# OPERATION MILLPOND
## U.S. Marines in Thailand, 1961

Colonel George R. Hofmann Jr.
U. S. Marine Corps (Retired)

*Occasional Paper*

HISTORY DIVISION
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
QUANTICO, VIRGINIA

*Cover: An Air America helicopter (with "Marines" painted over), part of a 20-aircraft fleet that arrived in Udorn, Thailand, in 1961. At this base, U.S. Marines provided ground support for civilian pilots and crews that flew missions in support of Royal Laotian troops who were fighting against the Communist Pathet Lao. Photograph provided by the author.*

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*With the 1st Marine Division in Iraq, 2003. No Greater Friend, No Worse Enemy,* LtCol Michael S. Groen, 2006. 413 pp.

### Occasional Papers

The History Division has undertaken the publication for limited distribution of various studies, theses, compilations, bibliographies, monographs, and memoirs, as well as proceedings at selected workshops, seminars, symposia, and similar colloquia, which it considers to be of significant value for audiences interested in Marine Corps history. These "Occasional Papers," which are chosen for their intrinsic worth, must reflect structured research, present a contribution to historical knowledge not readily available in published sources, and reflect original content on the part of the author, compiler, or editor. It is the intent of the Division that these occasional papers be distributed to selected institutions, such as service schools, official Department of Defense historical agencies, and directly concerned Marine Corps organizations, so the information contained therein will be available for study and exploitation.

# Foreword

George R. Hofmann Jr. experienced Operation Millpond firsthand as a young enlisted Marine. He is now a colonel on the retired list and an instructor at George Washington University, and we are indebted to him for this account of a little-known aspect of U.S. Marine Corps history in Southeast Asia.

This operation highlights the role that the small country of Laos played in the foreign policy calculations of the newly elected U.S. president, John F. Kennedy. Gravely concerned that the Laotian government was in danger of being overwhelmed by a growing Communist insurgency known as the Pathet Lao, President Kennedy took the bold step of deploying Marine Air Base Squadron-16 (MABS-16) to nearby Thailand for the purpose of supporting a collection of helicopters piloted by an organization called Air America. Hollywood later made a movie about Air America, and it is now widely known that it was linked to the Central Intelligence Agency. The Marines of MABS-16 received no such fanfare. Working behind the scenes in austere conditions, MABS-16 gave new meaning to the phrase "in any clime and place." While Operation Millpond may seem like a small thing in comparison with much larger operations that were soon to be conducted by Marines in the Republic of South Vietnam, it nonetheless represents a clear beginning to a growing U.S. military commitment to the region as a whole, one that did not end until the last Marine left the roof of the American embassy in Saigon in 1975.

We are indebted to Colonel Hofmann for providing us with this account and for sharing his personal papers and photo collection. While it has been nearly 50 years since Operation Millpond took place, it is still relevant today as we see Marines deployed across the globe in hundreds of far-flung locations. While many of these places are usually hidden from public view at the time of the operations, the important and various roles performed by our dedicated Marines will never be forgotten.

C. P. Neimeyer

Dr. Charles P. Neimeyer
Director of Marine Corps History

# Preface

In early 1961, Communist Pathet Lao military forces were coming dangerously close to taking control of the Southeast Asian country of Laos. A Pathet Lao victory over the Royal Laotian government not only would have lost a pro-Western nation to the Communist Bloc but would have put its neighbors—particularly pro-Western Thailand—at risk. To forestall this possibility, newly elected President John F. Kennedy and his administration decided to measurably increase U.S. support to the Royal Laotian government.

This increased support came in part in the form of a 20-helicopter fleet, flown by civilian pilots and crews employed by Air America. This helicopter force covertly flew Royal Laotian troops, weapons, supplies, and other war materiel in support of the Royal Laotian government's anti-Communist military operations. A major operational deficiency—Air America lacked any aircraft maintenance and flight-line operational and maintenance capability—was resolved by assigning a military organization with the required skills to play a supporting role. Marine Air Base Squadron-16 (MABS-16), located at Marine Corps Air Facility (MCAF) Futema, Okinawa, was assigned the mission. Operations were conducted from a bare-bones airfield located outside of Udorn, a town in northeast Thailand approximately 40 miles south of the Laotian capital of Vientiane.

At that time, I was a private first class, telephone/teletype repairman (MOS 2639) assigned temporary additional duty from the Communications Company, 3d Marine Division on Okinawa, to the MABS-16 communications detachment. I deployed to Thailand on 22 March 1961 and returned to Okinawa on 18 October 1961.* In addition to personal recollections and original letters written by me to my family, the sources for this occasional paper are the Operation Millpond after action report and various newspaper and news magazine articles. I provided all of the photographs that appear in this occasional paper.[1]

I would like to thank the Marine Corps History Division for its assistance on this paper and recognize the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation for the research grant it provided to support this project.

** See my original orders in the appendix.*

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# Introduction

A little-known Marine Corps operation in Southeast Asia in 1961 began with the March deployment of approximately 300 Marines to Udorn, Thailand.* There, for a period of nearly seven months, the Marine force provided support to a small group of Air America pilots, air crews, and support personnel whose mission was to fly helicopters and fixed-wing transport aircraft in Laos in support of pro-Western Laotian government forces. These Laotian government forces were fighting the Pathet Lao, an indigenous but externally supported Communist guerrilla insurgent group that was attempting to take over the country. The insurgency had been growing since the end of the French Indochina war seven years previous.

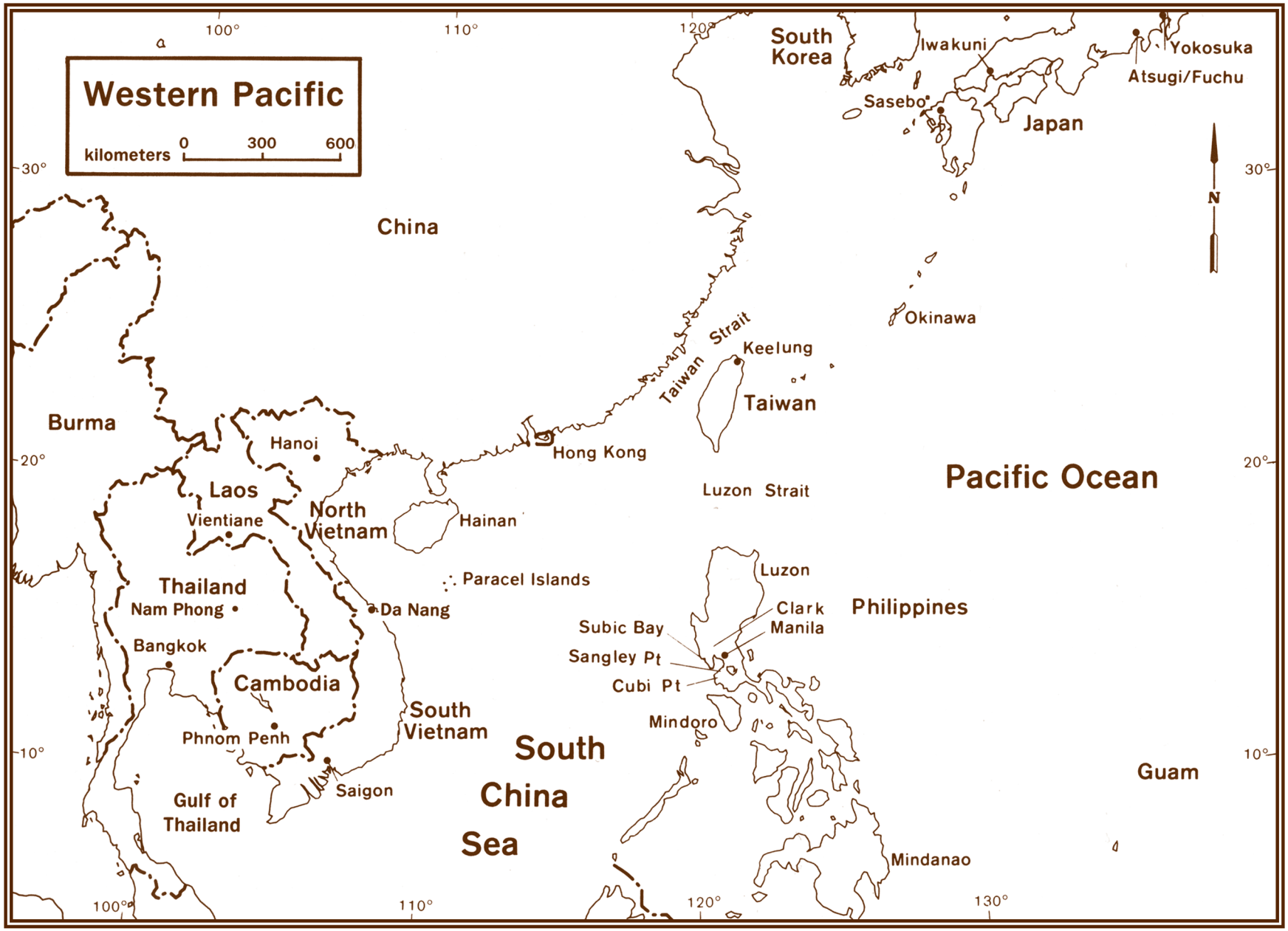
# Laos in the Years Following World War II

Between April and July 1954, diplomats met in Geneva, Switzerland, to negotiate a formal peace treaty in Korea and, following the surrender of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu to the Viet Minh on 7 May 1954, to negotiate conditions that would bring the French colonial period in Indochina to an end. On 20 July 1954, French and Viet Minh representatives signed an agreement effectively ending the eight-year conflict in Indochina. The following day, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, the Peoples Republic of China, Cambodia, and Laos joined the Viet Minh and France in endorsing the cease-fire agreement.[2]

The Geneva agreements called for, among other things, an independent and democratically governed Laos. However, events on the ground between the end of World War II and mid-1954 made clear that such an outcome for this landlocked nation would be unlikely. By the unfortunate fact of its geography, Laos was destined to become a pawn in the Cold War. Strategically located in the middle of Southeast Asia, Laos is slightly larger than the state of Idaho and has a population of approximately 2 million people. Its neighbors to the north and east in 1954 were the People's Republic of China and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, both Communist counties. Its other neighbors included South Vietnam to the east, Cambodia to the south, Thailand to the south and west, and Burma to the west.

The contest for the allegiance of Laos and for control of its government began in the late 1940s. Following the Japanese defeat in World War II, the French reinserted themselves into Indochina in an attempt to reassert dominance over their former colonies. In Laos, they encountered resistance to their return from forces affiliated with a provisional "Free Lao" government. As the French reestablished control, much of the leadership of the Free Lao forces, including many members of the royal family, fled to Thailand. Most returned to Vientiane (the seat of the

** The commonly accepted name of the city is now Udon Thani. It is the capital of Udon Thani Province. The airfield became known as Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base. It transitioned to a civilian airport in 1976 and is now Udon Thani (or Udonthani) International Airport.*




*Adapted from Naval Historical Center Material*

administrative government) and Luang Prabang (the royal capital) in the southwestern part of the country and began to form a government following semiautonomous independence within the French Union in 1949.

One leader, Prince Souphanouvong, aligned himself with Ho Chi Minh, who was establishing the Communist-sponsored Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). In September 1949, the DRV radio announced the formation of the Pathet Lao, a resistance government within Laos. In the months that followed, the resistance government elected Prince Souphanouvong as its prime minister and established a Laotian National United Front and a People's Liberation Army.

Up through 1952, Laos remained relatively free of active fighting, aside from sporadic guerrilla activity along the Laos-Vietnam border. The situation changed in April 1953 when Prince Souphanouvong and his Pathet Lao forces, supported by combat-hardened Viet Minh veterans, launched a full-scale invasion into Laos and soon established control over the northern provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly. Efforts by the Royal Laotian Government to dislodge the Pathet Lao forces ended in failure.

The April-July 1954 conference in Geneva, which was convened primarily to bring the French Indochina conflict to a close, produced a series of agreements that were designed to end all fighting in Indochina. Specifically for Laos, the agreements provided for a cease-fire pending elections and called for the integration of the two Pathet Lao-held provinces into the national government. To supervise the execution of the Geneva agreements that pertained to Laos, an international commission with representatives from Canada, India, and Poland was established, with headquarters in Vientiane. Laos gained full sovereignty at the end of 1954.

The Pathet Lao initially refused to participate in elections and rebuffed all attempts by the national government to reassert control over the provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly. In 1958, however, the Pathet Lao did participate in elections, and although the pro-government candidates won a resounding victory, the Pathet Lao was able to elect more than 10 of its supporters.

The Geneva agreements ultimately did little to foster democracy in Laos; in fact, they had the opposite effect. They conferred legality and respectability on the Communist leaders and their party. The Communist party in Laos—the Neo Lao Had Xat—gained status as a legitimate party and thus was well positioned to employ its trained and disciplined Pathet Lao cadres. Their tactics, until fighting escalated in the late summer of 1960, focused on infiltration, subversion, and preparation for the complete takeover of the Laotian government.

By early 1961, much of the northeast of Laos was under the effective control of the Pathet Lao (and North Vietnam), and these forces were seriously threatening the administrative and royal capitals, Vientiane and Luang Prabang, respectively. Supplies of heavy weapons and other war-fighting materiel were being provided in

large quantities by the Chinese and the Soviet Union. These supplies were being trucked into northeastern Laos from the port city of Vinh in North Vietnam along one of the only trafficable roads that connected the two countries. Other supplies were being flown from Hanoi to Xiengkhouang, Laos, the site of an airfield under Pathet Lao control in northeast Laos. The Royal Laotian Army was performing poorly against the more aggressive and motivated Pathet Lao forces threatening its capital.

## The Situation in Laos Deteriorates, 1960-61

August 1960 saw the beginning of a chain of events that brought the United States into active involvement in an attempt to keep Laos from falling into the Communist camp. During that month, Captain Kong Le, a little-known paratroop battalion commander, seized control of the capital of Vientiane. He passed control of the government to Prince Souvanna Phouma, a member of the royal family who was favorably disposed to the Pathet Lao. In its first actions, Souvanna Phouma's proclaimed "neutralist" government invited the Soviet Union to open an embassy in Laos and pledged to maintain friendly relations with North Vietnam and China. Over the next four months, Communist influence within the government increased steadily until, in late 1960, the Laotian army under a former defense minister, General Phoumi Nosavan, retook the city. After losing it for a short period, the army again retook Vientiane and in mid-December expelled the Communist forces. The fighting, however, was not over.

As the Pathet Lao and Captain Kong Le's forces were being pushed back to the east, reports began to surface that they were receiving massive support from the North Vietnamese and the Soviet Union. With this support, which was reported to include weapons, related war materiel, and North Vietnamese troops, the resistance in areas held by the Communist forces stiffened. In early January 1961, China's Radio Beijing reported that the Pathet Lao and Captain Kong Le's forces had taken the strategic Plain of Jars, including the town of Xiengkhouang and its airfield. In February, the Pathet Lao forces took control of the town of Muong Kassy, severing the strategic road between Luang Prabang and Vientiane. In its efforts to counter these advances, pro-Western forces continued to suffer "serious reverses near Xiengkhouang," as reported on 30 March.[3] From the positions they had established, the Pathet Lao could threaten the administrative capital of Vientiane to the south and the royal capital of Luang Prabang to the north.

The United States had been providing aid to the government of Laos since the Geneva settlement in mid-1954, which totaled $300 million by the beginning of 1960.* This aid had gone to support the Laotian Army, the police, and other governmental services. While Military Assistance Advisory Groups had been established to oversee aid and advisory efforts in other countries, the relatively

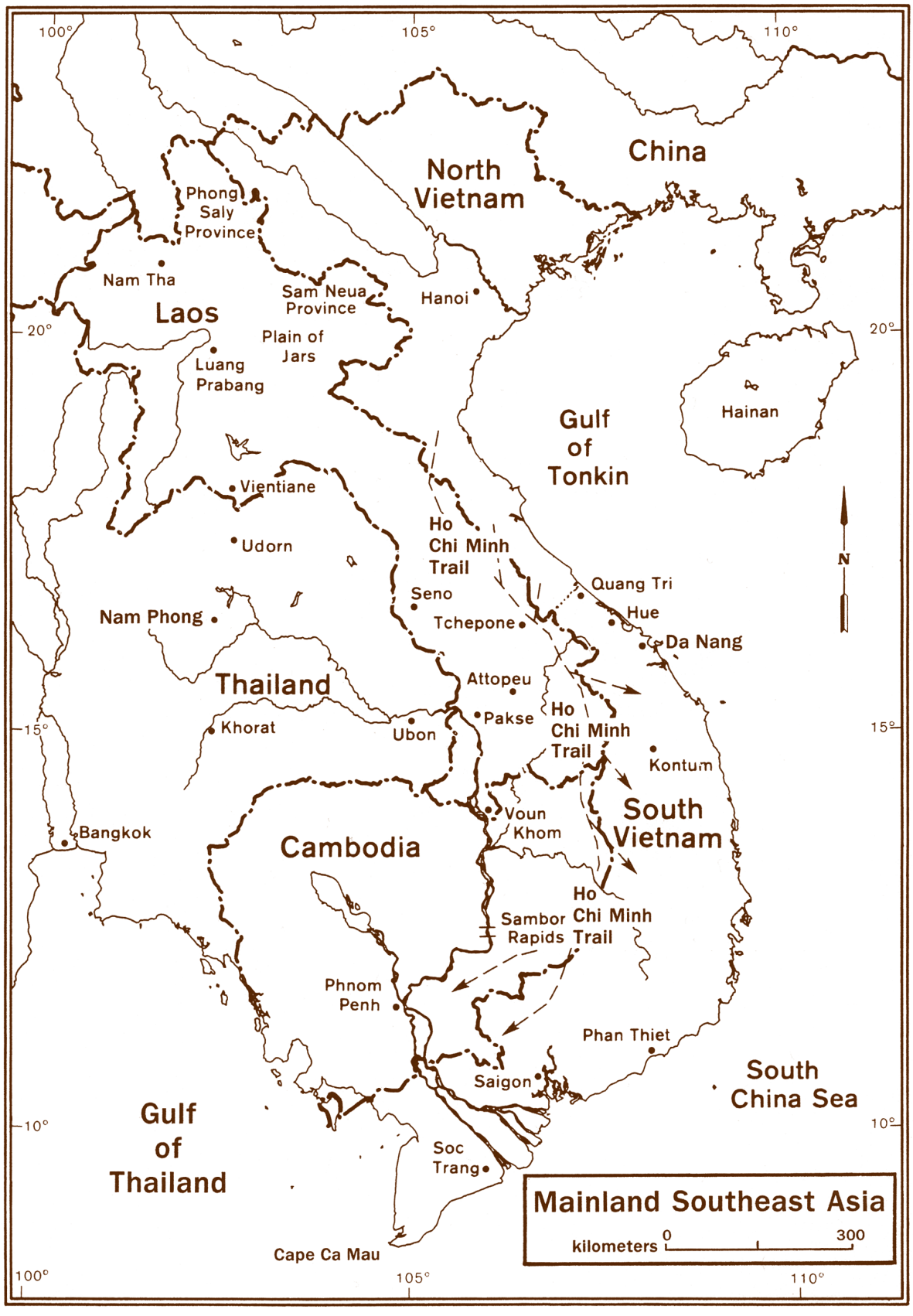
** The $300 million in aid equates to around $2.25 billion in 2008 dollars.*

small assistance program in Laos was being administered by a Program Evaluation Office. Personnel assigned to this office were mostly technicians whose principal focus was training the Laotian army personnel in the technical and maintenance aspects of the equipment being provided.[4] As the Laotian military faltered and the Pathet Lao forces—with seemingly unlimited support from the Soviet Union, China, and North Vietnam—gained strength and threatened to overrun the entire country, the United States, its support clearly inadequate, was faced with the decision of whether to make a greater commitment in an effort to reverse the unfavorable flow of events.

## President Kennedy Commits U.S. Forces

In March 1961, newly elected President John F. Kennedy was briefed on the deteriorating situation in Laos and U.S. force levels in the Pacific Theater by Admiral Harry D. Felt, the Commander in Chief, Pacific Forces. The report was not encouraging. The military situation in Laos was continuing to deteriorate, with the pro-Communist forces making gains on all fronts. A small cadre of American civilian pilots under contract to the Laotian government was flying resupply and troop transport missions employing American-made helicopters and aging C-47 transport aircraft.[5] They had sustained several hits on their aircraft, and as the level of fighting had intensified their support was becoming increasingly inadequate. A U.S. embassy C-47 aircraft conducting an observation mission had been shot down by hostile fire with the loss of all seven crew members—the first U.S. casualties of the Laotian war. The sole survivor, a U.S. Army major, was reported captured by the Communist forces.[6] During this same period, five members of the U.S. Program Evaluation Office barely escaped injury when their twin-engine Beechcraft was hit multiple times by Communist ground fire.[7] The small military assistance mission in Vientiane was also proving inadequate to the job.

In view of the dire situation facing the pro-Western forces in Laos, President Kennedy decided to substantially increase U.S. support. A major part of his plan called for the employment of increased numbers of nonmilitary helicopters and fixed-wing transport aircraft to be flown by civilian American pilots. Until this expanded nonmilitary force could become self-sustaining, support for its operations would be provided by U.S. military personnel, specifically Marines, who possessed the requisite skills in airfield operations, flight-line and aircraft maintenance, base support operations, and related functions. These U.S. military forces would deploy from military bases in the Far East to an airfield in northeast Thailand, approximately 40 miles south of the Laotian administrative capital of Vientiane.




*Adapted from Naval Historical Center Material*

# The Order to Deploy Marine Corps Forces is Issued

On 12 March 1961, Marine Air Base Squadron-16 (MABS-16), located at Marine Corps Air Facility (MCAF), Futema, Okinawa, received its first message alerting it for possible deployment.[8] The message directed the squadron to be prepared on 48 hours notice to move, employing theater airlift, a reinforced air base squadron with supplies, equipment, and personnel, to Udorn, Thailand, and establish an expeditionary base for operations and field maintenance for 20 HUS-1 helicopters. The deployment was to be completed within six days of receipt of the order to execute. Initially, MABS-16 was directed to establish and maintain a 30-day level of spare parts for the 20 HUS-1 helicopters. Prior to deployment, that requirement was increased to a 120-day supply. The deployment was named Operation Millpond.

MABS-16's initial deployment plans called for a total of 455 Marine Corps and Navy personnel. However, a U.S. State Department-Royal Thai Government conference imposed a ceiling of 300 as the maximum number of Marines that would be allowed to enter Thailand in support of Operation Millpond. This limitation had a serious impact on MABS-16's aircraft maintenance and flight-line operations capabilities, but the ceiling was not adjusted. Further, with only two exceptions, MABS-16 was directed to be completely self-sustaining with expeditionary equipment. The first exception was petroleum, oil, and lubricants that would be supplied by rail from Bangkok. The second was subsistence support, which as of 10 days after the Marines arrived would be provided by the Navy Commissary Store in Bangkok. In addition to the support for its Marines, MABS-16 was directed to deploy with additional camp equipment to support 80 Air America personnel.[9]

# MABS-16 is Task Organized for its Mission

In addition to organic personnel and equipment, seven detachments also deployed in support of MABS-16. They were:

- *Detachment, Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron-16, responsible for maintaining a Class C and D aircraft maintenance facility.*
- *Detachment Marine Air Base Squadron-17, responsible for setting up and maintaining a tactical airfield fuel dispensing system and an air freight facility and supporting the crew of a Marine R4D-8 aircraft.*
- *Detachment, Communications Company, 3d Marine Division.*
- *Infantry Platoon, 3d Marine Regiment, 3d Marine Division.*
- *Engineer Platoon, 3d Pioneer Battalion, 7th Engineer Regiment.*

* *Marine Aircraft Tactical Control Unit-1.*

* *Detachment, Marine Wing Headquarters Group-1, communications and postal support.*

## The Execute Order

The execute order for Operation Millpond was received on 19 March 1961. It directed movement to begin on 22 March, with the airlift phase to be completed in four days. MABS-16 was directed to be prepared to receive helicopters at the Udorn airfield on 27 March and to begin supporting helicopter operations immediately thereafter. Nine aircraft (five C-130s and four C-124s) carrying the most urgently needed members of the deploying force were scheduled to depart Okinawa on the evening of 22 March and arrive at Udorn, with intermediate stops at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines and Bangkok, on 23 March. Both organic 1st Marine Aircraft Wing and U.S. Air Force (315th Air Division) aircraft participated in this airlift. Due to mechanical problems, only seven of these aircraft made it to Udorn on 23 March.


*Air Force transport planes from the Military Air Transport Command brought many of the Marines and their equipment to the airfield at Udorn, Thailand.*

## The MABS-16 Mission

MABS-16's mission, in part, read: "When directed, MABS-16 (-) (Rein) deploy to Udorn . . . for purposes of establishing an expeditionary base for operation and flight maintenance of 20 HUS-1 helicopters."[10] In fact, its mission demanded much more from its 300-man force.

MABS-16 was to provide total aircraft maintenance and airfield services, plus training in both of the aforementioned areas, and other support, to Air America, Inc. Although Air America was publicly identified as a company under contract with the U.S. government—an April 1961 *New York Times* article described it as a "subsidiary of Civil Air Transport, a private company based in Taiwan"[11]—it was in fact covertly operated by the Central Intelligence Agency. Under its "contract," Air America provided pilots, air crew members, executives, administrative support, and other personnel. However, the company was initially unable to perform the maintenance on its aircraft to keep them flight worthy, and it could not satisfactorily execute airfield operations. It was expected that after a period of training by the MABS-16 aircraft maintenance and airfield services Marines, Air America personnel would assume full responsibility for the maintenance of their helicopters and airfield operations. At that point, MABS-16's mission would be accomplished and it could terminate operations and return to its home base on Okinawa.

## The Early Days of Operation Millpond

Air America pilots had already been flying missions in Laos. Operating under the control of the Program Evaluation Office, they had been flying four HUS-1s in Laos since December 1960. One had been lost to enemy fire, and all of the others

*The monsoon season brings considerable amounts of rain to northeast Thailand. The airfield is at the top of the picture. The initial, temporary camp was located to the right of the airfield.*

had been hit by enemy fire.[12] Under its new and expanded contract, Air America was to receive 20 HUS-1 helicopters from the U.S. government. It was to operate these aircraft in support of the Royal Laotian forces engaged in combat operations against Pathet Lao insurgents that were being supported by North Vietnamese ground troops and supplied by the Soviet Union and China.

Of the 16 additional aircraft made available (to bring Air America up to its 20 authorized aircraft), 13 flew into the Udorn airfield on 27 March.[13] Although efforts had been made to "sanitize" the aircraft, when the sun struck the fuselage of the arriving HUS-1s, a large white star and the word "Marines" were clearly visible under the light coat of green paint that had been applied to each helicopter.[14] With the arrival of the final three helicopters a few days later, and the repair of the three that had been provided the pervious December, Air America had 19 operational aircraft. The loss of a second aircraft a short time later left Air America with 18 assigned as April approached.

*Air America's helicopters as they arrived for duty. Underneath the light coat of green paint, a large white star and the word "Marines" were clearly visible.*

As maintaining Air America's operational capability was MABS-16's main priority, among the first Marines to arrive were 2 officers and 30 enlisted Marines from Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron-16's aircraft maintenance detachment. They immediately set about establishing aircraft repair shops in an empty hanger. Camp construction crews also arrived early. Communications was a priority, and when the author arrived on 23 March, only two general purpose (GP) tents had been set up.[15] Over the next few days, the remainder of the force flew in.

# Your Only Comment Will Be "No Comment"

During the initial days of the operation, Lieutenant Colonel Richard W. Johnson, the MABS-16 commanding officer, personally conducted an early morning "all hands" meeting. Within limits, he briefed his Marines on the command's activities and the importance of its mission. He emphasized at every meeting that while the unit's mission was not classified, Marines were not to talk about it to anyone. He noted that the secretary of defense had issued a directive making it clear that the only comment that Marines were allowed to make was "no comment."

*The first Marines to arrive were greeted with bare ground. As soon as tentage arrived, the Marines put up their own billeting and work spaces.*

This directive did not sit well with the many correspondents representing the major print and television news services who began arriving from Vientiane, Laos, on the evening of 23 March, shortly after they had been informed that U.S. servicemen had landed at Udorn, Thailand. One correspondent, who filed a 25 March 1961 report for the *Evening Star*, a Washington, D.C., newspaper, noted that "The Marines have landed in Thailand with their eyes open and their mouths firmly shut."[16] "The only comment I have to make is no comment," Lieutenant Colonel Johnson told the visiting newsmen.[17] Staff members from the U.S. embassy in Bangkok were on the ground to ensure that no unauthorized photographs were taken. Interviews with the Marines establishing the camp were forbidden.[18]

Although the Marines were portrayed by one source as "disembarking on their top-secret mission," there was nothing secret about it. Many correspondents, including newsreel cameramen, were at the airfield to greet the Marines as they arrived. Over the next several days, the newsmen filed many stories in major U.S. newspapers and weekly news magazines. Many gave accurate accountings of what was taking place; some, however, were well wide of the mark. An article from The *New York Herald Tribune*, with a dateline of 6 April 1961, ran with the headline "U.S. Marines Fly Laotians into Battle."[19] A 7 April 1961 *Time* magazine article published a picture of several HUS-1 helicopters with the caption "U.S. Helicopters & Marines in Thailand." The accompanying article noted inaccurately that "Five hundred U.S. Marines unpacked their gear in Northeast Thailand. . . . They were equipped with 16 helicopters, ready to help fly men and supplies to the fighting front if they were ordered into action."[20]

As the airfield and adjacent areas were Thai property, the Marines had no authority to restrict any correspondent's access. Accordingly, for the next few days, newsmen mingled among the silent Marines attempting to glean information about what was going on. By 27 March, however, most members of the media had become discouraged and returned to Laos. The story and pictures that they most coveted—the arrival of the helicopters—took place on 28 March. On that day there were no correspondents or photographers in the vicinity of the airfield.

The local Thais were also curious about what was taking place at the airfield. For several days during and after the Marines arrived, local citizens, often numbering in the hundreds, stood on the main road adjacent to the airfield and observed the Marines as they constructed their tent camp.

## Aircraft Maintenance and Line Maintenance Operations—The First Weeks

The Aircraft Maintenance Division's Marines faced a daunting dual mission. They were tasked with providing aircraft maintenance and line maintenance for 20 HUS-1 helicopters with an anticipated utilization factor of approximately 120 hours a month. While performing these functions—for a period expected to run for 90 to 120 days, but which in fact ran for more than six months—they were also tasked to train Air America maintenance crews that would gradually phase in and assume all aspects of aircraft maintenance and line functions.[21] Further, the Marines of the maintenance department were tasked with maintaining all shop and test equipment, special support equipment, aircraft spares, tools, and general aircraft consumables in sufficient quantity to sustain the operation.

The forced contraction of MABS-16's authorized personnel strength from the desired 455 to a ceiling of 300 ensured that the aircraft maintenance department was staffed to only spartan levels. To accomplish all of their tasks, only two officers, to include one avionics officer, and 37 enlisted men were assigned from Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron-16 to perform the aircraft maintenance functions. Initially, 56 Marines were assigned to perform line maintenance functions. This number was reduced to 37 early in the operation. Wisely, in light of the requirement to train Air America personnel, care was taken to assign experienced and qualified staff noncommissioned officers.

Within two weeks, Air America had provided approximately 40 men to begin training with the aircraft and line maintenance crews. About 15 were assigned to shops or other hanger functions. Unfortunately, as the tempo of operations picked up and backup helicopter crew chiefs were needed for actual flight operations into Laos, some of these men became unavailable for maintenance training and operations. Essentially, Air America's main effort remained on the flight line in the servicing of aircraft.[22]

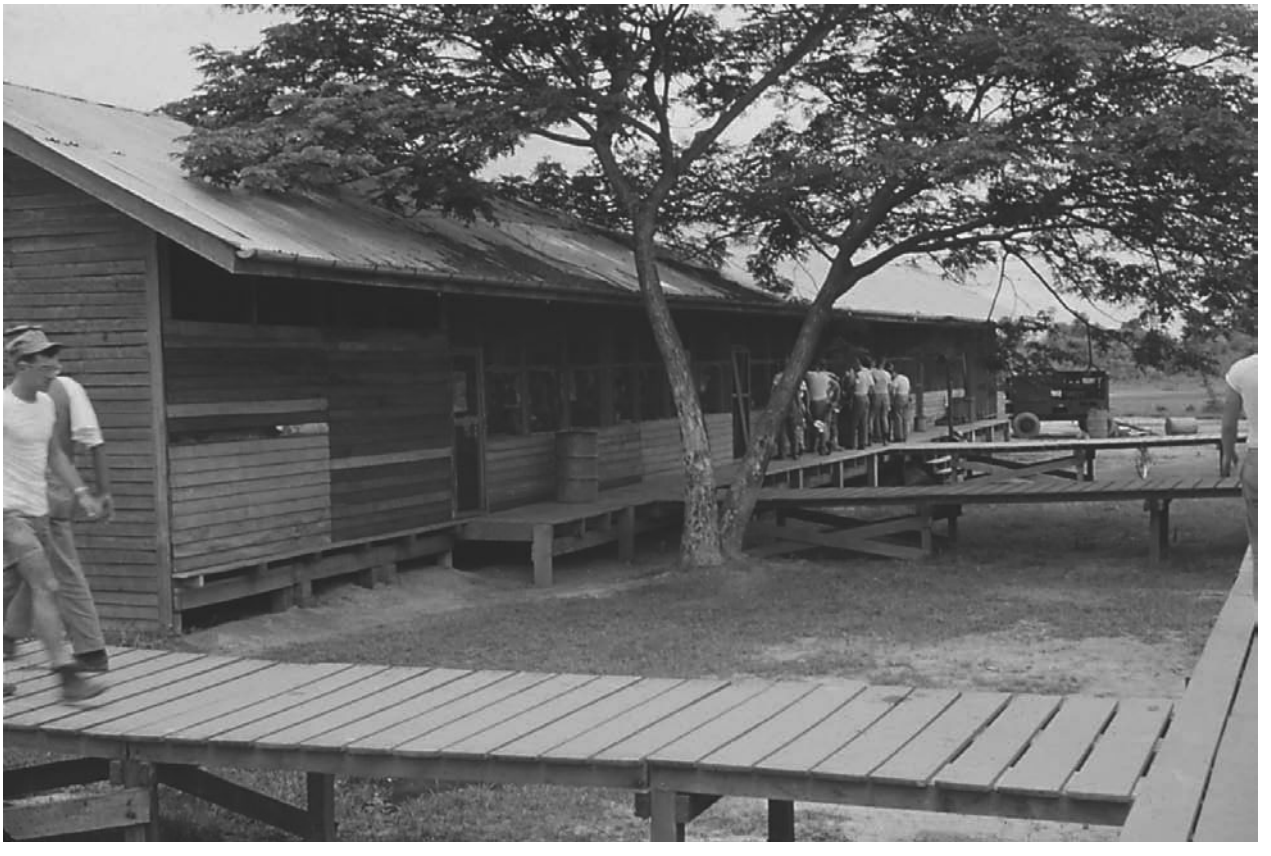
## Camp Construction

Establishment of the camp began immediately upon the Marines' arrival and proceeded in two phases. Phase I dealt with the initial, temporary camp. An area was selected and marked off and as tentage arrived, the tents were put up in predesignated areas. First priority was given to billeting. Once living areas had been established, the mess hall, sick bay, and office tents were put up. In approximately

*In the initial camp, all tents – including the Squadron Aid Station pictured – were pitched on the ground.*

three weeks, the temporary camp had been completed. It served MABS-16's Marines for more than two months until a more permanent—and more livable—cantonment was constructed on the opposite side of the airfield.

Phase II involved construction of a second camp that, while still expeditionary in nature, was more suited to protect the Marines from the monsoon rains that would soon be upon them. Construction of this camp took about 11 weeks to complete. The work was done by the engineer platoon with 1 officer and 21 enlisted Marines, augmented by 21 additional carpenters from the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. Plans were drawn up to build the camp above ground, as it was anticipated that the entire area would be under water when the monsoon season began in the early summer. An area of approximately eight acres, which was relatively flat and free of vegetation and also in close proximity to the airfield, was selected as the site for the camp.



*The squadron mess hall was located in one of the existing structures that had been rehabilitated by the engineers. Notice that it was built up off of the ground to prevent flooding during the monsoon season.*

Three buildings, all in extremely poor states of repair, existed in the area chosen for the camp. During Phase II of the construction, these buildings were renovated and put into service. The first was designated as the camp's future mess hall. Renovation began with the removal of all internal partitions and the screening of all windows. Storage areas were constructed on both ends of the building by