

VANG PAO

SOC 4.01.2 The Politics
of Heroin in S.E
Asia

PRESS CLIPS

By Alexander Cockburn

EXCERPT:

What Did You Do in the War, Daddy?

A couple of weeks ago I noted the *New York Times's* genial treatment of a couple of war criminals in the shapes of Blowtorch Komer and William Colby, both veterans of the pacification campaign in Vietnam.

The paper, I'm glad to see, is keeping up its efforts to draw a veil over those emotion-fraught events in Southeast Asia. Last Sunday, Steven Roberts had a pleasant piece, filed from Montana, headed LAOTIAN, AFTER YEARS OF WAR, LIKES THE PEACE OF MONTANA. Underneath was a cosy picture of Vang Pao, "a former major general in the Royal Laotian Army, inspecting cattle feeding on his ranch in Montana."

Amid his rhapsodies about the Montana creeks "reborn with melting snow," Roberts did find space to mention that Vang had been a major general in the Royal Laotian Army, and "had been an influential leader among a mountain people known as the Meos," helping "to organize them into a special fighting force with heavy backing from the Central Intelligence Agency." Roberts also noted that Vang had left Laos in May 1975 aboard his own American-made plane, along with six wives and 28 children. Roberts said Vang stated that he had managed to pay for his Montana spread with the help of family, friends, and bank loans.

It's too bad that Roberts did not turn for added information to Alfred McCoy's *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*. Here we find numerous citations: for example, ". . . the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics has reports that Gen. Vang Pao, commander of the CIA's secret army [to fight the Pathet Lao] has been operating a heroin factory at Long Tieng, headquarters for CIA operations in northern Laos . . ." Or, ". . . In addition to his regular battalian, Vang Pao was also commander of Meo self-defense forces in the Plain of Jars region. Volunteers had been promised regular allotments of food and money, but Vang Pao pocketed these salaries, and most went unpaid for months at a time. When one Meo Lieutenant demanded that the irregulars be given their back pay, Vang Pao shot him in the leg. That settled the matter for the moment . . ."

According to McCoy, the CIA and USAID helped Vang form his own private airline, Xieng Khouang Air Transport: "Reliable Meo sources report that Xieng Khouang Air Transport is the airline used to carry opium between Long Tieng and Vientiane." McCoy's analysis of Vang's alliance with the CIA in purchasing and moving the opium crop is most instructive. With such thoughts in mind, there is something a little moving about Roberts's final lines: "But now the American land grows his seeds and his children and the morning was slipping away. It was time to get on with the plowing."