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December 21, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR: MR. KISSINGER  
 FROM: JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE / S /  
 RICHARD T. KENNEDY  
 SUBJECT: North Laos Situation Report

**Tactical Developments.** Fire Support Bases Stingray and Cobra were ordered abandoned on the afternoon of December 20 (See map at Tab A). They were running low on ammunition and could not be resupplied.

-- Irregular forces withdrawing from the Plain of Jars reported no serious contacts with the enemy during the night of December 20-21, and at last report the Plain was also quiet on December 21.

-- Although the withdrawing irregulars were ordered to form a temporary defensive line along the southwestern edge of the Plain, most of them are continuing to withdraw south and west to Ban Na and Phou Long Mat.

- Two small NVA sapper units attacked Van Pao's headquarters at Long Tieng during the night of December 20-21. Two UH-1 control aircraft were seriously damaged and two others sustained minor damage. Two Lao policemen were killed and 18 others, including six civilians, were wounded. Five NVA were killed during the assault. One of the sapper units was surrounded about three kilometers from Long Tieng on December 21, and was struck by RLAF aircraft.

**Status of Irregular personnel.** Ambassador Godley is not yet able to give a firm report on personnel losses, since units on the Plain have just begun to straggle in. CIA, however, offers the educated guess that during December 17-20 the irregulars sustained 175 KIA, 400 wounded, and perhaps 50 missing. Enemy losses probably ran between 200 and 500 KIA.

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25X1

[REDACTED]

Vang Pao's morale is at an all time low, according to Godley. Vang Pao obtained Souvanna's permission to begin evacuating civilians from Long Tieng on December 20, and by December 21 approximately one third of the civilians had left. AID had been anticipating this possibility, and has ample stocks of rice, medicine and other supplies in the areas to which the civilians will probably move.

25X1

[REDACTED]

Artillery. Ambassador Godley reports that 24 artillery tubes were lost on the Plain of Jars (14 105's and 10 155's). Fifteen pieces of artillery were being prepared for delivery to Long Tieng on December 21; another 12 now being airlifted from the U.S. are due to arrive at Udorn on December 24. Admiral McCain is on hand and is helping to arrange for fire control equipment and other ancillary parts.

Air support. The unseasonably bad weather, along with intense enemy AAA fire, is seriously hampering air support. RLAF T-28's, for example, have had to reduce their activity because of the low ceiling. Godley reports, however, that U.S. air support is outstanding. MACV authorized 100 jet sorties on December 21 by aircraft which bombed through the clouds under ground radar control, and Godley believes that they will slow the enemy advance.

25X1

The number of medevac missions being performed on the Plain is not clear. At the least, they have been substantially reduced by the weather and heavy AAA, and this could have a debilitating effect on morale.

[REDACTED] additional medevac helicopters, will be ready January.

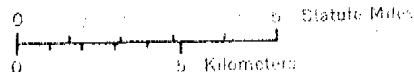
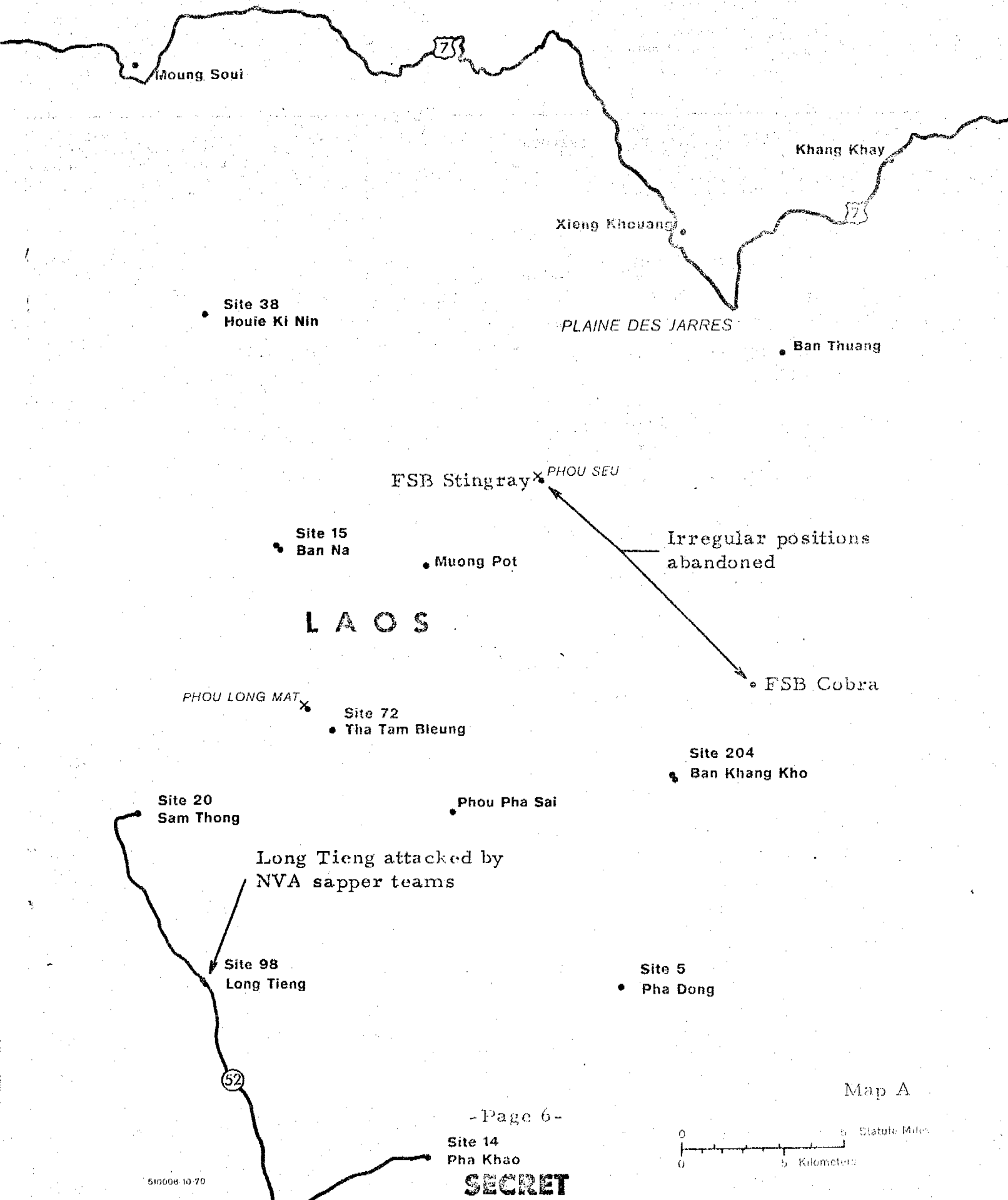
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Immediate outlook. We believe that it will be several days at least before the enemy will be able to reposition his big guns in order to mount sustained pressure on Long Tieng. In the meantime, the irregulars should be able to establish a new defensive line in the difficult terrain between Long Tieng and the Plain. But we should expect continued harassment of Long Tieng by enemy sappers similar to the attack last night. The Lao Ad Hoc Group meets tomorrow to assess the situation and to determine what additional steps can be taken to halt the NVA. A WSAG meeting is tentatively planned (subject to your desires) on Thursday.

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Map A

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