ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:	Reporting Laos: The U.S. Media and the "Secret" War in Laos: 1955-1975
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From 1955-1975 the United States Government was involved in covert paramilitary efforts in Laos. Congress did not approve the Laos conflict, which pitted tens of thousands of American-hired ethnic mercenaries against the North Vietnamese army and featured a massive bombing campaign by U. S. aircraft. Yet approximately 500 Americans were killed or disappeared in Laos during the period, and hundreds of millions of U. S. taxpayer dollars were expended on the covert war. Up to 200,000 Lao civilians were killed in the fighting. Meanwhile, policy makers were able to keep secret the main details of American operations in Laos until late 1969. How they did so without being challenged seriously by the mainstream American media is the subject of this study.

The thesis incorporates relevant secondary sources as well as interviews with more than 30 personalities associated with the war or the American media

coverage. It concludes that the press corps did not begin to focus on the actual situation in Laos until very late, when the U.S. public began to demand an end to the Indochina conflict in general. Moreover, U.S. journalism was hampered in Laos by its own "professional routines," including an overwhelming dependence on U.S. Government sources to provide the "news."

REPORTING LAOS:

THE U.S. MEDIA AND THE "SECRET" WAR IN LAOS, 1955-1975

by

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Professor Eugene Roberts, Chair
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To the memory of Marjorie Ferguson

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At the University of Maryland, Dean Greig Stewart of the College of Journalism has been unfailing in his conviction that I could finish my degree, and this thesis, despite my long absences from the United States necessitated by my "other" life in the U.S. Foreign Service. I would not have made it without him. Judith Paterson of the College of Journalism also has been an important mentor and inspiration.

Many people--journalists, former U.S. Government employees, academics, and others--agreed to be interviewed for this project. They graciously offered their time and perspectives, and for their cooperation and insights I am thankful. We did not always agree on how to interpret what happened in Laos, but I have tried my best to represent accurately their views.

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Finally, for Kit Norland, no words can compensate for the innumerable gestures of support, large and small, on the home front.

"This was a defeat: no journalists were allowed, no cables could be sent, for the papers must carry only victories."

-- Graham Greene, *The Quiet American*

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Notes to the Reader

I take full responsibility for my own views represented as such herein. Although I am employed by the United States Government, this work does not reflect the official views of the U.S. Government. Nor does it imply any endorsement thereby.

Several Lao names are used in the text. On first reference they are rendered in full, with first name and surname. However, the usual Lao practice is to refer to an individual by his first name alone. I therefore have used this method (i.e. Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma is sometimes referred to as Souvanna.)

Introduction

Nobody knew what was going on because it was supposed to be a secret war. There were rumors of colossal battles up north, of CIA bases, and of bombing, but they existed in a strange atmosphere of information deprivation. Nobody seemed to know anything.

-- Roger Warner, *Shooting at the Moon*

For nearly two decades, simultaneous with the war in Vietnam, the United States Government was involved in covert paramilitary efforts in Laos. Congress did not approve the Laos conflict, which pitted tens of thousands of American-hired ethnic Hmong-Lao mercenaries against the North Vietnamese army and featured a massive bombing campaign by U. S. aircraft. Yet American officials were intimately involved in planning and executing these activities, and approximately 500 American soldiers, pilots, and covert agents of the U. S. Government were killed or disappeared in Laos between 1955 and 1975.[1]

The four American presidents who presided over the conflict in Vietnam -- Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon -- also approved military assistance to, and covert action in, Laos. At various times the range of U. S. agencies directly involved in operations in Laos included the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the U. S. Department of State, the U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and various branches of the Department of Defense (DOD). American

administrations solicited key assistance for the Laos operations from the government of Thailand, a key ally in the struggle against communism during the Cold War. Perhaps most incredibly, three American ambassadors to Laos were given extraordinary powers to prosecute military activities with almost no interference from the Pentagon.

Of the many hundreds of millions of U. S. taxpayer dollars expended in Laos on the covert war, most still have not been accounted for today. Nor have the hundreds of thousands of Lao civilians killed in the war.[2] An unknown number of them died as a result of blanket bombing by U. S. aircraft attempting to deny Hanoi access to the strategic Plain of Jars in northern Laos and to interdict the movement of North Vietnamese soldiers and materièl on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in southern Laos.

Although there was general awareness that the United States was involved in Laos, Washington-based policy makers were able to keep secret the details of American operations there for many years. Lower-level officials in the field were under instruction not to speak to representatives from the media. Hampered by a wall of silence and by the difficult logistics of getting into and traveling inside Laos, the American press corps covered the war only sporadically. When it did, it often got its facts wrong, especially during the early years of the war. The late Bernard Fall, a French-American historian and war reporter recognized as one of the few Western authorities on Laos at the time, charged that inept U. S. reporting

unwittingly helped the United States and Royal Lao governments provoke North Vietnamese incursions into Laos in 1959.[1] Not until the late 1960s, when domestic opposition to American involvement in Vietnam reached fever pitch and war reporting moved into correspondingly critical high gear, did the American public began to become vaguely aware that the "little" war in Laos was much more than that.

It is an axiom of Western-style journalism theory that reporters write the first draft of history. This does not appear to be the case with respect to the American war in Laos. For the most part, journalists were not present at the scene as it was unfolding; they came to cover the key facts of the war only very late. Moreover, much of the U. S. Government's classified material with respect to Laos began to be released only in the 1990s (the Central Intelligence Agency, a key player in the story, has not yet released any of its records). Thus we are only beginning to learn the full extent of what happened there. Indeed, most of what is now known about the war comes not from journalists but from others in a better position to know. Most books and articles about the war have been written *post facto* by participant-observers with insider knowledge, by academics, or by anti-war protesters. (The attached annotated bibliography contains some of the best-known examples from each category.)

This researcher believes that it is time for a comprehensive study of the role of the U. S. media in covering the covert war in Laos, and this thesis is a first

step toward that end. The purpose of the paper that follows is not simply to recite the basic details of the war, which can be found in other accounts, most notably Timothy Castle's *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam* and Roger Warner's *Shooting at the Moon* (see bibliography). Rather, my intention is to study how American journalists covered, or perhaps failed to cover as well as they should have, the so-called "secret" war in Laos. In particular, the U. S. press corps seems largely to have ignored Laos during the key years 1962-1968, a time when Washington was initiating and managing large-scale covert activities there, including the bombing of civilian areas. Why is it, as one correspondent put it, that "we (the press) failed in Laos"?[3]

This thesis is an initial, albeit incomplete, examination of the entire complex of circumstances surrounding the environment in which journalists had to report; the content of what they wrote; the restrictions they faced; and their own behavior in following the Laos angle of the larger Vietnam story. The paper also examines in some detail the issue of "secrecy" with respect to this war, and to what degree American journalists may have been complicit, wittingly or otherwise, in not revealing the extent of American involvement to the American public. It incorporates an examination of relevant published sources, including original media reports and U. S. and foreign-government documents, and interviews with various personalities associated with the war or the American media coverage. In sum, it concludes that the mainstream American press corps

often missed, misreported, or misrepresented the actual situation in Laos during the two decades of U. S. military intervention there. Some aspects of the war might never appeared in the U. S. press at all had it not been for eleventh-hour intervention by a handful of activist anti-war stringers.

That the U. S. public did not know the extent of American involvement, however, was not just the fault of the journalists. My research up to now, which has included interviews with more than 30 journalists, participant-observers, and academic experts, has led me to hypothesize that the following factors may be central to a definitive history of American journalism in Laos, particularly with respect to the "secrecy" question:

- A series of American presidents and their key advisers, including ambassadors in Laos, controlled U. S. policy vis-a-vis Laos. This was especially true during times of crises. Even when the White House was not overseeing the day-to-day operational details, a small number of bureaucrats on the ground in Laos were responsible for implementing policy. Although some key congressional leaders were kept advised of certain aspects of American involvement, at no time until 1969 did the U. S. Congress attempt seriously to intervene to influence or guide policy with respect to Laos.
- The Geneva Conferences of 1954 and 1962 governing the future of Vietnam also stipulated that Laos was to be a neutral country. Early on, the United States, Russia, and China reached an understanding that Laos would not become a major

theater of the wider conflict. American officials therefore wanted no publicity about the fact that the U. S. Government was operating a combined guerrilla and air war designed to keep the North Vietnamese army from taking over Laos, and from infiltrating into South Vietnam via Laos.

- The U. S. Embassy in Laos, and the Royal Lao Government, proactively discouraged investigative reporting on the war. Officials were instructed to make no comment to representatives of the press. Unlike in Vietnam, there was no standard press guidance about the war because the war presumably was not being waged. In Vietnam a reporter could be sure that U. S. diplomatic or military officials would have something to say, even if it was something contrived or controversial. But in Laos a reporter could not even find a statement with which to disagree.[4]

- Reporters based in Hanoi, Bangkok, and Hong Kong found that their editors stateside were only tangentially interested in the Laos story. Reporters had marching orders to follow certain battles and personalities inside Vietnam. They therefore found it difficult to find time to travel to Laos and to devote the time and energy necessary to follow that aspect of the larger Indochina war. As William Prochnau has noted, the Laos angle was a "dull dud"[5] as far as the U. S. press corps was concerned. Likewise, Washington-based reporters failed to do their part to investigate what was happening in Laos.

- The infrastructure of Laos was (and still is) in poor condition. Roads were few and in dangerous condition. In most cases the battle sites were in inaccessible areas, and the bombing campaign, which reached a ferocity not seen since World War II, created large zones that were off-limits to Westerners. The only way to access them would have been via air. Nearly all airplanes and helicopters operating at the time in Laos were owned by or under the control of the CIA proprietary airline Air America. Air America did not transport newspaper reporters until very late in the war, after CIA involvement had become public. (Even then, air transport was provided on a case-by-case basis, never routinely.)
- The political-military situation in Laos was complicated and confusing, and most reporters had no background in Lao culture, history, or language. They therefore found it difficult to make sense of the internal power struggles. During the early 1960s, for example, there were five coups and counter-coups inside the Lao government, some pitting members of the same family against each other. It is no wonder that among themselves the foreign correspondents referred to the Lao capital Vientiane as "Never Never Land" and "The Land of Oz."
- Like the policy makers themselves, the U. S. media from the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s were unable to view the Indochina conflict through anything but a patriotic, pro-American, anti-Communist prism. They did not recognize it as having arisen from complex historical and nationalist factors. Thus, as with the conflict in Vietnam, the U. S. media did not seriously question

U. S. activities in Laos until very late (1969), when rising U. S. casualties in Vietnam no longer made it possible for the American public to support the Indochina war in general.

The U. S. War Correspondent in Vietnam: No Time for Laos

In contrast to the situation in Vietnam, few news correspondents were based in Laos full-time. At any one time the number of foreign stringers present in the capital Vientiane could be counted on one hand. By contrast, at the height of the Vietnam War approximately 500 foreign correspondents were registered in Saigon, and large numbers also were based in Bangkok and Hong Kong.[6] Among the Western media, only the wire services maintained full-time offices and personnel on the ground in the Lao capital, Vientiane: United Press International, Associated Press, Reuters, and Agence France-Presse. These were staffed by reporters with only limited experience, or by persons who worked elsewhere and did occasional "stringing." Major U. S. news organizations covering Laos, but only intermittently, were the *New York Times*, the *Washington Star*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *Time-Life*. Correspondents for *The New Yorker* and *National Geographic* occasionally visited and produced some stories that received wide coverage.[7]

On balance, however, the coverage of the war was very thin. Stories tended to be simplistic and to romanticize Laos. Both in their stories and in the

journalists' personal behavior, there was too great a focus on the lovely Lao women and the opium dens and sex shops. The stories often included errors of fact and place. So unreliable were American newspaper reports about Laos in the early years (approximately 1955 to 1965) that researchers trying to reconstruct the facts many years later have complained about them. Gayle Morrison, whose 1999 book *Sky is Falling* documented the CIA evacuation of Hmong refugees after the Communist takeover in 1975, said that she found U. S. news accounts only broadly helpful. Indeed, she said, the further away from Laos the news organization was based, the more unreliable the story. Of the three newspaper archives she used in her research, she said, the *Bangkok Post* was the most reliable, the *Los Angeles Times* less so, and the *New York Times* (theoretically then and now the most prominent American paper) the least so.[8]

The coverage was mainly driven by crises. This fact is not surprising, since most of the journalists were not based in Laos. They visited Vientiane only when there really was a news "hook" worth following. For example, for the years 1955 through 1960, a search of the *New York Times* (hereafter, *NYT*) revealed the following news stories devoted to Laos: 1956, seven articles; 1957, eight articles, 1958, 11 articles. (It should also be noted that up to 1959, the *NYT* indexed the subject "Laos" under the general category of "Indochina.") However, a sudden spike in *NYT* coverage occurred in 1959, the year that the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) began to make tentative pushes across the northeastern border of Laos.

Another upsurge in *NYT* coverage took place in 1961, following a series of coups and counter-coups in Vientiane. Even then, it appears that the journalists missed the main aspect of the story--which was that the CIA and the American military attaché were directly involved in the coups.[9]

Between 1962 and 1968, the years of a dramatic and clandestine U. S.-financed military build-up in Laos, reporters were increasingly devoting their energies to Vietnam. Reporters tended to visit Laos only on the weekends or for a holiday, and they rarely asked penetrating questions of the U. S. officials who were increasingly running a parallel government in Vientiane, a clandestine guerrilla war in the highlands, and a deadly bombing campaign from the air. It was not until late 1969, when the U. S. Senate convened a series of hearings regarding the security situation in Laos, that the American press corps began to cover Laos in a focused and unrelenting way. (It is no coincidence that these developments occurred during the year after the Tet Offensive, which marked a turning point in American attitudes toward the Indochina conflict in general.) And, after President Richard Nixon made the blunder of telling the press in March 1970 that no Americans had been killed in ground combat in Laos, the press "was all over the story like red meat."[10] (Appendix C is a timeline showing some of the major developments in the war in Laos and corresponding media coverage.)

Not surprisingly, coverage of Laos dropped off significantly in 1973 with the withdrawal of American soldiers from Vietnam, the final evacuation of the

U. S. Embassy in Saigon, and the corresponding departure of most American correspondents. However, the reporting on Laos picked up again when tens of thousands of Lao and Hmong refugees began to flee across the Mekong River into Thailand in late 1975 as the Communists came to power in Vientiane. The eventual immigration of many of these refugees to the United States provided a different focus for U. S. reporters in the 1980s and 1990s as the media began to focus on the problems of their integration into American society.

Significantly, only three of the original English-language journalists on the ground in Laos during the war years --Arthur Dommen, Martin Stuart-Fox, and Arnold "Skip" Isaacs--went on to contribute further to our extant knowledge about the U. S. covert involvement there. Dommen, a stringer for UPI and then a correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times,* went on to write scholarly books and articles focusing on Laos. Stuart-Fox, an Australian correspondent for UPI who later became a historian and political scientist, is one of the foremost authorities on Laos writing and teaching today. Isaacs, a long-time correspondent for the *Baltimore Sun,* has written various books about the Vietnam War that also address the American intervention in Laos. Yet even these three acknowledge that American journalism could have, and should have, done better by Laos.[11]

Unfortunately, in 1967 a land mine in Vietnam killed the American journalist with the most intimate knowledge of Laos at the time, the above-mentioned Bernard Fall. Fall's *Anatomy of a Crisis,* an account of the 1961

emergency that nearly brought the United States and the Soviet Union to war over Laos, still makes for sobering reading today. His death left a critical void in terms of expert knowledge about Laos.

Today more and more is being published about the U. S. covert involvement in Laos during the Cold War period, and there is no lack of material available for the researcher interested in this topic, including the work of a newer generation of journalists. However, it must be said with some concern that most of what we know about the war cannot be attributed to the normal first draft of history of the original journalists on the ground. That explains my interest in undertaking further study of the behavior of the American correspondents and the process of news reporting during this critical period in American history.

Structure of the Thesis

My findings are organized in the following manner. Chapter 1 sets forth the theoretical framework for the study, including the relevant literature in mass communication, foreign policy, and history. Chapter 2 is a brief summary of U. S. covert activity in Laos in the period 1955 through 1975, set against events in Vietnam, the larger U. S. domestic political context, and Washington's global fight against communism. Chapter 3 discusses how the U. S. press covered the Laos angle, including how standard Western journalism "routines" essentially

failed to produce a coherent or comprehensive "story" of this war. The Conclusions offer some final thoughts.

Notes to Introduction

[1] According to the U. S. Department of Defense, the exact number of those still unaccounted for as of March 2001 is 420. The overwhelming majority of these were lost in aircraft accidents.

[2] The pre-eminent historian of Laos, Martin Stuart-Fox, estimates the total number as up to 200,000 persons. This seems a reasonable figure. It is neither as high nor as low as some other sources claim. The true figure is probably unknowable since neither the Royal Lao Government nor the Communist regime that replaced it kept reliable statistics.

[3] Interview with George Wilson, former *Washington Post* correspondent, May 2000.

[4] A comprehensive account of the military-media relationship in Vietnam can be found in William Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam*, 1998.

[5] William Prochnau, *Once Upon a Distant War: Young War Correspondents and the Early Vietnam Battles*, 1995.

[6] See Hammond, 1998.

[7] See, for example, Robert Shaplen's series of "Letters from Laos" in the *New Yorker,* including 20 October 1962; 4 May 1968; and 2 August 1970. Also see "No Place to Run: The Hmong of Laos" by W.E. Garrett in *National Geographic,* January 1974, pp. 78-111.

[8] Interview with Gayle Morrison, June 2000.

[9] I will not be able to confirm this lapse until I have done a more complete analysis of the coverage.

[10] Interview with David Greenway (now editorial page editor of the *Boston Globe*), May 2000.

[11] Interviews with Isaacs, May 2000, and Dommen, July 2000. Correspondence with Stuart-Fox, January-February 2001. Isaacs does not consider himself an "expert" on Laos on the order of Dommen and Stuart-Fox. However, I include him because unlike most mainstream American journalists who covered Laos, he undertook further study of the topic after the war.

Chapter 1

The Theoretical Context

In my view, the key to understanding the tragedy that was Indochina for the United States lies in studying, recounting, and analyzing our engagement there not as an issue separate and divorced from the rest of American foreign policy, but rather as an intrinsic and inseparable part of our whole approach to the world in the post-World War II period.

-- Paul Kattenburg, former State Department official, 1979

. . . the ideology of the journalist as professional is in important ways a 'false consciousness.' Based on the idea that "news judgment" can be politically neutral, it not only conceals the process by which the news is shaped politically, but is itself a part of that process. It is, in short, a "myth"-- but in a particular sense of that word. Far from being a mere lie or illusion, it is a deeply held system of consciousness that profoundly affects both the structure of the news organization and the day-to-day practice of journalism.

-- Daniel Hallin, *The "Uncensored War"*

The study that follows attempts to make some sense of U. S. media coverage of a little-understood aspect of the American conflict in Indochina, the so-called "secret war" conducted simultaneously in Laos, Vietnam's western neighbor. As this study will make clear, both U. S. officials and the U. S. media understood the Laos theater as an adjunct to the conflict in Vietnam. Therefore, it

is not possible to evaluate either the war in Laos or press coverage thereof without reference to the larger context of the Indochina conflict.

I began my research with a few basic questions: 1) What happened in Laos, and how do we know what we know about what happened there? 2) To what extent did the U. S. press corps cover U. S. Government actions with respect to Laos? 3) Was their coverage timely, accurate, and appropriate? 4) What was the relationship among the journalists, their coverage, and the decisions of U. S. foreign policy élites? 5) What affect did the coverage have on the war? Did it help explain the war to the American public and thus help bring about its end? 6) Conversely, how did the U. S. Government's handling of the war affect the journalists or their coverage?

No Systematic Study Thus Far

These seemingly simple questions proved extremely difficult to answer. For as yet, there has been no systematic study of this issue. First of all, the extant American literature on the war in Laos is scant, and most of it was not written by journalists, at least not by the journalists who initially reported from Laos. Indeed, most was written by participant-observers, who naturally tended to describe what happened from their own particular vantage point. Thus, a full understanding, even by those who participated, still awaits the declassification of the files of American intelligence agencies. I have constructed an annotated bibliography (Appendix C) which lays out the principal available resources.

This literature falls into several categories: general histories; memoirs of journalists and participant-observers, including foreign-policy élites; academic studies; anti-war tracts; congressional testimony; and so forth. The most helpful secondary sources for reconstructing the basic facts of the war are Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam;* Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos;* Charles Stevenson, *The End of Nowhere;* Geoffrey Gunn, *Political Struggles in Laos;* Arthur Dommen, *Conflict in Laos;* Timothy Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam;* Christopher Robbins, *The Ravens;* and Roger Warner, *Shooting at the Moon.* [1]

Yet none of these stands alone as a full general history and analysis of the élites' decision-making process, including the response and role of Western journalists. Stevenson (1973), to be discussed more fully below, comes closest; unfortunately, his account ends in 1971, and is thus incomplete. Karnow (1983) is most helpful at understanding the Indochina conflict in global context. Dommen (1971) is comprehensive and masterly at the Lao élites' internal struggles, but, like Stevenson, deals with events only up to 1971. Gunn (1988) is essential for understanding the foundation of the Indochinese Communist Party and the development of the relationship between North Vietnam and the armed wing of Lao communism, the Pathet Lao, but his story ends before the time period covered here. Robbins describes the "secret war" through the eyes of the Air Force aviators who flew into Laos. Similarly, Warner (1996) frames the tale mainly from the point of view of U. S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operatives.

Castle is based on the most recently declassified documents, but deals only with U. S. military assistance to the Royal Lao Government.

There have been various histories of the professional and personal behaviors and routines of war correspondents, and specifically of the U. S. press corps' performance in Vietnam. The most helpful for the project at hand were Philip Knightley's classic, *The First Casualty*, which examines the "mythology" of combat reporters dating to the Crimean War; and William Prochnau's *Once Upon A Distant War* and William Hammond's *Reporting Vietnam.* The last two deal specifically with the reporters in Vietnam and include some references to Laos. However, there has been little if any work focusing on the performance of war correspondents in Laos *per se.* The journalists' own memoirs have done little to illuminate what they were attempting to achieve in Laos or how they went about it.

Likewise, the academic literature analyzing the relationship between the mass media and U. S. foreign-policy decision-making with respect to Vietnam (and by extension to Laos) is also surprisingly scant. The reasons for this particular dearth are varied. Traditionally, those writing about foreign policy and the media have represented two different schools -- political science and mass communication -- that have only recently begun to make the most of each other's research and expertise. On the political science side, the great classics of foreign-policy literature predate not only America's involvement in Indochina, but also

the ascent of television and thus the critique of that medium, which was so central to our collective understanding of the conflict. Meanwhile, communications specialists delving into the political realm have tended to focus on voter behavior and public-opinion polling, not on foreign-policy making.

The arcane subject of U. S. foreign policy, even with respect to such a seminal event as the Indochina conflict, has been relegated mainly to general histories and memoirs of the practitioners. These include former presidents, secretaries of state, and other officials, some of whom make only passing or grudging reference to the role of the press. And there is the very opaqueness of the subject matter. Nothing much has changed since political scientist James Rosenau observed more than a generation ago (*Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy*, 1967) that the "link between the media and foreign policy is not easily observed and resistant to coherent analysis."

That academe still awaits a definitive body of work on the interrelationship among the U. S. media, U. S. public opinion, and foreign-policy decision-making with respect to Laos does not mean that one cannot construct a rough outline of the considerable scholarly thought that has been expended on it indirectly through exploration of other topics. Therefore, I have found it necessary, in the course of this research, to analyze and assemble a variety of sources that heretofore have not been presented collectively in this manner.

Propositions to Be Tested

In the rest of this chapter, I will be testing a set of common propositions arising from the relevant, albeit inadequate, literature. I list the propositions first, and in the following discussion summarize the theoretical underpinnings for each. Their direct relevance will become clearer as we proceed to an accounting of American involvement in Laos in Chapter 2, and to the study of the journalists and their journalism in Chapter 3. To wit:

1) A confluence of historical and constitutional factors gave the President of the United States, as opposed to the Congress, pre-eminence in foreign-policy making, particularly during crises.

2) The American public is generally disinterested in foreign-policy issues and is willing to defer to the president.

3) Although foreign affairs subjects are considered "big" or "prestige" stories, they account for only a small percentage of news reports in the American media.

4) The internal routines and mores of the journalistic profession in the United States militate against the media's challenging the executive branch on foreign-policy issues.

5) Despite the popular conception of the press having a "watchdog" function in the U. S. policy-making process, the U. S. media are businesses primarily concerned with making a profit. The media thus have a

predisposition to accept the status quo with respect to societal structures and outputs, including public policy.

6) The media generally endorse presidential decisions in foreign affairs, except in the conspicuous absence of executive leadership on a particular issue.

7) Despite the considerable evidence supporting propositions 1-6, foreign policy élites attribute to the media much more power to create a negative public backlash than in fact exists. They expend enormous amounts of time and energy in "spinning" the media (i.e. via pseudo-events, press conferences and releases, and leaks).

8) Foreign-policy élites, as opposed to the general public, are the primary consumers of media coverage of international affairs. Ironically, the main relationship between the media and foreign policy may thus be that foreign-policy élites (particularly the president) are engaged in an unproductive, ceaseless effort to squash or manipulate coverage that already has been contrived to favor the élites' position.

9) From the mid-1950s onward, foreign-policy élites in Washington and Vientiane decided they wanted no publicity regarding covert American activities in Laos. They proactively discouraged investigative reporting, and they provided little press guidance or assistance to the reporters.

10) If propositions 3-5 are sustainable, it follows that the headquarters of U. S. media outlets would have been only tangentially interested in the Laos story. Their concern was Vietnam, on which U. S. official and public attention was focused. Reporters, therefore, would have had little time, energy, or incentive to cover Laos. Few reporters would have been actually assigned to cover Laos from inside Laos. They would not have been equipped with the language, cultural, or historical background to deal with the particularities of the situation in Laos.

The combined weight of propositions 1-10 leads to the inexorable hypothesis that U. S. media coverage of the Laos theater was limited, incomplete, and heavily tilted toward the U. S. Government version of events. Indeed, as later sections of this research will demonstrate, U. S. journalism in Laos fell far short of what was actually occurring there during the years 1955-1975.

Presidential Pre-Eminence, Public Disinterest

According to the relevant literature, U. S. foreign policy -- at least during crises -- is formulated outside the normal arena of pressure group politics that characterizes the making of domestic policy. (I will return later to the inherent "liberal pluralist" conception that permeates most U. S. communications and political science literature.) Although the U. S. Constitution provided for a system of checks and balances in the conduct of the country's international relations (i.e. the president is commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and the

Congress has the power to make war), in practice foreign policy has generally been in the hands of the president, particularly since World War II. Spanier and Uslaner (*Foreign Policy and the Democratic Dilemmas*, 1982) summarize the traditional political science model within which foreign policy is thought to be made. It is a framework that places the mass media at the far periphery:

> The dominant model of foreign-policy decision-making is that of the concentric circles. In these circles, the central decision-making locus on foreign policy is the president and his key advisers. In the second circle are the bureaucracies in the major foreign policy agencies and the armed services, the second-rank and less influential foreign policy departments, presidential advisers, and cabinet members whose primary responsibility is in the domestic sphere but who may be consulted on foreign policy questions, and scientists. The innermost circle is composed of a select few members of the administration; the outer circles have successively more members and, correspondingly, less impact on foreign policy decisions. Traditionally we have placed Congress in the third circle, together with political parties and interest groups; the fourth, outer circle comprises public opinion and the media (81).

According to these writers, the critical inner circle is "especially prominent" in decision-making with respect to crises (122). Indeed, according to this model, which has been used by political scientists with minimal variation for half a century, the mass media have very little, if any, effect on foreign-policy decisions, especially during a crisis. According to James Rosenau:

> Foreign policy deals with events and circumstances outside the system, and being in the environment, these events and circumstances can appear potentially threatening to members of the system. . . . Fellow system members thus come to be viewed as a "we" who are constantly endangered by a "them" (1967: 24).

It quite naturally follows that system members (including the public and the media) look to the president to resolve the crisis. Theodore Sorensen, one of President Kennedy's top aides, put it this way:

> In domestic affairs, a presidential decision is usually the beginning of public debate. In foreign affairs, the issues are frequently so complex, the facts so obscure, and the period for decision so short, that the American people have from the beginning -- and even more so in this century -- delegated to the President more discretion in this vital area and they are usually willing to support any reasonable decision he makes. (*Decision-Making in the White House,* 1963: 48).

Sorensen should know, as he found himself in Kennedy's "inner circle" during the so-called "Cuban Missile Crisis" of November 1962, which has become the most frequently analyzed case of crisis foreign-policy decision-making. Graham Allison (*Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis,* 1971) is the definitive text. (Stevenson's *End of Nowhere* applies Allison's model to Laos. My discussion in Chapter 2 of certain decisions with respect to Laos relies heavily on his analysis.)

Indeed, if we are to believe Allison and the myriad other historians of that crisis--which brought Washington and Moscow to the brink of nuclear war--Kennedy consulted in addition to Sorensen only about a dozen other people, including his brother Robert Kennedy, the attorney general. President Kennedy did not consult with Congress until he already had made up his mind to use a blockade, not air strikes, against the Russian missiles in Cuba. For its part, the

Washington press corps had little idea of how critical the situation was until it was almost over.

The Cuban Missile Crisis is useful for conceptualizing various models of policy-making as applied to the conduct of international relations. According to Theodore Lowi ("Making Democracy Safe for the World," 1967), the American political system comprises several subsystems--elitist, pluralist, and massified. In theory, élites make decisions about the distribution of resources. Competing interest groups (Congress and the bureaucracies) regulate resources. The system interacts with the masses (public opinion) only in the distribution of resources.

Applying this model to foreign policy, Lowi observes that crisis decisions are indeed the province of the élites: "The fundamental feature of crisis decisions is that they involve institution leaders without their institutions" (301). At such times, he says, policy hews closely to the framework set out by C. Wright Mills (*The Power Elite*, 1959): the élites work in unison, if not harmony. However, the daily management of *non-crisis, routine* foreign policy is something quite different:

> A modern, highly generated state generates conflict that cannot altogether be taken care of by mere elite management but must necessarily involve, under varying circumstances, a great deal of bargaining and logrolling (Lowi, 299).

Thus does the entire apparatus of the foreign-policy establishment come into play--the departments of State and Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency,

and any other bureaucracy or individual who holds a stake in the process--with predictable consequences:

> When there is time for planning there is time for disagreement. . . Disagreement spreads the area of involvement toward all individuals who possess or represent resources that would improve the positions of the initial combatants. More and more individuals, values, and institutions become involved as the stakes increase and the time allows. As the area of involvement spreads, it also decentralizes to include the more public resources and strategies" (Lowi, 302).

Similarly, Spanier and Uslaner (1982: 164) account for the difference between crisis and non-crisis decision-making by positing two different models, those of "rational actor" and "bureaucratic politics." The first model assumes a unitary actor (in consultation with his or her inner circle). The actor must select objectives, consider the alternative means to reach the objective, calculate the consequences of the alternative course, and choose the course most likely to obtain the objectives. Time is short, and so is the scope of the decision-making arena.

The bureaucratic model, by contrast, involves just that: a host of actors from the various executive agencies, plus interest groups, Congressional committees, and anyone else who can make his views known. Bureaucratic decision-making "resembles a brawl, usually an unseemly one at that. For the issue is not whose policy position and recommendation is correct. The issue is not who is right but how to reconcile -- if that is possible -- many conflicting interpretations of what the correct policy should be" (Spanier and Uslaner, 166).

Other characteristics of the bureaucratic model include bargaining and compromise (recall Lowi's "logrolling" concept). The result can range from an incremental change in policy to a "paralysis of policy" or stalemate (Spanier and Uslaner, 167). Furthermore, the process generally creates a debilitating side effect: "Old policies and the old assumptions upon which they are based tend to survive longer than the conditions which produced these policies initially" (Spanier and Uslaner, 168).

While the confusion and messiness of bureaucratic foreign policy may lead one to conclude that it is more "democratic" than crisis decision-making, that is not so. The salient feature of public opinion is that it rarely speaks with one voice. Decision-makers, even if they are willing to consider the public's views, may not be able to discern exactly what kind of policy the public wants. Not surprisingly, the overwhelming finding of the extant research is that public opinion with respect to foreign policy *generally follows the decision-makers, not the other way around.* The reasons for this are quite simple, according to Rosenau:

> For most citizens the external environment is simply an "out there," an undifferentiated mass that can be threatening but rarely is. It is only when rapid changes occur in the environment that this mass acquires structure for most citizens and thereby appears to be linked to their own welfare in potentially damaging ways. . . . Usually they are inclined to leave its management to officialdom, an inclination which is not nearly so widespread with respect to those seemingly close-at-hand, highly structured phenomena that constitute domestic affairs (1967: 26).

And then there is that portion of the literature that finds normative value in presidential pre-eminence in foreign-policy formation. Political scientist Gabriel Almond, who coined the "civic culture" concept that has become so central to the American polity's definition of itself, concedes the "policy disunity and conflict" characteristic of the American system (*The American People and Foreign Policy,* 1950: 158). However, he then goes on to make a sweeping generalization:

> . . . there is a general ideological consensus in the United States in which the mass of the population and its leadership generally share. At the level of basic attitudes this is largely an unconscious consensus of feeling with regard to values and of reactions regarded as suitable in response to certain political cues. At the level of general opinion on public policy, one may speak of a consensus of mood, of shared emotional states in response to changes in the domestic and foreign arenas. Neither in foreign nor in domestic policy is this to be understood as full agreement on principles or on details, but rather as an adherence to a broad compromise on political procedures and policies. Such adherence ranges from unqualified enthusiasm to a mere readiness to tolerate (158).

In sum, Almond would have us believe that such shared consensual values mean that the general public can look to the president in good confidence for "cues and responses" in discussions of foreign policy.

Where do the mass media fit into this complex web? Cohen ("Mass Communication and Foreign Policy," in Rosenau, 1967) observes that the mass media and those who operate it can handle only one main foreign-policy issue at a time. This phenomenon makes it difficult for the media to mobilize public views with respect to a host of foreign policies that may be occurring simultaneously. I

will return to the limitations of news gathering and news making both in a theoretical sense and in their relationship to Laos.

Kegley and Wittkopf (*American Foreign Policy, Patterns and Process*, 1982) call the media only a "cog in the machinery" of foreign policy making (311). Not only is the American public disinterested in, and uninformed about, foreign affairs; the capacity of mass media to influence foreign-policy attitudes is undermined by government manipulation. But public opinion can act as a restraint. Policy makers derive most of their information directly from the mass media. Policy makers must consider what the market will bear; "they use public opinion to obtain support for actions already taken" (291).

The Example of the Iran Hostage Crisis

With these various models in mind, let us now consider another case of foreign-policy making, namely the crisis created by the taking of the American hostages in Iran in November 1978. The hostage crisis is a good example of the "market" of public opinion collapsing under the weight of an indecisive, incomplete, or failed policy. Spanier and Uslaner recall that President Carter's approval rating initially improved dramatically following the taking of the hostages, from 30 percent to more than 60 percent. But as the hostage situation wore on without resolution, public confidence in the president declined. Moreover, "the constant media exposure of the Iranian situation served to highlight the President's inability to resolve the issue" (Spanier and Uslaner, 149).

Based on what we already have seen, we should not be surprised that initially President Carter sought to manage the crisis himself. He made a famous vow, which he would later regret, that he would "not leave the Rose Garden" until the hostages had come home. According to various reports, Carter's inner circle consisted of just five persons, two of whom--Hamilton Jordan and Jody Powell--were politicos from his home state of Georgia. Carter did not bring State Department or other experts into the circle even as the crisis dragged on into 1979 and into the election year of 1980. Nor did Carter give Congress prior notice of the failed military mission to rescue the hostages.

However, unlike the Cuban Missile Crisis, which had lasted hardly a fortnight, the crisis with Iran lasted 444 days, giving the media enough time to react and intervene. Indeed, the sideshow that the media mounted in response to the hostage crisis has been the subject of numerous studies. According to Spanier and Uslaner (175), President Carter's objectives during the crisis were to follow a policy of restraint and gradually apply sanctions to make it more costly for Iran to hold the hostages. The key was to gain the hostage's freedom, but without paying the price that the Iranians had set for ending the crisis (sending the Shah, then in the United States for medical treatment, back to Tehran to face the revolutionaries). However, as James Larson's analysis ("Television and U. S. Foreign Policy: The Case of the Iranian Hostage Crisis," 1986) makes plain, the media made it extremely difficult for Carter to carry out these aims.

Carter fell victim to a television technology that had, by 1978, become "inherently transnational in nature," Larson writes (111). The interminable presence of television cameras made it impossible for Carter to hold "private or secret negotiations" on the hostage matter. Paradoxically, the president and the Islamic mullahs in Tehran appealed their respective cases directly to an international television audience -- and thus indirectly to each other.[2]

The Limits of Professional Journalism

Indeed, Larson's major findings in the hostage case relate to the *routines* of news work and the limits those routines placed on the coverage of the story: First, "access to appropriate pictures" was critical to news gathering (112). Before the hostage crisis, the networks had no correspondents in Iran (notwithstanding that the U. S. had been heavily engaged there for two decades) and thus had no access to pictures. Once the story began, there was an imperative to gather appropriate footage. The networks suddenly devoted a disproportionate, saturation coverage to Iran, a country previously unknown to most of the American public.

But the "story" did not analyze the politico-economic factors inside Iran that had led to the revolution and thus to the crisis; instead of presenting the historical context, television journalism focused only on one angle: getting the hostages out. This focus required an over-dependence on routine, Washington-based sources of information: press conferences, briefings, and backgrounds. The

resulting Washington-focused story had little relevance to reality in Iran; it was, according to Larson, "an ahistorical account" that followed, and was obsessed by, U. S. Government policy (114). Predictably, the primary U. S. players -- Carter and his entourage -- responded "not to the 'objective' facts of the situation but rather to the 'image' of the situation" (115). Paradoxically, it was an image that Carter himself had helped create.

The hostage case persuasively illustrates that the mass media can cover foreign policy as a "beat" only insofar as the operational constraints guiding the media industry will allow. There is a rich literature examining the internal workings of the media and of news journalism in particular. Schudson's important study (*Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers,* 1978) describes the transformation, beginning in the 1890s, of American journalism from a gumshoe "storytelling" profession into one that placed priority on the production of "facts" and "neutral information." Schudson recounts the origins of the "beat" system; the rising "professionalization" of the trade; and most importantly, the inculcation of the goal of "objectivity" into news production. These developments collectively produced a trend of deference toward organized authority and, particularly beginning with World War II, an increasing intimacy between the press and the "national security state."

For Douglas Kellner (to whom I will return in depth below), there was something almost Machiavellian about this trend. "Government officials play a

key role in determining what is and is not news," he wrote (*Television and the Crisis of Democracy*, 1990: 105). The result is a news product that is overwhelmingly pro-government:

> The media serve the interests of the state by privileging the president and Congress as sources of news: by favorably presenting, at least initially, new government programs; and by generally supporting government foreign policy initiatives (105).

Kellner called such tendencies "hegemonic," and wrote that they were buttressed by a high degree of selectivity in "newsworthiness--failing to pursue some stories while dwelling on others"; codes of "fairness" dictating that both sides of a story be told; and the positivistic view that only "facts" count. Several other communications researchers (Herbert Gans, Gaye Tuchman) analyzed the "routines" of modern-day news work, and found a high degree of predictability and conformity therein. Obviously, American journalism, constrained as it was by the twin imperatives of increasing advertising revenues and keeping costs down, could not be expected to devote much time or effort to foreign policy. Gans's seminal content analysis of network television (*Deciding What's News*, 1980) found that only 14 percent of broadcast news could be classified as "foreign"--and even this small amount centered almost entirely on international events that impacted the United States (31).

Even political scientists noticed these distressing trends. Cohen calculated that newspapers allocated only between five to eight percent of the news hole to international stories (1967: 196). There is no mass market for foreign-policy

news; he wrote. Moreover, he observed no special type of training or path of experience differentiating the reporters/editors who handle foreign-policy news from those responsible for domestic affairs. He learned that the beat system does not produce genuine expertise, and that foreign correspondents were generally generalists. Moreover, the correspondents tended to be bunched together in Europe; few were located elsewhere, since it was well known that Americans were only interested in reading and hearing about news from "friendly" countries (197-199). [3]

Ironically, Cohen observed, the "foreign" beat had come to be known as the "prestige" beat; stories with an international element were now considered the "big" stories. Not surprisingly, Washington reporters covering foreign news looked for, and got, most of their leads from sources at the "prestige" locations: the White House, the State Department, and the Pentagon (1967: 198-199). The major foreign-policy players were now not only part of the story; they were ghostwriting it from behind the scenes.

Spinning the Press

It now becomes helpful to draw together the various threads of the foreign policy-mass media literature. Hence I turn to the seminal work of Daniel Boorstin and two of his disciples, Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz. Boorstin's *The Image* (1961) is one of America's best-selling nonfiction books of all time and a classic for introductory journalism courses. It introduced the theory of "pseudo-events,"

which strongly influenced communications research ever after. Boorstin's assertion that "the power to make a reportable event is the power to make experience" (10) may seem self-evident and not particularly subversive on its face. But its audacity lay in describing a particularly unseemly aspect of American journalism, especially with regard to the Washington press establishment: the reporting power lay not just in the hands of journalists but increasingly in those of government officials.

The livelihood of reporters, Boorstin noted, now depended upon "their collaboration with public figures" (16). He railed against the perfidious interview technique, one of the stock tools of the journalist's trade, calling it a "devious apparatus" that perversely "incites" public officials "to make statements which will sound like news." He attributed the inflation in the power and prestige of the presidency in part to "the rise of centralized news gathering and broadcasting, and the increase of the Washington press corps." The danger, Boorstin opined, is that "the President has an ever more ready, more frequent, and more centralized access to the world of pseudo-events" (24).

Not that the blame for this lamentable state of affairs was one-sided. Boorstin also faulted the élites themselves for contributing to the peculiar relationship of "concealment and contrivance" between the media and the government. Starting with the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, he observed, the White House had perfected a system of press releases, fireside chats,

planned leaks, and "group production" to portray the President in the most flattering light (17).

Boorstin's insights are important to our purposes for several reasons. He was a pioneer in identifying the trend of "generated" as opposed to "spontaneous" news, of calculation and collusion between big government and big media. He recognized the destructive power of the "leak" and called attention to it. And he saw the "spin" before it even had a name.

Building on Boorstin, Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz have created a substantial literature of the concept of "media events" (*Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, 1994). These televised phenomena, which first found full expression in the aftermath of President Kennedy's assassination, have since reached an unprecedented level of sophistication and technical wizardry. Broadcasters have tapped into a deep desire on the part of the public to be included in "shamanic" events such as patriotic festivals, state funerals, royal weddings, diplomatic summits, and the like. Such events permit television viewers to celebrate consensual values. They perform an integrative role, promoting reconciliation and perpetuating loyalty to established values and institutions.

But media events have dark implications, too. A broadcaster who agrees to stage such an event is by definition politically vulnerable. He has accepted an "apostolic mission," and for the duration of the broadcast will be unable to

"switch back to regular (i.e. critical) journalism" (Dayan and Katz, 91). The format and scripting of the event inevitably cast the principals (generally the president and other élites) as heroic figures. This method bestows a legitimacy on the event that may not be justified. The "live" nature of the broadcast creates an inevitable pressure on the producer to "succeed." He therefore cannot and will not adapt a critical adversarial stance with regard to the event. He must perform an integrative function, socializing citizens to the socio-political structure of the event and their role therein.

Indeed, the central characteristic of a media event is the production of an illusion. The viewer mistakenly believes that he is participating in an event at which he is not present (he merely follows the script from his living-room chair). And as we know from our previous discussion, the illusion is particularly deceptive with respect to diplomacy and foreign affairs, in which only a minuscule percentage of the American electorate has any interest at all. If citizen viewers cannot themselves contribute to foreign-policy formation, what is the function of the media in producing diplomatic "events"?

The answer is clear from the example of the Iran hostage crisis. Media events have the ability to displace intermediaries, "to talk over the heads of the middlemen" (Dayan and Katz, 204) and to abet summitry. At the same time, they create a heavy pressure on diplomacy to "go public." The era of quiet diplomacy in smoke-filled rooms is over. Moreover, media events are able to edit collective

memory and thus rewrite history. (Most Americans' knowledge of Iran can be summed up in the television clip of the blindfolded hostages in front of the U. S. Embassy in Tehran, in much the same way that their memory of the Kennedy assassination is comprised of a series of televised images: Jackie standing next to Lyndon Johnson in a bloodstained pink suit, Lee Harvey Oswald crumpling in pain at being shot).

The production of media events has several disturbing implications. First, broadcasters "collude" with organizers (foreign-policy élites, particularly the president, for our purposes). So routinized have media events become in modern society that they are now an important part of the "civil religion" (Dayan and Katz, 207). This in turn raises the question of "hegemonic abuse," as journalists set aside their critical distance and become a reverent part of the scenery.

The Contributions of Critical Theory

How best to summarize the literature described above? The answer is clear: Foreign-policy élites, as opposed to the general public, are the primary consumers of media coverage of international affairs. Moreover, they actively trigger and manage such coverage. Ironically, it follows that the main relationship between the media and foreign policy may be that foreign policy élites (particularly the White House) are engaged in an unproductive, ceaseless effort to manipulate stories which have already been contrived to favor artificially their own position.

This, my proposition 8 introduced above, seems to fit the reasoning of proponents of so-called "critical theory," such as Daniel Hallin and Douglas Kellner. These two researchers make ample use of the Gramscian concept of "hegemony" and of the so-called "propaganda" model advanced by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (*Manufacturing Consent,* 1988), to which I will return. Both Hallin and Kellner also attribute much of their thinking to the work of the German social scientist Jurgen Habermas, and in particular to his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.* Habermas' theory, simply put, is that in the late 18th century economic interests began to take over the media, as well as the state, transforming the public from participants in democracy into consumers of mass culture.

Kellner's work takes Habermas, and critical theory, to its logical extreme. (The gist of "critical theory," as opposed to the theory of liberal pluralism, is that not all interests and perspectives are equally represented in the media. Given an unequal distribution of political-economic power in the larger society, some members of society have greater access to communication institutions than others have.)

For Kellner, the liberal pluralist model of democracy has been rendered irrelevant in the television age. As television's overriding concern is to make money, covering public affairs is useful insofar as it contributes to corporate profit. Television programming is constantly preoccupied with raising its viewer

ratings and its market share. It is, therefore, devoted entirely to "creating attention for attention's sake." As a result, television's ability to play a constructive role in the public sphere is questionable at best. Indeed, Kellner believes that "democratic functions of the media have been severely curtailed during the short history of television in the United States" (72). Television has harmed, not contributed to, democratic debate and policy formulation.

How is this possible, given American television's offering of a vast number of stations and theoretically unlimited choice and diversity? According to Kellner, while U. S. television seems to produce great opportunities for pluralism, the reality is that the methodology underlying television programming is designed to produce conformity with the capitalist system. Kellner writes that the main role of the media in the United States is to advance the hegemonic views of the ruling government and business élites:

> Ideology becomes hegemonic when it is widely accepted as describing "the way things are," inducing people to consent to the institutions and practices dominant in their society and its way of life. . . . Hegemonic ideology serves as a means of "indirect rule" that is a powerful force for social cohesion and stability (17).

Kellner asserts that the very history of radio and television demonstrates how these technologies "sold citizens on the virtue of commercial capitalism and helped legitimate the capitalist system" (28). According to Kellner, the communications media in this country were the product of hegemonic and monopolistic tendencies: In the early years of the respective technologies, AT&T

controlled the phone system; Western Union, the telegraph; RCA, Westinghouse and GE, the radio; and CBS and NBC, radio broadcasting. U. S. Government actions further entrenched the position of the media monopolies. During World War II, for example, radio played an important role in mobilizing people for the war effort. Similarly, both radio and television broadcasting disseminated the government's virulent anti-Communist, Cold War rhetoric. This pro-government bias has had serious consequences:

> In general, television tends to reproduce the positions of the dominant hegemonic political forces of the era simply because, in its zeal to win big ratings and big profits, it gravitates toward what it believes is popular. As a consequence, it tends to reproduce and reinforce the dominant ethos, ideology, and policies (48).

Kellner's principal contribution to mass communication theory is his recognition that the primordial operating principal in television-news production is "getting attention" in order to raise ratings. Therefore, notions of civic responsibility play only a secondary -- and usually minor -- role in production decisions on how to cover public policy. Indeed, television "increases trends toward privatization and helps destroy a more participatory public sphere by keeping its viewers in their own homes, away from other people" (Kellner, 124). As a result, the consumer gets the idea that he is excluded from, not included in, public discourse. (This is similar to Dayan and Katz' theory, according to which media and the government contrive to keep the citizenry at home, so they cannot become politically involved.)

Now let us consider the work of Daniel Hallin, another critical theorist. Hallin is particularly important with respect to our query into the journalistic coverage of Laos, because he is one of the handful of principal researchers to have analyzed systematically the relationship between the U. S. media and the Vietnam War (another is the military historian William Hammond, mentioned previously). In *The "Uncensored" War: The Media and Vietnam* (1986) and *We Keep America on Top of the World: Television and the Public Sphere* (1994), Hallin persuasively shows that in Vietnam, reporters essentially followed the U. S. Government line until very late in the war -- indeed, generally until after the Tet Offensive of 1968. (This also is precisely the argument advanced by Hammond. The application of this finding will be made clear in chapters 2 and 3.) How he arrives at this conclusion requires some explanation.

Hallin begins by declaring his discomfort with American journalism's commitment to "professionalism," because "professionalism develops along with a closer relationship with the state" (1994: 7). He writes that major news organizations no longer have particular ethnic, religious, party, or religious affiliations as they did at the end of the 19th century. At the same time, the media are more entangled with economic institutions and the state. Therefore, "the news media have to be seen as a hybrid institution, at once economic, political, and cultural-professional" (1994: 5).

The issue is particularly germane with respect to reporting on national security and foreign affairs: "The irony is we have far more information about what government is doing, but the picture of the world the media gives us is more than ever tied with official views" (1994: 5). This state of affairs is harmful for several reasons: First, the culture of professionalism is largely hostile to politics, preferring technical and administrative expertise or cynical detachment to engagement in the public sphere. Such a clinical approach runs counter to Hallin's belief that journalism should be committed to justice and compassion as well as to accuracy. Secondly, as Hallin states more explicitly in *The "Uncensored War,"* such professionalization has "granted to political authorities certain positive rights of access to the news and accepting for the most part the language, agenda and perspectives of the political establishment" (1986: 8). Thus, he writes:

> The reporters who went to Southeast Asia were schooled in a set of journalistic practices, which, among other things, ensured that the news would reflect, if not always the views of those at the very top of the American political hierarchy, at least the perspectives of American officialdom generally (1986: 8).

What is the implication for the making of foreign policy, particularly in wartime or a crisis? For Hallin, the media participate in the "construction of political meaning and formation of opinion. The model is a conversation" (1994: 10). A real conversation, it would appear, would give the media a role in forming policy as well. But ironically, Hallin asserts, such a result is not the case. The

behavior of media is *dependent* on the degree of consensus among élites. When consensus is strong, the media are passive. When the élites are divided, the media become more active, more diverse in their points of view, and more difficult to manage.

Hallin argues, for example, that the anti-establishment media view of the Vietnam War got under way only *after* the foreign-policy élites themselves began to disagree with President Nixon's policy. Television then began to reflect what already was reality: an escalating opposition to the policy, beginning in the spring of 1967 and accelerating by mid-1969 (1994: 11). Hallin's analysis of the media's reaction to Vietnam recalls our previous discussion of the Iran hostage crisis. In sum, the media picked up neither crisis until after the élites already had lost control of the policy.

The central value of Hallin's work for our purpose is that, instead of asking the usual question as to why the United States "lost Vietnam," Hallin focuses on the question of how the United States got into Vietnam in the first place. He concludes that it was due to the "enormous strength of the Cold War consensus in the early 1960s, shared by journalists and policymakers alike" (1986: 9). Identifying a phenomenon he terms "Cold War news management," Hallin finds that Washington authorities were able to "define or frame the situation in such a way that its actions appeared beyond political controversy" (19). Indeed, according to Hallin, the president's power to control the news in Vietnam rested

on two factors: the prevalent Cold War ideology, and ironically, *the professional routines of journalism.*

For example, few reporters spoke Vietnamese. They were, therefore, overwhelmingly reliant on official, mainly American, sources. Most also tended to define "news" as a series of discrete events. Hence, battles and "body counts" were over-reported to the detriment of analysis of the underlying root of the conflict.[4] The war consistently was portrayed as pitting Western-backed freedom fighters against Communist invaders; the nationalist dimension arising out of decades of repressive French rule was totally overlooked. Nor did the U. S. press corps begin to use the term "civil war" in reference to the Indochina conflict until 1965 (1986: 89). Moreover, "once the American troops were committed to combat in large numbers, television coverage focused overwhelmingly on one central story: American boys in action" (129). In sum, the conflict between the press and the government in the early 1960s was an argument over "tactics, not principles" (28). The journalists did not challenge the assumption that the United States needed to be involved in Vietnam. Perhaps even more disturbingly, the journalists never took any other framework into account:

> An ideology defines not only what people see, but also what they do not see. What Americans saw in Vietnam was aggression; what they did not see, and could not see, given the political concepts available to them, was revolution (Hallin, 1986: 54).

Similarly, the media displayed a lack of critical stance with respect to the 1990 Gulf War, Hallin writes. They did so because the first Bush administration

had contrived a careful campaign to persuade both the Congress and the public of the rightness of its cause. Thus, once soldiers' lives were on the line, television and the public rallied to the president's policy. In the Gulf as well as in Vietnam, the media failed in what Hallin believes should be their primary role: "sparking active public participation in deciding the direction of public policy" (1994, 35).

Hallin is not the only researcher to assert the idea that American journalism ought not to have accepted passively the United States' involvement in Indochina. Knightley, for example, argues that U. S. media representatives not only avoided commenting on the morality of American intervention but also stood idly by while atrocities were being committed. Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky go even further, essentially attributing what they term war crimes in Indochina to the press corps as well as to U. S. policy makers. Specifically with regard to Laos, they allege:

> It would have been impossible to wage a brutal war against South Vietnam and the rest of Indochina, leaving a legacy of misery and destruction that may never be overcome, if the media had not rallied to the cause, portraying murderous aggression as a defense of freedom, and only opening the doors to tactical disagreement when the costs to the interests they represented became too high (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, xv).

The implications for our analysis are clear. The media do have a large impact on foreign policy, but perhaps not the impact that most Americans, including foreign-policy élites, have always assumed. The ability of the press to perform a normative liberal pluralist function is questionable. The relationship between the media and the state is more ambiguous, complex and contradictory

than American civic texts would suggest. The bottom line: the modern journalist is dependent on the state, a reality most obvious during coverage of foreign policy. To put it another way:

> It was a popular view in the post-World War II period that the "age of ideology" had passed in America, replaced by the spirit of objective inquiry and political pluralism and pragmatism. And it was true that no great philosophical debates over the direction of public policy were taking place. This silence, however, represented not the end of ideology, but the triumph of a single ideology over all competitors. It was an age of ideological consensus, and this was true above all in foreign policy. The world view of the Cold War dominated American thinking about international affairs so totally during these years that it became not merely dangerous but virtually impossible for most Americans to question or to step outside it. Americans simply knew no other language for thinking or for communicating about the world. The journalists were no exception (Hallin, 1986: 50).

With that point uppermost in our minds, let us now turn to one of U. S. journalism's darkest moments, its coverage of American involvement in Laos.

Notes to Chapter 1

[1] See the annotated bibliography for full citations.

[2] Presumably, the technology has since further amplified this trend. It goes almost without saying that the ability to transmit news in "real time" was the stuff of which the so-called "CNN factor" was made, and which today makes the globalization of the World Wide Web such an exciting and controversial development, both for journalism and policy élites.

[3] These trends have only intensified since Cohen wrote about them. The news hole is much smaller today than it was 30 years ago, and the consolidation of independent news organizations into so-called "infotainment" conglomerates has further reduced the focus on foreign news.

[4] Hallin helpfully reminds us that so-called "op-ed pieces" were not a regular feature of American newspapers until very late in the Vietnam conflict. Instead, the major papers had regular Washington columnists, many of whom were known for their coziness to officialdom.

Chapter 2

The United States at War in Laos

More even than Cambodia, Laos was used by both principal protagonists with a callous disregard for those caught up in the fighting. The country's territorial integrity was violated with impunity by both North Vietnam and the United States, in the name of revolution or freedom, neither of which had much meaning for the great majority of the Lao people. What was portrayed by opposing sides as a heroic struggle against imperialism or communism was a drawn-out misery both for those directly involved, and for those whose only escape was to become refugees.

-- Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*

It is not my aim to describe here the detailed particulars of the tactics, engagements, or grand strategy of the American war in Laos. However, in order to make plain what happened to U. S. journalism in Laos, it is important first to describe what was happening in Laos during the larger Indochina conflict. Although the scholarship on this topic is growing with each passing year, the details are still far less known to the U. S. public than the facts about the war in Vietnam. This chapter will lay out the basic historical groundwork for the reader, as a prologue to the analysis of the actual journalism of the period, which follows in Chapter 3.[1]

The End of France's Empire

At the end of World War II, the United States decided to support the position of France at the expense of the latter's colonies in Indochina. Although President Roosevelt had been sympathetic to the aspirations of the peoples in southeast Asia, the politics of the time made it impossible for his successor, Harry Truman, to pursue a policy of other than support for France, Washington's important wartime ally. Moreover, the Cold War was beginning, and some of the most rigid anti-Communists in the U. S. Government were in charge of Indochina policy at the State Department. They had their reasons. Key events in the period that consolidated the hard-line American posture were the Soviet blockade of Berlin in the spring of 1948, the Communist takeover in China in October 1949, and the outbreak of war on the Korean Peninsula in June 1950.

Therefore, even as it became clear that France was losing her position in Indochina, the United States intervened with military assistance to make sure that Paris remained in control of what otherwise could become a Communist stronghold in Southeast Asia. In 1950 the United States signed a treaty with France providing significant military and economic assistance to her Southeast Asia colonial possessions -- Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Between 1950 and 1954, it is estimated, the United States paid most of the costs of France's war against the armies of Ho Chi Minh.

This war became a costly bloodletting for the French, and one for which they could see no end. By the spring of 1954 the state of domestic politics in France was in such turmoil as a result of the conflict that the new premier, Pierre Mendès-France, decided that he would have to negotiate a withdrawal of French forces from Indochina. Ironically, this was precisely the moment when the United States, whose policy was firmly in the hands of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, wanted to stand firm against the Vietminh. In a resulting public argument between Dulles and the French, it became clear that Paris was no longer willing to pay the price of shoring up anti-Communism in Indochina. Mendès-France indicated his desire for an international conference to negotiate an end to the war.

The Vietminh, aware of France's increasingly shaky domestic position, seized the moment to inflict one last, humiliating defeat on the French. In July 1954, even as diplomats were meeting at Geneva in negotiations, news came of the fall of Dien Bien Phu, located at the critical gateway into northeast Laos. The French army fell back into Laos in disarray for a possible defense of the royal capital, Luang Prabang. But the Geneva Conference shortly ended the war, and the French would not fight again.

Battling Communism Head On, 1955-1960

At Geneva the negotiators decided, most famously, that Vietnam would be divided temporarily into two parts, with elections to be held within two years to decide the form of government. With respect to Laos, they decided that the tiny

landlocked country that formed a "buffer" between Communist Vietnam and China to the north and pro-Western Thailand to the south should be "neutral and independent." Provision was made for the Pathet Lao, the then-insubstantial armed forces of the Lao Communist Party, to "regroup" in the northern Lao provinces of Phongsaly and Sam Neua. This would have important consequences, as we shall later see.

With its French ally discredited, the United States now picked up the mantle in Indochina. Secretary of State Dulles had not signed the Geneva treaty, did not expect it to hold, and indeed actively worked to ensure its ultimate failure. In Vietnam, the Eisenhower administration began its policy of shoring up an anti-Communist government in the South to ensure that Ho Chi Minh would not triumph in the eventual elections. Meanwhile in Laos, the United States began quietly to train the Royal Lao Government for an eventual stand against the Pathet Lao. It would have to do so circumspectly; the Geneva Agreement specifically forbade "all foreign powers except France" . . . "from establishing military bases in Laos."[2]

Up until late 1954, there had only been one Foreign Service Officer assigned to Vientiane, the Lao capital. Now the first ambassador, Charles Yost, was stationed there, and between 1955 and 1960, the United States moved to beef up its personnel and its influence on the Royal Lao Government (RLG).[3] It began by establishing the United States Operations Mission (USOM) to administer

economic assistance. A companion military assistance office, the so-called Program Evaluation Office (PEO) soon followed. In order to downplay the military nature of the PEO, the U. S. Government staffed it with reserve and retired military personnel who wore no uniforms.

As it happened, Laos experienced a severe drought in 1955. Civil Air Transport (CAT), an airline owned by the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), was brought in to drop rice and salt to victims in remote areas. By 1957, CAT and the U. S. Embassy had signed a formal contract and a C-47 transport aircraft was based at Vientiane. In 1959, Washington introduced covert, mobile U. S. Special Forces training teams into Laos. By 1959, there were approximately 400 U. S. official employees of one description or another working in Laos.[4]

With respect to the internal political situation, by now the U. S. Government was also running a shadow parallel administration and pumping large sums of money into Laos. The money inevitably was put to questionable purposes, including the purchase of Mercedes-Benzes and ostentatious villas for the ruling élite. In 1959 Laos was receiving more aid than any other foreign country as the U. S. pressed to effect an increasingly hard-line Lao position vis-a-vis Communism. So corrupt had the aid program become, however, that in late 1959 the U. S. Congress began to investigate the large sums of money being expended in Laos, and to demand accountability for them.[5]

The 1958 elections in Laos meanwhile had produced a result not at all to the liking of the United States government: Communists won 13 of 59 seats in the National Assembly. In response, Washington froze its economic assistance, upon which the RLG had become almost totally dependent. This forced the neutralist prime minister, Souvanna Phouma, to resign. U. S. aid resumed only after a more anti-Communist prime minister, Phoui Sananikone, formed a new government.

The precedent had been set for changes of governments precipitated by U. S. interference. In December 1959, right-wing military leaders urged on by the CIA overthrew Phoui Sananikone. This action was shortly followed by another coup led by Captain Kong Le, a young U. S. -trained paratrooper who sought to return Souvanna Phouma to power. The United States then supported General Phoumi Nosavan in a counter-coup. Phoumi installed Prince Boun Oum Na Champasak, of the southern royal family, as prime minister.

While all this was happening, various factions inside the Royal Lao Government continued to seek to outmaneuver each other for American moral and monetary backing. One effective way to do this, they found, was to draw repeated attention to the Communist threat from North Vietnam. Thus in 1959 a tentative push by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) into Sam Neua and Phongsaly provinces was amplified into claims by the RLG of a large-scale invasion. Although the invasion was never proved, it received ample coverage in the American press and provoked a United Nations investigation. The end result was

more posturing by Washington and an even more aggressive "anti-Red" stance by the U. S. Embassy in Laos.[6]

Not surprisingly, both Peking and Moscow were increasingly concerned by U. S. activities in Laos, which they saw as threatening their own positions. In December 1960 Moscow flew support flights to the neutralist and Pathet Lao forces fighting the armed forces of the Royal Lao Government. The Pathet Lao guerrillas in the mountains of northeastern Laos were increasingly assisted not only by North Vietnamese but also by Russian, Czech, and Chinese advisers. In turn, the United States grew increasingly alarmed about an expanding network of Chinese-built roads in the north, particularly in Oudomxai, Luang Namtha, and Phongsaly provinces. These developments tended to reinforce American policy makers' thinking that Laos fit the bill as a Cold War "domino."

"Neutrality" and a Secret War, 1961-1963

By early 1961, when President Eisenhower passed off the "Lao problem" to his successor, John F. Kennedy, he warned that Laos would be the new administration's biggest foreign-policy headache. Indeed, in the early days of his administration Kennedy, egged on by the Pentagon, came to the brink of sending U. S. troops into Laos. Had the invasion of Cuba that April succeeded, he might have done so. Instead, in the wake of the disastrous Bay of Pigs, he came to the conclusion that a similar course in Laos would bring the United States into direct confrontation with the Soviet Union and/or China. Moreover, he correctly

understood that the Lao, a famously gentle and nonassertive people, did not mind greatly if their leadership reflected a range of political ideologies.

Thus Kennedy moved to change the long-standing policy of support for a staunch anti-Communist government in Vientiane. He returned to the original Geneva idea of a "neutral" Laos. He put his new Asia envoy, former New York Governor W. Averell Harriman, in charge of working out a solution to the civil war in Laos that would not involve the commitment of American ground troops. Ironically, the new Kennedy team now focused on strengthening the administration of Souvanna Phouma, whom Eisenhower's people had worked so hard to discredit and keep from power.

Meanwhile, the U. S. involvement in Laos was moving into a different realm altogether. American officials in Washington and Vientiane by 1960 had come to realize that all the money they had poured into the Royal Lao army in the late 1950s had produced no tangible result. The army, made up chiefly of lowland Lao "Loum" (the traditional name for the Lao of ethno-linguistic T'ai Kadai stock who occupy the Mekong River Valley) had come to naught.[7] The Lao Loum, they found, are not natural fighters.

Thus in late December 1960 CIA case officer Bill Lair met for the first time with Hmong tribal leader Vang Pao.[8] The Hmong, an ethnic group of Chinese origin that had moved into Laos only in the late 1800s, had a better reputation for war making than did the Lao Loum. Vang Pao had proved this

maxim by fighting with the French first against the Japanese in World War II and later against the nationalist Vietnamese. He agreed to help the CIA form a guerrilla army to fight against the North Vietnamese Army.

The idea of a limited covert effort rather than a full-scale assault on Laos appealed to President Kennedy. With the CIA in charge on the ground and Harriman running the policy from Washington, Kennedy could turn to more pressing matters, including the increasingly complex situation in Vietnam. At Harriman's instigation, a new international conference for Laos was convened in Geneva in July 1962; there the tiny country's "neutrality" was reconfirmed. A cease-fire was arranged, as was a coalition government representing the various political factions. All foreign troops were supposed to depart Laos by October of that year, and American military advisers -- approximately 1,100 of them -- did so. When their North Vietnamese counterparts (estimated at up to 8,000 men) did not, American policy makers were faced with a new dilemma. They could either call Ho Chi Minh's bluff and call attention to his violation of the accords, or they could play his game.

For various reasons to which we will return later, the U. S. policy makers chose to play the game. They decided to fight a covert proxy war, using Vang Pao's tribal irregulars to prevent the Pathet Lao and NVA from gaining any more ground inside Laos. By the summer of 1962, the CIA had constructed a full-fledged base of operations for the Hmong army, including an airfield, at Long

Tieng in the mountains of Xieng Khouang Province. Over time, Long Tieng became a thriving city of more than 50,000 persons, the second largest in Laos after Vientiane. Its existence was classified, as far as the U. S. Embassy was concerned; indeed, it was not supposed to exist at all.

Thus began the so-called "secret war," which the U. S. public would not know about in detail for several more years. But inside Laos it was not all that secret, and it was certainly no secret to either the North Vietnamese or its allies in Peking and Moscow. Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma acquiesced in the build-up of the CIA-led Hmong army, realizing that he had no other choice. He had good personal reasons for hoping that the Great Powers would eventually leave Laos alone; his own half-brother, Souphanouvong, was the titular head of the Pathet Lao, and Souvanna seemed to believe genuinely that the differing Lao factions, whom he regarded as a large family, could accommodate each other. Yet Souvanna knew that his own survival, and that of Laos, depended on skillfully navigating the treacherous political games then being played by the United States, China, and the Soviet Union.

A New Kind of Ambassador

By July 1962, a new ambassador, a Kennedy appointee, was in Laos. Leonard Unger had served in Thailand and had close ties to the Royal Thai Government. One of Unger's first moves was to set up a new unit under which covert U. S. -Thai assistance to the Royal Lao Government could be funneled.

This was the so-called "Requirements Office," which was put under the nominal control of the Vientiane-based headquarters of the U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Unger also came to Vientiane equipped with something his predecessors had not, a letter from President Kennedy putting him in charge of all elements of the U. S. Government operating in Laos. This was a precedent stemming both from the Bay of Pigs debacle and from the disarray inside U. S. Embassy Vientiane during the Eisenhower administration, when the CIA and the U. S. military attachés pursued their own policies regardless of the intentions of Ike's ambassadors.

With Kennedy having considered and then discarded the notion of a traditional military intervention, and with Unger now in complete control of the embassy and charged with implementing directives from Washington, the stage was set for a new kind of war -- one conducted under the auspices of the U. S. ambassador rather than the Pentagon. The CIA, USAID, and the military attachés inside the embassy now came together under the ambassador to support the Hmong army in the field and to prop up the Royal Lao regime in Vientiane.

Between 1964 and 1967, the Hmong faced off time and again against Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese fighters and acquitted themselves admirably. Although they did not decisively defeat the Communist forces, they were able to protect incursions past the Plain, south of which lay Luang Prabang, Vientiane,

and the majority of the Lao Loum population. The Communists would press their advantage during the annual dry season from October to May, but always had to fall back during the rainy season, when their vehicles and materièl bogged down in the mud. The Hmong were most successful during the early years, when the Americans employed them mainly for hit-and-run, guerrilla-style missions. They were less successful in the waning years of the war, when their CIA advisers tried to turn them into a conventional army to stem the growing North Vietnamese presence in Sam Neua (now Houaphan) and Phongsaly provinces.

Indeed, over the years, the Hmong army grew to more than 40,000 men (and boys as young as 10-12 years of age), all receiving a small salary from the CIA. Since their participation in the war disrupted their traditional lifestyle of slash-and-burn agriculture, it fell to the U. S. Government to feed their families. The CIA proprietary airline, now named Air America, played a key role in dropping rice and other commodities to Hmong villages in the mountains. USAID set up a refugee-relief headquarters at Sam Thong, near the CIA base of Long Thieng, from which humanitarian assistance to Hmong displaced by the fighting could be coordinated. Increasingly, Air America was drawn into providing air support and search-and-rescue missions for Hmong guerrillas on the ground.

In June 1963, the United States presented a "gift" of six T-28 propeller-driven fighter-bombers to the Royal Lao Air Force. But since the Lao appeared to

be less than willing or competent to fly the planes, Americans stationed at U. S. bases in Thailand were soon put into the pilots' seats. Meanwhile, U. S. pilots in reconnaissance planes disguised as Royal Lao aircraft overflew the Plain of Jars, observing movements of the enemy on the ground. Predictably, the next stage of the war would be fought from the air, with Americans directly in charge.

The Air War, 1964-1973

The American involvement which had started in such an inconspicuous way in the early 1950s had, by the mid-1960s, become a fairly large-scale effort. Americans were enmeshed in a shooting war in Laos, one with complicated civil and international dimensions. Indeed, the situation had now developed thus:

> This secret war was really four wars, administratively distinct and only partially coordinated. One was the conflict fought by the Royal Lao Army . . . which was generally limited to the areas surrounding the principal towns. Another was the vigorous, deadly war for survival by the Meos [Hmong] under the close supervision and support of the CIA. Third was the air war in northern Laos, under the code name of Barrel Roll, at first shared with the Laotian Air Force, but gradually dominated by the Americans. Fourth was the air war in the southern panhandle of Laos, under the code name of Steel Tiger, along the Ho Chi Minh trails to South Vietnam; this war was a direct adjunct to the struggle in that neighboring nation. The Ambassador had access to information about these military operations and a veto over certain plans (Stevenson, *The End of Nowhere,* 210).

How matters arrived at this state requires some explanation. By early 1964 the coalition government of rightists, neutralists, and leftists that had been in place in Laos since the 1962 Geneva agreements was in danger of collapse. It was abruptly put to death when two Royal army generals again decided to assert the

right wing's desire to monopolize power. The generals launched another coup attempt, but this one did not succeed in the manner of the coups of 1960-1961, mainly because the Americans intervened to save Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma this time. Thereafter, Souvanna aligned himself more explicitly with the rightists and the Americans; whatever his private thoughts, he could see which way the political winds were blowing.

The Americans were now arguing that a major combined Pathet Lao-North Vietnamese influx was underway, and persuaded Souvanna to accept an escalation of the war.[9] As indicated previously, from December 1963 on, U. S. Special Forces in Thailand began to train Lao pilots in reconnaissance work. And in May 1964, American pilots began reconnaissance overflights of their own, of both the Ho Chi Minh Trail in southern Laos and the Plain of Jars in the northeast.

No sooner had President Johnson authorized these activities (Kennedy having been assassinated the previous November) than the Pathet Lao shot down two American planes over the Plain. Predictably, the United States sent in a squadron of F-100 fighter-bombers to retaliate, and initiated a new policy of armed escorts for all reconnaissance flights. However, instead of dealing frankly with the press about these developments, the U. S. mission began a public-affairs policy of strict denial. Later, U. S. officials would assert that the press policy was at the request of Souvanna Phouma. However, it clearly also served the American interest of not publicizing that the U. S. as well as the North Vietnamese and the

Pathet Lao were also in violation of the Geneva agreements. (By contrast, during this same period, the U. S. mission in Saigon undertook a new "maximum candor" policy with respect to release of information to the correspondents.)

Growing American Involvement in Vietnam

It is also important to note corresponding developments with respect to Vietnam during this period. By early 1964, Washington had become deeply concerned about the growing movement of North Vietnamese materièl and personnel along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a latticework of foot trails and dirt roads that transited the southeastern panhandle of Laos into South Vietnam. Also, in August that year the reported North Vietnamese attacks on an American ship in the Tonkin Gulf gave President Johnson the excuse he needed -- and permission from Congress -- to intervene more directly in Vietnam.[10] He launched the first American air strikes against the North, and over the next two years, he sent 500,000 American soldiers to South Vietnam. This in turn led to an increase in the number of U. S. correspondents in Saigon; with the Americanization of the Vietnam conflict, fewer reporters were interested in Laos. (This will be treated more extensively in the next chapter.)

Later in the year, William Sullivan, a young Foreign Service Officer and protégé of Averell Harriman who had played an instrumental role in working out the 1962 Geneva agreements on Laos, became U. S. Ambassador in Vientiane.

The first U. S. direct bombing of military targets in northeast Laos ("Barrel Roll") began almost immediately, in December, with Sullivan assuming charge of the air war. As Stevenson tells us, "Bombing had become an accepted tactic by the end of 1964" (208); "once begun, air operations took on a life and momentum of their own" (216).

In early 1965 Sullivan received permission from Souvanna Phouma to bomb the Ho Chi Minh Trail. This escalation dovetailed with the corresponding air war over Vietnam. By 1966 most of the bombing runs over northern Laos originated at a major new U. S. -built facility at Udorn Thani, Thailand, and a dozen other American bases in that country. Meanwhile, B-52 bombers based out of Guam flew saturation bombing sorties over the Trail.[11]

Inevitably, it was found that American forward air controllers (FACS) were needed to direct the bombers to their targets; the FACS, who called themselves "the Ravens," were covert U. S. Air Force aviators who wore civilian clothes in case their planes were shot down inside Laos. But it was Ambassador Sullivan who gave the thumbs up or thumbs down for each mission, a situation highly unusual in U. S. military history. There is much evidence that the military brass from General William Westmoreland on down were unhappy with the situation and repeatedly sought, although usually in vain, to limit Sullivan's role.

However in 1966, the U. S. Air Force did manage to persuade Washington, over Sullivan's objections, to establish a tactical air-navigation

system (TACAN) inside Laos for the purpose of directing bombing runs against Hanoi. The system was built atop Phou Pha Thi, a mile-high mountain in northeastern Laos near the Communist stronghold at Sam Neua and the Vietnamese border. However, for various reasons the system never worked as well as it should have, and served only to alert the Pathet Lao and the Vietnamese of covert American activity next to the border. On March 11, 1968, Vietnamese sappers overran Phou Pa Thi, confiscating much of the sensitive equipment and engaging in hand-to-hand fighting with American personnel, some of whom were unarmed civilians. The event resulted in 11 Americans missing and presumed dead. But since the U. S. officially was not involved in Laos, their families could not be told the real circumstances.[12]

Two weeks later, President Johnson announced that he would not seek reelection, and offered a partial bombing halt and talks with Hanoi. Ironically, with the bombing temporarily suspended over Northern Vietnam, American bombers began to unload all their excess ordnance over Laos. Thereafter sorties over Laos doubled what they had been only a year earlier, and by mid-1969, 300 sorties were being flown into Laos on a daily basis. An intensification of such magnitude meant that the air war was increasingly difficult to control, and accidental bombings of civilian targets began to occur with some frequency.

By the summer of 1969 yet another American ambassador was in Vientiane. He was G. McMurtrie "Mac" Godley, an appointee of the new

president, Richard M. Nixon. Godley by all accounts relished the unlikely role thrust upon him, that of a quasi-general responsible for decisions affecting the lives of combatants and civilians alike. Soon after Godley took over, the rules of engagement for American bombers relaxed considerably, and civilian targets were no longer completely off-limits. Apparently in response to a request from Premier Savanna Phouma, Godley called in the first B-52 bombing strikes over civilian areas in the northeast, in response to a large-scale North Vietnamese offensive on the Plain of Jars in January 1970. American bombers completely destroyed the strategic village of Xieng Khouang Ville in a matter of days. According to reports that appeared first in the European press, not a house was left standing there.

The bombing of Laos continued, albeit at a reduced rate, right to the end of the American war in Vietnam (in Cambodia, it went on even longer). It continued despite rising antiwar demonstrations inside the United States, hearings conducted by the U. S. Congress, secret peace talks with Hanoi, and the pullout of American forces from Vietnam. Only after the war did it become clear that during the watch of ambassadors Sullivan and Godley, but particularly the latter, American firepower was responsible for the wholesale destruction of thousands of Lao homes and villages and the killing of untold numbers of civilians. More ordnance was dropped over Laos -- 2.1 million tons -- than over Germany during World War II. And the bombing story is not over, as unexploded ordnance

continues to kill and maim Laotian civilians to this date, at the rate of approximately 100 casualties per year.[13]

The Beginning of the End

As we have seen, U. S. policy in Laos became ever more linked with the Vietnam war in the late 1960s, particularly as American military planners grew increasingly vexed in their failed attempts to halt North Vietnamese infiltration along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Paradoxically, by this time Washington policy makers were under increasing public and congressional pressure to bring home American soldiers and to "Vietnamize" the war. Henry Kissinger, Nixon's national security adviser and later secretary of state, began secret negotiations with Hanoi to that end in early 1970.

Meanwhile, as a consequence of news leaks about the extent of American military activities in Laos and Cambodia, in March 1970 President Nixon had to acknowledge that the United States had been involved in Laos for many years. He misreported some aspects of the situation and failed to provide particulars on others (a serious misstep to be discussed more fully in the next chapter), but in the end the Senate reacted by placing limits on his power to wage war in Indochina.

With these new restrictions in place, a contemplated U. S. invasion of southern Laos could not be implemented. However, in February 1971, South Vietnamese troops with U. S. air support began ground incursions into Laos in a

last, desperate attempt to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail (Operation Dewey Canyon II). But the South Vietnamese, whose reputation as fighters was as wretched as that of the Lao Loum, turned and ran. Photographs of South Vietnamese soldiers hanging to the struts of American helicopters caused much embarrassment to the Nixon administration. The operation was a debacle on every count, with the South Vietnamese suffering heavy casualties and the U. S. losing hundreds of aircraft. Four journalists covering the invasion also were killed when their South Vietnamese helicopter went down.

Later that year, the last series of battles began in the northeastern theater of Laos. Ten thousand Hmong and Thai fighters attempted to defend "Skyline Ridge," which guarded the approaches to the CIA base at Long Tieng and the refugee center at Sam Thong, from several battalions of the North Vietnamese army. The battle seesawed off and on for six months, with the North Vietnamese using Soviet-supplied T-34 tanks and long-range 133-millimeter guns. At one point the North Vietnamese penetrated Long Tieng. But the Hmong and Thai held fast, and the Vietnamese eventually retreated to wait out the monsoon. The Hmong had staved off the Communists once more -- albeit only with considerable assistance from the Thai -- but it was to be a bittersweet, and final, victory.

America Loses Interest, 1973-1975

On January 27, 1973, President Nixon announced that the United States had signed a peace treaty with North Vietnam. Laos having been excluded from

the secret talks along with South Vietnam and Cambodia, Souvanna Phouma was on his own in negotiating an end to his conflict with the Pathet Lao and Hanoi. In February 1973, under pressure from Kissinger, Souvanna agreed to a cease-fire with the Pathet Lao, but one without even the fig leaf of the "neutrality" provisions of the 1954 and 1962 Geneva agreements. Kissinger assured Souvanna that Washington intended to help him establish and maintain a stable coalition government with the Pathet Lao, but these turned out to be empty promises.

Vang Pao's Hmong irregulars and his Pathet Lao adversaries were supposed to be merged into the Royal Lao army, although Pathet Lao violations of the cease-fire and Vang Pao's own stubbornness led to continued fighting between the two sides for several more months. Nevertheless, coalition government between neutralists and Communists returned to Laos for a third and final time in April 1974. Prince Souphanouvong, the titular head of the Pathet Lao and half-brother to Souvanna Phouma, received a hero's welcome upon his arrival in Vientiane to join the coalition.

For all practical purposes, this marked the end of direct U. S. involvement in Lao affairs. Air America withdrew its planes and pilots by the required deadline in June 1974, and CIA funding for the war officially ended on September 30 of that year. Meanwhile, in the United States, President Nixon resigned in humiliation over the so-called "Watergate" affair; as far as America was concerned, Indochina was becoming a distant memory. The last American

soldiers had departed Vietnam in the spring of 1973. In January 1975, when the North Vietnamese launched a new assault against the South, the U. S. Congress refused to reauthorize American involvement. The clear American disinterest emboldened the Pathet Lao and Khmer Rouge, in Laos and Cambodia, respectively, to press their advantage on the ground.

The fall of Phnom Penh and Saigon to the Communists in early 1975 meant that the coalition in Laos could not last much longer. Indeed, the Pathet Lao advanced on Long Tieng a final time, in early May. Vang Pao previously had refused to abandon his mountain redoubt, but he realized at this point that his only options were to flee or to face certain death at the hands of either the Pathet Lao or his own men, who were increasingly demoralized and angry at being deserted by the Americans.

The CIA, who had assisted in the haphazard departure of the last Americans from the Saigon embassy, organized a last-minute evacuation of at least some of their Hmong allies. On May 12-14, 1975, the CIA airlifted General Vang Pao and 2,500 Hmong to safety in Thailand. But tens of thousands of other Hmong were left behind and had to escape by foot over the mountains south to Vientiane. Many did not survive the ensuing exodus to Thailand. As the last C-47 transport planes took off, Long Tieng fell to advancing Pathet Lao troops. By August, Vientiane also had fallen. The Pathet Lao took over the former USAID compound with its neat rows of ranch houses, swimming pool, and school

gymnasium. And on December 2, the Pathet Lao accepted the abdication of the King of Laos, and declared the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Although the Pathet Lao were not as ruthless as their counterparts in Cambodia, they executed many soldiers of the former regime and sent the higher-ranking political and military figures to so-called "seminar," or re-education camps. Indeed, the king and queen and their son, the heir to the throne, died in detention while under house arrest near Sam Neua. The U. S. funding largesse of previous decades suddenly evaporated, helping to fuel a near economic collapse of the new regime. Meanwhile, over the subsequent months and years, nearly 300,000 Hmong and Lao who had supported the Royalists and the Americans fled to Thailand, where they endured horrific conditions in refugee camps before being permitted to resettle in other countries. Their exodus and resettlement began a new chapter in the interconnected histories of the United States and Laos. But that is another story.

Notes to Chapter 2

[1] My main sources for this chapter are Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*; Dommen, *Conflict in Laos*; Goldstein, *American Policy Toward Laos;* Stevenson, *The End of Nowhere*; Warner, *Shooting at the Moon*; Stuart-Fox, *History of Laos*; and Karnow, *Vietnam.*

[2] Robert F. Randle, *Geneva 1954*, 1969.

[3] The three ambassadors to Laos under the Eisenhower administration were Charles Yost, 1954-1956; J. Graham Parsons, 1956-1958; and Horace Smith, 1958-1960. For a study of the bureaucratic infighting in Washington and at U.S. Embassy Vientiane, as well as the machinations between the two, see Stevenson's brilliant *The End of Nowhere.*

[4] William Leary, "CIA Air Operations in Laos, 1955-1974," 1995.

[5] See House of Representatives Committee on Government Operations, *U. S. Aid Operations in Laos,* 1959.

[6] The panic over supposed North Vietnamese troops can be explained in part by the fact that the NVA had come into Laos previously in 1953, in preparation for the attack on Dien Bien Phu.

[7] As during the war, the Lao Loum today make up only approximately half of the Lao population. Non-Lao ethnic groups, of which there are more than 40, account for the other half.

[8] This was not, however, Vang Pao's first acquaintance with the Americans. It appears that he went to the Philippines in 1957 for U. S. -funded training. Zalin Grant moreover reports that Laos-based CIA operatives made initial contact with Vang Pao in 1958 or 1959. But it was with the Lair meeting in December 1960 that an operational agreement between the CIA and Vang Pao began to take shape. The intervention of Lair, who had a close personal relationship with King Bhumipol of Thailand, facilitated tight coordination of covert activities among the CIA, the Hmong, and the Royal Thai Government.

[9] The argument of a North Vietnamese invasion appears once again to have been based on incorrect numbers, announced by the Royal Lao Government and perpetuated by Western, primarily American, media outlets. Stevenson writes that inflated estimates of NVA invasions were publicly circulated on at least 10

occasions between 1955 and 1970. He also charges that this erroneous information could have been stopped had the U. S. Government wanted to stop it.

[10] It is now common knowledge that while the first attack did occur, the second was fabricated in order to justify Johnson's desire to intervene.

[11] B-52 strategic bombers were not used in northeast Laos until 1969. Their significant military advantages were to prove a political disaster. As they fly at extremely high altitudes, their pilots do not actually see the targets at which they are aiming. This leads to a high probability of missing the intended target and hitting something else.

[12] The full story of Phou Pha Thi was revealed only in 1999, with the publication of Timothy Castle's engrossing *One Day Too Long: Top Secret Site 85 and the Bombing of North Vietnam.* Castle's work is based on recently declassified documents. It shows, among other things, how Washington's refusal to deal frankly with the families of the dead and missing Americans at Phou Pha Thi contributed to the activism of the Prisoner of War/Missing in Action (POW/MIA) movement.

[13] In retrospect the bombing of Laos must be seen at best as one of the many series of mis-steps that characterized the entire American conduct of its war in Indochina. At worst, it must be considered a war crime of terrible magnitude (even if the Royal Lao Government did acquiesce in its prosecution). By any standard it violates the commonly understood laws of war laid out in the Geneva Conventions, to which the United States is a party. It has been estimated that up to 200,000 civilians were killed in the Laos theater of war, and an equal number injured. Another 10 percent of the civilian population was made homeless at one time or another. In 1969 alone there were approximately 300,000 internally displaced persons. Of course, the casualties were the result of a number of factors, including shelling and fighting between and among the Hmong and their Thai allies, the North Vietnamese, the Pathet Lao, and the Lao Royal Armed Forces. The U. S. official stance regarding war casualties and refugees in particular was that they were caused by North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao "aggression." This is only a part of the story, as only the United States was bombing Laos on a sustained basis. Ironically, the bombing led to a humanitarian crisis for which the United States then had to assume responsibility, by providing food, clothing and shelter for the refugees.

Chapter 3

Reporting the War: The Story That Got Away

The truth is that Laos was the deepest of backwaters. It was staffed by stringers who filed by cable short dispatches which became even shorter news stories. Except during the occasional crisis when half a dozen or a dozen of us would grab a plane over and watch it play out.

-- Joe Galloway, former UPI correspondent

At the request of the Royal Laotian Government, the United States is conducting unarmed reconnaissance flights accompanied by armed escorts who have the right to return fire if fired upon.

-- U. S. Embassy Vientiane,
standard press guidance, 1964-1968

The war-seeking correspondents who covered Laos in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s had other things on their minds. Laos was the second, allegedly less important theater of the Indochina conflict -- in fact, there was not supposed to be a war there at all, at least not a war involving *Americans*. Yet as discussed previously, by 1955 it was clear that the United States Government was working in Laos, significantly albeit quietly. Whether the U. S. press would pick up the story remained to be seen.

The Coverage in Context

Like the Indochina conflict itself, American press coverage can be analyzed according to distinct stages: prior to 1965, 1965-1969 (the build-up of American combat troops in Vietnam), 1969-1971 (height of the domestic reaction), 1971-1973 (the search for peace), 1974-1975 (disinterest), 1975 (the fall of the three Indochinese states to Communist rule), and post-1975 (refugee outflux to America and elsewhere). With respect to Laos specifically, the coverage also can be analyzed in terms of the constraints upon journalists identified in the Introduction. These include the widespread fiction shared by journalists as well as policy makers, derivative of the Geneva Accords, that Laos was "neutral" in the conflict; proactive dissembling and manipulation by the U. S. Embassy in Laos; lack of interest in, and censorship of reports on Laos, by stateside editors; poor communications and infrastructure inside Laos; the lack of reporters with a grounding in Lao (or even French) language, history, or culture; and the professionalization and routines of American journalism. In this chapter, we will see how the press conducted itself with respect to the Laos theater of war, given the context and constraints within which it operated, both within and outside Laos.

As indicated previously, there was no regular foreign press corps in Laos to speak of, at least not in the early years of American involvement in Indochina.

(Likewise, the number of accredited press in Saigon was minuscule until American combat soldiers arrived.) Even later, as U. S. engagement with Laos deepened, the reporters still considered Laos a lesser adjunct to the more conventional conflict in Vietnam. Most American reporters were stationed in Saigon, or to a lesser extent in Bangkok, Hong Kong, or Singapore.[1] They came to Laos only during a coup, crisis, or other discrete news "event." Similarly, once American troop strength in Vietnam began to decline, the number of reporters covering Indochina dropped off too -- ironically, even as an escalation in the U. S. bombing campaign against Laos and Cambodia was accelerating.

First on the Scene: Peter Arnett

While Agence France-Presse had maintained a bureau in Vientiane throughout France's struggle to maintain its empire, the American news media got to Laos relatively late, with the first bureaus opening there in 1959 or 1960. Peter Arnett was the first English-speaking, Western journalist to have more than a passing acquaintance with Laos. The young New Zealander had arrived in Southeast Asia for the first time in 1958, whereupon he was quickly picked up by the *Bangkok World.* As an apprentice to the *World's* American publisher, Daniel "Berry" Berrigan, Arnett quickly learned that the paper was a "mouthpiece for the U. S. Government and its aid enterprises in Thailand" (Arnett, *Live from the Battlefield,* 40). The *World's* connections with official Washington appear not to

have bothered Arnett greatly.[2] Having started a joint venture with Berrigan to publish in Laos a companion paper to the *World,* he moved to Vientiane in 1960. He was 26 years old, and as he admits readily in his memoirs, no match for the political machinations already swirling in Vientiane. This was the time of concerted efforts by the U. S. Embassy to back rival claimants to power, with the U. S. Ambassador, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) station, and the defense attachés supporting different factions.

Arnett stayed in Vientiane on and off for two years, during which time he relied heavily on American Embassy contacts for advice as to what was newsworthy. Arnett also became personally close to the family of Phoumi Nosavan, the military strongman who, with financing from the CIA, came to take the defense ministry in the second coalition government in Laos in 1962. By the time Arnett moved on, to take a position with the Associated Press in Saigon, he realized that he had gotten out of Laos just in the nick of time, while he still had some shreds of journalistic integrity left.

Besides Arnett, the Western media in Laos in the early years was represented by other young, non-American stringers who held other jobs in order to make ends meet. For example, the Australian Martin Stuart-Fox and the Briton Tim Page filed stories for UPI while simultaneously holding down full-time jobs with the U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in Vientiane. Stuart-Fox, who had a science degree, was working on crop-substitution projects,

while Page, then only 19 years old, was a lowly gardener, "tending flowers at the U. S. compound." Page remembered being paid very poorly by the wire service -- only 10 cents per word, or 10 dollars per photograph -- and being severely limited in the number of column inches he was allowed to submit for publication (Page, interview with author, February 2001). Estelle Holt, a British freelancer who wrote for various London-based dailies, the AP, and Reuters, was said to have been so down in the mouth that she couldn't afford a proper rental, and took turns sleeping over at friends' houses.[3]

Romance, Derision, Secrecy

Few journalists saw Laos as intrinsically important in itself. Indeed, most who covered Laos considered it mainly a nuisance, a way station, and a stepping stone to bigger things and a byline out of Vietnam. In most journalistic accounts written after the Indochina wars, Laos merits only a brief mention, if that. Of the few memoirs that go into any detail, most openly admit the disdain in which the reporters held Laos. The recollections of Malcolm Browne, who covered Vietnam and Laos for the Associated Press and later on, the *New York Times,* are typical:

> No American correspondents ever visited the Ho Chi Minh Trail or other Laotian territory that mattered to the real war, so they covered the shenanigans of the Laotian princes, politicians, and generals. By hawking inflated stories about endless Laotian crises, the Western press created a Laos that never was. The newsmen had fun, but it was not journalism's finest hour (Browne, *Muddy Boots and Red Socks,* 149).

William Prochnau's *Once Upon a Distant War* also conveys an authentic flavor of the fly-by-night journalistic environment in Laos, but his work is more concerned with the lives of the reporters in Saigon; Laos is covered in a handful of pages. What is clear from the extant literature, as well as from several interviews conducted by this author with journalists who reported from Laos, is that no one cared very much about what was happening there -- at least not until the late 1960s, when the domestic consensus in the United States had turned against the war.

Even at that late date, there appears to have been a palpable "romanticization" of the conflict. H. D. S. "David" Greenway, now of the *Boston Globe,* was one of many reporters who fell under the spell of Laos. Remembering his first visit to Vientiane in 1967, the then-correspondent for *Time/Life* recalls having been "absolutely enchanted." It was December, and "all of Vientiane was wrapped in smoke," he said, this being the cold season when the Laotians build outdoor fires with abandon to keep warm. Greenway's own father had been a naturalist and something of a celebrity in Laos, and to this day, the son says, he keeps the father's "Order of the Elephant" medal, awarded by the last king of Laos, in his office at the *Globe.*

When Greenway speaks of the secrecy in which the war was shrouded, he reveals an almost nostalgic feeling for those times, and a fairly protective attitude toward the most famous "proconsul" of the war, Ambassador William Sullivan.

"I had a good relationship with Sullivan," Greenway remembers of the man who personally directed the air campaign from the comfort of his own office during the period 1964-1969. "I thought he was as frank as he could be. You never knew the truth in Laos anyway."

The embassy "didn't try to prevent me from reporting," Greenway remembered. But it did in effect hinder the reporting, he acknowledged, by "preventing access to up-country." The CIA-run war was taking place on the Plain of Jars in northeastern Laos, not in downtown Vientiane. In southeastern Laos, the Ho Chi Minh Trail was strictly off-limits. Getting to either battle zone would have required transportation, something singularly unavailable to the reporters.

As Jerome Doolittle, press attaché at the U. S. Embassy in Vientiane from 1968 to 1970, recalled to this researcher:

> We controlled most means of communication, and we limited access except for dog-and-pony shows, usually to Sam Thong [a USAID rice-distribution center for refugees]. What ground combat there was (and the actual level, by Vietnam standards anyway) occurred out of sight. So did the entire air war. You were not even aware of it overhead, the missions were directed around Laos (Doolittle, letter to author, 29 November 2000).

Given the embassy's penchant for "no comment," the reporters had to scrape up other sources: loose-lipped pilots for Air America, the clandestine airline of the CIA; the Deuxième Bureau (intelligence) folks in the French Embassy; and Soviet or Polish diplomats. Tim Page recalls weekly all-night chess-and-drinking games in which some or all of the above regularly

participated, along with whatever reporters were on hand. Another place to find sources was at the Constellation Hotel on Samsenthai Street, just around the corner from the American Embassy.

Reporters, diplomats, and other foreign visitors to Laos during the 1960s congregated and swapped stories at the Constellation, which was run by an ebullient half-French, half-Chinese named Auguste "Maurice" Cavalerie. One of the reporters, Martin Stuart-Fox, even wound up marrying Maurice's daughter. It was at the run-down Constellation that one November night in 1963, UPI's Ray Herndon gave Stuart-Fox a quickie journalism lesson. That was the night before Herndon took off to cover the assassination of President Ngo Diem in Saigon. Herndon thought he would be back in a week or two, but UPI assigned him full-time to Vietnam, and left Stuart-Fox, who had never worked as a reporter in his life, to be the resident "unipresser" in Vientiane (recollections of Herndon, Stuart-Fox, and Tim Page to author, February 2001).

Living It Up in Vientiane

The Constellation was to Vientiane as the Hotel Caravelle was to Saigon; for decades after the war its name would be wrapped up in the mythology of the correspondents. Malcolm Browne remembered the hotel bar thus:

> . . . during the rainy season, [it was] filled with stray dogs and mud tracked in from the unpaved street. Cables to correspondents from their home offices were placed in the slots of a rack the . . . hotel owner hung up in

> the bar, and ever eager to steal a march on competitors, correspondents constantly opened and read each other's messages (Browne, 150).

Indeed, the numerous *farangs* (the Lao word for the French, or later, any foreigner) hanging about the Constellation revealed a central fact: most of the reporters, the Americans anyway, did not speak Lao. In fact, few spoke French, either. This liability led to a situation in which the reporters avoided almost entirely the views of the persons most affected by the war, the Lao themselves. Compounding the cultural gap was the lack of infrastructure, especially reliable methods for communicating with the outside world. As one reporter put it, "the phones were beyond primitive -- you could use the PTT [Poste, Transport, and Telécommunications] office and that was about it."[4]

Transportation was -- and still is -- notoriously difficult in Laos. The French-built "highway" system by then already was falling into disrepair. It consisted of only a few paved roads: Route 13 from Vientiane north to the royal capital of Luang Prabang; Route 9 from Savannakhet east to Vinh in central Vietnam; and Routes 6 and 7 from the Plain of Jars north and east into northern Vietnam. The Americans later built a road from Kasi on Route 13 east to the secret CIA base at Long Tieng, but no outsiders were allowed on it.

Moreover, it was dangerous out there. With no press guidance to issue, the U. S. Embassy also had no reason to facilitate the work of reporters. Unlike in Vietnam, there was no centralized accreditation system for journalists and no systematic means of transport.[5] A reporter striking out on his own upcountry

would likely lose his way, run into combatants on either side, or otherwise get into trouble.

With nowhere to go and no way to get there, all but the most enterprising reporters were confined to downtown Vientiane with its gold shops, whorehouses, and opium dens. At the same time, remembers Richard Pyle of the Associated Press, Laos was "a reporter's dream, with its beguiling aura of mystery and danger, sensuous charm, exotic characters and colorful oddities. . . . It was a 'Casablanca' movie set come to life" (Pyle letter to author, 2 February 2001).

Some journalists reportedly carried Lao government-issued "opium addict" identification cards, which provided easy access to the dens and guaranteed no trouble from the authorities. Several sources interviewed for this research indicated that various reporters were more interested in personally experiencing the local color, in the way of frequenting prostitutes and smoking opium, than in getting at the story of what the U. S. Government was up to in Laos.

Fred Branfman, an antiwar activist who reported for Dispatch News Service from Laos in the late 1960s, said that the mainstream American reporters who came through Vientiane "didn't care about what was happening in Laos, and were just serving their time hanging out at the local bars," such as the White Rose and Madame Lulu's. And they weren't just buying beer there, either (Branfman interview with author, 11 March 2001). Indeed, former journalist Zalin Grant

recalls cynically: "I think most reporters looked on their time in Laos almost as R & R [rest and relaxation]." Grant went on to say that the main "legacy" of the American reporters lay not in their coverage of Laos, but in their bringing back to the United States the phenomenon of Lao "lap dancing" (Grant, letters to author, 2 April and 7 April 2001).

Taking the Government's Side

Indeed, it appears that hearing the full story of American engagement was not something to be pursued too assiduously, at least not in the early years. "We were officially supporting neutrality," *Boston Globe* editor David Greenway says, appearing to acknowledge a link between U. S. Government policy and the stance of the press. "I can see some sense to the idea of not admitting" the extent of the U. S. role in the war "and not talking about it. . . . Neither side [the U. S. on the one hand or the Soviets/Chinese on the other] wanted Laos to become another Vietnam" (Greenway interview with author, May 2000).

One former reporter who boldly defends the position of the U. S. Government vis-a-vis the "secrecy" question is Arthur Dommen, who covered Vietnam and Laos for both UPI and the *Los Angeles Times*. UPI posted Dommen to Saigon in 1959; his first visit to Laos was in connection with the Kong Le coup, in August 1960. He returned many times thereafter and later wrote an important book about the Laos theater. "We [the press corps] had good friends in the

embassy," Dommen recalled. "We understood the reason for the secrecy. The embassy was trying to preserve the fiction that they weren't there."

From Dommen's point of view, "The North Vietnamese were determined to control eastern Laos, and the Lao were trying to defend their country from communism." Dommen asserts that the Royal Lao Government had a right to ask for U. S. assistance, and the U. S. not only responded correctly but was "fully justified" in defending Souvanna Phouma's regime. Moreover, he said, Ambassador Sullivan was correct in his "determination to keep the secrecy."

Dommen described Fred Branfman, the former volunteer humanitarian worker who in late 1969 was instrumental in helping "break" the story of U. S. covert involvement, as a "propagandist trying to make out that the U. S. was responsible." Dommen makes a clear distinction between the early reporters in Laos like himself, and the more critical ones like Branfman who arrived later on, whom he is convinced "were looking for a story to implicate the Americans" (author interview with Dommen, July 2000).

Attitudes of the U. S. Mission

Just how far Ambassador Sullivan was willing to go in keeping the secret became clear to Dommen and the others only later. If the attitudes of some reporters reveal a passive acceptance of the U. S. Government "line," the recollections of American personnel associated with the war effort in Laos

demonstrate that the U. S. mission in general and its ambassadors in particular regarded the reporters as naive nuisances and as forces to be neutralized.

George Dalley, a USAID contractor who worked in Borakon village in southeastern Laos from 1963 through 1965, recalls Ambassador Sullivan's having specifically told him not to talk to the press. Dalley said that Sullivan made a trip to see him at his post near Paxane, in late 1964 or early 1965, and "advised me against talking to the media." Dalley also alleged that self-deception was a regular practice at the embassy. During Dalley's exit interview in 1967 with the then-AID director, Charles Mann, Dalley says he was told disingenuously, "You can rest assured that Air America is not a CIA airline," as though the fact of the CIA link was not already common knowledge to all but the most ignorant observer[6] (Dalley interview with author, July 2000).

Bill Sage, who spent a collective seven years in Laos working for International Voluntary Services (IVS) and USAID, likewise recalled to this writer "the pervasiveness of the American effort" to keep secret the details of U. S. involvement. He acknowledged "official restrictions" regarding talking to the press, although there was "nothing in writing." In the main, he said, journalists were to be "handled by USIS" (United States Information Service, the public affairs arm of the embassy; Sage interview with author, November 2000).

Vint Lawrence, a CIA adviser to the Hmong army in the early 1960s, had no run-ins with the press because he was based up-country and was forbidden to

come into Vientiane lest he blow his cover. But he recalled that in the view of the U. S. mission, "The press was viewed as being generally just a tad above the PL [Pathet Lao]" (Lawrence letter to author, March 2001). And Win McKeithen, an AID employee who was based on the Plain of Jars, scene of much of the fighting, remembered

> the time in Sam Thong when our secretary got a call on the radio from Vientiane that a couple of reporters were flying up for a visit in the midst of a refugee crisis, and asked us what to do with them. "Fuck 'em," was our instinctive response, to which she replied, "But it's not in my job description" (McKeithen letter to author, 2 February 2001).[7]

Similarly, AID officer Ernie Kuhn reveals in an oral history conducted many years after the fact that providing any assistance to the press corps was the last thing on his mind. Following is an excerpt of his exchange with interviewer Arthur Dommen:

> Kuhn: 'I was instructed by Pop [Edgar Buell, the director of the AID refugee program] . . . and this is how relatively secret the program was supposed to be . . . that there were only four people whom I was ever to talk to about refugees or military operations.'
>
> Interviewer (Dommen): 'These did not include journalists, I presume.'
>
> Kuhn: 'These did not include journalists, no. One was Joe Mendenhall, the [AID] director; another was, of course, Ambassador Sullivan; one was Alex Mavro, who was AID executive office; and the fourth person was whoever the [CIA] station chief was in the embassy. Everything we did upcountry was to be considered classified' (Kuhn memoirs, 7).

How such dissembling might have impacted serious journalism is not difficult to imagine. Martin Stuart-Fox, the Australian aid worker-turned reporter-turned historian, recalled:

> We knew the bombing was going on. I went to interview the U. S. Ambassador [Sullivan] off the record, and asked what was going on. He said nothing, and we just looked at each other. I knew he was lying, and he knew I knew he was lying. I said: "Thank you, Mr. Ambassador." In that case there [didn't] seem to be anything else to say (Stuart-Fox letter to author, 22 December 2000).

Stuart-Fox tells another widely circulated anecdote of the period, which he acknowledges may be apocryphal, involving Sullivan's successor, U. S. Ambassador G. McMurtrie "Mac" Godley, at a diplomatic function. The story is emblematic of the surrealistic and cynical nature of the deception being practiced by the embassy in the late 1960s. When U. S. aircraft overflew the reception, Stuart-Fox writes, "the Soviet ambassador asked genially if those were American planes. The U. S. Ambassador looked up, shaded his eyes, and said: 'Planes, Boris? I don't see any planes'" (Stuart- Fox letter, 22 December 2000). In sum, if the recollections of these participant-observers are to be believed, the embassy and its personnel, from the ambassador on down, were not above denying the truth to themselves, their diplomatic counterparts, their own staffs, or the journalists.

Getting at the Impenetrable "Secret"

It appears nevertheless that Ambassador Godley's well-known penchant for bluster sometimes overcame his ability to keep silent about his own role in the air war. Joe Galloway, a former UPI reporter in Saigon, recalls Godley as "a hell of a hard-liner who boasted to us [a group of reporters whom the ambassador had invited to dinner] that he personally approved all the airstrikes inside the Lao

borders" (Galloway letter to author, 2 February 2001). And Leon Daniel, a UPI reporter who covered Vietnam and Laos for about six years out of Saigon, Tokyo, and Bangkok, said that "all the correspondents knew Ambassador Godley was running the war" (Godley having replaced Sullivan in the summer of 1969). Daniel described a map of Laos showing possible bombing targets that hung on Godley's office wall in the U. S. Embassy. "A Lao colonel would call in a B-52 strike," Daniel said. "Godley would OK the [bombing] target or turn it down" (Daniel interview with author, May 2000). Despite the blatant truth before them, Daniel said, the reporters could unearth few details.

"The secret war was no secret" to the U. S. press corps, he told this author. "We wanted to know more and we wanted to write about it. But we couldn't get enough info [sic] to write about it." Daniel said that a few junior Foreign Service Officers in the embassy "would talk some"; otherwise, an enterprising journalist had to "eyeball things for himself."

Jerome Doolittle, Godley's press attaché from 1968-1970, is even more categorical about the extent of the deception:

> When I first arrived in Laos, I was instructed to answer all press questions about our massive and merciless bombing campaign in that tiny country with: "At the request of the Royal Laotian Government, the United States is conducting unarmed reconnaissance flights accompanied by armed escorts who have the right to return fire if fired upon". . . . This was a lie. Every reporter to whom I told it knew it was a lie. The Communist Pathet Lao knew it was a lie. Hanoi knew it was a lie. The International Control Commission knew it was a lie. Every interested Congressman and newspaper reader knew it was a lie. . . . All the lie did was make us look just as cheap and dishonest as the North Vietnamese, who were also lying

> about the presence of their troops in Laos and South Vietnam (Doolittle op-ed piece, *The New York Times*, 20 September 1973).

So disgusted did Doolittle become with the policy in Laos that he resigned from government and went on to write a scathing commentary about the conduct of the war, in the form of a novel called *The Bombing Officer.* Even Arthur Dommen, the former reporter who went on to become one of the foremost experts on Laos, admitted with a sigh, "how little we [the reporters] knew of what was going on."[8]

Preferential Access

Notwithstanding the arguments outlined above, it also ironically appears that some journalists were given preferential access to sensitive military and intelligence sites and secrets. In his memoirs, AID employee Ernie Kuhn mentions the popular magazine *National Geographic* and one of its regular photojournalists, William Garrett, as being exempt from the usual "treatment":

> We had very specific orders [from the U. S. Embassy] that *National Geographic* is very sympathetic to us, they are not going to write anything that is going to be harmful to the program, take them around and give them what they want to see (Kuhn, 75).

As for Bill Garrett, Kuhn recalls, he "had free rein to go any place he wanted to" (Kuhn, 73). That Garrett and *National Geographic* received such a friendly reception from the AID workers did not mean that anything remotely controversial got into print.

A review of the relevant *National Geographic* articles from the mid-1950s right up through 1974 reveals an almost reverential tone toward American involvement, as the venerable magazine's writers praised AID's fight against communism and rarely mentioned the more controversial aspects of the U. S. program, including covert guerrilla activity and bombings. One article for which Garrett took the photographs, but which was written by Peter White, described Lao ethnic minority refugees fleeing "from Pathet Lao, from North Vietnamese, from bombings by Royal Lao planes." (This article appeared in December 1968, after French newspapers already had begun to report the saturation bombing of northern Laos by U. S. B-52 bombers.)

A piece written six years later, for which Garrett wrote the text and took the pictures, refers to AID refugee relief director Pop Buell as "my old friend." While applauding AID's role in providing food, medical care and shelter to Hmong refugees over more than a decade, the magazine still avoids acknowledging the U. S. bombing campaign that was at least partly responsible for the refugee flows.

Other reporters are not so charitable regarding the U. S. Embassy's stonewalling of the press in Laos, or with the reporters' passivity thereto. Arnold "Skip" Isaacs, a former *Baltimore Sun* correspondent in Hong Kong, is one of them. Isaacs' assessment is that the U. S. Government made fools of the American reporters, and the reporters acquiesced. Isaacs recalls almost bitterly

that "it was very difficult to get any detail" about American involvement. Perversely, he said, the situation was compounded by the clouded judgment of some newspeople who were too close to U. S. Government sources. This was particularly true with respect to the intelligence services. "There was no relationship between the [Central Intelligence] Agency and the press like there was in Indochina," Isaacs told this author in a January 2000 interview. The internecine rivalry between the intelligence operatives and the military brass created a situation in which the former sometimes wooed the press to the disadvantage of the latter. "The CIA out in the field were the most transparent spooks in the history of spookdom," Isaacs said. He recalled some reporters relishing having an "inside track" with the CIA, and he alleged that some of them were "so very cozy" with intelligence operatives that their behavior raised a question of "ethical malfeasance."

Fred Branfman, the volunteer-turned journalist-activist, alleged that some reporters were so close to their government sources that they might as well have been "spies" for the U. S. Embassy. This was particularly true of reporters who did not live in Vientiane but only parachuted in on an irregular basis, he said. He described the coverage by stateside-based reporters as almost uniformly "compliant" with the Washington line (Branfman interview with author, March 2001). However, Tim Page, the UPI stringer who played poker with the intelligence agents in the early 1960s, puts a different spin on it: "Who was using

whom? The CIA war wasn't fully revealed, but we [the reporters] knew who the spooks were. It was that obvious, that silly. It was the stuff of *The Honorable Schoolboy* [the John leCarré espionage novel]" (Page interview with author, February 2001).

One reporter who seemed to have unusual access to what was going on in Laos was the late Robert Shaplen of *The New Yorker*. During his two decades as a Southeast Asia correspondent for that magazine, Shaplen filed more than 50 pieces, including several from Laos. Roger Warner has written that Shaplen was given "unusual access to the Laos war theater, on the understanding that he would not directly write about his sources in the CIA" (*Shooting at the Moon,* 244). Shaplen's sources apparently included not only the Vientiane CIA station but also Edward Lansdale, the CIA operative who masterminded the early American "civil action" operations in Vietnam. According to author Zalin Grant, Lansdale and Shaplen were great buddies, dating from their acquaintance in the Philippines in the 1950s (Grant, *Facing the Phoenix: The CIA and the Political Defeat of the United States in Vietnam*, 1991). Other sources interviewed in the course of this research, including Jerome Doolittle, the former press attaché at the American Embassy, alleged that Shaplen knew a lot more about CIA activity in Laos than his erudite reports of the time revealed.[9]

Ideology and News Management

As indicated with respect to *National Geographic*, any study of journalistic coverage of the war in Indochina must take into account the conservative culture prevailing at the stateside headquarters of the main media of the era. In the 1960s, a time before CNN's round-the-clock news service and the Internet, popular lowbrow press such as *Life, Time, Look, Newsweek, Reader's Digest,* and the *Saturday Evening Post* were as influential as any other medium in bringing Vietnam--and Laos, what little coverage there was -- to the American public. And most of these influences were decidedly conservative ones. For example, the very right-wing publisher of *Time* and *Life,* Henry Luce, regularly attempted to reign in and censor his reporters. Most famously, in the 20 September 1963 issue of *Time,* Luce ran an editorial questioning the loyalty, judgment, and reliability of his Saigon press corps -- an incident over which Charles Mohr, one of *Time's* best reporters, resigned. Similarly, *Newsweek* failed to protect its best-known correspondent in Saigon, the Frenchman Francois Sully. When the intrepid reporter ran afoul of the ruling Diem family; he was expelled.[10]

Even at the esteemed "Gray Lady," the *New York Times,* the ideology of the news "gatekeepers" was solidly pro-establishment, particularly during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. The long-time managing editor was Clifton Daniel, son-in-law of former President Harry S. Truman. Foreign editor James Greenfield had been an assistant secretary of state for public affairs.

Presumably, these key personalities may account in part for the predisposition of the *Times* to accept at face value the official "facts" handed to them by Washington élites over the judgment of their own reporters, including the brilliant but difficult David Halberstam.

Paradoxically, although the news managers and the U. S. Government theoretically had different agendas vis-a-vis American involvement in Indochina, in reality their views of the global nature of communism were quite similar. It is possible to identify in the written record a mainstream ideology shared by journalists and bureaucrats alike. Thus, mid-1960s accounts from *Time, National Geographic,* or the columns of Joe Alsop in the *Washington Post* are remarkably similar to recollections of some of the participant observers. An example by Charles Weldon, a physician and the director of public health for USAID-Laos for nearly a decade, will serve to illustrate:

> Laos was a lovely, innocent country of delightful people invaded by a vicious, powerful, cruel Communist enemy. There was no doubt in our minds [the U. S. Government personnel] that Communism was a deadly threat to the free world and that our mission was good and righteous. We were the same guys who hit the beach at Omaha, Anzio, and Iwo Jima in WW [World War] II. The good guys. (Weldon letter to author, 23 January 2001).

Or consider the famous *Saturday Evening Post* story on Edgar "Pop" Buell, Weldon's colleague in USAID, which was later turned into a popular, albeit misleading, book. The headline of that article makes clear that the story will be told from a particular point of view: "An American Hero: The exclusive story of

how an American farmer has devoted his life to a one-man crusade for freedom and democracy in war-torn, Communist-infiltrated Laos" (Don Schanche, *Saturday Evening Post,* 2 June 1962). Following the publication of this article and the companion book, *Mr. Pop,* Buell became one of the few American personages in Laos with whom the U. S. public was familiar. But these publications offered no clue about expanding covert American paramilitary activity in Laos.

The hagiography of Buell in the American popular press in the 1960s was comparable to the personality cult manufactured in the 1950s by *Life, Look,* and the *Reader's Digest* surrounding another charismatic figure, the dashing physician Tom Dooley. Dooley, a staunch anti-Communist, had come to public attention during 1954, when he was involved in ministering to Catholic refugees fleeing North Vietnam following the Geneva agreements. For the rest of the decade, the popular press often featured stories about Tom Dooley and his medical clinics in remote areas of Laos. What they did not feature was in-depth analysis of the various sociopolitical difficulties besetting the tiny Asian nation or the role of the American government therein. Nor did they offer any perspective on how "the Reds," "the enemy," or anyone other than the Americans may have felt about what was happening in Laos.

Even *New York Times* (*NYT*) articles from the 1950s and early 1960s essentially repeated the standard U. S. Government line regarding the need to fight

communism. The articles also took at face value U. S. denials of covert or other involvement in Lao internal politics. Thus a *NYT* article of 12 May 1957 was entitled "Success of U. S. Aid Projects in Laos," at the very time that this aid was being used to fuel élite corruption in Vientiane. A year later, in a 14 May 1958 story, the *NYT* began to report on waste and malpractice in the U. S. aid program because, by then, the U. S. General Accounting Office (GAO) had begun to investigate the corruption.

In 1960, we find the *NYT* reporting in an August 10 story that Americans plan to train Lao troops, but that the U. S. role is "limited to nontactical activities." Ironically, this was the moment when the CIA was considering plans to recruit Hmong mercenaries for its proxy war. In another story the same month, the *NYT* does not question the U. S. Government denial that it is "setting up bases or sending troops" to Laos. Again, even as this report was going to press, the CIA was launching the chain of events leading to the setting up of the secret base at Long Tieng, from which the Hmong army would operate for the next 15 years.

With respect to the other side of the war--the view from the Pathet Lao or North Vietnamese vantage points--journalistic coverage in the American press was negligible. (Harrison Salisbury of the *New York Times* was the first American journalist to visit Hanoi, and that was at the very late date of 1966.) Some journalists told this author that they tried to report alternative views but were unsuccessful, and now suspect their stories may have been spiked by their

stateside editors. For example, Martin Stuart-Fox, who covered Laos for UPI, remembered that "when regular bombing of Laos began in 1965, the Pathet Lao radio reported each attack, the number of planes, direction, altitude, bombs dropped, etc. We [the reporters]) knew what was going on." And for his part, Stuart-Fox said, he tried his best to report it. He said that in his drafts he quoted Pathet Lao radio reporting the American bombing, but that "nothing would appear" about it in his published stories in the United States. "I suspect that stories were checked, denied by U. S. authorities, and spiked as communist propaganda, but I have no proof!" (Stuart-Fox letters to author, 23 January 2001 and 22 February 2001).

Similarly, Tim Page said that in the summer of 1964, sources in the Pathet Lao mission in Vientiane told him they were shooting down U. S. planes; when he went to the U. S. Embassy to check out the story, he said, "The Americans denied the whole bloody thing." Indeed, from that point on, a "disinformation campaign" from Washington to Vientiane was firmly in place, he said (Page, interview with author, March 2001).

Or, to put it quite another way:

> The American news media were . . . always ready to depict the Laotian troubles in terms of the global struggle with communism. . . . The first headlines attracted journalists to the scene of the purported action. Once there, they needed something to report. This the Laotians provided by relaying sketchy radio messages from remote areas and by stating rumors as irrefutable facts. Any hint of North Vietnamese participation was particularly welcomed since it fit the popular conception of 'aggression,' which is always a bigger story than a mere civil war (Stevenson, 76).

The Story Comes Out

As we have seen, during the tenure of Ambassador William Sullivan (1964-1969) there was no question that the press would not cover the operational details of American involvement in Laos. In an interview with Christopher Robbins, author of *The Ravens*, Sullivan recalled:

> I did not consider the press to be a problem. They were always pleading to be allowed to go up to Long Tieng [the CIA base on the Plain of Jars] and all these exotic places where they knew things to be going on, but of course we would jolly them along and not let them go (Robbins, 237).

But by the late 1960s it was no longer feasible for the American war-managers, including the new ambassador, Mac Godley, to count on cooperation from the journalists. Something had happened in Vietnam that would henceforth ensure bad press for the American war in Laos: the Tet Offensive of early 1968. Now, in parallel with the American public, journalists were turning against the Indochina war. It was clear the American side was not winning, and could not win. Already, American casualties had reached several tens of thousands in Vietnam alone. Anti-war feeling in the United States was at a fever pitch.

Then, in March 1970, President Nixon made the fateful decision to invade Cambodia, a move which according to one analyst

> seemed to galvanize at one sudden and certainly unexpected moment. . . all the opposition to the war which had been crystallizing among the nation's youth and even among their elders, most of whom had now ceased to believe either in our capacity or in our real need to win in Vietnam (Paul Kattenburg, *The American Trauma in American Foreign Policy, 1945-1975,* 1982: 145).

Simultaneously, with respect to Laos, President Nixon committed an equally major gaffe. On March 6 the president released a statement acknowledging that, while the U.S. Government had been involved in Laos for years, there had been "no American combat deaths" there. Struck with this assertion, the American press went for the story.

Meanwhile, a 25-year-old former Peace Corps Volunteer named T. D. Allman had moved to Laos and was stringing for the *Bangkok Post,* which was publishing articles that had not yet appeared in any American paper. His housemate was Fred Branfman, a former volunteer with International Voluntary Services (IVS). Following his stint with IVS, Branfman hooked up with Dispatch News Service, the alternative press that had broken, among other important stories, the My Lai massacre incident. Having lived in Laos and learned to speak Lao, Branfman made up his mind to get out the story of the secret war, particularly the bombing campaign's effect on civilians. Allman would be his key ally in this crusade.

As explained in the previous chapter, by the summer of 1969, fighting and bombing on the Plain of Jars had reached frightful intensity. The CIA airlifted 25,000 refugees from the Plain of Jars to remove them from the scene of the bombing. These refugees were resettled just north of Vientiane, on the road to the royal capital of Luang Prabang. There, for the first time since the bombing had begun, its victims were within reach of the journalists. Branfman interviewed the

refugees, then introduced them to Allman and other American reporters who were now congregating, belatedly, in Laos. "From their perspective I was giving them story ideas," Branfman remembered. "From my perspective, I was getting out the story of the bombings." Similarly, Branfman provided Lao sources for Henry Kamm, the first full-time *New York Times* reporter assigned to Laos--at the late date of September 1969. Branfman then assisted Ted Koppel, Sidney Schanberg, and Bernard Kalb in their endeavors to investigate the extent of U. S. bombing in Cambodia. Likewise, he also began to supply information to key contacts in the U. S. Congress (Branfman interview with author, March 2001).[11]

Thus by early 1970, the U. S. bombing of northern Laos was on the front pages of American newspapers. That February the U. S. Embassy laid on a special flight to take reporters up to Sam Thong, the USAID distribution center for refugees. Branfman and Allman were on board. When the airplane was about to leave Sam Thong, it was discovered that Allman, along with *Life's* Saigon-based bureau chief John Saar and AFP's Max Coffait, had escaped from their USAID handlers and walked over the mountain to the CIA secret base at Long Tieng. Afterwards, Allman and the others filed stories containing the first eyewitness details of activities at the base, which had been operating at full throttle for nearly a decade.

Meanwhile, due in part to efforts by Branfman, U. S. Senator Stuart Symington had conducted hearings on Laos on Capitol Hill in October 1969. Had

any representatives from the press been allowed to attend, they would have heard some eye-opening testimony, particularly from former ambassador William Sullivan (by then having taken up a new position as U. S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs). Indeed, Senator William Fulbright inflicted a merciless inquisition on Sullivan regarding the extent of U. S. involvement in Laos. However, the hearings were classified, and a heavily redacted version of the minutes were released to the public only after another year had elapsed.[12]

Indeed, according to Jerry Doolittle, official denial of the bombings of Cambodia and Laos continued well past their exposure in the press. "Insofar as the executive branch could possibly manage it, the air war in Indochina was kept a secret till August 15 [1973], the day Congress ended it (Doolittle, "The Search for Peace of Mind, Through Lies," *New York Times,* 1973).

The air campaign also is curiously absent, or near-absent, from various accounts of the war written years later. Perry Stieglitz, an American cultural affairs officer posted to the embassy for many years and the husband of the daughter of Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, never mentions it in his *In a Little Kingdom* (1990). Nor does Ambassador Sullivan, in his curiously detached memoir, *Obligatto* (1984). Charles Weldon, USAID's long-time medical director in Laos, does capture vividly the atmosphere of war, and tells us that " . . . from 1963 to 1973, the Vietnamese and Pathet Lao displaced approximately one million people from their homes at least once" (*Tragedy in Paradise*, 51).

However, nowhere does Weldon acknowledge that the internally displaced Lao may have been fleeing American bombs as much as they were fleeing Communist invasion.

In retrospect

To sum up: From the summer of 1962, when the series of fluff pieces about Pop Buell appeared and the second Geneva Conference supposedly returned "neutrality" to Laos, to approximately mid-1969, Laos appears simply to have disappeared off the U. S. press radar screen. As *Stars and Stripes* reporter Steve Stibbens recalled, "After 1963 we seldom heard the word 'Laos.'" (Stibbens' letter to author, February 2001). Journalistic inattention to Laos was particularly marked after August 7, 1964, the date the U. S. Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, clearing the way for President Lyndon Johnson to turn the Vietnam conflict into one involving American combat troops. Thereafter, the U. S. press corps just couldn't be bothered with what was happening in Laos. American boys were fighting and dying in Vietnam, and this was the story about which the American public and American editors were demanding the details. No wonder, then, as the latter-day journalist Roger Warner has written, "The kingdom [of Laos] was allowed to slip again into its customary obscurity, a place where the few men on the scene were allowed to call the shots more or less as they saw fit" (Warner, *Shooting at the Moon,* 137).

It was therefore a French journalist, not an American, who became the first reporter to expose the extent of U. S. bombing in northern Laos. This was Jacques Decornoy of *Le Monde,* who had requested and received permission from the Pathet Lao to visit the "liberated" areas of northeastern Laos. His reports began appearing in the European press in July 1968, more than a year before the U. S. public would begin to read about the bombing. As we have seen, the first American account showing something of the extent of the bombings did not appear until late 1969, initially in the reports of freelancer T. D. Allman, whose articles mainly were appearing overseas. Allman's October 1 article in the *New York Times* was the first indication by that paper of the extent of the devastation. U. S. bombers, Allman reported, are "able to destroy, almost at will, any given town, bridge, road or concentration of enemy soldiers or civilians." This was followed by an October 11 piece by Henry Kamm based on refugee accounts, detailing the destruction of the town of Phonsevan. By this time, the bombing of the Pathet Lao stronghold Sam Neua had been going on for three years without the *New York Times*, the American newspaper of record, mentioning it.[13]

Karen Olness, an American medical doctor who worked with USAID in Laos from 1962-1964 and again from 1966-1968, believes that some U. S. journalists may have been legitimately unaware of the extent of the bombing. According to Olness, many U. S. mission personnel, including herself, were not "in the know." Only a small handful of persons inside Ambassador Sullivan's

inner circle would have had access to the operational details of the air campaign. (Olness interview with author, 19 February 2001). That the journalists could have been that naive seems rather unlikely to me, even though, as we have already seen, Sullivan was skilled at keeping the news from just about everyone:

> While occasional articles in the American press alluded to the secret war in Laos, it was relatively easy for the American Embassy to maintain an official curtain of silence over the clandestine activities. Ambassador Sullivan asked the small handful of Western correspondents in Vientiane to observe discretion in their reporting on the grounds of Soviet sensitivity to publicity given American activities (Dommen, *Conflict in Laos,* 305).

That the journalists simply acceded to Sullivan's request is the more likely explanation for the long delay in reporting the air campaign. Why they would have done so is disturbing in retrospect, but perfectly understandable given what we know about the ideological mood of the U. S. Government and public during those critical Cold War years.

The example of Laos clearly outlines a central feature of American journalism in the 1960s. It was a transition period for journalism, as older reporters who had spent their formative years covering World War II and Korea showed up in Vietnam (and occasionally, Laos) for one last adventure reporting combat. Meanwhile, a new set of younger, brasher reporters arrived on the scene. Some had journalism training; others had none. But the Vietnam War gave them the chance they needed, the chance for a byline. Some of them would turn into skeptics of the government by the late 1960s. But most, even those who are now regarded as "renegades"--the Sheehans, Halberstams, and Arnetts--began their

experiences in Vietnam prepared to see the United States win the war. Their points of reference, by their own admission, were patriotic, pro-American ones.[14]

One Reporter's Story: Henry Kamm

Arguably one of the most famous reportorial reputations to come out of the American war in Indochina was that of Henry Kamm, who won the Pulitzer Prize for his work on Asian refugees. But Kamm also was instrumental in bringing the "secret" war in Laos to the front pages of American papers. The story of how did so is instructive.

Kamm was the first reporter for the *New York Times* to be assigned to cover Laos on a "full-time" basis. In reality, his beat also included Cambodia, and technically he lived in Bangkok. He took up his position in the fall of 1969 and for the next two years spent a great deal of time in Laos before being assigned to cover Southeast Asia as a roving "correspondent." He then returned to Laos in June and July 1975 to cover the Communist takeover. (His movements correspond with what we know about the drop-off in coverage of Laos between 1973, when the American soldiers left Vietnam, and 1975, when the Communists besieged Saigon and Phnom Penh, and in a more leisurely, Lao-like fashion--Vientiane.)

Kamm recalls that he was put on to his first story in Laos by Fred Branfman, the IVS volunteer who had assisted freelancer T. D. Allman. (In fact, Kamm took over the Laos beat from Allman, who had been doing occasional

stringing for the *Times*.) Kamm said Branfman introduced him to a group of refugees who had fled the bombing in Xieng Khouang Province. The resulting story symbolizes the next major reporting coup of the war--the first acknowledgement by a full-time correspondent for a mainstream American paper that the U. S. Government was bombing an allegedly "neutral" country (Allman's initial reports had appeared in the *Bangkok Post*).

When asked why the U. S. press was so late in reporting the bombing, Kamm attributed it to the fact that previous American reporters had few sources in Lao circles, because they could not speak the Lao language. Kamm, on the other hand, previously a Jewish refugee from Europe during World War II, spoke fluent French, which until the Communist takeover was the official language of government in Laos. His language skills allowed him access to personalities and officials with whom other reporters had simply never had contact. "Laos was covered by people who didn't speak French, so I was like a white elephant," he said. "Speaking French helped me create a very different intimacy, and develop a certain circle of friends among the Lao."

Kamm also sees himself as being of a different mindset from other American reporters. He refused to accept the "line" coming out of the American Embassy, he said. But at the same side, he says, he was not a "Pathet Lao sympathizer." Instead, he claims, he didn't believe the "bullshit from either side," whether Communist or anti-Communist. He decided to report the war from an

entirely different point of view, that of the Lao themselves (Kamm, interview with author, February 2001). It is important to note, however, that Kamm's extremely important work out of Laos was dependent on the groundwork laid by the renegade freelancers Branfman and Allman.

By then, it was almost too late. U. S. reporters in Laos had missed most of the story as it was happening, right under their noses. Of course, that they missed the story was not all their fault. As we saw in the previous chapter, both the U. S. Government and the U. S. media considered the Laos theater always as an adjunct to, a sideshow of, and a distraction from, Vietnam. Once Washington refused to acknowledge the full extent of its involvement, it followed that the mainstream media likewise never painted the full picture.

But Laos *was* an integral part of the bigger picture. Unfortunately, Washington did not admit as much to the public, and the press did not portray it as such. Or rather, it did not make clear what was happening in Laos, at the time it was happening, at the time it was *news*.

Notes to Chapter 3

[1] The U. S. Army Center of Military History has a large collection of the accreditation files for Saigon correspondents for 1965 to 1973. Initially these files were amassed by the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). William Hammond, senior historian for the Center, has performed extensive data analysis of the files. The data show that over the span of the war, there were 3811 reporters accredited in Saigon, of whom 1742 were American citizens. At this writing it is impossible to pinpoint with certainty which of the Saigon correspondents ever visited or reported out of Laos, because there was no systematic accreditation of journalists by either the Royal Lao Government or the U. S. Embassy. My initial unsophisticated attempts to construct a list of journalists who worked in Laos are based on word-of-mouth referrals and matching datelines with names. My database, which is still in an embryonic state, is Appendix D.

[2] In fact, the *Bangkok World* was founded just after World War II by former agents of the American OSS (Office of Strategic Services), the forerunner to today's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Geoffrey Gunn's *Political Struggles in Laos: 1930-1954* provides a fascinating look into the operations of the OSS in Laos and Thailand during this period.

[3] A former member of the U. S. Embassy staff who reported having often put up Holt for the night in the early 1960s recounted this to me. Holt is ill in London and could not be interviewed.

[4] Interview with Tim Page, February 2001.

[5] William Hammond of the U. S. Army Center for Military History has done much analysis of the accreditation system in Saigon and its effect on U. S. reporting. See, in addition to his *Reporting Vietnam,* the working paper "Who Were the Saigon Correspondents and Does it Matter?," 2000.

[6] George Dalley told this author that he resigned from USAID because he believed that the Embassy was at least indirectly responsible for the assassination of a Lao friend of his, a colonel in the Royal Lao Army. I have not been able to independently confirm this. However, the assassination itself is described in Warner's *Shooting at the Moon.*

[7] In a subsequent interview (March 2001) McKeithen also said that most of the reporters "were a joke" and "not very good." This gave the USAID workers even less an incentive to be helpful to them.

[8] Dommen interview, July 2000.

[9] Ben Bagdikian asserts in *The Media Monopoly* (2000 edition) that *The New Yorker* was solidly mainstream (i.e. in favor of the U. S. Government position) in its approach to the Indochina conflict until July 1967, when it published a story by Jonathan Schell based on his visit to a Vietnamese village. Not incoincidentally, Bagdikian reports, *The New Yorker's* upscale advertisers began to back away from the magazine following publication of the story. In the future, I plan to do a more systematic analysis of Shaplen's role in covering Laos and in contributing to the editorial tone of the magazine prior to the coming to prominence of Jonathan Schell.

[10] For these and other examples of censorship by Washington and New York media headquarters, see Prochnau's *Once Upon a Distant War* and Philip Knightley's *The First Casualty.*

[11] Branfman's key role was confirmed by many of the people I interviewed. His role is also described in Christopher Hitchens' "The Case Against Henry Kissinger: The Making of a War Criminal," *Harper's Magazine,* February 2001.

[12] Several persons interviewed for this research, including Arthur Dommen and Jerome Doolittle (who disagree on nearly every other point associated with the war) correctly assert that the Senate committees responsible for Laos had received briefings from the administration throughout the years of American involvement. Those Senators therefore could not legitimately claim ignorance of the "secret war." For example, Senator Symington visited Laos on several occasions prior to the hearings of 1969, and received on-the-ground briefings. However, it must also be pointed out that the administration did not explain the full details to more than a handful of legislators until the late 1960s.

[13] It is possible today to visit the caves at Vieng Xai, a few kilometers from Sam Neua, where the leadership of the Pathet Lao set up shop to avoid the bombs. Each of the principal Pathet Lao leaders had a private cave, containing bedrooms, offices, and a kitchen. Today the cave complexes are a popular destination for tourists who can manage to get to remote Vieng Xai near the Vietnamese border.

[14] Both Prochnau and Knightley describe many examples of this phenomenon. They quote the so-called "renegade" reporters of the era as admitting that they had gone to Vietnam in support of the U. S. Government position, and changed their minds only later on, after the numbers of U. S. casualties began to balloon.

Conclusions

The air war in Laos was not officially revealed to the American people or Congress for the best part of five years, despite being meticulously reported by both Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese radio. The full extent of American bombing became public knowledge only after the findings of secret 1969 Congressional hearings by the U. S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee were made public. By the time the air war finally came to an end with the conclusion of a cease-fire agreement early in 1973, Laos had been subjected to some of the heaviest aerial bombardment in the history of warfare.

-- Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*

This paper revolves around one central question: How can it be that a war of the magnitude prosecuted by the United States in Laos went largely unreported in the American press for so many years? We have seen that the reasons are multilayered and complex. The Cold War consensus that developed in the United States after World War II enabled a succession of presidents to do what they wished in Laos with only limited interest or intervention by the Congress or the mainstream American media. From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, policy discussions among the Washington élites -- including not only the decision makers in the executive and legislative branches but also the "Fourth Estate"-- focused not on the ideology of American involvement in Indochina but on the strategy of prosecuting that involvement. The American press tended to represent the U. S. -centered, normative view of the conflict (i.e., through an anti-Communist prism, rather than as the civil and nationalist conflict that it was).

Until the late 1960s, the "framing" of the story with respect to Indochina in general and to Laos in particular was nearly identical with the official U. S. Government line. As with Vietnam, journalistic coverage of Laos followed, not led, public opinion. Not until the Tet Offensive in Vietnam in January 1968 and the subsequent collapse of the domestic consensus did the press begin to question the fundamental issue of whether the United States should be involved in Indochina at all, or to examine the Laos theater in particular.

Throughout the period under study it is likewise clear that the routines of American journalism--including "professionalism," "objectivity" and the management imperatives of U. S. -based editors and production teams--meant that reporters in the field were severely constrained in what they were able to write or to get into publication. Ironically, these routines, upon whose very foundation rests the reputation of American journalism, served to cripple and tarnish the performance of its practitioners in Laos. The war was mainly covered by overworked, underpaid "stringers" or by correspondents who were based elsewhere and came to Laos only in times of crisis. Significantly, very few of the reporters spoke Lao or French or had significant on-the-ground experience in Laos. Indeed, few had any interest in reporting on Laos at all. For them, the story lay elsewhere -- in Vietnam, where the American commitment was more visible, and where the prospect of getting one's big journalistic "break" seemed more probable.

The Primacy of Government Secrecy

The inhospitable terrain of Laos and the difficulty of logistics, transport, and communications also played a role. But it was the refusal of the U. S. Government to acknowledge its role in Laos that was chiefly and directly responsible for the large gaps, inconsistencies, and errors in coverage in the U. S. media. Over a period of years, the U. S. Embassy in Vientiane systematically denied or misrepresented the true nature of American involvement. Policy makers in Washington and Vientiane, motivated by a desire to avoid being blamed for a breakdown in the Geneva "neutrality" agreements on Laos, pretended that the American role in the conflict was purely in reaction to Communist "aggression," and driven only by the loftiest ideals. It thereafter followed, from the point of view of officialdom, that the media should not be allowed access to the darker aspects of the policy that would have caused controversy in the United States.

Given the American mass media's overwhelming dependence on the U. S. Government to provide the "news," it is no wonder that much of the coverage was insubstantial, incorrect, or blatantly misleading. Yet Washington could not control the foreign press, including Pathet Lao and Vietnamese radio stations, which regularly reported on CIA-directed ground combat and the war from the air. Australian, British, and European news media also appear to have done a more comprehensive job than the American press at describing the U. S. role. That so few alternative accounts or points of view found their way into the American

press is of some concern, as it indicates at best censorship on the part of stateside-based editors, at worst direct collusion with the policy makers. An apparent close link between some journalists and their sources in American intelligence may have been responsible for the perpetuation of some misinformation in the American press, though this particular aspect of the story awaits further investigation.

The war in Laos, while inextricably linked to the one next door inVietnam, differed from it in two important respects. It was unacknowledged; and it was not subject to the usual bureaucratic checks, balances, and controls normally present during wartime. The ground portion of the conflict, the so-called "guerrilla war," was carried out in the main by Hmong mercenaries under the direction of CIA advisers, and the bombing campaign was under the direct personal supervision of a succession of U. S. ambassadors in Laos. Meanwhile, the public affairs system that the U. S. Government established in Saigon, with its interlinking gatekeepers in the Embassy and the U. S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), had no counterpart in Laos. These factors together produced a situation in which responsibility for the war could be avoided, and journalists could be stonewalled until they simply gave up trying to get to the bottom of the story.

Of course, there were exceptions to this general trend, and there are many concrete examples of fine and incisive reporting by certain individual reporters. What is clear, however, is that American journalism in Laos did not fare as well as it could have, or should have. Most of the journalists interviewed in the course

of this research admit as such. In sum, as one former correspondent writing of the American experience in Vietnam, has put it, " . . . conventional journalism could no more reveal this war than conventional firepower could win it."[1]

Next steps

Much further work needs to be done in order to substantiate fully my hypotheses regarding journalistic coverage of the war in Laos. Chief among the tasks to be undertaken is a more systematic analysis of American newspaper and magazine clip files, as well as a more thorough comparison between and among American, Australian, and European accounts. An analysis of television coverage also should be done, along the lines conducted by Hallin with respect to the coverage of Vietnam.

These activities must await my return to the United States. Meanwhile, I intend to begin research into the relevant Lao archives, scanty though they are, in order to reconstruct a timeline of what was reported from the Pathet Lao vantage point.

One of the most controversial aspects of the Laos war concerns the number of North Vietnamese troops who were operating or alleged to have been operating inside Laos at various times during the period under study. Wildly varying estimates were bandied about by the Royal Lao Government and the U. S. Government, and were picked up and perpetuated by the media at the time. Even today, various sources interviewed for this project disagree strenuously about the

capacity, extent, and influence of the North Vietnamese Army. The scholarly literature is also difficult to reconcile. After a year of researching this topic, I have not been able to correlate to my satisfaction the alleged numbers and dates, nor am I sure there is a definitive answer. This is no small dilemma. Presumably one reason for U. S. actions with respect to Laos was the perceived threat of invasion and infiltration from Hanoi; this was the one theme consistently reported by the press. Therefore, it merits much greater attention than I was able to give it here.

Likewise, I also intend to continue developing Appendix D, the database of reporters who covered Laos. In this regard I plan to seek the permission of the U. S. Army's Center for Military History at Fort McNair, Washington, DC, for access to the credentials of the reporters based in Hanoi. Construction of the database should lead me, in turn, to other reporters of the Vietnam War era, who can be contacted and interviewed regarding their experiences in or covering Laos.

Finally, I likewise will continue to seek out participant-observers who were based in Laos during the period under study. A key group of persons yet to be interviewed are the alumni of the International Voluntary Service (IVS), some of whom in the late 1960s played key roles in exposing covert government activities to the media, and later went on to positions of influence in the domestic antiwar movement. Their perspectives regarding the U. S. mission in Laos and its interaction with the reporters should provide further understanding of this key aspect of the story -- a story of the uses and abuses of "professional journalism,"

and of the failure to report accurately one of the major episodes of modern American history.[2]

Notes to Conclusions

[1] Michael Herr, quoted in Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty,* 423.

[2] A further extension of the research could extend beyond the war, and up to the present. I believe that further study would show that the U. S. media continue to cover Laos in only the most tangential way. My initial Internet searches for the time frame August 2000 to April 2001, for example, revealed that the overwhelming number of articles with respect to Laos are focused on two issues. These are the lives of the Hmong immigrants in the United States, and the continuing search for American soldiers still listed as missing-in-action (MIA) or prisoners-of-war (POW) in Southeast Asia.

Appendix A

Persons Interviewed

Journalists of the Vietnam War Era

George Wilson, several discussions since January 2000

Arnold "Skip" Isaacs, several discussions since January 2000

Eugene Roberts, January 2000

Leon Daniel, May 2000

H. D. S. Greenway, May 2000

Arthur Dommen, July 2000

David Lamb, December 2000

Martin Stuart-Fox, by correspondence since December 2000

Joseph Galloway, December 2000, by correspondence

Ray Herndon, January 2001, by correspondence

Richard Pyle, January 2001, by correspondence

Henry Kamm, February 2001

Tim Page, February 2001

Jack Langguth, February 2001

Zalin Grant, February 2001

Steve Stibbens, February 2001

Participant-Observers

Eugene Bruns, several discussions since January 2000

Timothy Castle, several discussions since January 2000

George Dalley, several discussions since January 2000

William Sage, November 2000

Jacqueline Chagnon, December 2000

Carol Ireson-Doolittle, December 2000

Jerome Doolittle, December 2000, by correspondence

Charles Weldon, M.D., January 2001, by correspondence; personal interview, March 2001

Edwin McKeithen, January 2001, by correspondence; personal interview, March 2001

Karen Olness, M.D., February 2001

Fred Branfman, March 2001

Vint Lawrence, March 2001

Academics

David Chandler, several discussions since January 2000

William Hammond, several discussions May 2000

William Leary, several discussions April and May 2000

Gayle Morrison, May 2000

Appendix B

Sample Letter to Journalists

U.S. Embassy Vientiane, Laos
Box V
APO AP 96546
January 22, 2001

Mr. Stanley Karnow
10850 Spring Knoll Dr.
Potomac, MD 20854

Dear Mr. Karnow:

I hope you'll forgive this letter from out of the blue. I am writing at the suggestion of Tommy Vallely of Harvard University. Mr. Vallely, Mr. Joe Galloway of *U.S. News and World Report*, and various other contacts have told me you might be willing to communicate with me regarding your experiences covering the American war in Indochina.

I am a U.S. Foreign Service Officer, posted to our Embassy in Laos since August 2000. I will be here for the next couple of years as director of narcotics affairs. Meanwhile, I am also writing a thesis for a master's degree in journalism at the University of Maryland. (I am a former journalist myself.) The topic of my paper is the U.S. media's coverage (or lack thereof) of U.S. involvement in Laos, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s. Ultimately, I hope to turn this project into a book. Although many books have been written about the war in Laos, none to my knowledge has treated the media issue in a comprehensive fashion.

The project will examine the entire complex of circumstances surrounding the environment in which journalists had to report; the content of what they wrote; the restrictions they faced; and their own behavior in following the Laos angle of the larger Vietnam story. It will also examine in some detail the issue of "secrecy" with respect to this war, and to what degree American journalists may have failed,

deliberately or otherwise, to describe the extent of covert American involvement to the American public. It will incorporate an examination of relevant published sources, including original media reports and U.S. and foreign government documents; and interviews with various personalities associated with the war and/or the American media coverage.

Given your long experience on the ground, I believe your recollections and insights would be invaluable for my project, and I hope you would be willing to participate. Specifically, I am interested in your views on the following issues:

- To what extent did accepted Cold War views of the time shape the coverage? The Geneva Conventions? Poor road and communications infrastructure inside Laos? Other factors?

- Inside Laos, what restrictions were put on the U.S. press by the Royal Lao Government, the Washington agencies, or the U.S. Embassy?

- What was your own experience? During your stay(s) in Southeast Asia, what percentage of the time did you spend covering Laos? Visiting Laos? What factors played a role in your own decisions regarding whether and if to report on Laos? To what extent were your stateside editors interested in the Laos angle?

- More specifically, in retrospect how do you regard the coverage of Laos during this period? Should the American press have done anything differently? If so, what? How?

- Finally, I would be grateful if you could recommend other U.S. journalists who covered Laos whom I should contact in regard to this research.

Should you be willing to participate in this project, we could communicate as you wish--by letter, e-mail, phone, or some combination thereof. (The logistics of dealing with Laos have not improved that much from your day! You will recall that Laos is 12 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time.) I am generally free in the evenings here from about 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. (6 a.m. to 11 a.m. in New York), or anytime on the weekends. I am also on e-mail at ardickey@aol.com and dickeyar@state.gov. My own phone numbers are as follows: 011-856-21-312-811 (home) or 011-856-21-212-581 (Embassy). The fax is 011-856-21-212-584. Finally, my mailing address is above, should you wish to correspond by mail and/or wish to drop me a line with your phone number.

Thank you for your consideration and I do hope to hear from you (ideally fairly soon, as I must complete the thesis portion of my project by April).

Sincerely yours,

Angela R. Dickey

Appendix C

Chronology

The following is a chronology of some key dates in the history of post-World War II Indochina, with a focus on U. S. involvement in Laos and corresponding developments in media coverage. The following sources were used to develop this chronology: Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*; Gunn, *Political Struggles in Laos*; Karnow, *Vietnam*; Leary, "CIA Air Operations in Laos, 1955-1974"; Robbins, *The Ravens;* Stevenson, *The End of Nowhere*; and Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos.*

1945

March: Japanese forces launch a coup against French officials throughout Indochina, including Laos; promise independence to the French colonies.

April 12: President Franklin Roosevelt dies in the United States; his vice president, Harry S. Truman, succeeds him.

August 15: Surrender of the Imperial Japanese Army ends World War II.

September 2: Ho Chi Minh proclaims Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

September/October: In Laos and Thailand, agents of the American OSS (forerunner of CIA) assist the Lao *Issara* ("independence") movement against a French return to power

1946

December: First Indochina War begins.

March: French forces commit atrocities against Lao *Issara* and civilians during the battle of Thakek.

May: French resume control of the government of Laos.

1947

The Lao *Issara* leadership relocates to Bangkok.

November: In the United States, Acting President Harry Truman is elected President.

1949

January: Dissolution of the Lao *Issara* government in exile; the movement splits into rightist, centrist, and leftist (pro-Vietnamese) elements.

October: In China, Communists gain control; Mao Zedong proclaims the establishment of the People's Republic of China.

1950

February: The United States recognizes the government of "South Vietnam" under Emperor Bao Dai.

June: The Korean War begins.

July: United States signs agreement to supply economic and military aid to France's colonies in Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia).

August: In Vietnam, Lao Prince Souphanouvong proclaims formation of the Pathet Lao.

1951

First Vietminh battalions are stationed in Laos to train Pathet Lao troops.

1952

November: In the U. S., Dwight Eisenhower is elected president.

1953

Between March and May, Vietminh forces advance into Laos, seizing key positions from the French, including Sam Neua; they return in December in preparation for the attack on Dien Bien Phu.

October: France acknowledges the Kingdom of Laos as an independent state within the French Union.

1954

May 7: French defeat at Dien Bien Phu ends French involvement in Indochina.

May to July: Geneva Conference; the resulting agreements divide Vietnam at the 17th parallel, confirm the status of Laos as "neutral."

August 20: In Washington, the National Security Council settles on a Laos policy of "covert operations on a large and effective scale."

1955

January: U. S. aid begins to flow directly to the government of South Vietnam.

In Laos, United States Operations Mission (USOM) established to administer economic assistance; later that year Program Evaluation Office, staffed by reserve and retired military, is set up to handle military assistance. Civil Air Transport (CAT), the CIA proprietary airline, conducts drops of rice and salt to victims of severe drought.

In Washington, the State Department establishes a country "desk" for Laos (previously part of Vietnam desk).

April: At Bandung Conference, China and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam pledge non-interference in Laos.

1956

July: Graham Parsons becomes U. S. Ambassador to Laos.

1957

CAT and U. S. Embassy begin formal contract and a C-47 is based at Vientiane.

By December, more than 100 staff, not including covert personnel, are assigned to the U. S. mission in Laos.

1958

May: Elections for the Lao National Assembly produce significant gains for the Pathet Lao. The U. S. is alarmed.

July: Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma dissolves first coalition government and is replaced by U. S.-backed military strongman Phoui Sananikone.

March: Horace Smith becomes U. S. Ambassador to Laos.

1959

March-April: U. S. Congress investigates corruption in the aid program for Laos.

July: U. S. Special Forces introduced into Laos. CAT changes name to Air America.

September: Spike occurs in U. S. media coverage regarding alleged infiltration of North Vietnamese soldiers into Laos. Later, these reports are discredited.

December: Military right-wing elements encouraged by the CIA, overthrow Phoui Sananikone.

1960

April: CIA station engages in election-rigging to prevent Pathet Lao gains in the Lao National Assembly.

July: Winthrop Brown becomes U. S. Ambassador to Laos.

August: Civil war begins with Kong Le coup. U. S. works with Gen. Phoumi Nosavan to foment a counter-coup.

October: CIA case officer Bill Lair brings in covert troops from Thailand, recruits Hmong leader Vang Pao to conduct guerrilla operations on behalf of U. S. government.

November: John F. Kennedy elected president.

December: U. S.-backed General Phoumi attacks Vientiane; more than 500 civilians killed. Soviet airlift begins to supply Souvanna Phouma's neutralists. Phoumi charges DRV invasion (later admitted as propaganda). Meanwhile, lame-duck president Eisenhower contemplates sending U. S. troops to Laos, but decides to let incoming President Kennedy make the decision.

1961

January: John F. Kennedy becomes president in the U. S.

March 9: Two covert American advisers to Royal Lao army are killed in combat (representing first American deaths in Laos).

March 23: President Kennedy holds a news conference alluding to the possibility of war in Laos.

April: U. S. attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro fails ("Bay of Pigs").

May 11: Kennedy agrees to send U. S. agents into North Vietnam and southern Laos.

May 16: Beginning of second Geneva conference.

June 3-4: Kennedy and Soviet Premier Kruschev meet at Geneva; agree not to bring Laos into the wider East-West conflict.

August: Kennedy authorizes an increase in support for the Hmong army, including up to 500 covert American advisers and authorization for a total Hmong troop strength of 11,000.

Establishment of the secret CIA air base at Long Tieng.

1962

Americans begin flying with Royal Lao air force. CIA advisers establish a secret headquarters for the Hmong army at Long Tieng in northeastern Laos.

March 6: The U. S. makes a formal commitment to defend Thailand from Communism.

June: U. S. news stories begin to appear popularizing AID refugee relief director "Pop" Buell.

July: In Vientiane, Leonard Unger becomes U. S. Ambassador to Laos.

July 23: Second Geneva Accords reconfirm "neutrality of Laos."

August: U. S. begins aerial reconnaissance flights at request of Souvanna Phouma.

October: Cuban Missile crisis almost brings U. S. and the Soviet Union to war.

November: In Washington, Averell Harriman becomes Kennedy's Assistant Secretary for Asia.

1963

August: The U. S. gives the Royal Lao Air Force six T-28 planes and provides training for Lao pilots.

September: CBS and NBC adopt a 30-minute evening news format, essentially to accommodate news from Indochina (this represents a 100% increase from previous 15-minute newscast).

November: In Vietnam, President Diem is assassinated. In the U. S., President Kennedy is assassinated and is succeeded by his vice president, Lyndon B. Johnson.

In Vientiane, Lao military strongman Phoumi Nosavan fabricates allegations of new Vietnamese "incursions;" these attacks are reported as fact in the American press.

By the end of the year, the international press corps in Saigon includes 40 correspondents.

1964

April: 7,000 North Vietnamese soldiers reported in Laos. Johnson authorizes low-level U. S. jet reconnaissance over Laos.

April 19: Military attempts a coup against Souvanna Phouma; the U. S. and British ambassadors intervene to restore Souvanna.

May: U. S. reconnaissance flights begin over Plain of Jars and southern Laos (Ho Chi Minh Trail area).

June: The Pathet Lao shoots down a U. S. reconnaissance plane and an escort plane. Six U. S. F-100 fighter-bombers retaliate.

July: "Maximum candor" press policy is instituted at U. S. mission Saigon. In Vientiane, however, the policy continues to be denial of any U. S. involvement.

August: "Gulf of Tonkin" incident in Vietnam; Congress gives President Johnson extraordinary powers to intervene in Southeast Asia.

October: U. S. fighter-bombers begin flying covert missions for Royal Lao Air Force aircraft, which bomb Ho Chi Minh trail complex at request from U. S. Embassy.

November: U. S. direct bombing of Laos ("Operation Barrel Roll") begins but goes unreported in U. S. press. First American jet shot down over Laos; Embassy claims it was on a "reconnaissance mission." Acting President Johnson is formally elected president in the U. S.

December: William Sullivan becomes U. S. Ambassador in Laos and assumes direction of the air war.

By end of year, U. S. has 200,000 troops in Vietnam.

1965

January: Lyndon Johnson's official inauguration as president. UPI's Arthur Dommen reports U. S. bombing over Laos has been going on for seven months.

March: Johnson begins regular air attacks on North Vietnam and Laos ("Rolling Thunder"). Public affairs officers in Saigon are instructed to not reveal when a U. S. aircraft is shot down in Laos, unless U. S. personnel are killed.

July: Johnson decides to commit U. S. troops to the ground war in Vietnam.

December: *New York Daily News* reports American aircraft spraying defoliants in Laos. UPI reports B-52 bombers conducting strikes inside Laos against Ho Chi Minh trail. The so-called "Christmas bombing halt" begins in Vietnam.

By the end of the year, the Saigon press corps includes 282 foreign correspondents, of whom 110 are Americans.

1966

U. S. Air Force installs a tactical air navigation system atop Phou Pha Thi, Laos, in order to direct bombing runs against Hanoi.

May: After the family of a serviceman killed in Laos goes to the press, the Pentagon announces that eleven personnel have been killed in Laos (a gross underestimate).

October: "Ravens" program begins (U. S. pilots flying as Forward Air Controllers in Laos but based out of Udorn, Thailand).

By year's end, U. S. has 400,000 troops in Vietnam. The Saigon press corps consists of more than 500 journalists.

1967

February 21: French journalist Bernard Fall is killed by a land mine near Hue.

By year's end, U. S. has 500,000 troops in Vietnam. Domestic protests begin in the U. S.

1968

January: Clark Clifford replaces Robert McNamara as Johnson's Secretary of Defense and begins an internal campaign to reject a further build-up of U. S. troops in Vietnam.

January 14: Royal Lao Army troops suffer heavy casualties and flee in panic at battle of Nam Bac.

January 31: Hanoi launches Tet offensive against towns and villages all over South Vietnam.

March 11: Fall of Phou Pa Thi (11 Americans missing and presumed dead; as of this writing, they remain unaccounted for).

March 31: President Johnson announces he will not seek reelection. He offers a partial bombing halt and talks with Hanoi (hereafter, with bombing temporarily suspended over N. Vietnam, American bombers unload all their excess ordnance over Laos).

May 4: Robert Shaplen's "Letter from Laos" in the *New Yorker* describes the catastrophes at Nam Bac and Phou Pa Thi but avoids direct reference to CIA activities.

July: Reports of U. S. saturation bombing of civilian targets on the Plain of Jars appear in the European press, but not the U. S. press.

November: Richard Nixon elected president in the United States; chooses Henry Kissinger as National Security Adviser early December.

By end of year, the U. S. has 540,000 troops in Vietnam.

1969

January: Nixon becomes President of the United States.

March 17: First U. S. direct bombing campaign against the Plain of Jars. The provincial capital, Xieng Khouang, is destroyed within four days.

March 18: Clandestine U. S. bombing of Cambodia begins.

April: U. S. troop strength in Vietnam peaks at 554,000 and then begins to decline.

April 3: UPI reports secret forays into Laos by U. S. Special Forces.

July: G. McMurtrie Godley becomes U. S. Ambassador to Laos. The U. S. Air Force is conducting 300 sorties per day against targets in Laos.

September: IVS volunteer Fred Branfman introduces press corps to refugees fleeing the Plain of Jars. As a result of pressure from the media, the U. S. Embassy for the first time permits a large group of American reporters to visit the AID refugee headquarters at Sam Thong.

October 1: *New York Times* reports extensive bombing on Plain of Jars.

October 20: Senator Symington conducts hearings in Washington; for the first time, details of U. S. activity in Laos are described to Congress; however, the hearing is closed and the results are classified.

November 15: Large antiwar demonstrations in Washington, DC.

November 16: First press reports on My Lai massacre.

By year's end, American troop strength has been reduced by 60,000.

1970

January: U. S. evacuates Plain of Jars prior to final "scorched earth" campaign.

February: T. D. Allman and two other journalists "discover" CIA base at Long Tieng after walking across the mountain from Sam Thong.

February 17: USAF employs B-52 bombers over Laos for first time. News is reported by *New York Times.*

February 20: Henry Kissinger begins secret negotiations with North Vietnamese in Paris.

February 25: Allman story in *Bangkok Post* reveals existence of the secret base at Long Tieng.

March 6: President Nixon states to the press that "no American stationed in Laos has ever been killed in combat"; more than 90 journalists converge on Vientiane to investigate.

March 18: Nixon initiates secret bombing of Cambodia.

May 4: Kent State incident occurs, at which U. S. National Guards shoot and kill four antiwar protesters. Domestic opposition to war reaches fever pitch.

June: Secret Senate hearings on Laos take place.

June 8: *Boston Globe* reports USAID chief's admission to the Senate that USAID-Laos has been a cover for CIA activity since 1962.

By year's end, the U. S. has further reduced its troops in Vietnam to 280,000.

1971

February 13: South Vietnamese troops with U. S. air support begin incursions into Laos to attempt to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail (Operation Dewey Canyon II.). The U. S. military permits only approximately 20 journalists to fly into Laos for this operation. Four of them are killed over Laotian territory when their South Vietnamese Army helicopter is shot down.

June 13: The "Pentagon Papers" are published in the *New York Times* (in addition to details of U. S. operations in Vietnam, these reports provide confirmation of U. S. covert activities in Laos going back to Eisenhower administration).

December: "Skyline Ridge," the last big ground battle in the Laos theater, pits 10,000 Hmong against several NVA battalions.

By year's end, U. S. troops in Vietnam number 140,000. The Saigon press corps has diminished to fewer than 200 reporters.

1972

CIA attempts to halt publication of Alfred McCoy's *Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia,* which among other things alleges that Air America is facilitating movement of opium within Laos.

February: Nixon goes to China.

June: Five persons are arrested breaking into the Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington, DC (beginning of so-called "Watergate Scandal," in which President Nixon will eventually be implicated).

November: President Nixon is re-elected.

1973

January: U. S. and North Vietnam negotiate an end to the war in Vietnam.

February: In Paris, cease-fire is arranged with respect to Laos.

March: Last U. S. troops leave Vietnam.

June 4: Deadline for final withdrawal of all foreign forces from Laos (U. S. withdraws most of its personnel by the deadline, but the North Vietnamese do not).

November: Congress overrides Nixon's veto of law limiting the presidents' right to wage war.

1974

January: South Vietnamese President Thieu announces resumption of war in Vietnam.

April: New coalition government formed in Laos, including Pathet Lao.

August 9: Nixon resigns and is replaced by his vice president, Gerald Ford.

1975

January: NVA launches a new offensive against the South, but Congress rejects U. S. re-involvement.

Mid-April: Pathet Lao forces take up arms again, but do not attack Vientiane, waiting to see what will happen in Cambodia and South Vietnam.

April 17: Phnom Penh falls to the Khmer Rouge.

April 29: Last Americans are evacuated from Saigon.

April 30: Saigon falls to North Vietnamese forces.

May 12-14: CIA evacuates Hmong General Vang Pao and 2,500 Hmong to safety in Thailand; on May 14, Long Tieng falls to advancing Pathet Lao troops.

August 23: Vientiane falls to the Pathet Lao.

December 2: Pathet Lao accepts abdication of the king of Laos; declares the Lao People's Democratic Republic

1976

Exodus of Lao with ties to the former Royal Lao Government begins; over the next couple of years, nearly one tenth of the population flees to Thailand and thence to Europe, the United States, and elsewhere.

November: Jimmy Carter elected President of the United States.

1977

January: Carter becomes president, pardons 10,000 Vietnam draft evaders.

1978

New York Times correspondent Henry Kamm receives Pulitzer Prize for calling attention to the plight of Indochina's refugees.

1981

Minneapolis journalist Ruth Hammond reports that Hmong general Vang Pao is extorting money from U. S.-based Hmong.

Appendix D

Reporters of the Vietnam Era Who Covered Laos

Name of Reporter	*Media Organization*	*Base(s) where assigned, with dates*	*Annotations*
Arbuckle, Tammy	Washington Star, then UPI	Vientiane	Scottish (?)
Allman, T. D.	Bangkok Post, freelance		
Alsop, Joe	Washington Post	Washington	Deceased
Arad, Antoine	AP	Vientiane, early 1960s	Lebanese
Arnett, Peter	AP	Vientiane, 1961-63; Saigon, 63-?	
Becker, Elizabeth	Washington Post		
Beech, Keyes	Chicago Daily News	Saigon	Deceased
Bigart, Homer	New York Herald Tribune, NY Times		Deceased
Braestrup, Peter	New York Times, Washington Post	Post bureau chief Saigon, 1968-1973	Deceased
Browne, Malcom	Associated Press; later NY Times	1961-1965, Saigon bureau chief	Deceased
Buckley, Kevin	Time/Life	1966-1970 where?	
Chanda, Nayan	Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)		Pakistani(?)
Chantaraj, Pon (check spelling)	UPI	Vientiane	Nationality?
Chappelle, Dickey	freelance photographer		Killed covering combat, 1965
Coffait, Max	Agence France-Presse		French
de Borchgrave, Arnaud	Newsweek		
de Cornoy, Jacques	Le Monde		French
Daniel, Leon	United Press International (UPI)	Saigon, Tokyo, Bangkok, 1966-1973	
Dommen, Arthur	UPI, Los Angeles Times	Hong Kong/Saigon, 1959-1963; LA, 1965-1971	Also worked for USAID
Dring, Simon	British stringer for Reuters, NYT	Approximately 1964-65 (ref. by Langguth, Page)	British
Durdin, Tillman	New York Times	Vientiane 1960 for Kong Le coup	

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Reporters of the Vietnam Era Who Covered Laos

Name of Reporter	*Media Organization*	*Bases(s) where assigned, with dates*	*Annotations*
Emerson, Gloria	New York Times	Saigon, 1970-1972	
Everingham, John	National Geographic, FEER	Saigon, Vientiane, Bangkok	Australian
Faas, Horst	AP (photographer)	Saigon, 1964-1975	German
Fall, Bernard	Freelance		Deceased
Galloway, Joe	UPI	Saigon	Now at U.S. News
Garrett, William	National Geographic	several visits over 15-year period	
Grant, Zalin	Time	1965-1967 (Saigon); to Vientiane several times	
Greenway, H. David	Time/Life	Bangkok, 1968-1970	Now at Boston Globe
Halberstam, David	New York Times	Saigon, 1962-1963	
Hamilton-Merritt, Jane	freelance		
Herndon, Ray	UPI	Vientiane, 1961-1963; Saigon,1963-1966	Now at Los Angeles Times
Hersh, Seymour	Dispatch News		
Holt, Estelle	various British publications	Vientiane, early 1960s	British
Isaacs, Arthur "Skip"	Baltimore Sun	Saigon, 1972-1975; then Hong Kong for 3 years	
Kaff, Albert E.	UPI	1957-1959	
Kalb, Bernard	Television		
Kamm, Henry	New York Times	Bangkok, 1969-1971 (Laos/Cambodia beat)	Now in France
Karnow, Stanley	Time/Life, Washington Post	Saigon, 1959-?	
Kirk, Don	Chicago Sun Times	1965-1974	
Langguth, Jack	New York Times	Vientiane/Saigon, 1962-1965 (Vientiane 64-65?)	
Lawrence, Jack	CBS	1965-1969 where?	
Malloy, Mike	UPI; later, Dow Jones	Vientiane, 1960-1962; Saigon, 1963-1965	
McArthur, George	Los Angeles Times		

Appendix D

Reporters of the Vietnam Era Who Covered Laos

Name of Reporter	*Media Organization*	*Base(s) where assigned, with dates*	*Annotations*
Mohr, Charles	Time		Deceased
North, Don			
Oberdorfer, Don	Knight Ridder, then Washington Post	1965-?	
Page, Tim	UPI (photographer)	Vientiane, 1963-1965; Saigon, 1965-1967	British; worked for AID Laos
Prochnau, William	Washington Post	Saigon, dates?	
Pyle, Richard	AP	Saigon, 1968-1973	
Rogers, Paul Brinkley	Newsweek	Saigon, 1968-1972	
Saar, John	Time/Life		
Sanders, Pamela	freelancer	Vientiane, early 1960s	
Schanche, Don	Saturday Evening Post	New York	
Sanders, Pamela	stringer for New York Times, others		
Schanberg, Sydney	New York Times		
Shaplen, Robert	The New Yorker	New York	Deceased
Sheehan, Neil	UPI	Saigon, 1961?	
Southerland, Don	Christian Science Monitor	1970s?	Now at Radio Free Asia
Sterba, James	New York Times	Saigon, 1968-1972; also Laos?	
Stibbens, Steve	Stars and Stripes; Leatherneck	1962-1969, Saigon	
Stuart-Fox, Martin	UPI	Vientiane, Nov 1993-April 1995; then Saigon	Australian; worked for AID
White, Peter	National Geographic	Covered Laos over 20 years	
Wilde, James	Time	In Laos following Kong Le coup (1960)	
Willenson, Kim	UPI	Bangkok	
Wolfkill, Grant	NBC (cameraman)		Captured by Pathet Lao

Annotated Bibliography on the "Secret" War in Laos
by category of authorship

This bibliography contains only those works with direct relevance to events in Laos and the media response thereto. For books about the war in Vietnam in general and on the broader relationship between the media and foreign policy, see the separate list of Supplementary Sources beginning on page 155.

Works by Journalists and Former Journalists

Arnett, Peter. *Live From the Battlefield: From Vietnam to Baghdad, 35 Years in the World's War Zones.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994. The most famous reporter of the Vietnam era spent a good deal of time in Laos; yet he devotes only 12 pages of this book to that aspect of his experiences.

Browne, Malcolm. *Muddy Boots and Red Socks: A Reporter's Life.* New York: Times Books, 1993. Like Arnett, Browne reported out of Laos on many occasions, but his assessment is that Laos "didn't matter" as a story.

Dommen, Arthur J. *Conflict in Laos: The Politics of Neutralization.* Revised edition. New York: Praeger, 1971. Dommen, who covered the Indochina wars first for UPI and then the *Los Angeles Times,* is still considered one of the leading authorities on Laos today.

_____. *Laos: Keystone of Indochina.* Boulder: Westview Press, 1985.

_____. "Social Science Research on Laos in the United States." In *New Laos, New Challenges,* edited by Jacqueline Butler-Diaz, 249-278. Tempe, Arizona: Arizona State University, 1998.

Emerson, Gloria. *Winners and Losers: Battles, Retreats, Gains, Losses, and Ruins from a Long War.* New York: Random House, 1976. Emerson was based in Saigon, 1970-1972. She befriended some of the young International Voluntary Service (IVS) workers in Vietnam and Laos, whose perspectives questioning the war brought great nuance to her reporting.

Fall, Bernard.. *Anatomy of a Crisis: The Laotian Crisis of 1960-1961.* New York, Doubleday: 1969. Fall, an American-French scholar, was correspondent for *The Nation* and freelanced for other publications.

Halberstam, David. *The Best and the Brightest.* New York: Random House, 1972. This is the classic study of the Kennedy elite who presided over the war.

Hersh, Seymour M. *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the White House.* New York: Summit, 1983. The investigative journalist who exposed the My Lai massacre is unrelentingly merciless in his depiction of Kissinger and Nixon as lying manipulators in their conduct of the war, including activities in Laos.

Isaacs, Arnold. *Vietnam Shadows: The War, Its Ghosts, and Its Legacy.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. Isaacs was the *Baltimore Sun* correspondent in Saigon from 1972-1975.

_____. *Without Honor: Defeat in Vietnam and Cambodia.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.

Isaacs, Arnold R., Gordon Hardy, and MacAlister Brown, eds. *Vietnam Experience: Pawns of War: Cambodia and Laos.* Boston: Boston Publishing Company, 1987. Isaacs' co-authors Hardy and Brown were, respectively, an editor for Boston Publishing Company and a professor of political science at Williams College.

Kremmer, Christopher. *Stalking the Elephant Kings: In Search of Laos.* Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 1997. This book by an Australian journalist is mainly a travelogue dealing with the fate of the Lao royal family, but there are some references to the war.

Merritt-Hamilton, Jane. *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992.* Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993. This account by a former Vietnam-era stringer is quite comprehensive but also controversial due to its one-sided account of the CIA-Hmong struggle against the North Vietnamese. It perpetuates, among other things, the persistent myth that the Pathet Lao subjected the Hmong to chemical weapons attacks.

Prochnau, William. *Once Upon a Distant War: Young War Correspondents and the Early Vietnam Battles.* New York: Times Books, 1995. This ethnography is an excellent account of the experiences of reporters during the first years of the wars in Vietnam and Laos, by a reporter who came to Vietnam later on.

Robbins, Christopher. *Air America.* New York: Putnam, 1979. A British journalist's account of the role of the CIA proprietary airline in U. S. policy in China and Southeast Asia.

_____. *The Ravens.* New York: Crown, 1987. Robbins' bravura account is based almost entirely on reminiscences of pilots who flew as U. S. Air Force Forward Air Controllers (FACs) into Laos. These pilots, who call themselves "Ravens" or The Edgar Allen Poe Society, now own the rights to this book.

Schanche, Don. *Mr. Pop.* New York: McKay, 1970. This book, a shorter version of which appeared as an article in *The Saturday Evening Post,* focused on Edgar "Pop" Buell, an AID contractor who ran the U. S. Government refugee program in Laos. The story and book perpetuated a misleading picture of the situation by crediting Buell with activities that were actually being overseen by the CIA.

Shaplen, Robert. *Time Out of Hand: Revolution and Reaction in Southeast Asia.* New York, Harper and Row, 1969. Shaplen was Southeast Asia correspondent for *The New Yorker* for almost two decades. He is said to have had an extremely close relationship with Saigon CIA operative Edward Lansdale.

_____. *A Turning Wheel: Thirty Years of the Asian Revolution by a Correspondent for the New Yorker.* New York: Random House, 1969.

Stuart-Fox, Martin. *Buddhist Kingdom, Marxist State: The Making of Modern Laos.* Bangkok: White Lotus, 1996. This is one of many Laos-related books by the Australian scholar who was a UPI correspondent, first in Vientiane, then in Saigon, from 1963 to 1966.

_____. *A History of Laos.* London: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

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Stuart-Fox, Martin, and Mary Kooyman. *Historical Dictionary of Laos.* Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1992.

Warner, Roger. *Shooting at the Moon.* South Royalton, Vermont: Steerforth Press, 1996. First published in 1995 by Simon and Schuster as *Back Fire: The CIA's Secret War in Laos and Its Link to the War in Vietnam.* This book won the Overseas Press Club award for foreign affairs reporting.

Works by Participant-Observers

Blaufarb, Douglas. *Organizing and Managing Unconventional War in Laos.* Santa Monica, California: Rand, 1972. R-919-ARPA. This is a declassified study by the former CIA chief of station in Vientiane from 1964 to 1966. Blaufarb himself had been a journalist before joining the CIA.

_____. *The Counterinsurgency Era: U. S. Doctrine and Performance, 1950 to the Present.* New York: The Free Press, 1977.

Colby, William. *Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978. The late Director of Central Intelligence was instrumental in launching the CIA-led counterinsurgency in Laos as well as the Phoenix program in Vietnam.

Doolittle, Jerome. *The Bombing Officer.* New York: A.P. Dutton, 1972. Doolittle was a press officer at Embassy Vientiane 1968-1970; he resigned after President Nixon stated publicly that no Americans had been killed in combat in Laos. Doolittle later became a novelist. This book, while fiction, is quite faithful to actual events.

Hannah, William. *The Key to Failure: Laos and the Vietnam War.* Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1987. The author, a Foreign Service Officer, served as State Department desk officer for Laos, then as deputy chief of mission in Bangkok during the war. He is a revisionist of the right, claiming that U. S. failures in Laos were key to the overall debacle in Indochina.

Hilsman, Roger. *To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy.* New York: Doubleday, 1967. Hilsman, Kennedy's Assistant Secretary for East Asia, was deeply

involved in U. S. policy toward Laos. Today he works to decrease the influence of the CIA in U. S. foreign policy.

Kuhn, Ernie. Unpublished oral history. Georgetown University Association for Diplomatic Studies. Foreign Affairs Oral History. Interview by Arthur J. Dommen, March 1995. Kuhn worked with Edgar "Pop" Buell in the AID refugee program. His memoirs reflect a concerted effort by the U. S. mission in Laos to thwart press efforts to learn the extent of CIA activity.

Lederer, William J. *A Nation of Sheep.* New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1961. Lederer, also the co-author of the popular novel *The Ugly American,* was a Naval officer assigned to the U. S. Pacific Command in Hawaii. *Nation of Sheep* was an impassioned argument that the U. S. press and the U. S. government had been "duped" into believing the North Vietnamese had invaded Laos in 1959.

McKeithen, Edwin T. "The Role of North Vietnamese Cadres in the Pathet Lao Administration of Xieng Khouang Province." Vientiane, Laos: American Embassy, April 1970. Unpublished paper. McKeithen was a USAID employee based in Xieng Khouang.

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Meeker, Oden. *The Little World of Laos.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959. As the director of CARE in Laos, Meeker witnessed the early USG aid build-up and expressed skepticism about it to the press.

Parker, James E. *Codename Mule: Fighting the Secret War in Laos for the CIA.* Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1997. Parker was a CIA adviser to the Hmong army in Laos in the 1970s.

Schlesinger, Arthur. *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965. Schlesinger was one of Kennedy's closest advisers, including during the Laos crisis of 1961.

Secord, Richard. *Honored and Betrayed: Irangate, Covert Affairs, and the Secret War in Laos.* New York: Wiley and Sons, 1992. One of the celebrated figures in the Irangate scandal, Secord began his long government career as an Air Force colonel involved in running Ravens flight operations from Udorn, Thailand, into Laos.

Sisouk Na Champassak. *Storm Over Laos.* Praeger, 1961. This is one of the few works about the war written by a Lao, in this case a member of the southern Royal family.

Stieglitz, Perry. *In a Little Kingdom.* Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1990. Although Stieglitz was a USIS officer in Vientiane during the key build-up in the early 1960s, his book mainly deals with his romance with, and marriage to, the daughter of Lao Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma. The few references to the war make no mention of the fact that the CIA was involved in running the Hmong army or that the U. S. Air Force was bombing Laos.

Sullivan, William H. *Obligatto: Notes on a Foreign Service Career.* New York: W.W. Norton, 1984. Curiously, despite Ambassador Sullivan's role in personally directing the war in Laos from 1964 to 1969, he makes only limited references to those events.

Toye, Hugh. *Laos: Buffer State or Battleground.* London: Oxford University Press, 1968. Toye was a British military officer assigned to Laos from 1960-1962.

Weldon, Charles. *Tragedy in Paradise: A Country Doctor in Laos.* Bangkok: Asia Books, 1999. Weldon was the USAID public health director in Laos from 1963-1974.

Works by Academics

Brown, MacAlister, and Joseph J. Zasloff. *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930-85.* Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986. Brown is a political science professor at Williams College. Zasloff is one of the preeminent authorities on the Pathet Lao and its relationship with North Vietnam; he conducted several other studies of that revolutionary movement along with Brown, former Ambassador Leonard Unger (below), and others.

Castle, Timothy Castle. *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam: U. S. Military Aid to the Royal Lao Government, 1955-1975.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1993. Castle was a USAF pilot who flew in Laos in the early 1960s. He has since become a military historian specializing in Laos. This book and his more recent *One Day Too Long* (below) have made good use of the most recently declassified material on the war in Laos.

_____. *One Day Too Long: Top Secret Site 85 and the Bombing of North Vietnam.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Conboy, Kenneth, and James Morrison. *Shadow War: The CIA's Secret War in Laos.* Boulder: Paladin Press, 1995.

Corn, David. *Blond Ghost: Ted Shackley and the CIA's Crusades.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.

Ely, John Hart. *War and Responsibility: Constitutional Lessons of Vietnam and Its Aftermath.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993. This groundbreaking study by a legal scholar contains a chapter on the "Unenforceable Unconstitutionality" of the war in Laos.

Goldstein, Martin E. *American Policy toward Laos.* Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1973. A political scientist at the University of Pennsylvania wrote this early study, prior to the declassification of many crucial documents.

Gunn, Geoffrey C. *Political Struggles in Laos (1939-1954): Vietnamese Communist Power and the Lao Struggle for National Independence.* Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1988. Gunn is an Australian historian specializing in Laos.

Ireson, W. Randall, and Carol J. Ireson. "Laos." In Douglas Allen and Ngo Vinha Long, eds. *Coming to Terms: Indochina, the United States, and the War.* Boulder: Westview, 1991. The Iresons were representatives of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC, or Quakers) in Laos in the 1980s.

Kaiser, David. *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War.* Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000. Kaiser is a professor of strategy and policy at the Naval War College.

Langer, Paul F., and Zasloff, Joseph J. *North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao: Partners in the Struggle for Laos.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970.

Leary, William. "CIA Air Operations in Laos, 1955-1974." In *Studies in Intelligence* (winter 1999-2000): 71-86. Unclassified Edition. Leary is a professor of history at the University of Georgia. He is the leading authority on the history of CIA aviation.

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Littauer, Raphael and Norman Uphoff, eds. *The Air War in Indochina.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1972.

Prados, John. *The Blood Road: The Ho Chi Minh Trail and the Vietnam War.* New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1999. Prados is a military historian specializing in Vietnam.

Randle, Robert F. *Geneva 1954: The Settlement of the Indochinese War.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969. Randle was a political scientist at Columbia University. His book is considered the definitive history of what happened at the Geneva Conference.

Stevenson, Charles. *The End of Nowhere: American Policy toward Laos Since 1954.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1973. Originally written as a doctoral dissertation at Harvard University, Stevenson's book is a case study of the American decision-making process vis-a-vis Laos.

Zasloff, Joseph J. "American Political Research on Laos, 1954-1993." In *New Laos, New Challenges,* edited by Jacqueline Butler-Diaz, 211-248. Tempe, Arizona: Arizona State University, 1998. Zasloff was and continues to be the leading authority on the relationship between North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao.

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Zasloff, Joseph J., and Allan E. Goodman, eds. *Indochina in Conflict.* Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1972. Goodman for many years was the graduate dean of the Georgetown School of Foreign Service.

Zasloff, Joseph J., and Leonard Unger, eds. *Laos Beyond the Revolution.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991. Unger is a former U. S. Ambassador to Laos.

Zasloff, Joseph, J., and MacAlister Brown, eds. *Communism in Indochina: New Perspectives.* Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1975.

Works by Anti-War Activists

Adams, Nina, and Alfred W. McCoy, eds. *Laos: War and Revolution.* New York: Harper and Row, 1970. This reader contains many useful articles for the researcher interested in the issues discussed in this thesis.

Branfman, Fredric. *Voices from the Plain of Jars.* New York: Harper and Row, 1972. Branfman, a volunteer with International Voluntary Services (IVS) in Laos, became disenchanted with U. S. policy and was responsible for many leaks to the press. He worked briefly as a stringer for Dispatch News and became a leader of the antiwar movement in the Untied States.

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Chomsky, Noam. *At War with Asia: Essays on Indochina.* New York: Pantheon, 1970. Chomsky, a philosophy professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), was a leader of the anti-war movement.

Gettleman, Marvin, ed. *Conflict in Indochina: A Reader on the Widening War in Laos and Cambodia.* New York: Random House, 1970.

McCoy, Alfred W. *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia.* Harper and Row, 1972. Revised as *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade*. Brooklyn, N.J.: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991. McCoy's claim that CIA operatives in Laos were complicit in the opium trade so enraged the CIA that it launched an all-out offensive to halt publication of the original version of the book.

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Other

(Note: The following four books are representative of recent literature documenting the lives of the Hmong in exile in the United States.

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Faderman, Lillian, with Ghia Xiong. *I Begin My Life All Over: The Hmong and the American Immigrant Experience.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1998. Faderman is an author and academic specializing in feminist and multiethnic studies.

Morrison, Gayle. *Sky is Falling, An Oral History of the CIA's Evacuation of the Hmong from Laos*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Co., 1999. Morrison is a trained social worker who has provided counseling to Hmong communities in California for many years.

Pfaff, Tim. *Hmong in America: Journey from a Secret War*. Eau Claire, Wisconsin: Chippewa Valley Museum Press, 1995. Pfaff is the curator of the Chippewa Valley Museum, which has undertaken a project to document Hmong history and culture in the Eau Claire area.

Newspaper and Magazine Articles

Allman, T.D. "Long Tieng Yields its Secrets." *Bangkok Post*, 25 February 1970.

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Branfman, Fredric. "The Media, the War, and 1.5 Million Ghosts: Thirty Years Later, Reflections on the Press Corps in Indochina." *San Diego News and Review,* 12 November 1998.

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Hersh, Seymour. "How We Ran the Secret Air War in Laos. *New York Times Magazine*, 29 October 1972.

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Boorstin, Daniel J. Boorstin. *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America.* Twenty-fifth anniversary edition. New York: Vintage Books. 1987.

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