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Journey From Pha Dong: Decision in the Hills

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JOURNEY FROM PHA DONG

DECISION IN THE HILLS

PROLOGUE

Patrol moving along trail:

North Laos

Leaves brush by camera

A threatened people break the
silence of a quiet war.

Face of soldier looking

Enemy truck comes

That war is being won.

This film is concerned with how
a people learn to win a war.

Truck is ambushed and
explodes

MAP SEQUENCE
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 1954 - 1960

Map of Indochina

Names of countries appear

When the French lost Dien
Bien Phu in 1954, their
Indochina Empire disinte-
grated into 4 states:

North Vietnam

South Vietnam

Cambodia and

Laos

Laos was the least ready
for independence.

A patchwork of princes ruled
this undeveloped land. Here
less than 3 million people of
many different tribes lived in
a country the size of England.

Historically marched across
and fought over, Laos lay
locked in a quiet war of
foreign ambition.

A war made quiet by the
land itself.

A war fought for the minds
of men.

Supply routes into Laos appear

North Vietnam supported the
Lao communists over a
border that existed only
on maps.

Ho Chi Minh Trail appears

They had to protect their
foothold in the north, and
the Ho Chi Minh Trail to
South Vietnam.

Dissolve into map of north Laos
Flashes around Vientiane appear

Arrow line moves north from
Vientiane and south from the
northeast province

The name Plaine des Jarres
appears and lines converge on it

Opposing the communists was
a succession of weak govern-
ments able to control little
beyond the Mekong River
Valley.

In late 1960, in the administra-
tive capital of Vientiane, a
Neutralist coup d'etat upset
the delicate balance of power.

But the Lao Army soon forced
the Neutralists to withdraw.
They moved to meet a
communist column coming
south.

They converged on the high
plateau of the Plaine des Jarres,
still held by two battalions of
the Lao Army.

Aerial fade in of Plaine des
Jarres appears behind map

This historic crossroads
of peoples and routes in the
north had been ruled for
centuries by Vietnamese.

A contested country full of
bitter memories.

HISTORICAL BLACK & WHITE FOOTAGE
THE FALL OF THE PLAINE DES JARRES 1961

Aerial view of the Plaine des
Jarres

The Lao Army commander,
claiming sudden illness, fled
toward the Mekong River with-
out firing a shot.

Refugees running across a field

The panicked people were left
to make whatever peace they
could.

C.U. of Vang Pao

But one Lao Army officer chose
to stay behind.

With a few men, he rallied the
people and led them south
toward safety.

Exhausted refugees resting:
women and children

This young officer and most of
the people were Meo.

Gnarled face of old woman

A proud and independent
mountain tribe who clung
closely to land and family.

Vang Pao inside a hut

But with the coming of the
communists came the
shadow of North Vietnam.

The young officer saw that
he could not hold back the
stronger enemy.

Legend would later say that
he cried all one night for
his country and his people.

He sent a plea to the south.
It reached men who were
concerned.

Helicopter on an airfield

Days later on a makeshift airfield
a promise of help was made for a
promise of men.

American and Vang Pao
confer over a map

Vang Pao with radio giving
orders

Various shots of Vang Pao
and refugees

Neither man was sure what
the other man could do.

Cajoling, arguing, ordering --
the young officer led his people
back to the high country south
of the Plaine des Jarres and a
village called Pha Dong.

His name was Vang Pao.

Born near the Plaine des Jarres,
a guerrilla soldier for fifteen
years and wounded three times.

He gained his reputation and
experience with the French in
the war for Indochina.

A Lieutenant Colonel at 31, he
said a man must make his life by 35.

Soldiers digging in:
C.U. men with weapons

Pan along the barrel of a
rifle - slow dissolve into
color

A charismatic, passionate
and committed man.

A patriot without a country.

In early 1961, an armed
people stood and fought at
Pha Dong.

The alternative to running.

An incident

A reason

A people

A leader

the genesis of a resistance.

They fought for the land they
had lost.

They fought for the families they
still had.

They fought for the independent
life they knew.

They fight for the same things -
and more - today.

Title "JOURNEY FROM PHA DONG" appears and then the sub-title:

"DECISION IN THE HILLS"

THE LOWLAND LAO AND THE
COUNTRY THEY DIDN'T WANT

Color Footage

Dawn

To understand the new kind

Mekong River

of war began at Pha Dong, you
must begin with the Mekong
River.

On its banks live the lowland

Lao where they took refuge from
China 1,000 years ago.

Lao Market

To survive among stronger

neighbors, they fashioned a

defense of time, compromise,

and doing business with passing

conquerors.

Mekong River

They had little interest in

P.O.V. of boat

defending the vast mountain

country or the many tribes that

lived beyond the Mekong River Valley.

Lao General in boat
on Mekong River

The Lao Army preferred to
patrol the peaceful Mekong
to fighting for the Plaine des
Jarres .

Its loss was muted and distant.

Mountains seen from the boat

Just another incident in the
quiet war that had sputtered
since the fall of Dien Bien Phu.

Only when the Mekong River
Valley itself was threatened
would the Lao people really
fight for their country.

Mountain stream and valley:
plane flying in the mountains

To get to the quiet war you
must walk for days or fly for
hours .

Mountain peaks

These mountains go up 9,000
feet and go on and on - one
after another .

	East to the coast of Vietnam, north far into China.
Waterfall	Man has small impact here.
Aerial of lonely outpost	You would find the Lao Govern- ment in isolated outposts. . . . or on forgotten mountains.
Fly-by of large independent mountain (Phou Pha Thi)	A forbidding country in which to live/ A forbidding country in which to fight.
Lao soldier silhouetted against country	Here the Lao Army tried to defend the French legacy of frontier forts in a country that has no border.

THE LAO THEUNG & THE MEO
THE COMMUNISTS COME
AND THE DECISION TO RESIST

Lao Theung Village

You would find the war the
communists fought in the
layers of different tribes that
the Lao did not care about.

In houses on stilts in the
cramped upland valleys live
the Lao Theung.

Lao Theung people
looking apathetic

Originally lowland people from
the south, they were pushed into
the hills by the Lao who called
them savages.

Here they survive, a simple
ignorant people, without
cohesion, and amenable to
any master.

Meo villages on mountains

In villages above 3,000 feet,
the Meos live in houses built
on the ground.

Their old men say that they
come from a land in China as
narrow as the trail a deer can
walk on.

They began moving south when
their land gave out and the
Chinese threatened their
independent way of life.

They arrived in Laos 100
years ago.

Here they found a rich land.

Girls cutting rice fields

Hillsides for dry mountain rice.

Cornfield in high valley

High valleys for corn.

Opium field & poppies

Opium to be traded for silver.

Village girls grinding corn

The villages grew and made
what they needed.

Interior hut with flintlocks
on the wall

With simple flintlocks, they
hunted game and tried to keep
strangers at bay.

Boy with flute

They made a home here.

Mountain village with clouds

There are no more mountains
to the south.

C.U.'s of rain hitting small puddle

The monsoon comes in June and
rains 8 feet through November.

Time in the hills is measured
by the seasons.

Mists rolling in over mountains

Distance is the number of
days walking on a trail.

To the people in the hills, the
communists came many seasons
past to the valleys only days
away.

First the civilians came.
They promised medicine for
the sick, schools for the children.

No one had ever offered help
before.

Wary and unsure, the people
let the communists come.

Then the patrols came.

The helping turned to taking
rice and animals.

The schools for children
became the Army.

The hospitals treated with
sick with propaganda.

Men were forced to be unpaid
coolies.

To resist was to disappear for
"straightening a crooked
capitalist finger."

Village on hill engulfed
by mist

With no alternative, the village
silently submitted and closed
grimly on itself.

But, when word came that Vang
Pao had stood and fought at Pha
Dong, the village found a choice.

Villagers with very little
clothing walking on trail

The people came to talk.

To fight and risk everything.

Or to stay out and keep
something.

People in village argue and talk

A decision as difficult for
these people, as for any man,
any place.

The decision to resist was
made by men who felt them-
selves too threatened to do
nothing.

At Pha Dong, Vang Pao offered
people the alternative to
running. Here, what happened
at Pha Dong offered people the
alternative to being alone.

A leader went to find Vang Pao.

VANG PAO AND THE VILLAGE

Girls making airfield

The Meo walk fast.

Vang Pao sends word to build
an airfield and collect men to
be armed.

PLANE SOUND

He will come.

Vang Pao flies in the first plane.
This is part of leadership.

Small plane exterior

Vang Pao is a unique man.
He said that when he started
working for the people, he
stopped listening to his wives -
all four of them.

Vang Pao talks animatedly
inside plane.

He talks of communism.
It is mostly family feuds, or
being in the wrong village at the
wrong time.

So he fights with politics
and psychology as well as guns .

Choosing the time to arm
people is like picking fruit or
a wife .

Too early and they are not
ready .

Too late and the enemy already
have them .

Exterior of plane approach
P.O.V. of pilot on approach

The plane is specially designed for
short fields at high altitude .

Windsock

Landings are tricky for the
wind always blows .

Landing

A field worse than this the
pilots call "agony" .

Vang Pao shaking hands and
greeting people on runway

Quick crosscut C.U.'s of
Vang Pao talking and people
listening

Vang Pao begins by making
contact with people.

No man too small to fight.

No man too small to listen to.

This too is part of leadership.

He talks of the war in the
language of the hills

The Lao Government treated
them as hunting dogs.

But to trust a communist is
to sleep with a tiger.

He understands their thinking
and half believes himself in the
spirits and spells of their animism.

The people will fight only
for what they know.

He will help the village fight
for village things.

A contract of equals.

They can be taught little by little
to grow and fight for something
larger.

Mountains into China

He begins by putting China in
the next valley.

But he has brought strong
friends to help them.

Drop plane comes and drops

SOUND OF AIRCRAFT

ARMING AND TRAINING THE VILLAGE

Aircraft drops parachutes

The plane makes only one pass, but the enemy in the valley are alerted.

Men stacking ammo and
weapon boxes

Weapon boxes

Special packing protects
the weapons.

C.U. man looking at weapons

This man has never seen a modern rifle - he knows only his flintlock.

Training team instructing

The training team comes with Vang Pao.

They have been specially trained in this new kind of war.

M.S. men disassembling weapons

C.U. men disassembling M-1's

Young man fumbling while taking
apart his weapon

The citizen army is eager
and curious.

They can get anything apart.

But putting it back together
again is something else.

The spirits of their ancestors
who fought so well for the Khans
might be slightly embarrassed.

There is a limit to what they
can learn now.

They are taught simple things.

They begin with the M-1 rifle.

An instructor tries to show
an old man how to put an M-1
together

Old man with shaved head

Extreme C.U. of burning coal
lighting an opium pipe

Old man smoking opium

They are difficult to train.

This man has his own ideas on
how it should be done .

Many of the leaders are old.
They rigidly follow their tribal
customs .

The opium they smoke will
destroy them .

As soldiers they will tire easily
and become careless and unreliable .

But they are the men who made
the choice and the village needs
them now .

The people will not yet follow
an outside man.

Return to old man piecing the
M-1 together

The village can fight well only
if village leaders learn to lead
in war .

L.S. of men drilling on the
airfield

The airfield makes a good
drill field.

Only some have uniforms now;
if they do well, they will get more
later.

Man sitting down and awkwardly
aiming an M-1

Old hunters handle M-1's like
flintlocks .

The M-1 is better than the carbine.
It has the range and accuracy to
hit a man across a valley.

Line of men sitting aiming rifles

The people are independent.

They will fight as individuals.

That can be strength or weakness,
depending on the leader.

HELP COMES TO THE VILLAGE

Women watch the training

It's a family affair .

Cardboard from butter -oil boxes
being made into targets

Women cut targets of cardboard
from butter -oil boxes .

Surplus guns .

Surplus butter .

There is only one war here .

Leaders make lists of people

Lists of people are made .

They must be organized for they
are the target of the enemy .

Distribution of AID goods

The men will not fight without
their families .

There are no secure areas to the
rear . There is no rear .

C.U. 's of various AID items

The people are given something
for having made a choice .

Old man getting shirt

A pot, a plate, some cooking oil,
soap, a blanket .

A parachute is set up
for a school

Medic treats young child

A school begins .

A literate soldier will be
the first teacher .

A dispensary is built .

With simple drugs, a medic
breaks the hold of communists
and witch doctors .

VILLAGE OPERATIONS
COMMUNICATIONS AND INTELLIGENCE

Men carry box up a trail

The gear for the radio
team arrives.

Radio operator sending message

The people think Vang Pao's
spirit is in that black box.

Boys cranking a hand generator

But at Vang Pao's headquarters,
their messages will turn a dot
on the map into people.

Caravan leaving the village

Caravans of traders leave for
the valley towns.

While bartering their goods,
they will watch and listen for
the enemy.

POW in hole is
interrogated

A prisoner is caught.
He says the enemy are moving
toward the village.
They will attack at night.

VILLAGE PREPARES FOR FIGHTING

BAR training

The training speeds up. New weapons are introduced.

The Browning Automatic Rifle, light and simple, good for ambushing trails.

LMG training

30-caliber light machine guns.

More complicated.

More difficult to handle.

A defensive weapon for the village.

Men laugh and joke while training

There is still time to think up games with guns.

Throwing grenades

Grenades.

They will be used more on trails as booby traps than in combat.

This teaching grenade class

The instructors have the
people's confidence.

They are better than foreigners
at guiding people learning to resist.

But the people learn to use
grenades for fishing by
themselves.

57 recoilless rifle training

The 57-millimeter recoilless
rifle is the ideal weapon for
guerrillas.

It is portable and powerful but
no match for the Russian 82 that
the enemy may have.

60 & 81 millimeter mortar training

They learn to handle 60 millimeter
mortars with aiming stakes - but
also with their thumbs.

The 81 millimeter mortar
round makes a big bang.

Among the superstitious people
that fight this war, big bangs
have a power of their own.

Quick shots of all weapons firing

Training becomes more
real and slides into operations.

ENEMY ATTACK, THE PRICE OF PROGRESS

Moon over mountains

The enemy attacks just
before dawn

Night firing

Beating drum

(Sounds of guns firing fade, beat of
drum comes in)

The battle is over.

Dead woman dressed in
ceremonial costume

She will be buried when all her
relatives in the distant villages
gather to touch her again.
She will be buried with the
traditional paper money and the
felt shoes of the dead.

Pig being stuck

The pig will accompany her
spirit on its journey to the
place where she was born.

Kids with toy mortar

The battle did not last long.

	The enemy withdrew back to their valley.
Face of soldiers	A great victory that no one but the village will remember.
	Small wars in many villages. Each grew in its own way.
Men moving down a trail	The word spread from mountain to mountain.
Parachute sling-swing	Progress is having parachute rigging for swings.
Man eating cucumber	Or eating a cucumber in the open.

MAP SEQUENCE SHOWING GROWTH
AND GENEVA CONVENTION 1961 TO 1962

Map of north Laos	May 1961
Pha Dong appears	Vang Pao has 5,000 guerrillas and 50,000 people in the mountains near Pha Dong.
Pha Dong flashes	June 1961 Pha Dong finally falls after a major enemy effort. But the resistance survives.
Zones begin to grow	It grows like roots where people are willing. Groups of villages become zones. Radios and airfields link one to another
	June 1962 15,000 guerrillas and 100,000 people now ring the Plaine des Jarres.

Roads in from DRV

The communist masters of guerrilla warfare hold old French forts and valley towns .

Flashes around roads

They are supplied by old French roads from North Vietnam .

They are forced to fight with old French methods .

An ironic twist of history .

MAP

October 1962

Zoom out to whole country

The Geneva Convention establishes a cease-fire and a coalition government of pro-communist/neutralist/and anti-communist factions .

Laos is outlined

An International Control

Commission is named to see
that all foreign troops withdraw
and that all foreign support
ceases.

Vang Pao orders the guerrillas
to fight only if attacked.

They are to watch the North
Vietnamese who do not go home.

Start zoom into north Laos

The resistance becomes a
refugee relief program and has
to survive on the edge of collapse.

BIRTH OF SAM THONG AND LONG THIENG

Zoom into dots

Pha Dong

Sam Thong

Dissolve to aerial of Sam Thong

To avoid publicity, the public

headquarters of Vang Pao is

moved from the capital of

Vientiane to Sam Thong,

already a refugee relief center.

Aerial shot of a lonely valley

The military headquarters is

moved to Long Thieng.

A handful of people live beside

the airfield in this forgotten

valley.

Old shot of runway

The barest essentials to keep

the resistance alive are moved in.

Old shot of tent

It began in one tent with 5 radios

and a few barely educated boys

who ate, slept and worked here.

Radio operator in village

Their messages reassured
worried and beleaguered
people in villages throughout
the north.

Aerial of Long Thieng

High ridges hid what looked
like just another refugee village.

Yet somehow 4 years later,
that cluster of huts has become
the third largest city in Laos.

A megalopolis faced with urban
sprawl -- and boasting the most
reliable electrical system in the
country.

Interior - new commo

Some of that power went to operate
a sophisticated radio net with 200
operators manning over 50 stations.

Radio message being sent

But not all the messages were serious: "I, company commander, Ly Song, have only one wife. Request you drop soonest black cloth and whiskey to buy second wife."

Meo men sawing log

In the sparse days after Geneva, there was little outside help.

The people had to use their own initiative to find their own solutions.

Quick shots of various buildings

They even developed unique styles of architecture:

Gas barrel baroque

Ammo crate classical

Tin sheet palladian

Building Vang Pao's house

When Vang Pao's house was built, it served as a war room, a town hall, even a social center.

Lao flag

The unique focus of the Lao Government in this new kind of war.

Zoom into Vang Pao's house

Zoom out to include visitors' house

Characteristic of the man, he built the more elaborate grey house - on the right - for visitors.

Interior plane in flight

The families of leaders were brought to Long Thieng.

Helicopter lands

They would be safe here.

For the first time men began to trust someone else to protect what they fought for.

Various shots of women
and children

Long Thieng became a city
of women and children.

Dissolve into map

By protecting these families,
Vang Pao strengthened his
political appeal.

MAP SEQUENCE
GROWTH AFTER GENEVA 1963 - 1965

Flashes on Plaine des Jarres

The war never really stopped.

In 1963, less than a year after the Geneva Convention, the uneasy alliance between the communists and neutralists disintegrated.

The neutralists were driven off the Plaine des Jarres.

They had to ask for Vang Pao's help.

Old enemies became wary partners when the communists brought back the war to Laos.

Growth in the northeast

The resistance began to grow again.

In the northeast, the traditional stronghold of the communists, thousands of men were armed.

Luang Prabang appears -
growth begins north of
Luang Prabang

North of Luang Prabang, the royal capital, people in the middle of communist territory asked to join Vang Pao.

January 1965

The resistance is 4 years old.

20,000 guerrillas protect 300,000 people.

Gaps between major friendly
areas are filled

The Lao Government makes
Vang Pao a General in the Army.

Gaps are filled but expansion
is slower.

Growth is measured by
improving what exists.

AIR SUPPORT, STAFF AND INTELLIGENCE

Runway construction

When the war began again, the airfields were improved and the planes returned.

Aircraft approaches and lands

Most airports as busy as Long Thieng have concrete runways

Dust engulfs aircraft

and fancy terminals.

Shots of various kinds of aircraft landing and taking off

These planes bring rice and supplies.

Over 1,000 tons arrive and leave each month.

Smaller aircraft resupply the little Long Thiengs that were established as friendly territory grew.

Choppers working

Isolated outposts near the front
are supported by helicopter .

Office sequence:

From the few who had an
education, an unusual staff
developed.

Men typing and writing reports

They learned to handle the problems
of a people bearing arms .

They support the unique needs
of a division of guerrillas .

They pay 20,000 men fairly
and honestly .

They care for the wants of several
hundred thousand people .

They exploit the sources of infor-
mation available on the enemy .

Debriefing of an agent

Debriefing of an agent.

Interrogation of POW

Interrogation of a prisoner.

Chopper unloading rice
on lonely mountain top

Intelligence on where the enemy
is and what he might do.

Good information

Good communication

Good support

This is the difference between
small villages and a stronger
enemy.

Dissolve to Vientiane
loading rice

In northern Laos, this is the
way the quiet war is being won.

THE RICE AND REFUGEE PROGRAMS

Loading rice into aircraft
in Vientiane

In Vientiane, 1,500 tons of rice each month are loaded into old cargo planes.

It is the difference between staying or running for 120,000 refugees.

A prearranged signal is put out, for all the villages look alike.

Various shots of aircraft
dropping rice to village

It tells the pilot the village is still in friendly hands.

It may be the oldest established permanent flying propaganda game in Asia, but in this war what falls from an airplane is as important as what grows from the muzzle of a gun.

Women running to drop zone

Refugees have come to the village.

People scraping up rice

They come in families and in small groups.

Refugees walking up hill

Each year 50,000 people come to hundreds of villages like this.

They come with nothing.

They could not wait for the resistance to come to them.

Distribution of rice to villages

The men of the village have been armed for several years now.

Old man gets rice

Some, mostly the old men and old leaders, have succumbed to age, opium and whiskey.

Individual shots of soldiers

Most of the younger men are
full-time soldiers

They have learned to fight as
companies with men from other
villages and follow outside leaders.

The commander of the zone has
several of these companies to
fight the local enemy.

Interior hut, soldiers eating rice

The dilemma of the village war is
that these guerrillas must defend
a land and people regular armies
usually protect.

Leaders talking to refugees

Younger men trained at Long
Thieng, now share authority with
older local leaders.

Rice distribution to refugees

The refugees must begin work
on new fields and homes .

A few give up. Too tired or too
lazy or too afraid the enemy will
come .

But most will try to start a
new life .

Until then they must be fed .

There is often not enough rice .

It is carefully controlled .

A canteen cup for each person --
about a pound a day .

Only half of what they used to have
but enough until they have grown
their own .

Old woman eating rice

In this war, people cannot be
given all they ask for.

Young kid eating rice

There can be no charity, even
with food.

A balance must be reached to
keep alive the hope but not
destroy the quest for that
new life.

THE MEDICAL PROGRAM

Stretcher case carried into
Sam Thong hospital

The seriously sick and wounded
come to Sam Thong.

The San Sook hospital stands
for another side in this new kind
of war.

It replaced the old dispensary which
had bamboo walls and a dirt floor.

Crowded interior of hospital

There are 100 beds and often
twice that many patients.

Nurses with child on stretcher

Local girls learn to be nurses.

Here half the children die before
they are 2.

	The hospital has an X-ray machine and operating room.
Face of Lao doctor	It is directed by a Lao doctor married to a Meo girl.
Ward interior	The medical program is built on thousands of people in distant villages.
Frightened woman being treated by old Thai doctor	They are afraid. They believe that when spirits leave the body they will get sick. They don't understand his medicine yet they come and ask for his help.
Face of old doctor	They trust him because they know he is concerned.

Doctor examining small girl

This kind of concern supports
the kind of trust that leads to
commitment.

The quiet war must have a
committed people.

THE LIVESTOCK PROGRAM

Cattle peacefully grazing

It was livestock not opium that
made the Plaine des Jarres and
the Meo rich.

Water buffalo being inoculated

But the animals were lost to
the enemy.

A new herd was begun near Sam Thong.

Vang Pao and cattle

Vang Pao helped bring livestock
back to the hills.

American pigs at experimental farm

At a model farm at Long Thieng,
American pigs have been brought in.

It isn't easy to put meat on flabby
local porkers.

Flock of ducks

Ducks from Thailand do well
despite a harsh climate.

Sam Thong rodeo

Here we are, sports fans, at
the Sam Thong Stampede

Milling cattle: Men trying
to lasso the cattle

Would you believe roping a water
buffalo with a parachute sling
lasso? It's even money.

The world record of 5 minutes
and 22 seconds still stands.

Pigs being driven to market

Time was bought for Long Thieng
and Sam Thong by the fighting in
distant villages.

Time to grow things.

Time to sell things.

Time to build markets for this
little piggy to go to.

THE MARKET PROGRAM

General shots of market

There is money now.

Old man carefully handling money

Soldiers are paid about 10 dollars a month, but a pig still costs a couple of months pay.

Unloading boxes from a plane

To bring in basic necessities at low prices a trading association has been established.

Stacks of money

Its capital came from the small contributions of many villages.

Fat merchant

The old merchant families lost their monopoly, and threatened Vang Pao's leadership.

The resistance has its war profiteers.

	But Vang Pao had to risk the support of a few for the allegiance of many.
Woman using hand scale	Because markets are a part of this war.
Noodle shops and people eating	Almost any hour of the day you can get a bowl of noodles -- or shop for a full-course meal.
Whiskey in bottles and woman drinking whiskey	Aged whiskey - 2 days old - for the cocktail hour.
Pile of meat	A T-bone steak coming up.
Greens being sold	Garden greens for a salad.
Drinking beer	Japanese beer to top it off.

But Vang Pao's hope from the beginning was an idea, and he called that idea a union of Lao races.

A common enemy gave life to this idea in war.

But when peace comes to keep this idea alive, children must now be taught to be citizens of Laos.

The older children go to grade school in Sam Thong.

They learn one language.

They must be able to speak as Lao.

Lao language being taught

Map of Laos

They learn one country and
one government.

There can be no tribal autonomy.

Picture of King and John F. Kennedy

They learn one king.

He stands for a Union that can be.

Teachers

The teachers are young and
barely trained.

But they were soldiers, they
understand the idea.

Children in Bangkok

In Bangkok, Thailand, sons of
the most important leaders go to
school.

Here they can learn of the West
without forgetting who they are --
and where they will return to.

Children laughing - up country

From these children will come
the leaders who will follow
Vang Pao.

What they are learning will keep
the guns of the resistance from
threatening the country that it
saved.

THE RADIO BROADCASTING STATION

Man looking at poster

The idea of a union of Lao
races is spread to the people.

Posters tell of the return of
the Lao Government to the
north.

Small plane drops leaflets

Leaflets are dropped to
uncommitted villages.

The idea will be carried to
enemy areas by word of mouth.

The transmitter building on a hill

But most of the people are
illiterate and schools are only
for the young.

To reach these people -- some
deep in communist territory -- a
radio station was built.

	It is called the Union of Lao Races Radio.
Announcers broadcasting	Programs in Meo, Lao-Theung and Lao are broadcast daily.
Writing scripts	Accurate news about the war counters enemy propaganda that the friendly cause is hopeless.
Listening to tape recordings	Tape recordings from defectors let their comrades know that they have been well treated
Girl singing and man playing Khene	She sings of love and war, and in her ballad weaves the hope for a united land.
People listening to radios up-country	The radio was not needed when men fought only for what they knew. But now men must get used to being part of something larger.

BUILDING THE ROAD TOWARD THE SOUTH

Bulldozers pushing over trees

A road is started toward
the south.

Set demo charges

It begins at Sam Thong.

Boom

Two 5,000 foot ridges must be
crossed before reaching Long
Thieng.

Bulldozer working on steep hill

100 miles more and it will
reach the Mekong Valley.

Young men are taught to be
engineers and drive bulldozers.

Driving along road POV of driver

When the King first traveled
this road, he said it was only
fit for mountain goats.

Man walking up trail

People come from great distances
just to see the road.

Various people walk on road

Merchants travel on it.

Refugees settle by it.

Aerials of road

Pilots call it "Skyline Drive" and
use it for navigation.

The road has impact on everyone.

It cannot be shot.

It cannot be eaten.

It is something the people
understand.

It will one day reach other roads
in the Mekong Valley.

It will bring by truck what now
must come by air.

It began nowhere in war and
is built toward a time of peace.

It will last.

INFILTRATION OF THE
ROAD WATCH TEAM AND AIR STRIKES

Aerial of enemy road

But there are other roads in
the north . . . enemy roads.

They must be watched.

A special road-watch team has
been trained.

Helicopter in mid air and landing

They are being infiltrated.

Interior of helicopter, men
getting out

They are left at a village deep
in enemy territory.

Local people are friendly here,
but the enemy is close.

Men walk up hill

The road is two days away.

Enemy trucks on road

This footage was taken by a member of the team with a simple movie camera.

Team observing

Identification cards of enemy trucks have code names.

--A Russian GAZ 63 is called a fish for radio transmission.

Message writing and transmission

"25 fish moving west on Route 7 from North Vietnam.

Udorn radio reception

Villagers say truck park located at UG 6066, 100 meters south of the old rice mill at Ban Ly Neng."

Strike sequence, jets hit trucks, explosions, etc.

HOW THE AMERICANS WORK

Symbols on a map

The destroyed trucks become symbols on a map.

Map marking an aerial photo

In the Mekong River Valley, the progress of the war is watched.

Big aircraft dropping

The support for this new kind of war, from the bulldozers that build roads to the planes that destroy them, is unique and staggering.

Yet all this would be wasted if the wrong approach were used.

The men who have come to help, plan a program strong enough to last yet simple enough to leave behind.

An American and Thai
talking together

They can only guide the local
leaders to create that program.

They can only train the local
men to make that program strong.

Together, they work for that
day they won't be needed.

One American in a village
talking to local people

To persuade but not command,
it is better with few men.

Ordinary men but given the
responsibility to do many things
and be many people.

They must stay close to that
lean life the people lead.

An American and a local
discussing situation on a map.

Stay there long enough to be
well understood.

American writing on the floor of
a helicopter

Vang Pao demonstrates traps
for catching birds and animals

Vang Pao talks to an American

Stay there long enough to be
involved yet know the limits of
involvement.

Stay there long enough to
record a unique history.

Stay there long enough to
understand and have a sense
of humor.

Stay there long enough to help
this man grow and accomplish
extraordinary things.

THE THAIS AND THE CADRE PROGRAM

Cadre standing in formation

It took fifteen years to build the cadre for this new kind of war. 100 of these men have been here from the start.

Officer of the cadre talking to the men

Led by men like this one, they helped fashion something new.

Cadre standing
Shots of individuals

Built on western techniques with Asian innovations, they could adapt to village ways and do what no foreigner could do --.

Officer of the cadre

But many of the best are dead like this man.

Village soldiers drilling

They start with young men in many villages and teach them to be soldiers.

	They give a touch of discipline to men whose strength is independence.
Firing drill and crossing a stream	They teach the men the tactics in the war that's being fought.
Class room	They take the brightest boys and teach them to be leaders. These will be the cadre when the men who teach them now, go home.
Radio training classes	They begin with the English alphabet. In 6 months a man can operate a radio.
Meo pilots being trained	Some things they teach take years. In the development of North Laos, these pilots will be needed.

Jump training on homemade
equipment

The cadre teach new skills
in homemade ways .

Jumping out of plane

And when they are finished,
they turn their students back
to local leaders to command.

The product of their work is
men both confident and proud.

THE VIETNAMESE COME TO FIGHT

High grass waving in
the wind

Vang Pao and leaders conferring
over a map

In 1965, the enemy brought a
new army to fight in Laos.

With the dry winds of winter,
soldiers from North Vietnam
came to save the quiet war the
Lao communists had lost.

They came in lines of trucks
at night.

They brought their own coffins.

They had to protect their roads
and valleys in the mountains
belonging to the Meo.

In the country near the border,
the war became a battle for these
roads.

With the dry season every
year, they begin by battering
the village companies back into
the mountains.

But once in the hills, the enemy
drive falters, and the war slows
into a stalemate.

When monsoon rains turn enemy
roads to mud, Vang Pao begins
to move.

THE RESISTANCE FIGHTS BACK

Helicopter landing

Vang Pao comes to the high mountains where the village companies have withdrawn.

Local soldiers

These men could handle Lao communists.

But they are no match for Vietnamese battalions.

Vang Pao instructs local soldiers

Vang Pao tells them to infiltrate the enemy rear and collect intelligence.

"When you fight the Vietnamese," he warns, "Have more tricks than the hairs on your head."

Vang Pao hands out money to women

Vang Pao gives money to the wives of village soldiers.

Vang Pao and soldiers
on helicopter pad

Soldiers carrying tube of
105 howitzer

While their homes are being
fought for, women and children
must go to the rear.

Against this enemy, families
cannot fight together.

Vang Pao orders in two
battalions from Long Thieng.

They are part of a special
intervention force created to
fight the Vietnamese.

They were organized as a
battalion from the best of
village companies.

Conventional weapons are used
in new ways.

A 105 millimeter howitzer
arrives piece by piece.

A helicopter brought it in
from a nearby mountain.

Rockets are set up on
launchers and fired

Surplus Air Force rockets
find new uses.

When fired from homemade
launchers they have great, if
inaccurate, range.

The target is enemy concen-
trations near the road.

Confused and frightened, the
enemy will say they are missiles
from America.

More firing of 105 howitzer

But the Vietnamese are
tenacious.

They resist and dig in deeper.

Something more is needed.

T-28 fighter/training
planes bomb and strafe
hill

The enemy, badgered into a
hilltop stronghold, is exposed and
vulnerable to air.

Converted T-28's flown by Lao
pilots.

A unique situation/

Guerrillas with close air support.

T-28 crash lands on air field
with wheels up. Pilot is shot
in neck

But the highly disciplined
Vietnamese put up curtains of
small arms fire.

The enemy score one success.

More planes bomb and attack

But the attack goes on.

Guerrillas climb up hill

The guerrilla groups close in.

Weapons fire

Recoilless rifles and mortars
give them cover.

Guerrillas standing on hill top

The hill is theirs again.
Most of the Vietnamese are
still here.

Vietnamese dead

Their ability and motivation gave
them a fearsome reputation among
the people of these mountains.

Vietnamese letters and documents

But the only human things left
are letters from home
and photographs.

And all that remains of a legendary
enemy are notebooks of self
criticism and artillery trigonometry.

More Vietnamese dead

Strange men dead in a strange
place.

Invaders who tried coercion
to win the quiet war.

This is the price of failure.
9,000 men lost each year.

The last message from their
commander said they would be
heroes in North Vietnam.

But they will be buried in
nothing Vietnamese --
Not even the coffins they brought
with them.

The spirits of old friendly dead
are placated.

Vang Pao and leaders honor
dead with ceremonies

Months ago when the enemy took
this hill, the men who died could
not be buried.

Captured enemy weapons

Now their spirits may leave
in peace.

Captured enemy weapons -
Russian and Chinese made.

They are more than trophies.

They will replace some of the
weapons friendly troops have
lost or broken.

Guerrillas making small
shelters and relaxing

The men make a new home on
the hill that looks like any other.

Soon they will move on.

They will take back the rest
of the land that was lost to the
Vietnamese and maybe one ridge
more.

When the enemy attacks next dry season, they will have to start closer to North Vietnam.

Wounded inside helicopter

Quick evacuation of the wounded and fast medical attention keep friendly losses to a minimum.

Wounded being carried in

This strengthens the kind of commitment needed to fight this war.

The commitment that began with old opium smokers, fighting only for themselves.

The commitment that grew with the slow arduous teaching of men to fight for something larger.

The commitment that leads
men to risk everything for
other men.

The line of that commitment
is direct and unbreakable.

FRIENDLY DEAD

Interior shot of Buddhist funeral

This man was a lowland Lao.

Funeral procession

A colonel under Vang Pao who
died trying to rescue a downed
American pilot.

Cremation of casket

A Lao fighting beside the Meo
dying for an American.

A great fighter.

A better leader.

A man much like Vang Pao.

There will be others like him.

Bodies being carried in

Other men come home to
small villages.

3,000 dead or wounded every year.

Women crying

Every seventh man.

No one counts the civilians

Most don't die in big battles
that win something.

Most die in small places to
single bullets or forgotten mines.

What eats at the will is that
they are not really soldiers nor
are they a warring people.

NEW YEAR CELEBRATION

New Year festivities

Yet the war has brought
a better life.

Crowd scenes - boys & girls
throwing black balls

And for a week late each year,
after the rice harvest is in, that
better life can be enjoyed.

Meo girls wearing new clothes
and jewelry

The war stops for the Meo
New Year.

Balls being thrown back and forth

There are new clothes and all
the family silver to wear.

Tug of war

There are girls to court while
catching or the other way around.

King & Queen visit

There are games to play.

Crowd scenes

There is the visit of the royal
family and the chance to feel there
really is a union of Lao races.

Awarding of medals

There are medals to be given --
a chance to be distinguished in a
war with little glory.

Drunken man intercut with
bull fight

After the ceremonies are over,
the serious business of forgetting
the war begins.

CONCLUSION

Plane taking off at dusk

The New Year ends .

The planes go home . . . there
are limits to what they can do .

The war will go on .

But a better life will go on too .

That alternative that began at
Pha Dong now grows beyond
commitment .

Evening sunsets silhouettes
trees and mountains

Vang Pao would say that it grows
like a plant .

Well fed it will grow faster .

Well protected it will grow strong .

Well guided it will grow better .

Aerial sunset scenes

Sun going down behind a mountain

Men talking around fire at night

But it must do the growing by
itself and cannot be changed into
something it is not.

Down there, it grows toward
something -- like that prophetic
road that - too - began nowhere.

From man to man.

From village to village.

From mountain to mountain.

It makes each important.

Men talk of it long, long into
the night.