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Refugee Policy of the USAID Mission to Laos

The following was the official Mission policy regarding the humanitarian assistance to the Lao government.

"It is the stated policy of the USAID Mission to Laos to assist the Royal Lao Government, both materially and technically, in the provision of timely and adequate assistance to refugees displaced, directly or indirectly, by military actions and political instability in Laos.

The established objectives of the refugee program are:

1. To demonstrate the humanitarian concern of the Royal Lao Government and the U.S. Government for the victims of the war in Laos.
2. To insure that the Royal Lao Government (RLG) has the necessary resources to assist refugees.
3. To promote and assist the reestablishment of civilian government authority and services for refugee groups, strengthening their ties with and loyalty to the RLG.
4. To assist the RLG to bring the economic, social and political condition of the refugees to a level equal to that of Lao citizens (non-refugees) living in the general area of relocation, whose immediate physical condition and environment have not been directly affected by the war.

Appropriate USAID resources are applied to the refugee program, in collaboration with the PLG, in the following order of priority:

1. Emergency movements created by or in anticipation of military

action. The primary requirements to support this phase are evacuation assistance; emergency medical care and attention; provision of food by surface, air-drop or landed load, and the provisioning and emergency staffing of temporary safehaven and staging areas for displaced refugees.

2. Relocation of refugees including allocation of land areas; provision of food, blankets, clothing, mosquito nets, utensils, shelter materials, medical care, assurance of adequate water supply; and movement of refugees into individual family housing constructed on a self-help basis.
3. Assistance in provision of essential facilities such as health, education, police, etc., including the establishing of appropriate agricultural production to bring the refugee groups to a living condition equal to that of non-refugees in the general area where refugee groups are relocated."

HISTORY OF THE REFUGEE PROGRAM IN LAOS 1960-1975

The first large modern-day refugee movements into and within Laos began after the fall of Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam and the subsequent Geneva Conference in 1954. One ethnic group, the T'ai Dam (Black Thai), moved from the Lai Chau and Dien Bien Phu areas of Vietnam into Phong Saly and Luang Prabang provinces. Many of these refugees later moved into Xieng Khouang, province, with many eventually settling in the outskirts of Vientiane.

In an unrelated move in the early 1950's several ethnic Lü settled in Houa Khong (Nam Tha) province after fleeing China. The first internal refugee movements in Laos occurred about the same time. Ethnic Lao Neua (Northern Lao) began to move southward from Hua Phan (Sam Neua) province into the Vientiane city area. Although present-day writers tend to negate the validity of early accounts of North Vietnamese incursions into Hua Phan at this time, refugees from the area maintain such incidents in fact occurred.

Over the years movements of ethnic groups into Vientiane gave rise to "quarters" similar to the quarters in Old Jerusalem, i.e. Hong Kha (the Lao Thung quarter), the Thai Dam quarter, the H'mong (Meo) quarter, the Hua Phan quarter, etc. In addition to the wealthier rural classes, many of these early refugees were officials' families and merchants (Lao and Chinese) who found the proximity to Communism untenable. In these early years when refugees evacuated their homes they found their own way out to safety, relocated themselves and eventually became self-sufficient. A small amount of U.S. Government furnished relief was provided through humanitarian organizations.

By the end of 1958 approximately 27,000 H'mong and other ethnic groups, primarily in the northern mountainous areas of Laos, had received assistance in this manner. However, these refugees had to rely mainly on assistance from local villagers.

Active U.S. participation in refugee affairs began after the Kong Le coup in 1960 and his eventual retreat to the Plaine de Jarres.

Irregular paramilitary units were formed in Xieng Khouang, Hua

Phan, Luang Prabang, Phong Saly and Houa Khong provinces in the early 1960's. Recruitment for these units was generally from among the ethnic minority groups such as the various Lao Thung groups, the H'mong (Meo), Yao and later Lu and Akha. These early groups operated in remote villages, deep in the contested mountain areas and revolved around villages or groups of villages rather than around a formal military structure. Being the first line of defense, these small isolated villages were vulnerable to concentrated or prolonged Communist thrusts. The primary consideration was to save the population, rather than to save or protect territory. As paramilitary units were forced to retreat from mountain top to mountain top, the villagers, who, for the most part included the families of the paramilitary units, retreated also. In short, entire villages were evacuated in what was to become a slow 15 year pull back to the south.

This combined paramilitary/dependent/dislocated persons exodus obviously needed external support for two reasons. First, as the level of Communist pressure continued to increase, the paramilitary could no longer attempt to protect their villages and clear fields and grow rice. Likewise, those villagers displaced were not able to grow sufficient amounts of food to sustain themselves. In evacuating their villages, often under fire from the enemy, villagers could not bring with them large supplies of rice or animals. Neither could non-refugee villagers continue to support a large influx of refugees into their areas. Upland rice fields must be cleared during January, burned off during February, March and April, planted during May and harvested in late October or early November. Thus the various displaced ethnic groups in the mountains had little chance to support themselves. This disrupted the entire local economic structure as the displaced

people could not only not grow sufficient amounts of food, neither could they produce the cotton and flax normally used to produce clothing. Normal trading routes into China and Vietnam were also disrupted, stopping the flow of salt and other necessities the mountain people could not produce themselves.

It should be stressed ^{here} that the refugee program ^{was} initiated as an adjunct of the para-military efforts in North Laos and for no other reason. The H'mong and other ethnic groups rely strongly on close family and clan bonds. It was quickly recognized that unless material support (food, clothing, tools) was provided to displaced villagers and to para-military dependents, the will and means to defend these remote northern areas would be undermined. However, the close co-ordination of the para-military-refugee program did not extend to the south, where ^{at} no time did the USAID support para-military dependents.

This problem of support was recognized early on in the general overall strategy of the Indochina conflict. In order to maintain this front line para-military defense substantial means of support was organized within the U.S. Mission in conjunction with the Royal Lao Government (RLG) and a Refugee Relief Branch was organized within the Rural Development Division to co-ordinate and implement delivery of relief commodities to refugees and the para-military and their dependents. The original PRO AG was signed in 1962 between the USAID and Mr. Keo Vipakhorn, then Commissioner for Rural Affairs of the RLG. A Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Branch was organized within USAID under the Assistant Director of the Rural Development Division. The initial staff consisted of a few Americans, a Filipino and a Vietnamese who worked in conjunction with local Lao field assistants.

~~and~~ It was not uncommon for field personnel to come to Vientiane, secure their own commodities, help load the planes and then fly out with them.

Initially U.S. Mission personnel were assigned to Ban Houie Sai, Luang Prabang and Sam Thong to tabulate numbers of people needing support by category (para-military, para-military dependent, or refugee). It should be clearly noted that para-military dependents were themselves often refugees. (By 1969 all such dependents were technically refugees). For funding purposes within the U.S. Mission it was important to maintain complete and separate food lists.

The ^{core}care of the program consisted of three or four Americans working out of a makeshift hut at Sam Thong in western Xieng Khouang Province. However, the key to the entire support program was the aerial food delivery system which was perfected in the early 1960's. Rice and PL-480 commodities in triple ^Spacked, 40 kilogram increments were air dropped to remote villages and ~~and~~ para-military units. The air-drop program was an outstanding success, both from the technical standpoint as well as the humanitarian.

In 1965 AID/Laos recruited several ex-Peace Corps Volunteers in order to expand the program country-wide. The Refugee Relief Branch had two Americans in the Vientiane office, two Americans coordinating the program in Ban Houie Sai, one operations officer in Luang Prabang, four to six Americans in Sam Thong and one each in Thakhek and Pakse. There were many more Americans in the field in Laos, but these were the ones directly involved with refugees.

~~and~~
The Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Project was initially operated

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as a branch of the Rural Development Division (RDD) headed by the Assistant Director for Rural Development (AD/RD). The Refugee Project field staffs came directly under the AD/RD and not the local Area Coordinator (AC). Food for Peace, while not directly under the Refugee Project, was located in the same office.

In September 1970 the RDD was split into two assistant directorships-- the ~~Asst~~ Assistant Director for Field Operations (AD/FO) and the Assistant Director for Refugee Affairs (AD/RA). The AD/RA consisted of a deputy, the Refugee Affairs Officer (RAO) and four separate branches, ie. the Refugee Relief Branch (RRB), Refugee Affairs Administrative Branch (RAA), the Refugee Relocation Branch (RRL) and the Food for Peace (FFP) Branch. The functions of these branches were as follows:

- 1) Refugee Relief Branch (RRB), which provided emergency relief to refugees as they were initially displaced, carried out requirements for refugee censuses; determined commodity requirements, including medical supplies, coordinated logistics requirements, and monitored refugee supplies.
- 2) Refugee Affairs Administrative Branch (RAA) organized, monitored and served as a central repository of all information relating to refugee affairs, including evaluation of conditions of refugee groups, problems, progress, and potential for phase-out of assistance.
- 3) The Refugee Relocation Branch (RRL) planned monitored, backstopped, and acted as liaison with other Mission elements to assure implementation of steps designated as second and third priorities.

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4) The Food for Peace Branch (FFP) programmed and monitored the use of PL-480 commodities.

In December 1973 the AD/FO was abolished and a new office, the Office of Refugee and Rural Affairs (ORRA) under the Assistant Director for Refugee and Rural Affairs (AD/RAA) was created. The Refugee Relocation Branch had become increasingly more important since 1970. By 1973 the primary emphasis in the refugee program was on relocation. The Branch Chief of the RRL became the deputy to the AD/RAA and in fact had de jure, if not always de facto, control of running the ORRA and determining policy. A Project Support Branch was later added which was essentially the old Refugee Relief Branch in disguise but with increased responsibility for logistical control of all ORRA commodities. This branch was later reorganized and the logistics control was put under the FFP branch chief. Most of these changes were cosmetic and were really not essential or conducive to good office management.

It should be noted here that while the basic goals of the refugee program remained constant, the modalities to implement those goals changed. The initial phase was one primarily of ~~emergency~~ ^{emergency} relief with an attempt to organize basic infrastructure in remote villages. The phase ended about 1970. The second phase made an attempt to relocate selected groups of refugees in areas where they might become self sufficient in food stuffs, There were integrated projects providing land, housing, schools etc.. Both phase one and phase two emphasized a large import of American technicians with operational control of the program. Phase two ended in December 1974 when the Provisional Government of National Union, in conjunction with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, began to canvas the refugees for eventual return to their original villages.

In phase one, the primary emphasis in the program was in the north and concentrated primarily on relief support to para-military dependents and refugees actively caught up in the burgeoning war. The scenario for getting support to refugees and para-military dependents followed a rather regular pattern. New refugees would be reported through Lao military or civilian channels. Depending upon the location, an American and a H'mong USAID assistant would visit the location either on foot or by helicopter or airplane the same day or at the latest the following day. Village leaders would be interviewed to determine all details regarding the refugees' former village, people who might still be there, nature of the action that forced them to leave, etc. After all data was gathered name lists by family were broken down by sex and age. If the group was large enough and no rice was immediately available in the village, a portable SSB radio was used to request

a rice drop from Vientiane. Normally the American and H'mong assistant would remain overnight with the refugees for further discussions regarding immediate relocation. When the name lists were completed the amounts and types of commodities needed were compiled. Depending upon the situation, the USAID personnel might order the commodities by radio or return to Sam Thong with the list. By 1968-69 the pressures of sustaining large numbers of people in widely scattered areas became so great that the USAID operations officer would usually move to other sites and return later for name lists, commodities lists, etc. In other cases the operations officer might remain with the refugees overnight to emphasize to the refugees that support was coming--in general to give them moral support. When the commodities arrived at the refugee site the refugees were assembled by name to receive relief commodities. A normal distribution would be computed as follows:

- 1 large pot per family
- 1 small pot " "
- 1 saute pan " "
- 1 bowl per two people
- 1 plate " " "
- 1 spoon " person
- 1 waterpail per family
- 1 blanket for 1-4 people (2 for 5-7 people, 3 for 8-11, etc.)
- 1 ax per family
- 1 knife per family
- 1 bar soap per family
- 1 mosquito net (same as blankets)
- 1 mat per family
- 1 can salad oil per family
- clothes for men - one set shirt/trousers
- clothes for women - one set blouse/skirt
- clothes for boy - one set boys shirt/trousers
- clothes for girl - one set blouse/girl's skirt
- other assorted items as available

Iron bars were often substituted for knives and axes if the refugees had time to make their own. Refugees coming in January through March would be given tools immediately as they were needed for clearing rice fields.

Vegetable seeds were also distributed. For the H'mong bolts of black cloth were distributed at the rate of 3 meters per person so that they could tabulate their individual ethnic dress which was totally different than Lao dress. Food was computed on the basis of 15 kilograms of rice per person per month and salt at 500 grams per person per month. Canned meat, when available, was distributed on the basis of immediate need--one can per 2 people per day, later reduced to roughly 2 cans per family per week, depending on how much food the refugees were able to grow themselves. Para-military dependents also received the same items as refugees if they were displaced. In the very early days of the program iron bars, salt and cloth were given to para-military dependents as a little bonus. Salaries of these early units were very low, if they received anything at all. If there were troops with the refugees, their rice was figured at 18 kilograms per person per month.

For any given drop zone (DZ) the amount of rice and salt needed for a month was figured on a total cumulative basis and the actual percentage breakout was done on the ground by local leaders. The rice drop planes, normally C-46's flying from Vientiane, were given a set of UTM coordinates and signal ⁱⁿ ~~no~~ order to locate and identify the DZ. As each individual DZ had a distinctive signal panel such as a red "A" or white "T" etc., the refugees would place the panel on the DZ as they saw the plane approaching. Pilots were instructed not to drop unless they saw the panel being put into place. If a signal panel was left in place permanently, the pilot would have no way of knowing if the people were still there or if the site were still friendly. By seeing the refugees place the panel it was assumed the site was friendly.

Once emergency relief was dispensed with, thoughts were given to relocation. If the area was secure enough the people were encouraged to remain in the same area. All such decisions were closely coordinated with General Vang Pao, Commander of MR II, and the governors of Xieng ^{Khouang} Khoung, Chao Saykham, and Hua Phan, Col Thong and after his death in 1965, Col. Phan. This same scenario was followed in certain areas of Luang Prabang and Hua Khong provinces which tactically fell under MR II, even though geographically in MR I. If the refugees were in an area too insecure to build villages, they would walk, if possible, to more secure areas. If this was impossible, air lift of the refugees to more secure areas would be undertaken as a last resort.

Support in phase one was basic in nature although food was always abundant. PL-480 butter and salad oil were extremely popular. Corn meal was accepted by some H'mong from the Nong Het area. While other PL-480 foodstuffs were regularly shipped out from Vientiane and Sam Thong, there was really no program to integrate these foods into the diet of the refugees. Physical debilitation was not yet the problem in phase one that it later became. The larger problem was primarily the emotional shock and trauma generated by a sudden and unexpected exodus from a village. As in any situation of this nature the very young and very old were usually the first to succumb to ⁱ disease or illness.

When it was determined where the refugees would relocate, they were assisted and urged to build small air strips capable of taking STOL (short-take-off-landing) aircraft such as the Helio Courier and the Pilatus Porter. These strips were from 450 feet to 1800 feet in length. Most were situated on high ridge lines or mountainsides. Usually buffeted

by strong, unpredictable winds, often shrouded in fog or mist, a "normal" landing would generally set the adrenalin flowing! Planes coming into these strips carried USAID or RLG personnel, medicine, food, school supplies, etc.. They were also used to evacuate wounded or seriously ill. Attempts were made to set up simple village infrastructure. This usually consisted of bamboo schools and dispensaries. Teachers and teaching material were sent to the village. If no RLG teachers were available, qualified para-military who may have had from one to three years schooling would conduct classes. Much of the early support for the schools came from private donations of money, pencils, paper etc.. Neither the USAID nor the RLG was initially interested in supporting these schools. By the late 1960's this situation had changed in most areas. Dispensaries were usually staffed by a medic or trained and paid by the USAID, nurse although occasionally an RLG medic or a para-military medic were available. Medicine was furnished by the USAID. In the vast majority of cases the mountain people in the north had never had schools or dispensaries in their villages. The limited resources of the RLG had not allowed such luxuries prior to this time.

The refugees were encouraged to maintain village life as closely as possible in their new locations. For the most part village leaders, both formal and informal, were retained. For security purposes overall authority for the village rested with local military commanders. All of these efforts, including the encouragement to continue traditional village life, were directed towards maintaining the will and desire of the people to fight.

~~To continue with the program in the north for a moment,~~ The mid 1960's was a period where the Area Coordinator of Xieng Khouang, Mr. Edgar

"Pop" Buell and his staff had a broad mandate from the Ambassador, William Sullivan. As a result, a very young staff (average age in their mid to late 20's) were able to coordinate a fast moving program, gather information not readily available elsewhere and make positive decisions with little or no supervision. It would be difficult to imagine a situation where a group of highly motivated, but low grade-lowly paid personnel had such support and confidence from their superiors.

In 1966-1967 the RLG, while losing a few key areas such as Hua Muong (LS 58) in the north, actually gained some ground. Na Khang (LS36) was lost in early 1966 but retaken 3 months later. Operations expanded in the Nong Khang (L52) area north of Sam Neua City. The Phu Pha Louie (LS226-228) operation conducted by ~~BU~~^{6V} 26 looked very promising deep in PL territory east of RIG 6. Friendly expansion in the Keo Bone area north of Nong Het was offset by the loss of several sites astride RIG 6 where it enters the ~~pan~~ Ban Valley. Earlier losses in 1965 south of the Plaine des Jarres (PDJ) were not recovered although Muong Ngan (LS236) was occupied in 1967. San Teau, (LS02) expanded east of the PDJ. The two sites set up in eastern Luang Prabang as a pushing off point for Operation Link-up continued to draw in LaoThung refugees with a subsequent increase in para-military strength in that area. One tragedy which outweighed all the gains was the death of Don Sjustrom, an operations officer, in a pre-dawn attack at Na Khang (LS36) in January 1967. By late 1967 a half-hearted attempt was made at Operation Link-up in an effort to draw Vietnamese troops away from the Nam Bac (LS203) Valley. The list of gains and losses are too many to enumerate. However, in each instance more refugees were generated.

December 1967 saw the beginning of large-scale Communist offensives in northern Laos including an abortive air attack by 3 Vietnamese biplanes on Phu Pha Thi (LS85). Vietnamese troops mopped up one small outpost after another in north central Hua Phan. On March 6-7, 1968, after an all night intensive shelling and early morning ground assault, the keystone of north Laos, Phu Pha Thi (LS85) was abandoned by the RLG with the loss of approximately 14 American lives. The following day the USAID operations center at Houie Kha Moun (LS111) was hit by the Vietnamese. Prior to the attack 4,000 refugees were on the strip awaiting helicopter evacuation under the direction of American operations officer. Extremely accurate mortar fire hit the little USAID shack destroying the radio and generator. Fortunately the USAID man was picked up unharmed. About half of these refugees were able to walk to RLG-held villages while the remainder were captured. Attempts were made to relocate 15,000 H'mong, Lao Thung, Lao Neua and T'ai Dam at Phu Loi near LS 184 ^{but poor} ~~about~~ POW security made that plan unfeasible. 2 March 1968 the U.S. Ambassador gave the approval to ~~an~~ evacuated 12,000 civilians from Sam Neua to points south of Long Threng. This first airlift tacitly acknowledged that those people could never return to secure villages in Hua Phan. It also implied that the U. S. government would assist in moving refugees from insecure areas to places where they could be safely relocated.

In September 1968 an offensive to retake Phu Pha Thi was launched. After heavy Lao-H'mong casualties, the operation was called off at the end of December. Another 10,000 refugees were air-lifted to Phu Loi. These people remained there until January 1970, when they were all evacuated by

U.S. AirForce helicopters to the Sam Thong-Long Thieng area. In March 1969 Na Khang (LS36) the center of support for the Houa Phan area was overrun with heavy RLG casualties including the military commander and governor, Col. Phan. Small enclaves north of Nong Het held out until mid-1970 when they were overrun. A few hundred civilians were evacuated by USAF aircraft but the program in the north was effectively dead.

In 1968 other parts of northern Laos were fairing no better. Sites in Southern Phong Saly were lost as were territories in northern and western Luang Prabang. Inhabited largely by Lao Thung tribal groups, the loss of these lands did not generate the number of refugees expected as people were either cut-off or elected to stay behind. The same was true after the fall of Nam Bac in January 1968. Confidence in RLG leadership in Nam Bac was minimal due to mismanagement of the area by local commanders. Neither was troop morale enhanced when misguided air strikes wiped out an entire company of Lao troops.

By the end of 1968 the original conceptual relationship between the para-military, their dependents, the refugees and local villagers was nearly finished. Long before official air evacuations had been sanctioned thousands of civilians had managed to flee north Laos into the Sam Thong-Long Thieng ^{area} returning aircraft.

The complete disintegration of the original concept of the para-^{three} military-civilian relationship ended when two important decisions were made. The first was to attack and attempt to hold the Plaine des Jarres, secondly to relocate the civilian population ^{found} there, thirdly, to integrate village para-military (ADC's) into the more structured Special Guerrilla Units (SGU's).

The comments below are in no way intended to pass judgment on the decisions affecting these ~~two~~ events, nor should they be construed as a conscious attempt to change the program.. They are mentioned here only as they affected the refugee program in the north.

In April and May 1969 RLG forces captured Xieng Khouangville and later, in June-August, the entire Plaine des Jarres (PDJ) area. Approximately 20-25,000 civilians fled or were initially evacuated to more safe areas near the PDJ. There was no clear-cut overall policy regarding these refugees by either the RLG or the USAID. Many refugees were cheated or robbed of belongings by the RLG para-military troops. Because General Vang Pao, Commander of MR II, would not allow the civilians to remain on the fringe areas of the PDJ, all refugees were initially air evacuated a short distance away to Tha Tham Bleung (LS 72). This small STOL strip and surrounding tiny valley could not safely absorb all the incoming refugees. Black plastic for roofing and plastic tubing for water systems was used here on a large scale for the first time. Later as the RLG consolidated their hold on the PDJ, new relocation areas were set up on the Plaines. Although there was some recruitment among the refugees, many (if not most) were PL sympathizers with sons or husbands in the PL army. Approximately 1000 non-Lao civilians, primarily Chinese and Vietnamese, with some Indians and Khmer were air evacuated to Vientiane where they were taken in by their respective ethnic, social or political societies. By January 1970 the military situation had deteriorated on the Plaines such that neither could the refugees be trusted nor could they be adequately protected. In February the civilian refugees were airlifted from the Plaine Des Jarres area to Vientiane and located in the surrounding areas. The points here are that, one,

a large scale military operation was undertaken to spoil future enemy advances south and to hold land. This was a clear divergence from the past whereby the civilians were an integral part of the overall plan. Secondly, the concept of relocating such large numbers of civilians was relatively new. The third departure is outlined below.

Nearly every village in the northern area had para-military ADC's who received food support and some money. There were also ADO's who received no support. Both of these groups, in theory, protected only their own areas. The Special Guerrilla Units (SGU's) were widely recruited and their dependents were allowed to settle in Long Thieng for safety as these units might be sent anywhere in MR II. To bolster the sagging SGU's, ADC's were converted to SGU's or simply taken from their villages to help defend the PDJ. This again broke down the conventional para-military and civilian relationship. As a result those few isolated villages in north MR II quickly fell leaving Long Thieng and Sam Thong virtually the front lines. Except for Phu Cum (LS50) and Boum Long (LS 32) there were no other RLG enclaves north or east of the PDJ.

While the RLG had been moving on the southern edges of the Plaines in June 1969, the Vietnamese beseiged Muong Souie (L 108), the large neutralist stronghold just off the north-west edge of the Plaines. The USAID had been enlarging the airfield at Xieng Dat southwest of Muong Souie as a contingency fall back point. However the retreating neutralist troops refused to regroup and fled directly to Xieng Dat, some even arriving before the civilian refugees. The airstrip was open for one day--just long enough for a C-130 to pick up the heavy duty equipment, and for C-123's to airlift civilians to Vang Vieng. Five-six thousand civilians were relocated around

the Vang Vieng area.

One more word about MR II in phase one. Sam Thong fell on 20 March 1970. Prior to that work had begun on a fall-back strip near an old Lao village, Ban Xon. A large airstrip was constructed, support facilities were put up, such as warehouses, office space, and a small hospital. The USAID support center for what was left of the old program was then conducted out of Ban Xon, or Na Sou (LS 272) as it was also called.

Other areas of northern Laos were faring no better. Nam Bac fell in January 1968 (above). By 1970, RLG areas in western Luang Prabang, the Nam Houn Valley and Nam Beng Valley were lost. In November 1969 the fall of the last RLG position on the Mekong between Pak Ou and Pak Tha closed that river for shipping between Luang Prabang and Ban Houie Sai. This in effect isolated both towns in different ways. Luang Prabang had to ^{rely} ~~reply~~ on only RIG 13 or the Mekong from Vientiane. Commercial cargo and rice could not be barged in from Thailand. Ban Houie Sai, on the contrary, could receive commodities from Thailand but was cut off from the rest of Laos. In one positive thrust in 1967 RLG troops captured Nam Tha for a day or two. Over 5000 civilians were brought out by the Lao Army which in fact was the primary purpose of the operation. A determination was made by the Refugee Relief Branch Chief in Vientiane ^{reluctantly} ~~which refused~~ support for these refugees on the basis that these people did qualify as refugees under the circumstances. (In fact most of these people were in some way related to many of the para-military in the Ban Houie Sai area.) A USAID operations officer later left AID over the dispute whether or not to feed these people.

Thus by early 1970 all of north Luang Prabang was gone, as well as the area west to the Nam Tha (River). Luang Prabang itself was nearly encircled. With a record high of 48,000 people on the support rolls, land was at a premium. Villages on the Mekong which had always been secure, were swiftly overrun. The ensuing struggle the next two years virtually destroyed all the old villages up river including Ban Pak Ou.

Although not accompanied by the same sense of urgency, other portions of Laos felt the impact of the war. In 1961 three important areas in central Laos were lost--Mahaxay, Xepon and Khamkeut. In the panhandle and the south the North Vietnamese consolidated their hold on the Lao-Vietnam border area during the mid and late 1960's. In 1970 the military encroachments by the South Vietnam into Laos forced the North Vietnamese to move further west to protect their old trail system and to open up new trails into the Khmer Republic. Large numbers of civilians were displaced. However, except for the Saravane ^{and numerous Phao} area, much of the population was either cut off or elected to remain in their villages.

In August 1970 Saravane and Attapeu in the south fell and Muong Phalane went ^{as} ~~the~~ of January 1971. Fighting continued intermittently at those locations as well as ^{at} Thateng and Dong Hene up to the ceasefire in February 1975. In December 1970, 1200 civilians from Thateng and Houie Sai fled to Paksong and later to Pakse. In early 1971 Vietnamese troops attacked the Houie Nam Phak relocation site south of Pakse. A school, dispensary, office and cooperative store were destroyed. Several bulldozers and tractors were destroyed or damaged and personal goods of the refugees were stolen. The attack lasted only one night and the USAID and RLG staff

remained in the project. There were no further attacks. In March 1971 continued attacks along RIG 9 in the Muong Phalane-Dong Hene area produced 2243 refugees. 7000 civilians were trucked into Pakse from Saravane. 2500 refugees fled Muong Phalane in mid-March 1971. The RLG made successful gains in the Phalane area as 1500 refugees began to return to Muong Phalane. However, by late April Phalane was recaptured by the Vietnamese and Dong Hene followed. 4000 and 2800 refugees respectively were displaced. In June Dong Hene was reoccupied and by November 2936 of 2983 refugees had returned home. The USAID then drafted plans to rebuild Dong Hene. By late 1971, the Vietnamese were again in Saravane, Muong Phalane, Thateng and Paksong as the civilian population again fled these areas. Dong Hene held on until 7 February 1972 when it was overrun. Heavy fighting continued in the Saravane area into the ceasefire period. Almost 10,000 refugees were reported from the area in January and February 1973. These people settled first in Khong Sedone and later nearer Pakse.

On 17 May 1972, in a sudden move, Vietnamese forces occupied the provincial capital of Khong ^{Sedone} ~~Sedone~~. During the initial occupation 1500 refugees fled to Savannakhet and 1300 went to Pakse. By the end of May 7300 civilians had fled from the Khong Sedone area. Fighting continued until the end of the year spreading throughout the entire province of Wapi~~K~~hamthong as several thousand civilians fled from Wapi town and from south of Khong Sedone.

In another sudden and surprise move on 28 October 1972 Vietnamese troops attacked and captured two key Lao towns in Central Laos. Nam Thone (LS 141A or Grove Jones 2) on strategic RIG ^B in northern Khammouane province fell, thus severing the land route between Vientiane and Thakhek and Savannakhet.

The other town to fall, Kengkok, was an important rice growing area and home of many high ranking Lao officials. Nong Bok, near Thakhek, was raided as was the Seno relocation site and 145 people were abducted.

RLG forces quickly retook Kengkok and the 3000 plus civilians who had fled were soon able to return home. No moves were made around Nong Bok nor did the Seno raid displace anyone other than those abducted. The capture of Nam Thorne was more serious. In 1967-68 7000 civilians, who had previously fled Khamkeut in the early '60's, were relocated near Nam Thorne along RIG #13. These people were again displaced along with several thousand other villagers. 4-5000 of these Khammoune people eventually came as far north as Vientiane and were relocated at Pak Sap on the Vientiane Plains.

During the first half of 1973 several thousand civilians continued to filter out of Vietnamese-held areas of central and south Laos. Although the cease-fire formally took effect in February 1973 sporadic fighting continued into the early part of 1974. Most notable in the south was the fall of Paksong after the ceasefire and serious Vietnamese incursions around Hin Boun.

By the time that the Provisional Government of National Union was formed in April 1974 the refugee situation in the south had stabilized somewhat. Some movement of peoples back into the Lao Patriotic Forces (LPF) zone was going on primarily into the Saravane region.

In the north during the years 1970-73 the Vietnamese continued to press against the outskirts of ^{Luang}~~Duang~~ Prabang, several times hitting the airport area with rockets, although the enemy was never able to effectively penetrate the inner city defenses. By the time of the ceasefire in February 1973, the RLG had regained the villages along the Mekong River up to Pak Ou

and several kilometres up both the Nam Ou and Nam Xuang (Rivers). This allowed several thousand villagers to return home to attempt to rebuild their war-ravaged villages. The USAID began an ambitious program to build schools and install gravity-fed water systems in this area. Several villages along the Nam Xuang formed a buffalo cooperative with funds provided by the USAID. The cooperative closely followed a successful swine cooperative in Muong Khai several years previously. In both cases a certain amount of money was put up by both USAID and the villagers for the initial purchase of the animals. Under the terms of the agreement a fixed number of offspring were retained to form a new cooperative in another village. After the initial obligation all other offspring belonged to the original association.

Most refugees in the Luang Prabang area stayed in place during the 14 month interval between the ceasefire and the formation of the Provisional Government for National Union in April 1974. However by the end of 1974, substantial numbers of refugees had returned to their original homes in the PL-controlled zone of north Laos. The modus operandi was worked out locally for their return. Each family was given a "grubstake" kit which aided in both rebuilding their old villages and clearing land. Other parts of north Laos were also coming under heavy pressure. The ancient Lao villages of Ban Done (LS ²⁸~~28~~), the residence of the second ranking Buddhist monk in Laos, was overrun in December 1970. In this same general area along the Lao-Vietnamese boarder in north-central Laos, Muong ^{Mok}~~Mak~~ (LS 46) and Muong Nham (LS 63) came under heavy pressure. By January 1971 5000 civilians were milling around the latter two villages while 2000 civilians fled to Paksane from Ban ^DDone. Muong Nham fell on April 1, 1971, was later retaken

and lost again on January 10, 1972. Most of the civilians along the Vietnam border remained in place. Some H'mong made their way S-W to Nam Heo (LS 360) and adjacent areas N-E of Paksane. This small enclave was still loyal to the RLG up to the very end.

A significant event occurred in September 1972 in this same general area north of Khamkeut which merits some mention in length. A local ethnic Thai Pong group who had been Pathet Lao soldiers for several years contacted a H'mong intel team operating between Khamkeut and Pha Hom (LS 241) and offered to defect. The group, including the Pathet Lao military co^mmander and the Pathet Lao ex-governor were taken to Long Thieng to meet General Vang Pao. An agreement was reached whereby support was to be given to several thousand Thai Pong and H'mong (many former supporters of General Van P^ao) villages. The group of Thai Pong rebelled and killed over 30 Vietnamese troops. (One report indicated that the slain Vietnamese may have been immobilized soldiers in a remote hospital recuperating from war wounds.) The operation began as somewhat of a mystery--and this general atmosphere continued to prevail. Reports reached AID that 4000 refugees had assembled in a village called Na Leng north of Khamkeut. As the entire area had supposedly defected, it was unclear why there were 4000 displaced people. In the meantime the Prime Minister, before emplaning for a trip to France, gave explicit orders that this operation was to be given utmost priority with assistance to be provided to both defecting military and the civilian population. In the meantime, unknown to anyone else, the governor of ~~Thakhe~~^{Thakhet} and the Commanding Officer of MR III, in which area the operation was actually taking place, flew to Na Leng along with a local USAID representative from ~~Thakhe~~^{Thakhet}. They passed out a small amount of commodities. Later MR V, which was closest ~~logistically~~^{geographically}, said they should be in charge of

the operation. In the meantime there was indecision on the part of the U.S. Mission whether or not the CIA or the Defense Attache Office should provide support. The USAID continued to drop rice. The operation expanded and several new landing zones (LZ's) were set up and Pha Hom (LS 241) was reopened. Even though several trips were made to the area, it was impossible to get meaningful figures on the Vicilian population. The military impasse was "resolved" when MR V was given control of the operation under General Thonglith ~~the successor of General Kou~~ and General ^{Aht} Ont. This was ironic because one of the reasons that many people of these had ~~Thai Pong~~ sided with the Pathet Lao years ago was the unfair treatment (so they considered) meted ~~and~~ to them by these same military officers in MR V. (General, then Major Aht ^{had} ~~and~~ been in charge of Paksane for years. After the abortive Phoumi coupe in early 1965 Aht was responsible for tracking down fugitive Phoumi supporters in the mountains north and east of Paksane.) Once MR V had control of the operation it was extremely difficult for the American USAID personnel to visit the area regularly. A large contingent of the defectors were brought to Vientiane and were given VIP treatment at the airport by the RLG. They were feted for 3 days with detailed accounts of the story in the local papers. A USAID representative met again with the leaders of the group at Chinaimo Military Camp to determine what support they needed in addition to rice and salt. The meeting was vague and inconclusive. It was obvious that a highly inflated figure had been reported in terms of numbers of people. Although the USAID continued to drop rice to several DZ's in the area to both Thai Pong and H'mong, no real commodity support was given. Also planes from both MR II and MR V began to air evacuate several hundred H'mong from the area. Some key Thai Phong defectors and

their families were also air lifted out. But by the end of the year the Vietnamese were pressing the small outposts. They fell one by one and by the time of the cease-fire in February 1973 the area had been retaken by the Vietnamese. The ex-Governor escaped but the former Pathet Lao military ^{Commander} was captured and reported to have been executed by the Vietnamese. Thus the entire operation--known as Operation Spartacus--died a slow death. Unfortunately, the defection was an anachronism--occurring at the wrong time in history and in the wrong place. It was an operation that required the full attention and support of all involved. Unfortunately neither was given, although the USAID was ready to assist. Operation Spartacus might have succeeded in 1965 or 1966--in late 1972 it was doomed for failure.

9 While south-eastern MR II was crumbling, the north-west section of MR II where it abuts with MR I was also coming under heavy attack. Several thousand Lao Thung from LS's 196 and 178--the old original "Operation Linkup" sites fell. The civilian population, as well as the para-military, were trapped. In March 1971 another 8000 Lao Thung and Meo from Lima Sites 57 and 180 north of RIG 7 headed for the direction of RIG 13. In addition 2000 civilians formerly at the old neutralist center of Muong Souie began moving west, south-west. When that area fell on 4 February, general uncertainty brought about by Vietnamese incursions around Long Thieng put 30-40,000 refugees into a confused flight.

North of the PDJ Phu Bia fell on 28 June 1971. In December, during the initial days of H'mong new year, the Vietnamese launched massive attacks against the PDJ. In one day the entire Plaines was overrun. The refugee population crowded into the "crescent" from Long Thieng south of the PDJ panicked. An estimated 40,000 people evacuated their villages, many not in

direct danger of the Vietnamese thrust. However thousands of refugees had been warned by the Vietnamese that if they were caught again they would be killed. This was especially true of the Thai Dam and La^o N^y, many of whom fled as far as the Vientiane Plain^s. 3389 civilians fled from Ban Xon area itself to Vientiane.

On 21 January 1972, after 10 days of fighting, Sala Phu Khoun, the junction of RIG's 7 and 13, fell, as the RLG force retreated south towards Muong Kassy. 3600 civilians fled their homes. Kiu Khacham, in the same area, on RIG 13, fell on 31 January 1972. 7000 more refugees began to move. The situation stabilized and by March Phu Chia (LS 25), near RIG 13, was retaken. Continued fighting around Long Thieng did not generate any more big moves of people although there were trickles of small groups as late as March. In a bizarre move 3-4,000 H'mong living in MR I requested in May 1972 to return to MR II. In a unilateral move ~~General~~ ^{General} Vang Pao concurred. The very old, and young and infirm were flown out of Luang Prabang on RLAF planes. The remainder rented trucks where possible or walked to Vang Vieng. RIG 13 and adjacent areas were not all that secure, but all those who elected to move eventually reached MR II and were put on the support rolls.

In nearby ~~Sya~~ Sayaboury province 12 Yumbri (Phi Thong Luang or "Spirits of the Yellow Leaves") contacted a local village leader for support. They were brought to Sayaboury and given clothing and food. This was an event of extraordinary anthropological significance as the total population of these shy people probably number slightly over 100. They normally will leave forest products that they have gathered on edges of villages, particularly H'mong. They then melt back into the forest. The villagers will in return leave salt or a knife etc. near the Yumbri products. When the villagers have

gone the Yumbri return. If satisfied with the exchange the Yumbri take the village goods, leave their own products and disappear! If the exchange is not satisfactory the Yumbri leave the goods in place for the villagers to add to or perhaps to substitute items. The Yumbri do not build houses nor do they really cultivate crops. Males and females separate into separate groups during various times of the year and reunite at a given time and place. These people sought assistance because the Pathet Lao had killed some of their small band and they were afraid. After a week or so these people disappeared and were never seen again.

North of the Plaine des Jarres only two enclaves held out--Bouam Long (LS 32) and Phu Cum (LS 50). While the courage and tenacity of the H'mong and Lao Thung were equally outstanding, at both places, Bouam Long has received deservedly more attention. Situated in a small bowl with one open end, Bouam Long is surrounded by hills, each topped by a small, but well-dug in position. For two years Buam Long was subjected to continuous ground and rocket attacks by the Vietnamese. Scores of civilians, as well as troops, were killed or wounded. Several instances Vietnamese sappers penetrated the airstrip, only to be killed or driven out. The most remarkable thing was that there was never a day when the 4000 civilians and 500 troops lacked food or supplies. Air America and Continental Airlines crews braved incredible batteries of 12.7 mm anti-aircraft guns to drop 70-80 metric tons of food stuffs per month. Pilots were given extensive briefings on the situation before each flight. On several occasions the USAID refugees relief logistics officer from Vientiane flew north to observe and coordinate rice drops into Bouam Long. Unfortunately in mid-1971 an Air America C-46 went down, although there is some question whether or not the pilot followed flight instructions on

his approaches to the DZ. This was the only non-STOL aircraft to have been shot down while dropping rice in the entire history of the USAID rice drop program. Neither Bouam Long nor Phu Cum were ever captured by the Vietnamese.

By the time of the ceasefire in February 1973 the situation had stabilized. RLG troops had moved back into some areas previously lost north and east of old Sam Thong and an area south-west of Muong Souie. There were considerable population shifts into these areas in a continual effort to find land to plant rice. There were clashes with Pathet Lao troops, but the civilian populations remained. With two relatively quiet planting seasons, the refugees in MR II cleared land for rice at an unprecedented rate. Entire mountains were stripped bare. As a result, the food support rolls were reduced drastically so that all refugees from MR II were removed from the ~~rolls~~ after the 1974 harvest.

While not in the limelight as was MR II, the events in Houa Khong in the north-west was extremely important. As noted above the years 1967-70 found Vietnamese and Pathet Lao forces putting heavy pressure on Houa Khong province. In 1971 the northern panhandle which jutted into China and Burma began to crumble. Several small sites fell as well as LS 194. This set several thousand ethnic Akha fleeing south. Most walked for several days until they reached the larger Lu-Akha village of Muong Meung, LS 93. Several refugee sites were established around Muong Meung as land was getting scarce. The USAID had constructed a small dam to increase wet rice hectqrage and a second was planned. Even this was inadequate to handle the numbers of people coming in.

In late 1972 the entire province was under pressure--particularly the eastern portion. Vieng Phu Kha (LS 135), the keystone of the upper Nam

Tha (River) area was overrun. This effectively was the collapse of the interior. It was obvious that Nam Yu (LS 118A) was next. Just prior to the signing of the Cease-fire agreement Nam Yu was attacked and fell the following day. The entire population--military and civilian--panicked. Muong Meung changed hands twice with the final fall occurring after the ceasefire agreement. Thousands of villages evacuated en masse along the Mekong (River), including the center of the ethnic Yao, Nam Khreung (LS 150). Many of these refugees fled to Thailand and some to Burma and received no assistance. The number of food recipients in the Ban Houie SAI area jumped to 20,000. The majority of these refugees, along with old refugees and indigenous villagers, were crowded into a thin strip of land along the Mekong. Small groups of refugees continued to filter into RLG-held territory up to the time of the April 1974 formation of the PGNU.

RELOCATION PHASE

The earliest AID-assisted relocation effort in Laos occurred in 1963 when 544 H'mong refugees from Luang Prabang province were flown into Nam Hia in Sayaboury province. Although simmerings of discontent always permeated the relationship between these H'mong and the Lao officials, these people and later arrivals made a go of it. One group is pictured in the January 1974 issue of National Geographic with their tractor which they had purchased.

Houie Nam Phak

The first real integrated relocation project in Laos was located at Houie Nam Phak, 25 kilometres south of Pakse. The project was approved in 1968 after security conditions forced large numbers of people off the Bolo^{Lea}~~nee~~ Plateau. Originally planned as an experimental project in agriculture and community development, the first 70 families moved into their new homes in

April 1969. In a unique social experiment, three ethnic groups were relocated in the same project. 900 hectares (2,223 acres) of the National Forest Reserve were allocated for the project. Houses and physical infrastructure such as schools, dispensaries and offices were constructed for the settlers. A dam was built which needed a lengthy canal system in order to achieve the intended benefits. In October 1970 plans for the irrigation canals were postponed and never revived. As a result the project never achieved its intended objectives in terms of permanent self-sufficiency. 1399 refugees were relocated in this project.

As stated above Houie Nam Phak was attacked by the enemy in March 1971 with several thousand dollars worth of property and equipment destroyed. The project remained static in that no further sub-projects were authorized. In October 1972 the office of Refugee Affairs suggested that Houie Nam Phak should be treated in the future as a regular community development project, but the suggestion was never followed up.

Although not a real integrated relocation project in the same sense as Houie Nam Phak, the relocation villages in Paksane were considered as one project. These people, about 75% of whom were Lao or tribal Thai (Thai Dam or Thai Daeng) and 25% H'mong and Lao Thung, fled south from the southern fringe areas of the Plaine des Jarres during the heavy fighting in 1970. These people, primarily following the Nam Nhiep (River) and Nam Sane (River) first grouped around the provincial town of Paksane. 21 separate villages were constructed in two long areas--one running 50 kilometres west from Paksane and the other area extending 27 kilometres north of Paksane. Over 1800 hectares of land was put under rice cultivation.

This area was generally free from enemy harassment. However, the

town of Muong Cao (Borikhane) was raided in mid-1972. In November 1972 many of the villagers, fearing for their personal safety, fled to Paksane and camped out around the airstrip there after Pathet Lao troops raided two of the refugees villages. 728 refugees from Muong Ngam in Xieng Khouang province went with the Pathet Lao. It was not known if these people were abducted or not. However some days prior to the raid many of these refugees had been seen selling off household items and newly-harvested rice.

In November 1972, the office of Refugee Affairs recommended that the Paksane relocation area be transferred from a refugee project to a regular community development activity. No action was taken however.

SENO

In late 1969, nearly 3000 civilians were evacuated prior to the battle for the strategic town of Muong Phine astride RIG 9. These refugees were first brought into the Seno Military Camp east of Savannakhet. In early 1970, 14,820 acres of land in the Seno Military Camp were reserved from the relocation of the Muong Phine refugees. Houses were built for the refugees and each family was given land for a garden plot plus 5 acres of cropland. By October 1970, 400 of the 500 projected families had moved into Seno.

Eight villages were established with appropriate schools, water storage ponds, roads and elemental medical facilities. Charcoal became a major product at Seno. The land was not of good quality. As a result these refugees never received the degree of self-sufficiency that was expected. This was in spite of an extensive program initiated in April 1971, whereby refugees could buy water buffalo with money provided by the USAID to the Ministry of Social Welfare. In November 1971 and again in 1972, the Office of Refugee Affairs recommended that Seno be phased out as a refugee project and a regular community development be initiated. There was no follow up.

Security in Seno was normally good. However, in October 1972 enemy forces abducted 145 people from the project.

VIENTIANE PLAINS

The next official relocation project was in the Vientiane Plains area. The initial project relocated 27,000 refugees in 27 villages, later expanded to 58, on 79,000 hectares (195, 000 acres) of land reserved by the Lao Government. The initial settlers were Lao Phuan who had been airlifted from the Plaine Des Jarres in February 1970. During the next year several thousand other refugees fled the Long Thieng area to the relative safety of the Vientiane Plains^e. These people were also incorporated into the project, except for one site at Hin Heup which was designated as a separate relocation site.

As individual parcels of the 79,000 hectares were designated by the RLG, land classification teams followed, as well as survey teams who laid out village sites and rice fields. Land disputes between refugee and indigenous villagers were common, and committees were formed to adjudicate such disputes. For administrative reasons the project was divided into 10 areas.

Unlike Houie Nam Phak and Seno, no attempt was made to build each family a wooden house. Each family was responsible for constructing its own modest wood/bamboo house in the traditional manner. Heavy duty equipment did clear land for rice fields. An extensive system of roads were constructed and wells were drilled in the villages.

One inherent problem in the relocation of large numbers of refugees in Laos was the availability of suitable land for cultivation. In one area, Relocation Area 5, five flood gates and 13 miles of road dikes were constructed

in order to protect land previously unuseable due to perennial flooding.

One inherent facet of this project never solved, or really ever confronted by the RLG (and the USAID), dealt with two problems. First, how did these people fit into the political picture? Coming primarily from Xieng Khouang, with lesser numbers from Hua Phan, the refugees were legally under Xieng Khouang⁹ provincial officials. However, their location in the heart of Vientiane obviously raised problems with that province's district and local officials. The second problem was economic, which perhaps hit the refugees harder than the political one. The refugees (as well as indigenous villagers) were the victims of local military and civilian leaders who extorted money from anyone wishing to sell produce or livestock. On RIG 13 north to Vang Vieng there were over 20 "checkpoints", not all of which were operating at the same time, but when operating demanded a tax in order to allow goods to pass by. Studies conducted by the USAID's Office of Refugee Affairs pinpointed this problem in detail. The existence of this practice adversely affected the incentive to produce more, and also raised the price of produce in the market. The U.S. mission refused to confront the RLG directly or indirectly over this problem. It was ironic that while the USAID was trying to increase agricultural production among refugees on the Vientiane Plains, they would not put pressure on the RLG to ease or eliminate local corrupt practices that may have acted as a constraint against increased production.

From a technical point of view, i.e., planned villages, roads, schools, wells, etc. the Vientiane Plains project was a success. However, the mission never seemed to really grasp the essence^c of the problems of these particular refugees--both from the standpoint of their original situation in the PDJ and in respect to their status within RLG-controlled territory as a "people" in exile.

Thasano

In 1971 several relocation sites were begun. In Savannakhet in July 1971, the RLG reserved a 31 square mile tract of land located between Ban Tha Sano and Ban Houa Xang for the relocation of refugees from the Muong Phalane area. During the remainder of 1971 access roads were constructed, 5 dam sites were surveyed, soil surveys were completed and village sites were selected and laid out. Three years later an extension was added to the Tha Sano project, primarily for refugees from the Dong Hene area. The project eventually relocated 11,500 people. As the situation stabilized in 1973-74, refugees began to trickle back to Dong Hene while still maintaining residency in Thasano in order to retain food support from the USAID.

Hin Heup

The Vietnamese capture of the Plaine des Jarres in December 1971 and the subsequent pressure on the Long Thieng area during 1972 produced a flood of panicked civilians, many formerly from Hua-Phan province, onto the Vientiane Plains. In order to accommodate many of these people, a new relocation area was designated on the Nam Lik (River) opposite Hin Heup, which ran for 19 miles to the west. This area had good soil and extensive groves of bamboo suitable for constructing houses. At least during the initial year the Nam Lik (River) yielded extraordinarily large numbers of fresh fish. Ten relocation villages were laid out along a 12 kilometre (7 mile) road. Approximately 6000 people were relocated in these villages. (The road was later extended over the mountains to the Ban Done Valley.)

Most of the refugees initially entered the relocation site in time to clear fields for a first year crop. However, on instruction from the USAID, the refugee relief operations officer for that area was instructed to tell the

refugees not to clear land for rice. Instead they were told to first build nice permanent houses which would look good to visiting reporters. This order was carried out and land was cleared to yield enough rice for one or two months.

In general, the Hin Heup project was well accepted by the refugees themselves. A very successful chicken co-op was organized with Agriculture Development Organization (ADO) support. Several farmers were involved in raising and reselling chickens primarily to markets in the northern Vientiane areas and areas north of the Nam Ngoum Dam. Unfortunately the Lao government withdrew the duty-free status of imported chicken feed which pushed the price of feed so high that these small entrepreneurs could no longer afford to profitably raise chickens. Entreaties to the Lao government to reinstate chicken feed on the import list was to no avail.

Long Nam Khan

As outlined in the historical narrative above, over 40,000 refugees were crowded in and around Luang Prabang by 1971. Although there were many who could, and eventually did, return to homes along the Mekong, there were several thousand refugees from northern Luang Prabang province who could not return. These people were primarily ethnic Lao Thung who were finding life very difficult around the city. To alleviate the problem of this group, a project was drawn up in late 1971 reserving 86,000 acres of land for a relocation project in the Long Nam Khan between Xieng Ngum and Muong Namⁿ. Plans were made to build a road between these two villages with the refugees to be settled along the road. Work was delayed for several months due to poor security in the area, but a rough trace was pushed through by May 1972.

This project, on the whole, was successful. Some problems were

encountered regarding land reserved for veterans which was within the refugee reserve. The most important offshoot of this relocation site was the 25 mile road which linked Xieng Ngum and Muong Nane. This all-weather road gave Sayaboury province direct access to the urban market area of Luang Prabang City, thus eliminating the necessity to barge commodities up or down the Mekong.

Phu Ba Chieng

In August 1971 sites were under review for relocation areas in the Pakse area. Phone Thong on the west of the Mekong in Champasak province was considered and surveys were made. However in October 1971, a decision was reached to locate a relocation project in a forest preserve at the foot of Phu Ba Chieng (Mountain). Soil surveys showed this land to be extremely fertile. Theories are that eons ago a volcanic eruption spewed forth a huge cloud of volcanic ash. This cloud of ash hit the changing air pressure around the mountain and dumped the entire load at its base.

Work began on village sites, road construction and dams for water storage. In January 1972 work was temporarily suspended as Vietnamese troops pushed near Pakse. Two months later work resumed. Security remained uncertain during the year. Many refugees fled the relocation site for areas along the road into Pakse. By the time of the ceasefire everyone had returned. However, EOD teams were brought in to help dispose of unexpended ammunition in and around village sites and fields.

Some problems were encountered between the refugees and the local military regarding the exchange of USAID rice for coffee beans from the Bolé^ovons. The value of coffee in Pakse was much higher than rice so that the refugees could sell the coffee and have enough to buy rice and still have a profit!

The FAR commander claimed that the refugees were helping to support the Vietnamese troops occupying the Bol^ovens Plateau.

In terms of agricultural potential, this project was the most successful.

Thakhe^k - Khammouan^e Province

The relocation efforts in this province were directed towards assisting several thousand civilians who fled following the attack on Nam Thorne (LS 141A) on 28 October, 1972, and the subsequent Vietnamese push down to Pak Hin Baun. This relocation effort was never the coordinated project that other sites were. There was no attempt to put in roads, dams, etc.. The villages could only be considered semi-permanent due to poor soil at their locations. The numbers of people at any given time was very fluid as many refugees saw definite advantages to moving to the relocation sites in Borikhan^e province or to Pak Sap, designated a formal relocation site within the Vientiane Plains project. Many of these refugees had originally been relocated from the Kamkheut area in the early '60's and relocated along RIG 13. Other than minimal assistance, primarily relief, there were few formal relocation programs in this area.

Houie Nam Ngam - Houa Khong Province

The Houie Nam Ngam project, officially designated a relocation project in early 1974, was set up to handle the large influx of refugees generated during the enemy push on Houa Khong in late 1972, and 1973. This relocation site was just getting under way with roads and agricultural experiments being the primary projects.

Ban Xon LS 272

This area was never an official USAID relocation project. Several very

expensive projects were undertaken which were not under USAID's domain.

In general the entire relocation effort never was successful in the same sense that the relief effort was. It must be pointed out that the relief project had primarily short-term, immediate objectives based on clear-cut criteria. The relocation effort was an open-ended attempt to relocate selected groups of refugees in specific localities, with the specific objective of becoming self-sufficient. The major problems were that one, most available soil was not good, and two, there was no way to determine how long the people might have to remain in these relocation villages before they could return to their original villages. Three, the Mission was never consistent in determining when a relocation project was self-sufficient and no longer needed food support. Four, the Mission made no attempt to integrate relocation projects into overall area development or rural self-help projects.

It was also often difficult to accurately judge what should be short-term versus long-term objectives. The "outer trappings" such as permanent concrete or wooden schools, dispensaries, roads, dams etc. were long-range, some essential, others not. However, the Mission was reluctant to engage in long-term agricultural endeavors with the refugees. It was unfortunate that the agriculture leadership within the Mission was very weak during these years. The few attempts when individual agricultural reforms or innovations were proposed, Mission leadership would not follow up.

In fairness to the relocation effort, it was obvious by early 1970 that specific measures would have to be taken to provide large numbers of refugees with rehabilitation or relocation projects. Unfortunately the Mission, as noted above, never clearly defined what our finite goals were and when refugee

projects could be phased into more normal rural development projects. One old saw against switching any refugee relocation efforts over to conventional rural development was that monies were readily available for refugee projects, but not for development. During 1974 criteria for relocation stages was developed as follows:

Relocation Stages

- I. Resettlement
- II. Development of Core Infrastructure
- III. Development of Economic, Social, Political Infrastructure
- IV. Self-sufficiency

Phase Out

In December 1974 the Mission had classified the relocation sites as follows:

Houie Nam Phak	Phase out
Paksane	" "
Vientiane Plains	" "
Seno	" "
Thasano	" "
Long Nam Khan (Valley)	" "
Phu Ba Chieng	" " Dec. 74
Tha Khek	" "
Houie Nam Ngan	III IV

The Role of the UNHCR

The terminal phase of direct USAID operational involvement in the refugee program began with the arrival of the representative of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Laos in mid-1974. Prior to his arrival direct USAID operational control of the refugee program by the USAID was being questioned by the Provisional Government of National Union. By late 1974 the UNHCR representative was closely involved with the PGNU in conducting surveys for the eventual return of the refugees to their original villages. During this period in late 1974 much advice was discreetly passed

on to the UNHCR representative by the USAID regarding the operational aspects of supporting and moving refugees as well as cost accounting procedures for the leasing of Royal Air Lao aircraft.

During this time USAID was still providing certain foodstuffs and commodities to the refugees. Unfortunately, the whole issue of refugee commodities was a political mess as donations from other countries had to be divided between both political zones. One example is that neither side wanted to assist refugees returning home from the Vientiane side to the PL side. The PL said their share of the goods was for people within their zone. The Vientiane side said that if they helped the returning refugees then all the commodities would end up in the PL zone.

The U.S. Ambassador had a particular hang-up over any U.S. refugee commodities going into the PL zone for fear that it would be misused. This issue was much in evidence regarding commodities to refugees who returned to the Plains^s des Jarres. Since the Mission did not have rights ^{of} ~~to~~ inspection, an agreement was made whereby the UNHCR would verify that the U.S. furnished commodities were properly being used. Of course no inspections were ever made.

In late 1974 Joint Mobile Teams (JMT) under the jurisdiction of the Joint Central Committee for the Implementation of the Agreement (JCCIA) began to canvas refugees in various parts of the Kingdom about their intentions to return home. During December, January, February and March, 3,580, 16,352, 18,391, and 19,938 refugees returned to their original homes. The most dramatic move was the return of 21,340 refugees airlifted from Vientiane to the Plain^e des Jarres area. 342 flights were made, primarily by the Royal Lao Air Force (FLAF) and leased Royal Air Lao (RAL) planes, with assistance of planes supplied by the governments of Australia and the Soviet Union. The UNHCR provided the

funds, which was actually a U.S. contribution, for the leasing of aircraft and for the cost of POL for the RLAF planes. There was no direct U.S. involvement in the movement of these people. In other areas of Laos, there was some isolated U.S. assistance in helping refugees return to their homes. But for the most part the JMT and JCCIA coordinated their program with local officials.

Perhpas the most dramatic policy decision issued by the U.S. Mission, and one which most people overreacted to, was the USAID Food Support Policy of 21 November, 1974. This Policy eliminated rice, except in certain specific cases, from the U.S. food assistance program in Laos. The timing of this policy was unfortunate as well as the way in which it was issued. The root of the problem lay in the fact that the USAID had never had a real coherent food support policy. Some astute Lao leaders such as Chao Saykham, governor of Xieng Khouang Province, had been saying for years that the U.S. was still feeding people who should have been cut off the rolls. Refugees in some cases had been fed more out of fear of congressional or press criticism than actual need. Other groups of legitimate refugees were not fed because they fled without authorization, or had moved to a city, etc. Some areas fed government officials who were refugees, other areas did not. Some areas had strong local lobbyists, such as General VAng Pao, who always demanded more rice. There were also AC's who gave lip service to decreasing food support and announced every year that groups would be dropped from food support, only for them to reappear each year.

This rice policy was one that was long overdue--but therein lies the problem. It came at a time when the communist faction in the PGNU was beginning to flex its muscles. Although they were generally disorganized with

no coherent plans for opposing Communist proposals, the Vientiane side considered that this rice policy further undermined their position within the government. In addition the Vientiane side wanted the "political" leverage of rice in dealing with refugees when it came time to discuss possible return movements of people back to their original homes. (There was a general feeling within the Vientiane side that all forms of U.S. Assistance were being reduced at a time when the Vientiane side needed to maintain the same level of U.S. assistance to counteract or balance out assistance from North Vietnam. As total U.S. assistance was much greater than known Vietnamese aid, this feeling was more political than economic. However the ultimate potential of Vietnamese influence increased as U.S. aid decreased.)

The point in the food policy announcement is that it was basically a U.S. decision, which again was ammunition for the Pathet Lao to use against both the USAID and the Department of Social Welfare and its Director General.

General Conclusions

On the short-term, the overall refugee program was a success in providing the support and the means necessary to sustain a large refugee population in a small country whose own resources were woefully inadequate to handle the problem. On the long-term the program woefully failed to consider how the Lao Government would or could continue a large Department of Social Welfare (D of SW) once large scale U.S. aid was curtailed. During FY 1975 the D of SW was essentially the only Lao Government department to continue to receive direct USAID inputs of POL and monetary grants into the Ministry budget. Just prior to USAID's termination, vehicles were still being granted to the D of SW. It was becoming more clear during 1975 that as refugees returned to Pathet Lao zones the need for a large D of SW was diminishing. Another facet of US aid, outside the immediate D of SW, was an expanded medical and educational system

which the Lao Government was hard pressed to maintain. This was especially true when the USAID closed down many dispensaries around the country.

The D of SW had a rather extensive staff with offices and personnel in all the provinces controlled by the Vientiane side. During the period when the war was at its height nearly all operational decisions were implemented directly by the USAID, either through Americans or local employees. There is a justifiable argument in that the Lao decision-making process was so cumbersome that direct implementation was necessary to get programs going. This was an effective means of operation. But by the time of the ceasefire in February 1973 and the formation of the PGNU in April 1974 the USAID could not change its modus operandi. This problem was further compounded in those times where decisions from the Lao Government were solicited because only the Director-General of the Ministry of Interior and Social Affairs could or would make a decision.

There can be no denying the fact that the refugee program was almost completely free of scandal and corruption. There were rumors, which certainly were true in many cases, of local corruption or shakedowns of rice trucks etc.. But there were never any large scale charges of corruption simply because the USAID controlled nearly all commodities from the time they entered ^{CUS} ~~sectors~~ into Laos until the final distribution to the refugees in their village. While this provided a good image for the USAID, it did little to improve or strengthen the D of SW or to strengthen the RLG or later the Vientiane side of the PGNU.

Unfortunately, the USAID made a major error when the PGNU was formed

in April 1974. More direct control of project commodities should have been extended to the proper Lao officials. Also plans should have been made to slowly reduce the total amount of money and commodities going into the refugee program. Even with a reduced program, direct control of project commodities by Lao officials could have strengthened their position vis-avis charges from the Pathet Lao that the Americans controlled not only the program but also the type of projects that were implemented. While somewhat exaggerated, there is much truth in the PL's charge.

The Mission had at least a year to change not only policy direction, but to also reduce personnel. The Office of Refugee and Rural Affairs was grossly over-staffed during the last 12-18 months of the project. It would have been possible to eliminate all ORRA field positions by the beginning of FY 76. This could have been accomplished by combining the functions of the Refugee and Rural Self Help projects into one person per province or region. Although this was projected, it could have been affected much earlier.

Perhaps one of the most distressing points of the project's termination was the waste of trained, competent Lao personnel in the ORRA. While perhaps not actually within the scope of this paper, the implementation of the refugee program could never have been fulfilled without the loyalty and confidence of the Lao, H'mong, Vietnamese, Indian and other ethnic staff members of the USAID Mission to Laos. While the method of the AID's termination in Laos is unfortunate, all American personnel were safely extracted. It can only be hoped that the local staff left behind in Laos will not be subjected to reprisals due to their past work, but will be utilized to assist in rehabilitating their country.