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MEDICAL SUPPORT BASES IN LAOS
FOR NORTH VIETNAMESE/PATHET LAO FORCES

[redacted]
Life Sciences Division
OSI/CIA

SUMMARY

The Communist forces in Laos have established some 90 medical facilities from the Muong Luong area in northwest Laos, south to the Cambodian border. The facilities, which appear to be concentrated in groups, are located along the infiltration routes used for moving North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units to the south and for moving supplies to South Vietnam from China and North Vietnam. Five general groupings of medical facilities are apparent in the following areas: Houa Khong and Luang Prabang Provinces, Xiangkhoang and Houa Phan Provinces, Khammouane Province, Savannakhet Province, and in Sedone and Attapeu Provinces. The facilities have been reported [redacted]

[redacted] to consist of approximately 63 hospitals unspecified as to size or type of service available, four medical supply depots, a "medical school," a "medical training" facility, a combination hospital/medical headquarters/medical supply depot, and some 20 unidentified medical installations.

The concentration of these facilities appears to be consistent with the observed pattern of PL and NVA military concentrations and operations in Laos. Also the facilities are well located for handling the storage and distribution of supplies coming from China through the Yunnan salient, for supporting the infiltration of supplies and men from North Vietnam into Laos, and the movement of men and supplies from Laos into South Vietnam.

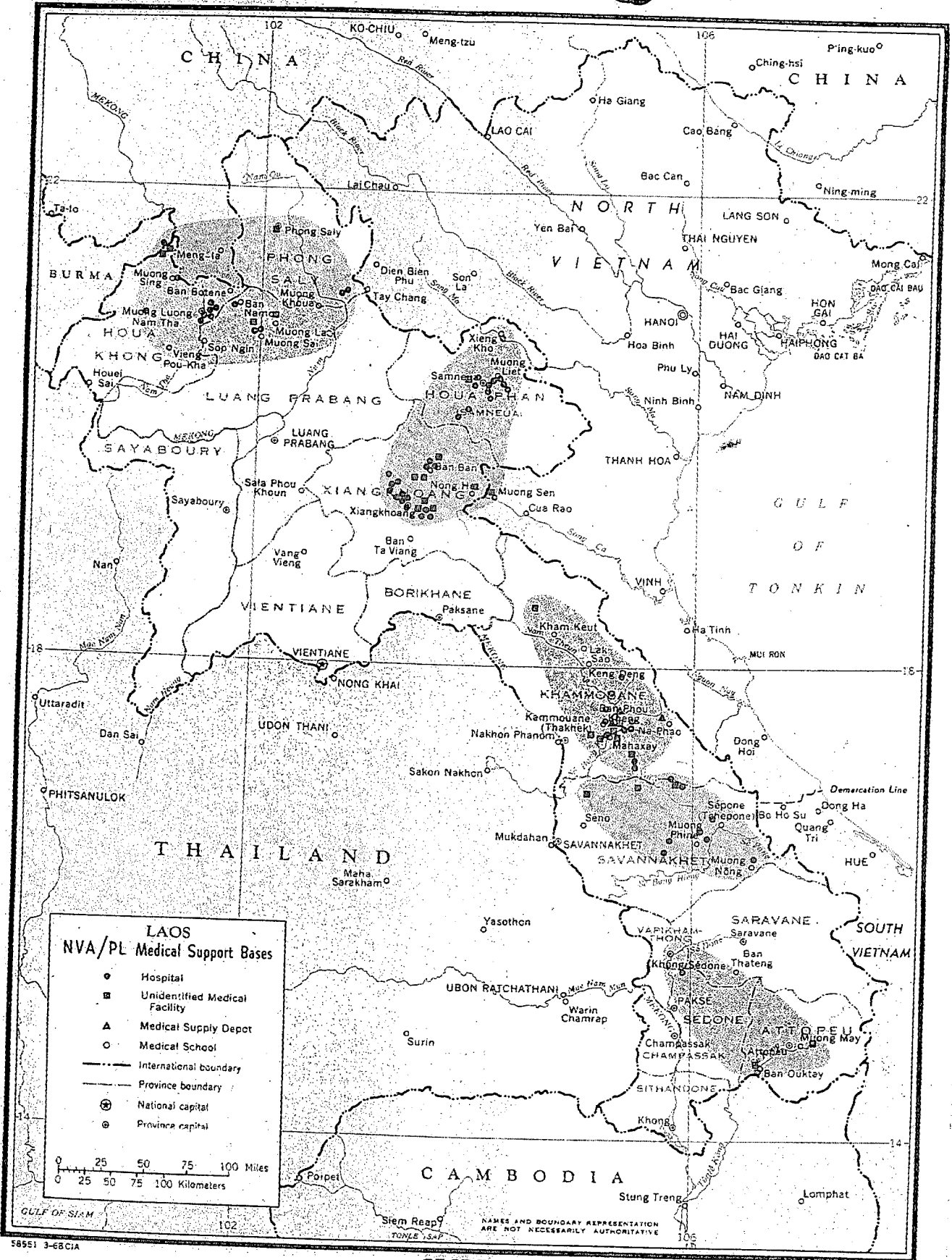
The medical facilities undoubtedly are primarily for the support of the NVA units and secondarily for the PL. Those in the Laotian panhandle probably also serve as support bases for the evacuation and care of the Viet Cong.* Civilians in PL controlled areas are limited in their use of these facilities.

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school is not reflected on the map but could be any one of the unidentified medical facilities in the Xiangkhoang area.

The third general grouping of facilities is located in Khammouane Province and is largely in the Mahaxay-Thakhet area. Six hospitals, five unidentified facilities, two supply depots and a medical school are located within 20 miles of Ban Phou Kheng. Additional facilities in this group consist of three hospitals, two unidentified facilities and a medical supply depot. The grouping of these facilities is consistent with reports of a build-up of communist forces in the Mahaxay-Thakhet area.

The fourth general grouping of facilities is located in Savannakhet Province. This group extends from the Khammouane border south to Muong Nong. Included in this group are six hospitals, a hospital/medical supply/medical headquarters complex, and two unidentified facilities. The complex is located in an area of PL/NVA build-up that started in 1965. Since then, enemy activity has increased in this area which is believed to be a staging area for NVA operations into South Vietnam. According to MACV and other sources, the Viet Cong also are believed to use this general area as a refuge and probably for medical support.

The fifth group lies in Sedone and Attopeu Provinces. This group has the fewest facilities and all but two are near the Cambodian border. The facilities include two hospitals, two unidentified facilities, and a medical supply depot.

The installations in Attopeu may be concerned with the storage and distribution of medicines obtained from Cambodia as well as rendering some medical support to PL and Viet Cong wounded in the area. One report alleges that a PL/NVA headquarters was in the Cambodian border area in the fall of 1967. Among the duties of this headquarters reportedly was the distribution of weapons, food, and medicine from Cambodia. The location of the facilities in Sedone and Attopeu Provinces is consistent with a reported concentration of enemy military units and operations in that area.

Descriptions of PL/NVA medical support facilities in Laos have been very few. Judging from the reports available, however, most of the hospital units appear to be equivalent to Viet Cong battalion aid stations or regimental medical facilities. Bed capacities have not been given but all are probably under 50 beds. While most of the facilities probably can be moved, they appear to be used as fixed installations. Such facilities could handle minor wounds, shock, routine surgery, infectious diseases, and limited periods of convalescence. Apparently few of these hospitals are capable of treating severe wounds, and reports indicate that wounded NVA personnel coming from South Vietnam or Laos are filtered north through Laos to North Vietnam or China. However, one report concerning a large PL hospital near Xiangkhoang Town states that "minor illnesses are not treated." This hospital possibly has facilities for major surgery because it is near a PL/NVA military headquarters. Further details are unavailable.

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Information on the qualifications of Laotian physicians or medical workers also is limited, but most Laotian trained physicians probably are of low professional quality with the exception of those few trained in France. Some Laotian medical personnel apparently have received Chinese or North Vietnamese training sponsored by the PL, but their quality cannot be determined. It can be expected, however, that Chinese physicians, when present, give the best medical service available. Most of the PL medical personnel probably are graduates of six-month medical courses or less where basic nursing and advanced

first aid are taught. The medical school and medical training facilities also are probably of the six-month variety.

The overall capability of the PL for adequate medical care of their own forces is estimated to be low. The treatment of NVA casualties and probably the Viet Cong also will seriously strain their present capability. Civilians in PL controlled territory reportedly are without medical aid, and this situation is the basis for defections among some civilians from PL controlled areas.

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