Chomsky visits leaders of Laos, Viet Nam

(Continued from page 1)
talking to these refugees.

The Tech: Could you tell us about them?

Chomsky: Well, the refugees I spoke to were released in late 1964 and early 1965.

The Tech: At whose orders? The Pathet Lao...

Chomsky:...the refugees say that everything that they knew of that, is that they were told that they had any information about, were totally destroyed by American bombs, and once they were evacuated, which makes the problem a bit academic...they had already been living in the forests and the mountains for some time, ever since the very sharp American escalation in 1964.

There had been sporadic bombing of the Plain of Jars and other government-controlled areas from 1964 up to 1966. Reconstructing their story from their point of view about October, the bombing shifted to the area frequently where communications and what might be considered military targets, to distant areas far from the towns.

The planes used also shifted, from Lao T-28s, to propeller-driven trainer planes, to American jet fighter-bombers. The Tech: ...and in early 1969 there was bombing by American jets?

Chomsky: Well, Americans presumably, and from Udorn Air Base, in Thailand.

The Tech: ...and in Laos? Chomsky: Yes, there are free fire zones in Laos. In fact, they're officially designated free fire zones. I didn't even know what that actually, until I read the testimony of the Symington Committee. Again the question in academic, because even when they weren't free fire zones, the American jets were destroying everything in sight.

The Tech: Did you learn this from the refugees? Chomsky: Yes, and as a matter of fact, the refugees were pretty close-mouthed at first, because they assumed we were American soldiers. The first thing they told us was always the government propaganda line. In only when you start getting personal histories, that really starts to emerge. In fact, they're quite specific about the fact that when American bombs were landing in 1966 and particularly in 1968, the new attacks were directed almost solely at civilian targets, those being the only ones there were in the area.

The Tech: How did you communicate with the refugees?

Chomsky: Well, through an American Lao-speaking interpreter, the same person by the way that all the refugee organizations put their any information out of the people.

The Tech: What about the Plain of Jars?

Chomsky: Well, the Plain of Jars is probably the least badly

bombed area because this was a contested area for a long time, whereas the other areas have been under total Pathet Lao control since 1964. People weren't going to these places. For example, a French correspondent and a member of the Algerian embassy in Hanoi, say that there's basically no sign of life above ground, and that everybody's being lived in caves. Apparently the Plain of Jars has now been cleared of people, and been turned into a kind of free bombing zone.

The Tech: Is the Plain of Jars or any other area in Laos a so-called free fire zone?

Chomsky: Oh, yes, you can feel zones in Laos. In fact, they're officially designated free fire zones. I didn't even know what that actually, until I read the testimony of the Symington Committee. Again the question is academic, because even when they weren't free fire zones, the American jets were destroying everything in sight.

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