

MEMORANDUM FOR: Dr. Henry A. Kissinger

I thought the President and you would be interested to get the recent flavor of the fighting in Laos.

Rich
Richard Helms

Attachment

11 October 1969
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

11 OCT 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

1. Since your trip to Thailand, the Laotian guerrilla forces under the command of General Vang Pao have fought a series of engagements with the North Vietnamese in north central Laos, and Vang Pao has successfully occupied the Plain of Jars. The Meo attempt to cut the main supply routes used by the North Vietnamese to support and resupply their troops in north central Laos was successful. The North Vietnamese retreated leaving behind large caches of arms, ammunition and medical supplies. My officers in Laos estimate these losses cost the North Vietnamese twelve million dollars. The Meos captured nine Soviet-built tanks, a field hospital with all its equipment, a radio station given to the Pathet Lao by the Chinese Communists and a number of assorted artillery pieces. The captured ammunition is estimated to be more than the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces used in South Vietnam in 1967. General Vang Pao's major victory, however, came in attracting to his side some 10,000 refugees in the Plain of Jars who have lived under communist rule since 1964. This has left the North Vietnamese in a difficult position. For years these people have been used as porters to move supplies down innumerable trails in central Laos to support the North Vietnamese offensives against the towns and cities of Laos. These people are now denied to the enemy, and he will have a more difficult time in future logistics operations in the Plain of Jars.

2. The key to this successful advance is General Vang Pao. Through the past eight years we have had a unique opportunity to watch the growth of a leader of an ethnic minority. Early this

week, Ambassador Godley and our station chief visited several areas in the Plain of Jars as guests of General Vang Pao. As a sidelight to the war my officer sent in some vignettes which I feel may interest you. I quote from a cable I received yesterday.

"When the Ambassador and I visited rear areas of the Plain of Jars on 7 October, we found that Vang Pao had organized old men and boys to police up the battlefield. They were collecting assorted ammunition and other supplies abandoned by friendly troops when they were launched on attack missions. As you are aware, troops going into the attack can carry only limited supplies and sometimes have to leave behind stocks of rifle ammunition, grenades, and rockets that were built up to permit them to resist attacks in forward positions. In one area we found a group of old men with a homemade wooden cart mounted on bicycle wheels, minus tires, busily sorting through the debris of battle in an effort to recover every last cartridge.

"A few weeks ago one of the irregular battalions was overrun at night and driven off a hill position. The following day when Vang Pao went out to insure that his troops were again on the offensive and endeavoring to retake the hill, he found the battalion commander busily engaged in repairing a sewing machine which he had 'liberated.' Vang Pao snatched up the sewing machine, smashed it on a rock, kicked it down the hill, and with a few well chosen words launched the acting battalion commander and his men back up the hill. They took it.

"A short time ago Vang Pao was at a command post on Phou Keng, a key hill position on the north-western side of the Plain of Jars when it came under counterattack by the enemy. Vang Pao, who was eating lunch at the time, dropped his sticky rice and was the first person to reach the 81 MM mortar located next to

his command post. He personally fired the first twenty or thirty rounds into the enemy and then directed the troops into the final assault which captured and secured a strategic hilltop.

"A short time later Vang Pao stood on the trail leading to the summit of the hilltop and personally turned around his troops who had broken in the face of determined enemy resistance. Some he turned by cajolery, others by a show of anger, and some by mocking them for their fears. Others turned about of their own accord when they saw him standing, unafraid, in the path."

3. The Laotian Government, Vang Pao and the Meos are understandably elated with the success of their military offensive. Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma realizes, however, as do Vang Pao and the other officials in Laos, that this is just another stage in the battle for the kingdom. The Laotians are well aware that the North Vietnamese may now be mounting a counterattack to retake the Plain of Jars and continue the push to the west they began during last year's dry season. The Meo offensive has undoubtedly slowed the new Vietnamese attack. The Meo, however, are tired and greatly outnumbered. They cannot hope to withstand a determined enemy force.

4. The North Vietnamese 312th Division of approximately 12,000 soldiers has begun to enter Laos along Route 7 and various trails. This is the first time since 1954 and the battle of Dien Bien Phu that this Division has been deployed in combat. We expect the North Vietnamese troops who withdrew from the Plain of Jars to regroup will join this Division and counterattack the Meo forces. It seems clear that the Meos will not be able to stay in the areas they have taken, and may shortly be hard put to defend their base in the hills around Vang Pao's headquarters.

Rich

Richard Helms
Director