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8 April 1963

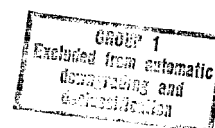
SUBJECT : CIA Support to Meo Tribesmen in Laos

Support to Meo tribesmen began initially in January 1961 when authority was given to train and arm 1,000 to serve as a guerrilla force. From that time until 6 October 1962, with the approval of the Special Group, the organized Meo forces were increased to a maximum strength of 19,500. These Meo were trained to various degrees, given arms, organized into several types of guerrilla units, some of which were mobile, and certain personnel were selected for leadership and communications training.

25X1 After 6 October 1962 this guerrilla force, principally defensive in nature, was converted into a "force in being" which could provide the U. S. with an already organized guerrilla force should hostilities be re-initiated by the communists in Laos. A carefully selected group of this force had been trained in intelligence reporting, and as a result its leadership has provided the U. S. with one of the best stay-behind intelligence organizations yet achieved. It is by means of this group, with the guidance of two Agency case officers [redacted]

25X1 [redacted] that the U. S. is obtaining intelligence information on the activities of the Pathet Lao and the Viet Minh who are currently harassing Souvanna Phouma's neutralist forces. Since 6 October, under a program supervised by AID, and jointly financed by AID, the Defense Department and CIA, the Meos have been provided rice, seed rice, salt, clothing and primitive agricultural tools for cultivation. The continued supply of food and daily needs for the Meo until they can become self-sufficient themselves has been the subject of bitter attack by the Pathet Lao (and certain neutralists closely allied with the Pathet Lao) who have charged that the U. S. Government is maintaining a maquis which the U. S. will eventually use to upset the Government of National Union. Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma at one juncture requested in writing of the U. S. Ambassador that these relief flights be maintained to Meo refugees, but the activity has not been without incident; two planes

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have been shot down by neutralist units inspired by the Pathet Lao. Souvanna Phouma has failed to exercise a strong hand to guarantee the safety of these flights. Nevertheless rice and salt drops are continuing from Vientiane under AID auspices as best as possible under the circumstances.

Covertly, CIA has a mission to supply Meos with ammunition if the Meo need such for defending their home areas from harassment by the Pathet Lao and Viet Minh. Since 23 July 1962, the date of the signing of the Geneva Accords, the Ambassador has recommended, and the Department and the White House have approved covert ammunition resupply on four occasions

to help the Meo defend their own homesites. The most recent of these ammunition resupply flights occurred in March 1963.

It is of interest to note that in Xieng Khouang Province, which includes the currently critical Plaine des Jarres area, there are between 5,000 and 6,000 Meo. They are principally in defensive positions atop the hills which encircle the Plaine des Jarres.

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