

# Pathet Lao Attack Is Constant Threat to Royal Army

By ARTHUR J. DOMMEN  
United Press International  
Attapeu, Laos—UPI—A young army private of the Royal Lao army who earns the equivalent of \$10 a month looked up from his muddy foxhole on the bank of the Sekong river and said: "The Pathet Lao always attack just before dawn. It makes the night seem very long."

All along the river bank were similar foxholes occupied by soldiers idly oiling their bright American rifles and 30 caliber machine guns. To the rear of the foxholes was a mud and log dugout with a .50 caliber machine gun emplacement.

Col. Khong Vongnarath, commander of the isolated and surrounded garrison here, pointed across the dirty, brown river and said he had companies deployed on the opposite side, where nothing appeared to be stirring among the banana trees in the twilight of early evening.

It had been raining most of the day and darkness came a little earlier than usual.

Khong said an estimated three battalions of Pathet Lao troops had the town virtually surrounded. In event of a serious attack, he said, he would radio to the regional military headquarters at Pakse, 75 air miles away, for help.

**Battalions in Hills**  
The situation was made more disturbing for the town's defenders by the presence in the hilly region to the south of two battalions of North Vietnamese regulars.

Their location had been pinpointed by information supplied by refugees from vil-

lages in the area—mostly loincloth-clad Kha tribesmen—and by aerial reconnaissance. This meant that the Communist Pathet Lao forces would have another 900 to 1,000 troops to back them up in any determined battle to take control here, Khong remarked.

Arms were being passed out to a delegation of tribesmen, who had come into the town to volunteer to fight against a feared Pathet Lao attack.

Of 10 tassengs (villages) comprising Attapeu district, only four remain free from Communist control. All others have been taken over by the Pathet Lao, who recruit soldiers and requisition food to take away to their forces in the jungles.

In the center of a dirt compound is a heavy bunker made of stout logs and mud and protected from the frequent tropical rain by a corrugated tin roof.

Next door is a smaller bunker containing the garrison's heavy armament—a single American 81 millimeter mortar—with boxes of ammunition stacked beside it. The mortar is zeroed in on an undisclosed target across the river.

Soldiers, carrying their rifles across their hips or on their shoulders, straggle in from swimming in the river or from a meal of stick rice and bamboo shoot soup.

There are about 500 men in all inside the town. But last Tuesday night a battalion of the Royal Army's 16th mobile group from a plateau northwest of Attapeu reached here after a four-day, 50-mile

forced march. It is camped at the edge of the vital airstrip, about a mile outside town. The battalion is under the command of a Col. Bounchan Svadphaiphane, who got his training at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina.

The colonel led his battalion on the forced march, which included a single file descent down an almost perpendicular 500-foot cliff with the aid of rope ladders. This was necessary because the Pathet Lao control the passes through which regular routes leading off the plateau go.

When night falls here it is uneasy and uncomfortable. It is humid and even brushing flies away from one's rice is an exertion which brings more sweat.

This night there were few stars. It was black and silent in the surrounding jungle, but

Attapeu is cut off from normal land transportation because the Pathet Lao control the roads leading into the town. It is dependent on air transportation for bringing in supplies. That is what makes control of the airstrip so important.

Suddenly, there was a burst of machine gun fire. It was closer. This was answered by shots from our side of the riv-

er. The whir of ricocheting bullets can be heard. They're coming from across the river.

Then the mortar wakes up. It fires four rounds. The small arms fire ceases.

All is quiet again. **Khong Explains**  
Over breakfast, Col. Khong explains what it was all about. The Pathet Lao made their normal probing patrol during the night to test the town's defenses.

They do it by sending two or three men to infiltrate the outer perimeter. They then fire a burst of machine gun

fire. The response they provoke tells them how alert and how strong the defenders are in that sector.

If they think the defenses are weak, they attack, Khong said.

The mortar fire of the defenders is to let the Pathet Lao know that any attack will be met with stiff resistance.

The uneasiness ends with daybreak. "They (the Pathet Lao) sleep in the daytime," explained one officer. "But they're wide awake and mov-

ing about out there at night." One of the first things the Pathet Lao soldier learns is how to move quietly through the jungles at night and how to conceal himself by day under the cover of bushes.

The Pathet Lao gets ready for a large-scale attack by having coolie labor carry their mortars into position. Movements or companies and platoons are coordinated by blowing whistles.

This is what they did last week when they tried to attack but were beaten off. They carried away an esti-

mated 43 dead and wounded in pirogues (native boats) down the muddy Sekong.

There's little doubt about a new attack. It probably will come when the Pathet Lao think the defenders are lax, tired or demoralized or when they think they have enough strength to overwhelm the defending force.

For the men defending the town, it is not a pleasant prospect. There's no place to retreat, only 50 miles of inhospitable jungle.

So they're determined to hold on. They have no choice.



**DRESS GETS SEAT**—Actress Jane Russell and dress designer Mr. Blackwell bought a seat on an airliner for one of the gowns Miss Russell wears in her show at a Las Vegas, Nev., hotel to avoid soiling or folding the garment, valued at \$18,000. The dress, shown being unloaded in Las Vegas, is made of 14 karat gold chiffon and has six miles of white ostrich down. (UPI)



**FIRE REFLECTED**—A pillar of flame from a raging three-alarm fire at a country club in Pikesville, Md., is reflected in the club's pool. Firemen and volunteers from several nearby communities were called in to help fight the blaze. (UPI)

**Articles Reported Gone from Jackson**

A number of articles, valued at \$102, have been reported missing from the Jackson House, according to city police records. Included in the list were

two transistor radios and several items of clothing. All were the property of hotel residents, out of town when the items were missed on Aug. 5. The report was made to police by Billie Mae Case.

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