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[Article by Daniel Lulinski: "From a silent war to invasion"]

[Excerpt] At nearly every Lao airport one can observe the following scene: each afternoon, after "work", hundreds of U.S. officers dressed in civilian clothes get into unmarked airplanes or helicopters in order to leave the Mekong for nearby Thailand. In the morning they return again to Laos. Thus they attempt to maintain the fiction that American military personnel are "not stationed" in Laos, that they only stay there temporarily "on business trips." However, American officers or advisers living in so-called "secret CIA cities" in Long Cheng or Sam Thong northeast of Vientiane on the Plaine des Jarres do not leave the country. Attack bases and airfields of General Vang Pao's mountaineer army, which is composed of CIA mercenaries from the Meo tribes, are situated here. "Air America" or "Continental Air Service" planes take off from here with weapons and supplies for rebellious Meo active on the Pathet Lao home front.

The CIA brutally uses for its own ends ethnic discord and certain resentments frequently kindled in the past by colonialists between Lao and Vietnamese, between various ethnic groups living in Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Burma, and southern provinces of China. Among these

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minority ethnic groups, which live mainly in Laos, the DRV, and CPR, the Thai, Yao, and Meo play a special role in CIA plans. About 300,000 Meo live in Laos, mainly in the northeastern provinces of Sam Neua, Xieng Khouang, and Luang Prabang.

This is a very proud, brave, nomadic mountain tribe, of whom it is said they cannot live below 1,000 meters above sea level. Meo live in small villages in the mountains, engaged in primitive agriculture and opium production. They have been on an unfriendly basis for years with the royal government in Vientiane, which did not want to recognize their economic wishes and desire for autonomy; in other words, freedom in opium trade. The Meo are also rebelling against the government of Thailand, where about 250,000 of them live, for similar reasons.

After increased U.S. intervention in Laos the CIA decided to utilize the rebellious sentiment and to draw the Meo over to their side. Therefore, sabotage units composed of Meo and subordinate to U.S. intelligence officers were created. Forty-year-old Vang Pao, former sergeant in the French colonial army, was put at the head of the units and given the rank of major general. To win over the Meo, the CIA buys opium from them at a high price -- of course without respecting international agreements on the fight against narcotics -- or facilitates a market for this commodity in

Danang or Macao. This is also a form of financing arms deliveries to the Meo on the Pathet Lao front.

The U.S. promises the mountaineers that they will impel the Lao government to accept Meo demands for autonomy, which the Vientiane government certainly will not honor after the eventual withdrawal of American troops. The royal government views with great reserve the role which the CIA has assigned the Meo and did not recognize Vang Pao's rank of general for a long time. However, it recently named him "commander of the Second Military District" under pressure from Washington. The army of Meo executioners numbers about 10,000 soldiers, which is directly commanded by American officers and receives its tasks from the "H.Q. 333" staff in Udon, Thailand.