SHOOT & SALUTE

U.S. Army Special Warfare in Laos

by Jared M. Tracy

"IT THUS APPEARS TO US HERE AN INESCAPABLE CONCLUSION THAT WE MUST NOT TERMINATE OUR EFFORTS IN LAOS . . ."[1]

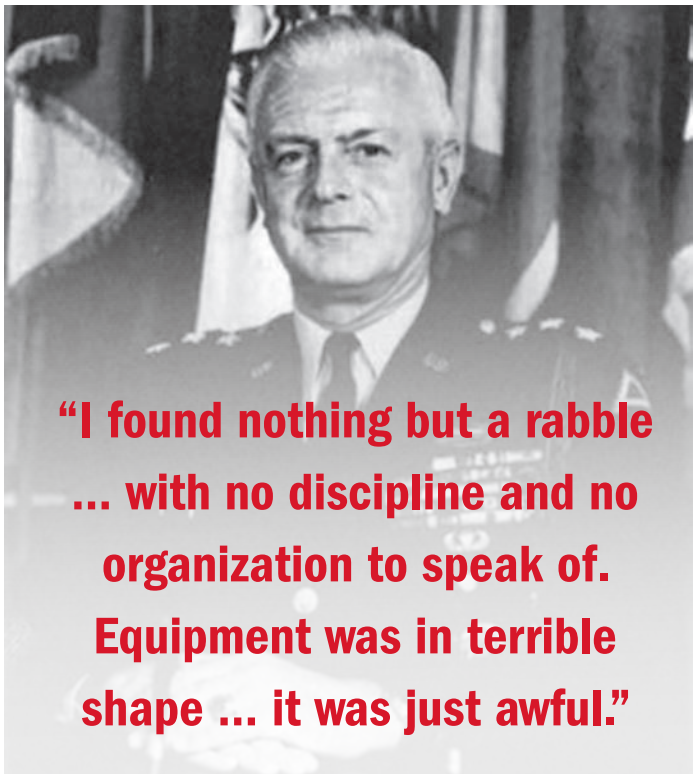
U.S. Embassy in Laos, November 1957

In October 1958, Brigadier General (BG) John A. Heintges was nearing the end of his tour as Deputy Commander, U.S. Army Infantry Training Center, at Fort Dix, NJ, and preparing for transfer to Korea when he received a call from the Pentagon. His orders to Korea were cancelled, the person said. "Well, where am I going?" Heintges inquired. Refused an over-the-phone answer due to classification, he was told to report to Rear Admiral (RADM) Edward O'Donnell, Director, Far East Section of International Security, Department of Defense (DoD).[2]

The following day, O'Donnell told the baffled general to go to Laos, a land-locked Southeast Asian (SEA) country formed from the former French colony of Indochina. Bordered by Burma, China, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV, 'North Vietnam'), the Republic of Vietnam (RVN, 'South Vietnam'), Cambodia, and Thailand, Laos had a population of around two million, half of whom were ethnic Lao, with the other half comprised of heterogeneous tribal groups.[3] In Laos, Heintges would replace BG Rothwell H. Brown as head of the Programs Evaluation Office (PEO), a small, secretive DoD staff agency located in the Laotian capital, Vientiane. The Chief, PEO, represented the military on the U.S. Embassy Country Team.[4] Established in 1955, the PEO channeled arms and equipment to the Royal Lao Government to help it combat both internal and external Communist threats, chiefly the Pathet Lao.[5]

Laos represented a diplomatic challenge for American political leaders. While the U.S. recognized Laotian sovereignty and neutrality, it also followed the Cold War foreign policy of 'containment,' or preventing the spread of Communism. Located in the 'heart' of SEA, Laos could not be allowed to 'fall' to Communism like China did in 1949 or like the Republic of Korea nearly did in 1950. Committed to cost-efficiency, President Dwight D. Eisenhower leaned heavily on diplomacy, nuclear deterrence, and covert operations in foreign policy. While he ruled out open military intervention in Laos, he would also not stand by and 'do nothing.'

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the PEO, in concert with State Department and U.S. Information Agency (USIA) efforts, deployed non-uniformed advisors to provide clandestine training, logistical support, and funding to the Laotian government.[6] Accordingly, Heintges was about to become the 'civilian' head of the PEO, answerable to Horace H. Smith, U.S. Ambassador to Laos, and Admiral (ADM) Harry D. Felt, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM). Heintges' rank in Laos would simply be 'Mr.'[7]

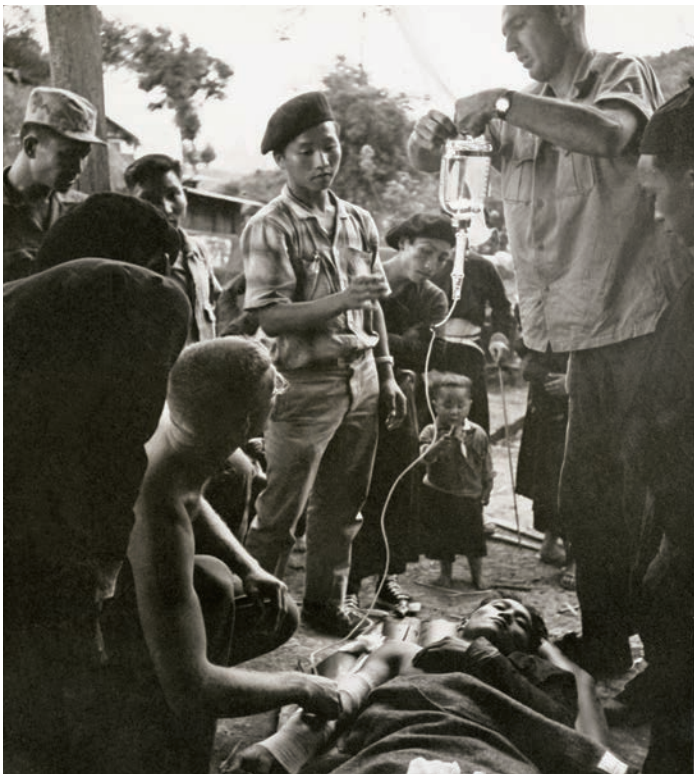


As PEO commander, then-BG John A. Heintges devised the "Shoot and Salute" plan to use U.S. Army Special Forces to train the Laotian military.

Heintges knew little to nothing about his new location; his 'comfort zone' was in Europe. He had commanded 3/7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division during World War II; attended Heidelberg University in 1946–1947; served as Chief, Advance Plans and Training Section, U.S. Army, Europe (USAREUR), in 1954–1955; and headed the Operations and Training Branch, Army Section, U.S. Military Assistance Group, in Germany, followed by the Army Section itself, in 1955–1957. He therefore did a 45-day survey of Laos, primarily to evaluate the military, before assuming command of the PEO.

He was disgusted with what he found. "I found nothing but a rabble in half military uniform and half civilian clothes, with no discipline and no organization to speak of.

Equipment was in terrible shape and there were no signs that any of our materiel we sent there was being properly maintained. The guns were rusty, the vehicles were in bad shape [with a] shortage of gasoline and so forth; it was just awful." During the colonial period, the French had filled officer and noncommissioned officer (NCO) positions in the Laotian military. Their mass departure had left a leadership vacuum, which in turn contributed to the further deterioration of the Laotian armed forces. (While some 1,500–2,000 French military advisors remained in Laos after independence, their effort was halfhearted, and "the Laotians paid no attention to them.")[8]

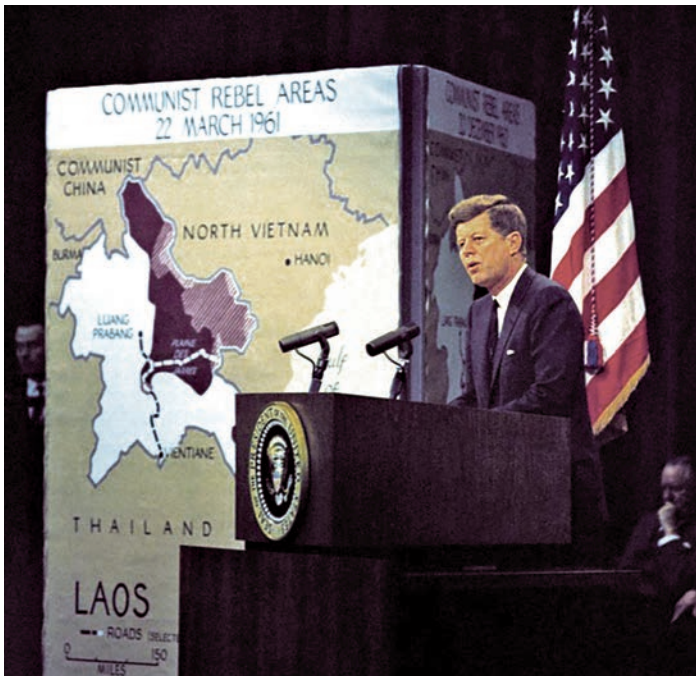


Non-uniformed U.S. personnel train Laotians in combat lifesaving techniques.

After completing his survey in December 1958, Heintges penned the "Shoot and Salute" plan to instill discipline and basic military proficiency in the Laotian military. This plan formed the basis for seven U.S. Army Special Forces (SF) rotations from July 1959 to October 1962. These SF soldiers came from the 77th, 7th, and 1st SF Groups (SFGs). As part of Project HOTFOOT, non-uniformed SF teams supported the PEO from July 1959 until April 1961, when newly inaugurated President John F. Kennedy replaced the PEO with the Military Assistance Advisory Group, Laos (MAAG Laos). At that point, U.S. soldiers donned uniforms in support of Operation WHITE STAR. The U.S. advisory role in Laos (both CIA and SF) is fairly well documented.[9] However, the January 1961 introduction of a twelve-man psychological warfare (psywar) team from the 1st Psywar Battalion (Broadcasting and Leaflet [B&L]), at Fort Bragg, NC, is not. Psywar support to counterinsurgency (COIN) in Laos is addressed in a future article.

This article sets the stage for U.S. Army Special Warfare in Laos, and lays the groundwork for an article on the psywar effort in the next issue of *Veritas*. First, a short history of Laotian governance, followed by major developments in U.S.-Laos relations, provides the broad context. Second, it details how the U.S. got drawn deeper into Laos by an armed coup launched by 'neutralist' Captain (CPT) Kong Le and his American-trained 2nd Parachute Battalion in August 1960. Ensuing U.S. support of anti-Communist Prime Minister Boun Oum and defense minister General (GEN) Phoumi Nosavan put the U.S. at odds with most of the international community, including allies, who recognized Souvanna Phouma as Prime Minister.

Third, this historical account chronicles the path toward creating MAAG Laos in April 1961. President Eisenhower (1953–1961) declined to activate a MAAG, preferring instead to keep the operation 'under wraps' and in CIA hands. However, the CPT Kong Le coup (coupled with the unrelated, abortive, CIA-sponsored Bay of Pigs Invasion of Cuba in April 1961) forced the issue, and paved the way for overt U.S. military involvement in Laos. The formal training and advisory mission of MAAG Laos (WHITE



Left
President Dwight D. Eisenhower opted to keep a low profile in Laos, allowing the CIA and non-uniformed SF to handle the training and advisory mission.

Right
President John F. Kennedy offers an update on Laos at a 23 March 1961 press conference. Within a month, he approved the formal establishment of MAAG Laos.

STAR) supported President John F. Kennedy's (1961–1963) flexible response strategy, in which U.S. Army Special Warfare (COIN, psywar, and Unconventional Warfare [UW]) could be employed to combat Communist-backed 'wars of national liberation.'

Finally, this article introduces U.S. Information Service (USIS) activities in Laos. In order to consolidate all overseas information activities under one agency, President Eisenhower established the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) in 1953 to oversee efforts of its deployed field offices (USIS). (Confusingly, USIA and USIS were two different names for the same organization; 'USIS' was simply the overseas version of 'USIA.') Aiming to promote Laotian support for the Royal Lao Government and counter Communist propaganda, USIS Laos began activities in 1954. As will be explained, USIS Laos encountered many difficulties, and it benefited greatly from 1st Psywar Battalion (B&L) augmentation starting in 1961. However, before explaining U.S. information and psywar activities, it is first necessary to provide some general background on Laos and the U.S. involvement there.

A Short History

Immediately following World War II, France resumed its colonial management of Indochina, but was resisted in Laos by the Communist Pathet Lao and in Vietnam by the Viet Minh. French colonial influence had eroded greatly by the early 1950s, but the *coup de grâce* was the Viet Minh's May 1954 defeat of French forces at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam, near the Laotian border. Concluded in July 1954, the Geneva

Pathet Lao soldiers in combat during the Laotian Civil War. *(photo copyright of Osprey Publishing, originally in* The War in Laos 1960-75 *[1989], used with permission.)*

Conference formally created four new countries from the former French Indochina: North and South Vietnam (divided at the 17th Parallel, pending unification through national elections), Cambodia, and Laos.

Plagued by an externally supported Communist insurgency, Laos was not left to its own devices after independence. For starters, an ineffectual, troublesome French military advisory presence remained in the country. Second, various U.S. agencies, including the CIA, PEO, and USIS, were active inside Laos. Third, the Geneva-created International Control Commission (ICC), comprised of a Communist, a non-Communist, and a neutral country (Poland, Canada, and India, respectively), assumed responsibility for enforcing the Accords throughout SEA. And in September 1954, the U.S. and seven other nations formed the SEA Treaty Organization (SEATO) to help prevent the spread of Communism in that region.[10] In essence, Laos was sovereign in name only.

Under the monarchy of King Sisavang Vong, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma and subsequent ministers tried reconciling with the Communist Pathet Lao. In 1957, Souvanna and his half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, leader of the Pathet Lao, concluded the Vientiane Accords to begin integrating the Pathet Lao into the Laotian government and military. The newly recognized party *Neo Lao Hak Sat* (*NLHS*), representing the Pathet Lao, earned a significant number of seats in parliamentary elections held in May 1958. Claiming political assimilation had been achieved, the Royal Lao Government 'jumped the gun' and pressed the ICC to leave Laos.

Senior U.S. leaders interpreted these events "as proof that the Lao could not be relied upon . . . to establish a soft buffer against communist encroachment," according to historian Seth Jacobs. For example, CIA Director Allen W. Dulles warned Eisenhower that there was "a great deal to fear," while his brother, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, described the Royal Lao Government as "negligent, self-seeking, or worse."[11] Their recommended

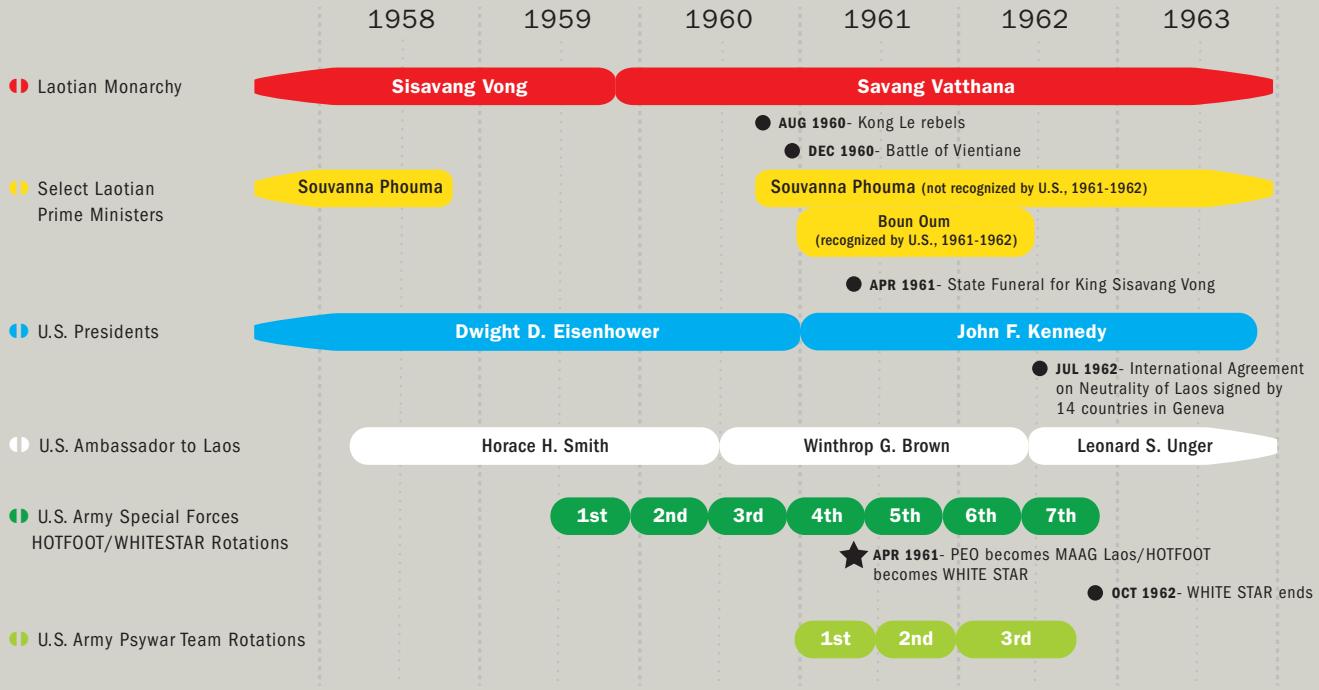
solution was continued, if secretive, U.S. involvement. The CIA assessed that the Soviet Union, Communist China, and the DRV also opposed the ouster of the ICC, but for another reason: they wanted to keep using Poland to funnel guidance to the Pathet Lao.[12]

Political reconciliation in Laos was more of a fantasy than a reality. Communist integration into the Laotian military proved difficult. Efforts to bring two Pathet Lao battalions into the army in May 1959 failed when they rebelled instead. (Subsequently, one battalion surrendered and the other fled to the DRV, along with the *NLHS*.) Believing the rebellion to be externally supported, the Royal Lao Government formally protested to the United Nations (UN) that the DRV was interfering in its internal affairs. A late 1959 UN investigation confirmed DRV involvement in Laos, but stopped short of accusing it of active military operations.[13]

Compounding the Communist threat were internal political shifts, to include the monarchy. In October 1959 King Sisavang Vong died, and the Western-leaning Savang Vatthana ascended to the throne. By early 1960, the political pendulum had swung in favor of the conservative nationalists, in part because of the departure of Prime Minister Souvanna from power in 1958, and in part because of a 'bloodless coup' by the anti-Communist GEN Phoumi Nosavan in 1959. However, hopes for stability proved short-lived. In August 1960 'neutralist' CPT Kong Le and mutinous soldiers from the U.S.-trained 2nd Parachute Battalion overthrew then-Prime Minister Somsanith Vongkotrattana and seized much of the country, including the capital, Vientiane. Communist forces exploited the instability and launched offensives in tandem with Kong Le, who shrewdly re-installed Souvanna as Prime Minister.[14]

The CIA believed that Souvanna wanted to negotiate with the Pathet Lao for a ceasefire and a coalition government, even as Laotian forces and the Pathet Lao continued battling. Fearing an eventual Pathet Lao victory due to external support, GEN Phoumi-led reactionary elements fought to retake areas from CPT Kong Le, the Pathet Lao, and DRV forces, including the 'royal capital,' Luang Prabang. With U.S. and Thai support, Phoumi's forces won the Battle of Vientiane (13–16 December 1960), and pushed the enemy back to the strategic *Plaine des Jarres* ('Plain of Jars') in northern Laos.[15] There, the Soviets air-delivered food, oil, and materiel to the insurgents, against the protests of the Laotian and U.S. governments. A new government was formed under Prince Boun Oum, which King Savang and the national assembly recognized in January 1961. To complicate matters, most nations, including U.S. allies and the moribund ICC, publically complained that Souvanna Phouma—not Boun Oum or Phoumi Nosavan—was the rightful leader. This was the confused situation when the U.S. became more deeply involved.[16]

Key Players: HOTFOOT/WHITE STAR



**Dates depicted on chart are approximate, see article for more detail*

Leaders of Laos During the Crisis Period, 1958–1963

King Sisavang Vong

King Savang Vatthana

Prince Souvanna Phouma

	King Sisavang Vong	King Savang Vatthana	Prince Souvanna Phouma
LIFE SPAN	■ Born: 14 July 1885 (Luang Prabang) ■ Died: 29 October 1959 (Luang Prabang)	■ Born: 13 November 1907 (Luang Prabang) ■ Died: unknown (late 1970s or early 1980s)	■ Born: 7 October 1901 (Luang Prabang) ■ Died: 10 January 1984 (Vientiane)
YEARS IN POWER	■ King: 1905–59 (minus break in 1945–46)	■ Prime Minister: 1951 ■ King: 1959–75	■ Prime Minister: 1951–54, 1956–58, 1960, & 1962–75
POLITICAL ORIENTATION	■ Pro-French ■ Opposed hardline Laotian nationalists	■ Independent ■ Western-leaning	■ Neutralist ■ Left-leaning
NOTABLE FACTS	■ Ruled Kingdom of Luang Prabang during French colonial period and Japanese occupation ■ King of Laos during early independence	■ Tried but failed to create coalition government ■ Abdicated throne in 1975 due to Pathet Lao victory, ending the monarchy ■ Sent to re-education camp ■ Final fate uncertain	■ Half-brother to Pathet Lao leader Souphanouvong ■ Re-installed as PM during 1960 Kong Le rebellion ■ Recognized by most countries (not U.S.) as true government leader, 1961–62

Post-independence (1954) Laotian politics was a tangled web of diverse loyalties, competing ambitions, dynamic personalities, familial conflicts, external pressures, and 'palace intrigue.' As much as the U.S. tried to reduce the situation to a simple 'Communism versus anti-Communism' scenario, the reality was far more complex. While the U.S., France, the Soviet Union, and other nations often regarded Laotian rulers as exploitable political-diplomatic amateurs, those rulers played would-be benefactors against each other for their nation's (and personal) gain. This chart provides readers with a 'cheat sheet' of key Laotian leaders during the period addressed in this article.

			
Prince Boun Oum	**Prince Souphanouvong**	**GEN Phoumi Nosavan**	**CPT Kong Le**
■ Born: 12 December 1911 (Champasak) ■ Died: 17 March 1980 (Boulogne-Billancourt, France)	■ Born: 13 July 1909 (Luang Prabang) ■ Died: 9 January 1995 (Vientiane)	■ Born: 27 January 1920 (Savannakhet) ■ Died: 3 November 1985 (Bangkok, Thailand)	■ Born: 6 March 1934 (unknown, Laos) ■ Died: 17 January 2014 (Paris, France)
■ Prime Minister: 1948-50, 1961–62	■ Pathet Lao leader: 1950–75 ■ 1st President, Lao People's Democratic Republic: 1975–91	■ Defense Minister and de facto Prime Minister of Laos: 1961–62	■ Royal Lao Army officer: 1951–66
■ Pro-French ■ Royalist ■ Anti-Communist	■ Anti-French ■ Communist	■ Anti-French ■ Anti-Communist	■ Neutralist ■ Royalist ■ Political opportunist
■ Recognized by U.S. and monarchy as true head of government, 1961–62 ■ Left Laos for France just before 1975 Communist takeover, never returning	■ Half-brother to Prince Souvanna Phouma ■ Supported anti-French/ Communist aims in Indochina ■ Technically president from 1975–91, but stepped down from power in 1986 for health reasons	■ Chief of Staff of the Royal Lao Army starting in 1955 ■ Led a bloodless coup in 1959, but ousted during 1960 Kong Le rebellion ■ Helped 'roll back' Kong Le in 1960 ■ Regarded as key ally by U.S. ■ After several coup attempts in 1960s, fled to Thailand, dying in 1985	■ Commanded elite 2nd Parachute Battalion ■ Supported Phoumi's 1959 bloodless coup before launching his own coup in 1960 ■ Aligned with both Communists and royalists in bids to consolidate power ■ Left Laos in 1966 ■ Lived abroad until his death in 2014

SF soldiers train Royal Lao Army personnel on basic marksmanship using Thompson submachine guns.

LTC Arthur D. 'Bull' Simons commanded the first 77th SFG contingent to deploy in support of Project HOTFOOT.

Drawn In Deeper

With full diplomatic relations with Laos established in 1955, U.S. Ambassadors (AMB) to Laos carefully balanced objectives as the U.S. tried to honor the Geneva Accords while supporting the Laotian Government and the 25,000 soldiers in the Laotian military.[17] To avoid the appearance of unilateral action, the U.S. also bolstered its relationship with Laos's neighbor, Thailand, a fellow SEATO member. The U.S. had established MAAG Thailand in September 1950, which was replaced with the Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group, Thailand (JUSMAGTHAI) on 22 September 1953. In the late 1950s, USPACOM and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) mandated a close relationship between JUSMAGTHAI and the PEO to facilitate Thai-Lao defense planning. Thailand proved critical as a logistics feeder to Laos in support of military actions against CPT Kong Le in 1960 and beyond.[18]

Throughout its existence, the PEO had proven incapable of shaping events in Laos because of several flaws. First, as a DoD agency, its presence essentially violated the Geneva Accords, which prohibited outside military involvement in neutral Laos. The public image of the PEO as civilian-staffed was disingenuous since it was comprised primarily of non-uniformed active duty personnel or administratively 'retired' soldiers. Even Heintges called it a "[MAAG] in civilian clothes."[19] Second, as a staff element of only thirty to fifty people (not counting SF teams starting in mid-1959), the PEO was too small to handle its country-wide responsibilities. For example, in June 1957, the Embassy argued that the PEO could have identified waste and abuse of U.S. funds by Laotian forces sooner "if [it] had been adequately staffed."[20]

The Path To A MAAG

While Eisenhower preferred to keep a low profile in Laos, some civilian and military leaders in the U.S. preferred the idea of a formal MAAG instead of the secretive PEO. For example, in response to the May 1958 Communist electoral victories, AMB Horace H. Smith offered three options: (1) increase PEO staffing; (2) assign uniformed military personnel on a temporary basis; or (3) replace the PEO with a MAAG. Commander-in-Chief, USPACOM (CINCPAC), ADM Felix B. Stump, supported the third option. However, policymakers in Washington 'kicked the can down the road' and opted to simply 'hire' more 'civilians' for the PEO.[21] While a MAAG was still years away, Heintges paved the way for greater U.S. involvement in Laos during his two-year tenure (January 1959 to January 1961). His "Shoot and Salute" plan evolved from a concept he and his French military counterparts developed: France would provide *tactical* training to Laotian forces while non-uniformed U.S. SF would equip and provide *technical* training.[22] Heintges pushed his plan through USPACOM, which issued the formal request for forces.[23]

Because the "Shoot and Salute" plan conformed to prevailing attitudes about military assistance, policymakers agreed to deploy non-uniformed SF soldiers to support COIN in Laos. In July 1959, Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Arthur D. 'Bull' Simons and 100 plus soldiers from the 77th SFG deployed as the first rotation of Project HOTFOOT. The PEO scattered SF teams throughout Laos's five Military Regions (MR): MR I centered on Luang Prabang; MR II on Long Tieng; MR III on Savannakhet; MR IV on Pakse; and MR V on Vientiane. However, U.S. presence in MR II in the northeast was limited because it was largely Communist-controlled and the threat was greater.[24] Despite assuring the French that the U.S. would only conduct technical training, Heintges later admitted that SF had done some "clandestine tactical training."[25]

The low-key SF training mission was fairly straightforward until the CPT Kong Le rebellion, which renewed questions about the level and type of U.S. involvement in Laos.[26] In response to the insurgency, the U.S. National Security Council (NSC) approved five recommendations on 12 August

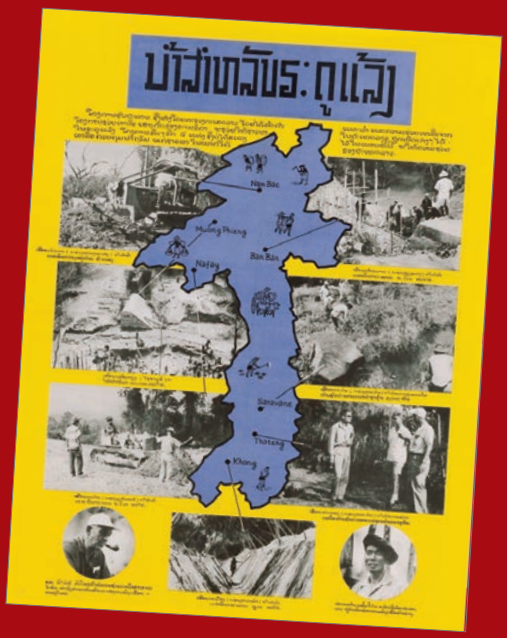
Secretary of Defense Thomas S. Gates, Jr., argued in policy meetings that the U.S. was "losing the propaganda war" in Laos.

1960: (1) the PEO would send two officers to Luang Prabang and Savannakhet to support loyal Laotian commanders; (2) DoD would ensure direct communications between those officers and JUSMAGTHAI; (3) equipment and logistical support would be provided to Laotian forces using Thai assets "on a reimbursable basis"; (4) Civil Air Transport (CAT, affiliated with the CIA-operated Air America) would increase aerial support to Lao forces; and (5) the U.S. would put a radio transmitter in Thailand for clandestine pro-government radio broadcasting.[27]

The rules of engagement for U.S. and Thai forces remained restrictive during and after the insurrection. For example, Thailand could provide logistical support, but cross-border operations were a last resort. Likewise, using Thai or U.S. military planes (other than those already approved for use by CAT, the PEO, and the Embassy) required presidential approval. Even if approved, they were not to be easily identifiable. Finally, U.S. troops could not accompany Laotian forces in combat at the battalion level or below.[28] In January 1961, Eisenhower permitted the use of C-47 *Skytrains* for photo reconnaissance and T-6 *Texans* for all operations except bombing.[29] In February, newly inaugurated President John F. Kennedy expanded Thailand-based C-130 aerial resupply operations to support the Laotian Government.[30] Senior officials repeated their calls to elevate the PEO to a MAAG, and found a more receptive audience with the new Administration.

Meanwhile, during senior-level discussions about the military role in Laos, Secretary of Defense Thomas S. Gates, Jr., stated that the U.S. was "losing the propaganda war." The Communists were convincingly portraying the U.S. as obstructing peace and neutrality in Laos (while downplaying their own efforts to do so).[31] Swaying international opinion was U.S. diplomacy business, but influencing public opinion inside Laos was tasked to two agencies: the USIA and, starting in early 1961, the U.S. Army 1st Psywar Battalion (B&L), under the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, NC.

1950s-era USIS leaflets in Laos stressed national unity, government legitimacy, public health and welfare, and U.S. support to Laos.



The need for pro-Royal Lao Government/anti-Communist propaganda was recognized soon after Laotian independence. At that time, Souvanna announced an aggressive civic action program largely in response to Pathet Lao "political subversion and propaganda in provinces." The emphasis was in Sam Neua and Phong Saly in northeastern Laos. The State Department feared that Communist propaganda would "continue and undoubtedly grow in intensity."[32] For example, during CPT Kong Le's 1960 uprising, Pathet Lao Radio and TASS (Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union) broadcasted against GEN Phoumi.[33] The U.S. had limited success in countering Communist propaganda inside and outside of Laos. This was due in part to self-imposed political and diplomatic restrictions, as well as the language-cultural barrier, dispersion, and rural character of the Laotian people.[34]

USIS Introduced

Since 1954, USIA had singularly handled overt informational activities in Laos, until it was supplemented by an Army psywar augmentation team in 1961. Established on 1 August 1953, USIA consolidated all foreign information activities, including the Voice of America (VOA), under one agency. USIA administered overseas information programs executed by its field offices, known as the U.S. Information Service (USIS).[35] USIS Laos had two main objectives: improve the credibility of the Laotian government in the eyes of the population, and counter-Communist propaganda. In the late-1950s and early-1960s, USIS employed the following media and programs: radio, printed products, films, an information center and library in Vientiane, formal presentations, an English teaching program, cultural exchanges, and personal contacts.[36]

"Messages of support were only as good as security for the province."

— James D. McHale

A USIS Laos inspection report (March 1960) revealed challenges with each approach. For example, with radio, there was only "one very weak local radio station" in 1956; even after that number grew to two 1 kilowatt (kw) shortwave transmitters and one 5 kw medium wave transmitter by 1960, transmissions did not adequately cover the entire country. In an attempt to boost access to the population, the U.S. government provided two 10 kw transmitters and a thousand radio public address systems to the Laotian military to distribute to villages across the country. These systems would augment the estimated 14,000 individually owned radio receiver sets in Laos.[37]

Determining how many transmitters were needed, where to place them, where to distribute receivers, and what kind of programming the stations would broadcast was based heavily on languages spoken by listening audiences. Since less than one percent of potential listeners spoke English, it was impractical for USIS Laos to simply replay VOA or other English-language broadcasts. Similarly, French was spoken only by educated elites. This left Lao as the primary programming language, even though much of the population spoke a myriad of local dialects.

The Laotian military had 'seeded' areas where Lao was commonly spoken with small U.S.-provided radio receivers. In places where Lao was not dominant, receivers were distributed to those few villagers who *did* speak Lao, usually local leaders, who could relay programming content to their constituencies. Some villages attached receivers to loudspeakers in the village square, which could be heard by passersby trading, shopping, or dining.[38] Individually owned receivers by non-Lao speakers were considered luxury items, and were primarily tuned to music stations.

The USIS Laos Motion Picture and Press and Publications Sections had their own challenges. These ranged from personnel, resourcing, and budgetary shortages; a fifteen percent literacy rate among the population; villagers' inability to understand English, Lao, and French-language films; and terrain and climate (which hindered the transport of and caused damage to cameras, projectors, and other motion picture equipment).[39] The experience of several USIS officers mentioned below reveals the difficulties in trying to win popular support for the Royal Lao Government while countering the Communists.

Yale Richmond was among the first to serve in Laos. He quickly grasped the challenges: "Our major problem was that . . . the Lao people did not know they had an independent state, a federal government, and a King. Our job was nation building from the ground up." Richmond and USIS Public Affairs Officer (PAO) Ted M.G. Tanen "published a Lao-language edition of USIA's monthly magazine, *Free World*, in a land which had never had a publication." In addition, "We produced a monthly newsreel about . . . the government, the royal family, and U.S. assistance, which we showed in villages to people who had never seen a motion picture. It was a tough, tropical tour, with no running water, electricity, air conditioning, or medical care; hazardous air travel; and tropical diseases."[40]

Five years later, many of the same challenges remained. Retired Foreign Service Officer (FSO) James D. McHale was a USIS representative in northeastern Laos in November 1959. He remembered that Sam Neua was "infested" with Communist guerrillas. "Security was a small local Lao government garrison and Meo Montagnards guarding the hills around us . . . In six months my information structure included VOA broadcasts and Lao mobile

military and civil information teams carrying . . . a message of support from the King and promises of material support [to every village]."[41]

Like the State Department and the PEO, USIS Laos was caught off-guard when CPT Kong Le rebelled. As McHale recalled, "Messages of support were only as good as security for the province. Just nine months after my arrival a military coup [by Kong Le] in Vientiane, followed by a Hanoi-backed Pathet Lao communist invasion, ended [Sam Neua's] short, independent existence." Meanwhile, USIS member Ivan Klecka and his team "traveled with the Royal Lao Army as it chased CPT Kong Le and the Pathet Lao north toward Luang Prabang . . . We posted photos along the way, to show villagers how its government was committed to their safety and well-being. We worked with [non-governmental organizations] making sure vital supplies reached Lao mothers and children in the cold northern mountains, and that the villagers knew who their friends were."[42]

Several factors led to the decision to deploy a U.S. Army psywar team to Laos to support USIS. First was Laos's downward spiral from a limited insurgency into an open civil war, with outside Communist support. Second, USIS argued that the DoD was better suited to working directly with the Laotian military. Finally, with an authorization of 15 Americans and 82 locals, USIS Laos personnel were spread thin across the various posts and sub-posts in Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Pakse, Savannakhet, and elsewhere. This personnel shortfall made it difficult to coordinate with the various U.S. and Laotian agencies to develop information campaigns and disseminate multimedia products across the country.[43]

Deploying a psywar team to Laos coincided with Special Warfare doctrine and national-level policies governing overseas information activities. In the early 1960s, the U.S. Army understood Special Warfare as the confluence of UW, COIN, and psywar. Anti-Communist efforts in Laos represented COIN, as defined in *U.S. Army Special Warfare* (1962):

> . . . all military, political, economic, psychological, and sociological activities directed toward preventing and suppressing resistance groups whose actions range in degree of violence and scope from subversive political activity to violent actions by large guerrilla elements to overthrow a duly established government. The basic military problem is to maintain or restore internal security . . .

Supporting COIN efforts, psywar entailed "activities and operations . . . to influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes, and behavior of the enemy, the indigenous population, and neutral or friendly foreign groups [in order to] to support . . . national aims and objectives."[44]

National policies 'drew the lines' for U.S. interagency roles in overseas information activities. As previously discussed, USIA had primary responsibility outside of declared U.S. hostilities. The DoD was "to support the psychological operation of USIA in preinsurgent [*sic*] or [COIN] situations. The [DoD], in coordination with USIA and [USAID], also assists the host country in developing, equipping, and conducing psychological operations aimed at preventing or defeating subversive insurgency." In all cases, "care must be exercised to avoid undercutting the host nation or implying that the [U.S.] is acting because its beleaguered ally is unable or unwilling to accomplish what U.S. forces [can]."[45] In sum, despite political reluctance to get too militarily involved, several factors made it feasible to introduce U.S. Army psywar soldiers into Laos: USIS' need for 'backup' in Laos; contemporary U.S. Army Special

This was the welcoming sign to the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center. The insignias from left to right represent Special Forces, the Special Warfare Center, and the 1st Psywar Battalion (B&L).

Warfare doctrine; and national policies governing overseas information activities.

This article has provided context for understanding the role of U.S. Army psywar in Laos in the early 1960s. First, it provided a brief history of Laotian governance and U.S.-Laos relations. Second, it detailed the August 1960 armed coup by 'neutralist' CPT Kong Le and how that drew the U.S. even further into the chaotic situation in Laos. Third, this article described the long and winding path to establishing an overt U.S. military presence (MAAG Laos) in April 1961. Finally, it provided a background of U.S. information activities in Laos via the USIS, and the challenges it faced in its 'hearts and minds' campaign, dating to the mid-1950s.

In the summer of 1960, twelve unsuspecting soldiers of the 1st Psywar Battalion (B&L), U.S. Army Special Warfare Center, at Fort Bragg, NC, were given a sensitive overseas assignment. Many were young and new to the military, and none of them knew what to expect. They were as bewildered as BG Heintges had been two years earlier when the Pentagon sent him to the PEO in Laos. Based on his initial survey, Heintges had developed a plan for U.S. Army Special Forces to provide 'Shoot and Salute' training to Laotian armed forces in their fight against the Communists. However, the introduction of a psywar augmentation team in early 1961 proved there was more to the American military effort in Laos than 'Shoot and Salute' training. The activities of these 1st Psywar Battalion (B&L) soldiers in Laos is the focus of a follow-up article in the next issue of *Veritas*.

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Endnotes

1 Document (Doc.) 505: "Telegram from the Embassy in Laos to the Department of State," 15 November 1957, in *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1955-1957, East Asian Security; Cambodia; Laos, Volume XXI*, online at https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments, accessed 20 April 2017. Hereafter, *FRUS* documents will be cited by number, title, date, and *FRUS* volume (vol.); all were accessed on the Office of the Historian, Department of State website.

2 LTG John A. Heintges, interview with MAJ Jack A. Pellicci, 1974, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 494, hereafter "Heintges interview" with page number.

3 USIA, "Inspection Report: USIS Laos," 31 March 1960, 4-5, in Folder "Laos, April 19, 1960; February 6-17, 1956," Record Group (RG) 306: Records of the U.S. Information Agency, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), hereafter "USIA Inspection Report" with page number; CIA, "Background Notes on Laos," 16 January 1961, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/home, accessed 17 April 2017. Unless otherwise noted, all CIA documents were accessed on the CIA Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Reading Room website.

4 Its membership consisting of leaders from agencies deemed necessary by the Ambassador (e.g., MAAG, USIA, USAID, etc.), a country team "functions within the country to which it is accredited and focuses its attention on furthering the aims of U.S. policy and providing the country with requested advice and assistance." Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 33-5: *Psychological Operations Techniques and Procedures* (Washington, DC, 1966), 3.

5 Doc. 339: "Telegram from the Embassy in Laos to the Department of State," 3 February 1956; Doc. 341: "Memorandum from the Director of the Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs," 4 February 1956; Doc. 343: "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Laos," 9 February 1956; Doc. 464: "Report by the Joint Strategic Plans Committee to the JCS," 8 August 1957; Doc. 389: "Telegram from the Embassy in Laos to the Department of State," 26 October 1956, all in *FRUS, 1955-1957, East Asian Security; Cambodia; Laos, Vol. XXI.*

6 The Geneva Accords and Laos's status as an independent, neutral nation presented an ongoing challenge for the U.S. in its ability to provide direct support. In addition, the U.S. perceived a feeling of ingratitude from and contention with the Royal Lao Government for its support, as evidenced by the 26 October 1956 State Department statement, "[Military funding] is making U.S. support to Lao Army, which is indispensable to independence, a major issue between us." Moreover, the frequent conciliatory approach of the Royal Lao Government towards the Pathet Lao caused the U.S. to conclude on 15 November 1957 that it was "aiding [the Communists] more than [the] free world." For documents pertaining to U.S. aid to Laos and its impact on U.S.-Lao relations, see, for example, Doc. 376: "Telegram from the Embassy in Laos to the Department of State," 23 August 1956; Doc. 389: "Telegram from the Embassy in Laos to the Department of State," 26 October 1956; and Doc. 505: "Telegram from the Embassy in Laos to the Department of State," 15 November 1957, all in *FRUS, 1955-1957, East Asian Security; Cambodia; Laos, Vol. XXI.*

7 "Heintges interview," 495, 500, 502, 511, quotation from 500.

8 "Heintges interview," 495-96, 498-99, 579-81, quotations from 495-96, 499.

9 See, for example, Kenneth Conboy, *The War in Laos, 1960-1975* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1989); Kenneth Conboy, *Shadow War: The CIA's Secret War in Laos* (Boulder, CO: Paladin Press, 1995); Roger Warner, *Shooting at the Moon: The Story of America's Clandestine War in Laos* (South Royalton, VT: Steerforth Press, 1996); and Seth Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling: American Foreign Policy in Cold War Laos* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

10 "Background Notes on Laos"; Stephen E. Ambrose and Douglas G. Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938* (New York: Penguin Group, 1997 [8th ed.]), 138-39; Doc. 1: "Memorandum of Conversation with President Eisenhower," 2 January 1961, and Doc. 8, "Memorandum for the Record," 19 January 1961, both in *FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. XXIV, Laos Crisis*. The other SEATO countries were the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, France, Thailand, Pakistan, and the Philippines. Despite U.S. hopes, SEATO would prove incapable of resolving the crisis in Laos.

11 Jacobs and Dulles quotations in Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling*, 80-81.

12 "Background Notes on Laos."

13 "Background Notes on Laos." According to Thomas L. Ahern, Jr., *Undercover Armies: CIA and Surrogate Warfare in Laos, 1961-1975* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 2006), 4, the "Laotian military was known as the *Forces Armées Laotiennes* (FAL), but after 1960, it came to be referred to as the *Forces Armées Royales* (FAR)." Ahern chose to only use FAR for consistency. To avoid confusion, this article will use more general terms like 'Laotian army' or 'royal armed forces'.

14 "Background Notes on Laos."

15 "Background Notes on Laos"; "Heintges interview," 542-45, 564-66, 576-79, 581-83; CIA, "SUBJECT: North Vietnamese Involvement in the Fighting in Laos," 7 January 1961. The Plain of Jars was, as its name implies, an area containing prehistoric jar-like archaeological relics.

16 For U.S. support to Boun Oum and GEN Phoumi; international support of Souvanna; U.S. efforts for an international solution to Laos (except for the ICC), and the Soviet airlift of supplies, see, for example, Doc. 1: "Memorandum of Conversation with President Eisenhower," 2 January 1961; Doc. 2: "Memorandum of Conference with President Eisenhower," 3 January 1961; Doc. 3: "Memorandum of Discussion at the 473rd Meeting of the NSC," 5 January 1961; Doc. 4: "Paper Prepared by the President's Assistant Staff Secretary (Eisenhower)," 9 January 1961, all in *FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. XXIV, Laos Crisis*; CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "SUBJECT: The Situation in Laos (as of 0800 EST)," 1 January 1961; CIA, "NSC Briefing," 5 January 1961.

17 State Department, "U.S. Relations with Laos," 13 December 2016, https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2770.htm, accessed 25 April 2017. The U.S. Ambassadors to Laos during this period were Charles W. Yost (1955-1956), J. Graham Parsons (1956-1958), Horace H. Smith (1958-1960), and Winthrop G. Brown (1960-1962)

18 For more on the PEO as a mechanism for U.S. support to Laos, see, for example, Doc. 339: "Telegram from the Embassy in Laos to the Department of State," 3 February 1956; Doc. 388: "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Laos," 20 October 1956; and Doc. 464: "Report by the Joint Strategic Plans Committee to the JCS," 8 August 1957, all in *FRUS, 1955-1957, East Asian Security; Cambodia; Laos, Vol. XXI*; description of MAAG Thailand and JUSMAGTHAI found on National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), "Record Group 472: Records of the United States Forces in Southeast Asia, 1950-1975," https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/472.html, accessed 26 April 2017. The budget for U.S. military support to Laos totaled $35.6 million in 1956 and $20 million in 1957.

19 "Heintges interview," 500. For more on 'civilianizing' Heintges and others for this assignment, see "Heintges interview," 517-518. In January 1961, much to the irritation of Heintges, the *New York Times* 'blew the lid' on him and the secretive 'civilian' mission in Laos. Jack Raymond, "U.S. General Runs Quiet Laos Team," *New York Times*, 9 January 1961.

20 Doc. 452: "Telegram from the Ambassador in Laos (Parsons) to the Director of the Office of Southeast Asian Affairs (Young)," 25 June 1957, in *FRUS, 1955-1957, East Asian Security; Cambodia; Laos, Vol. XXI.*

21 Doc. 181: "Editorial Note," no date, in *FRUS, 1958-1960, East Asia-Pacific Region; Cambodia; Laos, Vol. XVI.*

22 "Heintges interview," 505-10, 516, 521-25, 528-29, quotations from 505, 521.

23 Heintges' plan was timely, as U.S. policymakers were working to improve long-term Military Assistance Planning and mutual security operations plans for countries receiving U.S. assistance. At one National Security Council meeting, GEN Lyman L. Lemnitzer, U.S. Army Chief of Staff (1957-1960) and Chairman of the JCS (1960-1962),

argued that "training for military forces was . . . one of the most important things that we did . . . [O]ur plans should be worldwide in character and [we] should not let the needs of NATO detract from the needs of other areas of the world." Doc. 266: "Memorandum of Discussion at the 465th Meeting of the NSC," 31 October 1960, in *FRUS, 1958-1960, Foreign Economic Policy, Vol. IV.*

24 See, generally, Stephen Sherman, *Who's Who from HOTFOOT/WHITE STAR* (Houston, TX: Radix Press, 1994).

25 "Heintges interview," 524, 529. For more on the French 'halfhearted'—even obstructionist—approach to defending Laos, see, for example, Doc. 10: "Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Nitze) to Secretary of Defense McNamara," 23 January 1961, and Doc. 25: "Memorandum of Conference with President Kennedy," 9 March 1961, both in *FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. XXIV, Laos Crisis.*

26 "Heintges interview," 536-537, quotation from 536.

27 Doc. 357: "Editorial Note," no date, in *FRUS, 1958-1960, East Asia-Pacific Region; Cambodia; Laos, Vol. XVI.* CAT had its origins in post-WWII efforts to support Chinese Nationalists in their fight against the Communists.

28 Doc. 489: "Telegram from the Delegation at the North Atlantic Council Ministerial Meeting to the Department of State," 25 December 1960, in *FRUS, 1958-1960, East Asia-Pacific Region; Cambodia; Laos, Vol. XVI.*

29 Doc. 4: "Paper Prepared by the President's Assistant Staff Secretary (Eisenhower)," 9 January 1961, in *FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. XXIV, Laos Crisis.*

30 Doc. 14: "Summary Record of Meeting," 8 February 1961, in *FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. XXIV, Laos Crisis.* Despite expanding aerial resupply missions, U.S. planes carrying military supplies were still instructed to land in nearby Udon in northern Thailand, rather than in Vientiane. Laotian and Thai forces would then move the supplies into Laos.

31 Doc. 6: "Memorandum of Conversation," 17 January 1961, in *FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. XXIV, Laos Crisis.* On the diplomatic side, the JCS and others continued to recommend that the U.S. seek SEATO support for its pro-Boun Oum/Phoumi approach; resist UN involvement and the reactivation of the ICC; and only pursue unilateral action as a last resort if SEATO fell through. For more on U.S. supporting an international solution to the problem as opposed to unilateral action, see, for example, Doc. 11: "Memorandum from Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Kennedy," 24 January 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. XXIV, Laos Crisis.*

32 The U.S. looked to support the Royal Lao Government in this civic action program, which would be handled by the National Council for Civic Action, consisting of a Commissioner (COL Oudon Sananikone) and representatives from several Royal Lao Government ministries (including Public Health and Urbanism, Public Works, National Education, Agriculture, Finance, National Defense, and Interior). The key "action elements" would be the armed forces and mobile teams of technicians from the various ministries with the mission of putting "self-help program [in the provinces] in motion through [the] application [of] technical skill." The intent for the armed forces was to put one company of 100 men in each of the country's 56 districts to maintain security by cooperating with the population "through auto-defense and local assistance programs." Doc. 412: "Telegram from the Embassy in Laos to the Department of State," 8 January 1957; and Doc. 424: "Telegram from the Embassy in Laos to the Department of State," 13 February 1957, both in *FRUS, 1955-1957, East Asian Security; Cambodia; Laos, Vol. XXI.*

33 CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "SUBJECT: The Situation in Laos (as of 0800 EST)," 1 January 1961; CIA, "NSC Briefing," 5 January 1961; Doc. 357: "Editorial Note," no date, in *FRUS, 1958-1960, East Asia-Pacific Region; Cambodia; Laos, Vol. XVI.* In an effort to counter the aggressive 'neutralist'/Communist propaganda in Laos during the CPT Kong Le rebellion, the NSC approved the furnishing of a radio transmitter to northern Thailand to use as a clandestine pro-Royal Lao Government/anti-Communist broadcasting station. There is little evidence of the effectiveness of such measures.

34 "USIA Inspection Report," 4-5.

35 Description of USIA found on NARA, "Record Group 306: Records of the U.S. Information Agency," https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/306.html, accessed 16 May 2017.

36 "USIA Inspection Report," 2, 26-40.

37 "USIA Inspection Report," 26-28.

38 Email from Raymond P. Ambrozak to Jared M. Tracy, "SUBJECT: Re: Radio Station," 27 December 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

39 "USIA Inspection Report," 28-32.

40 USIA, "The United States Information Agency: A Commemoration," no date, 23, available for download at http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/usia/, accessed 16 May 2017.

41 USIA, "The United States Information Agency: A Commemoration," 23.

42 USIA, "The United States Information Agency: A Commemoration," 23, 29.

43 "USIA Inspection Report," 2, 16-19.

44 Office, Chief of Information, Department of the Army, *U.S. Army Special Warfare* (Washington, DC, 1962), 9. For more on Special Warfare, see Alfred H. Paddock, *U.S. Army Special Warfare: Its Origins* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

45 FM 33-5: *Psychological Operations Techniques and Procedures* (1966), 9, 17.

President John F. Kennedy meeting with Souvanna Phouma on 22 July 1962.