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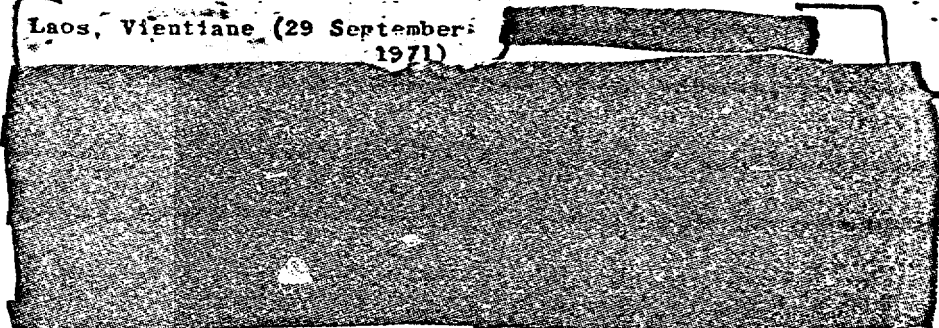
COUNTRY Laos/North Vietnam

DDI 1968 - August 1971

SUBJECT Low PL Morale, Local Economic Situation, PL Propaganda Activities, PL Prison and Hospital in the Nam Bac Area

ACQ Laos, Vientiane (29 September 1971)

SOURCE



Summary. As of late August 1971 the morale of the Pathet Lao (PL) troops in the Nam Bac area was very low due to a shortage of supplies and resentment toward the overbearing attitude of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) advisors and troops. A PL propaganda team was active in the villages in the Nam Bac area. The village chiefs oversaw the movement of the local people. A prison cave, used to detain local people who sympathized or collaborated with the Royal Lao Government, was located about five miles north of Nam Bac. The PL and NVA forces had not engaged in civic action projects in the Nam Bac area and allowed the villagers to run their own schools. End Summary.

1. As of late August 1971 the morale of the Pathet Lao (PL) troops in the Nam Bac (TH 3583) area was very low because of the lack of foodstuffs, medical supplies and clothing. Another factor contributing to the poor morale of the PL troops was the discrepancy noted by the PL between their lot and that of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) troops and advisors, who had sufficient supplies, medicine and entertainment. Most decisions were made by the NVA officers who set the standards and rules for the PL to follow. PL

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officers complained among themselves about NVA officers assuming all of the decision making responsibility because this infringed on the PL officers desired autonomy.

2. Due to the possibility of Royal Lao Government (RLG) air strikes, PL/NVA military personnel and a number of the civilian population no longer lived in Nam Bac proper, but in the outlying villages and caves. Local people were not allowed to engage in normal trade activities or operate as merchants unless they were members of the PL. Clothes, food and manufactured articles were not in abundance in the Nam Bac area. PL authorities set up a cooperative store in a cave (TH 401857) in which the local villagers could buy dry goods such as cloth, salt, knives, spades, soap, canned fish and other food products. Goods could only be purchased if villagers showed need and paid for the goods by barter or in PL currency. The primary means of earning a living was by farming. The PL/NVA conscripted about one-third of the total rice crop grown in the Nam Bac area. Occasionally the PL or NVA conscripted local villagers as coolies and paid them a salary, but this was generally considered too little to satisfy the laborers.

3. A PL propaganda team lead by O u n Kham and consisting of about 12 men and eight women was active in the area. The propaganda team visited the villages between one and three times a month. During the visits by the propaganda team, an assembly was called and discussion groups or speeches were held. (comment. Plays and visual aids were not used by the propaganda team.) The topics of discussion centered around Communist indoctrination, unity and cooperation with the PL, the need to act as informants on RLG movements in the area, and the necessity of supplying the PL with food and labor. The villagers were told that the seige of Luang Prabang in March 1971 was made to liberate the people in the surrounding areas from RLG control and that the villagers in Nam Bac would be better off if the PL would seize Luang Prabang. At the meetings the PL demonstrated their authority by arresting known RLG sympathizers in the villages.

4. The movements of ordinary villagers were not directly controlled by the PL/NVA, but were overseen by the village chiefs. For short travel, people were supposed to verbally inform the village chief about their business and obtain permission to conduct it. For long distance travel to other villages, villagers were required to obtain travel permission cards from the village chiefs. These cards contained the reason for the travel, the destination, and the duration of the visit. The cards were not of a standard type and did not need to be returned. (comment. The villagers in the Nam Bac area did not adhere very closely to the requirement to have a travel permission card and often traveled without such documentation.)

5. Approximately five miles north of Nam Bac, in the vicinity of TH 407927, there was, as of August 1971, a cave called the Na Mai Prison, also known as "Prison Number 2." There were no U.S. prisoners in this cave, or known U.S. prisoners in the entire Nam Bac area. The cave was used primarily as a temporary detaining area for local people who were arrested for collaboration with or sympathizing with the RLG and its military components. During the period of June-August 1971, there were seven prisoners from the local area in the Na Mai cave. (comment. [redacted])

(D) files do not contain any information on a prison in the [redacted] Current Order of Battle [redacted]

immediate TH 4000 vicinity. The closest prisons are at TH 3888 (no longer confirmed as the information is too old), TH 61904 (Pha Phung Cave) and TH 82700 (Phu Tho Cave Prison). However, analysis of 12 September 1978 photographs of the Nam Bac area revealed a probable cave located at TH 413028, approximately 200 meters east of the reported coordinates. An overgrown foottrail was observed leading toward the cave from an active rice paddy area at TH 4000. Two other probable caves were observed at TH 420030 and TH 420047. Some light foottrail activity was observed nearby.)

6. NVA and PL forces had not engaged in any civic action projects in the Nam Bac area since 1968 when approximately 50 NVA helped repair a small dam using empty gasoline drums. Villagers were allowed to set up their own local schools for grades "I to III," but were not assisted by the PL or NVA. Teachers were literate local people selected on a mutual consensus agreement. The subjects taught were Lao and basic arithmetic. Local villagers were dissatisfied with the quality of instruction, since they knew better education facilities were available elsewhere. A hospital was located in the Nam Sop Van (TH 808700) area with a capability to perform minor surgery. The hospital was supplied medicine from Sop Heng Nua storage area (TH 4077) by boat along the Nam Ou River. (Comment: Exactly for whom the hospital operated, or whether it admitted civilians was not known.) (Comment: The Sop Heng Nua storage area has been the target of an airstrike with unknown bomb damage. According to [redacted] listings the closest known hospital facilities to Sop Van which have surgical capability are in the Maeng Ngoi (TH 3801) area where both the PL and NVA have major facilities. The PL hospital has been reported to treat both military and civilian patients.)

7. Field Division. State Army Air, CUEPAC ANPAC PACAF  
PACFLT MACV TTH AF 7/12TH AF TTH BRPS (redacted)