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The Pace Quickens: Summer 1964

9. When the ambassador received the photo boards with narrative on June 3, he was disappointed. (A similar set was given Ambassador Martin for the use of the Thai embassy and the RTS.) In Unger's view, the pictures failed to document communist violations of the accords. Although the reconnaissance had signaled American concern, the poor results were now overshadowed by the distinct possibility an aircraft might be shot down. The T-28 pilots already reported many more 37-mm antiaircraft positions on the Plain of Jars, and Unger proposed again that reconnaissance over northern Laos be curtailed but not suspended. Widely spaced rechecks of key areas were still needed to pinpoint new concentrations, shifts of enemy units, and altered or camouflaged installations. Unger stressed that his comments applied solely to northern Laos, not the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the panhandle.⁹

10. Admiral Felt was in basic, but not total, agreement with Unger. Photo requirements were not as high as when the Pathet Lao "were knocking Kong Le off the PDJ."¹⁰ Recon could be random, say, twice a week, but not until there was better coverage of northern Laos. Moreover, spot checks would not likely produce the proper T-28 targets. Only regular photo and visual reconnaissance would discover trucks, troop concentrations, and supply buildups.¹¹

11. Unger found an ally in Adm. Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, Jr., CINCPACFLT, who thought the results did not justify the effort. Roads and areas of suspected Pathet Lao/NVA activity had been reconnoitered repeatedly without locating significant numbers of troops or war materials. The hazards of poor visibility and low-level flying in mountainous terrain had forced stereotyped tactics. So far, he added, 50 percent of the Navy's Yankee Team planes had encountered ground fire. Sharp feared that if the enemy's guns were massed, one of the reconnaissance planes could easily be mousetrapped. Like Unger, Sharp wanted the Yankee Team tempo slowed to random flights.¹²

12. What Unger and Sharp feared occurred on June 6. A Navy RF-8A from the *Kitty Hawk*, flying at twelve hundred feet near Xieng Khouang, was downed by communist flak. At this time, General Moore's earlier request to use U.S. aircraft in Laos for SAR still had not been approved. Even though a rescue coordination center manned by a few rescue controllers was set up in Saigon AOC, no professional USAF SAR forces were in Southeast Asia when the RF-8A was lost. The prevailing MACV view was that VNAF, U.S. Army, or Marine helicopters could perform any SAR. This might work in South Vietnam; but in Laos, such U.S.-conducted operations were forbidden by the Geneva accords. The task accordingly fell to Air America. Fortunately, two of their transports, a C-123 Provider and a C-7 Caribou, were near Xieng Khouang at ten thousand feet when the Navy aircraft was shot down. The transports intercepted the pilot's "mayday," immediately jettisoned their cargoes, and began directing the SAR. Two Helio Couriers and two H-34s of the airline were flown to the scene, and Meo guerrillas in the vicinity were alerted for a possible extraction. Because of poor communications, none of the Air America people knew they were looking for an American pilot.¹³

13. Meanwhile, Colonel Tyrrell requested that Ambassador Unger let U.S. aircraft fly cover for the rescue helicopters. Unger sent [redacted] instead, but they could not contact the downed flyer, Lt. Charles F. Klusmann. The helicopters were compelled to turn back when a crewman

9. Msgs, SECSTATE to AmEmb Vientiane, 1114, Jun 1, 1964, 1512, Jun 4, 1964.

10. Felt was in error. Kong Le still retained forces on the western and southern fringes of the plain and several scattered redoubts in its heart.

11. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 052030Z Jun 64.

12. Msg, CINCPACFLT to CINCPAC, 060420Z Jun 64.

13. Msgs, AmEmb Vientiane to SECSTATE, 1528, Jun 6, 1964, 1532, Jun 6, 1964, 2d AD to 13th AF, 061037Z Jun 64 (retransmitted by CSAF to SECSTATE, 061635Z Jun 64), AmEmb Bangkok to SECSTATE, 2116, Jun 10, 1964; Helmka and Hale, pp 116-17; hist, CINCPAC, 1964, p 271; Capt B. Conn Anderson, *USAF Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia, 1961-1966* (Proj CHECO, Hickam AFB, Hawaii, 1966), pp 1-2, 32.