

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In return for U.S. support the RLG permitted the bombing of the NVA logistics system. Although the bombing appeared to be contrary to U.S. policy for Laotian neutrality, it was considered necessary for the achievement of U.S. objectives in South Vietnam. Additionally, during CH V the United States encouraged the Lao forces to do their part in reducing NVA infiltration through Laos by conducting a number of interdiction raids against enemy LOC. As was the case for the Lam Son 719 operation, both the stepped up RLG interdiction attacks and U.S. air interdiction operations supported U.S. objectives for SVN, but could have ramifications which would be detrimental to the attainment of U.S. objectives in Laos. Effective air interdiction in STEEL TIGER would force the NVA to expand his logistics system to the west, thereby further reducing RLG controlled territory in southern Laos. Similarly, stepped up RLG ground interdiction operations could provoke a strong enemy reaction, which would further erode RLG control and influence in southern Laos. However, the benefits of these operations, from the standpoint of attainment of U.S. objectives in SVN, were considered to outweigh the possible adverse effects in Laos. ^{115/}

(S) [REDACTED] In summary, during CH V the following military strategies were to be pursued by friendly forces in Laos: in northern Laos, the emphasis was placed on a defensive posture. Military stabilization along the lines of the 1962 Geneva Accords and preservation of threatened RLG forces were the primary goals. In southern Laos, the strategy was twofold: the defense of strategic friendly positions,

[REDACTED]

and the harassment of enemy LOC by conducting forays into the western portions of the enemy's infiltration system. The emphasis placed on these raids was greater than during previous campaigns. ^{116/}

b. ~~SECRET~~ (S) USAF Role in Laos.

1) (S) ~~SECRET~~ Air Strikes. The largest and most visible aspect of USAF support of the RLG during CH V continued to be the provision of air strikes, which was a critical factor in the survival of RLG forces. With U.S. SEA air assets declining, however, and with an increasing weight of effort devoted to interdiction, the level of attack sorties flown in support of the RLG during CH V was only one-third the number flown during CH III. Mitigating this decline, RLAFF T-28 and AC-47 gunship sorties increased significantly, assuming a greater portion of the load during CH V than ever before. Nevertheless, the overall level of air sorties available for RLG support was still much lower than for CH III. Accordingly, the emphasis for USAF air support during CH V was on better management and control of reduced air resources. ^{117/}

(S) ~~SECRET~~ Almost all visual USAF strikes in support of RLG forces were directed by RAVEN FACs. The RAVENS were USAF FACs who performed visual reconnaissance (recce) and directed U.S. and Lao/Thai air strikes in support of friendly forces. They were stationed in Laos at each of the five Air Operations Centers (AOCs), and thus became intimately familiar with the day-to-day events of

the war. During CH V, the number of RAVENS was increased, resulting in more efficient control and direction of air strikes. ^{118/}

2) (S) **[REDACTED]** Helicopter Support. A very important aspect of USAF support of the RLG was the provision of resupply or troop transport by CH-3 and CH-53 helicopter resources located at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand. These helicopters were normally used to support Controlled American Source (CAS) sponsored irregular forces, or PRAIRIE FIRE* missions, rather than FAR** or FAN** operations. (Troop transport for FAR or FAN operations was provided by Air America or RLAFF operated H-34 helicopters.)

(S) **[REDACTED]** The CAS missions were generally of two types. One type was the insertion or extraction of teams (consisting of six to 35 men) for long-range patrol, road watch, agent plant, or other special actions. The other type of CAS operation was the transport of large irregular forces of from one to five battalions. One example of such an operation was DESERT RAT, covered later in this study, in which a multi-battalion irregular force was flown into the Route 23 area northwest of Tchepone in southern Laos.

(S) **[REDACTED]** In addition to supporting such CAS operations, the USAF helicopters were sometimes used to supply isolated

**Discussed in PACAF CORONA HARVEST Volumes, Subtasks IIc and IIId, Strike Operations in Laos.*

***Laotian Regular and Neutralist Forces. FAR - Forces Armee Royale, FAN - Forces Armee Neutrale.*

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

sites in Thailand and Laos, though most aerial resupply was accomplished by light, fixed-wing Air America aircraft or by H-34 helicopters. Finally, the helicopters were used for medevac, and for emergency evacuation of large groups of refugees in Laos (though the latter capability was not used during CH V). Helicopter assets were an important element of USAF support, because they provided outnumbered irregular forces with the advantage of mobility. ^{119/}

3(5) [REDACTED] Training/Maintenance. The USAF was also tasked to train RLAF pilots under the WATERPUMP program. Training and upgrading of RLAF pilots was a continuous process, and was accomplished at Udorn RTAFB, Thailand. In addition to their training mission, WATERPUMP instructor pilots flew occasional strike/recce or contingency combat sorties in Laos. Also under the WATERPUMP program, USAF mechanics and munition/armament specialists were sent, in a temporary duty status, to AOCs in Laos to provide assistance in maintaining Military Assistance Program aircraft. The WATERPUMP program must be given at least partial credit for the high quality of RLAF pilots, and for the high T-28 sortie rate flown during CH V. ^{120/}

4(5) [REDACTED] Other Activities. Under Projects 404 and PALACE DOG, USAF personnel manned five AOCs throughout Laos, one at each of the military region headquarters in Vientiane, Pakse, Savannakhet, Long Tieng, and Luang Prabang. These AOCs provided the U.S. Ambassador to Laos with intelligence, operations, administrative, communications, and supply expertise in support of the air effort. Because of the Geneva

[REDACTED]

Accords, the emphasis on these two projects, as well as for training/maintenance and helicopter support, was to keep participation of U.S. personnel as low key as possible. Manning of these projects was austere and every effort was made to avoid incidents which would bring attention to U.S. personnel in, or operating over, Laos. ^{121/}

5) (S) [REDACTED] Command and Control. The complex command and control relationships described in earlier PACAF CORONA HARVEST Volumes on Laos* continued to exist during CH V. The Ambassador to Laos maintained overall responsibility for management and control of all U.S. activities in support of the RLG. Reporting directly to him was the Air Attache (AIRA), the Ambassador's senior military advisor during CH V. (The AIRA, an Air Force Colonel, supervised all USAF personnel in Laos.) The Ambassador also exercised direct control over CAS activities in Laos. His relationship was less well defined, however, with respect to the personnel and air resources under the operational control of 7AF.

(S) [REDACTED] The actual application of USAF air resources in Laos was planned and coordinated by means of joint 7/13AF, CAS, and AIRA working agreements and meetings. The opportunities for disagreement and conflict were numerous, and since the Air Attache and CAS personnel were directly under the Ambassador's control and worked closely with him, they were in a good position to influence his

*Subtask IIc, IIId and IIe, Strike Operations in Laos.

[REDACTED]

decisions. Conversely, the contact of 7AF, 7/13AF personnel with the Ambassador was much less frequent. Although most of the expertise concerning air operations was in the staffs of 7AF and 7/13AF, the only connection between this expertise and the Ambassador rested in the personal relationship between himself and the Deputy Commander, 7/13AF, who was the focal point for coordination between USAF air resources and other U.S. activities in Laos. On the one hand, the Deputy Commander 7/13AF was the deputy to both the 7AF and 13AF commanders. On the other, he established personal working relationships with the Ambassador, the Air Attache, and senior CAS officials, even though he had no official connection with or control over any of these individuals. ^{122/}

(S) **[REDACTED]** On the whole, cooperation between CAS, AIRA, and 7/13AF personnel improved during CH V, although some disagreements and coordination problems continued to surface. The improvements that did occur were largely the fruition of efforts by the Deputy Commander 7/13AF and his staff to smooth working relationships between the involved agencies. The BARREL ROLL Working Group (BRWG) meeting, held bi-weekly at Headquarters 7/13AF at Udorn, RTAFB, was a primary vehicle for improving coordination and cooperation among the various agencies. Whereas in the past the BRWG was concerned primarily with the exchange of operational and intelligence information between the various agencies, during CH V its role was expanded to encompass the creation, by the multiple agencies, of joint monthly plans for the application of airpower in northern Laos. ^{123/}

[REDACTED]

(S) [REDACTED] Though CAS, AIRA, and 7/13AF relationships generally experienced an upswing during CH V, command and control relationships continued to cause problems. In his end-of-tour report, Major General Andrew J. Evans, Jr., Deputy Commander of 7/13AF during CH V, commented: ^{124/}

As long as the U.S. Ambassador has overall responsibility for military actions in Laos there seems little likelihood that significant improvements can be made in existing working relationships between 7/13AF, CAS, and AIRA-- the three principal U.S. agencies coordinating military operations in Laos. However, the leveling influence of the Deputy Commander 7/13AF is essential and is considered to have contributed significantly to whatever success was achieved in military operations in Laos during this reporting period.

c. (S) [REDACTED] (U) The Increasing Role of the RLAF.

(S) [REDACTED] With the level of USAF air support for the RLG lower during CH V, and Communist activities more menacing than ever, the outlook was not encouraging for the 1970-71 dry season. To make matters worse from the standpoint of the RLG, the USAF fighter considered most effective in the close air support role, the A-1, was one of the weapon systems being withdrawn. In a September 1970 message Ambassador Godley stated: ^{125/}

Withdrawal of the A-1 units places the Laos mission in the position of not possessing a single U.S. air weapons system available with the characteristics necessary for mission objectives for TAC AIR in the Laos ground war.

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

. . . subsequent to withdrawal we find . . .
RLAF T-28s and AC-47s will constitute the
most effective close support force avail-
able.

With the heavy cut back in USAF air support of the RLG, it was imperative that the remaining sorties be employed in the most effective manner possible, and that the RLAF take over a greater share of the air effort by increasing its sortie rates. Another message from the Ambassador, ^{126/} during October 1970, summarized:

There is absolutely no doubt that we face a difficult dry season - perhaps the toughest since the war in Laos began. Air power saved the Lao skins last year. This year with so much less fast mover support available we will have to improvise. The Lao and ourselves are prepared to milk every last sortie out of [the] RLAF. . . .

(S) [REDACTED] (U) Ground Strategy for the Dry Season.

(S) [REDACTED] Ambassador Godley summed up the general mili-
tary strategy planned for Laos during the 1970-71 dry season: ^{127/}

As in previous years our main concern is to create a flexible defense which will economize the RLG's limited forces and firepower and make the most effective possible use of the only advantages the RLG possesses in defending itself against a powerful aggressor--mobility and TAC AIR.

Specific military strategies were outlined by him for each of the RLG's five Military Regions (MRs). (See Figure 1, which outlines the MRs for Laos.)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The bulk of USAF air support to RLG forces was directed to MR II in northern Laos, in support of irregular forces led by General Vang Pao and equipped and supported by CAS. During CH V, a holding strategy was to be followed in MR II, where the primary concern was the protection of Long Tieng (headquarters for Vang Pao and also for MR II), and the preservation of the integrity of Vang Pao's irregular forces which constituted the backbone of the RLG's military strength in northern Laos. Both of these actions were essential if over-all objectives in MR II, the stabilization of the military situation along the lines of the 1962 Geneva Accords, and the prevention of enemy incursions into RLG territory, were to be pursued. In addition, MR II forces were tasked with conducting spoiling actions in enemy rear areas, and inflicting maximum practicable casualties on the enemy.

(S) [REDACTED] Irregular forces were not in a good position at the start of the 1970-71 dry season, having sustained heavy casualties over the years of fighting in northern Laos. In view of the weakened condition of friendly forces, a strategy of de-escalation was considered. Such a strategy, though desirable in principal, was rejected as unworkable and unrealistic. ^{128/} Ambassador Godley summarized: ^{129/}

. . . The Vientiane country team does not believe that Hanoi would be encouraged to lower the level of hostilities in north Laos if we forced the RLG forces to limit their mobility and form a defensive ring around Long Tieng. We believe on the contrary that the communist adversary will

[REDACTED]

negotiate only when the cost of achieving his objectives by military means is higher than he is willing to pay. Conversely we are convinced that he will exploit mercilessly any sign of military weakness or indecision on the part of friendly forces. Particularly at the present time when there is an increasing possibility that talks between the Laos factions will actually occur, it is extremely important to help the Souvanna government to work from a position that has not been completely whittled away by communist military actions. Souvanna is an excellent negotiator but whatever slight chance he has to reach a viable compromise with the communists would be utterly destroyed if RLG military forces were pushed out of Long Tieng.

(S) [REDACTED] Large portions of MR I in northernmost Laos had gradually been wrested from the RLG and were under the control of Chinese, North Vietnamese, and Pathet Lao forces. Communist strategy in the area was traditionally aimed at whittling away areas controlled by friendly forces and eliminating RLG influence throughout the region. Government forces in the area were totally inadequate to cope with the threat, and the strategy during the 1970-71 dry season was aimed at limiting the erosion of government positions and improving intelligence gathering capabilities in the area. Small scale operations were planned in an attempt to keep the enemy off balance, but there was no capability to mount major operations in the area. ^{130/}

(S) [REDACTED] MR III was south of MR II in Laos, and sat astride the northern half of the enemy's infiltration system. Enemy intentions in the area were primarily related to maintenance of his

[REDACTED]

logistics system. During the 1970-71 dry season, RLG irregular forces were to conduct a number of interdiction operations (up to multi-battalion size) against the western portions of the enemy's LOC. They were also to assist the FAR if enemy activity threatened RLG controlled areas in the region. 131/

(S) [REDACTED] The most difficult situation to be faced by RLG forces during the dry season was expected to be in MR IV, which was situated in southernmost Laos where the enemy's vital LOC network exited into South Vietnam and Cambodia. The consensus in the Vientiane Mission was that events in Cambodia would force the enemy to strengthen and possibly expand his LOC throughout the Laotian panhandle. It was considered likely that the enemy would seek to develop a new route through the strategic Bolovens Plateau area into Cambodia. Friendly strategy for the dry season in MR IV was twofold: effective defense of the Bolovens Plateau, and interdiction of the flow of supplies through the enemy's western route structure to Cambodia and South Vietnam. 132/

(S) [REDACTED] MR V was located in northern Laos in a pocket to the south of MRs I and II, and contained the administrative capital, Vientiane. (The Royal capital of Laos was Luang Prabang, where the king resided.) Enemy activity in the area was expected to take the form of small harassing actions or raids, and friendly forces were considered capable of handling the threat. Emphasis was to be placed on patrolling and security operations of a preventive nature. 133/

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2. (S) [REDACTED] (U) Operations

a. (S) [REDACTED] (U) Summary of the Ground War.

1) (S) [REDACTED] MR I. At the end of the 1970-71 dry season, friendly and enemy controlled territory showed little change from positions held a year earlier. Events in the region generally followed the patterns of earlier dry seasons, with one major exception: for the first time, enemy forces posed a serious threat against Luang Prabang, military headquarters of MR I, and residence of the King of Laos. In previous dry seasons, the enemy had engaged in harassment in the Luang Prabang area and shelled its airfield, but the scope of enemy activities in the area during CH V far exceeded those of earlier dry seasons. ^{134/}

(S) [REDACTED] Enemy intentions in the Luang Prabang area during CH V were not clear. However, it seemed that his strategy was not to take the city itself, but to drain RLG strength from other areas in Laos and to force the RLG to negotiate from a position of disadvantage rather than strength. A direct attack on the city would probably have had serious repercussions for the NVA, since the Lao (including the Pathet Lao) were devoted to their King. On the other hand, because of this devotion, the Lao would be willing to employ almost any means necessary to defend the town, even if it meant seriously jeopardizing the defense of other important positions in Laos. This proved true during the dry season as the RLG reinforced the Luang Prabang area with several thousand troops. Though these forces were eventually

successful in expanding the friendly perimeter, thereby reducing the enemy threat to the city, they seriously drained RLG assets which were badly needed in other areas of Laos. ^{135/}

2) (S) ~~████████~~ MR II. For several years irregular forces in MR II, led by Major General Vang Pao, had occupied strategic blocking positions between NVA forces and the Vientiane plain. Though seriously outnumbered, they had been able to maintain their positions in the vicinity of the Plaine Des Jarres and exact a high toll of enemy resources in the region.

(S) ~~████████~~ Typically, enemy activities and the extent of his encroachment upon RLG territory peaked near the end of the dry season, while friendly gains crested near the end of the wet season. During the 1969-70 dry season the Communist offensive had surged to the ridges overlooking Long Tieng before it was turned back. During the 1970 wet season, however, friendly gains had been unusually modest, and by its end the enemy was in a more advanced position to launch his offensives than ever before. The situation did not look encouraging in MR II at the beginning of the 1970-71 dry season, and it was feared that Long Tieng might fall to the enemy. If it did, it could eliminate the presence of the irregular forces as an effective blocking force, which in turn would give the NVA virtual control of northern Laos. ^{136/}

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(S) ~~████████~~ It was uncertain whether the enemy intended to overrun Long Tieng and to eliminate the irregulars as a fighting force, or whether his intention was only to maintain heavy pressure against them throughout the dry season. Whatever his intentions, the enemy's activities during the first half of the dry season were ominous. By early February, only a handful of strategic friendly positions remained, and enemy sapper companies executed a damaging ground attack against Long Tieng itself on 13 February. Further enemy attacks against Long Tieng, however, did not materialize, and friendly forces in the area were reinforced. Reinforcements, the increasingly effective employment of artillery, and the advantage of close air support (enhanced by a surge in RLAF and USAF sorties), were among the factors that enabled the friendly forces to maintain their hold on the remaining critical positions in the area. By the end of the dry season, enemy forces had pushed the friendly forces back to the last few strategic sites defending the Long Tieng complex, and had maintained constant pressure on Vang Pao's irregulars. However, the Long Tieng complex held, and the viability of the irregulars as an effective fighting force was maintained. ^{137/}

3) (S) ~~████████~~ MR III. During the dry season, friendly activities in MR III were to involve multi-battalion operations into the enemy's infiltration system, as well as defense of RLG controlled territory. Irregular forces conducted three major interdiction operations against the Ho Chi Minh Trail during CH V: Operations GAUNTLET,

~~SECRET~~

SILVER BUCKLE, and DESERT RAT. ^{138/} These operations were of relatively short duration (about one month each) and depended on mobility, surprise, and air support for their success.

(S) ~~SECRET~~ Operation GAUNTLET, Phase II*, initiated on 20 October, was directed against enemy LOC west and south of Tchepone. In the operation, six guerrilla battalions (over 1,600 men total strength) mined key intersections and route segments in the area, ambushed enemy traffic, and pinpointed enemy targets for air strikes (the majority provided by RLAFF T-28 sorties). The operation officially ended on 13 November 1970, after heavy casualties had been inflicted on enemy forces massing against GAUNTLET units. ^{139/}

(S) ~~SECRET~~ Operation SILVER BUCKLE began on 12 January 1971, and had as its objective the interdiction, mining, and disruption of enemy LOC in an area of the Ho Chi Minh Trail about 35 nautical miles (NM) south of Tchepone. Additionally, it was hoped that the four-battalion force would be able to locate lucrative targets for air strikes. USAF helicopters airlifted the troops into the area and the USAF provided the majority of tactical air strikes supporting the operation. Enemy reaction was at first very light, but after several weeks it increased markedly. The operation was officially ended on 11 February, after friendly ground forces had made their way overland to RLG positions to the west.

**Phase I was conducted during the rainy season in the Bolovens Plateau area (MR IV) and terminated near the end of September.*

~~SECRET~~

(S) ~~██████████~~ SILVER BUCKLE apparently did not produce results commensurate with its size, and most aircrews reported little BDA for their strikes. Dense foliage in the area was probably the primary factor influencing the unimpressive results. Because of the dense jungle foliage and rugged terrain in the area, ground teams had difficulty in passing target coordinates, and aircrews had a hard time assessing strike results. ^{140/}

(S) ~~██████████~~ Operation DESERT RAT was launched on 16 February with a USAF helicopter airlift of a four-battalion irregular force into an area near Route 23 about eight NM south of Muong Phine. The objective of the operation was to interdict and mine Routes 23 and 238 and to block or disrupt traffic forced west by the Lam Son incursion. If the enemy decided to use these routes, he would first have to mount an operation to remove the DESERT RAT forces from the area. Air support of the operation was provided primarily by the RLAF, and coordination between air and ground units during the operation was particularly good. Lucrative targets located by ground units were passed to RLAF pilots and were struck rapidly, yielding favorable results. After mining, cratering, obstructing, and occupying Routes 23 and 238 for several weeks, and conducting numerous ambushes of truck convoys in the area, the task force moved north through Muong Phine and fought its way west toward friendly positions. ^{141/}

(S) ~~██████████~~ While irregulars were engaged in operations against the enemy's infiltration system, other government forces were

battling the enemy in the Muong Phalane vicinity. The city changed hands a number of times during the dry season, but in early May an overwhelming enemy force moved into the area and forced the FAR to withdraw west towards Dong Hene. The enemy force unexpectedly continued its advance and by the middle of May had captured Dong Hene. Intelligence analysts believed the enemy's westward drive was designed to forestall a future repetition of the RLG dry season interdiction operations against his infiltration system. The enemy actions, however, could also have been aimed at westward expansion of his route structure in reaction to the threat caused by Lam Son 719, or possible future RVNAF incursions. Whatever the causes, the enemy movement west in MR III near the end of the dry season again placed RLG military forces in the area in a particularly precarious position.^{142/}

4) (S) ~~SECRET~~ MR IV. Activity in MR IV during the dry season was related to two RLG objectives: harassment of the western portion of the enemy's infiltration system, and defense of RLG positions on the Bolovens Plateau. Irregular ambush teams, using the Bolovens Plateau as their staging point, conducted truck, boat, and patrol ambushes throughout the dry season. By April, forces defending friendly positions on the Bolovens were forced to fall back to strongholds on the western portion of the plateau, but it appeared that enemy gains on the plateau were not unusual for a normal wet season offensive. Additionally, Saravane, a key town which had been captured

[REDACTED]

by the enemy during the 1970 wet season, again came under government control during the 1970-71 dry season. Unfortunately, the tolerable military situation in MR IV changed dramatically during May 1971, when the enemy forced RLG forces from their blocking positions on the Bolovens and captured the key town of Paksong. With the fall of the Bolovens Plateau, the path was cleared for an enemy attack against Pakse, the MR IV provincial capital on the Mekong. These attacks coincided with the westward push of NVA forces to Dong Hene in MR III.

(S) [REDACTED] The situation in southern Laos looked bleak. The attacks there during May were apparently designed to drive RLG forces farther west from the enemy's infiltration corridor, and even if additional NVA attacks did not materialize, the prospects were dim for future RLG operations against the Ho Chi Minh Trail in MR IV. RLG officials expressed alarm and designated the recapture of Paksong and nearby positions as the priority objective in southern Laos.

143/

5) (S) [REDACTED] MR V. There were no significant or unusual military developments in MR V during the dry season.

b. (S) [REDACTED] (U) USAF Support of Friendly Forces, New or Significant Developments.

1) (S) [REDACTED] Reduction of U.S. Forces. The drastic cutback in the level of TAC AIR was the biggest change in USAF support of RLG forces during the 1970-71 dry season. USAF sorties

[REDACTED]

SECRET

flown in support of RLG forces in northern Laos dropped from 114 a day during CH III to 38 per day in CH V. Although USAF air strikes continued to play an important role in the ground war, their influence on the ground situation was less than during the previous year. Two factors, however, helped to offset the reduced sortie level: there was a sharp increase in RLAF T-28 and AC-47 sorties during the dry season, and the USAF effort was better applied and tailored more to the needs of the ground forces than during previous years. ^{144/}

a) (S) **[REDACTED]** Increased Role of the RLAF. During the 1970-71 dry season, the majority of sorties flown in support of ground forces were provided by the RLAF, which was much improved compared to previous years. The RLAF AC-47 gunships "flew more frequently, flew further from their bases, and achieved a greater effectiveness supporting ground troops." ^{145/} The T-28 pilots also did an outstanding job. During the dry season, T-28 sortie rates peaked at more than 100 flown per day, an impressive figure considering that the RLAF had but 40 pilots and an average of only 36 operationally ready aircraft. Even though the T-28s carried small bomb loads, the aggressiveness and pinpoint accuracy of their pilots made them the favorite close air support aircraft of the ground forces. ^{146/}

b) (S) **[REDACTED]** Changes in USAF Support. With the low level of USAF air support during CH V, greater efforts were made to apply the few available sorties in the most efficient and effective manner possible. The number of RAVEN FACs was increased, and as a

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[REDACTED]

result USAF air strikes were better controlled. The RAVENS also made important contributions as fire adjusters for increasingly effective friendly artillery. Improved munitions were used by USAF aircraft supporting RLG forces, and the USAF all-weather capability in BARREL ROLL was enhanced by improvements in LORAN targeting procedures and increased radar coverage of northern Laos. Finally, a technique which had been tried on earlier occasions in Laos was reestablished during CH V: F-4s on alert at Udorn RTAFB provided a quick reaction capability for strikes against lucrative perishable targets, or for support of unanticipated critical situations. The Quick Reaction Force (QRF) was considered effective, and was maintained throughout CH V. ^{147/}

(S) [REDACTED] Another significant development during CH V was the allocation of most USAF tactical air in northern Laos to the close air support rather than interdiction role. During the CH V dry season in northern Laos, the great majority of available USAF sorties were directed to critical areas in the vicinity of friendly positions. There were not enough air assets to devote to both interdiction of the enemy's logistics system supporting northern Laos, and air support of friendly forces in the battle area. In the face of enemy advances towards the Long Tieng complex in early February, the Air Attache established a Designated Battle Area (DBA) into which almost all tactical air was directed. B-52 strikes, however, continued to be allocated to interdiction points in the PDJ vicinity, and a few

TAC AIR sorties continued to strike the most lucrative targets in the area.

(S) [REDACTED] The DBA was formed around key RLG strongholds in MR II, and the concentration of available TAC AIR in that area was considered essential to the survival of irregular forces in northern Laos. Even if devotion of air support to this relatively small area should produce less reported bomb damage than strikes against other areas, it was still considered a valid tactic by those closest to the ground war. ^{148/} The AIRA explained: ^{149/}

Washington has said they want the . . . complex held--Long Tieng, Sam Tong, LS-15.*
. . . we developed what we call a priority area of responsibility. We've drawn a perimeter around these complexes that encompass most of the major headquarters areas--it encompasses the range of the 122s,** the 85s,*** the mortars and this sort of thing. I feel the only contribution the Air Force can make is to pound that area all day long. . . . if we can keep their heads down in the daytime, so they can't get into position and do the night work, . . . and have the gunships and flareships up at night to let them not forget that air is overhead, sun-up, sun-down; sundown to sunup, I don't know of any other contribution the AF can make. They have enough supplies in the area right now to fight through the rest of the dry season.

*LS - Lima Site.

**122mm rockets.

***85mm artillery.

[REDACTED]

. . . I can't overemphasize the name of the game is keep their heads down. . . . All we are trying to do in the confines of that priority area is slow them down, keep them in their caves, restrict their movements, kill a few of them, knock out weapons, particularly their mortars and their 85s and 122s, pound at those things so that when the rain comes the property belongs to us. . . .

(S) [REDACTED] Not everyone agreed, however, with the emphasis on strikes in the battlefield area to the exclusion of a sizeable interdiction effort. The wings were anxious to hit targets for which results could be directly observed. The AC-119 gunship crews, for example, were frustrated standing by over the DBA night after night while lucrative targets went unstruck to the east of the battle area.* On most occasions the gunships were required to fly their orbit over the DBA, even though the situation on the ground may have been relatively quiet. From the point of view of the aircrews this represented a misuse of their weapon system, which was specially configured for truck-killing operations. To the troops on the ground, however, the mere presence of gunships overhead was important because it bolstered friendly morale and discouraged enemy attacks.^{150/}

2) (S) [REDACTED] The Role of the Fast Mover. The primary USAF fighter used to support RLG ground forces in Laos during CH V

**On some occasions the gunships were allowed to leave the DBA and search for trucks as long as they stayed close enough to respond to Troops in Contact situations within 10 minutes.*

was the F-4. Only a third of the A-1 resources employed in Laos during CH III were available during the 1970-71 dry season, and most of these were used in support of covert CAS operations, or for Search and Rescue (SAR) support. The F-4, therefore, had to provide the bulk of USAF support of RLG forces. It performed a variety of missions, varying from close air support of Troops in Contact (TIC) to LOC interdiction. There was general agreement that the F-4 was effective in its flak suppression, quick reaction, and interdiction roles, where its high speed and heavy ordnance load worked to its advantage, and that it provided an all-weather capability not possessed by the T-28s. Agreement concerning its effectiveness in close proximity to friendly forces, however, was less than unanimous. For close air support, ground forces preferred slow movers--the A-1s or T-28s--rather than the F-4.^{151/} Ambassador Godley expressed the feeling of the Vientiane mission in the previously quoted 14 September 1970 message:^{152/}

Withdrawal of the A-1 units* places the Laos Mission in the position of not possessing a single U.S. air weapons system available with the characteristics necessary for mission objectives for TAC AIR in the Laos ground war.

. . . The F-4 fleet, operating under current release altitude restrictions, does not possess sufficient delivery accuracy for employment in close proximity to friendlies. The Mission has proposed a program for F-4s utilizing low level release of high drag

**One A-1 squadron was retained at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, and two were deactivated.*

[REDACTED]

weaponry in permissive areas which may partially alleviate the problem.* Inherent jet aircraft performance factors do not permit continuous observation of a small target or long loiter capability, thus will not satisfactorily replace the A-1 system.

(S) **[REDACTED]** There was concern, especially during the first half of the 1970-71 dry season, that aircraft from some F-4 wings were not coming in low enough to provide the type of close air support needed by the ground forces. Some wing commanders wanted to press in on targets aggressively, at low altitudes, while others believed that safer delivery altitudes were just as effective. The Air Attache expressed his concern in this matter and stated that different wings had different policies concerning delivery tactics and altitudes, but that in his opinion most of those policies sacrificed too much accuracy. Further, CAS officials felt that operating restrictions, imposed in the interest of safety and oriented to the AAA threat in STEEL TIGER, were overly restrictive for the areas in which friendly troops were operating, and did not permit the F-4s to realize their maximum potential in the close air support role. One CAS official commented, however, that these restrictions were eased somewhat during the second half of the dry season, and that the fighters began to come in lower. ^{153/}

**High drag bombs and napalm ("snake and nape") were delivered by F-4s throughout the 1970-71 dry season.*

~~SECRET~~

(S) ~~██████████~~ As far as the RAVENS and ground Forward Air Guides (FAGs) were concerned, however, they preferred to have a "slow mover" for close air support. The situation was aggravated by a short round incident in which an F-4 delivered CBU anti-personnel munitions, well off target, into the American compound during an enemy sapper attack against Long Tieng. The bomblets had friendlies pinned down in the area for nearly an hour, and caused considerable confusion and damage. News of the incident spread quickly among Laotian forces, and further eroded their confidence in the F-4 as a close air support system. 154/

(S) ~~██████████~~ Following the incident, a senior CAS official with seven years experience in Laos commented that the Long Tieng incident was just an isolated accident which should not have been important in itself, but that its widespread dissemination through the "Bamboo Telegraph" had caused a confidence problem among the Lao. He hoped the Lao forward air guides could eventually "be brought back to the point where they can use the F-4s--if not within 50 meters, at least within a thousand meters." 155/ At the same time, however, he hastened to point out the unchallenged value of the F-4 in a variety of other missions: 156/

. . . we who supervise the Laos paramilitary effort feel that the fast movers are certainly valuable for--if not necessarily close support, until we break down the ground FAGs' opinion of us--at least for troop concentrations, area weaponry. The T-28s, of course, in pin-point bombing are superb. . . . but all the other targets require area work, and this is where the F-4s are great. .

~~SECRET~~

. . . What the AF has to do is cover those targets that require area bombing with the heavy fighters, and of course, as the AAA moves in as a threat against the RAVENS and Tiao Pha Kaoas [T-28s] the AF has to take care of this. And they are doing just fine.

3. (S) ~~SECRET~~ (U) Results

(S) ~~SECRET~~ At the end of the 1970-71 dry season, there had been little change in the amount of territory controlled by the RLG in northern Laos as compared with the situation a year earlier, and the viability of irregular forces in the area had been maintained. In southern Laos the picture was less favorable, particularly in MR IV where Communist forces gained control of the strategic Bolovens Plateau. Nevertheless, the RLG forces there had survived another dry season, and were preparing to recoup some of their losses. Throughout Laos, most friendly forces remained intact and most key areas held by the RLG at the end of the previous dry season were still under government control. That the RLG forces had been able to do as well as they did was attributed in large part to RLAF and USAF air support. ^{157/}

a. (S) ~~SECRET~~ (U) USAF Sortie Allocation.

(S) ~~SECRET~~ The bulk of USAF support of RLG forces was applied in BARREL ROLL (northern Laos). USAF support in BR was anticipated

to be about 30 sorties per day, with a surge capability during critical periods. This amounted to about 6 percent of the U.S. attack sorties authorized in SEA. A sortie level was not established for USAF support of forces in southern Laos. This support was provided, as needed, from STEEL TIGER sortie allocations. ^{158/}

(S) [REDACTED] During the first half of the dry season, a daily average of 36 USAF strike sorties (F-4 and A-1) were scheduled into BR. Because of bad weather, cancellations, and diverts, only about two-thirds of these were "effective sorties," i.e., were actually flown and delivered ordnance. In early February, the widespread enemy offensive caused both the USAF and RLAF to surge their sortie rates in northern Laos. Scheduled USAF support for BR during the surge (10 February-31 April 1971) jumped to 56 sorties per day. Furthermore, due to an increase in the use of all-weather bombing techniques during the surge period, nearly 90 percent of the sorties scheduled were "effective." Table 9 lists the "effective" strike sorties flown in BR during CH V, by aircraft type, compared to those flown during CH III. ^{159/}

b. (S) [REDACTED] (U) BDA.

(S) [REDACTED] During CH V, USAF air support of RLG forces continued to play an essential role in the ground war, although accurate measurement of strike results was not possible. The results reported for USAF strikes in BR during CH V and CH III are shown in Table 10, but they are at best only crude estimates. ^{160/} The difficulty of quantifying strike results during the 1970-71 dry season was

TABLE 9

USAF TAC AIR ATTACK SORTIES IN BR, CH III/CH V (U)

	<u>F-4</u>	<u>A-1</u>	<u>F-105</u>	<u>Gunships</u>	<u>Total</u>
Nov	1429/438*	517/278	979/0	154/59	3079/775
Dec	1522/641	551/192	1043/0	164/80	3280/913
Jan	1584/591	574/108	1086/0	171/67	3415/766
Feb	1865/932	675/90	1278/0	201/74	4019/1096
Mar	1604/1479	581/140	1100/0	173/109	3458/1728
Apr	1632/1407	591/122	1119/0	176/122	3519/1651
Total	9636/5488	3489/930	6605/0	1039/538	20796/6929

*CH III sorties/CH V sorties.

Source: Report, Statistical Summary: BARREL ROLL, COMMANDO HUNT V, COMMANDO HUNT III (U), 7/13AF, May 71, p. 23. (S)



TABLE 10
BDA FOR USAF STRIKES IN BARREL ROLL (U)

	<u>CH III</u>	<u>CH V</u>
Secondary Explosions	13,238	6,020
Secondary Fires	4,890	935
Killed By Air	2,936	882
AAA Guns D/D*	266	202
Trucks D/D*	1,157	998

**Destroyed or Damaged.*

Source: Report, Statistical Summary: BARREL ROLL, COMMANDO HUNT V, COMMANDO HUNT III (U), 7/13AF, May 71, p. 25. (S)



[REDACTED]

increased by the nature of the targets struck. Most USAF strikes in support of RLG forces during CH V were aimed at restricting enemy movement and activities within the battlefield area, rather than interdicting the enemy's logistics system supporting his troops. Therefore, such things as suspected enemy locations or antiaircraft/automatic weapons positions were more likely to be targets than were enemy LOC, storage areas, or trucks. Results of strikes against the former were often unobservable. For example, strikes against suspected enemy locations or provision of gunship presence over the battlefield area were less likely to produce directly observable results than striking enemy LOC or trucks. ^{161/}

(S) [REDACTED] Aircrews preferred hitting targets for which they could see positive results, and they voiced concern that strikes in the battlefield area were not yielding the BDA attainable in other areas. CAS officials, however, expressed confidence that the strikes against targets in the battlefield area were yielding solid results, even though accurate BDA for these strikes was not obtained. One senior CAS official commented: ^{162/}

Airpower is killing the enemy . . . but we can't put a quantitative value on [it]. . . . I think that air power is reducing the potential of the enemy to a great extent; to what extent, I can't define. I'm absolutely sure that we're really hurting them badly with air power. . . .

That's BDA, really, a long term analysis of enemy capabilities. He should have been able to invest Ban Na. He should have been able to overrun the

SECRET

LS 72* area. They haven't been able to. This is a negative approach, but in my opinion, it's air power that's done it. In fact, I'm absolutely sure of it.

(S) [REDACTED] Whether or not concentration of strikes into the battlefield area resulted in the maximum damage to the enemy and represented the most effective use of air power was debatable. To those most directly concerned with the ground war, however, the real effectiveness of USAF support was better reflected by the successful defense of friendly controlled areas and protection of friendly forces than it was by such statistics as secondary explosions/fires, road cuts, and trucks destroyed/damaged. The Air Attache expressed strong feelings that too much stress was being placed on BDA as opposed to the overall effects of airpower. He emphasized that retaining control of Ban Na, Sam Thong, and Long Tieng at the end of the dry season was the true measure of effectiveness. ^{163/}

c. (S) [REDACTED] (U) RLAF.

(S) [REDACTED] RLAF participation in the ground war during CH V showed an improvement in both the quantity and quality of support provided. For the first time, RLAF sorties consistently exceeded the

*Lima Site.

[REDACTED]

monthly totals flown by USAF aircraft. Table 11 reflects the marked increase in the level of support provided by RLAF T-28 and AC-47 aircraft during the 1970-71 dry season as compared to the previous year. Especially significant was the RLAF surge during the critical February through April 1971 time period in which NVA offensives were at their peak. During those months RLAF T-28 sortie rates throughout Laos exceeded 100 per day, more than doubling their CH III rate. RLAF AC-47 gunship sorties also peaked during the period, averaging well over 200 per month. ^{164/}

(S) [REDACTED] Just as important as the quantity was the quality of air support provided by the RLAF. The RLAF T-28 pilots were dedicated, skilled, and courageous. Their pinpoint accuracy and aggressive low altitude bombing and strafing gave them a reputation in close air support which was unexcelled. Although they lacked an all-weather capability and carried much smaller bomb loads than USAF fighters, the T-28s played an increasingly important and effective role in support of RLG forces during the dry season.

(S) [REDACTED] Complementing the daytime T-28 strikes, RLAF AC-47 gunships provided coverage for friendly forces at night. During the 1970-71 dry season, there was a tremendous improvement in the

SECRET

TABLE 11
RLAF ATTACK SORTIES (U)

	T-28		Gunship	
	<u>CH III</u>	<u>CH V</u>	<u>CH III</u>	<u>CH V</u>
Oct (69/70)	1476*	2744	--	103
Nov (69/70)	1476*	2138	--	120
Dec (69/70)	1476*	1964	--	187
Jan (70/71)	1024	1911	28	110
Feb (70/71)	1542	3413	38	202
Mar (70/71)	1693	3508	20	249
Apr (70/71)	1771	2739	30	205

**Sortie rate not available by month for CY 4/69. Figures shown are the total CY 4/69 sorties (4,427) divided by 3.*

Source: Report, USAF Management Summary Southeast Asia (U), USAF, 19 Jan 71 and 21 May 71 editions. (S)

SECRET

[REDACTED]

effectiveness of RLAF AC-47 support. With the help of a USAF advisor, the gunship crews evolved from an unmotivated, disorganized, and ineffective group at the beginning of the dry season, to a dedicated and capable group by its end. The performance of the RLAF T-28s and AC-47s, particularly during the critical February through April months, was a major factor in the preservation of friendly forces and positions during the height of the Communist offensive. ^{165/}

(S) [REDACTED] Although the RLAF successfully assumed a greater portion of the close air support burden during the 1970-71 dry season, it was recognized that their capacity for continued improvement and expansion was limited. ^{166/} RLAF resources were stretched to the limit to reach the sortie rates attained during CH V. Greater sortie rates would require provision of more aircraft, training of more Lao pilots, and additional U.S. maintenance personnel. Furthermore, the capacity of the T-28 to assume the roles previously carried out by higher performance U.S. aircraft was limited by its small bomb load and lack of an all-weather capability.

(S) [REDACTED] Over and above these problems, another major obstacle blocked the path to RLAF self-sufficiency--airfield security. Throughout the years of war in Laos, RLAF airfields had been periodically subjected to costly mortar and sapper attacks. No airfield was secure, ^{167/} and if the RLAF were to expand and successfully assume the entire burden of air support, airfields would become a prime target for sabotage, standoff, or sapper attacks. If the NVA decided to

[REDACTED]

eliminate the RLAF, it was doubtful that the RLAF could continue to operate from Lao airfields without suffering excessive losses.

[REDACTED]

D. S. [REDACTED] (U) LAM SON 719

1. [REDACTED] (U) Concepts, Planning and Tactics

a. (S) [REDACTED] (U) Background.

(S) [REDACTED] Lam Son 719, the South Vietnamese incursion into Laos, was a continuation of the overall Allied strategy of attacking all elements of the enemy's infiltration system. As noted previously, the fall of the Sihanouk regime denied the Communists the use of the port of Kompong Som. The joint U.S./Vietnamese sweep into Cambodia beginning in April 1970, together with subsequent RVNAF ground/air and U.S. air operations, deprived the enemy of large quantities of captured/destroyed supplies, and ended his unchallenged use of sanctuaries along the Cambodian/SVN border. MARKET TIME operations, the joint U.S./Vietnamese naval barrier, kept Communist infiltration into SVN by sea at a low level. Thus, events during 1970 made the enemy increasingly dependent upon his LOC through Laos. The enemy's Laotian infiltration system had to function effectively if he were to adequately support his forces in South Vietnam and Cambodia. ^{168/}

(U) President Richard M. Nixon summarized the situation in a February 1971 report to the congress: ^{169/}

Southern Laos became critical to Hanoi after the allied Cambodian operations deprived it of the port of Sihanoukville and the border sanctuaries. They swelled their forces in the area by more than 25,000, captured the towns of Saravane and Attopeu, and intensively built up their supplies and their logistics network. Whereas for years southern Laos

~~SECRET~~

had been central to Hanoi's operations in northern South Vietnam, at the end of 1970 it was becoming the hub and cross-roads of Hanoi's campaigns throughout Indochina. Almost all of its men and supplies were now flowing through this area. . . . Hanoi deepened the area's part in the Vietnam war, with direct implications for Vietnamization and our withdrawals.

(S) ~~SECRET~~ Recognizing the importance of the Communists' infiltration efforts during the 1970-71 dry season, the United States continued with renewed vigor its air interdiction program of previous years. It had long been recognized, however, that air interdiction alone could not choke off the maze of roads and trails in the Communists' Laotian infiltration network. In view of the value of ground interdiction operations, and considering the critical importance of the Communists' network in southern Laos, an RVNAF strike was planned against the heart of the infiltration system. ^{170/}

(S) ~~SECRET~~ Although Lam Son 719 was an important operation, it was but one of several Allied air, ground, and sea efforts against the different parts of the enemy's infiltration system. It was a large operation, but not unprecedented from the standpoint of numbers of friendly forces involved. It was actually much smaller than the U.S./Vietnamese incursion into Cambodia a year earlier, ^{171/} and was in fact but one of two major RVNAF cross-border ground operations being undertaken almost simultaneously against the enemy's logistics system. On 4 February 1971, a 20,000-man RVNAF force

[REDACTED]

launched a drive into Cambodia along Route 7. This operation, TOAN THANG 1/71, was directed against Communist border sanctuaries and logistics activities. It received little attention, even though both sides eventually suffered heavy casualties during the course of the operation.^{172/} A few days later, on 8 February, RVNAF forces launched Lam Son 719, a drive along Route 9 into the Laotian panhandle. RVNAF strength in Laos peaked at 17,000 during operation Lam Son 719, yet it was this operation, not the larger TOAN THANG 1/71, which was to receive universal attention.^{173/} A number of factors made Lam Son 719 important, and focused Allied, enemy, and world-wide attention on it.

(S) [REDACTED] First, the RVNAF incursion into Laos, in addition to its short-term logistics implications, was important in that it could set a precedent for further RVNAF operations in Laos. As was the case for the Cambodian incursion a year earlier, the Laotian incursion was a "first." It was a departure from the earlier Allied policy of at least superficial adherence to the Geneva Accords regarding ground operations in Laos; and the possible enemy reactions to the operation, both short and long term, were unpredictable and subject to widespread speculation. This tended to focus attention on the operation.

(S) [REDACTED] In addition, though not necessarily intended by the planners, the RVNAF incursion into Laos came to be widely viewed as a test case for the progress of Vietnamization. As in concurrent RVNAF operations in Cambodia, no U.S. ground forces or advisors would accompany

South Vietnamese troops beyond the borders of South Vietnam. Though the U.S. would provide air support, the Vietnamese were on their own on the ground. They were going into an area of critical importance which had long been occupied by enemy forces. Furthermore, unlike earlier operations in Cambodia, the enemy's logistics lines to the battlefield were short, and supplies and reinforcements would be readily available. If the South Vietnamese could make a good showing under such circumstances, it would be a demonstration of real progress in Vietnamization. On the other hand, if the South Vietnamese were to suffer a disastrous defeat, the whole Vietnamization program could be jeopardized. ^{174/}

b. (S) ~~██████████~~ (U) Combined Operation.

(S) ~~██████████~~ Lam Son 719 was a combined operation of RVNAF/ U.S. forces, with U.S. forces in a support and advisory role. There was no single commander of the forces involved in the operation. RVNAF forces were under the command of Lt General Hoang Xuan Lam, the Commanding General of Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) I Corps. General Lam was in charge of the operation, though he did not, of course, command U.S. forces. General Creighton W. Abrams, as COMUSMACV, commanded all U.S. forces supporting the operation. Again, the U.S. role was unquestionably one of support and advice, and at times major decisions were made and executed without the advice or coordination of U.S. representatives. Further complicating matters, General Lam reported directly to President Nguyen Van Thieu, who on several occasions became intimately involved in major decisions regarding the operation. ^{175/}

[REDACTED]

(S) [REDACTED] Army units under the command of Lt General James W. Sutherland, Commanding General of U.S. Army XXIV Corps, were to provide artillery, air mobility, and logistics support to the Laotian operation from within SVN, and were also to provide blocking forces in case of a major enemy reaction across the DMZ into northern SVN. All U.S. helicopter support for Operation Lam Son 719, except for very limited USAF SAR efforts, was to be provided by the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile). Organic assets of the 101st were supplemented by aviation and air cavalry units from other Army divisions throughout SVN. These additional air resources were placed under operational control of the 101st. They did not come under the single management concept, but were managed independently by the Army. ^{176/}

(S) [REDACTED] The Commander of 7AF, General Lucius D. Clay, Jr., was in command of USAF forces supporting the operation. In addition, under the single management concept, U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps air resources were also under the direction of General Clay in his role as DEPCOMUSMACV for Air Operations. ^{177/}

(S) [REDACTED] Participation of U.S. forces in Lam Son 719 closely paralleled U.S. support of concurrent Allied operations in Cambodia. In both cases RVNAF forces were on their own on the ground, and no U.S. ground forces or advisors were allowed to go beyond the borders of SVN. In both cases, RVNAF forces were supported by USAF and Army air resources (though air support was more extensive for

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Lam Son 719). In both cases, U.S. forces were in a support and advisory role. Command and control arrangements for U.S. air resources were also similar, with one important exception: in Cambodian operations, some Army air assets were fragged by the Tactical Air Control Center Network and thus were under the management of DEPCOMUSMACV for Air, ^{178/} while in Lam Son 719, they were not; they were totally independent.

c. [REDACTED] (U) Planning.

1) (S) [REDACTED] U.S. Approval. Allied plans for an incursion into Laos had been under consideration for some time, but final approval of the operation did not come until late January 1971. On 19 January 1971, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff announced that the Lam Son 719 operation had been approved, and outlined operational authorities. Laotian Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma and the U.S. State Department had both expressed opposition to the operation. Based upon political considerations, COMUSMACV and CINCPAC had recommended the operation be cancelled. Considering only military factors, however, both COMUSMACV and CINCPAC strongly supported the operation. In the end, United States support of Lam Son 719 was approved, and the first phase of the operation, named DEWEY CANYON II, started on 29 January 1971. ^{179/}

2) (S) [REDACTED] Planning U.S. Air Support. United States air support was a prerequisite to the conduct of Operation Lam Son 719. Although the VNAF was capable of supporting RVNAF operations in Cambodia, the hostile environment in the Laotian panhandle, coupled with aircraft

limitations and limited resources, required additional, extensive air support by U.S. forces.^{180/} Accordingly, heavy reliance was placed on U.S. helicopter and tactical air support during planning for the operation. This dependence of RVNAF forces on U.S. air support created a situation in which coordination between, and joint planning by, the various participating ground and air forces was critical.

(S) In an effort to prevent leaks to the enemy, however, access to information concerning the operation was extremely restricted, and planning staffs were unusually limited. Most of the initial, detailed planning was done on short notice by selected members of U.S. XXIV Corps and ARVN I Corps staffs and a handful of representatives from MACV and 7AF. Even these few 7AF representatives were not brought into planning until 14 January, two weeks before the scheduled start of the operation. As the starting date drew nearer, more 7AF planners became involved, although unusually tight security restrictions remained in effect. Further complicating matters, the Vietnamese commander, General Lam, due primarily to security problems, often did not release details of the operation to planners until the last minute. The high degree of limited access and the last-minute release of information "hampered rather than assisted"^{181/} the operation. Planning suffered from lack of coordination between the various units involved, overestimation of Allied capabilities, and underestimation of the enemy's strength.^{182/}

d. (S) [REDACTED] (U) Objectives/Planned Tactics.

(S) [REDACTED] The primary objective of Lam Son 719 was ground interdiction of the central route structure in southern Laos. This was to be accomplished by executing a rapid air/ground advance astride Route 9 to Tchepone, blocking the major north/south LOC in the vicinity of Tchepone and the junction of Routes 9 and 92, and conducting extensive search and destroy operations throughout the interdicted area (known as Base Area 604). Finally, RVNAF forces were to attack to the southeast, destroying enemy forces and supplies in Base Area 611, located in the vicinity of the A Chau Valley. Duration of the operation was flexible, but it was expected to continue until the beginning of the wet season. ^{183/}

(S) [REDACTED] The two most important factors considered in planning the timing and geographical location of the Laotian incursion were the desires to cause the maximum disruption of the enemy's logistics flow and to take advantage of the most favorable weather. The general time of the operation, January through March, was, therefore, chosen, since that period would coincide with the peak in enemy logistics activities and with the season when the weather was relatively good in Laos and improving in northern SVN. ^{184/} Base Area 604 was selected as the entry point, and Base Area 611 (or alternatively Base Area 604) was chosen as the exit route. The selected entry route, Base Area 604, offered a number of advantages: there was a direct line of communication from South Vietnam (Route 9); it was an area where the roads, trails, and streams of the enemy's logistics system came together within effective range of friendly helicopter

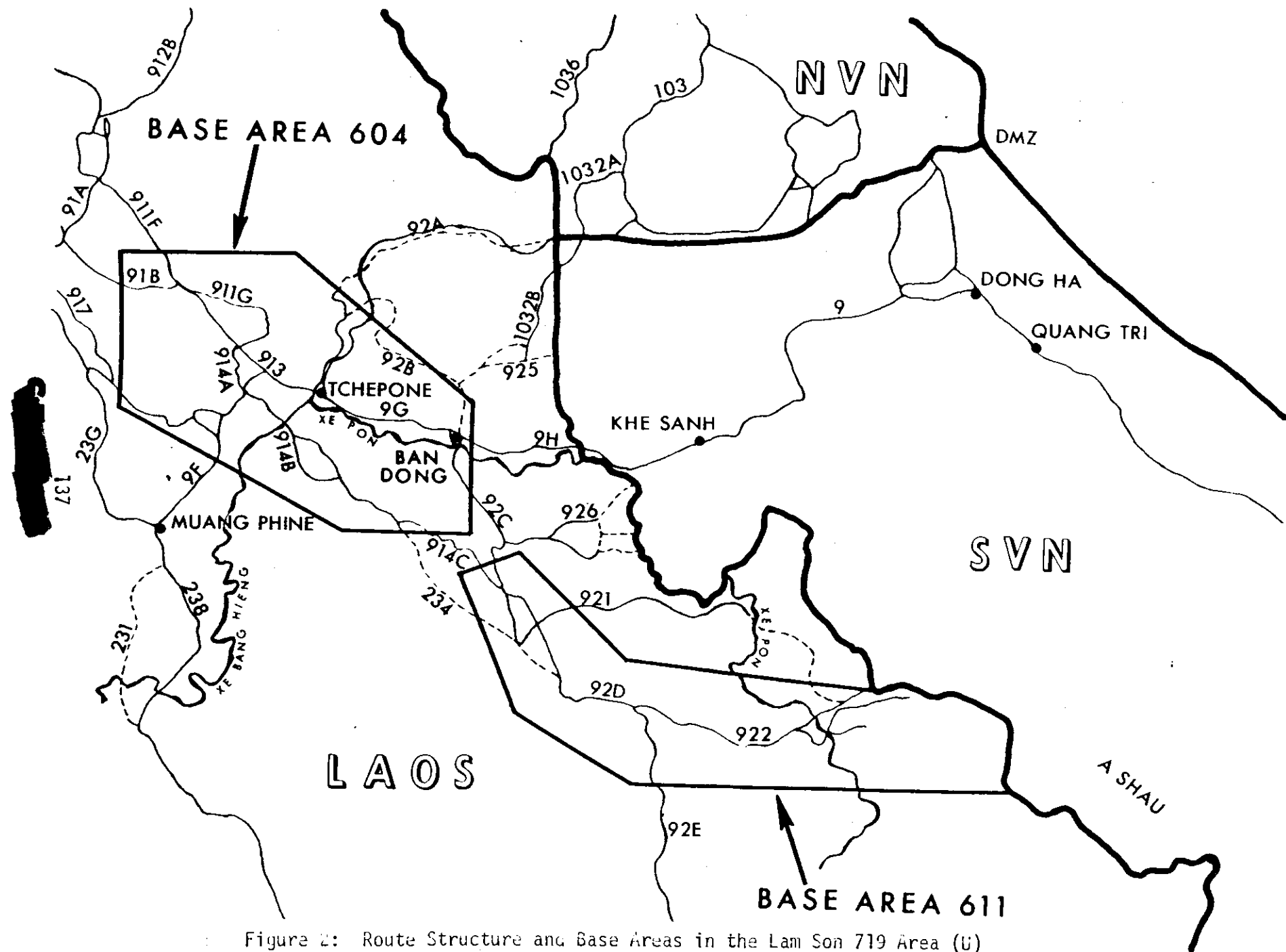


Figure 2: Route Structure and Base Areas in the Lam Son 719 Area (U)

[REDACTED]

support; and, it was in the northern portion of the enemy's system, close to the source of infiltration. The exit route, Base Area 611, was desirable in that it contained large quantities of enemy stockpiles. ^{185/}

(S) [REDACTED] The operation was to be conducted in four phases. Phase I called for the securing of vital LOC in the northern SVN/Laos border area and the deployment of the incursion force to the border. This was to be accomplished in the following manner: United States forces were to clear and secure Route 9 from Dong Ha to the border; secure Khe Sanh and Vandegrift Fire Support Base (FSB); position and cover heavy artillery near the Laos/SVN border; and, in conjunction with RVNAF forces, screen the northern flank along the central and eastern DMZ southward along the Laos/SVN border to the incursion area. ^{186/}

(S) [REDACTED] While these operations were underway, RVNAF forces were to deploy to the border area and position themselves for the drive along Route 9. Many of these forces were in the Saigon area, and a USAF C-130 airlift was planned to move them to Dong Ha/Quang Tri. Nearly ten thousand RVNAF troops were involved, all to be airlifted in a four-day period. In addition, during Phase I several thousand U.S. troops were to be airlifted to Military Region I. Round the clock C-130 operations were planned to accomplish Phase I airlift objectives. After D day plus four, resupply operations from Da Nang and Quang Tri to Khe Sanh were to begin, requiring an estimated 40 to 60 sorties a day for about 90 days. ^{187/}

[REDACTED]

(S) [REDACTED] A number of actions were taken in an attempt to confuse the enemy concerning the intent and location of Lam Son 719. Phase I, the in-country portion of the operation, was referred to as DEWEY CANYON II, thus implying to the enemy that the operation would be in the A Shau Valley area.* To further disguise the friendly intentions, locations in Lam Son 719 area were referred to with the names of locations in the A Shau Valley area. In addition, diversionary friendly activities were initiated in the A Shau area. Phase I of Lam Son 719 was to last from five to eight days. ^{188/}

(S) [REDACTED] Two days prior to the end of Phase I, TAC AIR was to launch a concentrated AAA suppression campaign along Route 9 and in the vicinity of Tchepone. The AAA suppression was expected to require three to seven days. ^{189/}

(S) [REDACTED] Phase II of the operation was to consist of coordinated ground/air mobile attacks into Laos along Route 9 aimed at a rapid (two to three days) seizure of Tchepone. The first objective of ARVN airborne and armored forces attacking along Route 9 was Ban Dong (code name Aloui), at the junction of Routes 9 and 92. After securing Ban Dong, airborne troops were to conduct heliborne operations to seize Tchepone, while ARVN infantry, in a series of heliborne operations, was to secure the high ground south of Route 9 between Ban Dong

*DEWEY CANYON I was an earlier in-country operation in the A Shau Valley area.

[REDACTED]

and Tchepone. Meanwhile, ARVN Rangers were to establish blocking positions north of Route 9 in order to provide security on the northern flank. During Phase II, Vietnamese Marines were to conduct operations south and east of Khe Sanh and, upon order, cross into Laos south of Route 9. 190/

(S) [REDACTED] Phase III was to commence upon capture of Tchepone. In this phase, RVNAF forces were to consolidate their positions and conduct extensive search and destroy operations in Base Area 604. Airborne troops were to establish numerous blocking positions north and south of Tchepone along Routes 9 and 91 to isolate the Tchepone area. ARVN infantry was to conduct search and destroy operations in the area south of the Xepon River near Tchepone, just south of Route 9. During these operations, ARVN Rangers were to continue blocking and screening the northern flank. Tactical air and B-52s were to support all aspects of the operations. The duration of Phase III of the operation was flexible, but it was expected to continue until the end of the dry season. 191/

(S) [REDACTED] Phase IV of the operation, the withdrawal phase, was to consist of either a concerted assault through Base Area 611 toward the A Chau Valley (Option I), or a more limited attack on the northern portion of Base Area 611, with RVNAF units withdrawing through the Route 9 area (Option II). Both options were to include the insertion of guerrilla forces and RVNAF "stay behind" elements into Base Areas 604 and 611. 192/

[REDACTED]

(S) [REDACTED] Under Option I, airborne units were to leave their blocking positions in the Tchepone area and withdraw to Ban Dong, the junction of Routes 9 and 92, to cover ARVN infantry who were to attack into Base Area 611 southeast from their positions below the Xepon River. The Rangers were to continue to screen the northern flank. Upon order, ARVN armored units, and later the Rangers, would withdraw along Route 9 to Khe Sanh where the armored units would prepare to attack south. Meanwhile, the airborne units in the Ban Dong area would either return to Khe Sanh along Route 9 or follow ARVN infantry units southward and support them in their attack through Base Area 611. Vietnamese Marine units were to attack Base Area 611 upon order.^{193/}

(S) [REDACTED] Under Option II, the general maneuver concept of RVNAF forces was the same with the exception that the ARVN airborne and infantry units attacking through Base Area 611 would turn north after attacking only the western portion of 611, and would exit Laos south of Route 9 and Khe Sanh, but well to the north of the A Shau Valley.^{194/}

e. (S) [REDACTED] (U) Planned U.S. Air Support.

(S) [REDACTED] The XXIV Corps Operations Order (Opord) for Lam Son 719, dated 23 January, established the concept and the operational procedures for U.S. ground and air support of RVNAF ground forces. The operations order stated that the RVNAF incursion into Laos was to be supported by "maximum tactical air, heavy bomber, artillery and gunships,"^{195/} and outlined in detail the role of U.S. Army ground

[REDACTED]

and air assets. The XXIV Corps Opord was augmented by I DASC* (Air Force) Opord 1-71, dated 28 January, and by the 7AF Opord 71-2 of 6 February. I DASC Opord 1-71 dealt mainly with the reestablishment** of VICTOR DASC (V DASC), and with the provision of forward air control and visual reconnaissance in support of XXIV Corps Opord Lam Son 719. Seventh Air Force Opord 71-2 established the air plan for support of the XXIV Corps Opord and tasked various Air Force units to provide the necessary fragging, tactical air control, and airlift functions.^{196/}

1) (S) [REDACTED] Fixed Wing Air Support. In order to provide continuous coverage of the operation, initial plans for out-country operations called for a stream of TAC AIR in the day, with a pair of fighters arriving every fifteen minutes over a 12-hour period (96 sorties per day), and for continuous gunship and flareship coverage at night (eight sorties per night). Assurance was given to the RVNAF that additional strike resources would be provided if needed. Aircraft would report in to the Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center (ABCCC), and then be handed off to the appropriate HAMMER FAC.***

*DASC--Direct Air Support Center.

**VICTOR DASC was originally established in March 1968 to provide more responsive air support to U.S. forces in the northern provinces of I Corps. It was downgraded to a TACP during 1969, and was reestablished in January 1971 to support RVNAF operations in Laos during Lam Son 719.

***The call sign for FACs supporting Lam Son 719 on the Laos side of the border was HAMMER.

[REDACTED]

Initial plans called for two OV-10s (HAMMER FACs) to be on station at all times during the day, based upon RVNAF plans for a two-division force operating in Laos.^{197/} If the planned sorties were insufficient, a secondary source of TAC AIR was available in the form of divers from the ABCCC. If divers were not available, the FACs could request the ABCCC to scramble alert aircraft.^{198/}

(S) [REDACTED] Extensive use of B-52 resources was also planned for Lam Son 719. Initial plans written at 7AF, and approved by General Sutherland, called for the use of B-52 strikes against enemy LOC entering the combat area, as a means of blocking enemy reinforcement and resupply efforts. As the operation developed, ARC LIGHT strikes were used against a wide variety of targets including LOC, storage areas, landing zones, and troop concentrations in close proximity to friendly forces. Planning had called for selection of ARC LIGHT targets by MACV, but in actuality General Lam selected the ARC LIGHT targets based on daily sortie allocations from MACV.^{199/}

(S) [REDACTED] Reconnaissance requirements were identified and coordinated between the Commanders 7AF and XXIV Corps, and guidance concerning Army reconnaissance efforts were contained in the XXIV Corps Opord Lam Son 719. The XXIV Corps approach was that "maximum use" would be made of U.S. Army air reconnaissance assets and that Air Force resources would be used only for "missions beyond Army capability."^{200/} In accordance with that philosophy, the task of the Air Force was to "wall-to-wall photograph" an area about 30 miles