liked to make trouble.

[laughs] Figuratively speaking, if he could stick the knife into the diplomatic pomposity and absurdity that this was a meaningful peace, he would do so - and then he would twist the blade a little bit."

Q: "How did that affect his relations with Pat and Bill, and even with Vientiane at that time?"

A: "His relationship with Vientiane were non-existent because everything went to Pat and Bill. I'm sure the people in Vientiane felt that Tony was an absolute loose cannon. Pat and Bill had known Tony for 20 years. They knew that a lot of what Tony said was just bluster. Thank God the people in Vientiane didn't hear half of what he said he was going to do - or what he had done. Otherwise, they would have shit in their britches."

Q: "As far as helping the Hmong consolidate things?"

A: "Yeah, but I can't recall any specific missions. Tony went out and tried to get into firefights, and he got wounded at some point. I don't recall much about it, I wasn't there. It happened up in Sam Neua. I think it was about 1965. It was just hard on Tony; he's not cut out for that."

THE THAIS IN LAOS, POST ACCORDS

Q: "Did the Thai [PARU] contingent change much?"

A: "None. I think there were fewer of them. I think they plled out some of the units that were out in the field somewhere, but they kept the unit at Long Tieng. That unit pretty well stayed there."

Q: "Are there any other military skirmishes or events that stand out in your mind from the Accords to the 1964 offensive?"

A: "No. There was obviously skirmishes but there was nothing major. We spent a lot of time working with Pop Buell, setting up the hospital and a lot of programs with Buell. We built a road between Long Tieng and Sam Thong. We worked on a lot of stuff that was something like an infrastructure. We could get all the money we wanted for that kind of thing, so we figured that we might as well help the Hmong build up an infrastructure. We set up a lot of schools and things like that. It was very important, and we spent a lot of time on it. There was a real effort to teach every Hmong child how to read and write Lao. They were extraordinarily literate. There was an enormous effort to do that because Vang Pao had no desire to perpetuate an autonomous language. The Catholic missionaries and the Baptist missionaries had worked out a written language for the Hmong, which they never had before. I had to meditate between the Baptists and the Catholics as to which areas they could go into. Vang Pao didn't want a written language for the Hmong. He said it didn't made sense for them to have a written language. They ought to learn Lao and English, and if they spoke Hmong with their families, fine. He didn't mind that at all."

THE KING AND THE HMONG

"There was a lot of effort to encourage the King to come visit Long Tieng, which he did. There was an awful lot of effort to connect the Hmong with this distant political culture in Vientiane."

Q: "What do you recall about the King's visit?"

A: "They built a house for him. He arrived and there must have been five or six hundred little kids standing on either side

of the runway, all holding Lao flags...The Hmong went out of their way to make this a success, and it was fabulous. The King was a most inperturable, expressionless human being. I don't know what he thought about it. I just don't know."

INTERDICTING ROUTE 7, CIRCA 1963

Lawrence confirmed that, around August 1963, Vang Pao's guerrillas started conducting interdiction operations long Route 7, primarily by using demolition charges to blow bridges or cause landslides on the road. "We went in and tried to blow up the bridges and block the roads, but it was very hard to do. We were not very successful because there wasn't any one choke point along the route that could be blocked on a regular basis. So we stopped doing that fairly quickly and just monitored the traffic."

1964 COUP ATTEMPT

Lawrence couldn't recall much about the attempted coup by Gen. Kouprasith Abhay and his faction in April 1964. "It was just more of the same old politicial infighting that was so prevelant in Vientiane. Vang Pao was suspicious of all those guys, but by the time Souvanna got chucked out, Vang Pao and he were getting along pretty well. He did not trust Kouprasith and the crew that came in at all."

Q: "That coup caused all sorts of political problems, and the upshot was that, I think, on May 17, 1964, the Pathet Lao clashed with Kong Le's forces."

A: "Yeah. Vang Pao knew about it, and it did not come as a

surprise. Long before the attack, we had intelligence coming in that indicated that the Pathet Lao were moving toward Kong Le's forces, and that an attack was imminent. I can't remember the specifics. Vang Pao had opened up a channel to Kong Le, and he was passing him information. I think Kong Le was indepted to Vang Pao for that. Vang Pao basically told him when it was going to happen. It was clear that Kong Le wasn't going to be on the PDJ for very long. When it did happen, many of his troops came over to our side. There was quite a bit of cooperation before they then turned around and went down to Vang Vieng."

Q: "One of your superiors in Vientiane said he flew up there the day after the attack started and spoke to Vang Pao. According to him, when Kong Le's guys began to retreat, there was a possibilty that some of them were going to raiding Hmong villages for food. When he spoke to Vang Pao, he found that Vang Pao wasn't too thrilled about having to work with Kong Le, primarily because they'd been enemies during the 1960-62 period. He then made it very clear to Vang Pao that the U.S. was going to support Kong Le and try to stabilize the situation."

Q: "Well, far be it for me to challange the opinion of one of my superiors. [laugh] I don't think there were a whole lot of Hmong villages in the area that he was talking about. The places they were going, the road that goes through there [Route 7], there were not very many Hmong villages there."

Q: "Were Vang Pao's guys mostly holding the mountaintops around the PDJ when the attack occurred?"

A: "The Neutralists were sitting over here [on the western PDJ?]. We had quite a big area here [where? Just south of PDJ?]

We had something up here, but we were not nearly as strong on the north side. These little guys...this is where the connection was [where?] Vang Pao was down at Long Tieng, but he had a good zone commander up here who's name I can't remember. He was in contact with Kong Le and the Lao. Believe me, the Lao had no desire to go up into the hills, and the Hmong had no desire to let them up there either. There were some rice drops, so there was some food resupply. So I don't think the Neutralist Forces did any molesting of Hmong villages because, first of all, there wasn't that many nearby and, second of all, they wouldn't have found a whole lot of food and, third of all, they didn't want to be there. I think it's accurate to say that Vang Pao was very, very suspicious of the Neutralists. He admired Kong Le, but he did not admire the officers under him. The sooner Vang Pao got them off the plaine, the happier he was. He didn't want to stop them from leaving."

Q: "In general terms, how were they deployed?"

A: "I'm not sure. My impression is that Kong Le started off with a sector, and that sector kept getting smaller and smaller during that 18-month period. By the spring of 1964, Kong Le was fundamentally sitting right in this last hole around Moung Soui, and the Pathet Lao had all rest."

Q: "When the attack started, how did you and everybody else up there respond?"

A: "As I remember, when he [Kong Le] breaks [and retreats?], I think we helped them. I'm not sure how much we helped them, but I know we helped them. We flew out a lot of their wounded, and I

ended up with a lot of their wounded at Long Tieng. We picked up a lot of their wounded and brought them back to Long Tieng."

Q: "How was the hospital facility at Sam Thong at that time?"

A: "Excellent. It was a first-rate hospital."

Q: "Does anything else stand out in your mind about the initial attack and response? Was there much of a sign as far as the North Vietnamese at this time?"

A: "I don't know. We knew that there was a thin wedge of Pathet Lao that actually started the [attack]....so that it was a Lao-Lao fight when they attacked Moung Soui. Our sense was that there was very, very few Pathet Lao - and that all the rest behind them were Vietnamese. We knew that there was large concentrations of North Vietnamese in the Plaine des Jarres. When the fighting began, I think it was actually Lao versus Lao. I think they [the PL or Vietnamese?] made very certain that happened."

KLUSMANN SHOOTDOWN

Lawrence said he couldn't recall getting any air support during this period. "If there was, it probably wasn't support for the Hmong. It was probably worked out as support for Kong Le."

Q: "Do you recall when Navy Capt. Klusmann was shot down on a recon mission over the PDJ on June 6, 1964?"

A: "Yeah, I was there. As I remember, he went down over here [on the PDJ]. We launched a team out of Tha La Noi [sp?], which is somewhere in here."

Q: "Around [mountain] 1930."

A: "Someplace in there. I went to Tha La Noi to organize this thing, and we got him out."

Q: "That was quite a ways down the road. He got grabbed, spent several months in a Pathet Lao prison camp, and then he supposedly bribed a guard and escaped. Do you recall any details of that?"

A: "No, I don't. I don't recall how he got free. I just connected with some guy who was flying CAP above. Somehow, he got free, and I'm not sure that I ever knew how he got free."

Q: "Do you recall the rescue effort to get him?"

A: "The choppers came in. We launched the choppers out of Tha La Noi, and we got some air cover. They took the choppers up to where they talked to Klusmann. They picked him up, and I went back to work. Tha La Noi had a low [site] number, and it subsequently fell."

Q: "Were you working with Air America T-28s on that mission?"

A: "I was working with choppers and jets. I don't know where the T-28s were."

Q: "Do you recall anything about the air strike against the Chinese cultural mission at Khong Khai on June 11, 1964?"

A: "That was worked out from Udorn, I had nothing to do with it."

OPERATION TRIANGLE

Q: "What do you recall about Operation Triangle, Vang Pao's offensive in late 1964?"

A: "When we took Xieng Khouang?"

Q: "Yeah, I think so."

A: "There was no question of actually taking Xieng Khouang.

Vang Pao just wanted to make them feel uneasy, so we choppered up a bunch of pack 75mms, and I think we actually had a couple of captured Russian 122mms, some ["line guns"?]. We just sat up on a mountaintop and tried to make life very uncomfortable for the military depot in Xieng Khouang. We also launched some harrassing attacks in that area just to make life miserable for them - and to let them know that we were around."

Q: "What was your role in something like that?"

A: "My role was to sit there with Vang Pao, go over the operational plan, make suggestions, and try to organize the support he needed to have it succeed. I was more of his liaison officer than anything else. We talked about the operation and whether it made sense, and what he was trying to accomplish. It was just an effort to unsettle them in the PDJ area."

Q: "Maybe some road interdiction, blowing up the road?"

A: "Yeah."

Q: "Do recall the Thai artillerymen they had there at Moung Soui in either August or September 1964, I believe?"

A: "That's possible. Yes, I think you're right. At that time, the Thai Army took over [what?]. I think they brought in some Thai gunners who knew how to shoot some of these things, because the Hmong didn't know how to do it. I think they brought them in; I'm sure they did."

Lawrence couldn't recall any other anecdotes, etc., involving the Hmong or Air America during the 1964 period. "I can't remember, because we'd get real busy. We started working worked 24 hours a day. When everything heated up in 1964, the

freeze came off and we started to expand into Sam Neua and the north. We tried to come down into some of these places down here [southeast of the PDJ near hill 5669], but you start running out of Hmong. Our relationship with the Lao started getting better. Most of our effort at that time focused up in Sam Neua, because that's where most of the Hmong lived. The Lao army had a battalion up there."

COL. THONG

Q: "Oh, Col. Thong?"

A: "Yeah. Thong was a fabulous guy, and very unusual. Vang Pao was enormously impressed by him, and very sad when he died."

Q: "Wasn't he holding a mountain up around Sam Neua town?"

A: [Looking at Air Am's site book] "It was Site 58, Hua Moung [elevation 4600 ft]. That was his major base. He was ethnic Lao, and most of his people were either Lao or Lao Theung. I don't think he had any Hmong troops."

Q: "Was he just holding his base - a village-defense type thing?"

A: "He had a real perimeter up there. He was launching attacks and operations from there, and he got hit quite a bit by the North Vietnamese. They would go in there and try to knock him off. He was real good." [Any examples of his operations?]

Q: "What do you recall about Thong's death and funeral?"

A: "I had never seen anything like that before. They gave him a funeral at Sam Thong. There was a funeral pyre with Buddhist monks. The Hmong made it quite clear that they deeply appreciated what Thong had done for them. By that time, there

were elements within the FAR that Vang Pao was very close to. There was Col. Thong and a Tom Sow [sp?], who was a very close friend of Vang Pao. Vang Pao went all out to try to honor Thong for both personal and political reasons."

Q: "Yeah, it was a good chance to get the Lao and Hmong together."

A: "Absolutely. At that point, I think Vang Pao was a general, and he was in charge of all of Military Region II. He wanted to make it very clear that he didn't consider it to be just a Hmong operation, and he went out of his way to impress that on the Lao."

THE SULLIVAN ERA

Speaking about William Sullivan, the U.S. ambassador during 1964-68: "Sullivan was a very smart man. We got along very well with Bill Sullivan. I got along very well with Bill Sullivan. I think Sullivan appreciated what we were trying to do. He was very pro-Agency in terms of what was going on. I think he realized that this was the only way that the Laos operation could be kept relatively quiet. Sullivan and the Agency got along just fine. We had certain guidelines as to what we could do and couldn't do, and Sullivan backed us up."

Q: "Was there much of a difference in the guidelines?"

A: "It was more active, but it required the same, very careful preparation. If there was a place that we could move to, we made very clear that the documentation was absolutely up to snuff. We had to be clear as to the political wrath and liability of the areas that we were going to move into. We were

clear as to what the liabilities were and what we hoped to achieve. It wasn't just a matter of us throwing arms out there so we could say, `We have X number of thousands of men under arms in northern Laos.' We tried to bring in the best units from each individual place and create what we called mobile battalions [Groupes Mobile], but they're really not. We never thought of them as actually battalions. They sometimes worked in battalion strength, but it was really more like mobile companies. But they were better trained and willing to fight for more than just their own homes and families. The whole effort was to get these people to fight for an abstract idea - a united Lao nation."

SPECIAL GUERRILLA UNITS

Q: "When did the Special Guerrilla Units [SGUs] get started?"

A: "We started the SGU training during the stand down. When we started that process, we also had to admit that we were taking responsibility for their families. If we were going to ask a guy from Xieng Khouang to go fight in Sam Neua, we had to do something about his family. That's why Long Tieng suddenly grew so much; their families all came to Long Tieng. We had to provide security for their families when the SGUs went off to fight. Vang Pao basically took the young men who were somewhat educated and not opium addicts, and he said, `Look, I'll make you a deal. If you go through training and become a member of this special unit, and if you agree to go fight for me and your people in a place that is not your home, I'll look after your family.' The SGUs got paid better, and they were very good fighters. The problem was that they were too good, because the U.S. eventually

pushed them into fighting conventional warfare - and that destroyed them. The SGUs were never meant to fight a conventional war."

Q: "Yeah, some of your early [Agency] colleagues had problems with that transition toward conventional war, which seemed to get going about 1967-68."

A: "It was a disaster. We exploited and used the Hmong for our own [U.S.] objectives, and I think it was bordering on the criminal. It was a total reversal of the whole thrust of the earlier part of our program in Laos. The Agency's early program was aimed at making it possible for the Hmong to live within the political structure that was evolving in northern Laos. But by pushing the Hmong into this more formalized war, we made them sitting ducks and invited a very strong retaliation from the North Vietnamese - which eventually came. There was no way the Hmong were going to fight like the North Vietnamese, because that's not what they were good at doing.

"That whole horrible thing with the Air Force guys [at Site 85] on Phou Pha Thai in Sam Neua was a travesty, and it never should have happened. The Hmong were good, but they were good at their own type of guerrilla fighting. They were not good at conventional war, or in holding ground, or any of that kind of warfare. Once we got them into that kind of warfare - once we started exploiting them like that - it was just clear what was going to happen."

TED SHACKLEY

Q: "Who was behind making that change?"

A: "I don't know. [Theodore] Shackley was the guy running it from the Agency's point of view. I don't know him very well. I'm not sure I like him very well for what I do know. But that's all hearsay from my point of view. I wasn't there, so I don't know. I met Shackley when I came home; we basically had dinner together. He is a very bright man. We had a very good dinner. By the time he left, I think he understood what I felt was the best part of the operation. I stressed that the Hmong were good at guerrilla warfare, but not push them into a place where you have to string them out. I will just have to grant him the fact that he believed that. I think he got a lot of pressure from above because things were not going well in Vietnam. I think there was a lot of pressure on both Shackley and the Agency in general to do anything up in northern Laos that would relieve pressure on what was going on the south." [South Vietnam or south Laos - ie., the Trail?]

Q: "I've heard that before, the fact that the Hmong were tying down a lot of NVA troops in northern Laos. But isn't it kind of like what came first, the chicken or the egg, because if the North Vietnamese pulled out of there..."

A: "If you're asking....I doubt that we were tying down a hugely significant Vietnamese force in northern Laos that would have otherwise turned the tide of battle in the south. I don't know how many North Vietnamese battalions we were tying down up there. Certainly, we tied down enough Vietnamese troops so that they felt that it was enough of a worry that they were concerned with their own minorities in their own backyard. We must have made life sufficiently uneasy for them that they felt that it was

worth while to go in and do what they did.

"The tragedy is that maybe this should have been foreseen; that if things went bad in South Vietnam, it was inevitable that we would use the Hmong and try to push them into places that they shouldn't go. I think Vang Pao is also guilty of this to a certain extent, too. Vang Pao started to get where his head got pretty big during that period. It was very hard to sit on Vang Pao. He liked the ideat that he had an air force. I was one of the people who even suggested that having all this American airpower wasn't such a great idea because it would tend to make the Hmong think they could do things they really couldn't do. The pilots often came in and dropped their stuff as a secondary mission, so we couldn't rely on them. They would only expend their ordnance if they didn't have any place else to drop it. Then we started having problems with them dropping bombs indiscriminantely - all over the place."

SHORT ROUNDS

Q: "Yeah, the Air Force's records go into a lot of deal about short-rounds - hitting the wrong villages."

A: "Oh, yes. There was a lot of that.

Q: "Do you recall any specific cases of that?"

A: "No. I remember one operation in Sam Neua where we almost lost all of us. [laughs] We were all standing on a ridgeline, and the planes bombed the wrong ridge. They hit our ridge with one big, fucking bomb, but it was a dud. [laughs] That's all I remember. I think it was Air Force, maybe an F-4 or something. That was just at the beginning; I left when this

started. It was clearly a very difficult balance. I had a real problem sitting on Vang Pao at times, because he wanted to do everything if he could. We had a lot of arguments over what operations made sense to do up there. We had to strike a balance between accomplishing what we wanted to accomplish and not getting into a place where, if they counterattacked, we would not be in a position to hold our ground."

EARLY FORWARD AIR CONTROL

Q: "Of course, as you started getting more U.S. Air Force assets around 1965, you had the problem of trying to control these airstrikes."

A: "That's when we got the first forward air control."

Q: "The Butterfly FACs, the Air Force enlisted guys?"

A: "There were a number of officers. I remember one guy who was the son of a Texas congressman. I think his name was Brooks; he was a very nice guy. They were just very nice young kids, and very sharp young officers. They were there as a liaison with some of our people. We would also...The Air Force attache would come up, and we would get the Hmong to look at photographs and try to figure out what targets were available on the Plaine des Jarres."

Q: "I guess the Thai PARUs were flying around and helping out with forward air control, too."

A: "Yeah."

Q: "Any other thoughts about the U.S. air support you received? Was it accurate?"

A: "It was fine, but it was iffy; you couldn't count on it.

At that time, we were not the Air Force's prime concern by any means. The problem was that we just couldn't rely on getting air support exactly when we needed it."

Q: "And, as you said, it also gave the Hmong a little more ambition than they normally would have."

A: "Yes. We weren't going to be able to hold anything unless we had airpower, but it was too chancy. It was too tough of an environment for tactical air support - unless you had masses of it - to hold something primarily on the basis of airpower. I mean, the Hmong were just one generation out of the jungle."

Q: "Yeah, this isn't NATO."

A: "Right. This ain't NATO at all."

OPERATIONS IN 1965-66

Q: "What stands out in your mind about operations about the 1965-66 period?"

A: "The whole Sam Neua thing. That's when we went back and forth during the rainy season and dry season. The dry season would come, and they would push us back. Then the wet season would come and we'd retake what we lost. That was pretty much all in Sam Neua."

END OF INTERVIEW