

Worthy daughters
and sons of
Lao people

WORTHY DAUGHTERS AND SONS OF LAO PEOPLE

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The signing of the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Indochina, by recognizing the national sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Laos as well as Vietnam and Cambodia, put an end to French domination in Indochina.

The long and hard war of resistance of the Lao people against the French colonialists ended in victory.

But the American imperialists immediately took the place of the French colonialists. To achieve their aim of turning Laos into a neo-colony and a military base for aggression, they were quick, through economic "aid", to foster a clique of traitors, rig up a puppet administration and organize an army of mercenaries. These are tools in the service of their "special war", in fact their neo-colonialist war of aggression in Laos. The country's liberated areas have been savagely bombed by Phantoms, Thunderchiefs, Sabres since May 1964, and recently even by B. 52s.

Over the last twelve years, and especially since the signing of the 1962 Geneva Agreement, Laos should

have enjoyed peace and the Lao people should have been free to devote themselves to national rehabilitation and building. But up to now, because of the crimes perpetrated by the Americans, the Lao people have continued to shed blood and tears. That is why they have no alternative but to rise up again to struggle against the imperialist aggressors and their valets, the clique of traitors.

Under the leadership of the Neo Lao Haksat headed by Prince Souphanouvong, our entire people, united as one man, have engaged in a resolute struggle against the invaders, for a peaceful, neutral, independent, democratic, reunified and prosperous Laos.

In the course of this sacred struggle, large numbers of worthy daughters and sons of the Fatherland have emerged from all nationalities of the Lao community. On the military front as well as in political action, they have evinced the traditional heroism of an indomitable people, confident of final victory in their national-liberation struggle.

In 1964, the Second Congress of Army Heroes of the Lao People reviewed and, in the name of the nation, praised numerous exploits of our fighters.

By presenting in this booklet a number of those exploits, we hope that these stories founded on true facts will help the reader better understand our people who deeply love peace but stand ready to endure every sacrifice for the independence and freedom of the nation.

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Neo Lao Haksat Publications

THAO NAO, A BRILLIANT FIGHTER

by THAO BOUN LIN

ON the night of March 3, 1961, I arrived at the Salaphoukhoun crossroads. This was a rather wellknown place, for it was there that the Pathet Lao armed forces had foiled an advance by the Americans and their puppets, who had tried to force their way into the Plain of Jars through a large-scale attack.

From an artillery emplacement, I followed a trench up the slope of Phousoung Hill to an outpost located on top. It was perhaps two in the morning, a spring morning, and it was quite cold. In underground shelters covered with round logs, our fighters were sleeping on wooden planks, wrapped in warm blankets.

I asked to see Thao Nao. The man on duty told me that he was on the look-out post, adding hastily:

"There are nineteen of us here, including Thao Nao, the commander. Fighting and guard duty hardly leave us any time for rest. So, when one of us is sick, Thao Nao replaces him on the watch-tower."

At three in the morning, Thao Nao was back. As soon as he saw me, he threw his arms round my neck without even removing his rifle and cartridge belt :

"Heavens!" he exclaimed. "How happy I am to see you, brother!"

It is easy to guess the emotion felt by two soldiers who had known each other in battle and who met again after a long separation. For me Thao Nao was like a young brother : he had been with us in so many episodes of the revolutionary war.

When I told him the reason for my coming to Salaphoukhoun, he again warmly embraced me :

"So you are now a war correspondent. Good! Come with us at any time and in any place. We won't let the Americans lay a finger on you!"

"Never mind the Yanks, brother. I know their worth!"

We discussed a programme of work, then I told him to lie down and have a good sleep, but he refused, saying he didn't need one. But the rings under his eyes belied what he said. So I insisted that he should go to bed. No sooner had he lain down than he started snoring. Poor chap! I knew he would rather sit up all night talking with me.

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I remember the day when I had met him for the first time. The picture is as clear in my mind as if the whole thing had happened only yesterday. Our combat group was to carry out a propaganda mission at

Dakcaleup, a small village inhabited by Kaxing minority people in the district of Sansay, Attopeu province, at the foot of the Indochina Range. The rain caught us when we were only a short distance from the village, and we took shelter in a hut on the side of the path. A young boy also came running to the hut, clad in an indigo loincloth. When he saw the little hut already full of people, he stopped with a perplexed look. Rain water was trickling on his body, on the crossbow of *teck* wood slung over his shoulder, on his quiver and on his bush-knife hanging from his waist. We beckoned to him to enter. To our questions, he gave only brief answers.

"Where are you going?"

"School."

"What's your name?"

"Thao Nao."

"Nice name. How old are you?"

"Don't know."

"How many brothers and sisters have you?"

"Never count them."

It was only when the rain had stopped and we had started out on the path again that he asked :

"Brothers, you are Itsalas, aren't you?" *

"How do you know?" I asked him. But I got no answer.

At Dakcaleup, we visited every home in fulfilment of our mission. Like the other families, Thao Nao's

* Members of the Free Laos Front (Ed).

lived exclusively from the products of a patch of burnt-out forest clearing. Wild beasts often came to ravage the crops, and taxes took the major part of the harvests. The loss of national independence had made the Lao people the slaves of colonialism, and how hard their condition was!

Thao Nao's old mother said:

"Yes, you are right, my sons. Our fellow-villagers must have warm clothes for the winter and good bush-knives for clearing the forest; our girls should no longer be reduced to covering their bodies with tree-bark, and mothers nursing their babies should have rice to eat, and not only bamboo shoots!"

Tears welled up in Thao Nao's eyes. This taciturn and rough-mannered boy was in fact very sensitive.

Some time later, we left Dakcaleup for another village. As we started on the path, we saw Thao Nao waiting for us at the side of the track.

"Let me go with you, brothers," he said.

"We're going to Daktyet," we said, "what are you going to do there?"

He remained silent, his eyes glued to the ground.

"I have nothing to do at Daktyet," he answered at last. "I want to go with you to wage the revolution. Just like you. To wage the revolution so that the Kaxing and all other Lao people will no longer have to suffer misery and humiliation."

Since then, Thao Nao worked as our guide, courier and cook. He also participated in our activities. Soon he became a very good guerilla. In the spring of 1954, I saw him donning a soldier's uniform. After the signing of the Geneva Agreements, the armed forces

went to the regrouping areas in Samneua and Phong-saly provinces. Thao Nao and I went with different units, and we hadn't seen each other since.

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The whole of Salaphoukhoun was still shrouded in the morning mist. But the enemy artillery was rumbling without respite. At noon, there was a lull, and Thao Nao took me to the observation post. He told me that there had been days when the small hill opposite had received more than a thousand shells, and its red earth had turned brown. The wind coming from there brought us a smell of powder, burnt grass and calcined earth. Facing us, and about one kilometre away, there were enemy advanced positions on a hill called Sensi, and further away, we saw the arc of Road 13, and, on the roadside, a two-storeyed bungalow which looked like a blockhouse. From those advanced positions, enemy artillery was pounding away day and night at the ridge of Phousoung, which had by now become something like a burnt-out forest clearing. This beautiful-looking hill, formerly covered with coffee plants which, when in bloom, put white splashes on the green background, was now barren and lifeless.

"I had told my comrades," Thao Nao said, "that if we knew how to dig galleries into the mountain like the pangolin, enemy artillery and aircraft wouldn't be able to do us any harm. For them it would be just like trying to dig wells in the river. But if we didn't dig any trenches and galleries, the enemy could break our

skulls by merely throwing stones at us! The comrades had listened to me and spent much time and effort digging shelters. Hardly had we finished digging them when the enemy started their attack. After a violent artillery preparation, about one hundred of them tried to crawl up the slope of Phousoung. I sent a five-man team with a light machine-gun on the enemy's left. The rest of us, fourteen men in all, just sat tight in our trenches, determined to wait until enemy troops had come within close range, to mow them down. But they were chicken-hearted bastards: when we opened fire all of them just dropped flat on their bellies, and it was hard to tell which of them had been hit. Behind them, their commanders shouted orders and fired pistol shots, but to no avail. None of them budged an inch. They just hugged the soil tightly and fired at random. Even if their chiefs had tickled the back of their necks with a bayonet, they would have refused to raise their heads! Why should they risk their lives when they could just stay where they were and squander American ammunition? To tell the truth, not all of them succeeded in saving their hides, for our men were crack shots. Then our five-man group sneaked down the hill-slope and opened a raking fire on their flank. Panic-stricken, they took to their heels, leaving their dead, whom we had to bury ourselves, using the craters dug by their artillery."

Anger suddenly came into Thao Nao's voice and his features hardened.

"Then," he continued his story, "the enemy became more furious than wolves deprived of their prey. Some days they launched no less than five attacks! Once,