



10 August 1992

Possible POW/MIA-Associated Markings in Southeast Asia

Introduction

This information was prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency for the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs. It is a summary of CIA analysis performed in 1976, 1980, 1981, and 1992 of areas in Vietnam and Laos where markings on buildings and terrain were evaluated as evidence of possible links to US POW/MIAs in Southeast Asia.

July 1976 Analysis of Dong Mang Prison Camp, North Vietnam

The prison is located at 21-04-00N/107-07-15E, approximately 26 kilometers west-northwest of the port of Cam Pha. It is located in a secluded area at the base of the foothills about 1 kilometer north of Dong Mang and 2 kilometers north of Route 183.

Although we were unable to find any conclusive evidence that this prison might contain American POWs, there are several unique features in this prison that differ from other known Vietnamese prisons. It is secluded in a relatively remote area and has an access control point on the road leading to the camp. Walls within the compound, physically and visually segregate the prisoners. The visual segregation of prisoners indicates it is

not a forced labor camp. The only other known prison that used internally walled compounds to segregate the prisoners was the former POW camp at Dan Hoi.

There was roof repair work on one of the confinement buildings/living quarters in July 1975. A study of this revealed a unique alternating light and dark pattern on the roof. This pattern, in the form of squares, was repeated three times at different locations on the roof. Because of the seemingly unusual manner in which the roof was being repaired, we attempted to discern if this pattern was coincidental or purposeful. We were unable to make this distinction and realize that the prospect of it being purposeful is remote. It is not known if prisoners would be used or allowed to make these repairs. However, we did investigate this possibility. An attempt was made to transpose this pattern into Morse code. The white squares, being larger than the dark ones, were considered as dashes and the dark squares as dots. A dash-dot-dash in Morse code transposes as the letter K. However, two less conspicuous possibilities exist. These are the letters NT and TA that are variations of the same dash-dot-dash pattern. We contacted an individual in the Department of Defense who has extensive knowledge of the POW situation. According to this individual, the letter K was the permanently designated signal letter assigned to air crews should they be downed and unable to recall the monthly and/or daily assigned signal letters. This information has been confirmed through discussions with former POWs.

The prison was under construction adjacent to a small possible detention camp in July 1972. The possible detention camp consisted of a secured compound containing approximately ten small, semipermanent buildings. As work on the present prison progressed, the semipermanent facility was dismantled.

The currently existing prison consists of a walled compound containing eight confinement buildings/living quarters, one probable messhall, two support buildings, at least four latrines, ten unidentified buildings and two probable guard houses/towers. The interior of the compound is divided into 14 separately secured areas. Each area is secured by a solid wall with a single access. The only buildings in the compound that are not separately secured are the probable messhall and two support buildings. Studies of prisons in North Vietnam known to contain POWs during the war have shown efforts to segregate the prisoners by using walls or other materials to obscure visibility. However, none were as extensively segregated as at this compound. A small building, possibly used for solitary confinement, is located outside of the walled compound. The building is secured on three sides by fencing and on one side by the east wall of the compound. Two possible guard houses/towers are at the two outer corners of the fenced area. Another guard tower is located on a hillside outside of the compound near the southeast corner and it affords good visibility of the entire prison.

During construction of one of the confinement buildings/living quarters, we determined that there would be eight rooms or cells. Assuming the other confinement buildings also contain eight rooms and if two to four prisoners were in

each room, the compound could contain between 130 and 260 prisoners.

A large area behind the east (rear) wall of the compound has been cleared and leveled. Portions of an outer wall have been constructed around the compound with one segment of this outer wall extending into the cleared area. The height of this outer wall is about three times higher than the existing wall securing the prison. If this cleared area is for enlarging the compound, it could increase the current capacity by approximately 50 percent.

The administration and support facility for the prison is located just outside the prison compound. This facility consists of one administration building, three barracks, one probable messhall and several support buildings.

A possible satellite/auxiliary detention camp is located 1,100 meters northwest of the main compound. This camp began to develop as construction of the main compound progressed. It may have been constructed to hold personnel from the possible detention camp that was dismantled to make room for the main compound. If this satellite area is a detention facility, it indicates an effort to separate the prisoners being kept there from those being confined at the main compound. Otherwise the main compound would have originally been constructed of sufficient size to accommodate these prisoners.

This possible satellite compound is triangular shaped and contains four to five possible confinement buildings/living

quarters and several support buildings. These buildings are much smaller than those at the main compound. Two walls of the compound are in the open, but vegetation covers the area where we expect the third wall to be. There is a large opening where the two walls should meet. This large opening raises questions about the security of the compound. Nine administration/support buildings are located outside of the compound.

December 1980 Analysis of Nhommarath Detention Camp East of Thakhek, Laos

A detention camp is located in central Laos, 67 km east of Thakhek at [REDACTED]. It is in a relatively isolated area. The camp was established between April 1978 and September 1979. We determined it was occupied in December 1980, but could not identify persons in the camp.

The camp is located in the northwest of a large cleared area of slash and burn activity. What appears to be a low fence is present at the tree line around part of the clearing. The camp consists of an outer area and an inner area, each of which is enclosed by a fence.

The outer stockade-type fence is about [REDACTED] and encompasses an area of about 18,200 square meters. Between this outer fence and the inner fence, there are guard force quarters, a trench, an automatic weapons position, two observation towers, and row crops. The observation towers are thatch-roofed and each has a platform [REDACTED] above the ground. The

only entrance through the outer fence is at the southwest corner. A trail leads from this entrance to Route 12, about 500 meters to the west. The trail is wide enough for vehicles but there was no indication of vehicular use.

The inner compound is located near the center of the camp. The compound encompasses an area of about 2,800 square meters and is enclosed by a stockade-type fence [REDACTED] The main entrance to this compound is near the southwest corner with a second entrance near the northwest corner. The inner compound contains five buildings, several sheds, and various unidentified structures/objects located mostly along the compound perimeter. The two largest buildings appear to be barracks. A narrow fenced corridor extends from the southeast corner of the inner compound into a cluster of trees.

A flat, nearly square cleared area of about 760 square meters is about 40 meters east of the camp. Its function is unknown. A small possible earthen dam is located on a stream that flows through the east side of the camp. A few buildings, which could have some relation to the camp, are located in the forest south of the slash and burn area around the camp.





In April 1978, only a narrow foot trail passed through the heavy forest now containing the camp. By September 1979, the primary structures had been constructed but the camp did not seem complete.

January 1981 Analysis of Khommarath Detention Camp, Laos

A detention camp is located in central Laos, 67 km east of Thakhek at [REDACTED]. It is in a relatively isolated area. The camp was established between April 1978 and September 1979 and was occupied in December 1980. We could not identify persons in the camp.

The camp is located in the northwest of a large cleared area of slash and burn activity. What appears to be a low fence is present at the tree line around part of the clearing. The camp consists of an outer area and an inner area, each of which is enclosed by a fence.

The outer stockade-type fence [REDACTED] and encompasses an area of about 18,200 square meters. Between this

outer fence and the inner fence, there are guard force quarters, a trench, an automatic weapons position, two observation towers, row crops, and what appears to be the number 52 on the ground. Also located between the two fences is a stream with two earthen dams used to impound water, probably for the row crops. The observation towers appear to be positioned for observing the inner compound. The towers are thatch-roofed and each has a platform [REDACTED] above ground. The only entrance through the outer fence is at the southwest corner. A trail leads from this entrance to Route 12, about 500 meters to the west. The trail is wide enough for vehicles, but there was no evidence of vehicular traffic.

What appears to be the number 52 is on the ground in the row crop area between the inner compound and the stream on the east side of the camp. Each numeral is 1-2 meters wide and 3 meters high. The two numerals appear to be shallow depressions, possibly with low vegetation along some of the outer edges. If the numerals had been formed by vegetation, growth over time would have enhanced their shape. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The location of the numerals is such that they most likely cannot be seen from either of the two observation towers because of trees located in the line of sight.

The inner compound is located near the center of the camp. The compound encompasses an area of about 2,800 square meters and is enclosed by a stockade-type fence [REDACTED]. The main entrance to this compound is near the southwest corner with a second entrance near the northwest corner. The inner compound

contains five buildings, several sheds, and various unidentified structures/objects located mostly along the compound perimeter. The two largest buildings appear to be barracks. The inner compound seemed to be occupied in December 1990. Two parallel fenced corridors extend from the southeast corner of the inner compound into a cluster of trees.

A gently sloped, nearly square, cleared area of about 760 square meters is located about 40 meters east of the camp. A tree was left standing in one corner of the area and a possible automatic weapons position was recently dug in another corner. This cleared area's function is unknown. A third earthen dam is located outside the fenced camp on the stream that flows through the east side of the camp. A few buildings, which could have some relation to the camp, are located in the forest south of the slash and burn area around the camp.





In April 1978, only a narrow foot trail passed through the heavy forest now containing the camp. By September 1979, the primary structures had been constructed but the camp did not appear complete.

1992 Analysis of Surface Markings at Sam Neua, Laos

Our analysis of January 1988 information focused on several unusual markings--the letters USA and what resembled a US Air Force escape and evasion symbol known as a Walking Kilo (essentially the letter K used to indicate a downed pilot)--on the ground west of Sam Neua, Laos. We are uncertain as to who may have made these markings, but recently completed analysis gives us a better understanding of how the markings were made, how long the markings may have been present, and what activity may have been going on concurrently in the surrounding region.

We obtained early 1987 and mid-1988 information on the Sam Neua area, but the markings were not present as in January 1988. [REDACTED] analysis enabled us to more confidently determine that there was a relative age difference between the USA letters and the possible Walking Kilo. It also enabled us to make an assessment as to the method used to create the markings. Our analysis suggests the following:

- The USA letters were newer by not more than a few

months than the possible Walking Kilo.

The USA markings were manmade. Because of the apparent decay of the possible Walking Kilo, it could not be determined if it was manmade, although that possibility cannot be ruled out.

- No other markings or symbols were identified in the Sam Neua area.
- The markings appear to have been created by forming depressions in the ground--either stamped, or more likely dug--that were then filled with water. The area surrounding the letters may indicate recently dug soil, and the narrow portions of the S may indicate that the water was drying up. The markings do not appear to be formed from manmade material or from vegetation.
- Since the markings were constructed in a rice paddy, it is likely that the USA was formed after the harvest season, which ends in December, and would have been obliterated by the beginning of the rainy seasons in May, when rice shoots are transplanted into the flooded paddies.

In related analysis, our study indicates that the markings may have been visible from a portion of Route 6 just to the northeast. The letters were positioned so that an individual traveling along Route 6 from the northeast to southwest could have seen them. In addition, the markings would have been

clearly visible to an aircraft or helicopter taking off from the airfield at Sam Neua, which is 3.2 km to the west northwest, if that aircraft took off from east to west into the prevailing winds and flew in the direction of Vientiane or Xiangkhoang.

Finally, we studied other information to assess activity in Rua Phan Province in general and the Sam Neua area in particular. We reached the following conclusions:

- An historical precedent exists for suggesting the presence of American POWs in the Sam Neua area. Photographs taken by a reconnaissance aircraft in October 1969 show what may be as many as 20 non-Asians accompanied by Pathet Lao guards near caves at Ban Nakay Teu, 20 km east of the Sam Neua markings. Sam Neua at that time was a major Pathet Lao stronghold.
- There was a substantial amount of reported sightings of American POWs in this region following the discovery of the Sam Neua markings, indicating that DIA's investigations probably prompted locals to offer information after the markings were found. However, in no case did further analysis confirm any of these reports.
- Reports indicate that there was in 1928, and continues to be to this day, a certain amount of insurgency activity-- best described as low-level hit-and-run--in the vicinity of Sam Neua. This in turn prompted some counterinsurgency operations by Lao government forces, and may account for some reports of unusual activity.

-- It is very likely that a small number of Soviet personnel (mainly pilots) occasionally visited Sam Neua as late as 1988. A limited number of other Westerners similarly traveled to the town, sometimes up Route 6 past the site of the Sam Neua markings.

1992 Analysis of Surface Markings Near Muang Tan, Laos

Our analysis of January 1988 also focused on what appeared to be ground markings resembling possible numbers and letters in rice paddies 500 meters south of the village of Muang Tan, about 43 km southeast of Xieng Khouang provincial town, on Highway 42. These markings resembled (depending on the orientation) A5!, K5!, i5Y, or iSY in one rice paddy, and in the other paddy either 07 or L0.

[REDACTED] recent analysis has provided some additional information that may be useful in determining whether or not these markings can be attributed to a possible American POW/MIA presence.

When the USA marking was detected near Sam Neua, Laos, we reexamined other areas in Laos and discovered the possible markings near Muang Tan. We obtained late 1988 and early 1989 information on the Muang Tan area, but the markings were not present as in January 1988.

Our review indicates that the possible markings most likely were associated with the rehabilitation of terraced rice paddy dikes.

- We compared the January 1988 information with later data and found a realignment of the rice paddy contained in the possible markings resembling 07/L0. The 7/L marking actually was the result of a shadow cast by the rising sun on an angular but--at the time--disconnected section of terraced dike. Subsequently, a completed dike with the 7/L shaped angle was incorporated into a longer terrace. The 0 (like a square with rounded corners) had disappeared, but one side of this round-cornered square had been incorporated into a new terrace dike. This shape routinely occurs throughout rice paddies in this region, and may represent a small diked area employed in the growing, harvesting, or processing of rice.
- Similar comparative analysis of the terraced rice paddy in which the possible AS!/K5!/i5Y/iSY marking was noted indicated that portions of the possible S/S, the !/i and the A/K/Y were also part of an effort to rehabilitate and realign the dike. However, only a portion of the possible markings can readily be attributed to shadow caused by the buildup in height of a section of dike wall. The remainder may result from shadows in depressions--possibly caused by excavation of soil to rebuild the dike.

-- Much of the roughly 90,000 square meter paddy area containing the possible markings was being rehabilitated in 1988 and 1989. The repair and rehabilitation of terraced paddies is a routine occurrence in Southeast Asia. This work generally occurs in the dry season (November through April), after the rice harvest.

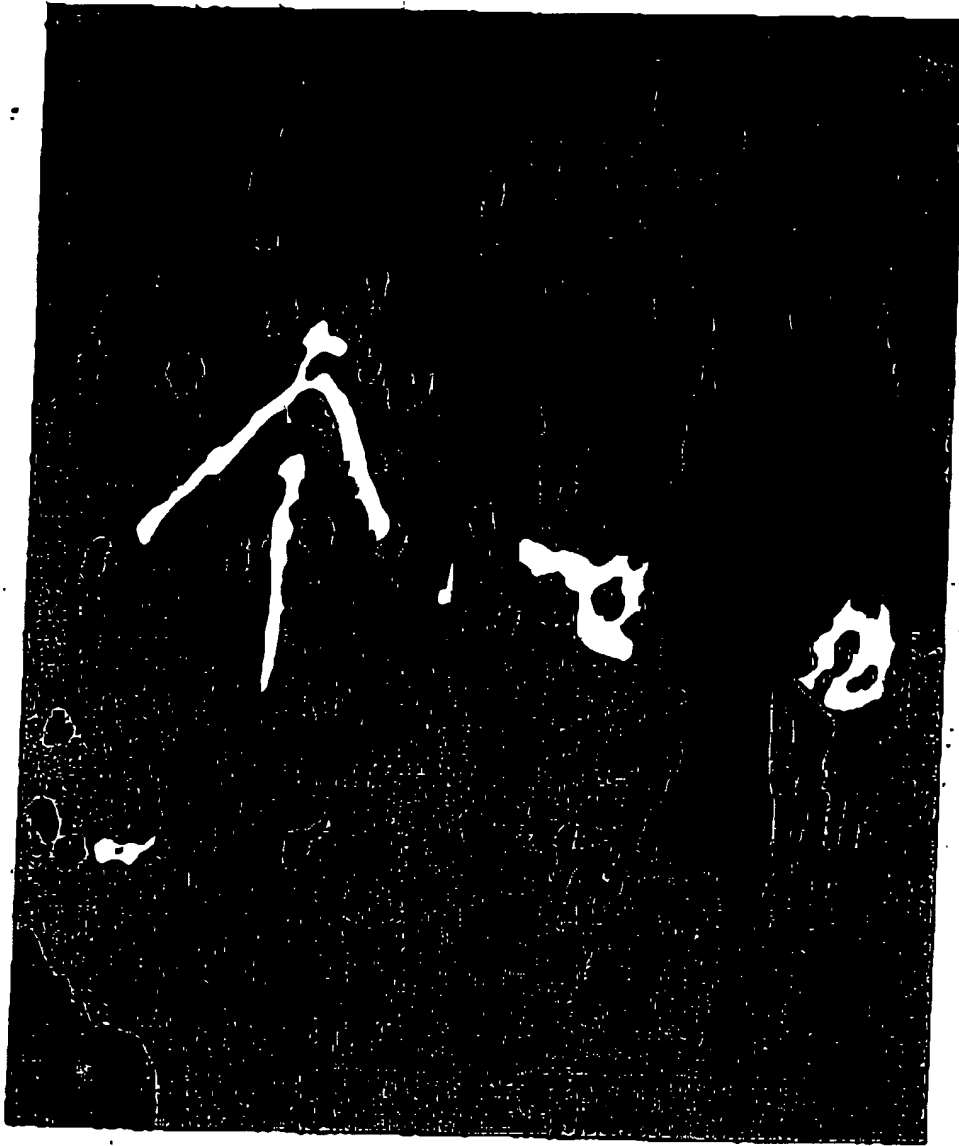
We also assessed other activity in the Xieng Khouang area in 1988.

-- There were some reports regarding sightings or lack of sightings of possible American POWs in Xieng Khouang Province. Evidence cited in many of these reports is inconclusive and often contradictory.

-- A few Soviet military advisors were involved--at least in the earlier stages--in a long-term effort beginning in 1975 to upgrade the Xieng Khouang (aka Thong Hai Hin) Airfield. Some probably were still in the area in 1988.

-- The Lao resistance was active in Xieng Khouang Province in 1987-88, although the small size of the insurgency limited it to hit-and-run attacks against government outposts in the countryside. This may account for some reports of unusual activity.

Surface Markings
Ban Nampo, Loas



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