Study details problem of Laotian refugees

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assumptions were derived from population resources; more intensive bombing of communist-controlled territory was made possible; and the men could then be drafted to fight against the Pathet Lao. The study mission report went on to say that "US AID humanitarian programs in Laos served as a principal cover for CIA-sponsored paramilitary activities."

The forced movements took a heavy toll on the population. Scrimshaw told The Tech, "Undoubtedly, there was a high mortality of both children and adults associated with the movement of the population over great distances. In addition, there were casualties from the bombing. The exact numbers, however, will probably never be known."

Another problem for many of the refugees is malaria. "Some tribes were driven from non-malarial areas to areas where malaria is hyperendemic," Scrimshaw said. He added that in the sense to which the refugees moved, "the mosquitoes are resistant to DDT."

Nevertheless, said Scrimshaw, "the health status of the people, except for malaria, is probably better in the refugee camps than it was where they were living before."

The reason, he explained, was that AID was providing medical services. Scrimshaw also remarked that "the children, being exposed to schooling for the first time."

In addition, the people are eating better in the refugee camps because, said Scrimshaw, "AID is even buying the Thai beef to help keep them loyal to the RLG."

In comparing the health programs of the Pathet Lao and the RLG, Scrimshaw commented that "there is general agreement that the medical and health services provided by the Pathet Lao are at least as good as, and are probably better than, those provided by the RLG with AID assistance."

The study mission report noted that AID supplies personnel and logistics for the distribution of food and health care in Laos. While this avoids what the report terms "the corruption of local officials," the consequence is that the Laotians are made even more dependent on the US. "The RLG is getting the experience (needed) to carry on when USAID phases out," according to the report.

As justification for the intensive bombing of Pathet Lao areas of Laos, the US government previously claimed that few people lived there. Contrary to these previous claims, however, the study mission was told by AID officials in Laos that between one-fourth and one-third of the three million people in Laos lived in Pathet Lao-controlled territory.

Along with the recent decrease in the lighting in Laos has come a decrease in the number of refugees. According to the subcommittee report, the number of AID-supported refugees has fallen from 380,000 in October 1973 to 160,000 in mid-January 1974. "I suspect that means that people are streaming back to the areas from which they came," Scrimshaw concluded.

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