

1-21-2007

Interview with Mac Thompson

Paul Hillmer
Concordia University, St. Paul, hillmer@csp.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/hmong-studies_hohp



Part of the [Oral History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hillmer, Paul, "Interview with Mac Thompson" (2007). *Hmong Oral History Project*. 33.
https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/hmong-studies_hohp/33

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Hmong Studies at DigitalCommons@CSP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Hmong Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSP. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csp.edu.

Mac Thompson

21-22 January, 2007 – Bangkok, Thailand

Interviewer, Editor – Paul Hillmer

Transcriber – Diane Schuessler



Paul Hillmer and Mac Thompson in the lobby of the Ambassador Hotel, Bangkok, January 2007.

Editor's note: If you knew Mac Thompson you know he was not fond of sitting in a quiet place and talking. Better to be in a bar sipping a Singha. While the audio is reasonably clear despite this handicap, a few phrases got lost. Anything highlighted in yellow is unclear and is spelled phonetically (if possible) based on the transcriber/editor's best guess.

(0:21) We'll start with the obvious. Your name, sir.

[Chuckles] MacAlan Thompson or more commonly known as Mac.

(0:28) And where were you born?

Eleven June, 1941. Just made it as a prewar baby.

All right. Where did you grow up and go to school, that sort of stuff?

Well, grew up—born in Portland, Oregon and grew up in all that immediate area. High school at Lake Oswego just outside of Portland and the first two years, '59 to '61, off to college in Colorado—Colorado School of Mines.

School of Mines.

Correct.

OK.

Which is in Golden, Colorado, which, coincidentally, is where the Coors Brewery is.

Right. I've been there.

Which contributed to my only staying two years at that school, I think, that ...

[Laughs] OK.

Transferred back to Oregon State University then, the fall of '61 and in '63 graduated in forest engineering.

(1:12) OK. So, how did you get from there to signing up for IVS and going overseas?

Well, ROTC at Oregon State—the fall of '63, November of '63, off to the army. Three months engineer offered basic course in Fort Belvoir, Virginia. And I was assigned to—oh, Fort Devens, Massachusetts for my two years. While we were at Fort Belvoir the—somebody from personnel came down in the Pentagon and said, 'Hey, you're all second lieutenants. You all have the same

37 MOS [Military Occupational Speciality]—1331. You're combat engineer platoon leader. So you're
38 basically interchangeable. If you find somebody you want to swap with, swap—let us know before
39 the deadline', whatever that was. So I put my notice on the board—I'm not interested in Fort
40 Devens. Anybody want to swap? One guy didn't want to go to Germany, but that was an extra
41 year—a three-year commitment. I said, 'No.' Another guy didn't want to go to Korea, but —ooh!
42 Wintertime—that didn't sound good. And the day before the deadline a guy comes running up and
43 says, 'Hey, hey, Thompson, I've been looking for you. Well, I want to swap.' 'Well, where are you
44 going?' And he says, 'Well, I'm from Fort—50 miles from Fort Devens and my wife is seven
45 months pregnant. And swap, swap, please.' 'Well, where are you going?' Well, he's going to Korat,
46 Thailand. I knew where Thailand was, so, 'Well, OK, given the deadline, what the hell? I'll go to
47 Thailand.' That was February 1964, showed up here in Thailand. And I'm—here I still am.
48 [Chuckles] You know, one year up at Korat and February of '65 off to Dugway Proving Grounds,
49 Utah, until I got out of the army in November of '65. And then just wandering around job hunting
50 back in Portland, not doing very much and just had run across a 3x5 card on a—where was it?
51 Down at the Southern Oregon College of Education. I was just traveling through there and paying
52 for breakfast at the cafeteria. I just wrote down—you know, it said International Voluntary Services,
53 positions in Vietnam and Laos and found that note a few weeks later. And I had lots of job
54 applications out and sent one off to them. And on towards April '66—this would have been
55 December of '65. Along towards April of '66, got two phone calls the same Friday—one from
56 Bureau of Land Management in Fairbanks. I had already been rejected for smoke jumping up there
57 for that summer. And they said, 'Hey, you know, we've had some no-shows. Can you show up on
58 Monday?' But just before that, I'd got a phone call from the IVS traveling interviewer and said,
59 'Hey, coming through Portland Airport. Could I come out in the airport and we'll talk?' I said,
60 'OK. Well, I'll call you guys back on Saturday.' So, talked to the IVS guy and said, 'Hey, it doesn't
61 pay very much, but it sounds interesting.' And so, he said, 'Well, it looks like a lock.' Called the
62 BLM and said, 'Oh, I won't go there.' Then June '66, off to Washington D.C. for orientation. And
63 we had—our group had seven weeks of Lao language training at Foreign Service Institute in
64 Arlington. And then, in September of '66, you know, we went to Laos. But right after the flood.
65 The water—the flood waters had gone down, but not enough to open the airport. So, we went in
66 by helicopter from Udorn into That Luang there in Vientiane.

67

68 **(4:48) I'm going to check this for just a second. My guess is that we're OK.**

69

70 [Interviewer turns off recorder to check microphone, new track begins]

71

72 **(0:00) OK. So, you hit the ground where here?**

73 [Confused]

74 **I'm sorry, in Laos?**

75 In Laos, it was September '66 right after the flood, and I was in Vientiane for about a week. And
76 oh, the—parts of the runway at Wattay Airport, you know, the subsurface dried out enough so they
77 had little airplanes flying in and out. So at that time, we had two people—myself and another guy—
78 John Vantine who were going to be assigned up in Hongsa. So we got on the Dornier airplane—
79 little twin engine STOL [short take-off and landing] airplane made in Germany that was flown by
80 Continental Air Services, Inc. And we flew up to Hongsa. And—which is in Sayabouri Province.

81

82 **(0:43) So what was your job description?**

83 Well, that was—at that time, USAID had a program that was a cooperative with IVS, called the
84 Forward Area Team Program—USAID funded. Well, the whole USAID—or IVS program in Laos

85 was on USAID contracts. But anyway, this Forward Area Program was kind of designed as—to
86 impact rural development in areas that had been, oh, either semi-insecure or who had been—which
87 had been kind of retaken from all the bad guys recently—well, recently being one or two years
88 sometimes. And just kind of to show the flag—show the Lao government flag that, you know,
89 schools and dispensaries and, oh, cement and other visible aid can flow from the good guys—the
90 Royal Lao government. [Chuckles] So there—that was—well, Hongsa—the two of us. And we
91 also had two Lao guys, interpreter-field associate type thing.

92
93 **(1:52) OK, so, I'm sorry. I'm distracted by bugs here—so if you would, just describe the**
94 **work that you did there and how successful it was.**

95 Well, it's hard to say how successful. [Chuckles] You know, I was there—only there up until about
96 January of '67. IVS stayed in, you know, with different people, stayed in the valley there up until at
97 least 1971, I think, '71 or '72. In fact, one of the guys who was there—Jim Archer, a Canadian, he's
98 been back in Laos for eight or nine years, working out east of Savannakhet for a Canadian
99 development agency. And I've e-mailed with him fairly often and kind of rarely, with a couple of the
100 other people that have been in Hongsa. And there—Hongsa was mostly an ethnic Lao valley—or
101 the valley parts of it were. There were some Hmong that came through—more Yao, it seemed in
102 the hillsides and—that were down in the markets, you'd see now and then. A very isolated valley.
103 Now you can drive to it. But, in fact, Tony Zola, a couple years ago drove from Hongsa Valley
104 down to Sayaboury town. He was up there on a—I think, on a World Bank sponsored trip in a four-
105 wheel drive pickup. But that is accessible to the Mekong River by road and the Mekong then
106 from—either from Thailand, Chiang Khong, Houei Sai or Luang Prabang. But after Hongsa, a guy
107 named—was transferred up to Nam Bac, Lima Site 203, up north of Luang Prabang. And that was
108 a relatively hot area. Then, taken back—let's see, in spring of '66, it was taken back from Pathet Lao
109 forces. And there was an IVS guy up there named [Kyde Levitt] and he was finishing his two years.
110 And so I was assigned up there then to replace him. And got up there and should be, oh, probably
111 mid-February, late February 1967. And we were there just a few weeks. We had a tent there, lived
112 in a tent, which was maybe 100 yards from the local Lao army camp. And had a pretty good
113 shootout one evening and so I and my field assistant, we walked over to—scrambled over to the
114 army camp and stayed there through the night and then through parts of the morning. And there
115 was still sporadic shooting going on, so no evac airplane came in until—what, late afternoon, mid
116 afternoon. You know, I had my radio—ground air radio talking to the pilots. And the mid
117 afternoon, got a H-34 come in on the west end of the runway because it was all quiet down there
118 and picked up the wounded—you know, a couple trips of wounded and a little bit of re-supply, and
119 then myself and the field assistant went out. And after that, normally I did not spend the night at
120 Nam Bac. USAID didn't want me to and the IVS didn't want me to, so I lived, for the most part,
121 down at Luang Prabang and commuted back and forth in the daytime. And...

122
123 **(5:10) Well, let me back you up to this exchange you made with this desperate fellow who**
124 **wanted to be near his pregnant wife.**

125 Oh, back at ...

126 **How much did you know about the situation in Laos when you made this change and**
127 **suddenly found yourself heading in a direction you hadn't anticipated?**

128 [Pauses] The situation in Laos—virtually nothing. Oh, I had read in, you know, *Time* and *Newsweek*,
129 back when I was in college, you know, the Kennedy era when he sent the Marines into—oh,
130 Udorn—the helicopters and I forget—Larry Fraser, the guy you met yesterday—if he was part of
131 that early Marine group or not, but ...

132 **No.**

133 OK.
134 **Well, you know, we didn't talk as much about Vietnam as we did about Laos, so I'll just say**
135 ...

136 Well, it wasn't Vietnam. They went into Udorn in Thailand.

137 **OK.**

138 And ...

139 **He didn't mention it.**

140 ... I forget what month it was in 1962, where a Marine helicopter wing or a couple of wings went in
141 and that's actually when the U.S. military buildup kind of started in Thailand. The U.S. Army
142 buildup, not Air Force. And they—oh, that was played at a bit in the newspapers. But you know, in
143 *Time* and *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report*. So, I knew about Thailand, but not very much.
144 And I knew, essentially, zero about Laos. And then, when got up to Korat in Thailand—this was—
145 we got there in February of '64 to February of '65—heard again very little about Laos because we
146 didn't get much in the way of newspaper up there at that time and there was no U.S. TV as it came
147 in later to the U.S. forces up there. About the weekend I arrived, there was a coup d'etat in Laos
148 and we were all on alert. And then the weekend before I left, there was another semi-coup d'etat in
149 Laos and we were on—restricted to base and loading up our trucks, you know, getting ready to
150 evacuate American civilians, if need be, from Vientiane, which didn't come off. Everything quieted
151 down in Laos. But that was about all I knew about Laos.

152

153 **(7:22) So, what was your sort of learning process as you got into first one village and then**
154 **another about the status of things in Laos, about the role of ethnic minorities in the**
155 **campaign and things of that nature?**

156 Well, again, up country in places like Xieng Lom, prior to Hongsa, where I first was the first five
157 months, there was no news except what you might be able to pick up on your own personal little
158 shortwave radio, maybe VOA or a station like that—BBC. We had electricity, say, 15 minutes to 30
159 minutes a day. You know, a radio check to crank up our little three KW generator in the morning in
160 the morning and in the afternoon, 5:00, make radio check with Luang Prabang. You know, just said,
161 'Hey, everything's still OK.' Because the rule was if you missed two radio checks, they were
162 supposed to send an airplane out to see if there was a problem—if you were wandering around in
163 the bush or not. So, we had no news except now and then an airplane would come by and, you
164 know, a couple of the pilots were nice. They'd say, 'Hey, there's some activity'... We were just
165 talking to them on the radio, they might not land. But, 'Hey, there's some activity to the east of you
166 guys. Sleep gently the next night or two.' So, on the geopolitics side, absolutely nothing. You
167 know, living in the Lao Valley, we saw a few of the highlanders, but had no interaction with them.
168 The only things I did with the Yao there—I used to buy—get some brass from 105 Howitzer shells
169 from Muong Soui, one of our other guys who worked over there. And they'd pound them into
170 bracelets and then take the bracelets and they'd sell them to Americans down in Vientiane and then
171 take the money back [Chuckles] to the villagers and, you know, a little producing some income, cash
172 income. And—but there's no real insight into the war. What I got into later at Xieng Lom and
173 other places, I found on my little shortwave radio, just again a personal GE portable shortwave, you
174 know, the frequencies that were used—a couple of them were used by the airplanes, the Air America
175 and Continental airplanes for the various odds and ends of position reports, and if you had your
176 map and you listened long enough and you got down to Vientiane every now and then, you could—
177 and you had the site book, the Air America field—published field—the air field site index for Laos,
178 you could kind of follow the war from what was going on, just from a lot of the radio chatter. And
179 you got so you could recognize voices oft times. And ... [Chuckles]

180

181 **(10:14) So, to what extent did you rely on Air America or Continental Air or, you know, other**
182 **services to get your work done?**

183 Well, to get to work. We—they were used to get in and out of places. If we were staying for an
184 extended period of time, they brought replacement food up from the commissary because often
185 there was not very much available locally to buy or not very much I really wanted to eat. And in a
186 couple of the places I worked, like Nam Bac, there was only either—well, primarily Air America at
187 that time, you know, air available to get cement roofing sheets or whatever else I needed up to Nam
188 Bac itself because the river—the Nam Ou River was closed, you know, by the bad guys. And
189 Hongsa, for—at that time, the river was often open so we could get cement down from the Thai
190 border at Chiang Khong, Ban Houei Sai by riverboat, and then hauled over the ridgeline by, you
191 know, elephants. And I guess that was one of the early contracts was elephant hauling contracts...

192
193 [Mr. Thompson's cell phone goes off. Recorder turned off, new track begins.]

194
195 **(0:00) Coming through loud and clear.**

196 All right. No, they, well, just brief background. I was in Vientiane. I moved from Ban Houei Sai
197 down to Vientiane in June of 1970. And until June of '75 I was based in Vientiane. And I spent
198 99% of my time in Vientiane. You know, with some trips up country, oh, several trips up to Long
199 Tieng and up country from there just checking on security things for our C-46 program. But I did
200 the organizing for the logistics part of it and the gross drop schedule each month for that period.
201 And they—come, oh, April '75—that would have been mid-April—myself and two other guys—
202 three other—two Lao and one other USAID guy—we went to Manila for a food storage
203 conference, mostly for an appeal for aid, you know, U.S. donated food overseas, which we had quite
204 a bit of in Vientiane. And while we were there in, again, mid April '75, Phnom Penh went down the
205 tubes. And that was April 17, I think, when it went down. And at that same time, the evacuation of
206 Saigon had started, kind of a—not a panic evacuation as yet, but people would be showing up at—in
207 the evening at the Seafront restaurant, kind of a U.S. mission restaurant bar complex on, oh, on the
208 main drag. And you know, 'What are you doing here?' 'Well, you know, we're from Vientiane.'
209 'Well, we just got evacuated from Saigon.' 'Oh, OK, well, interesting.' And then, myself and the
210 other three people, we flew back to Vientiane. And then April 29, 30, Saigon went down the tubes.
211 And I'm sometimes kind of a thinking guy. So, I think it was the next weekend, my Volkswagen
212 camper—I had a '71 VW camper I had bought secondhand in '73 in Vientiane. And it needed a
213 little bit of work done on it, too, and the Volkswagen dealer in Vientiane didn't have much for parts.
214 The people in Udorn did. So I loaded everything I owned from my house, except a bit monster
215 stereo cabinet that might have fit on top of the car, but everything except a suitcase to—and the
216 clothes to live out of and splayed the wheels on the car and drove it down across the river over to
217 Nong Khai that weekend. Monday, back in Vientiane and—by taxi, and some of the people in the
218 office—'Where's your car?' 'Well, I took it down to Udorn for maintenance.' 'Oh, you're—chicken
219 shit.' [Chuckles] I said, 'No, no, I'm not.' Anyway, oh, see, that was early May—May 10, something
220 like that. And I don't remember the exact date, but about May 23, '75, when the leftist students and
221 not really the PL [Pathet Lao] soldiers, but leftist students and USAID protestors surrounded the
222 USAID compound in Vientiane, locked it up. And also the large, you know, the housing compound
223 out at Kilometer Six, just north of town. And prior to that Savannakhet had had, you know,
224 problems and USAID in Savannakhet and USAID in Luang Prabang and USAID Ban Houei Sai,
225 which I personally wasn't that much aware of. You know, we'd just hear rumors of it in Vientiane. I
226 was very low on the totem pole at that time, you know, within the USAID hierarchy. But anyway, I
227 lived outside the compound—outside of the housing compound at KM Six. Probably, oh, I don't
228 know, maybe 20%, 30% of our people did, some with families, other bachelors like I was. And

229 about—it took about a week before we got back into the compound and the negotiation with the
230 PL. But for that last month, my job was going around with a car and a crow bar and bolt cutters,
231 going to a house and—formerly leased by USAID, busting into it and then loading up the personal
232 effects of the occupants and getting it out to our packers and then delivered to the airport to be
233 either flown down to Bangkok or later we started flying things to Udorn. It was just a closer haul.
234 And I was going to be staying on. And day by day, we had people leaving, you know, small numbers
235 of people. I forget if we actually chartered the Air Lao or Thai Air International plane or not, but
236 [there were] numbers of people, worker people and their families, wives and kids, leaving every day
237 until mid June we were down to a fairly small number of people. And my plan was to stay on for
238 another month, you know, continue working on household effects. But June 26, '75, I believe it
239 was, I had gone in—I had taken some cars across the river to Nong Khai already that morning—
240 personal cars. And came back in to say good-bye to our USAID director Gordon Ramsey and his
241 secretary Bea Perez, who were leaving, you know, early afternoon on a Thai International flight.
242 And they said, 'Hey, you've got to go, too. We've all be PNG'd.' You know, persona non grata. I
243 said, 'Well, hey, but I was planning on staying.' And 'Well, no you can't. You've got to be out.' And
244 Chris Chapman, the DCM or chargee was there—we didn't have an ambassador at the time. He had
245 already transferred down to Bangkok with Charlie Whitehouse. But they said, 'No, no. You've got
246 to go.' You know, and I said, 'Well, I can't. You know, all my stuff is—I haven't packed a bag.'
247 And they said, 'Well, OK. You can go out on the 4:00 DAO—defense attaché airplane, the C-47.' I
248 said, 'No, I got my car over at Nong Khai. You know, I'll just go out 5:00, 6:00 tonight.' 'No, you
249 can't do that. The road's blocked in between here and Thanaleng.' I said, 'No, it's not. I've been
250 down there twice this morning and I took 17 cars across.' So it was agreed I would leave, you know,
251 that—before close of business, roughly. But the main reason, I had something like 21 cases of
252 Foster beer [Interviewer laughs] down at my house I had picked up from the Australians. They
253 owed me some beer. And I wanted to get that to get it back. Anyway, I got out—went over in the
254 Australian forestry office and got my buddies there and we went down and loaded the beer up and
255 got that back, got my money back and they delivered me down to Thadeua and took a long tail boat
256 across the river. But anyway, so that was sort of my end of official stay in Laos. That was 26 June.
257 I think, you know, spent the weekend there in Nong Khai and then drove on down to Bangkok.
258 And here in Bangkok, we're on the Sukhumvit Soi 11. Sukhumvit Soi 1 is where our USAID Lao
259 Bangkok liaison office was that had been in existence since about 1963 or '64, I think, right up and
260 through, well, through late '75, early '76, there was a, oh, a contract in our office where a lot of the
261 Thai goods, like rice, you know, and salt and things that we bought in Bangkok and transportation
262 for shipping up country, meeting and greeting people when they transited Bangkok. And I reported
263 in there. They said, 'Well, what's up?' 'I've been tossed out. Are we supposed to go back to
264 Washington?' They said, 'No, no. You stay on here for a month TDY—temporary duty.' And we
265 worked out at Quang Tri Port at the big warehouse where the furniture we had evacuated from Laos
266 was just stacked in long, long piles and rows, all mixed up. It had not been packed very well. It was
267 an evacuation of furniture from Laos. And you know, we had encouraged people to try to put their
268 names on things. But to try to sort it out. That was about the time—that was July '75, about the
269 time the refugee program was starting. And the counselor staff here at Bangkok from the embassy
270 was working on some of this. You know, primarily, it was the Vietnamese that were flying out.
271 Some of them flying out their airplanes out to U Taphao Air Base. Others—there were a few
272 Cambodians on the border. You know, there was no—there was still a Vietnamese refugee program
273 at that time. And why does—I guess, I don't know, one of the—some of the embassy people heard
274 that I was down here. And they asked if I would go back up to Udorn and help crank up a program
275 there. You know, do some interviews. So, 'Well, fine.' You know, June—no, August 5, I drove

276 back up to Udorn, '75, and checked in with the consul up there. And that was sort of the start of
277 my time in Thailand on that program, detailed to state from USAID.

278
279 **(9:08) Now, as I understand it. This is—when I was talking to Lionel Rosenblatt, there was**
280 **you, there was Jerry Daniels and there was John Tucker?**

281 John Tucker came a bit later. Jerry was there living out what they call the JLD—joint liaison
282 detachment, which is also called AB1—administrative building one, when we're out at the air base,
283 which is the CIA office building. Kind of a bunkhouse upstairs and their offices downstairs.

284 **Taj Mahal.**

285 Right—well, not quite. But anyway ...

286 **As it's referred to.**

287 Yeah. Right next to the, oh, Air America ramp and the Continental hangars—Continental or CASI
288 hangars. And I didn't know Jerry at that time. I had not met him in Laos. When I worked out of
289 Sam Thong, I think he was off and back in Missoula getting a degree, '69. But anyway, I saw him a
290 couple times, but the first thing there in Udorn was cranking up or interviews of the Thai Dam
291 refugees, maybe 600 of them or so that were up in [Wat Nun Pranau] in Nong Khai that we got
292 there for Thai Dam, you know, the older people from North Vietnam into Laos and actually some
293 into Thailand, too. And the—some Tai Nung, another ethnic group from North Vietnam. And we
294 got those people processed out under the Vietnamese quotas. And they all had to be in the U.S. by
295 30 September 1975, the end of the fiscal year. And that's what I was talking with Jerry about—you
296 know, the Hmong are here. Well, and there were lots of Lao, too. There were Lao up in Nong
297 Khai and Lao—there were no camps, really, at that time. You know, quite a few Lao in Udorn. Lao
298 Air Force people in Udorn. Some—a few had even flown their planes out. Yeah, one of them lives
299 in Portland. I had to go down to the governor's office and sign a receipt for the guy to get him out
300 of jail. But I wish I had kept a copy of that. [Interviewer laughs] But it would be good to show his
301 grandkids. [Takes a sip of beer] Sipping a Singha here at the moment.

302 **Yes, absolutely.**

303 Anyway, the [Pauses] at Nong Khai, I had seen the Hmong encampment area, which is off on the
304 north side of the road in what they call the [Sogo Toa]. It was the old border police detention
305 center, primarily, I think, earlier for Vietnamese. And at that time, UNHCR did not exist at the
306 Nong Khai - Udorn area, so there was no support for any of the people who were in camp. One of
307 the Thai Chinese guys in Nong Khai, a guy named [Kim Gai], who had, over the many years, had
308 many, many USAID contracts and transportation contracts in Thailand with the U.S. military, he
309 started providing, you know, some water and things of this sort, I think, out of his own pocket. I
310 don't know if he ever got reimbursed for it or not. But anyway, the—we had an INS guy, the
311 district director from Hong Kong, Sam Feldman, came in from Thailand and he came up to Udorn
312 and he did the processing on the Thai Da, you know, approving for U.S. immigration. Now we
313 also, of course, at that time, we were talking about all the other groups that were in Udorn and also
314 other camp—other places in Thailand, in Nan and Chiang Rai provinces primarily. And you
315 know—and I was not—well, I was here and, again, low on the totem pole. I don't know what the
316 politics were back in the U.S., but my understanding in talking with Lionel is that decisions had been
317 made that the Hmong—the Meo—were not eligible for U.S. resettlement, no real need to send them
318 to the U.S. And that was sort of blanket for all hill tribes. Sam was on the phone every now and
319 then, through his headquarters, central office. What mainly sticks in mind is Saul Eisenstein, who
320 was not the director of INS. The director's name escapes me. It was a retired Marine general of one
321 grade. But anyway, Sam decided he wanted to see what a Hmong is. So Jerry set this up and the
322 Hmong were encamped at that time down at Namphong. And so Jerry spent quite a bit of time
323 down at Namphong. He went down there and must admit it was a bit of a sandbagging, I think,

324 because I went down with Sam and Tucker may have been there—probably was there by then. It
325 would have been September '75, down to Namphong. And here's a line of Hmong. And you know,
326 it starts out kind of with, you know, fanaticize a little bit, talk, you know, with Yang Dao. And Yang
327 Dao says, 'Parlez-vous Français?' We all said, 'Duh. Who's this yo-yo?' 'Well,' they said, 'Well, he's
328 the only PhD Hmong we got in the world.' 'Oh, well, he doesn't speak English. Don't need to talk
329 to him.' And then there's USAID medic this and then there's major that and captain this and, oh,
330 nurse this—everybody's speaking, you know, decent English to fantastic English, down the line for
331 50 or 100 people. And that—we were back to Udorn that evening and Sam's on the phone at the
332 consulate calling back to central office saying, 'I will personally pick 1,200 Hmong for the U.S.
333 program.

334
335 **(14:37) Now, Sam, again is in what position?**

336 He's the INS district director for—out of Hong Kong that included Thailand and Korea and, you
337 know, not Guam, I think, but at least Southeast Asia. And that was approved and the central office
338 and Sam then spent a few days doing it. At that time, we had, of course, no idea that there would be
339 any future program going on. So an extremely restricted family structure. You know, husband,
340 wife, kids.

341 **Yeah, which to the Hmong is anathema.**

342 If—you know, no dependent parents, you know, things of this sort. If you didn't want to go, that
343 was OK. And I remember one family—well, at that time, we did telegrams and on bios from—a
344 brief bio, cabled it into Washington and went to the ACVA, the sort of joint voluntary agency
345 headquarters and they farmed it out to the six, seven ...

346 **And how's ACVA different from [JVA] or ...**

347 Oh, no, JVA is a local thing here in Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong. You know, doing the in-
348 processing, if you will, the out-processing interviews. And the ACVA—and I forget exactly what it
349 stands for. The VA—voluntary agencies. But kind of an over blanket group with—of the six or
350 seven. And they would farm the bios out to the different VOLAGs [Voluntary Agencies] in the U.S.
351 And then we would get a cable back, you know, OK, Ying Yang Phu has been sponsored to
352 Minneapolis. And the first, if I remember correctly, the first—I don't remember the guy's name, but
353 the first Hmong who got a bio or got a sponsor down at Namphong and we went down there—
354 Namphong or Nong Khai, anyway, because we picked a few from Nong Khai, too. But down there,
355 gave them the bio. They had to sign and agree to go. And well, one of the guys said, well, that's
356 OK. So, you know, 'How many Hmong are there in Minneapolis?' 'Well, zero.' 'Oh, who's there?'
357 'Well, a lot of Americans.' 'Oh, how many of those people speak Hmong?' And this guy had been a
358 USAID bulldozer operator. He didn't speak English. So ...

359 **Is it Leng Vang, perhaps?**

360 Huh?

361 **Leng Vang?**

362 No, no idea what the name is.

363 **OK. Well, that was the first guy who came to the Twin Cities area.**

364 Well, it may have been, you know, Kansas where this guy went, too.

365 **Oh, OK.**

366 But anyway, so, 'Well, how many of those American people speak Hmong?' 'Zero.' 'Oh, well, I'm
367 not sure if I really want to go.' Said, 'Go. Go. Get out of here.' So, anyway, I hope he did OK, but
368 ...

369 **(17:16) So this was September?**

370 It would have been September of '75. Yeah.

371 **OK.**

372 So, and unfortunately, I didn't keep a—oh, kind of a daily log. Starting in 1977, I did. You know, a
373 little—it's not enough to—that you feel bad writing three or four lines, but it's enough—it's easy
374 enough to do. So, I've got good dates after that. But I'll, you know, then—regress just like we were
375 talking earlier about Namphong, you know, and the air evac from Long Cheng, which was, what, 12
376 to 14 May, 1975. And I was down to Vientiane then, numbly, happily working away and not—
377 things not all that busy in those days, but didn't know what was going on. And I don't know how
378 closely all that was held, you know, what USAID people, country team people probably knew about
379 it. But it didn't filter down the pipe very much. But anyway, talking with Les Strouse, who you'll see
380 tomorrow, flying one of the C-46s, and his logbook and Al Rich's logbook—Al died. He was flying
381 the other 46. And I—looking at the C-130s and that, you know, the number of trips it made and I
382 figured that rough—between 3,000 and 3,500 Hmong were flown out of Long Tieng to Namphong
383 and to Udorn. They didn't all fly down to Namphong. They decided to shorten it up somewhat and
384 fly to Udorn and then a bus or truck from Udorn on down. And then another roughly, say, 8,000
385 showed up at Nong Khai and they were trucked down to Namphong.

386
387 **(19:07) Now, you know—I realize this isn't something you are intimately involved with, but**
388 **I know you're also a man who's studied this pretty intensely. There were the ones who were**
389 **flown out by the CIA because of the list that they asked Vang Pao to put together. And**
390 **then, there are the planes that came in because Aderholt made a phone call and a general**
391 **approved and he called pilots and more planes came in.**

392 I don't see that VP could have handwritten a list and, you know, 3,000 people. Now, especially with
393 talking to Les, the mob scenes and everything that showed up and if there were 10,000 people—
394 20,000, 15,000 people in the Long Tieng Valley and looking at people getting on airplanes. And if I
395 was a captain or a lieutenant or a sergeant who wasn't on the list and I've got my wife and kids there,
396 I would have tried to scramble on an airplane, too. And I might well have made it. You know, I—it
397 may have been an attempt. But we had, for the USAID Lao side and we had—they had it for
398 Vietnam and Cambodia, too, they called the KIP list, which is key indigenous personnel. You know,
399 these were the ones who were really priorities. If things go down the tube, we have to get them out.
400 Well, they didn't do that in Saigon and in Cambodia, talking to Les and others, you know, so many
401 people just—he said, 'Well, it won't be that bad.' They'd just decline to get on any of the airplanes.
402 So they missed the evac there. And in Laos, when I hear the term KIP list, I thought that was
403 appropriate because that's the Lao currency. I didn't know it meant key indigenous personnel for
404 several years. [Interviewer laughs] And I never saw a list. I've got a—I've got the last, oh, printout
405 of the USAID Laos personnel roster for the locals and the TCNs, the third country nationals. And I
406 just sent that off to Steve Maxner and company at Texas Tech. It's in Oregon now. It should be
407 mailed. My sister will send it off FedEx tomorrow along with a bunch of other stuff. But the—
408 now, I don't see that there was any—there would have been maybe like for Ly Tou Pao and a bunch
409 of the—you know, the colonels, the higher ups and all that, but get on the first airplane because
410 after that it's going to turn into a goat fight.

411
412 **(21:33) Well, the—I mean, the story is that Jerry came to Vang Pao and said, 'You have to**
413 **leave. Who do you want to go?' And there's a man named Yang Long who was in Long**
414 **Tieng at that time. And he said basically VP put together, I think, a list of 96 officers and**
415 **their families.**

416 OK, yeah. That's not 3,500, but that makes sense. Yeah, and I—well, I think the last plane out
417 was—have you read Gayle Morrison's book? [*Sky is Falling*]

418 **Yeah, I skimmed through it. I read it awhile ago, but now I really should go back and sort**
419 **of go through it a little more carefully.**

420 Yeah, because I don't—I forget who was on that—the jet ranger. You know, Jerry, VP and
421 Glassman [Yang See] might have been on it, too. Glassman was, you know, Jerry's sort of right-
422 hand man at that time. There was another Hmong guy in Missoula—Lucky, Yang Lu—that I e-mail
423 with now and then, but he was sort of our main man at Udorn, because Glassman had left already
424 with VP. So, yeah, 90 people, 90 heads of families with their families is not 3,500, but that may—
425 that's a more reasonable number.

426 **Yeah. Although ...**

427 Eminently believable.

428 **Yeah. Family, by Hmong standards, one never knows. [Laughs]**

429 Well, all right.

430 **I don't know.**

431 Well, we used to have the problem interviewing in the camps. You know, says, 'OK. Well, great.
432 You know, line up a family.' And you know, just checking the family relationships and said, 'OK.
433 And he's your brother, right?' 'Yeah, he's my brother.' 'Same mother, same father?' 'Well, no, but
434 what that's got to do with it?' And we also had—Lucky had a good way with words—Yang Lu.
435 We'd bring—he'd bring lists of people over to me, you know, by family, you know, to send bios out
436 on. And I'd say, 'OK, Lucky, here we go.' You know, Hmong moms are much better than
437 American moms.' 'Well, what do you mean?' He says, 'Well, here's baby born in January. OK.
438 And here's another baby born in April. And here's the third baby born in November.' Hoi Yo, Hoi
439 Yo. [Hmong for "Oh no! OK?"] 'Well, I'll come back tomorrow.' So, some people's birthdays as,
440 you know, under—those current social security records are kind of out of the blue.

441
442 **(24:10) Oh, I met a young man who's an artist who's probably all of 28, 30 years old. He**
443 **looks 12. But he said, yeah, his father's birthday is January 1. His mother's birthday is**
444 **February 2. His oldest brother's birthday is March 3. You know, right on down the line.**
445 [Chuckles] No, we—I'll—there was one young couple we interviewed in Nong Khai or Namphong,
446 wherever. It might even been Ban Vinai. But a young couple with their two kids. Mom was
447 pregnant again, I think. And the boy was named Pepsi and the daughter was named Cola. Well,
448 you're going to pop another one. What is that? Green Spot or—definitely anti-Communist. You
449 have to go to the U.S.

450
451 **(24:58) Now, you mentioned the visit where this deputy INS guy came in and said we're**
452 **going to take 1,200 Hmong.**

453 Well, not deputy. He was the INS district director from Hong Kong.

454 **Fortunately, we've got the right title on here.**

455 Yeah, Sam Feldman. Right. He's dead now, but ...

456 **That is separate and distinct from Lionel's visit to Namphong, I assume?**

457 No, no. This was prior to that. Lionel—that's when I first met Lionel. He—and it seems to me it
458 was November—October or November. We were interviewing down at Namphong. And maybe
459 with INS at that time. And this scraggly State Department guy with frizzly hair and wearing sandals
460 shows up [Interviewer laughs] and, 'I'm Lionel Rosenblatt.' Well, BFD. That's great. You know, let
461 us get back to work. And ...

462
463 **(25:48) So, he didn't come by your invitation. He just sort of ...**

464 No, he ...

465 **...happened in.**

466 He does that. But he's in Phnom Penh now. But he doesn't tell me when he's coming, usually,
467 because he knows I'll ask him to bring peanuts or homebrew beer kits or something or other. But

468 anyway, he's due back here—due into Bangkok Thursday, I think. But anyway, that's—you know,
469 Lionel sort of, what would you say? Thanks to Lionel, the refugee program kept going. And he
470 went back and he was working for Julia Taft, the head of the program at the time. Said, 'Hey, we've
471 got numbers left over from the Vietnamese program. We've got to save those numbers for—there's
472 refugees still in Thailand and ... [Chuckles]

473
474 **(26:36) So probably the same impression that was made on Sam was made on Lionel. As he**
475 **meets all these people who speak English and who have code names and ...**

476 Well, Lionel, I think, was a whole hell of a lot more broad-minded than that. He had previously
477 worked—he was a consular officer in Bangkok in '69 and he also had, I don't know, three month or
478 six months TDY up in Udorn at the same period, you know, while the Air Force and the war was
479 going on. So, he knew what was going on. And that's why he wanted to come up country a bit,
480 having been in Bangkok and to see what's going on up there—this little Udorn office. And that's
481 where we got the numbers for the spring of, actually, May, June 1970 program was like 10,742
482 numbers were reserved from the old quota to use in Thailand. Well, maybe Thailand—maybe some
483 of them might have gone to Malaysia and Singapore, too, for Vietnamese, but...

484
485 **(27:35) So, Jerry Daniels, obviously, a very important figure in the Hmong community,**
486 **probably, other than Bill Lair and Vang Pao himself, a name that gets thrown around a lot.**
487 Right.

488 **What was your working relationship like with him and what do you think people should**
489 **know about him?**

490 Oh, well, my working relationship was quite excellent. You know, just sipping suds in Udorn. It
491 turned out we were born, you know, the same day, month and year.

492 **Oh, you're kidding me! [Laughs]**

493 Yeah. 11 June '41. So, but, yeah, Jerry had a nice way of talking. I don't know if it was smoke
494 jumper or Missoula talking. One brother is a PhD in physiology, writes for—what—running
495 magazines and the like. The other, I think, owns a bar, or at least used to own a bar there in
496 Missoula. And I forget which the order—you know, who's younger and who's older. But anyway,
497 in Udorn in '75, '76—I left Udorn in the end of May '76, came down to Bangkok and replaced
498 Lionel. And then, end of October of '76, left Thailand back to Washington. And I came back in
499 August '77 down to Malaysia for a couple months and then to Thailand for two months. And then
500 in December of '77 back to Washington. And then June of '78, Lionel is out here and says, 'Hey, get
501 your ass out here.' He says, 'Well, hey, I'm in this very good, you know, hard-to-get-into USAID
502 training program—two-year OJT training program.' And, you know, 'It doesn't matter. Come out
503 here.' [But I said] 'Hey, but it's kind of career destroying, but ...' 'I don't care. Get out here.' He
504 says, 'I don't care. Get out here. I need some help.' So, anyway I, with some difficulty, quit the
505 USAID program and came back out here in June of '78. And Jerry was here already at the time.
506 And then, we got more formally organized as the refugee section of the U.S. Embassy and assigned
507 slots here—permanent slots. So I ended the temporary duty in November of '78. And Jerry also
508 goes into a State Department slot. I was in a State Department slot. Tucker was in a state slot. And
509 at that time, when we got formally organized, I started writing Jerry's efficiency reports for a few
510 years. For two or three years. Anyway, not on the real form because it was probably classified. But
511 I would do like a memo to the record and send it over to his office, and then, oh, they would put it
512 in the proper format and send it back to the head shed. And the son of a bitch got promoted to
513 GS-14 before I did. [Interviewer laughs] So ...

514
515 **(30:33) You should have written your own efficiency reports.**

516 Right. Well, he was an easy one to write them on.

517 **How so?**

518 Well, this very, very dedicated in his work and his approach to the work. And the problems, that the
519 Hmong and other hill tribes came up with in their family relationships, particularly multiple wives,
520 and recommendations on how do we handle this problem and how to—well, from his personal
521 relationships with a lot of the Hmong leadership, how to calm things down when people got pissed
522 off at what we were doing. And like on the multiple wife thing, our policy was to—well, we had
523 everybody, since we had so many people wanting to apply for the U.S. program of all ethnic groups,
524 we had a one-year in camp rule. If you're a new arrival, we didn't even interview you or JVA did not
525 even interview you until you'd been in a camp for a year. And then you'd get into the processing
526 system. Then we had—at various times we had a point scale. You know, we had to have a cut line
527 and—do we take a samlor driver over a, you know, Lao government official or a Hmong lieutenant
528 or a Lao Theung sergeant? How did it work out? So that became kind of complicated on occasion.
529 But on the multiple wife thing, we came down with the policy finally that, OK, the head of family,
530 he would choose, OK, who is his wife that he's going to apply for the U.S. program with? OK.
531 And then if he had one or two or three others, we said, 'OK.' They had and—they and their
532 children had to come up with a resettlement solution on their own before we would process the
533 original head of family, the guy. And whether that resettlement solution is going to France, going to
534 the U.S. on their own, remarriage in camp or whatever, you know, if that took one or two or five
535 years, that was the rule. Once everybody else got taken care of, then we'd go back to the head man
536 and he'd get processed. And you know, I understand on occasion, some may have gotten—
537 rumored to have gotten back together in the U.S., but that's life.

538 **I imagine that's true.**

539 My last year in the Army or nine months in the Army was in Utah, so I understand that somewhat,
540 but ... [Interviewer laughs]

541

542 **(33:11) So what were some of the other things that the Hmong may have been a little less**
543 **than happy about?**

544 Well, one thing that was not so much surprising to me, but it was opium addiction. It was my
545 experience in Laos, my four years up country in Laos, is that I ran into extremely few opium addicts.
546 The other villagers, you know, one village might have one or two, but the other villagers would see
547 what a rotten way that is to die and stayed off it except for medicinal purposes—you know, gout, or
548 other people may have been on kind of a chronic bit, you know, smoking, but not to the point of
549 real addiction. But you know, we came up with the peeing in the bottle, the nanogram. You know,
550 you had to pass that before you go. And lots of people did not like that program. And—well, OK,
551 but that's the rule. You know, it's your choice. I had one good Yao friend, you know, former, I
552 don't know, captain, (***) Wun Chien). You know, a captain ended up in the Yao program was more
553 like a colonel in the Long Tieng program. And this is up at Ban Houei Sai and Nam Yu. And he—I
554 don't know if he had a stomach ulcer or what, but for years he could never pass, you know, the
555 nanogram. And our policy again, at the time, was even if the wife and kids wanted to go onto the
556 U.S., we were pretty hardnosed. We did not split families. So, no, you've got to wait. You've got to
557 wait. And it wasn't until, I don't know, '86, maybe or so, when [Wun Chien] finally passed the
558 nanogram, the peeing in the bottle thing and they may—I don't know if he faked and had somebody
559 else pee, [Interviewer laughs] but he went to Seattle and I was happy, you know, to see him and his
560 family get out of here. Nice family, but ...

561

562 **(35:14) Were there proposals made by representatives of the various clans on what the**
563 **United States should do for the Hmong besides just sending them off to the United States**
564 **or someplace else?**

565 None that I ever really got into. I was never a real strong proponent for U.S. resettlement of the
566 Lao or the Hmong or the Yao or the other highlanders. My more concern was, say, first asylum,
567 that people who fled Laos for decent reasons should be allowed a first asylum in Thailand. And
568 then the ideal situation in my feeling for the bulk of the people—Lao—whatever ethnic group—was
569 that resettlement in Thailand was really the best solution—you know, common language, no snow
570 like Minneapolis, whatever. And—but to ensure first asylum in Thailand, a certain number of
571 people had to leave—to leave Thailand. You know, keep the Thai government, their embassy, their
572 ministry of interior happy. To allow an influx of the 5,000, you know, 1,000 had to leave, you know,
573 sort of showing the flag. So—and this is a particular—I put a problem in quotation marks in the
574 Hmong camps and the camps up like in Nan province with the Yao, the Mien refugees—is that we'd
575 announce that JVA is going to go up and do a prescreening. OK. So 3,000 people, counting the
576 wives and kids and everything, would come up for the prescreening. And they were getting in the
577 process, OK? Then a few months later with all the files and computerized files and folders, another
578 team would go up with INS—a JVA team with INS. And out of those 3,000, maybe 2,000 would
579 show up for INS. And the bulk of those people would all be passed by INS, approved for U.S.
580 immigration. OK. And then they'd get their medicals and get sponsors in the U.S. and a month,
581 you know, two months later the buses would show up and only 1,000 would get on the buses! And
582 we've got lots of our American people and the Thai are really upset. And on the American side,
583 'Oh, look at all this wasted money, the wasted resources we've blown, you know, for only one-third
584 of the people that came up for prescreening have gone. And my attitude was 'We are not running a
585 forced U.S. resettlement program. If somebody wants to go, fine, they can go. But I'm not going to
586 go up there and, you know, dynamite them out of their hootches, you know, to get on the bloody
587 bus. And if they're not ready to go right now, that's OK. So, they'll be around later—if there's a
588 continual program. And ...

589
590 **(38:16) What were some of—I'm sure there must have been kind of unofficial**
591 **responsibilities that came with the job of being a resettlement worker or a refugee worker. I**
592 **mean, obviously, you're doing interviews and you're counseling people. But what kinds of**
593 **other things did you have to do to keep yourself and the people you work with sane?**

594 Well, we had our JVA, you know, the contract staff—Joint Voluntary Agency—which for Thailand
595 was NGO—the International Rescue Committee, which I still hold in a very, very high regard.

596 **Do you know Jim Anderson, by the way?**

597 Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. And Liz, his wife, yeah.

598 **He's in St. Paul as you must know.**

599 Right. Well, say hello to him when you get back.

600 **Well, in fact, I'm going to interview Liz and her sister when I get back. So ...**

601 Which sister—Sue?

602 **Patricia.**

603 Oh, the younger one. OK. Yeah, Sue is another good—the older sister, you might want to ...

604 **Well, I might get all three. I'm not sure.**

605 Yeah.

606

607 **(39:09) So, anyway, I'm sorry. You were talking about IRC and what else type of things you**
608 **were doing.**

609 Yeah, the—we had the JVA side, which were pre-screeners and processors. You know, those
610 decision-making things. And above them, before them, we had our—what we call our EAOs—
611 ethnic affairs officers. And those were our U.S. government officers, which—it was Jerry and John
612 Tucker and at different times we had one or two other people in that job and also maybe for the
613 Vietnamese and for Cambodians. And for—from '75 on to at least about '81—'80 maybe or '81—
614 our EAOs were kind of the decision makers. We—and then myself, after we got reorganized in the
615 refugee program starting about '79, I was kind of the boss of the EAOs. We split our—Lionel split
616 the program up into the Cambodian-Khmer Affairs that were at the border of Cambodia, and then
617 the refugee processing side, which was kind of my side, the deputy for refugee program, and EAOs
618 under me. And the EAOs would select which cases were going to be presented to INS. And for
619 the most part, they interviewed every family in the camps to, some extent, verify their stories. It
620 varied at different times, at some times early one, when we had these point systems and severe cut
621 lines as to who we could process, somebody claimed to be a colonel and he turned out to be a
622 samlor driver—you know, he didn't make it. But we took the tack that lying to us was not lying to
623 INS, which is a reject type thing for immigration, you know, 212 A19 of the Act. But we [Pauses]
624 you know, problem cases and if they got referred to me sometimes for decisions, yea or nay, you
625 know, very rarely for an up country interview. Jerry could do that much better on the Hmong and
626 some of the other ethnics and he put an awful lot of study into particularly the other ethnic groups
627 because he had never really worked in the other areas in Laos. And John Tucker spoke Lao or still
628 speaks Lao better than I do. I still do pretty well at it. But, anyway, I'd end up with sometimes
629 stacks of files on my desk and—you know, for yea or nay or reject. And—but ...

630
631 **(41:50) I don't know that much about John Tucker. What was his background coming into**
632 **this?**

633 He was Peace Corps in Thailand—1970, up at Khon Kaen, northeast Thailand. And then he hired
634 on with USAID and was in with several other guys in the Vietnamese training center back in
635 Virginia in Arlington. He was going to study Vietnamese when, I guess, USAID saw the
636 handwriting on the wall and decided not to hire a bunch of people—you know, for Vietnam. And
637 Tucker, since he already had northeastern ties from the Peace Corps, you know, quite similar to
638 Laos, he switched over to USAID Laos and came and worked in Savannakhet and Pak Se in
639 southern Laos. And that's where I met him. I never worked with him at all. But he was evacuated
640 out of Savannakhet in [Pauses] from May—early May '75, mid-May '75 to Udorn and then back to
641 the States. And then all the Vietnamese showed up, so he ended up working in Guam for a month
642 or two. And then, when the program got started in Udorn, he showed up in Udorn in September—
643 I'm thinking September of '75.

644
645 **(43:06) OK. Did you have to deal with any Hmong who were sneaking across, trying to go**
646 **back to Laos and fight and then sneak back again and ...**

647 Well [Pauses] By 'deal with them'—I don't know what your—I knew—I knew several and several,
648 you know, quite a few Lao that were doing the same thing. And it was sometimes kind of a joke in
649 Nong Khai camp and Ban Vinai and the other parts where they had Lao refugees like at Nakhon
650 Phanom where, you know, they'd come back to the Thai side, you know, turn their guns into the
651 Thai army security people, come back and visit their families in the camp and sometimes pick up a
652 bag or ten bags of rice or whatever—that and pick up their guns from the Thai army people and
653 then back to Laos. So, I was—well, not so much deliberately. It was not my job, so I just sort of
654 stayed out of that program and later, when we got involved, to some extent with the POW-MIA
655 business, I contacted those people a little bit more often, you know, looking for information and

656 false information.[Chuckles] And then, later after August '78, when the yellow rain thing came up, I
657 was in more contact with them, looking for that smoking gun. And ...

658

659 **(44:30) Did you ever find anything close to [a smoking gun] or ...**

660 No one ever did. No, we kept asking the guys, 'Hey, come on.' You know, the Commie Lao are no
661 better secret keepers, I think, in general than the old Royal Lao army were—people were—Lao
662 government people were. So, there's got to be a hand grenade, a rocket, an artillery shell. Even if an
663 artillery shell weighs 40 pounds, you can pull just the head out of it or the guts out of it and bring it
664 out in a bag. And CIA put money into that search. The State Department put money into it, a
665 consulate up in Udorn. DIA—Defense Intelligence Agency—had a lieutenant colonel working on it
666 quite extensively for '82, '83, anyway, traveling around, spoke Thai. And as far as I knew, absolutely
667 zero came out of that except, you know, Matt, was it Meselson's bee shit theory [that "yellow rain," a
668 chemical agent that the communists allegedly sprayed over the Hmong in the jungle was really
669 massive amounts of feces from Asian bees] and I interviewed with Meselson, the Harvard
670 biochemist whatever. I interviewed with him back in '85 or '86, back in Virginia. And I got a letter
671 from him, I don't know, six months ago. He said he was coming out with another paper on it and
672 haven't got it as yet, but ...

673 **Interesting.**

674 Yeah, they—Lionel and I and another guy—we did what may be the first official U.S. government
675 reports on the yellow rain and that was in August of '78. Jerry was up in Nong Khai and he set up
676 several interviews for us and Lionel and I and this other guy, we took the train up to Nong Khai and
677 spent the day interviewing Hmong with interpreters about what they'd seen, what they experienced,
678 and came back to Bangkok and Lionel wrote a two-page cable about, you know, yellow rain. A few
679 months later, Reagan's in, Al Haig's in, you know, the great anti-Communists are in government.
680 You know, so we're really down on Russia and the yellow rain. Well, OK. That was the policy at
681 the time.

682

683 **(46:45) Mike Carroll said I was supposed to ask you if you knew anything about a plan to**
684 **turn Ban Vinai into kind of a Hmong—a permanent Hmong enclave, a Hmong village. He**
685 **said something like 71 square miles of land were supposed to be set aside to make that area**
686 **permanently Hmong. Do you know anything about that?**

687 No, I don't.

688 **OK.**

689 It would have made sense that somebody might have been thinking about it, but one of the
690 problems we had—problems on one side, benefit on the other side, is when somebody asked what
691 is the Thai government policy for Hmong or for Indochinese refugees, say, 'Well you've got to
692 specify which part of the Thai government.' You know, administrative interior has one. The police
693 have another. The Thai army on one side may have some. The Thai army intel on another side will
694 have a different policy. The Thai NSC will have a different policy. And they're not talking to each
695 other. So ...

696 **Well, supposedly, Jerry Daniels was all hot and bothered because the Hmong had been**
697 **guaranteed that and it didn't come through and so, anyway, he said ask you about it, so**
698 **there, I asked.**

699 Yeah, right. No, it may have just been an idea that was floated. You know, hey, this is a good idea.
700 Let's do it. But then somebody else in the government said, 'No, no. We don't want them here.'
701 Just like they're saying now. We don't want them here.

702

703 [The two take a break and re-convene shortly thereafter. New track begins]

704

705 Mac Thompson 5

706

707 **(0:01) When did you meet Xuwicha?**

708 That would have been with Jerry or via Jerry in probably, I don't know, early 1980s.

709 **Oh, OK. So ...**

710 Late ' , early '80s.

711 **They shouldn't make the front of this thing so doggone small. So, between the time that**

712 **you—when you left—it would have been '76, '77?**

713 Yeah, I left November of '76 and came back in—back to the refugee program in August '77, but

714 two months down in Kuala Lumpur to help get that program started. And then, in November or

715 December of '77 here back in Thailand.

716 **Was there—I mean, I realized there was sort of a greater influx of Hmong, but were there**

717 **any other specific reasons why you think Lionel basically said to you, 'OK. I don't care**

718 **about your career. I don't care about your prospects. Get your butt up here'?**

719 Well, we worked well together. In '76—Lionel came back in January of '76, you know, for this real

720 push on the refugee program. That's when kind of the JVA concept for Thailand got started. He

721 went to IOM, which is International Organization for Migration. State Department money grants to

722 IOM to hire American staff. And he just hired a whole bunch of Peace Corps—people that just got

723 out of the Peace Corps because they had language, said, 'OK. Now, you're working for me. You're

724 going to be working here in the refugee camps in Thailand interviewing.' And he sent two of them

725 up to Udorn to work with us. And Lionel and I were in—well, Lionel in Bangkok with one other

726 guy and Jerry and John Tucker and I up in Udorn. And you've not met Lionel as yet, but

727 [Thompson's cell phone rings, Interviewer pauses recorder] Hold on. I must not have my name

728 programmed into his phone because he said, 'Who's this?'

729 **Oh, well, then.**

730 But at least he's returning the call. Anyway ...

731 **OK, you were ...**

732 ... with Lionel. Lionel showed up, you know, Jerry and John and I are up in Udorn and, of course,

733 by then we're experts on refugees, INS matters and all this other stuff. And Lionel is—it can be

734 kind of a 'blow them out of the water' battleship-type thing when he approaches problems. And

735 usually he's right and usually he wins. And he came out with all sorts of strange—to us up in

736 Udorn—to me up in Udorn—ways to implement the program and things to do and some of them

737 we implemented, like the point system, when it got developed. And some of them, he said, 'Hey,

738 we've got too much going on up here, you know, covering for Ubon and Nakhon Phanom and

739 Udorn and then Jerry up north also. We just ...'

740

741 **(3:00) I'm sorry. Give me just a second here. My microphone has drooped on me, so I'm**

742 **going to point it back where it needs to be.**

743 All right.

744 **OK. Now it's just behaving badly.**

745 OK. Need a stiffer collar.

746 **I guess. Well, you know what? We'll just make do. All right. Sorry.**

747 Anyway, some of the things he directed. Said, we just can't handle this, so we'll ignore it.

748 **So, what were some of Lionel's ideas that didn't pass muster? I'm not trying to make Lionel**

749 **look bad. I'm just curious.**

750 No, no. Well, I don't really specifically remember. But, you know, timelines to do some things,

751 numbers to get things done, deadlines. You know, it just won't work, you know, for our program

752 up in Udorn. And it may work in Bangkok. We had John, Jerry and I and two former Peace Corps,
753 Patty Culpepper and Sally Maxwell, I think. And covering a pretty good sized territory. And we did
754 something right because out of that 10,000 some hundred-odd numbers, you know, for that May-
755 June '76 program, we had something like 7,500 of them out of our office. You know, the INS
756 approval. So, something worked anyway. And I've told Lionel, in later years, that if I had worked in
757 Bangkok for him, I probably would have quit and gone back to work for USAID. [Interviewer
758 laughs] But when I got back to Washington, Lionel—that was in '76, Lionel was back in
759 Washington and was this through spring of '77, then again in '78. Once a week, Lionel's—I
760 forget—I think he was in Chinese language at the time, but once a week I'd drive over to Lionel's
761 house in DC—I lived in Alexandria—and we'd get on the phone and we would call John Tucker in
762 Bangkok to see what's going on. And we'd split the cost. You know, Lionel's a concerned
763 individual, willing to do things—do what he thinks is right. And we'd get information because the
764 embassy did not really want to report on the refugee situation in Thailand and Tucker was not really
765 allowed to send out the sit rep—situation reports at all. Anyway, we'd get it on the phone and then
766 Lionel would start, you know, lobbying around with Julia Taft and Congress and the State
767 Department, you know, and all these other folks. And as I said, you know, blowing people out of
768 the water when they objected to what things he was proposing. So later in '78, when he phones 'Get
769 you ass back out to Bangkok,' I said, 'Well, why not?' [Interviewer laughs] It may not be career
770 enhancing, but it worked out quite well for me. I mean, in spite of USAID, if you will, but ...

771 **Considering you like Singha, you like Thai women, I think it worked out just fine. [Both**
772 **laugh]**

773 Right. So like I said, you know, Lionel, we're still very, very good friends and I'd probably go work
774 for him again on some program. Some things I wouldn't just because I've retired now and I've got a
775 family here. But—too busy, but ...

776

777 **(6:07) Obviously, there must have been a tension between your work as kind of an advocate**
778 **for refugees who, at least in some cases, would choose to resettle somewhere else and INS**
779 **people.**

780 Ooh. Now, are we taping? I guess, yeah, I guess we have to.

781 **You just—well, you can edit out for public consumption anything you want.**

782 OK. Good. Yeah, in general and not on some specific people, but in general, the INS people I
783 worked with were a bunch of cretins, Neanderthals. And some of them just too—some—many—
784 they were too glorified in their authority, you know, in approving and rejecting people to go to the
785 U.S. And they, well, I mentioned earlier when we had our—up until about '80 or '81 when we had
786 our EAO system going—well, we always had the EAO system. But Jerry and John and I probably
787 rejected more people than INS did. We rejected or selected not to present to INS at this time
788 because of, you know, the cut line in the quota system or different ethnic groups or whatever, you
789 know, trying to make a balance in the program between Yao and Hmong and Lao Theung and Akha
790 and Vietnamese and Cambodians. And later, INS got in a—well, 1980—the Refugee Act of 1980
791 passed, which—probably it would have been '81—Joe Surek was the INS director in Hong Kong at
792 the time. And things got a whole lot tighter and then INS decided they were in charge. And the
793 State Department did not have the authority to select which refugee applicants got to see INS. And
794 I was still kind of the deputy for immigration side down here in Bangkok. But the EAOs—and at
795 that time, we had a lot more numbers, so the EAOs were in a position of being less selective or not
796 even having to select who got to see INS. But I guess, kind of a loss in authority at that time on our
797 side, but still, many of the INS people were, you know, sitting there just happy—happily rejecting
798 people—and God, I—it still bothers the shit out of me. [Chuckles]

799 **Oh, I'm sure. I'm sure. I suppose they imagined themselves to be the gatekeepers for**
800 **American citizenship.**

801 Many of them, as opposed to, say, hey, these—whatever may be additions, you know, better than
802 some of the illegals we have in the U.S. They're coming in legally.

803
804 **(8:58) At what point—this is something I should remember because I talked to Dennis**
805 **Grace and I know he mentioned this, but at what point was there discussion of trying to get**
806 **some kind of official dialogue with Laos to discuss resettlement of those who may have**
807 **wanted to resettle or ...**

808 You mean, voluntary repatriation?

809 **Right.**

810 Oh, I don't even remember. That may well have come after—I left in August '83. And I know after
811 that Dennis went up with, you know, a couple meetings in Laos—Luang Prabang, particularly, I
812 think where he met his current wife. You know, where the UNHCR, you know, what tripartite
813 meeting, you know, UN, Lao government and Thai government meeting. But ...

814 **OK. So, that was after your tenure there.**

815 I think so, yeah.

816
817 **(9:50) OK. So, let's see. '78, Refugee Act of '80. Were there significant changes that sort of**
818 **took place in the refugee camps over that period that made life for people in them easier or**
819 **worse or was it more of a static situation which people just had to either qualify or make a**
820 **decision about whether to stay or go?**

821 Well, things got better in the camps and such with massive funding coming into UNHCR and more
822 NGO presence in the camps, whether it's hospitals and public health services, schools, English
823 teaching, French teaching. Still not particularly pleasant places to live, but maybe I got a little bit
824 jaded in seeing too many refugee camps. But like when I was up at Huai Nam Khao, just sort of—it
825 was described to me earlier by people that had been there—you know, hovels alongside the railroad.
826 And we were driving into it and they're—they were indeed fairly—it would seem to me fairly nice
827 hovels on the side of the road—not wooden buildings, but, bamboo shacks with blue plastic
828 sheeting, keep the rain off and the—I said, 'Well, OK, I've sort of spent nights in places like this up
829 in Laos in the old days. You know, it's livable, not really nice, but it's OK. And when they get into
830 this new stalag thing, it will be nicer, but restricted. You won't be able to get out. [Chuckles] Now,
831 changes in the camps, just internal camp politics. I'm thinking like on the Hmong side, like the Ban
832 Vinai. You know, lots of heartburn when different camps closed. When Ban Vinai closed and
833 when the camps in Nan province closed and when Nong Khai, it will be a residual move to the Nam
834 Pong camp up in Nakhon Phanom province. And I'll send you or scan and e-mail to you the camp
835 stats—statistics for all those years. Or maybe I'll snail mail them to you. It would be just as easy.
836 But ...

837
838 **(12:07) Is there a site somewhere that has a map with all the Lima sites on it? That's one**
839 **thing I've never really been able to ...**

840 That's one of the ones I sent you today.

841 **Oh, wonderful.**

842 There's a friend—the Thai-Lao-Cambodia Brotherhood Group. And back in 1998—the group just
843 started in '98. That's when Les Strouse and I signed on with it. And this guy, Jim Henthorn, whom
844 we had met, but we met on e-mail, he started a—his project map scan and ...

845 **Oh, yeah. You were telling me about that.**

846 Yeah, the 1:250,000 maps for Thailand—or for Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and, say, eastern Thailand
847 where the, you know, the airbases were. And he ran out of maps. And so, I sent him all of my
848 maps, which were, you know, were a pretty complete collection and Les sent him his. So Jim
849 finished his scan project. And so some of the maps on Laos, anyway, still have—and a few on
850 Thailand, have my writing on them still because they were the old operational maps from those days.
851 [Interviewer laughs] Anyway, that one, when you open up a map of a particular area and then it's
852 broken into—you scan it—each map is about yea size. Scan it in eight sections. So you can click on
853 one section and then that blows up and then, of course, you can go plus, plus, plus and get down to
854 it. So they're a hell of a lot easier to read than the originals. Plus Jim went through and—for Laos,
855 not so much for Thailand—put down our—almost all of the Lima sites. And ...

856 **Excellent.**

857 So that goes along with you've got the Air America site books for Laos. Do you have those?

858 **No, I'll have to get them.**

859 Yeah, you can—Back in 1988, I think it was or early '89, when I was in Khartoum. One of the good
860 books services—Dalley Book Service—George Dalley was a USAID for a couple years up in
861 Paksane in Laos, '62, '64. And then, you know, left the foreign service, but amongst—he was
862 working for a living, but also had a book service out of his basement on southeast Asia, particularly
863 Laos. And I loaned him my site books from Laos back in '88, '89 and he got them copied in the
864 same, you know, flip format. Another 12 bucks or \$17.00 or something or other. But at least
865 they're there. And then he's still selling off his website. You can Google—d-a-l-l-e-y—Dalley Book
866 Service, you know, it will pop up. And ...

867

868 **(14:47) Were there many internal Hmong political problems that you or other staff had to**
869 **intervene in, in the camps?**

870 [Pauses] Well, not me. And I'm really not aware of others. Jerry—well, the great boiling pot of
871 Hmong was, particularly Ban Vinai, as opposed to the northern camps, you know, up in Nan
872 province. Two camps in Nan—Nam Mieu and Maejarim [or Sobtuang]. And there were lots of
873 politics in, you know, the Ban Vinai camp, which I'm not really very familiar with. You know, the
874 Chao Fa movement, which is still going on and other people like my friend Lee Lao, who got pissed
875 off and took his group out.

876

877 **(15:35) Well, go ahead and tell that story because you told it this morning, but of course, it**
878 **wasn't on the record. So ...**

879 Which one?

880 **Lee Lao.**

881 Oh, yeah. Yeah, Lee Lao just—one of the kind of unfortunates, in some ways, who missed the
882 resettlement boat. He was—I had worked with him in the spring of '69 when I—out working on
883 Sam Thong. And Li Lau was the commander as a captain up at Houei Tong Ko or way up north of
884 the PDJ, Lima Site 184. And good guy. You know, not a real strong military commander, but he
885 was the—kind of the leader of the Sam Neua Catholic Hmong. You know, not a real large group.
886 But anyway, he was in Ban Vinai—or in Namphong and I think he was part of the groups that got
887 flown out down at Namphong. And then up at Ban Vinai. And I'd see him on occasion, but he—
888 along toward 1979 or '80, he took about 500 of his people out of the camp—out of Ban Vinai, up
889 to—I think it was Udorn province to kind of locally resettle and work with the Thai army on anti-
890 Communist projects. And sometimes I think they got in fighting with the PL up in the Lao border
891 in Saraburi province. And here about two years or three years ago, kind of out—well, I left in
892 August '83, a couple days before I left, he must have got the word that I was departing. Because he
893 bopped into my office here in Bangkok to say good-bye. So, OK. And then the next time I heard

894 from him was two or three years ago—like 2003—a phone call. He tracked me down and
895 probably—maybe through relatives in the U.S. or something. But anyway, we had lunch a couple
896 times and now he wants to go to the U.S.—well, with his wife and kids. And he's got a couple kids
897 in the U.S. already. And say, 'Hey, there's no refugee program. You have to go on the normal
898 immigration. You know, one of your sons has to file an I-130 petition for immigration. And I just
899 don't know if that's been done or not. I kind of suspect it has not been done. But...

900

901 **(17:52) Maybe it's just an outsider's perspective, although I think I heard both Dennis and**
902 **Jim [Anderson] talk about this. But there seemed to be a real reticence on a significant**
903 **number of the Hmong's part to not want to go to the United States and to really want to go**
904 **back to Laos. Did you pick up on that?**

905 Oh, yeah. But back to Laos under what circumstances?

906 **Oh, for sure. Sure.**

907 And I talked with—Jim, you know, worked for IRC in Seattle for quite a few years. And [there
908 were] no direct flights from Asia to Portland at that time, so I'd bop into Seattle. And a couple
909 times, Jim would come out by the airport and we'd BS a little bit. And I talked with some of the
910 Hmong there in Seattle and, of course, in Portland. And a lot of the older people. And I talked to
911 ethnic Lao, too, that I know in Portland and in San Diego. And they'd say, 'Yeah, we want to go to
912 Laos.' Well, I said, 'Well, yeah. But you're the 50 year-old. You and your wife are. And you've
913 been in the States for six years now, something like that. And can your kids give up Big Macs? Can
914 your wife give up her washing machine? You know, can your four-year-old who was born here, give
915 up what—the cartoons or whatever on TV? Can they learn how to squat to take a shit again? Yeah,
916 you'd be happier back, but not them necessarily. And a lot of it was tied up to the resistance,
917 whether it was the ethnic Lao folks or the Hmong and the Yao—Lao Theung were heavy in the
918 resistance up in outer Ban Houei Sai area. But yeah, you know, dreams to return. How about the
919 Cubans down in Florida?

920 **How's that working out?**

921 Right. Or the Hungarians.

922 **So, what ...**

923 Oh, and then also, you know, the thing absent, you know, voluntary repatriation to a new Laos or an
924 old Laos. The longer, again, part of my viewpoint, the longer they stayed in Thailand maybe the
925 better for them because maybe the Thai government would open up a local resettlement program.
926 They never did. And they may never will. I say may never will, you know, not not never will—
927 double negative there, but if there's let's say, just Hmong in Thailand—there are 6,500 up at Hui
928 Nam Kau in Petchabun province. And who knows how many more in Northern Thailand, you
929 know, sort of self-resettled. You know, 20,000, 30,000? How—untold number of ethnic Lao in
930 northeastern Thailand and just sort of melded in. Yao, Yumian refugees or migrants from Laos, you
931 know, not refugees from Laos necessarily, in northern Thailand. Never hear anything about them.

932

933 **(20:50) So what ultimately took you out of this line of work in 1983?**

934 Well, it was decided that I had been here long enough.

935 **By whom?**

936 Well, we were on State Department detail. Actually, it came up kind of as a result of the Cambodian
937 situation down at Kamput camp on the Cambodian border. Fall of 1982—summer and fall of '82—
938 the INS down on the Cambodian camps were just going wild with an 80%, 90% rejection rate. And
939 their viewpoint, which had a viewpoint of sorts—we didn't happen to agree with it. But they said,
940 'Hey, the Cambodians fled Pol Pot. Right? OK.' And December '78, January '79, the Vietnamese
941 invaded Cambodia and basically knocked Pol Pot off the map. You know, he and 400,000 refugees

942 are up on the Thai border. OK. Just east of Bangkok three hours. OK. So these people left—fled
943 Pol Pot. They were refugees. But now Pol Pot's out of power, they can go back to Cambodia.
944 So—you know, extremely high rejection rate. And you've not talked to Mike Highland as yet, but
945 anyway, Mike—as the—he had replaced Lionel in June of '81 as the refugee coordinator. And
946 anyway, Mike sent me down to Kamput. He said, 'Try to keep the lid on things.' And talk to Jim
947 Anderson. He was down there then. Keep JVA and INS—or JV—keep JVA from killing INS.
948 Extremely high tension factor down there. I was down there for about seven weeks and I lost a
949 little over 20 pounds. And it was not a—that was the most difficult working situation I've had in my
950 life. But out of that, you know, sort of sandbagging INS, if you will. I'd call back to Mike and Mike
951 would call back to a buddy of his back to the NSC, and out of that came NSDD93—early in '83.
952 From the U.S. National Security Council—NSDD—National Security Decision Directive, signed by
953 Ronny Reagan—by him, not by a machine—to the head of agencies—you know, State Department,
954 justice—which includes immigration—and several others basically to say, 'I hear there's a problem
955 with Cambodians in Thailand. What is this problem going on? It doesn't sound good, so please
956 straighten it out and report back.' That may have been late '82 when it came out. And it's—yeah, it
957 would have been late '82. But that's only the 93rd for that whole year. So, it got everybody's
958 attention. And yeah, it would have been late '82 because Mike was leaving in August '83 anyway. I
959 was going to extend for a year from my normal departure time in August '83 to August '84. And
960 right—just before Christmas time, our State Department refugee program bureau boss was here and
961 he said, 'Well, you know, Mike is leaving on schedule. You'll leave on schedule, too. Extension
962 curtailed.' But at least three of the INS guys that were here were given something like two weeks to
963 choose their next post. And the district—or the OIC—officer in charge—was allowed to finish his
964 tour, I think. And they moved—and a very good plus, they moved the district directorship from
965 Hong Kong to Bangkok because this is where most of the immigration action in the whole region
966 was going on. A guy named John Schroeder, who turned out to be a very, very good guy. I mean,
967 he was one of the pluses to the program. So, not all INS are Neanderthals, definitely, but—so
968 anyway, Mike and I felt somewhat vindicated in that the INS guys were sort of semi-tossed out and
969 we were allowed to finish our normal tours. And I must say, after, you know, seven out of the
970 previous eight years, it was just kind of a—almost a relief. You know, a fairly high-tension job. You
971 know, an intense job for seven years.

972

973 **(25:31) I would imagine that you'd spent a decent amount of time doing work that**
974 **determines the fate of scores of human beings on a weekly basis. That's got to take its toll.**

975 Yeah, well, it did. And you know, I was adding up that the State Department, well, the U.S.
976 government who were getting, what—six hours in annual leave, you know, per pay period, 26 hours
977 for 26 days a month. Twenty days a month—whatever that comes out to be at that time. And
978 during the refugee program—and that's also on a use or lose. You got your annual leave ceiling,
979 which for foreign service is 360 hours, which is a whole bunch of days. But anyway, during that
980 period, I lost something like 600 hours just because things were busy. Well, it was not really
981 appropriate to take off for a week or two weeks.

982

983 **(26:31) Yeah. [Pauses] Well, are you hungry?**

984 [The two make plans for lunch, recorder is turned off]

985

986

987 Mac Thompson 6

988

989 **(0:01) So, you were about to tell the story about how Xieng Khouangville had just been**
990 **recaptured in '69.**

991 Yeah, May of '69, when I was working over at USAID out of Sam Thong and, oh, the—it was
992 mostly the Hmong and some of the Lao Theung who took it back. They had been working out of
993 Padong, Site 5. And up ...

994 **This doggone thing. I'm going to just put it over here and be done with it. OK. Sorry.**

995 Yeah, they had been working out of Padong, Site 5 and, oh, for quite awhile. Anyway shelling the
996 place from, oh, Site 19 area, a kind of mountain ridge between five and Xieng Khouang. They had a
997 105 Howitzer up there. And they recaptured the place in the morning and I had been—I guess, in
998 Sam Thong, probably. We got the word on it. So, you know, jump in one of our Porters and we
999 flew over and—to the runway east of the town. And Her Tou, and I then—my Hmong *naikong*.

1000 And I went over there and we were—got a ride downtown and such as the town is. And there were
1001 all sorts of civilians around and it seemed to be a kilometer or two kilometers or a bit more from
1002 town out to the airport. And the families didn't know if they were going to be able to hold the place
1003 or not. So, decided to move the civilians out. So, we had, oh, Hughies, the Sky folks had their
1004 Hughies coming in with more troops and ammunition resupply and all that, coming into the soccer
1005 field downtown. And so we loaded up—on the back haul, we'd load them up with civilians and fly
1006 them out to Padong Site 5. And then, we had Porters—USAID and Sky Porters come and—
1007 [Loud music starts blaring out of the restaurant speakers]

1008 Wow, can't win. Wow. Turn it off for a minute.

1009
1010 (0:04) Well, we had the Sky and USAID Porters, you know, coming into Site 5 were coming into the
1011 airfield, Lima Z03. But no people there to back haul. So, Her Tou and I found a couple of trucks.
1012 There was a Russian, [*sounds like* “**Le Dusingam**”], perhaps a French language reference to the “Deuce
1013 and a Half”]-sized truck I drove. It didn't have any brakes when I took that one. And Her Tou
1014 took the Russian-style jeep. And so, we were, for an hour or a couple hours, we had people from
1015 the soccer field starting walking out to the airfield so we could move people faster out of the airfield.
1016 And then we started shuttling, you know, several loads of the truck in the Russian style jeep out to
1017 the airfield so we could make use of the empty quarters. And—but I've got a photo of us on the
1018 jeeps and all that someplace in the archives. And then, oh, the town itself, I've got some other
1019 photos where—in a helicopter—

1020 [Food arrives]

1021 Whoa, that was quick. Well, maybe we'd better turn it off and I'll ...

1022

1023 [Recorder turned off, the two eat their lunch. New track begins]

1024

1025

1026 **(0:01) Now, I don't know where you want to start, but we were in the middle of that story**
1027 **about ...**

1028 Right. Middle of Xieng Khouangville and Her Tou and I had—we were shuttling civilians from
1029 downtown—out from the downtown soccer field out to the airport for—so the Porters could
1030 shuttle them on down to Padong, Site 5. And at the same time, helicopters, the Hughies, were
1031 picking them up downtown and running them out to, oh, the—directly on down to Site 5. And I've
1032 got some photos from the airport. They had—the friendlies, the SGU had drug up, I think it was
1033 three or four of 37-millimeters anti-aircraft guns and they were all lined up and I got photos of
1034 those. And down at the—or just off the airfield. And one thing I'd like to go back. We were
1035 talking about caves in northeastern Laos a bit. But right close to the airport, there was also called
1036 the hospital cave. And when they—some of the guys—some of the SGU troops told me when they

1037 got into the place and inside the—I've got some photos of the outside of the cave. But they had
1038 gone in and the hospital cave had a parachute over, you know, kind of the operating room table and
1039 there were some of the metal bowls, you know, doctors use during operations still had soggy
1040 bandages in it. You know, they had taken over so quickly. And I had—when I—in the evening,
1041 when I got back to Sam Thong, I radioed down to Vientiane to Dr. Pat McCreedy, you know, Dr.
1042 Weldon's wife. And she came up the next day and we took her back out to the hospital cave. And
1043 we had a couple flashlights. We wandered around a bit with just stacks and stacks of medicine, you
1044 know, going back in the cave. And we don't know how far away because we only had one flashlight
1045 each. And you know, the rules say have at least three sources of light when you're underground.
1046 But we talked to a couple of the troops that had—were walking out here. They just wandered
1047 around back further in the cave and said it went back a hell of a long way. Well, I don't know how
1048 far a hell of a long way is, but Pat took samples of odds and ends of the medicines to take back and
1049 here some of them were marked for the Iraqi Ministry of Health and just got diverted in the
1050 shipment. And that Russian truck that I had been driving the day before, the dashboard
1051 information, you know, like the gear shift levers that, you know, designate this were in Spanish. So,
1052 it probably got diverted in a shipment also to Haiphong and ended up in Laos. And—but, anyway,
1053 one—I think the first or second day, I was flying around town in a Hughie and I've got some aerial
1054 photos of the town. And you know, between the 105 Howitzers and U.S. Air Force, it was just
1055 rubble. And I don't know if it's been rebuilt since then or not. If you go along for tours in Laos you
1056 see all these guest houses up on the PDJ and that, but I don't see any guest houses down in Muong
1057 Khoun, in Xieng Khouangville. And so there is a way—it's fairly close. I know, 30, 40 kilometers
1058 from the PDJ, so it's easy to visit. And the road's supposed to be pretty good. And—but it also—a
1059 couple places between town and the airport where I stopped and I was looking at—well, the road
1060 went through kind of a small cut bank area. And on the vertical part of the cut, where the road had
1061 been made, there was a—kind of a people-sized hole going back into the side hill a little bit. And I
1062 asked a couple of civilians what was that? And they said, 'Well go take a look.' I didn't want to—
1063 snakes or whatever. But they said, 'Well, it goes in two or three feet and then turns into kind of like
1064 a T. So, if you're walking along and the airplanes come over to do some bombing, you scoot in
1065 there, you know, for safety reasons.' And anyway, I ended up with all these several, well, I don't
1066 know if it was several thousand or several hundreds. Quite a few hundreds anyway, of those
1067 civilians down at Padong, in Site 5. They didn't have any food, so, you know, radioed up for C-46,
1068 you know, to come in for a rice drop for them, you know, for a day or two of food, anyway. And at
1069 the same time, the Sky and helicopters refueling there. They also had a couple 123s coming over
1070 dropping fuel and some—and dropping ammo. And I don't remember what site it was. It wasn't
1071 there I think—maybe you could ask Les Strouse about it. One of the Air America C-123 pilots had
1072 a record, I think, for—kind of like they did in World War II or whatever—or the Vietnam War, too,
1073 when you shot down an enemy airplane, you got a little star on your airplane. This one Air America
1074 123 pilot had two Air America H-34s painted on the cockpit of his 123. He had dropped parachute
1075 bundles into friendly helicopters. [Laughs] Whoops, right.

1076
1077 **(5:19) A mark of shame.**

1078 But anyway, the others— Xieng Khouangville —that was that kind of spring and summer of '69
1079 offensive by Vang Pao that I think kind of surprised everybody. People weren't really expecting that
1080 things would go so quickly and so well. And quite—just a few days afterwards. And again, I wasn't
1081 keeping a diary in those days, unfortunately, but by late May, early June, they got into the, really, the
1082 south end of the PDJ. And I was—I forget where I was, but anyway, I had heard that the friendlies
1083 were right on the south end. So they took a helicopter up there—one of our USAID H-34s and
1084 landed. And again, there was a whole bunch of civilians around and the troops were kind of, you

1085 know, wandering around. You know, what are we doing here? You know, there's no bad guys.
1086 And we didn't know, again, what was going to happen. So, we got a C-46—it was out of my ground
1087 air radio to HD2 and heard a C-46 dropping in the area and talked to him and say, 'Hey, come on
1088 over to these coordinates, we need a drop here for holdover for the troops and for the civilians.'
1089 And I can just sort of him—see him thinking and looking at his map and, you know, say, 'Oops,
1090 wait. We haven't been on the PDJ for several years. You know, who's buried in Grant's tomb?
1091 What is your name? Who's Babe Ruth?' Anyway, he came over and dropped OK. And then, oh,
1092 that afternoon we were shuttling with the helicopters, shuttling civilians out to Site 72—Tha Tam
1093 Bleung, the one Preecha had mentioned yesterday because the closest friendly place anyway. And
1094 that was the only time in my life I've ever fired an M-16. It was almost—like the last load of the day
1095 and sun going down and had the civilians loaded on the airplane. And their pig jumped out of the
1096 helicopter. And you know, the husband and the wife jumped out of the helicopter, the kids still in
1097 the chopper. And they're going after the pig and getting dark and the pilot's getting low on fuel and
1098 we got to get back to Sam Thong and everything. And I grabbed an M-16 from one of the troops
1099 and zapped the pig. It took a whole bunch to stop the little pig anyway and the owner of the pig all
1100 kind of bent out of shape. And I said, 'Well, at least this way you can cut it up and maybe sell to all
1101 the other civilians there to eat with their rice this evening.' [Chuckles] Well, I never shot an M-16
1102 after that or not before.

1103
1104 **(8:07) So, it seems to me when we were talking the first time we got up to your transition**
1105 **from IVS to USAID. And I know that maybe we should focus on those specific periods you**
1106 **talked about where you were working with the Hmong in Laos.**

1107 OK. Well, they—I went over to USAID in—well, I finished IVS in June of '68 and prior to that I
1108 had worked in—well, in Hongsa—had never specifically worked with the Hmong. But in Hongsa, it
1109 was largely a Lao ethnic group. And in Nam Bac, that was more of a kind of a hot place and
1110 everything. And it was kind of restricted in travel. And when I went, it was out with—you know,
1111 we used the helicopter with some of the troops. And just supplies out to an outlying school,
1112 something of this sort, or some medical supplies, and no real time on the ground. And those were
1113 ethnic Lao and a couple villages were Tai Dam from the Diem Bien Phu area that we just stopped,
1114 we settled in—north, in Nam Bac area, not even as far south as Luang Prabang or Vientiane. There
1115 were Hmong in the area, but they were some of the SGU troops had outlying paths to the north.
1116 And so I wasn't working, really, with the Sky people at that time. They had their units—the SGU
1117 down at the east end of the Nam Bac runway and I was over on the west end where the Lao army
1118 folks were. And that—oh, Nam Bac, as I say, or about February through June when I left Nam
1119 Bac—that was '67. And the summer of '67, I don't remember what happened. In the fall of '67,
1120 along towards September, I got transferred to my favorite valley, which is Xieng Lom Valley, up in
1121 northern—northwestern Sayaboury province. It kind of borders on Thailand on the northern
1122 Nan—way at northern Nan province. And that valley was some Lao, but largely ethnic [Lu] people.
1123 And Lao Theung were in and out and the Hmong were in and out, not living in the valley. There
1124 were a couple of Hmong, oh, airstrips—the one strip in—to the south of the Thai border. And Nan
1125 province, of course, and they were able to—they had quite a few Hmong. But at least in Xieng
1126 Lom, there were not too many of them. That was through the end of '68 when Sky decided to turn
1127 Xieng Lom into a training base and they moved in quite a few Thai. And then, they built a Sky
1128 compound, another small airstrip for porter or twin otters. And the Sky folk moved in there and
1129 that's when I moved out. So that was—that was fall of '67 through December of '67 and I had also
1130 been working in a place called Muong Met.

1131 **I left my camera at the restaurant, didn't I?**

1132 Oh, well, shut down and ...

1133
1134
1135
1136
1137
1138
1139
1140
1141
1142
1143
1144
1145
1146
1147
1148
1149
1150
1151
1152
1153
1154
1155
1156
1157
1158
1159
1160
1161
1162
1163
1164
1165
1166
1167
1168
1169
1170
1171
1172
1173
1174
1175
1176
1177
1178
1179
1180

[Recorder turned off, the two go retrieve the camera and come back. New track begins.]

Mac Thompson 9

(0:00) All right. Good. Now that the camera's been recovered ...

Yes, all is well.

The—fall of—late '67, December of '67 when I left Xieng Lom, the Sky folks were moving in there making a training base. And for a few months I had been working also a place called Muong Met, east—through north—northwest of Vang Viang. That had been recovered back in 1964 by the Lao army, what they called the Triangle Operation, which is Muong Met, Muang Kasi and I think over to Vang Viang also. And covered in Conboy's book, *Shadow War*. So, this was four years afterwards, but still, the valley was interesting. Again, didn't have much in the way of highlanders there except coming into trade now and then. Ethnic Lao valley. But they were still, it seemed, mostly Pathet Lao sympathizers. And they—well, when I first went in there to work, another IVS guy had been in there and had left. He had started a five-room or a seven-room school that wasn't complete. So, I was in—sent in there to see about finishing up the school with the local villagers doing the work and USAID supplying the cement and roofing tin and the like. But I went in and as I kind of normally do, go up to the local army commander and just ask—check the security. And there was the town and then the airstrip and the IVS house, a little two-story bamboo place right next to the airstrip. And then, walk on up to the head of the airstrip and up a small hilltop is the local army camp. You know, maybe a platoon or—a large platoon or a small company ensconced there in their positions. And just talking to the commander. 'How's the security situation around here?' You know, just normal things. 'Oh, no problem. Hey, we're all OK. No bad guys around at all.' 'Oh, fine. Great. Sounds good to me.' And I had been there in Laos 18 months at that time already and said, 'Well, good.' And I said, 'I'll be down at the house.' He said, 'OK, and every evening about 1800, we'll send a half a dozen troops down to sleep around the house on the ground or around.' And I said, 'Oh, the security's that good, huh?' I said, 'Well, I don't want to inconvenience your troops, so do you have a spare bunk up here on the hill?' So, I, during the time I was there, in and out, I'd usually spend every week or two weeks at Muong Met and then, say, two to three weeks up at Xieng Lom and fly down to Vientiane, you know, for a little R&R and then do the circuit again. But I never did spend the night in the local IVS house there. [Interviewer laughs] They also had a village about two or three kilometers away. We were doing a small one-room school over there. And it was a nice village and it was known locally with the local Lao officials and the army as a good party village. And if there was a particular wedding or something or other they wanted to go to, they would put the word out two or three days ahead of time that they and I, if I wanted to go—and I did a few times—were going to go over there and get drunk and spend the night in this village two, three clicks away. And the reason for putting the word out was so the villagers could tell their husbands, their fathers, their elder brothers that, don't come home—you know, the guys that were still in the PL army, don't come home because there might be problems. And there was—the only time I was ever there—when I was in Muong Met where there was a problem was when a couple of the new Lao soldiers from the Vientiane area had been over there, staying in that village, stayed late, were walking back to the army camp and they ran into a couple guys coming home for R&R and there was a little shootout and one of the PL guys was killed. And then there's apologies all over and hey, these new guys didn't know the rules. There was a—it was sometimes kind of a strange war. Muong Met has a—the Lao army had a barber who was also kind of a village medic also. But he had been a PL soldier, had been recruited back in the early '60s, whatever, been sent up to Hanoi

1181 for, supposedly, for some medic training. Then he was in the Pathet Lao army as a medic. And he
1182 had been coming back to—sometime—I was up there in late '67 and early '68—so, sometime, I
1183 guess, '66 or '67 he had been coming back to visit his family and he didn't know that the valley had
1184 changed hands and he got captured. [Interviewer chuckles] But they did not turn him into the
1185 Vientiane authorities because they needed a medic—local army did and he was also a barber. But I
1186 let him give me a haircut, but I didn't allow him to give me a shave.

1187 **No razor.**

1188 Yeah, the summer of '68—June of '68, I finished IVS and was job hunting that summer and then
1189 August '68 over at our ACA—the American Community Association Club in Vientiane, which was
1190 in the USAID compound and just having lunch and a couple beers with some of the USAID guys
1191 from the USAID refugee office—refugee relief branch. And I knew several of those guys pretty
1192 well. And one of them said, 'Well, he's going on home leave and then, or training for a couple
1193 months in France and he's going to be gone for four months.' Why don't I take his job? Well, fine.
1194 I got nothing else to do. And so, back over to the office—well, they said your first exercise is to
1195 figure out how to fill out this form—USAID form to authorize hiring a person. And if you can
1196 figure that out, maybe you'll get hired. [Interviewer laughs] So the salary I proposed for myself was
1197 too high. That got cut down, but I did that. That was my introduction to the refugee program on
1198 the logistics side of it. You know, the C-46 rice drop program that another guy handled—Jack
1199 Williamson did that and I did all the pots and pans and blankets and rice and salt, you know, the
1200 requirements and movements upcountry. Then, January '69, went up to Luang Prabang with Joe
1201 Flipse for a few days—well, a few weeks—three or four weeks. And I think it was February '69 is
1202 when I moved over to Sam Thong to work with—for Pop Buell for an indefinite period. And that's
1203 when I got into more Hmong than anything else. Hmong and Lao Theung, that's basically all that
1204 was up there.

1205

1206 **(6:47) Well, what was your relationship like with Pop Buell? Obviously, he's been described**
1207 **by many people in many ways. What's your take on the man?**

1208 Well, I don't know him half as well—a third or a tenth as well as people like Ernie Kuhn and Paul
1209 White and Carol [Mills] and Tom Ward and other know him. But I—one of the reasons I think
1210 the—well, Joe Flipse was sort of my mentor for many years. Yeah, he was up at Houei Sai at the
1211 time. And a guy named Bob Dakin was at Luang Prabang. But he and his wife were on home leave.
1212 And Joe was also working in Luang Prabang and he wanted me to come up to work at Luang
1213 Prabang for a month or so, work for him to learn, to some extent, as Joe described it to me later, to
1214 learn kind of Joe's way of doing business. So, when I went over to Sam Thong, I would not be Pop-
1215 ized. [Interviewer laughs] P-o-p-i-z-e-d. You know, everything with a grain of salt or whatever.
1216 But Pop was a super great guy and everything, but there are other ways of doing business. And I did
1217 this—when I worked for him, I did business his way. But he was very liberal on what he wanted
1218 done. Oh, up at Bouam Loung one time there was a whole bunch of military activity right near
1219 Bouam Loung and Pop said, 'Well, go up and evacuate the civilians, dependents and refugees from
1220 Bouam Loung.' OK. We go up there to Porter and we got the USAID Porters and a couple of
1221 helicopters and the Sky airplanes coming in and out and just get it done however you want to do it.
1222 And there were—that's where I first kind of ran into kind of a Lao Theung-Hmong/Meo conflict is
1223 that people [were] mobbing the airplanes. So, I went up and talked to Cher Pao Moua, the
1224 commander there, a super good guy, a strong guy. And they said, 'Hey, look. I've got to separate
1225 the ethnic groups down here on the runway.' And he said, 'OK.' 'And I need a couple troops to
1226 help me do that.' 'OK.' 'And have them—Lao Theung on one side and Meo on the other side.
1227 And every other airplane, you know, load them up. And I need the troops with the guns to maintain
1228 order.' 'OK.' So it worked. It was cooperative, but at least it quieted things down and ...

1229

1230 **(9:14) Did you have any sense of what the nature of the conflict was between the Hmong**
1231 **and the Lao Theung?**

1232 Well, the conflict was—well, not so much on—based on ethnicity or as were bad guys were around.
1233 And at nighttime, this would have been probably March, April of '69. There was a lot of military
1234 right around. And at nighttime, the civilians would have to filter off into the underbrush because
1235 the bad guys were coming in and shooting up the positions all around Site 32 and they didn't want to
1236 get killed. So, when their airplanes show up to get out, I think there were somewhat more Hmong
1237 than there were Lao Theung. And they were just people who were trying to mob the airplanes. And
1238 the Lao Theung weren't getting their fair share of the evacuees, so that's why I did the separation.

1239

1240 **(10:10) We've talked several times now about how it's always the Hmong and not the Lao**
1241 **Theung and how it's Air America and not Continental Air. What would you like the**
1242 **uninformed person such as myself, to know about the Lao Theung and maybe how they**
1243 **compare with the Hmong?**

1244 Well, they—over the years, talking to some of the Sky guys and as you talk to more Sky guys and
1245 talk to Ernie, particularly, you'll get a little different—well, maybe the same take on it. But in the
1246 earlier years, I think, the Meo army was primarily a Meo army and took heavy, heavy casualties. And
1247 they started getting more ethnic groups involved in the SGU program. And the Lao Theung, by the
1248 time—at least—and I was out of Sam Thong by this—well, Sam Thong was gone by this time. I
1249 was down at Vientiane. But '71 or so, Redcoat, who is the case officer for Site 32 area, who said
1250 there was fully 50% Lao Theung. And you know, they were taking their heavy hits, too. But it's
1251 kind of—they very rarely ever get a mention into [?? – sounds like statches] as being participants in
1252 the war, up in Military Region II. Region I, you know, the Yao are the ones that, just being a
1253 monster, killed a million of them in the southern Yunnan province and shed a couple hundred
1254 thousand or whatever in Laos, but you know, they get more mention than the Lao Theung do. But
1255 the Lao Theung did some hard fighting up in the—out of site of Nam Yu, up in northwestern Laos.
1256 And it's like Continental. Air America is sexy, you know, CIA-owned, proprietary. And, you know,
1257 Bird & Sons started up as a bit of competition and then Continental bought them out in '65 and
1258 right through '75, but hardly ever mentioned. So, kind of a much smaller operation and, to a large
1259 extent, a friendlier group of pilots to work with. And they had fewer restrictions than Air America
1260 did and no union. As Les may mention, FEPA—Far Eastern Pilots Association—a union of Air
1261 America pilots really screwed things up for a lot of Air America folks.

1262

1263 **(12:36) Yeah. I think Heinie [Aderholt] talked about that a lot.**

1264 Yeah.

1265 **I think they're still working on trying to get retirement to some for some of these guys or**
1266 **something.**

1267 Good. But anyway, oh, I—Professor Bill Leary, doing his long book, which never got done before
1268 he died, you know, I kept trying to say, 'Well, tell Bill or ask Bill. At least at the end, you know,
1269 include a chapter on the other airlines and—but ...

1270

1271 **(13:05) So, you were in Sam Thong for how long?**

1272 Just about February through June. At—when we got down to the—earlier I was mentioning when
1273 we got down to the southern end of the PDJ, when we had the rice drops in there and moving the
1274 civilians out to Site 72. And there was a grass runway there. And they started bringing in Caribous,
1275 you know, to resupply the food and the ammo and that. This would have been like day two or day
1276 three. And one of the Caribous—I got some photos of it turning around. And one of the gears

1277 went off the hard pack of the runway and sunk three foot into the dirt. And I left before they got it
1278 out. But we've got some pictures of the trench they dug and, you know, 100 troops with a rope
1279 trying to help pull it out. But right after that one I finished—that was on a USAID personal services
1280 contract. And I left to go back to Portland and then back to DC to hire on as a direct hire with
1281 USAID. And when I came back in September of '69 and I forget exactly where I went the first
1282 month, but anyway, shortly thereafter, I went up to Ban Houei Sai from about October '69 through
1283 June of '70 when I got moved down to Vientiane.

1284
1285 **(14:31) So were your responsibilities in Sam Thong and Ban Houei Sai essentially the same,**
1286 **providing ...**

1287 Pretty well. Oh, USAID—well, USAID refugee relief program in southern Laos—Takhet,
1288 Savannakhet, Pakse—or Pakse, Savannakhet, we had people assigned there from a refugee relief
1289 branch. And they did refugee relief and resettlement, primarily resettlement. In northern Laos,
1290 Houei Sai, Luang Prabang and Sam Thong and later Sam Thong out of—Ban Soun after Sam
1291 Thong was finished. We were—USAID was doing the feeding for the SGU—the basic rice rations
1292 for the SGU and all the paramilitary dependents. So, we had—we were funded, probably, oh, 50%
1293 or 60%. I don't remember the exact percentages. Say, 40% USAID budget and 60% CIA money
1294 filtered through DOD that filtered down through USAID RO—requirements office—then over to
1295 our office for procurement of rice and salt and pots and pans and blankets for the paramilitary
1296 dependents. So we—on our C-46 drop program, for example, we just had split rice contracts. A
1297 bag of rice would go—100 kilo of rice would go up to Luang Prabang and 40% of it was USAID
1298 funded and 60% was the filtered funding. And then, it went out to whomever, you know, the
1299 dependents and the refugees and the paramilitary. And for special combat rations or team rations,
1300 the—Oh, CIA had their own—they did their own funding and procurement for those rations. But
1301 we had basic rice, canned meat, we—Dr. Weldon decided, on a public health basis, particularly in
1302 northeastern Laos, Region II, that the refugees and dependents needed more animal protein. So we
1303 started the big canned meat procurement thing. It started in Singapore and then procured down
1304 there and then moved up to Bangkok and basically canned water buffalo. And it got up to
1305 something like 25,000 cases a month. And it's expensive stuff, but it's what's needed to keep people
1306 alive, I guess. That was one of my inventions. When we first started getting the canned meat, we
1307 were using helicopters to deliver it. Helicopters are humongously expensive and USAID did not
1308 have that much in the way of helicopters on contract. Joe Flipse and I up at Luang Prabang, we
1309 invented a parachute out of—we had PL-480 program, which provided for—from the U.S.
1310 Department of Agriculture—food, wheat, cornmeal, wheat soya blend, bulgur wheat. But they also
1311 had large amounts of excess cloth that I guess U.S. manufacturers made. It was sort of an
1312 agricultural subsidy program. And we got that stuff cheap and everybody needed cloth upcountry,
1313 too, for making clothes. You know, red and blue and black, you know, for the Hmong and black
1314 and maybe other colors—when I left Laos, I left something like, I don't know, 100,000 square
1315 meters of good quality denim in the warehouse, so the PL must have been selling jeans. They've had
1316 the Levis for years. But Joe and I invented a parachute up in Luang Prabang. So, you know, locally
1317 made out of some of the cloth we had and just buy rope and use rocks and slipknots and tie
1318 everything together. And five cases of meat, drop it out of the door of a Porter and we were having
1319 about 70%, 80% success rate with the parachute opening. And if it didn't open, the cans on the
1320 ground they could eat that day. If they were both—and you just peel the metal out between your
1321 teeth. But still, that was—and we did that over Sam Thong a little bit, too. And then, the meat
1322 requirement—the delivery requirement went way up. By '70, I was down in Vientiane then and we
1323 invented what we called a hash. For the C-46 program, we dropped, oh, 40 kilo of rice. We
1324 dropped 40 kilo salt and we also dropped—we ended up making noodles out of this PO-480

1325 program as a rice substitute. And then, to deliver the canned meat, I would just try different
1326 combinations of kilos and cans of meat and different shapes of cans. You know, come up with a
1327 new shaped can, you know, from our Bangkok people. Go out to the airport and we'd—you know,
1328 the Air America people would bag it up for me and go out and we'd take a porter and just drop it on
1329 the Vientiane runway. Then run out and open up the bag to see what survived. And we ended up
1330 with one—or half a kilo—454 gram—you know, one pound, kind of a flat can—maybe six inches
1331 diameter and inch-and-a-half thick that survived the drops better than anything else. So we ended
1332 up with maybe with eight cans of meat and 32 or 33 kilo of rice per drop. So depending on the drop
1333 zone, our people at Sam Thong or Luang Prabang and Ban Houei Sai was they all—you know, we
1334 need, X number of bags of rice at this drop zone, X number of bags of noodles and X number of
1335 bags of hash. So, that was Les Strouse's job for several years with Continental was dropping C-46
1336 loads.

1337
1338 **(20:19) So, if I heard you right—and maybe I didn't—you said it was in Sam Thong where**
1339 **you sort of had your big exposure to the Hmong.**

1340 Yeah.

1341 **At least lots of Hmong experience.**

1342 Oh, right. Yeah. For a relatively short period of time.

1343
1344 **(20:33) What do you think you picked up during that period of time about how they were**
1345 **organized, maybe some of the cultural traits or the ways that they behaved towards each**
1346 **other or towards you? Just any stories or recollections about them from that period that you**
1347 **can recall...**

1348 Not particularly, just because there was so much activity going on work-wise. You know, work
1349 three or four weeks straight through and then take off a few days down in Vientiane. And I was
1350 working, as I said, mostly the northern area. Ernie Kuhn had gone on home leave and I had
1351 replaced him on home leave. There was a site—well, north of the PDJ, from Site 50, 32 and north
1352 of there up to what was left of Sam Neua province at 184. And then, for a period, I was working
1353 around Xieng Khouangville and Site 5 and then down over southeast of the PDJ for a week one
1354 time and never a day off unless you left town and you went down to Vientiane. Now actually, I had
1355 more—a hell of a lot more contact with the Hmong after I was down here on the refugee program.
1356 Udorn for ten months in '75, '76 and then another seven years—or six years in Bangkok. But you
1357 know, traveling fairly often, say, with Jerry and others up to Namphong and then Ban Vinai and up
1358 to the northern camps. And I got to know more—several of the leaders fairly well, like Vue Mai,
1359 Vang Neng and others, not half as well as people like Mike Carroll would have known who lived in
1360 the camps. But I—courageous people. Lao Theung and others, too. You know, humongous
1361 hardships during the war and not necessarily real pleasant experiences in the refugee camps. Plus I
1362 still look at the Hmong that are up there at Huai Nam Khao now, you know, the 6,500. Again,
1363 what's going to happen to those folks? And many of those have been there for several years now
1364 and many of those would pull out their papers from Ban Vinai—you know, UN registrations when
1365 they were in Ban Vinai in 1976. You know, 30 years, 31 years in and out of the refugee camps and
1366 they could have gone to the U.S. if they had just happened to be in Wat Tham Krabok in August
1367 2003 when the Thai army did an inventory and a name list. And for some reason the U.S.
1368 government and the Thai just said, 'OK. Everybody who's on the name list is eligible.' And if
1369 families—and this happened quite often, when husband, wife—or father, mother and younger kids
1370 are at Tham Krabok and the younger kids, you know, 20, 35 years old married and might have been
1371 up country farming—a labor—contract labor services, and didn't make it on the list. So, a lot of
1372 these split families were just sort of created by that August 2003 list.

1373
1374
1375
1376
1377
1378
1379
1380
1381
1382
1383
1384
1385
1386
1387
1388
1389
1390
1391
1392
1393
1394
1395
1396
1397
1398
1399
1400
1401
1402
1403
1404
1405
1406
1407
1408
1409
1410
1411
1412
1413
1414
1415
1416
1417
1418
1419
1420

(23:55) So, I think we started our sort of first big chunk in the last days of Vientiane. So, we'd better talk about your duty in Vientiane and ...

Vientiane was June of '70 through June of '75, which was, to a large extent, a paperwork shuffle—a juggling of things: determining the rice requirements we needed, talking with our people upcountry, you know, how many refugees are we going to have and, for the first couple years, Jack Williamson was my boss.

(24:36) What, technically, was your job title in Vientiane?

Logistics—logistics management, something like that, and kind of the middle man between our contracting office in Bangkok for commodities that were purchased in Thailand and our folks upcountry who determined the individual needs for drop zones and for Sam Thong or for Ban Houei Sai or Luang Prabang. And then determining how to—well, simple logistics stuff, and how to get stuff up to them, when to order the rice and pots and pans and blankets and salt and canned meat, so it gets in the proper contracting sequence for competition—you know, two months, three months for competition, and then delivery, and delivery into Vientiane. On the rice side, we had a very, very small warehouse down at Kilometer 4 in Vientiane, where we did all of our rebagging. The rice came in at 100 kilo rice and we had a rebagging contractor who turned it into 40 kilo, a triple sack rice for an air drop. And oh, that was—a phone call in the morning out to the Air America—ATOG—their Air Transport Operations Group. How much rice and canned meat and hash and salt and what do you have in the warehouse now? OK. And then, to the FIC—Air America Flight Information Center—what did we drop yesterday? If I can mark it off and, you know, what's it look like for today and then check my lists. And then, OK, a phone call down to the rice warehouse. OK, tell the people in Thailand to bring in 50 tons of rice or to bring in 300 tons of rice. Our warehouse—it had to be turned over, basically, daily. Coordinate the cars. [Thompson's cell phone rings, recorder is paused]

Oh, yes.

Yeah. Are we back online?

We are back online.

OK. That was turning over the goodies in the warehouse on a daily basis on a pretty highly fluctuating thing. That was just part of the juggling to make sure that the airport did not run out of what they should have. Empty airplanes don't make any money for anybody. You're wasting time, especially in the rainy season when you have windows to get up to certain drop zones. There were quite a few of them. Pots and pans and blankets—steel bars. We used to buy steel bars in Thailand, which were fairly soft, oh, say, what—a quarter—a quarter or three-eighths inch thick at about an inch-and-a-half, two inches wide and maybe two feet long—18 inches long. And to send those up country for the refugees and they can pound out the style of knife they want for themselves, you know, for cutting brush and the like. And USAID at one time had always said—and that makes sense—'Buy American. Buy American.' So, they said—I was getting hit, you know, buy U.S. Don't buy—spend all this money in Thailand. OK. So, we ordered in, I don't know, a ton of steel bars from the U.S. from GSA and they—I guess I wasn't specific enough in the spec because some of the poor refugees who got them up there are probably still shaking. When they heated that steel bar and whanged it with a hammer and the hammer rebounds and their arm is vibrating and—so, we went back to the relatively soft steel and easy to sharpen parts from the States—or from Bangkok. Plywood—we used to get all of our plywood for the C-46 rice drop program from Thailand. And ...

(28:17) Now why do you need plywood to drop rice?

1421 The C-46s and the K-123s that we used—the pallets held—the old-style pallets held 13 bags of rice
1422 and a bag of salt at roughly 100 pounds a piece. That's 1,300 pounds per pallet. But it's on a
1423 track—rollered tracks in the airplane and leading up to the door. And you drop, say, two pallets on
1424 the old style and then the plane would come back around and drop two more pallets—so, six or
1425 seven passes. And the plywood was sort of the interface between the rollers and the rice bags
1426 strapped—tied onto the pallets. And the pallet went out the door with the load at that time and, you
1427 know, the people on the ground could use the pallets for making houses or whatever else—furniture
1428 or whatever else they wanted. Again, 'Buy U.S.' So, you know, I ordered up a whole bunch of U.S.
1429 plywood and they loaded it up out at the airport with 1,200 pounds of rice and they couldn't move it
1430 on the tracks. It was Douglas fir or pine plywood and it was just too soft. And the wheels from the
1431 track just ate into the plywood. So that was the end of that project. But the Air America admin guy,
1432 a former 123 pilot—yeah, a 123 pilot—copilot—Jerry McPherson. He never got proper credit for
1433 his bright idea. He and a Philippine parachute rigger there—worked Air America, Ramon De Mesa,
1434 came up with an idea of using what we call—end up calling a tilt trap. And they called me about it.
1435 'Come up and take a look at what we're working on' and 'Hey, it looks good to me.' With my
1436 support, very little credit on this. You know, 'Keep working on it. I think it looks good.' They
1437 developed a system where we ended up going to a larger pallet, but when it hit the door, it stopped,
1438 the track tilted forward and the—at that time, probably about 20 or 25 bags of rice slid off the pallet,
1439 you know, under the left horizontal stabilizer of the airplane. And the pilot pulled—dropped back
1440 into the airplane, the kickers pulled it off. So, we went for using a—I have to check the numbers,
1441 but went for using like 2,000 or 3,000 pallets a month to using ten pallets a month. And the cost
1442 difference was significant, plus the logistics when they had to have pallet contracts and steel roller
1443 pallets contracts and rope contracts, you know, to have all these pallets for the old style drop system
1444 in place at the right time. A very simple thing. And Pop Buell chewed me out on that one time.
1445 Again, this would have been 1972 or so. He said, 'Hey, what are people going to be using for tables
1446 and roofs and everything up country?' 'Well, Pop, what could I say? They've had all this free
1447 plywood for ten years already. Maybe they saved some of it.' [Interviewer laughs] That's the only
1448 real complaint I got out of it, but McPherson—he's not on e-mail. I've been thinking of writing up
1449 something, anyway, and get him to fill in the details and send it into the Air America quarterly log so
1450 at least he gets some credit for it.

1451 **Absolutely.**

1452 Yeah.

1453

1454 **(31:52) Did you have any time in the midst of all this busyness and logistical planning to sort**
1455 **of get a sense of how the war was going between '70 and '73?**

1456 Well, the sense, yes, in that we also—well, I did the C-46 drop schedule. So as places were lost, they
1457 dropped off the schedule. And as people moved, they—a drop zone might have five drops a month
1458 and suddenly it's up to ten drops and 15 drops a month. Well, that's more people. And I only have
1459 one copy of a drop schedule. It was May of '69, I think it was. October of '69. And I notice one
1460 place in it had something like—I was just skimming through it the other day. I sent it off to Texas
1461 Tech, the Vietnam archives, but I made a copy of it. And one place that was taken—it was way the
1462 hell up on the rice drops and I don't remember particularly why. I think it was Site 271 [Hat Khon],
1463 which was southwest of Site 50, Phu Khum. But—and I don't remember specifically any hard
1464 battles that would have moved people down there. But I—want to ask around about. Ernie would
1465 probably know. Well, actually Ernie wouldn't. He was up at Houei Sai by then. But ...

1466

1467 **(33:18) So, from—I mean, '73 comes, the ceasefire, but your job doesn't really change that**
1468 **much, does it? You're still feeding people and ...**

1469 Well, it changed markedly.

1470 **Oh, OK.**

1471 One reason being that USAID had built a road from Route 13, from [Hui Promone] up to Ban Soun
1472 and then the road was continued one up at Long Cheng. And Ban—Sam Thong had gone down
1473 the tubes in March of 1970 and the USAID operations moved down to Ban Soun 272. Though
1474 the—many of the drop zones along that area came off the C-46 list and we started sending things up
1475 by truck—food items up by truck. Also, with the ceasefire, there were much less movement of
1476 people around, so there were in a more stable situation. They were able to plant rice. And to
1477 harvest their own rice rather than getting kicked out of home and letting the PL come in and harvest
1478 it. So, things—oh, and then we started dropping airplanes—C-46s off the contract. We didn't need
1479 20 drops a day, you know, 500 drops a month—down to 400, 300 drops a month. And then, Air
1480 America left in summer of '73 and we're down to Continental 46s. And I think they may have had
1481 five 46s at one time but went down to just one or two, and then even dropped those. And there
1482 was—I think the last drops we had was one Papa Bravo Whiskey or Victor, was a—supposedly a
1483 Royal Air Lao C-46 given by the U.S. government. And I don't remember the date on the last
1484 USAID paid for rice drop, but probably 1974. So things slowed down. It was sort of less fun.

1485

1486 **(35:20) What was the sense from your office and your area about how the political situation**
1487 **was developing once the provisional government was established?**

1488 [Chuckles] The PGNU—the Provisional Government of National Union. I was low on the totem
1489 pole. I didn't think much about it. You know, I did see one big—kind of big mistake that, I think,
1490 we, the U.S. government had made was no provision for demobilizing soldiers from both the Lao
1491 army and the SGU. One of the things that was mandated by the U.S., was that the SGU would
1492 be—to some extent, would be melded into the FAR—the Forces Armee Royale. But it also meant
1493 that large numbers of troops on both sides were demo'd. And that young guys, maybe with—well,
1494 not so young—30 years old and a soldier for ten years and got a wife and a couple kids and he hasn't
1495 been home for many years and there's no rice paddy for him to work. What is he going to do? And
1496 we had no demo [demobilization] program to speak of. And we didn't fund one on the USAID
1497 side, and the CIA didn't either. It was something that we should have and banditry went up. You
1498 know, just thievery went up, which was understandable, but—and kind of acrimony, of course, on
1499 the side of the former troops. Personally, I didn't get into this very much, but I remember—well,
1500 your guy Fue Her her, his father Her Chai and I used to talk about that when Her Chai would come
1501 into the office looking for rice for VP's house and for the house in Vientiane, where they had people
1502 coming down from—well, Ban Soun at that time or Long Cheng. And 'Well, we need some more.
1503 We've got extra troops here. You know, they're hungry. Former troops.' They'll get an
1504 authorization and we can do this.

1505

1506 **(37:33) So, the news—I'm sorry. Please, go ahead.**

1507 I was going to say that back to—on the geopolitical side, again, I was low on the totem pole and I
1508 guess pretty naïve about the whole thing. But USAID was looking at—maybe in the embassy, too
1509 kind of upbeat that the ceasefire, the peace, the PGNU would hold. And then, of course, Cambodia
1510 and Saigon down the tubes and things started falling apart. But I'd been in—with USAID in
1511 Vientiane—or in Laos at that time from summer of '69 to summer of '75—OK, six years. That was
1512 overly long. And for the—a little longer term future, USAID was planning on opening up another
1513 liaison office down in Thailand here at the Port of U Taphao, a large industrial port. And I was sort
1514 of tagged and moved down there, south of Pattaya would have been great, you know, down on the
1515 beach, you know, to possibly run that office or be number two in that logistics office. They were
1516 planning on bringing in cement and things for more reconstruction in Laos. So another thing I'll

1517 fault the PL on. You know, they screwed me out of that job. [Both laugh] Everything went down
1518 the tubes. But I remember one day in June of '75, when we were moving— I was moving
1519 household furniture. When we'd go into a house, I was working with a PL police captain who was a
1520 very nice guy. And there were usually two or three of either the USAID protestors or the leftist
1521 student lawyers were with us. And we had two trucks—two USAID trucks. Or maybe one was—it
1522 might have been a Lao army truck. We had some Pathet Lao army coolies, and I had a USAID
1523 truck. And we'd—I'd bust into a house and we had an inventory of the rental contract—and on the
1524 rental contract, it would show what was provided by the owner of the house and what was provided
1525 by USAID. And anything that wasn't on that list would belong to the individual house owners. So
1526 maybe we'd had three air conditioners—one provided by the owner of the house that stayed there.
1527 The other two air conditioners that were provided by USAID. That would go on the PL truck
1528 because that belonged to the government. According to the leftist lawyers and students—the PL
1529 captain didn't care. But if they had two refrigerators—one on the USAID list and the other not
1530 listed, well, obviously, the not listed one was the personal property of the American who lived there.
1531 The PL captain supported me—no, no, that goes on my truck to go out to the warehouse for
1532 shipping down to Thailand. And that was sort of my daily job for several weeks. And one day
1533 we're—you know, hot day, we're just having some cokes, taking a break, waiting for the trucks to
1534 come back and a couple leftist lawyers were pulling my chain and said, 'Hey, how much money do
1535 you think you people or USAID is leaving here in Thailand?' We said, well—we had heard this at a
1536 staff meeting. You know, \$100 million worth of warehouses and vehicles and heavy equipment and
1537 PL 480 food in the warehouse out at Kilometer 9. It's hard to say. \$100 million, something like
1538 that. And they said, 'Oh, boy. Don't you feel pretty bad about that?' And we said, 'Well, a little bit.
1539 But we look at the bright side of it.' 'Well, what's the bright side?' We said, 'Well, you know what
1540 the USAID budget was for next year?' Well, the guy didn't know. I said, 'It was \$65 million for
1541 Laos.' 'Oh, great. Hey, that sounds good—\$65 million.' 'Well, how much of it do you think you're
1542 going to get?' 'Well, what do you mean? We're haulin' ass.' 'Oh, oh.'

1543 **Nothing.**

1544 Right.

1545

1546 **(41:34) Now, maybe it was—someone suggested that General Vang Pao and some of the**
1547 **other higher ranking generals were essentially forced out of the country so that the United**
1548 **States could get these USAID people back that had been taken hostage.**

1549 No, no.

1550 **Have you heard anything about that?**

1551 No. Vang Pao left on May 14 and the USAID compound—office compound—in [***?] Vientiane
1552 and the housing compound out of Kilometer 6 did not get invested and surrounded and taken over
1553 until May 23 about. So no connection with VP and his people at all.

1554 **That's what I thought, but ...**

1555 Yeah, none whatsoever.

1556 **I just sit and listen.**

1557 And on the Lao government side, leadership side—the FAR military leadership side, they left on
1558 their own at different times—either in May and June and I don't know if anybody left in April. But
1559 others left later in the year. I can't see any connection at all because there's no organized exodus of
1560 the FAR generals and the like.

1561

1562 **(42:44) Well I think we've come full circle and caught up with the first part of our interview.**
1563 **But let's talk a little bit about the here and now and some of the issues that interest and**
1564 **occupy your time now.**

1565 Well, I'm 100% retired. I retired in January of 1992. That's quite—15 years now, yeah. And I did
1566 work for 22 months in Moscow between '94 and '96 on USAID contracts. But since '96, I've had no
1567 gainful employment. I haven't looked for any. But then still been involved unofficially in refugee
1568 issues and it's come more often that the Hmong are the problem than the other ethnic groups that are
1569 in Thailand. I think the other ethnic groups and probably the bulk of the Hmong are just seemingly
1570 integrated into Thai society already and lay low and aren't making problems.

1571

1572 **(43:44) What would you describe as some of the reasons for the continuing problems with**
1573 **the Hmong non-integration in Thailand?**

1574 Well, you say non-immigration, we're talking ...

1575 **Integration.**

1576 If there's 30,000 Lao-Hmong in Thailand, there's only, what, 22% of them are up at Wat Tham
1577 Krabok. The rest are seemingly disappeared into the woodwork in Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai and
1578 Nan and Mae Hong Son provinces, the other provinces. So, you've got 25% less than that at Huai
1579 Nam Khao in Petchabun. Many of those people will say at least 5,000 of them were either Wat
1580 Tham Krabok residents or were former residents of different—one or more UNHCR sponsored
1581 camps. You know, go back all the way to 1975—who missed the boat on U.S. resettlement. And
1582 who for, to a large extent in the last several years, would like to go to the U.S. now. You've got the
1583 Wat Tham Krabok population estimated at one time back in, say, 2000, 2001, 2002, to be up to
1584 20,000 or 25,000 or so, but people coming or going, out working as contract labor. You're moving
1585 up to Nan province for a year or more and then maybe coming back for parties with the family,
1586 marriages and the like. But when the Thai army took the inventory on August 2003, there were
1587 15,000 there. So, there's at least ten or more thousand absent. And many of those are ones who are
1588 at Wat Tham Krabok. And of the 15,000, who were on the inventory list, there were also people in
1589 Wat Tham Krabok at that time who declined to be listed at that time, but they were, 'Hey, this is
1590 another Thai army trick. They're going to get a name list and photos and then they're going to send
1591 us back to Laos.' So they were legitimately there, but not on the list, so they were ineligible for U.S.
1592 resettlement per the rules that were set by state and by the Thai. And then, out of the 15,000, there
1593 were others that declined to go to the U.S. and ones that were even INS approved, after that
1594 declined to go. And just a real mish-mash. Part of that—after August 2003, there were the phone
1595 calls from Thailand and the phone calls from the U.S. to Laos, to the jungle people, but also to
1596 Vientiane and Luang Prabang and the KM 52 and said, 'Hey, you all come now. This is your
1597 opportunity.' And that's roughly, say, 1,500 of the people that are in Nam Khao, some of whom, if
1598 they got hit with a decent UNHCR refugee qualification interview and one by the U.S. government,
1599 too many of those people would flunk it. And many of those people could go back to Laos without
1600 any real problems. But it's kind of questionable to me if somebody had been out since 1975, and
1601 even if they were, well, 15 or 10 years old when they came out, they're 40-some now and how they
1602 would do back on Laos, whether the Lao government would even acquiesce to having them back.
1603 Since they've been out so long, there might be an argument made of presumption of refugee status
1604 because of the long-term presence in Thailand in a first asylum country. And then, there's the jungle
1605 people who've legitimately come out in the last several months—six months and more—who are, I
1606 think, without a doubt, legitimate refugees, who are not—some in Wat Tham Krabok, many not in
1607 Wat Tham Krabok, like the 152 at Nong Khai. And then there's the people still in Laos who,
1608 against the Lao government, would finally allow UN, UNHCR or ICRC or almost anybody to do
1609 some monitoring and resettlement program, the jungle people would probably, largely come out,
1610 too. The impression I get talking to some of the foreigners, the Americans that have been up there
1611 and talked with them and, you know, kind of getting away from the rhetoric of [Chuckling]—and
1612 the bleeding heart side is that, you know, they're not a real resistance movement. They're more of a

1613 defensive posture and they want to be either left alone or, if they could be guaranteed a safety thing,
1614 'Hey, come out of the woods. It's nice they're living in a village complex.'

1615

1616 **(48:56) So, do you see any hope of some kind of constructive addressing of this refugee**
1617 **situation or do you think it's—we're in it for the long haul?**

1618 Well, as opposed to forced repatriation, I'd prefer the long haul.

1619 **Yes. Quite true. Quite true.**

1620 And at least for now, I don't see the U.S. government moving back on the State Department side.

1621 It's not so much an embassy problem here, an embassy problem in Vientiane on the U.S. side. It's

1622 State Department side and attitude problems in RP—Refugee Program Bureau. And 'Hey, all these

1623 folks, they're not refugees.' So, I guess if it gets to a point of forced repatriation, then we're getting

1624 back to what I was talking about yesterday, a first asylum case and first asylum is important. But it

1625 takes more than me retired out in Bangkok to turn the State Department around. [Both chuckle]

1626

1627 **(49:58) Yeah, especially post-9-11, I'm sure. I mean, that's complicated matters**
1628 **considerably.**

1629 Well, the bureaus—the State Department bureaus have their responsibilities and I—OK, they're

1630 taking 9,500 [Karen], I think, this fiscal year off the Burmese border and I don't—I've not looked

1631 into, researched at all what association the Karen had with the U.S. government, you know, since

1632 World War II. Well, World War II they did, OK, with the OSS and that and the British. But since

1633 then, was there any particular association? You know, they've been in Thailand—refugees in

1634 Thailand for 20 years, 30 years. It's a real problem for the Thai, problem for the refugees up there

1635 on the border. But why are 9,000—and I don't want to sound too much sour grapes here, but why

1636 are 9,500 Karen qualified for the U.S. refugee program when several thousand at Huai Nam Khao—

1637 many of whom did have a direct U.S. association with the SGU, were not qualified? The one reason

1638 is Thai and, I guess, probably state, too, are worried about the pull factor, the magnet factor. More

1639 go to the U.S., more will come out of Laos. Well, if anything new comes out of Laos, if they're a

1640 Hmong shopkeeper in Vientiane, send them back. And if they're jungle people, take them to

1641 Wisconsin or take them to the Twin Cities.

1642

1643 **(51:33) All right. Well, it's probably getting close to time for you to ...**

1644 All right. Well ...

1645 **... take off and ...**

1646 Oh, yeah. I've got Lee Pao ...

1647

1648 [Mr. Thompson is going to visit a Hmong man imprisoned in Thailand. Interviewer expresses his

1649 thanks, interview is over]

1650