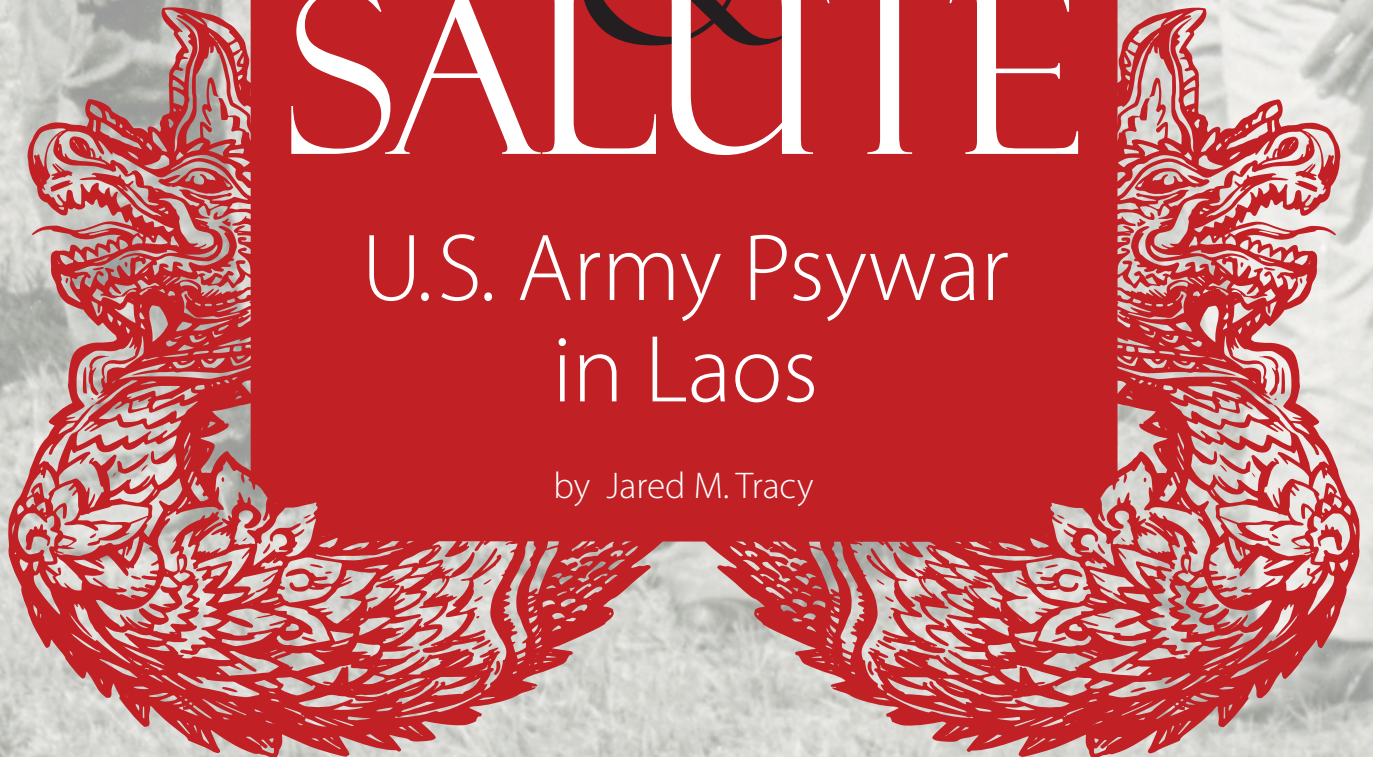


MORE THAN SHOOT & SALUTE

U.S. Army Psywar
in Laos

by Jared M. Tracy



In January 1961, a twelve-man team from the 1st Psychological Warfare (Psywar) Battalion (Broadcasting and Leaflet [B&L]) deployed to Laos as part of a secretive, small-scale U.S. Army Special Warfare presence to advance U.S. strategic objectives in Southeast Asia (SEA). Assigned to the Programs Evaluation Office (PEO) in the Laotian capital, Vientiane, the psywar team offered multi-media psywar support to U.S. agencies operating in-country, but its primary role was augmenting the U.S. Information Service (USIS). In addition, team members advised the Royal Lao Government and armed forces, which had been fighting the externally-supported Communist Pathet Lao and other insurgents since 1954.

Comprised of mostly junior officers and soldiers, many of them new to the Army or on their first deployment, the psywar team was inserted into a highly ambiguous situation (as explained in the contextual Laos article in the previous issue of *Veritas*). Afforded little preparation, guidance, or direction from higher headquarters, these soldiers relied heavily on their own education, experiences, and initiative. The team's selection, pre-mission preparations, and six-month deployment, the focus of this article, are described by three of its members: Second Lieutenant (2LT) Raymond P. Ambrozak, Specialist 4 (SP4) Neil E. Lien, and Private First Class (PFC) William J. Dixon.

Born in Nanticoke, PA, on 8 November 1935, 2LT Raymond P. Ambrozak studied Industrial Engineering at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, before being drafted into the Infantry in September 1958. His enlisted time was short, as he completed Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, GA, in October 1959, earning a commission as an Infantry 2LT. Expecting an Infantry assignment, he inexplicably received orders to the 1st Loudspeaker and Leaflet (L&L) Company at Fort Bragg, NC, as a Psywar Officer.¹ On 24 June 1960, the 1st L&L was re-designated as the 1st Psywar Company [L&L], a subordinate unit of the 1st Psywar Battalion.² Adding to his confusion was notification of deployment to an unknown country in SEA a couple of months later. Two other unsuspecting prospective members of the psywar augmentation team were SP4 Neil E. Lien and PFC William J. Dixon.



2LT Raymond P. Ambrozak, Psywar Officer in the 1st Loudspeaker and Leaflet Company, 1st Psywar Battalion.

Born, raised, and educated in western Chicago, Neil E. Lien attended Lawrence College in Appleton, WI, where he double majored in English/Creative Writing and Speech Arts. The latter discipline encompassed such fields as theater, oral interpretation, and radio broadcasting. He also minored in psychology and worked at the college radio station. Graduating in June 1958, Lien waited “for the shoe to drop (for my draft notice to come).” In anticipation, he bought the *Draftee’s Guide to Military Life and Law*. Receiving his draft notice in late summer 1959, then-Private (PVT) Lien felt prepared. While in basic training at Fort Ord, CA, he had his Classification and Assignments (C&A) interview with a career counselor to determine his Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). Looking at his fields of study and radio broadcasting experience at Lawrence, the NCO said, “There’s only one place for you to go: psywar.” He reported to Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), 1st Psywar Battalion (B&L), on Smoke Bomb Hill, Fort Bragg, in late 1959, as a radio broadcaster.³

“There’s only one place for you to go: psywar.”

William J. Dixon was born, raised, and educated in Dixon, IL. He attended the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, IN, graduating in June 1959 with a B.A. in Fine Arts. His father, a retired colonel who had served in both World Wars, felt strongly about his five sons joining the military. Accordingly, in 1959, Bill enlisted for two years as an Army Illustrator. He attended basic training at Fort Riley, KS, before reporting to the HHC (S-3), 1st Psywar Battalion (B&L), around Thanksgiving, as one of seven illustrators in the battalion.

After six months learning from more experienced illustrators and performing ‘extra duties as assigned,’ Dixon got wind of a real-world ‘opportunity.’ “One day, I got an urgent message to get back to my company,” recalled Dixon. Informed by his leadership that he may be deploying on a secret mission, he was not sure why *he* among the illustrators was selected. He suspected that since he was an ‘excess’ soldier above and beyond the battalion’s Table of Organization and Equipment (T/O&E), the unit had wanted to send him so as not to lose assigned personnel.⁴

LTC Charles A. Murray

Born on 22 May 1908, LTC Charles A. Murray graduated from Austin High School in Chicago, IL, in 1926. The 1931 Economics graduate from Ripon College in Ripon, WI, was commissioned an Infantry 2LT in the U.S. Army Reserve (USAR) on 10 June 1931. A captain (CPT) during WWII, he was assigned to the 612th Tank Destroyer (TD) Battalion and the 671st TD Bn, deploying to the Pacific with the latter (December 1944 to November 1945). From September 1946 to September 1949, he served in the Allied Translator and Intelligence Service, GHQ, FECOM. As a major (MAJ), he was assigned to the USAR Instructor Group, 2304th Area Service Unit (ASU), Virginia Military District from 1949 to 1953. Following that, he again deployed to the Pacific as a member of the Troop Information and Education (TI&E) Section, HQ, Korean Communications Zone, until January 1955. Returning to the U.S. as a LTC, he was briefly the TI&E Officer, XVIII Airborne Corps, at Fort Bragg, NC, before becoming Director, Extension Courses Department, U.S. Army Special Warfare Center (USASWC). The 1956 Psywar Officer Course graduate commanded the 1st Psywar Battalion (B&L) from 13 April 1959 until becoming OIC of the Psywar Team to Laos in January 1961. He returned to USASWC in July 1961 and retired on 31 December 1961.



Lien had another theory for their selection. “First, we all had good reputations. I was Soldier of the Month twice, I never caused any problems, and I was really affable with the other guys. The second consideration was skills—what skills were needed to build this team, and who had them? For example, mine was radio broadcasting.” Finally, each enlisted member had to have enough time left in service for the deployment. Lien had just enough, with two months to spare. “On those three criteria, that’s how I qualified.”⁵

Lien, Dixon, and sixteen other prospective candidates—including a civilian and a major—met in an empty barracks for a more detailed rundown. “They didn’t tell us where the mission was, but said it would be for roughly six months,” said Dixon. Interested people would need to get a security clearance, a time-consuming process; therefore, they needed to volunteer ‘on the spot.’ “Everyone raised their hands. However, within a month or so, there was a shakeout and it narrowed down to twelve.” The major had to leave for another assignment, and was replaced as Officer-in-Charge (OIC) by Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Charles A. Murray.⁶ Eventually ‘filled in’ on the particulars and sworn to secrecy, the team began *ad hoc* pre-deployment training.

Slated to arrive in Laos by September 1960, the team had about six weeks to prepare for deployment. The 1st Psywar Battalion (B&L) provided no training regimen, so they developed their own. According to 2LT Ambrozak, they built an “area study” to familiarize themselves with the people, culture, economy, and political situation in Laos. “We parsed out each one of these areas to different members of the team.” Once an individual completed his ‘class,’ he presented it to the group. In addition, the team received a crash course in the Lao language from a 7th Special Forces (SF) Group NCO (non-commissioned officer) who had spent a year in-country and had picked up 200–300 words. Ambrozak pointed out that while the language training was minimal, it actually did help “promote a quick relationship with the local Lao people” during the deployment.⁷

In August 1960, the team had nearly completed its pre-deployment training when its overseas movement was delayed due to the chaos in Laos following Captain (CPT) Kong Le’s insurrection. The group took advantage of the time by improving their area study and continuing *ad hoc* language training in French and Lao. Having lost their SF language instructor, the team elected one of their own who had earlier gotten the best scores in the Lao language: 2LT Ambrozak. “I became the language instructor for a country I didn’t even know existed six weeks prior to that,” he remembered.⁸ For the rest of 1960, the team continued learning more about its host country.

“We parsed out each one of these areas to different members of the team.”

— 2LT Raymond P. Ambrozak

While CPT Kong Le's rebellion had been the main reason for the delayed overseas movement, another was that not all of the administrative steps involved with an 'off-the-record' military deployment had been completed. Formal U.S. military involvement in Laos, evidenced by President John F. Kennedy's creation of Military Assistance Advisory Group, Laos (MAAG Laos), was still eight months away. There was to be no indication that these twelve men were U.S. Army soldiers. "We were administratively severed from the Army and assigned as DoD civilians," even though their pay, allotments, and time in grade in the Army continued. "Before leaving, a State Department employee came down from Washington, DC, met with our team, and provided us with civilian passports, DoD civilian identification cards, and international drivers' licenses," according to Lien.⁹

On 5 January 1961, the formal deployment order arrived. All twelve men were listed as 'Mr.' and given fake DoD civilian (General Schedule [GS]) grades on the orders. The 'civilian' status of these men meant that "there was no rank consciousness," Lien remembered. "There was no separation between officers and enlisted; we were all *compadres*."¹⁰ With their civilian passports in hand, they were to deploy around 25 January for duty with the Programs Evaluation Office (PEO) in Vientiane, Laos.¹¹ The PEO, the 'civilian' predecessor to MAAG Laos, was established in 1955 as a low-key DoD staff agency providing advice and assistance to the Laotian government and military. It had been the higher headquarters for American SF teams training their Laotian counterparts since 1959, and would be for the psywar team as well.

"We packed our Army uniforms in duffle bags, which shipped separately from us. I don't know where they went, and I never saw them again until I got back to Fort Bragg," recalled Dixon. "In civilian clothes, we drove up to Washington and flew out on Capital Airlines. After a layover in Chicago, we flew into San Francisco and stayed there for five days. Then, we flew out on a chartered Pan Am *Constellation* from Travis Air Force Base (AFB), CA. We were in the air for around 48 hours, with only short stops for refueling and changing crews. It took us twelve hours just to get to Hickham AFB, HI."¹² When they finally landed in Bangkok, Thailand, they reported to Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group, Thailand (JUSMAGTHAI). Activated in 1953, JUSTMAGTHAI had since developed a close relationship with the PEO, and was the gateway for U.S. personnel destined for Laos. JUSMAGTHAI presented a number of briefings to the team, with topics ranging from health and safety to current intelligence estimates on Laos.¹³

The team initially thought that it would just be working in Vientiane; JUSMAGTHAI and the PEO changed that perception. While most of the psywar personnel would 'live' and work in Vientiane, the team would send one officer to each Military Region (MR) in Laos (except the Communist-infested MR II) to advise Laotian commanders and support U.S. agencies in those areas.¹⁴ 2LT Ambrozak would be 'solo' in Luang Prabang (MR I); 1LT George M. Daly in Savannakhet (MR III), but as it turned out, Daly would



Soldiers from the 1st Psywar Battalion in Laos. From left to right are SFC Andrew K. Greer (NCOIC), PFC William J. Dixon, and SP5 Leslie H. Hollomon.

Psywar Augmentation Team

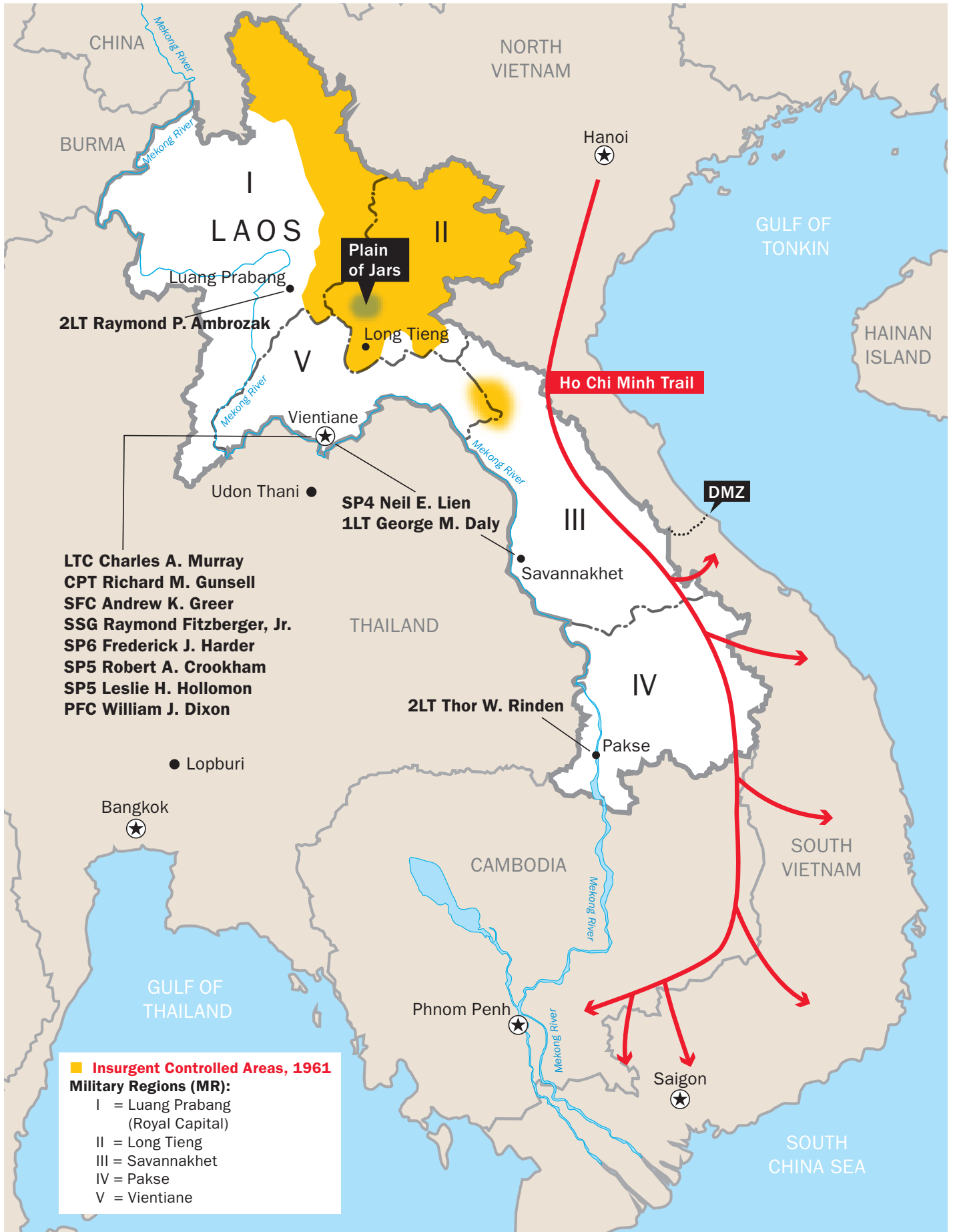
Civilian ranks were used to reduce their operational profile.

OFFICERS

LTC Charles A. Murray (OIC)	GS-13
CPT Richard M. Gunsell	GS-11
1LT George M. Daly	GS-11
2LT Raymond P. Ambrozak	GS-11
2LT Thor W. Rinden	GS-11

ENLISTED

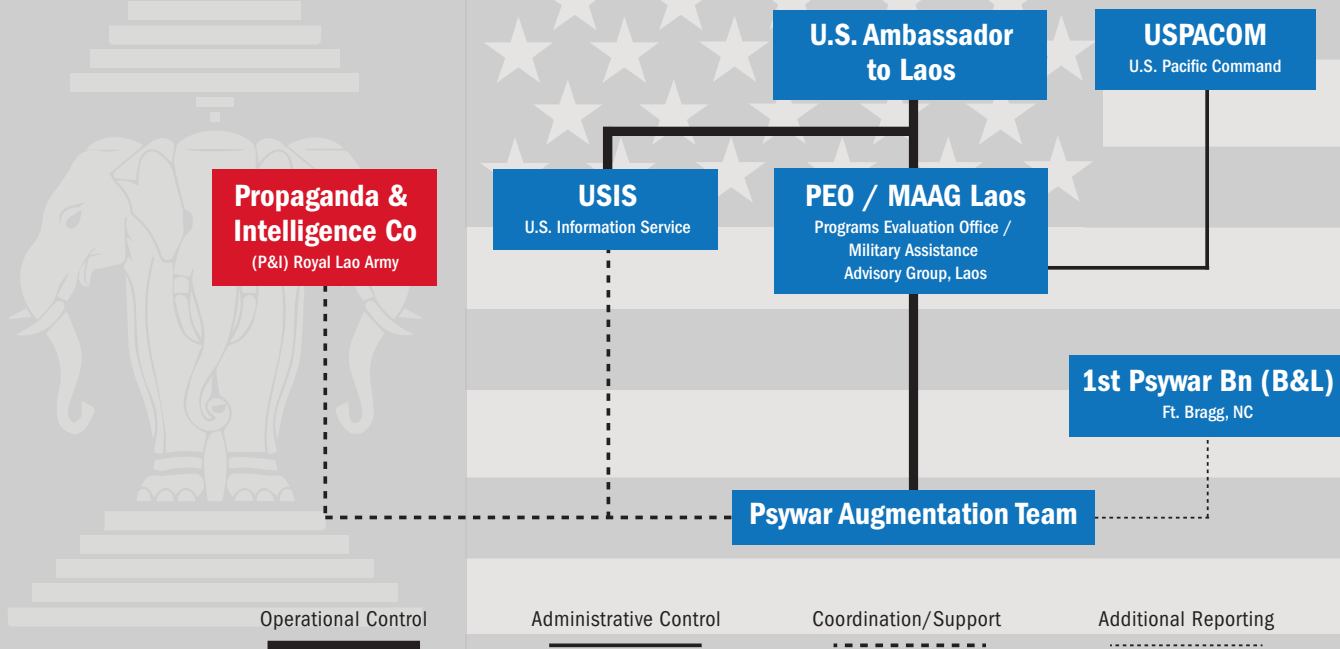
SFC Andrew K. Greer (NCOIC)	GS-9
SSG Raymond Fitzberger, Jr.	GS-5
SP6 Frederick J. Harder	GS-5
SP5 Robert A. Crookham	GS-5
SP5 Leslie H. Hollomon	GS-5
SP4 Neil E. Lien	GS-5
PFC William J. Dixon	GS-5



■ Insurgent Controlled Areas, 1961
Military Regions (MR):
 I = Luang Prabang
 (Royal Capital)
 II = Long Tieng
 III = Savannakhet
 IV = Pakse
 V = Vientiane

COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS

Laos, 1961



be mostly in Vientiane; and 2LT Thor W. Rinden in Pakse (MR IV). LTC Murray, CPT Richard M. Gunsell, and all of the enlisted men would operate from Vientiane (MR V).

2LT Ambrozak recalled the threesome’s trepidation after that was decided. “We three [Ambrozak, Daly, and Rinden] went into a quiet panic mode . . . This was our first rodeo and we felt that the credibility of PSYOP [psychological operations] rested on our shoulders.” The three lieutenants met in a hotel room in Bangkok to coordinate plans for their respective regions. In addition, they came up with a plan to get ‘buy-in’ from their host nation counterparts. “We thought that a letter signed by a senior commander, outlining areas where we could work with them, would give us some status with our counterparts and specify programs for immediate attention.”¹⁵ The team drafted a letter and wired it to the PEO before catching a military ‘hop’ from Bangkok to Vientiane.

Their draft letter was published in the form of an official two-page memorandum from Laos’s Defense Minister and staunch U.S. ally, General (GEN) Phoumi Nosavan, to senior Laotian Army commanders. Titled “Plan for Increased Emphasis Upon Psychological Operations,” the memorandum “included some items not in our [original] message, which we felt was a good sign. Someone had given some thought to our mission and wanted our assistance,” Ambrozak remembered.¹⁶ Phoumi wrote of his desire for unity and peace in Laos, but regretted that they could not be achieved with Communist propaganda infecting villages throughout the country. “We must counteract this threat,” he wrote. He then laid out a plan for “a strong [Royal Lao

Army] psychological operation” to support national aims and earn popular support for the Royal Lao Government.¹⁷

Phoumi informed his commanders that “twelve [American] specialists . . . are now in Laos to assist [us] in the development of a strong information program and to teach the techniques necessary to conduct such a program.” These ‘specialists’ would help with four main areas. First, helping Laotian soldiers understand the need to improve conditions in villages and counter Communist propaganda. Second, educating villagers by training Laotian soldiers to show motion pictures and hand out printed materials throughout Laos. Third, curbing Lao-on-Lao violence by assuring Pathet Lao fighters of proper treatment by the Laotian government if they surrendered or deserted. Finally, improving radio operations, which he called “essential for the education and training of our troops and for informing our people of our aims and programs for their better living.”¹⁸ This memorandum provided a basic framework for the U.S. Army psywar role in Laos.

Once in Laos, 2LT Ambrozak headed to Luang Prabang (MR I) with the official title of Information Consultant to the Regional Commander, GEN Bounleut Sanichanh, although he had little more than an occasional briefing relationship with the general. In this capacity, “I could affect both military [and] civilian programs which were supporting national objectives in that region. These happened to be right in line with what USIS was doing there, so I began working very closely with the USIS personnel in that area.”¹⁹ For several weeks, Ambrozak supported USIS pro-

government product development and dissemination. Unfortunately, tragedy gave him greater responsibility.

On 1 April 1961, the USIS chief in MR I and Ambrozak's mentor, Mr. Francis P. 'Frank' Corrigan, died on a leaflet delivery mission when his Cessna O-1 *Bird Dog* engine failed shortly after takeoff and crashed.²⁰ Ambrozak took the loss of his friend and mentor hard, but he had little time to dwell on it. The Chief of USIS in-country, Daniel E. Moore, asked him to take over the USIS office in Luang Prabang until they could get a replacement. The USIS staff expected this assignment "because they assumed I was with USIS anyway." Ongoing USIS efforts included nascent radio operations, printed products, and training Lao governmental and military personnel to conduct pro-government and anti-Communist messaging throughout the country. "We didn't try *anything* on a unilateral basis. We always pulled in the appropriate Lao military or civilians into any campaign that we had going on."²¹

One day, Ambrozak received an urgent call from LTC Murray to return to Vientiane, as did 1LT Daly in Savannakhet. In the capital, they were directed to assist 2LT Rinden in MR IV with developing a Pathet Lao Prisoner-of-War (POW) 're-orientation' program at a camp just outside of Pakse. Their main task was to make assessments and recommendations to Laotian government personnel running the site. After arriving in Pakse, the three LTs visited the camp and quickly identified problems. "First, it was filthy," noted Ambrozak. "We recommended cleaning up the camp, bathrooms, and showers, and providing the nearly fifty POWs with clean clothes and better food. Second, we found out that the guards weren't treating the POWs well. If there was ever to be any hope of 'repatriating' these POWs, then it needed to start with the attitudes of the guards."²² They recommended training guards in the fair treatment of prisoners.

The team also established POW 'discussion groups.' "If there was a former Pathet Lao soldier who had

A multinational team investigates the crash site of Frank Corrigan's Cessna O-1 *Bird Dog*.



Left
Francis P. 'Frank' Corrigan was the senior USIS officer in MR I (Luang Prabang).

Right
Buddhist monks pay respects to Frank Corrigan before his remains are shipped to the U.S. Note the non-uniformed SF soldiers kneeling behind them.





Top Left

Powering a pedicab, 2LT Thor W. Rinden and his passenger PFC Dixon pass by a small group of Laotian children. Rinden represented the psywar team in MR IV.

Top Right

2LT Ambrozak and a 're-oriented' Pathet Lao POW take a break while constructing the antenna tower for the new radio station in Luang Prabang.

Left

2LT Ray Ambrozak (left, standing) and interagency partners from U.S. Operations Mission (USOM) (Dallas C. Voran, center, rear) and USIS (unknown, left, kneeling) pose with Laotian counterparts in Luang Prabang.

successfully completed the program and reintegrated, we would bring him back as a discussion group leader," Ambozak stated. "We'd also bring in elders from the prisoners' home village, and get them to talk." Finally, cooperative Pathet Lao POWs needed to feel trusted if there was any possibility of them 'reintegrating' back into the mainstream. Accordingly, Laotian administrators gradually allowed cooperating POWs to visit their home villages (supervised) or to receive family visitation.²³

Ambrozak and Daly returned to their posts only a week after arriving in Pakse, and therefore could not assess the long-term impact of their POW 're-orientation' program. However, the Laotian government ended up implementing this 'pilot' program throughout the country, including Luang Prabang. The Laotian military "asked me [Ambrozak] if I knew anything about this, which I thought was pretty funny. I didn't let on that I knew about it." The young lieutenant "was surprised how closely it resembled what we had developed."²⁴ Not only had the

POW program taken root throughout Laos, but it provided a working model for future PSYOP-supported programs in such locations as Vietnam during the 1960s (the *Chieu Hoi* program) and Afghanistan during the Global War on Terror (Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program).²⁵

While in Luang Prabang, 2LT Ambrozak had another priority: the completion of a radio station, Radio LUANG PRABANG, with a 60' antenna tower, to reach audiences throughout the province. Frank Corrigan had promised a new station to the king before his death, and "it was almost complete by the time that I got there." Once all remaining equipment arrived, "with the other members of the team, I was able to finish off the radio station and put in the antenna field."²⁶ 2LT Ambrozak, SP6 Frederick J. Harder (visiting from Vientiane), and a dozen 're-oriented' POWs were the construction crew.

Ambrozak explained the construction steps: "In erecting the antenna, a gin pole (15ft) was built (a framed tower with a wheel on top). The completed antenna lay on the ground

connected to the base in a manner which would allow the antenna to rotate to a vertical position. A rope was then attached to the antenna and passed over the wheel of the gin pole with enough length for six POWs and two U.S. PSYOP advisors to grab hold and pull. A storm was blowing in as the antenna began to move off the ground arcing toward the gathering clouds. Guy wires were adjusted as slack was needed or taken up as the crew of eight strained at the rope.²⁷

“At the point of no return, when the rope cleared the gin pole, as if that was the signal, heavy drops of rain pelted the field which quickly turned to mud.” The makeshift construction crew “dug in harder through the deluge until the tower was vertical with guy wires set to see that it stayed that way.”²⁸ Upon its erection, local Buddhist monks blessed the antenna. This ceremony was followed by a brief visit from King Savang Vatthana, who spoke quietly to the provincial governor, waved at the U.S. personnel, and departed, justifiably pleased with ‘his’ new station and antenna.²⁹ Radio LUANG PRABANG would play a key role in the state funeral for the previous monarch, Sisavang Vong, which Ambrozak thought offered a terrific psychological opportunity to unify all Laotians.

When King Sisavang Vong died on 29 October 1959, his body was encased in a sandalwood coffin and preserved until funeral arrangements could be made. Due to internal strife within the country following CPT Kong Le’s rebellion in 1960, the king’s funeral had been postponed several times. The Laotian government finally deemed it suitable to hold the state funeral and cremation ceremony in April 1961. The psywar team would facilitate the live, national broadcasting of the occasion, “the first time that this had ever been attempted,” according to Ambrozak.³⁰

The plan had many ‘moving pieces.’ A Laotian assigned to USIS would carry an AN/PRC-10 radio and accompany the funeral procession, starting at the royal palace in Luang Prabang. He would relay what was going on to an announcer at the cremation site, a soccer stadium near the palace. The announcer would repeat the information via telephone to Radio LUANG PRABANG, the content of which was in turn received and relayed country-wide by the main USIS station in Vientiane.

Villages throughout the country had been told that the broadcast would take place. In preparation, “Some of the villages had set up loudspeakers to broadcast the event locally,” recalled Ambrozak. “We were about as ready as we could be on the day of this event. When things started happening, I was able to follow what was going on at the procession and also at the cremation site.”³¹ Exactly how many people heard the broadcast via receivers or village loudspeakers was unknown, although Ambrozak later estimated that it may have been as much as two-thirds of the population. Despite their relative youth and junior rank, the psywar team members had helped foster a rare sense of national identity amongst Laotians by broadcasting the king’s funeral via Radio LUANG PRABANG.

While 2LT Ambrozak was working in Luang Prabang, SP4 Neil E. Lien was sent to Savannakhet further south

in MR III for a month. “There was no psywar effort of any kind going on there. I linked up with a SF team, who was providing basic training to recruits in the Royal Lao Army.” He interviewed several trainees to see if there was “some kind of psywar opportunity that could be executed.” Lien also met with James D. McHale, a USIS officer who had been in Laos since November 1959. “He was a great resource for me. He encouraged me to get with some of the religious and political leaders in Savannakhet.”³² Because there was no radio station within listening distance, any psywar messaging Lien developed would have to happen face-to-face. Lien was recalled to Vientiane before getting any program off the ground, but his brief visit had given him valuable experience interviewing members of the populace, which served him well later.

Lien had several jobs while living and working in the capital. One of his primary duties was to assist CPT Gunsell with the team’s monthly situation report (SITREP) to

**“We were about as ready
as we could be on
the day of the event.”**

— 2LT Raymond P. Ambrozak

Fort Bragg. In addition, “I developed a course on radio broadcasting in Vientiane for a group of Lao students recruited by the CIA.” The CIA planned to equip each with a small transmitter to broadcast positive messages to the countryside. “My job was to prepare them to do that. I had limited reference material, so I relied heavily on my personal broadcasting experience.” Within ten days, his class was ready to go. “Once the class started, we had an interpreter present the lectures.” Lien also worked with each student individually on basic radio repair, using the interpreter. “At the end of the two-week course, I felt like the students were in good shape for broadcasting.”³³

After the course ended, Lien spent a weekend in a small village in northeastern Laos, a region with little government presence or influence. “I went there seeking psywar opportunities.”³⁴ After a thirty-minute helicopter ride to the village, he interviewed local leaders, including the school superintendent, the mayor, and the chief of police. While the two-day visit did not result in a major psywar program, it assured village leaders of continued U.S. support. Unfortunately, the Pathet Lao attacked thirty minutes before Lien’s scheduled departure, which forced



Situated beside the Mekong River, the royal palace at Luang Prabang served as the start point for the funeral procession of King Sisavang Vong.



The funeral procession enters the soccer stadium where the cremation pyre was built, just outside of Luang Prabang. The gold canopied royal carriage with the urn for the king's ashes is in the left side of the entryway.



The culmination of the funeral for King Sisavang Vong was his cremation on this elaborate pyre. Laotians, monks, and foreign dignitaries paid their respects, prayed, and offered gifts on the steps of the pyre.



With Laotian flags prominently displayed, thousands lined the route to observe the funeral procession of King Sisavang Vong.

him to abandon his notes and tape recordings. However, he knew that he could not come back empty-handed.

“As soon as I got back to Vientiane, I went to the USIS office (about 10–15 minutes by *sāhm-lór* [pedicab]), found a typewriter, and spewed out everything while it was still fresh in my mind. I wrote it up, polished it, sent it up the chain, and forgot about it.” Shortly before re-deploying, Lien got a call to report to Ambassador Winthrop G. Brown’s office. “I had no idea why, nor did Mr. Murray. When I got to the ambassador’s office, he welcomed me by shaking my hand, and said, ‘This report you prepared from your three days at that site is one of the best things I’ve read about this country. I just want to thank you and commend you for your work.’”³⁵ This praise was a ‘feather in the cap’ of the young psywarrior.

PFC William J. Dixon, one of Lien’s team members, also worked in Vientiane. “The team lived in the same house. We had our own offices in a compound that was about the size of a football field. At the center of the compound was a green Malaysian-style house, surrounded by another twelve-foot-high fence. That’s where CAS [a CIA euphemism] was located.”³⁶ In Vientiane, Dixon had three major tasks: (1) develop leaflets based on USIS directives; (2) conduct aerial leaflet drops; and (3) train the Laotian Army Propaganda and Intelligence (P&I) Company OIC, a captain.

Developing printed products occupied most of Dixon’s time. “Our focus was determined by the head of USIS, Daniel E. Moore. He or his secretary would visit every Monday or Tuesday. They’d say, ‘We need a leaflet or other product like this.’” Then he would meet with three Thai illustrators assigned to his section, each of whom arrived at 0800 hours every morning after crossing the Mekong River on a water taxi. “Fortunately, one of them spoke perfect English. I would give the one English-speaking illustrator a rough idea of what I wanted, and maybe provide a little sketch. I asked him to think about it. The two other fellows drew the actual leaflets. It would take them a day or so to produce a draft. I’d recommend minor changes while welcoming their input. It was a real team effort.”³⁷

U.S. Ambassador to Laos Winthrop G. Brown personally commended SP4 Neil E. Lien for his informative report on conditions in the Laotian countryside.



Leaflets promoted host nation legitimacy, anti-Communism, and public health and welfare messages. “The one we got the biggest kick out of was *Vietnamese Eat Dogs*,” Dixon recalled. “In Laos, dogs were revered. The Lao would never kill them. In fact, older dogs would simply die of natural causes, lay around in the street, and get bloated, because the Laotians would never put them down or handle their corpses. However, the North Vietnamese would kill dogs, which irritated the Laotians. So, USIS wanted to highlight the poor North Vietnamese treatment of dogs to turn the Laotian population against them.”³⁸ All leaflet guidance came from USIS.

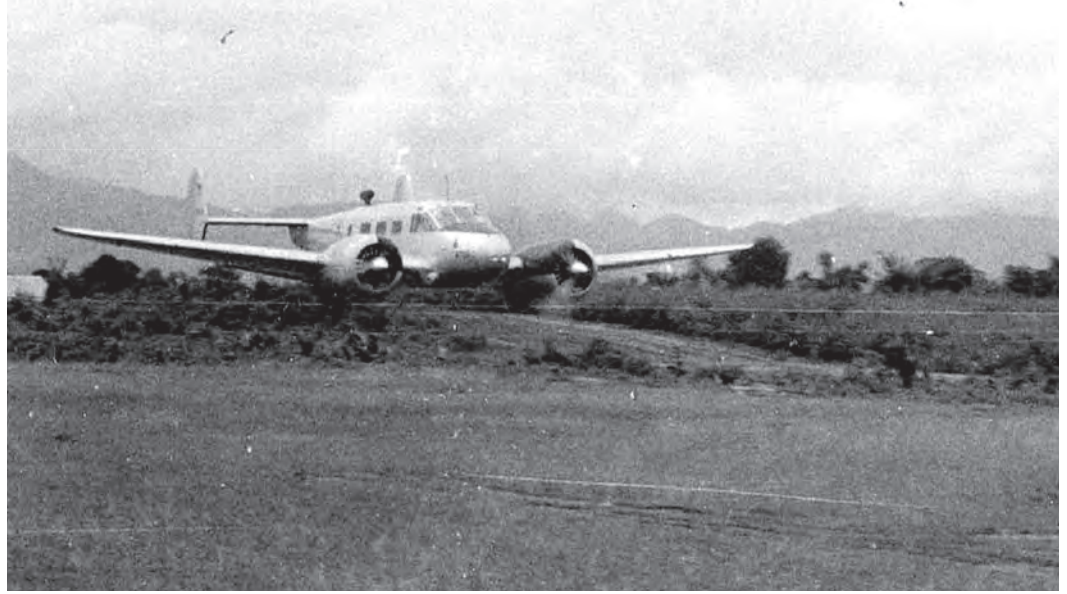
Once Mr. Moore approved the design, Dixon went to a local vendor to get the leaflets printed and cut to size before dissemination. USIS had no air assets, but the PEO

“I’d recommend minor changes while welcoming their input. It was a real team effort.”

— PFC William J. Dixon

did.³⁹ Dixon arranged aerial delivery with COL William H. Pietsch, Jr., the PEO intelligence chief. “Mr. Pietsch went out to collect intelligence two or three times a week, and we coordinated our missions with him. The aircraft were Air America C-45 *Expeditors*. We would drop the leaflets in pre-designated areas, often where CPT Kong Le was still active. Despite the low literacy rate in Laos, we hoped that at least some people would pick them up and read them. We were trying to get the Laotian people to stop supporting Kong Le’s efforts to overthrow the government.” Dixon and his team experimented with time fuses to get the widest and most accurate aerial leaflet delivery. “We worked it out so that the leaflet packs would burst at around 500 feet and cover a couple of villages.”⁴⁰

While the young psywarriors focused on leaflet delivery, occasionally Dixon and Lien served as ‘kickers’ of rice and equipment from U.S. Marine Corps HUS-1 *Seahorse* helicopters to help meet village needs. “That was not really why we were there, but we all just wanted to do what we could to help.”⁴¹ In addition to these re-supply missions, radio repairmen SSG Raymond Fitzberger, Jr. and SP5 Robert A. Crookham frequently visited Laotian Army and



Top Left

COL William H. Pietsch, Jr., an OSS Jedburgh during WWII, was the intelligence officer in the PEO. Leaflet drops were coordinated with Pietsch's weekly intelligence trips.

Top Right

The psywar team conducted its leaflet drops using Air America C-45 *Expeditor* aircraft that supported the PEO.

Left

Psywarriors supported village supply drops with U.S. Marine Corps HUS-1 *Seahorse* helicopters.

private radio stations to fix or do preventive maintenance on the transmitters. Psywar team members performed these missions as 'value added.'

Dixon's third task was briefing and training the Laotian Army Propaganda and Intelligence (P&I) Company OIC, a captain. Since the private had no formal psywar training himself, he based his lessons on developing USIS leaflets. "I met with him once a week. I'd get there around 1000 hours, leave at lunchtime, and return at around 1500 hours. I'd advise him about how his unit could conduct psywar more efficiently, based on what I'd learned from our leaflets."⁴² While Dixon got no indication that the Laotian Army conducted its own psywar, the arrangement built rapport with the host nation force and lent credibility to U.S. efforts. When MAAG Laos stood up in April 1961 and directed the wear of military uniforms, the psywar team successfully lobbied to continue wearing civilian clothes so as not to hurt their personal connections with their counterparts.⁴³

In June 1961, the first U.S. Army psywar team in Laos neared the end of its deployment. An eight-man replacement team from 1st Psywar Battalion (B&L) arrived on 15 June. It consisted of CPT Desmal G. Smith (OIC); 1LTs Cecil E. Bray, James Carney, Jr., Frank J. Coughlin, and Benjamin R. Lane; 2LT Janis Ikstrums; and SP4s Stephen G. Lorton and Charles F. Streichert.⁴⁴ "The first thing I noticed was that there were more officers this time, whereas we had been more balanced," recalled Dixon. "They overlapped with us for about two weeks, so we were really cramped in our quarters. We gave them some training before we left for the States."⁴⁵ The first psywar augmentation team returned before Independence Day 1961. They laid a solid foundation for the next two WHITE STAR psywar team rotations (June to December 1961 and December 1961 to September 1962).⁴⁶

This article has detailed the deployment of a twelve-man team from the 1st Psywar Battalion (B&L) to support Project HOTFOOT/Operation WHITE STAR in Laos in

early 1961. With little direction, these men, mostly young, militarily inexperienced, and of junior rank, made the best of an ambiguous situation in Laos by being creative and adaptable, and by relying on their own knowledge and experience. As SP4 Lien said, "We had to *ad lib* our way through the six months."⁴⁷ To prepare themselves, the team studied Laotian history, society, culture, and language before deployment, and later conducted 'site surveys' throughout Laos. They successfully coordinated efforts with the USIS, CIA, and State Department, and worked closely with host nation forces. And they developed local, regional, and national information programs to unite the Laotian people and promote popular support for the government. Their actions proved that U.S. Army Special Warfare was ideally suited for the mission.

In 1961-1962, the U.S. had reason for cautious optimism, since a fourteen-nation agreement in July 1962 reiterated Laotian sovereignty and neutrality, ending MAAG

Laos/WHITE STAR by October.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, this optimism would be short-lived. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV, 'North Vietnam') violated this agreement by continuing to aid the Pathet Lao insurgency and by using a sophisticated trail network in eastern Laos (the 'Ho Chi Minh Trail') to supply Communist insurgents in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN, 'South Vietnam').

In response, later in the 1960s, the U.S. conducted some of the most intensive bombing in history against the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Meanwhile, it deployed personnel to Laos to augment attaché staffs in Vientiane on a Temporary Duty (TDY) basis. In May 1966, the Joint Chiefs of Staff formalized this system by creating Project 404. The roughly 120 members of Project 404 were on permanent assignment, administratively controlled by JUSMAGTHAI and operationally controlled by the attachés in Vientiane. Interagency PSYOP continued in the late 1960s, including leaflets, radio broadcasts, and advising the Royal Lao

BG Andrew J. Boyle, Chief, MAAG Laos, presented this Certificate of Achievement to LTC Charles A. Murray at the end of the psywar team tour in Laos in mid-1961.



Army.⁴⁹ However, despite decades of American assistance, Laos (like the RVN) ‘fell’ to Communism in 1975.

The ultimate fate of Laos notwithstanding, in 1961, twelve U.S. Army psywar ‘specialists’ had made a positive impact on the U.S. counterinsurgency campaign in Laos. Although few in number, given little direction, and employed over a wide area with minimal resources, their hard work, ingenuity, and application of Special Warfare principles increased the overall effectiveness of the American interagency effort in Laos. Project HOTFOOT/Operation WHITE STAR offered U.S. Army Special Warfare soldiers an operational ‘dress rehearsal’ for the ‘main show’ in Vietnam later in the 1960s. 📌

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JARED M. TRACY, PhD

Jared M. Tracy served six years in the U.S. Army, and became a historian at USASOC in December 2010. He earned an MA in History from Virginia Commonwealth University and a PhD in History from Kansas State University. His research is focused on the history of U.S. Army Psychological Operations.

Endnotes

- 1 Biographical information obtained from the official personnel file of Raymond P. Ambrozak, National Personnel Records Center (NPRC)/NARA, St. Louis, Missouri.
- 2 U.S. Army Special Warfare Center, *U.S. Army Special Warfare Center* (Baton Rouge, LA: Army and Navy Publishing Company, 1962). **The other units in the 1st Psywar Battalion were the Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), the 3rd Psywar Detachment (Reproduction), the 4th Psywar Company (Radio Broadcasting [RB]) (Mobile [MBL]), the 308th Psywar Company (RB) (MBL), the 350th Psywar Company (L&L), and the 353rd Psywar Company (Consolidation).**
- 3 Neil E. Lien, interview with Jared M. Tracy, 27 April 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Lien interview.
- 4 William J. Dixon, interview with Jared M. Tracy, 17 April 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Dixon interview.
- 5 Lien interview.
- 6 Dixon interview.
- 7 Raymond P. Ambrozak, recorded video narration, no date, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Ambrozak narration.
- 8 Ambrozak narration.
- 9 Lien interview.
- 10 Lien interview.
- 11 Headquarters, Department of the Army, “SUBJECT: Orders (AGPA-O [4 Jan 61]),” 5 January 1961, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 12 Dixon interview.
- 13 Ambrozak narration.
- 14 See, for example, Doc. 10: “Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Nitze) to Secretary of Defense McNamara,” 23 January 1961, in *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1961-1963, Vol. XXIV, Laos Crisis*.
- 15 Email from Raymond P. Ambrozak to Jared M. Tracy, “SUBJECT: Re: Names,” 23 March 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Ambrozak email with date.
- 16 Ambrozak email, 28 March 2017.

- 17 Memorandum from GEN Phoumi Nosavan to Bounleut Sanichanh, Boun Pone, Kouprasith Abhay, and Siho Lamphouthacoul, “SUBJECT: Plan for Increased Emphasis Upon Psychological Operations,” no date, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Phoumi PSYOP memo.
- 18 Phoumi PSYOP memo. **For more on Laotian government views on the ‘psychological factors’ of the conflict, see** USIA, “Inspection Report: USIS Laos,” 31 March 1960, 8-9, in Folder “Laos, April 19, 1960; February 6-17, 1956,” Record Group (RG) 306: Records of the U.S. Information Agency, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), hereafter “USIA Inspection Report” with page number.
- 19 Ambrozak narration.
- 20 “U.S. Aide Dies in Laos: F.P. Corrigan of USIS is Killed in Laos,” *New York Times*, 2 April 1961, 2. **Originally from Napa, California, 35-year-old Mr. Francis P. ‘Frank’ Corrigan. Corrigan had lived and worked in Hawaii and New York before joining the USIA in 1957. After his death, Frank’s wife, Flora, came up from their residence in Bangkok to attend three days of ceremonies and social events to honor him. This culminated at the royal palace in Luang Prabang where King Savang Vatthana conferred Laos’ highest award for service on Corrigan. A small-scale Buddhist ceremony, attended by U.S. SF personnel and others, was held at the airfield prior to sending his casketed remains to the States.**
- 21 Ambrozak narration.
- 22 Raymond P. Ambrozak, interview with Jared M. Tracy, 12 June 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Ambrozak interview.
- 23 Ambrozak interview.
- 24 Ambrozak interview.
- 25 USASOC History Office, Info Paper, “SUBJECT: The Chieu Hoi Program,” 16 November 2015, and USASOC History Office, Info Paper, “SUBJECT: Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program,” 14 December 2015, both in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 26 Ambrozak narration.
- 27 Email from Raymond P. Ambrozak to Jared M. Tracy, “SUBJECT: a picture for you,” 13 June 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Ambrozak email with date.
- 28 Ambrozak email, 13 June 2017.
- 29 Information from photo caption sheet written by Raymond P. Ambrozak, no date, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Ambrozak photo caption sheet.
- 30 Ambrozak narration.
- 31 Ambrozak narration.
- 32 Lien interview.
- 33 Lien interview.
- 34 Lien interview.
- 35 Lien interview.
- 36 Dixon interview.
- 37 Dixon interview.
- 38 Dixon interview.
- 39 “USIA Inspection Report,” 16.
- 40 Dixon interview. **For more on CAT, Air America, and U.S. air operations in Laos, see, for example, Terry Love, *Wings of Air America: A Photo History* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Military/Aviation History, 1998).**
- 41 Dixon interview.
- 42 Dixon interview.
- 43 Dixon interview. **For more on the activation of MAAG Laos, see** NARA, “RG 334: Records of Interservice Agencies,” <https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/334.html#334.5.9>, accessed 12 July 2017; Kenneth Conboy, *The War in Laos, 1960-1975* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1989), 33-36.
- 44 DA Msg 560710, AGPA-0 DTG 142201Z Jun 61 and DA Msg 79658, AGPA-0 DTG 13211 BZ Jun 61, both cited in Stephen Sherman, *Who’s Who from HOTFOOT/WHITE STAR* (Houston, TX: Radix Press, 1994), 19.
- 45 Dixon interview.
- 46 Sherman, *Who’s Who*, 19, 42.
- 47 Lien interview.
- 48 **This 14-nation solution had been proposed on 1 January 1961 by Sihanouk, Head of State of Cambodia. The nations were: the U.S., Great Britain, France, Canada, RVN, Thailand, Soviet Union, China, DRV, Poland, Cambodia, Burma, Laos, and India. For more on the reinstatement of Laotian neutrality and the end of the MAAG/WHITE STAR, see, for example, Office of National Estimates, CIA, Memorandum for the Director of Central Intelligence, “SUBJECT: Laos,” 9 March 1961; Doc. 25: “Memorandum of Conference with President Kennedy,” 9 March 1961, in *FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. XXIV, Laos Crisis*; Conboy, *The War in Laos*, 5.**
- 49 COL (ret.) Joseph D. Celeski, “Project 404—The Assistant Attachés and the Secret War in Laos,” in Lewis Sorley, Tom Yarbrough, et al., *Indochina in the Year of the Cock—1969* (Houston, TX: Radix Press, 2017), 70-84.