Iron Man of Laos

Prince Phetsarat Ratanavongsa

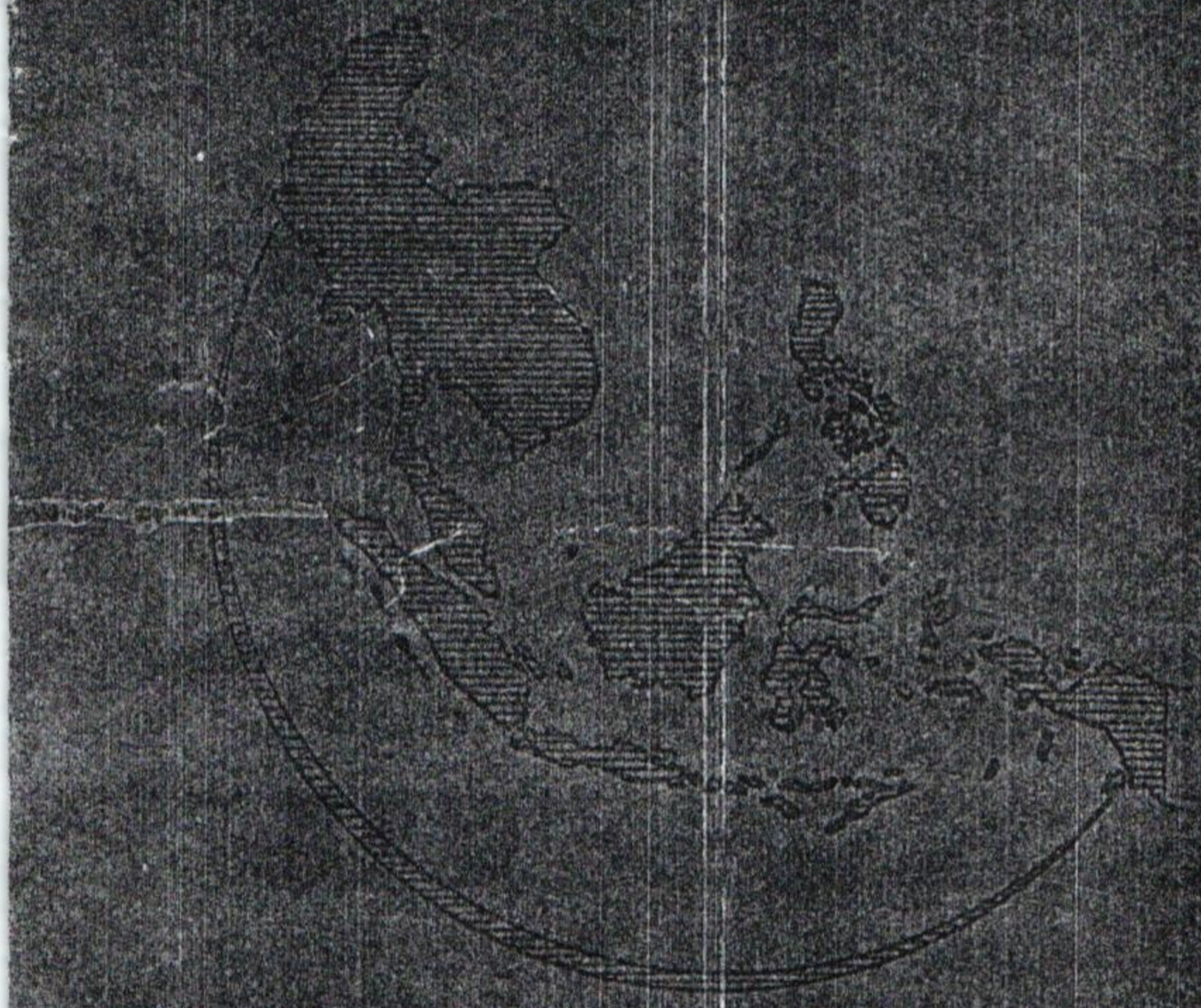
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# IRON MAN OF LAOS
# PRINCE PHETSARATH RATTANAVONGSA

by "3349"

Translated by John B. Murdoch

Edited by David K. Wyatt



DATA PAPER: NUMBER 110

SOUTHEAST ASIA PROGRAM

DEPARTMENT OF ASIAN STUDIES

CORNELL UNIVERSITY, ITHACA, NEW YORK

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IRON MAN OF LAOS

PRINCE PHETSARATH RATANAVONGSA

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Department of Asian Studies
Cornell University, Ithaca, New York
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ห้ามจำหน่าย

# FOREWORD

The Translations Project Group is engaged in sponsoring translations of Southeast Asian source materials. Formed in late 1970 as a subcommittee of the Southeast Asia Council's Research Committee, the Group endeavors to respond to the need for translating important works from Southeast Asian languages. The Group decided that initial translation efforts into English should focus on materials of a biographical nature emanating from the various countries of Southeast Asia.

The members of the Translations Project Group with to express their appreciation to the Southeast Asia Council and its parent organization, the Association for Asian Studies, for facilitating its efforts, and to the Ford Foundation for providing the necessary funds.

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# PREFACE

When the Translations Project Group was first formed in 1970 and its members began to discuss their favorite Southeast Asian autobiographical works, this volume on Prince Phetsarath of Laos came readily to mind. My own acquaintance with it dates back to a spring day in 1962, when, researching a topic in Lao history, I happened upon it in the library stacks. I was immediately captivated by its simple, unsophisticated style and fascinated by the light it shed on critical events in recent Lao history. It is a most unusual narrative, important as much because of how it tells its tale as because of what it has to say. Its style is laborious, its organization sometimes chaotic, its language at times difficult even to the native speaker; and yet it has a charm and a revelatory quality that are rare.

The story of Prince Phetsarath's life demanded a translator sympathetic to its subject; one who understood the period in which Phetsarath lived and the environment from which he came. It took more than a decade to find a translator worthy of the task: John Baldwin Murdoch. Murdoch came to Cornell University in 1971 comfortably fluent in Lao and fascinated by the country in which he had just spent four years in rural development and education work with the International Voluntary Service. By his second year of graduate study in Southeast Asian history, he had immersed himself in Lao history and had become interested in Phetsarath and with the history that had shaped the Prince's career. He chose to undertake doctoral dissertation research on the Kingdom of Luang Prabang at the end of the nineteenth century. Before leaving Cornell in 1974 to conduct research in France, Thailand, and Laos, Murdoch had worked through two drafts of this translation, and he continued to work on it, and an introduction to it, while abroad.

Working together, John and I agreed to cut out some sections of the text (mainly long descriptive accounts of journeys, lists of people, and the full text of the Geneva Agreement on Laos of 1954), and we rearranged the manuscript where its organization proved confusing or repetitive. John hewed closely to the style of the original, at times to the point where it interfered with the reader's easy understanding; but in checking the translation against the text I never encountered an instance of mistranslation or inaccuracy. This is a faithful, if not an elegantly literate, translation. I had just given the final chapter to a typist, and was awaiting John's "Translator's Introduction" when word arrived of his death by drowning in Bangkok on June 9, 1976.

Murdoch's notes and the fragmentary draft of his "Translator's Introduction" probably do not begin to convey all that he intended to say on his subject. In putting his notes and drafts together in the "Translator's Introduction," I have tried to remain faithful to what John actually had committed to paper. I can only guess at the shape of the final section he might have written by way of summarizing the importance of Phetsarath and his book and the peculiar light it sheds

on recent history. Were I able, I would have asked John questions that might have elicited answers to some of the nagging questions and doubts I have about this work. Knowing the importance I know John attached both to family connections and to personal relationships in the politics of Laos, I would have asked him whether he might be able to say something about the selectivity with which the author chose the individuals to whom special biographical chapters are devoted--Prince Souphanouvong, Boun Kong Manivong, and Bong Souvannavong--and whether this selection might reflect Phetsarath's political commitments in the last years of his life. Why were the lives of these men described instead of those of Prince Souvannaphouma, Oun Sananikone, Katay Don Sasorith, and *phanya* Khammao, for example? What is the significance of the references to "the party" that appear late in the chapter on Boun Kong? What were the author's sources of information on the actions of Souphanouvong, Boun Kong, and Bong? Murdoch would have been better prepared than anyone else I can think of to attempt answers to such questions. Without him, it will be that much longer before some of the many riddles of postwar Lao history begin to be solved.

John Murdoch had a more productive scholarly career as a graduate student than many of us have as professors. He completed two other translations[1] and published an exceptionally valuable account of the millenarian rebellions in Southern Laos and Northeastern Thailand of 1901-1902.[2] He also left a number of unpublished papers in addition to this translation of Prince Phetsarath's life story. We own John Murdoch a great deal more than we will be able to thank him for.

We are grateful to a Lao friend, "3264," for assistance with problems of translation, and to Steven L. Kaplan for help in rendering French names. Pat Guilford was marvellously generous and patient in undertaking the typing of the manuscript in its final stages, following earlier drafts on which Terri Campbell and Carol Smith worked. I am especially appreciative of the hospitality and generosity of Mr. and Mrs. George B. Murdoch of Bloomer, Wisconsin, who made it possible to bring their son's work to completion.

David K. Wyatt

Ithaca, New York
January 1977

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[1]"3264," *Under Fire: Growing Up on the Plain of Jars*, translated and edited by John B. Murdoch (Ithaca: n.p., 1973); and *Lao Issara: The Memoirs of Oun Sananikone*, translated by John B. Murdoch and "3264," Cornell Southeast Asia Program Data Paper (Ithaca, 1975).

[2]"The 1901-1902 'Holy Man's' Rebellion," *Journal of the Siam Society*, 62, 1 (January 1974), pp. 47-66.

# TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Most that has been written about the post-World War II political struggles of Laos has been produced by outsiders in Western languages: the voices of the Lao participants themselves have been almost silent in the literature and commentary available to us. Thus this book, a biographical or autobiographical account of the life of the man who must be considered the father of Lao nationalism, Prince Phetsarath, fills a significant gap in our understanding of the affairs of Laos from the turn of the century to the late fifties.

For nearly half a century, Prince Phetsarath held a unique place in the history of Laos. His lifetime (1890-1959) spanned the period of French presence and French colonialism in Laos. Prior to World War II, he was head of the Lao Civil Service under the French. During the wartime years he was prime minister and viceroy of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang, which was first loosely under Vichy French control and then briefly "independent" under the Japanese. In 1946, Phetsarath became leader of the Lao resistance movement against the French return to Laos, a position which placed him in direct conflict with the king, who sought a return to the French Protectorate. Consequently, Phetsarath left the country and spent eleven years in exile in Thailand, a period during which Lao politics was dominated by his younger brothers, Souvannaphouma and Souphanouvong. Phetsarath finally returned to Laos in 1956 to act as mediator in the conflict between Souvannaphouma and Souphanouvong and died in his birthplace, Luang Prabang, in 1959.

This biography, or perhaps autobiography, of Prince Phetsarath is a very curious work. It was pseudonymously written in Thai and published in Bangkok in October 1956, less than three months after Phetsarath had ended his exile and returned to Laos. The author of the work is identified only as "3349."[1] Whether or not Phetsarath himself wrote the entire book is a matter of some conjecture, but he clearly was very deeply involved in its preparation. Sections of the book purport to be verbatim extracts taken from Phetsarath's own journals. Other sections, generally narrative accounts of Phetsarath's life, are written in the first person. In addition, there are portions of the book, generally either eulogizing Phetsarath as a hero of Laos or bitterly criticizing the king and his policies, that are presented in the third person. Finally, there are chapters on other Lao leaders, Prince Souphanouvong, Boun Kong Manivong, and Bong Souvannavong, that are written in the third person though they are clearly subjective, evaluative accounts reflecting Phetsarath's point of view. It is quite likely that Phetsarath himself is the author of the entire book.[2] Clearly the eulogiza-

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[1]"3349," *Chao Phetsarat: burut lek haeng Ratcha'anachak Lao* [Prince Phetsarath: Iron Man of the Kingdom of Laos] (Bangkok: Printed at Rongphim Ruam Mit Thai, 1956).

[2]This opinion is shared by Savèng Phinith, who reviewed the book in the *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 58 (1971), pp. 321-330.

tion of Phetsarath and criticism of the king are sensitive subjects that Phetsarath might well have been reluctant to claim as his own work. Though it is still possible that someone other than Phetsarath wrote at least part of the book, it nonetheless reflects his ideas and judgments.

In addition to its authorship, the book raises many other questions. Why was it written in Thai? Why was it published in Bangkok? Who was its intended audience? Phetsarath was clearly capable of writing in French, Lao, or Thai, and probably could have had any of his works published in France, Laos, or Thailand. Given the content of the book, Phetsarath's role in the unification of Laos and its liberation from French control, and the underlying theme of Phetsarath's disagreements with and criticism of the king and crown prince of Laos as well as of the 1949-1954 Vientiane governments, the book was sure to be controversial and to touch some sensitive nerves at the time of its publication. This well may have mitigated against its publication in Laos as well as against its being published in Phetsarath's own name. Phetsarath had been in Thailand for eleven years, had close connections there, and was fluent in Thai. Furthermore, the Lao and Thai languages are very closely related, and virtually any educated Lao, which at the time the book was published meant the Lao elite, could also read Thai. Thus publishing the book in Thai in Bangkok under a pseudonym would make it available to both a Thai and a Lao audience and at the same time protect Phetsarath on his return to Laos from being directly associated with its more controversial qualities.

Phetsarath's book is somewhat rambling and often disconnected, and it is highly selective concerning which issues are discussed and which are omitted. It was clearly written with two purposes in mind. The first was to explain and justify the positions Phetsarath had taken in his political life as head of the Lao civil service under the French, as viceroy and prime minister under the king and then in conflict with the king, and as leader of the Lao Resistance against the French. As such, the book is an apology or defense of Phetsarath's personal positions and is biased towards an emphasis--and at times an exaggeration--of his role in Lao national affairs.

Second, at the time this book was written Phetsarath felt that the "Lao problem" of unity, independence of France, and reconciliation among national leaders, the foremost among whom were his brothers, had been solved, and that he had been the key figure in bringing about this happy success of the Lao national movement. Given this interpretation, which later history has shown to have been sadly mistaken, Phetsarath intended the book as a "revolutionary manual," both as a history of how Lao national independence and reconciliation had been achieved, and as a lesson to other politicians working towards similar goals. Here Phetsarath is clearly, though somewhat reluctantly, appealing to his Thai audience, whom he has taken to be the "Thai politicians." He repeatedly refers to the brotherhood and unity of the Lao-Thai race and of the history of Lao-Thai cooperation from the days of the sixteenth-century pledge of friendship between the kings of Lan Xang (Laos) and Ayudhya (Thailand). He conceives of the Lao and Thai as members of one family which had become separated. At the same time, however, he asks his Lao readers not to be distrustful: the Thai people support independence, and there is no plan to incorporate Laos into Thailand. Curiously, Phetsarath never mentions the fact that from 1778 to 1893

virtually all of Laos was under Thai control and that for all practical purposes Laos was a part of Thailand. Furthermore, there is no mention of the sacking of Vientiane by the Thai in 1828, or the ending of the Vientiane royal line, events which are deeply imbedded in the Lao consciousness and are the basis of considerable resentment toward Thailand from the Lao point of view. Phetsarath seems to reflect in his attitude toward Lao-Thai relations a reaction against the French colonial effort to sever all Lao political, cultural, and economic relations with Thailand and to link Laos with Vietnam and Cambodia. Certainly early postwar governments in Thailand were congenial to Lao nationalism, as they were to many other anticolonial nationalist groups that based themselves in Thailand with Thai government support, and this may well have influenced Phetsarath's attitude toward Lao-Thai relations, looking toward future Lao-Thai harmony.

Who was Phetsarath, and what was the significance of his career? Though expressing himself largely in the idiom of the anti-French revolutionary, Phetsarath's role can perhaps best be understood in traditional terms. Phetsarath was the heir of the princeship of the viceregal family of Luang Prabang, the "cadet" branch of the royal family. Though largely unrecognized in present-day Laos, this branch of the royal family, in power for four generations, was a nineteenth-century creation of the Thai, who as Luang Prabang's suzerain confirmed the positions of Lao leaders. Thus Phetsarath's forebears, his great-grandfather Oun Keo, his grandfather Souvannaphromma, and his father Boun Kong played the leading political and military roles in the Kingdom of Luang Prabang under the Thai. In effect, they owed their positions to the Thai, and they undoubtedly had divided loyalties--to the Thai who kept them in their positions and to the Lao whom they served and with whom they identified ethnically.

Phetsarath's role under the French was virtually identical to his forebears' role under the Thai. The King retained his religious and ceremonial functions under the French but suffered a loss of real power when the French removed his privy purse and brought him directly under their financial control.

Phetsarath, however, after his return from France in 1913, held a variety of positions in the Indochina Civil Service, a point that he virtually ignores in his own memoirs. He emphasizes his role as a freedom fighter while serving as viceroy and prime minister (1941-45), and also recounts his earlier nationalist motives from the beginning of his official career; but nowhere does he give any details of that career.

Phetsarath's position within the ruling elite of Laos was traditional but problematic. Like his better-known brothers, Princes Souvannaphouma and Souphanouvong, he was a son of Boun Kong, the viceroy or "Second King" of Laos; and before Boun Kong, his father Souvannaphromma and grandfather Oun Keo had held the position of viceroy. In the traditional ruling hierarchy of Laos, the position of viceroy was virtually that of crown prince or successor to the king. In the traditional ruling structure, the top five positions were those of the king, *uparat* (viceroy), *ratsavong*, *ratsabut*, and *ratsasamphanthavong*. These positions were hierarchical in status, importance, and order of succession one to another. Traditionally, when Laos was independent and the succession order was determined by a council of Lao nobles, the

usual order of succession to the throne was first through a king's younger brothers and then through his sons. However, during the period of Thai control over Laos, the Thai kings, rather than the Lao nobles, determined the Lao succession. Thus the Thai kings appointed each member of what became the "viceregal line" in Luang Prabang in the late nineteenth century, and all three such appointments--those of Oun Keo, Souvannaphromma, and Boun Kong--were outside the normal order of succession. The family of Oun Keo and his descendants, however, were dynamic leaders, skilled administrators, and distinguished military leaders who had proven their loyalty and their value to Bangkok. The Thai, who in no other case violated the traditional succession order in Luang Prabang, appear to have intended that the viceroys succeed the kings. However, through accidents of circumstance, Viceroy Oun Keo and King Seukseum both died in 1851; Viceroy Souvannaphromma was killed in 1887 during Oun Kham's reign; and while Boun Kong was viceroy under King Zakarine (Kham Souk), control of the succession passed from Thai into French hands. The French, however, did not recognize the traditional order of succession in the Luang Prabang hierarchy, and saw the king's first son as "crown prince" and successor, instead of the viceroy.

The result of the Thai appointments of Oun Keo and his successors to the viceregal position was to establish a virtually hereditary "viceregal line" and to create a good deal of tension between this line and the "royal line" of succession. Because of the Thai appointments of Oun Keo and his successors outside the "normal" line of succession and against the kings' wishes, the Luang Prabang kings were unsure of the line of succession throughout much of the nineteenth century. The French finally decreed that with the death of Boun Kong, Phetsarath's father, the position of viceroy would be abolished. Until his death in 1920, however, Boun Kong fulfilled the viceregal position of the king's chief administrator under the French.

While Phetsarath did not receive the title of viceroy until it was revived in 1941, he grew up very much in his father's footsteps in the viceregal tradition. He was born in 1890, and as a child accompanied his father on a trip to the north to point out the boundaries of the kingdom to the French Resident, and on a trip with King Zakarine to pay respects to the French Governor-General Paul Doumer; both of these trips are described in detail.

Phetsarath's education from 1896 to 1904 was irregular, broken by his absences to accompany his father on trips and by the availability of French teachers in Luang Prabang. In 1904 he went to Saigon and studied at the Lycée Chasseloup Laubat where there were several Lao students. Following a year in Saigon, Phetsarath was sent to study in Paris, where, apart from one trip back home to Laos, he spent nearly eight years at the École Coloniale, Lycée Montaigne, and Lycée Saint Louis.

Phetsarath's account of his childhood and his education in Luang Prabang, Saigon, and France is quite detailed. Curiously, however, his account leaves virtually a complete gap of more than thirty years between his return from France in 1913 and the Japanese occupation of Laos in 1945. The only information Phetsarath offers on this important period of his life is a reminiscence near the end of the book where he points out that during the period from 1913 to 1945 he had sought to

unify Laos through creating a Lao civil service which provided for the transfer of officials among all parts of the country in order to counteract French "divide and rule" tactics of administration.

From other sources, however, the essential shape of Phetsarath's career under the French can be ascertained.[3] In 1914, he entered the civil service as a clerk-writer at the Royal Treasury in Luang Prabang. After Phetsarath had worked there for a year, M. Garnier, Chief Resident (*résident supérieur*) of Laos, asked Phetsarath's father, Boun Kong, for permission to take Phetsarath into his employ. With Boun Kong's permission, Phetsarath became a clerk in Garnier's office in Vientiane. In 1917 he became the Chief Resident's deputy assistant secretary. Following this, Phetsarath made annual inspection tours of the provinces with the resident; these tours probably were the basis of Phetsarath's recognition and popularity throughout the country. In 1918, at the Resident's request, King Sisavangvong conferred on Phetsarath the title of *chao ratsaphakhinai* ("royal nephew"), the same title his father Boun Kong had been given by King Chulalongkorn of Thailand in 1884. The Chief Resident requested this title for Phetsarath as a reward for his efforts at collecting money from the Lao people to aid France in World War I.

In 1919, Phetsarath was appointed Director of the Lao Civil Service (*Directeur du bureau des affairs indigènes*). In this position he set up the system of ranks and titles for civil servants as well as a promotion and pension plan, and established a school of law and administration. In the same year, Phetsarath was also appointed to the Government Council of Indochina[4] by the French Governor-General, a position he held from 1919 until 1930; his father had held the same position from 1911 until his death in 1920.

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[3]The main sources Murdoch used include the following: J. de Galembert, *Les administration et les service publics Indochinois*, 2nd ed. (Hanoi: Impr. Mac-Dinh-Tu, 1931); *chao* Khamman Vongkotrattana, *Pharatsapavat 'ong vang na, ratsatakun Chao Uparat Un Kaeo* [Lives of the Viceroys, Descendents of Oun Kaeo] (Vientiane: National Library, 1971); idem, *Phongsavadan sat Lao* [History of the Lao Nation] (Vientiane: National Library, 1971); Katay Don Sasorith, *Le Laos: son évolution politique, sa place dans l'union française* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1953); idem, *Contribution à l'histoire du mouvement d'indépendance national Lao* (Bangkok: Phanich Suphaphon Press, 1948); Pierre Gentil, *Remous du Mékong* (Paris: Charles Lavauzelle, 1950); Michel Caply, *Guérilla au Laos* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1966); Paul le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos français* (Paris: Plon, 1931); Nina S. Adams and Alfred W. McCoy, *Laos: War and Revolution* (New York: Harper, 1970); Paul F. Langer and Joseph J. Zasloff, *North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970); Arthur J. Dommen, *Conflict in Laos: The Politics of Neutralization*, rev. ed. (New York: Praeger, 1971); and Hugh Toye, *Laos: Buffer State or Battleground* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968). The reader may also be interested in *Lao Issara: The Memoirs of Oun Sananikone*, translated by John B. Murdoch and "3264," Cornell Southeast Asia Program Data Paper (Ithaca, 1975).

[4]Galembert, *Administration*, p. 157. This 'privy committee" under the Governor-General was to assist him in examining principal political and administrative questions. In addition to the heads of the French governments of the five constituent territories of French Indochina, its membership included one indigenous representative from each territory.

In 1923, Phetsarath was promoted to Inspector of Lao Political and Administrative Affairs (*Inspector indigène des affairs politique et administratives du Laos*) by the Governor-General of Indochina.[5] In this capacity, Phetsarath organized a Laotian consultative assembly (*Assemblée consultative indigène du Laos*), a body made up of all Lao district chiefs (*chao muang*) and province heads (*nai khoueng*).

Clearly, Phetsarath was by this time the most powerful Lao in the country. As head of the Lao Civil Service and adviser to the French (if not the actual designer) on the administrative system, as well as on the examination system for entrance into the civil service, Phetsarath had gained a powerful position of patronage in determining appointments, promotions, and transfers. While he may not have had a great deal of power vis-à-vis the French, he was certainly an influential figure, and vis-à-vis the Lao he was the most powerful Lao figure in the kingdom. His effective power throughout French Laos far overshadowed that of the king, who ruled only the four provinces of Luang Prabang, Samneua, Phongsaly, and Sayaboury with a very limited budget and within the confines of policy set down by the French Chief Resident.

In 1927, Phetsarath's administrative powers again increased, and he began to take a greater hand in the direct administration of the king's territory, the four provinces of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang. While the king was sick in Vientiane, Phetsarath was appointed his representative, and in this capacity he received Governor-General Alexandre Varennes on a visit to Laos. In the same month, Phetsarath reorganized the king's advisory council along functional lines, creating three positions to take charge of Interior; Justice, Cults, and Education; and Finance, Public Works, Commerce, and Agriculture. He further appointed a Royal Palace Secretariat, a thirty-man Palace Guard, and a council of the Royal Family.

In 1932, the Governor-General of Indochina appointed Phetsarath as a member of the Council of Economic and Financial Interests of Indochina (*Grand counseil des intérêts economiques et financiers de l'Indochine*), on which he served until 1937. He also was appointed head of the Buddhist Council of Laos, and in this position he reorganized the administrative system of the Buddhist clergy, set up a system of Pali schools for the education of monks, and a library to collect both palm leaf manuscripts and foreign books. In his capacity as head of the Buddhist Council, Phetsarath made a trip to Phnom Penh in 1935 to visit the Buddhist Council of Cambodia and to send Lao monks who had finished their Pali studies in Laos to continue in the higher Pali school in Phnom Penh.

In 1940-41, the situation in Indochina changed dramatically. France had fallen to Germany, and the Vichy French government was collaborating with the Japanese in Indochina to the extent that they did nothing to hamper Japanese military movements in the area. Thailand, in alliance with the Japanese, was well aware of the weakness of the French position and sought to gain the return of parts of Laos and Cambodia that Thailand felt had been unfairly wrested from her at the turn of the century. Most disturbing for Laos was that, with Japanese

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[5]Ibid. This position was shared with a French counterpart. The two inspectors jointly had to inspect each province of the country each year and report to the Governor-General on administrative efficiency and local conditions.

mediation, France was forced to cede Sayaboury and Champassak provinces to Thailand. The loss of Sayaboury province was deeply resented by King Sisavangvong in Luang Prabang, for Sayaboury contained the royal teak forests and the graves of many of the royal ancestors. The French "protectorate" now was seen to be illusory: the French appeared unwilling to fulfill their obligations to Luang Prabang, and the king threatened to abdicate and enter a monastery.[6]

In an effort to consolidate their declining position as best they could, the French decided to placate the king of Luang Prabang and try to maintain his loyalty by compensating him for the territory lost to Thailand. Thus by a treaty of August 29, 1941, the French enlarged the Kingdom of Luang Prabang by adding to it Houei Sai (Houa Khong), Xieng Khouang, and Vientiane provinces. In addition, the Royal Advisory Council was transformed into a council of ministers, and the position of viceroy, abolished with Boun Kong's death in 1920, was recreated for Phetsarath. The council of ministers for the expanded kingdom was made up of a prime minister without portfolio, Phetsarath, and four ministers taking charge of Interior and Defense; Public Works, Economy, and Commerce; Registry and Education; and Justice and Cults. In this reorganization, the Palace Secretariat, headed by Crown Prince Savangvatthana, was abolished, and the crown prince thus lost his position as its leader.[7]

Phetsarath was now at the height of his power. With the French position declining, and with his new position as viceroy and prime minister of the enlarged Kingdom of Luang Prabang, as head of the government and head of the Buddhist Council, Phetsarath was in virtual control of the Lao elite. By his own account, Phetsarath also appointed Lao administrative governors, paired with French Commissioners, in the four southern provinces. He further asked the French on two occasions to consolidate the entire country as one kingdom, but they refused.[8]

Such was the situation in Laos up until March 1945, when the Japanese seized Laos and assumed direct control, as they did elsewhere in Indochina. Phetsarath's account of the events of the Japanese seizure of Laos is by far the most complete and comprehensive that exists. The significance of the six-month Japanese occupation for Lao national life is that it decisively increased the possibility of Lao independence while at the same time bringing into the open serious tensions within the Lao ruling elite. The difficult relations between Phetsarath and King Sisavangvong, between Phetsarath and the French, and particularly between Phetsarath and the crown prince, came to the fore at this time.

Phetsarath's rise to power, like that of his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, had depended not only on his own competence but also on the intervention of a foreign patron. Oun Keo, Souvannaphromma, and Boun Kong had received their positions as viceroys by appointment of the Thai kings, a situation at times resented by the Lao kings, whose positions the viceroys threatened and whose sons' successions were called into question. Phetsarath owed his position to the French,

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[6]Gentil, *Remous*, p. 26.

[7]Ibid., pp. 26-27; Katay, *Le Laos*, p. 53; Khamman, *Pharatsapavat*, pp. 59-60.

[8]"3349," *Čhāo Phetsarāt*, p. 209.

and there were clearly tensions, as in earlier generations, between Phetsarath and the members of the royal family. One of the themes of Phetsarath's account of his early life is how he fared better than the king. Phetsarath claims to have beaten him in a fist fight after the then-crown prince had bullied him. He also claims that the woman later to become queen had wanted to marry him. That such memories should be included in an account of Phetsarath's life shows something of the tension between these two branches of the royal family.

In his account of the proclamation of Lao independence under the Japanese, Phetsarath clearly discloses a struggle between himself and the crown prince over their respective roles and statuses. Phetsarath felt that as head of the government, he should deal with the Japanese, and that the king and the crown prince, as the king's representative, should remain above politics and fulfill what amounted to a largely ceremonial role. The crown prince, however, by Phetsarath's account, sought to deal directly with the Japanese, and wanted to make the proclamation of independence himself.[9] There was also a struggle over which of them should go to Saigon with the Japanese envoy, a disagreement that Phetsarath finally won. Clearly the crown prince felt threatened by Phetsarath's assumption of political power, and both Phetsarath and the crown prince were seeking favor with the Japanese in order to enhance their position vis-à-vis each other.

As he describes eloquently and in great detail, when the Japanese surrendered in August 1945, Phetsarath sought to prevent the return of the French. He sought instead to carry out his ambition of uniting Laos as a single independent kingdom. When the king refused to consider this proposal and announced that the Kingdom of Luang Prabang would return to the status of a French colony, Phetsarath proclaimed the unification of Laos as a single kingdom on his own authority as viceroy and prime minister, whereupon the king dismissed him from both positions; both men claimed that their actions were based on "public opinion."

Following Phetsarath's dismissal on October 10, 1945, a Free Lao (*Lao Issara*) Government was formed in Vientiane "to integrate Laos and fight the French for the preservation of independence as proclaimed by King Sisavangvong on April 8, 1945."[10] From the formation of the Free Lao Government in October 1945 to its move into exile in Thailand in April 1946, Phetsarath's account is extremely sketchy. He indicates that the Free Lao Government gave an ultimatum to the king, and when the king made no reply they sent a military force to Luang Prabang. Beyond this he describes neither the events nor the outcome of the situation. This period, however, like that of Phetsarath's role under the French, can be filled in from other sources.

Two days after Phetsarath's deposition by the king, the "Committee of the People of Vientiane," led by Khammao, the governor of Vientiane province, announced the provisional constitution of a unified Laos, a provisional house of representatives, and a provisional government. The following day the new government "respectfully" asked for the "immediate abdication" of the king until an elected house of representatives ruled on the question of royalty and pronounced a definitive political regime for the Lao state.[11] On October 17, four days later,

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[9]Ibid., pp. 44-45. [10]Ibid., p. 71. [11]Caply, *Guérilla*, p. 314.

the crown prince telegraphed the head of the Lao Issara government, saying that the majority of the people were against the movement, that Laotian unity would be achieved and sanctioned by diplomatic accords, that it was first necessary to maintain peace, and that the people could determine their form of government afterwards.[12] On October 20, Khammao announced that the king had been deposed, and the same day a military force led by Sing Rattanasamy, Minister of Defense of the Lao Issara, left for Luang Prabang.[13]

In Luang Prabang, however, an uprising against the king and crown prince began on November 4, before the military unit from Vientiane had reached the city. Luang Prabang was more or less occupied by Chinese troops who were there by prior agreement with the Allies to disarm the Japanese. The Chinese, like the Americans at this point, were hostile to the return of any French colonial presence, and they were quite willing to cooperate with the Lao Issara-sponsored uprising. The Frenchmen in Luang Prabang were surrounded by the Chinese, ostensibly for their protection, and the uprising, led by Prince Bounyavat, was carried out with little opposition.[14] A force of around one hundred men marched on the palace, disarmed the guards, and took over the court. Both the king and crown prince were threatened and the king was informed that he had been deposed. Bounyavat triumphantly telegraphed to Khammao and Phetsarath in Vientiane that "the Court and Royal Government of Luang Prabang have submitted to our government."[15]

The Lao Issara Government, in its nominal control over Luang Prabang, at first had the full support of Nationalist China, and it attempted rapidly to mobilize there the sort of political support that was the foundation of their strength in the Vientiane region. They succeeded in forcing from the royal capital the French representatives whom the now-deposed king had been importuning with requests for aid. Within five months, however, the nationalists found they again needed the king. As French military reoccupation forces began to move into the southern provinces of Laos, the Lao Issara Government in March 1946 attempted through negotiations to gain a peaceful compromise that would leave Laos a degree of independence, but keep it within the French Union. By mid-April, these negotiations having stalled, the government invited Phetsarath to act as regent in a hesitant move towards restoring the monarchy. Phetsarath declined, perhaps judging that this action would permanently alienate a large conservative segment of the population. A week later, King Sisavangvong acceded to the government's request that he reassume his throne as a constitutional monarch, now king over all of Laos--the first since the division of the Kingdom of Lan Xang on the death of King Soulignavongsa around 1700. But on the following day, French troops reoccupied Vientiane, forcing Phetsarath and the Lao Issara into exile. By the middle of May, Luang Prabang had fallen as well, and the king had declared his loyalty to the French.[16]

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[12]Gentil, *Remous*, p. 31. [13]Caply, *Guérilla*, p. 314.

[14]Ibid., pp. 317-18; Gentil, *Remous*, p. 32. [15]Caply, *Guérilla*, p. 318.

[16]Murdoch left only the first line of this paragraph. It has been pieced together from an outline (on which it is the final item) and his notes on Caply and Gentil. The paragraphs which follow are based closely on a paper Murdoch wrote at Cornell in 1972, "Transnationalism across the Mekong: The Formation and Period of Exile of the Lao Issara."

On the return of the French, the Free Lao government fled to Thailand, where both leaders and troops found a hospitable welcome and sympathetic support from strongly anticolonial Thai governments led (March to August, 1946) by Pridi Phanomyong and Thamrong Nawasawat (to November, 1947). Prince Phetsarath played a major role in organizing the Free Lao government-in-exile and assumed its leadership in December, 1946. His younger half-brother Prince Souphanouvong assisted him as commander of the exiles' military forces, in close liaison with the Vietnamese and Cambodian resistance movements that also were continuing to fight the French.

The beginning of the end for the Free Lao came in November 1947, as a result of two separate developments. First, a constitution which had been promulgated under French auspices the previous May and which allowed the formation of a new Lao government under Souvannarath (another of Phetsarath's half-brothers) went into effect. This government, though still French-dominated, enjoyed some degree of political and administrative autonomy within the French Union, and to some it posed at least a viable alternative to either the French or exile. Second, the Thai government of Thamrong Nawasawat was toppled by a military coup led by Field Marshall Phibun, and the new government's policies were sharply redirected towards a pro-Western, anticommunist stance. Phibun's government ordered all the Free Lao soldiers out of Thailand. They returned across the Mekong to Laos, while the Free Lao cabinet remained in Bangkok.

The break between Prince Souphanouvong and the rest of the Free Lao leadership came at the same time. As military leader of the Free Lao, he was unwilling to see the soldiers under his command return to the areas of Laos under the control of the French-dominated Lao government. Instead, he infiltrated his troops through western Laos to the Lao-Vietnamese border region, where they joined up with the Viet Minh (the Vietnamese resistance movement against the French), which had set up a Resistance Committee of Eastern Laos beginning in August 1946.[17] In 1947 and 1948, Souphanouvong had visited Vietnam at least once and probably many times. By the end of 1948 and the beginning of 1949, "military zones" of Northeast and Southeast Laos were established in Samneua and Tchepone.[18] In January 1949, Souphanouvong effectively broke with the rest of the Free Lao by organizing the Progressive People's Organization, made up of Free Lao forces directly responsible to him; and in a letter to Phetsarath on March 26, 1949, Souphanouvong officially ended his participation in the Free Lao.[19]

The final disbanding of the Free Lao came seven months later, in October 1949, when Khammao, Katay Don Sasorith, and Phetsarath's brother Prince Souvannaphouma returned to Vientiane. The arrangements for their return were made by Souvannaphouma's French wife, who had contacted the French government. The French agreed to restore the status of all leaders who wished to return and to provide them with funds and transportation for their return trip.

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[17]Adams and McCoy, *Laos*, p. 113.

[18]Langer and Zasloff, *North Vietnam*, p. 39.

[19]Ibid.; Adams and McCoy, *Laos*, p. 116.

Thus the die that led to the internal struggles which were to wrack Laos for another generation was cast. Souvannaphouma led his faction in the return to Vientiane and cooperation with the French; Souphanouvong led his faction to eastern Laos and cooperation with the Vietnamese; and Phetsarath, unwilling to side with either of his brothers and still stripped of his rank and titles, remained in Bangkok. His return from exile in 1956 was to feature one last attempt to work together with his two brothers for a unified Laos, an attempt that was to collapse upon his death in 1959.

As far as is known, Phetsarath was the father of five children, three by Princess Khamwen and two by *mom* Nangsī. Princess Khamphiu, married to Prince Somsanith, died in Vientiane in 1943. Princess Khamchan studied in Hanoi and married a Frenchman. Prince Souriyarath was educated in Saigon, served in the French army and with the Lao Issara forces, and was a member of the Lao Parliament. Princess Arouna became a medical doctor in Thailand, and Prince Manorom studied civil engineering there.[20]

Of course, it is an oversimplification to imply that the recent history of Laos can be reduced to the rivalries between three brothers; yet in their interrelationships there is much that is characteristic of the plight of modern Laos. In his memoirs, Phetsarath is critical of Souvannaphouma for being too willing to go along with the French and too willing to settle for half-measures on the road to full independence. Phetsarath offers great praise to Souphanouvong as a fighter for freedom and national liberation but criticizes him for becoming drawn too close to the Vietnamese. Similarly, he criticizes Souvannaphouma for having a French wife and Souphanouvong for marrying a Vietnamese woman. At the same time, the reader will note Phetsarath's strong affinities for Thailand, as well as his marriage to a Thai. Thus the three brothers, both in their politics and in their choices of wives, represent the three chief divisive tendencies in Lao politics of the period: orientations towards France, Vietnam, and Thailand.[21]

Long largely forgotten, Prince Phetsarath deserves new attention. To many Lao, for a whole generation he represented both continuity with the precolonial past and the hope for a new, postcolonial future: he was both a traditionalist, by culture and by his affinity with the Lao people among whom he was so popular, and a modernist, determined to forge a new Lao unity where a congeries of kingdoms and principalities had existed before. He was both an aristocrat, scion of a powerful viceregal family, and a democrat. His account does more than shed light on neglected or puzzling episodes in the Lao past: like no other available source, it offers us a unique revealing glimpse into the life and thought of one person whose ideas and actions are indelibly imprinted into the modern history of Laos.

John B. Murdoch

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[20]Khamman, *Pharatsapavat*, p. 72. The date of this information is unclear: *chao* Khamman's preface is dated 1949, though the book was published in 1971. Because of the references to Prince Souriyarath's career, I am inclined to believe that this information is current for the 1960s. (DW)

[21]This paragraph is based upon a draft left by Murdoch.

# NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY AND TITLES

The romanization of Lao presents special problems in this work. Virtually all the terms which it is necessary to reproduce in transcription are Lao proper names, rendered in the original in Thai script. We have attempted to transcribe them in the way which the individuals themselves are known to have preferred. When such preferences were not known, we generally followed the French-style romanization most Lao have customarily employed.

Titles, terms of address, and honorifics are romanized following a systematic phonetic romanization similar to that adopted by the Library of Congress. Among these the reader should be aware of the following: *thao* (Lao) and *nai* (Thai) are analogous to English "Mister"; *chao phanya*, *phanya*, and *phia* are ranks of conferred nobility, here listed in descending order of importance; *maha* and *thit* are honorifics prefixed to the names of former Buddhist monks; and *chao* denotes a member of the royal family or a descendent of a ruling house.

It has proven extremely difficult to reconstruct the spellings of French names from their Thai spellings in the text, and in most cases the forms given are educated approximations.

# INTRODUCTION

The Thai[1] race has been great since ancient times. It appears that the Thai people migrated from the north more than five thousand years ago. The Chaophraya River basin became the home of the Siamese people, while other Thai groups remained to the north and east of the Mekong River, which is the present northeast border of Thailand. Modern political events have divided the Thai into two Thai nations: the Thai of Thailand and the Thai outside Thailand or the Free Thai state. The Free Thai occupy the region of present-day Laos adjoining the Sip Song Pan Na and Sip Song Chu Thai regions.[2]

According to history, the Thai people east of the Mekong migrated from China to Muang Theng, which was the capital of King Khun Borom of the Nan Chao Kingdom. It is in the Sip Song Chu Thai region and is now called Dien Bien Phu. It is an historic site, important now as the place where the French fought the Viet Minh in 1953.[3] The French proclaimed they would fight to the death rather than surrender, but nearly a division of Frenchmen were captured.

The Thai called this *muang* (a town or principality) by the name "Then" or "Theng," which is Thai for "heaven" or "god." The Chinese call it "t'ien," which has the same meaning, and "fu," which means *muang*. Historically, the Thai-Lao of Luang Prabang, who were the source of the Lan Xang lineage, migrated from Muang Theng and spread to the south at the same time when the Thai of the Uthong period migrated from Chiengrai to Ayuthia.

Because of historical migrations, the Thai people were dispersed in many areas. In recent years, when Laos became independent, though still under French influence, the French Information Service in Vientiane publicized the fact that the French returned an old seal to Laos. This seal was made of six kilos of gold and bore the likeness of a camel. The French alleged that Deo Van Tri, a "Thai" king who plundered Luang Prabang, had presented this seal as a gift to Auguste Pavie. It was subsequently preserved in the Paris Museum before being returned to Laos.

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[1]"Thai" is used here in the larger sense of the ethnic Thai peoples rather than in the modern political sense of the word, denoting the citizens of Thailand. The "Thai" peoples include the Siamese of modern Thailand, the Lao of Northeast Thailand and Laos, the Black and White Thai or "Tai" of northeastern Laos and northern Vietnam, and the Shans of northeastern Burma. (JM)

[2]The Sip Song Pan Na region is the home of the Thai Lü people and comprises the border region of northern Laos, southern China (Yünnan Province), and northeastern Burma. The Sip Song Chu Thai region is the home of the Black and White Tai and comprises the border region of northeastern Laos and northern Vietnam. (JM)

[3]Actually, 1954. (DW)

These cynical words suggest that a "Thai" king is good only for pillage. Deo Van Tri was not really Thai: he was *Tai* from the Sip Song Chu Thai region, and Tai of that region change leaders so often that its capital has come to be called the "town of many leaders," or Lai Chau. The Thai are not a people who steal the riches of their race from each other. Their character is not like that of the French, who covet the possessions of others and consequently see others in their own image. Because the French were at that time in the process of stealing the independence of Laos, their cynical words should not be believed.

The French returned the camel seal to Laos at the time of its independence neither because of love nor affection, but of necessity. The French Government was itself on the verge of collapse. Among the Lao people there was a growing realization of freedom, from which arose an independent Lao government of national liberation. Even within the French-dominated government of Laos there was daily opposition speaking boldly against the French. Whenever the French ventured out to fight, they lost, because they fought without purpose. Their soldiers were stationed only in Vientiane and Luang Prabang; when they ventured out, the Free Lao could destroy them at will. The French also sent Lao soldiers to fight, but when Lao met Lao they joined together and fraternized rather than fought. The French soldiers were reluctant to fight, wishing only to live and collect their pay. The French also brought in African soldiers: Senegalese, Moroccans, Tunisians, and Algerians. After fighting a long time, these Africans came to despise the French, who had made them suppress patriots who were fighting to recover their freedom. Laos is a country with a population of only three million, but it is brave enough to fight France, a great power with a population of fifty million. Every African country has many times the population of Laos, yet the Africans appeared to be the slaves of the French who had come to destroy patriots. In conscripting Africans to suppress the Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Lao, the French will only teach them patriotism. The Africans see a poorly-armed small number of people patriotically fighting a better-armed great power. When they return home, they will repay the French with revolt, revolt, revolt!

The Lao patriotic rebellion has split into two factions, the Free Lao under Prince Souphanouvong and the Vientiane Lao Government under Prime Minister Prince Souvannaphouma. These two leaders are half-brothers, having the same father, but each has different views. The Free Lao seek the complete elimination of French influence in Laos, while the Vientiane Government seeks reconciliation by peaceful compromise. Although led by brothers, each faction has the power to command the loyalty of its partisans. Who is right or wrong, only time can tell. I, the writer, therefore introduce Prince Phetsarath, the Iron Man of Laos, who has fought all his life to eliminate French influence in Laos. He laid down his arms and came to Thailand because he was unable to join either side by reason of his position as head of the family of the two fighting leaders.

When no one was able to stop the brothers' armies of national liberation, the people, the Sangha, and the Vientiane Government invited Prince Phetsarath to return to Laos, an event such as had never happened in any previous period of Lao history. The author therefore invites the reader to follow the story of this prince.

Some sections of this biography are in Thai-Lao style. I assert that I have preserved the style of the Prince. The Prince wrote much of this personally; but I, the author, wrote some of the general narrative. I invite the reader to continue on. For any mistakes, I apologize to those concerned.

This book was written with the intention of letting Thai politicians and administrators know how their brothers have fought to shake off the yoke of the French and to be free. This struggle of the Lao people, led by Prince Phetsarath, is a heroic and exemplary performance by a nation of three million that has a few thousand patriots willing to die in order that their compatriots may live in freedom.

These heroes' national liberation is presented in this book. I, the writer, have never joined, but have followed, and have put together this story so that those who come later can learn how the true restoration of freedom was accomplished. Because it is a domestic matter, I do not have true knowledge of politics within Thailand. As a layman, I am not involved, and thus have little knowledge and am unable to make comparisons.

You will discover in these chapters how a neighboring nation, historically and geographically united, came under the leadership of Prince Phetsarath. The Prince has fought many struggles in internal politics and external resistance, and has had a lifetime of sacrifice; for national freedom can neither be bought by ballot nor by obsequious politicians, but must be paid for with blood and sacrifice. Also, Prince Souphanouvong's ten-year sacrifice of his happiness has made the Prince a lion in the forest. Lieutenant Boun Kong, the soldier-hero of the Mekong Valley, was the knight destined to serve the Prince and his people. There are honest officials who spoke out boldly--people like Bong Souvannavong. The government has jails, but he has never given up because of them. By his words this rebel also has participated in the struggle.

Is there anyone who would struggle and sacrifice for ten years? The history of the Kingdom of Laos in this period is a lesson that should teach a great deal. If you are interested in being a politician, it should be beneficial to you to read this account of Laos in its period of national liberation.

# CHAPTER 1

# BIOGRAPHY OF PRINCE PHETSARATH RATANAVONGSA, VICEROY OF THE KINGDOM OF LUANG PRABANG

## Birth

Prince Phetsarath was born in the Front Palace[1] in Vat That sub-district, Luang Prabang, in the Year of the Ox, 1251 of the Lesser Era, on the fourteenth day of the waning moon of the first month, almost at noon (11:15); this day corresponds to January 19, 1890.

## Natal Horoscope

The zodiacal signs and their configurations on the day and time of Prince Phetsarath's birth:[2]

The sun was in the 9th house of the zodiac, 6 degrees, 47 minutes, and 5.95 seconds.
The moon was in the 8th house, 12 degrees, 45 minutes, and 57.5 seconds.
Mars was in the 6th house, 19 degrees, 2 minutes, and 41.287 seconds.
Mercury was in the 9th house, 8 degrees, 3 minutes, and 21.376 seconds.
Jupiter was in the 9th house, 1 degree, 17 minutes, and 9.287 seconds.
Venus was in the 8th house, 28 degrees, 22 minutes, and 17,087 seconds.
Saturn was in the 4th house, 7 degrees, 37 minutes, and 41.693 seconds.
Rahu [the Demon who seizes the sun or moon to cause eclipses] was in the 2nd house, 9 degrees, 26 minutes, and 42.313 seconds.
Neptune was in the 1st house, 18 degrees, 1 minute, and 41.576 seconds.
Uranus was in the 5th house, 24 degrees, 46 minutes, and 29.337 seconds.

The angle of the ecliptic of the day was in the 10th house, 3 degrees, 39 minutes, and 46.47 seconds.

## The Lineage of Prince Phetsarath

His Majesty the Royal Uncle, King Oun Kham, had a younger brother by the name of Prince Boun Khong who became Viceroy and was the father of Prince Phetsarath.[3] Prince Boun Khong had three wives:[4]

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[1]The Front Palace was traditionally the residence of the Uparat or Viceroy, the second highest personage in the Kingdom. The residences of the three highest royal officials, the King, the Viceroy, and the Ratsavong, were traditionally referred to as the Royal, Front, and Rear palaces. (JM)

[2]Prince Phetsarath was an accomplished astrologer, the author of the standard treatment of Lao chronology: "The Laotian Calendar," in René de Berval, ed., *Kingdom of Laos* (Saigon: France-Asie, 1959), pp. 97-125.

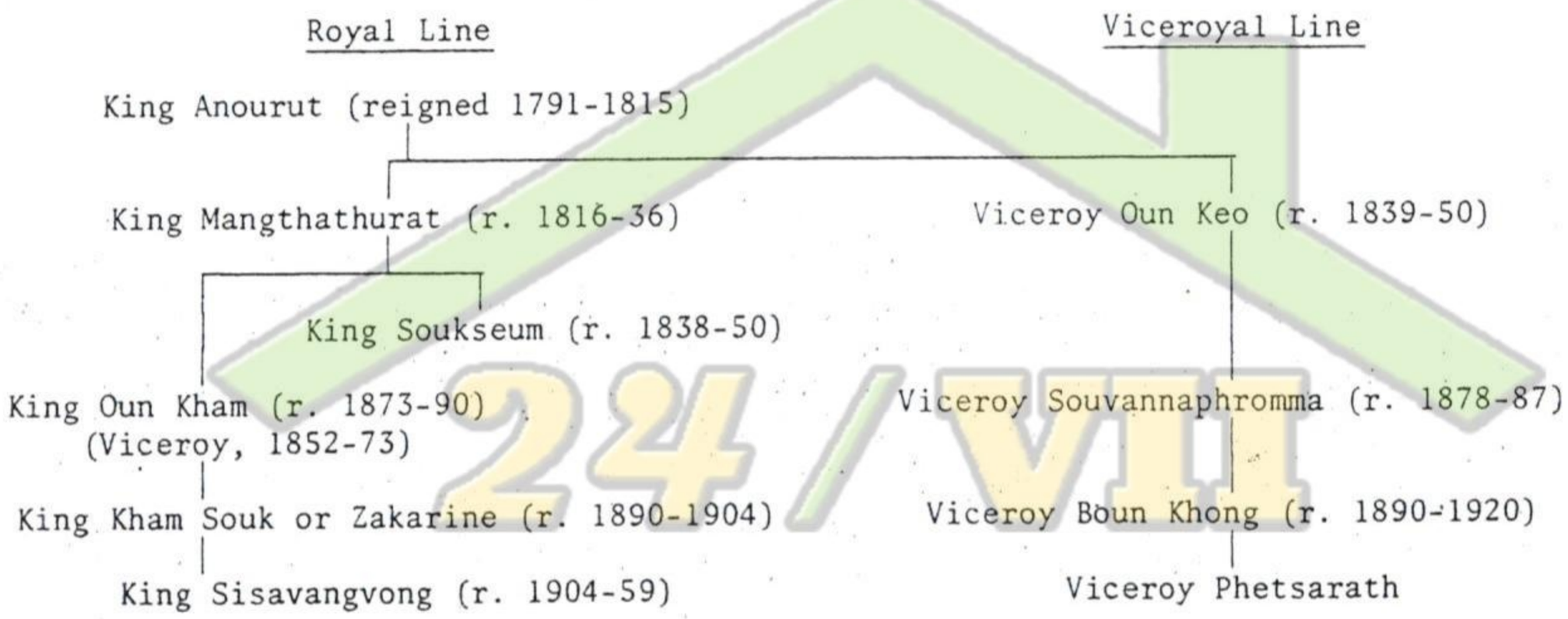
[3]The family relationships expressed here are not genealogically accurate. In fact, King Oun Kham was the grandfather of King Sisavangvong and Boun Khong was a

Princess Thong Si[5] had a total of seven children:

1. Prince Chitarath
2. Prince Phetsarath
3. Princess Sanga Kham, who had two sons,
   a. *Chao* Khamkhan (a provincial governor)
   b. *Chao* Sisumang (in the forest [?])
4. Princess Sangiam Kham, who had one son,
   Prince Somsanith
5. Prince Souvannapharom
6. Prince Souvannaphouma, or Prince Khampheng, the present [1956] Prime Minister of Laos
7. Princess Kham La, the wife of Prince Suksisavangvong, who is Prince Souphanouvong's assistant.[6]

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distant cousin. The royal and viceroyal lineages and the divergence between the two lines are shown in the following chart. (JM)




[4]This list is accurate, but incomplete. In fact, Viceroy Boun Khong had eleven wives, eight royal and three nonroyal; he had twenty-four children, eleven sons and thirteen daughters. See *chao* Khamman Vongkotrattana, *Pharatsapavat 'ong vang na, ratsatakun Chao Uparat Un Kaeo* [Lives of the Viceroys, Descendents of Oun Keo] (Vientiane: National Library, 1971), p. 42. (JM) Another long genealogical list occurs at the end of this chapter, listing simply ten sons and eight daughters of Boun Khong. In order to eliminate repetition, that list has been omitted in translation. Names that appear on the latter list which do not occur here include the following: Prince Samutsaikham, Prince Rattana, Prince Singhanath, Prince Chintavong, Princess Sengsuriyachan, Princess Sisavath, and Princess Phitsamai. (DW)

[5]Not the Thong Si who was queen to King Zakarine.

[6]Prince Suk was first the District Chief of Borikhane, then fled from political danger in 1951 and went to Ban Bung Kan along with Princess Kham La. Five years ago [1951?] he returned to Laos to work with Souphanouvong's Free Lao movement. He set up military headquarters in Theuak Kaho on a mountain north of Vinh. His attack on Xieng Khouang defeated the French, and he was promoted to lieutenant-colonel. Captain Kham Keng, Captain Boun Kong, and more than twenty Thai from Ubon province [in Thailand] joined him. Prince Suk raised an army contingent and removed his wife *mom* Khamla and his son away from Ban Pak Bung about eight kilometers south of Paksane at the beginning of April 1953. [Taken from text at end of chapter. DW]

*Mom*[7] Kham On had a total of three sons and daughters:
1. Princess Thavivan
2. Princess Chindarasami
3. Prince Souphanouvong, or Prince Fan, leader of the Pathet Lao Issara.

*Mom* Khai had a total of three sons and daughters:
1. Prince Souvannarath (the first Prime Minister)
2. Princess Souvannamali (the wife of Prince Chitarath)
3. Princess In Kham.

## Education

*Studying to Read and Write Lao*. The tradition of the family of the Front Palace, handed down from Viceroy Oun Keo, was that children of both sexes had to learn to read and write Lao from the time they were five or six years old. When they were literate in Lao, they would then study Thai or Pali. As a result, Viceroy Souvannaphromma, my paternal grandfather, was known in Bangkok for his proficiency in Pali and Sanskrit; and Viceroy Boun Khong, my father, also was proficient in Thai and Pali.

However, I did not begin to study Lao at the age prescribed by family tradition, but began at the end of my seventh year. Instead of beginning my studies earlier, I accompanied my father on a trip up the Mekong River to Thang Q.

In December 1895, the Year of the Goat, my father accompanied M. Boulloche, the first French High Commissioner of Laos, on a trip up the Mekong River to advise the High Commissioner of the details of the northern border of Laos. Among the party who made the trip with M. Boulloche and my father, I remember M. [François] Baudouin, the High Commissioner's Secretary, who later became the High Commissioner of Cambodia and was High Commissioner of all of Indochina in the Year of the Dog, 1922. There were also Prince Chitarath, Prince Phengrath, and *chan*[8] Phao, who was later given the title *phanya* Phanthana and became a civil servant at the rank of District Chief.

When my father had accompanied the High Commissioner to Thang Q, a site north of Chieng Saen and north of the mouth of the Luak River on the Thai and Burmese side of the Mekong, we floated down the river and stopped in Fort Carnot, which is Ban Houei Sai. When evening came, High Commissioner Boulloche, his secretary, and my father went up to the fort to eat dinner. I was left in the boat with my brother Chitarath and *chan* Phao, and to amuse myself I took a silver bowl to dip up water and pour it on the bubbles flowing by the side of the boat. As I splashed the water, the bubbles floated further away from the boat.

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[7]Wives bearing the title *mom* are nonroyal wives. In the Lao system, only royal-born wives could be queens. Nonroyal or commoner wives were given the title *mom* or *mom chao*, although their children inherited the princely titles of their father's line. See Tournier, *Notice sur le Laos française* (Hanoi: F. H. Schneider, 1900), p. 52. (JM)

[8]*Chan*, abbreviation of *'achan*, "teacher," is a title used for an ex-monk who attained a certain level of scholarship while in the Buddhist monkhood. (JM)

To reach them, I had to lean out farther and farther from the boat. I finally fell into the water, sank to the bottom, and then bobbed up to the surface. At just the right moment, I saw a hand reaching out above my head. The hand quickly grabbed me and pulled me to safety. It was *chan* Phao's hand that saved my life. When I was safely in the boat, *chan* Phao and the royal pages insisted that we should not tell my father what had happened, because we would surely be punished.

In the sixth month of 1896, the Year of the Monkey, we returned to Luang Prabang. My father then ordered my brother Chitarath and me to begin studying Lao. The Front Palace School was taught by Prince Sithamnoroth and class was held on the verandah of the Royal Audience Hall. A new Front Palace School was being built at that time beside the three tamarind trees south of Prince Vongkot's residence, the same tamarind trees that are in front of Prince Saeng Sourichan's house today.

The teacher had come from the Army Officers School in Bangkok and had been a lieutenant. I remember well that he was greatly feared by the students because he was extremely ferocious and liked to administer painful punishment with a switch. His character seems to have been that way because he had commanded soldiers for a long time.

*The First French School.* After I had studied Lao for only a few months, the French opened their first school in Luang Prabang, using the chapel of Vat Si Koet as a classroom. They also built two houses, one as a boarding house for students from outlying areas, and the other for dining and studying. When the French school opened, my father ordered his young relatives to study there as an example to encourage the people to study French. However, those who still could not read and write Lao had to master it first before they could study French.

*Teachers and Supervisors of the Students.* The first French teacher, M. Beaulieu, was from Saigon. His manner was very gentle and he always tried to interest the students in their studies. For their enjoyment during free periods, M. Beaulieu gave the students toys from France, such as multicolored marbles and shuttlecocks. The Lao teacher was *phanya* Sisatham, who had been a Pali teacher for a long time. He was completely old-fashioned and very compassionate towards the students, just the opposite of my former teacher, Prince Sithamnoroth.

The students' supervisor was Prince Phim. He came from the military school in Bangkok and had just left a position as a captain in the Thai army. Consequently Prince Phim dressed and lived like people in Bangkok, which meant that he wore three freshly ironed shirts a day --one in the morning, one in the afternoon, and one in the evening. Besides that, he brought with him a two-wheeled bicycle, something which was very exciting for the people because it was the first bicycle in Luang Prabang. Every evening he would ride his bicycle through the streets to show off his proficiency and to admire the girls bathing along the Mekong and Khan Rivers. Prince Phim liked to punish the students with a switch. This was the opposite of M. Beaulieu, who punished students by having them stand and face the wall. Prince Phim's penchant for punishing the students by beating them seems to have been the Bangkok method, as it was also used by Prince Sithamnoroth.

*Students from Outlying Areas.* There were dozens of students sent to the French school from outlying provinces. I remember only three--*thao* Kaeo, who was blind in one eye and came from Muang Et (in the Five-Six Hua Phan Cantons),[9] and Prince Phromma and *thao* Chansi who came from Muang Phuan or Xieng Khouang. *Thao* Kaeo later became a civil servant in the French language translation service in the Five-Six Hua Phan Cantons. Many years later, he resigned and became a merchant. Prince Phromma also became a translator, but he died a few years later. *Thao* Chansi became a doctor's assistant until he retired on a pension.

*Studying Pali.* In the middle of 1897, the Year of the Cock, M. Beaulieu was sent to teach in Saigon, and since there was no teacher to replace him, the French school was closed. By that time, I could read and write Lao, and my father had me become a Buddhist novice along with my brother Chitarath and Prince Khamman Vongkotrattana. We became novices at Vat That Luang and studied Pali with *phanya* Sisatham at his house on Koksak Street.

My father then sent his younger brothers and nephews who had already begun French to Saigon. Those of his brothers who were sent were Prince Ratsavadi, Prince Sithammarath, Prince Sudadeth, and Prince Bunyasan. The nephews who were sent were Prince Chaiyawuth, Prince Phanyathip, and Prince Oun Kham.

Phraya Sisatham's method of teaching Pali was old-fashioned. Before we could study translation, he had us study grammar until we knew it by heart. Consequently, studying took a great deal of time. We studied grammar for two years and finished in 1899, the Year of the Pig. That was the year my father went to Saigon with King Zakarine to present gold and silver flowers to the representative of the French government, Governor-General Paul Doumer.[10] At this opportunity, King Zakarine took two royal Princes, Prince Sisavangvong and Prince Sisaleumsak, to study at the Chasseloup-Laubat school in Saigon, and in the following year, the Year of the Rat, 1900, my father sent them to Paris to enter the École Coloniale.

As for my study of Pali, when I finished studying the rules of *sandhi*, I continued with the study of nouns and finished in 1901, the Year of the Ox. Then, when I had begun to study translation, the French reopened their school.

*Studying French.* The French school that opened at this time used the lower story of the old Royal Palace for classrooms and the upper story for boarding students. The French teacher was a woman named Mme. Crochet [?], the wife of the official in charge of the Lao Treasury. The assistant teacher, who had studied in Saigon, was *thao* Phao. He taught only one year, then drank too much whiskey, bathed in the cold Nam Khan River, and soon died. The supervisor, named *thit* Kham Pan

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[9]The "Five-Six Hua Phan Cantons" is the nineteenth-century name for the six districts of Hua Muang, Sop Et-Chiang Kho, Samneua, Muang Sri, Sam Tai, and Muang Son. This region comprises the modern Lao province of Houa Phan or Samneua. (JM)

[10]The presentation of flowers fashioned of gold and silver was the customary tributary obligation of a "vassal" state to its "overlord." Before Laos became a French colony, the Lao kingdoms traditionally presented this offering to the Thai king in Bangkok. (JM)

But, was an in-law of *phanya* Sisatham, my Pali teacher. Later he received the title of *phia* Asana and became a judge in Vientiane.

When the French school opened, my father sent me to study along with many of my relatives from the other palaces and the military service. From the Royal Palace there were Prince Saisanitvong, Prince Sisavong, Prince Sisawath (two of these were sons of Prince Sonsai), and Prince Kham Hing, son of the Treasury Director, Prince Kham Ngao. From the Front Palace there were Prince Chitarath, Prince Souvannarath, Prince Souvannathong, Prince Khamman Vongkotrattana, Prince Nyieo, Prince Sut, and I. From the Rear Palace there were Prince Kanya and Prince Khamtan. From the military there were *thao* Khampan (*chao phanya* Muang Chan), son of *chao phanya* Muang Saen; *thao* Khamsuk and *thao* Khamphui, the sons of *chao phanya* Muang Chan; and *chan* Bua. (*Thao* Khamsuk later received the title of *chao phanya* Muang Saen, and *thao* Khamphui that of *phanya* Sisonsai.) The next year Prince Sisaleumsak, a royal relative, returned from Paris and studied there also.

*Temporary Halt to French Studies.* When the school year was finished, in the tenth month of 1902, the Year of the Tiger, my father had my older brother Chitarath and me leave school in order to accompany King Zakarine and Prince Sisaleumsak to Hanoi. The King's party went by ordinary boat to Vientiane, by steamboat to the mouth of the Hin Boun River, and then up the river to Chaeng Chek. Dozens of elephants, horses, and porters were waiting there to receive the King and his retinue. From Chaeng Chek we reached Khammuan one day after crossing the Kading River. Before crossing the Kading, we spent a long time performing ceremonies to propitiate the protective spirits so they would not endanger our crossing.

When we reached Khammuan, we spent the night at M. Fournereau's camp, rose early the next morning and continued on to Kham Keut. From Kham Keut to Ban Nape it was two days' journey, and from there we crossed the mountains on the Lao-Vietnamese border at Song Ta Mua. From Song Ta Mua we descended to the coast and to the site of a French military camp, where the Deputy Governor of Ha Tinh was waiting to receive King Zakarine. M. Dauplay, the Deputy Governor, later became the High Commissioner of Laos. He was happy to meet Prince Phasuk, a royal relative who accompanied King Zakarine, because they had known each other at the École Coloniale in France.

From there we went on to Vinh (Tinh Nghe) by boat. The reception by the Vietnamese government was very exciting. On both banks of the river, the people of the villages saluted us with lighted candles and umbrellas. As soon as the King's boat reached the borders of a village, large drums were sounded, and drum-carrying runners on the shore ran alongside the King's boat until it passed beyond the borders to the next village. The village drums were sounded in welcome and were carried along the shore all the way to Vinh.

When we reached Vinh, King Zakarine stayed at the Commissioner's house with a French Captain named Chevalier. Prince Phasuk and one of the King's aides acted as translators. The rest of us stayed at another house for two days, then went by a French torpedo boat to the port of Haiphong. While travelling on the ocean, almost all the King's retinue became seasick--especially Prince Chakravat, *chan* Phao, and *phanya* Muang Chan.

From Haiphong, we went by train to Hanoi, where there was a large party of soldiers waiting to receive us at the railroad station. In Hanoi, the King and the members of the royal family stayed at the Métropole Hotel. The civil servants and royal pages stayed separately on rue Paul Bert across from where the Radiaume Building is today. I cannot remember how many days King Zakarine stayed in Hanoi, but before we left, I remember that the French asked the King to let Prince Chakravat and Prince Chitarath go to Laos with a Captain who was making maps. The King agreed to the request.

From Hanoi we went by steamboat to Viet Tri, to where a railroad was being built. From there we went to Cho Bo and stayed at a French fort. At Cho Bo, the sandbar in the Black River was so high that the boats could not pass. Consequently, we had to carry our belongings overland and get another boat at Hua Hat.

The boatmen for our trip up the Black River were from Muang Lai. We used a plank boat of the same type that is used on the Seuang and Khan Rivers in Luang Prabang Province. The Tai boatmen from Muang Lai took off their pants and shirts whenever they paddled and were completely nude. They did this to prevent wet clothes from discomforting them, but it was quite embarrassing. Whenever we tied up at a village, they put on their pants, and when we left, they took them off again.

While we were travelling by boat, two days before reaching Muang Lai, three headless corpses appeared floating in the river. Later we learned that they were the corpses of bandits that Deo Van Tri, the Chief of Muang Lai, had executed three or four days before.

When we reached Muang Lai, Deo Van Tri (Kham Heum), the District Chief, along with Kham Sam and Kham La, his younger brothers, and Kham Khang, his nephew, who had studied French at the École Coloniale, came down to receive King Zakarine's boat. Then we went up to Deo Van Tri's office, which had been prepared as a residence for King Zakarine. Muang Lai is situated on the left bank of the Black River, on the right side of the mouth of the Luang River. The ground is hilly, without the slightest plain. The houses were small and numbered only in the dozens, and there were more military fortifications than there were ordinary houses. The large house on the bank of the Black River opposite the town was Deo Van Tri's residence. On the right bank of the Black River was a broad plain with rice paddies along the valleys of the streams that flow into the river.

Deo Van Tri raised four or five spotted deer next to his residence. We knew that these deer had been bought in a Vietnamese region near Hanoi because in the forests around Muang Lai there are no deer of this species. When I saw Deo Van Tri, Kham Sam, and Kham La, I could not help but hate them, because they had led the Haw attack on Luang Prabang and had executed my grandfather, Viceroy Souvannaphromma, in 1887, the Year of the Pig. However, the people of Muang Lai respectfully received King Zakarine with full honors and behaved with propriety toward his retinue.

When we left Muang Lai, King Zakarine rode one of the two or three horses that Deo Van Tri had given him. We went along the trail that passes the fields leading to Muang Theng (Dien Bien Phu). Along that trail, Deo Van Tri had prepared places for us to spend each night. On

the fourth day, we reached the Pavie hilltop resthouse. This is in the forest above the mountain pass between the watersheds of the Ou River and the Black River. From the Pavie resthouse it took three days to reach Muang Theng, which is under the authority of Muang Lai and has a garrison of French troops.

From Muang Theng, we went by boat down the Yom and Nan Rivers to the Ou River, Muang Ngoi, Muang Seum and Pak Ou. Then we went down the Mekong to Pak Seuang where my father and the Ratsavong, along with the royal princes and military officers, had come to receive the King and lead him in procession to the capital. I remember that the floor of the roofed platform built on the shore at Pak Seuang to receive King Zakarine was nearly in the water. This provided an enjoyable opportunity for me to play in the water and to net some small fish. I also remember that while King Zakarine sat on the platform at Pak Seuang eating lunch, the princes and civil servants were all laughing noisily on the beach. When the King asked the reason, a military officer said they were laughing at *phanya* Muang Chan (Sieng Phao). He had taken some dried buffalo meat that his wife had roasted for provisions when we left Luang Prabang and had warmed it up for his friends to eat on the day we came back--which showed his stinginess.

When we reached Pak Seuang, it was the beginning of the rainy season in the sixth month of 1903, the Year of the Hare.

*Studying French in Saigon.* When we returned from Hanoi, I resumed my study of French in Luang Prabang, but when I had studied for only a few months, M. and Mme. Crochet were transferred to Saigon. French studies were stopped again because there was no teacher to replace Mme. Crochet.

In July 1904, the Year of the Dragon, the French High Commissioner, M. Mahé, reached Luang Prabang by the steamboat "Lagrandière." With him came his secretary, M. Ladriur, and a military doctor, M. Rouffiandis. My father took this opportunity to ask the High Commissioner to send my brother and me to study in Saigon. We then accompanied the High Commissioner to Vientiane and stayed at his house there. *Chan* Bua went along as a servant.

*M. Mahé is the Victim of Robbery.* One night, after we had been with M. Mahé for two or three days, we heard cries and moans from the main house where the High Commissioner lived. My brother Chitarath, *chan* Bua, and I were frightened because the cries and moans were not the sounds of anyone talking in his sleep. Someone was crying for help indicating that something violent was happening. We ran over to the house to listen and heard the sound of people fighting inside. We banged on the door to the large room that contained many Buddha images. After we had hit it several times, a panel of the door opened and we carefully walked through the room. When we reached the door to the living room, we saw the fleeting images of two men running toward the dining room and heard the sound of chairs crashing to the floor. The three of us ran over there and saw someone sitting next to another person who was lying on the floor and crying for help in French. We realized immediately that the High Commissioner had been the victim of violence. When we ran to help, the assailant saw the three of us and leaped up to fight us, but we grabbed chairs and hit him with them. He lost his balance and fell down. The three of us then took the

chairs and pinned him to the floor so he couldn't get up. Then I took another chair and hit him over the head several times. At that point, M. Mahé got up and came to help us capture the attacker. *Chan* Bua took a knife, cut the cord from the ceiling fan, and tied the assailant's arms and legs together at which point M. Mahé sank unconscious to the floor.

My brother ordered me to find a doctor. I ran to Dr. Rouffiandis's house, awakened him, and told him that the High Commissioner had been injured. He asked me what had happened, but I could not answer because my French was inadequate. He went with me to find the High Commissioner and tended him immediately. While he was treating M. Mahé, M. Vavontaille came in carrying a revolver. He had heard the noise and had come to investigate. When he saw the open door, he entered, but he did not know what had happened. The doctor told him, and M. Vavontaille went to awaken the other Frenchmen who lived nearby. In a short time, a crowd gathered. The military commander had soldiers carry the assailant into the room where the Buddha images were. Then they lifted M. Mahé up and sat him on a chair. After a while, the crowd of Frenchmen slowly dispersed. The military commander had the soldiers put the assailant in jail. The three of us returned to bed, but we could not sleep the rest of the night.

Three or four days later, my brother Chitarath and I went to Saigon by the Mail Steamer[11] with M. Ladriur, the High Commissioner's secretary. I don't know what punishment the court later gave M. Mahé's assailant.

*The Chasseloup-Laubat School.* When we reached Saigon, we were sent to be boarding students at the Chasseloup-Laubat School. There were several Lao students there ahead of us, including Prince Phanyathip and Prince Ounkham from Luang Prabang; Khampui, Nunoi, and Ku from Muang Khong; Bounlieng from Attopeu, Sien and No Ngeun from Savannakhet, and Prince Oui (Sakprasoet) from Champassak.

My brother Chitarath studied in the Elementary Class (Second Year), and I studied in the Preparatory Class (First Year). The Lao students who had come before were all more advanced. They studied in the Middle and Higher Classes (Third and Fourth Years). The two of us began studying at the end of August. At the end of December, the term ended and there was vacation for two months. When the vacation came, Prince Oui took a steamboat for Bangkok because of his dissatisfaction with the Franco-Siamese treaty signed on February 13, 1904, by which France took Champassak.

The Chasseloup-Laubat School was divided into two sections, a French Section and a Vietnamese Section, which differed in both facilities and curriculum. All of the Lao students were in the French Section. At this school, they taught up to the *brevet élémentaire* (Sixth Year) in the French Section and to the *diplôme* in the Vietnamese Section--also Sixth Year but with a slightly different curriculum.

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[11]This boat sank at Cheng Thong Chum on July 15 in the Year of the Rat, 1912, while the vessel was en route from Luang Prabang to Vientiane. Among the passengers were Major de Belize and Dr. Rouffiandis and two or three other Frenchmen. De Belize and Rouffiandis drowned but the others escaped. (Footnote from original text, p. 37.)

The school reopened in March 1905, and when we had studied until June, M. Ladriur came from Vientiane to take my brother Chitarath and me to France. We reached Paris at the beginning of July and stayed at M. Ladriur's father's home for a week. Then we entered the École Coloniale in July 1905.

*The École Coloniale.* The French Government had earlier established this school for those who volunteered to be administrators in the colonies. It was divided into two sections, one for those going to Indochina and one for those going to the African colonies. The administrators' curriculum was the same in both sections. The difference was in teaching the native customs, religions, and languages. Those going to Indochina had to study Buddhism and the customs of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, and had to study one of the three languages. In addition, Thai was taught to those who needed it. For those going to Africa, Islam, customs, and languages were taught. In about 1899, M. Pavie first brought more than ten Cambodians to study in France; at his request, the French Government started another section especially for people from Indochina.

By the time I entered the École Coloniale, there were already many Indochinese students there. Nguyen Van Khai and Le Quang Trinh were there from Vietnam. They had finished the seventh year in Vietnam and were studying Engineering and Medicine. Do Van Giap and Le Van Huyen, also from Vietnam, were studying in the eighth year. Saeum was there from Cambodia. Deo Van Long, Deo Van Mun, Deo Van Thai, and Deo Van Kien were there from Sib Song Chu Thai (Muang Lai). They were close relatives of Deo Van Tri (Kham Heum), the Chief of Muang Lai, and were studying in the second year. All of them studied at the Lavoisier School, one-half kilometer from the École Coloniale.

When I entered the École Coloniale, the schools of France were about to end the term. At the end of July, we went to stay at Thonon, on the shore of Lake Geneva near Evian. The south shore of the lake was French and the north shore was Swiss. While vacationing in Thonon I had several opportunities to go to Geneva, Lausanne, and other places in Switzerland.

In October, we returned to Paris and enrolled at the Lavoisier School with our Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Muang Lai friends. Because I had studied only to the level of the second grade of elementary school, I could hardly keep up with the other students. I couldn't understand anything the teacher taught and found it a waste of time. There was no way to keep up with the Vietnamese students who had already had secondary schooling in Vietnam. The academic level my brother Chitarath and I found at the École Coloniale had long been a problem for Lao and Cambodian students who had come there before us. Because of this, those who returned home after three or four years at the École Coloniale had only a little knowledge--not commensurate with the time they had spent studying. The four Muang Lai students who had come two years before us had the same problems we did.

When the end of the term came, I was afraid that it had been just a waste of time. Therefore I let M. Ladriur's brother-in-law know my dissatisfaction, and asked him to help find a solution to the problem of my education. He was a section chief in the Ministry of the Interior. He took up the matter by contacting the Colonial Ministry,

but someone in the Ministry told the director of the École Coloniale, and that resulted in the director of the school calling me in to reprove me for going over his head to complain directly to the Ministry. Then he punished me by not letting me go out on Sundays for two months. This made my brother afraid that the school director would continue to despise me. Although I suffered heavy punishment, I was not worried, because my complaint was justified: I was dissatisfied with wasting several years.

The final result was that in May 1906, the Year of the Snake, the Colonial Ministry decided they would hire a teacher to tutor those students whose level was not up to that of secondary school and then send them to continue at the Lavoisier School. This was started in October.

When June came, King Sisowath of Cambodia came to France and visited the Indochinese students at the École Coloniale. He brought his sons, Prince Monivong, Prince Souphanouvong, and Prince Chanthalekha. Prince Norodom came also. Before taking leave of the students' supervisor, King Sisowath ordered that Prince Souphanouvong and Prince Chanthalekha should enter the École Coloniale along with *okya* Kesari, the son of a military official, but that Prince Monivong should study in the military school in Saint-Messain [?].

A few days later, Prince Souphanouvong, Prince Chanthalekha, and *okya* Kesari joined us. When the term ended, they stayed with us until the end of September on the shore of the Mediterranean at Bandol. Then we returned to Paris, where we studied together under M. Barri [?], a retired teacher who had formerly taught at the rue de la Martinique.

Those of us who studied together were Prince Souphanouvong, Prince Chanthalekha, *okya* Kesari, the four Muang Lai students already mentioned, Kham Ouan and Somchine Nginn who had just come from Vientiane, and two Vietnamese students named Duan Ky and Nguyen Dinh Thong who had come at the same time.

Studying under M. Barri had very good results for me. In only six months, I felt I could understand and write good French. My knowledge of mathematics had also progressed considerably. Consequently, I thought I would like to enter the Lycée after finishing the term that year. When I had decided on this, I told M. Ladriur's brother-in-law. He agreed, then advised me to ask the Colonial Minister. I called on the Colonial Minister the following week, but did not request permission to do so from the director of the École Coloniale. When I returned to school from the Ministry, the director called me to report to him immediately. He told me that he had heard by telephone from the Minister's Secretary that I had gone to see the Minister, and that seeing a Ministry official without the permission of the school director was very much against the rules. Therefore I would be punished by not being allowed to go anywhere for three months after the end of the term. This occurrence, which arose from my carelessness, frightened my brother Chitarath, and he decided to return to Luang Prabang at the end of the school year. I insisted that he should stay on for a year or two to get more education before returning, but he would not agree.

Consequently, at the end of July 1907, the Year of the Goat, my brother Chitarath made arrangements to return to Laos, then got on a steamboat and left. I was sorry he was leaving but did not go to send

him off at Marseilles. Prince Souphanouvong, Prince Chanthalekha, and *okya* Kesari returned to Phnom Penh at the same time my brother Chitarath returned to Laos.

When the term ended, I stayed on the shore of the Atlantic at Royan until the end of September.

*Studying at the Lycée Montaigne.* In October, I entered the Lycée Montaigne which was adjacent to the École Coloniale. After testing me, the teacher put me in the third level of secondary school (the fourth year in the French system). I lacked the required knowledge of foreign languages as specified by the Science and Foreign Languages sections in which I was studying. This meant I had to study one foreign language. I chose English, and studied very diligently to catch up with the other students who had already studied two years of foreign language. To fulfill my desire to learn English, I found a special tutor to study with outside school hours.

However, it turned out that studying English privately was against the rules of the École Coloniale. Every Thursday the Indochinese students had to go with our supervisor to visit important historical sites in Paris. When I asked to be exempt from these trips so I could study English, the supervisor, who was named Coupillon and who later became a teacher in Tonkin, said that my purpose was to avoid studying history and to sneak off and play. He told the director of the École Coloniale, who again became angry with me and punished me by not letting me go out on Sundays for two months. This didn't trouble me at all since I thus had more time to study English.

His punishing me again made me decide not to continue in that school, because if I continued, the supervisor and director would probably find more things against me and I might be expelled. Consequently, I went to see M. Prade, M. Ladriur's brother-in-law, and told him of my dissatisfaction and my desire to get out of the École Coloniale. I wanted to stay with a French family that my father had known for a long time. M. Prade agreed, then contacted the Colonial Ministry to give me my wish. At the end of the term in July 1908, M. Faidherbe came to fetch me at the École Coloniale, and I stayed with him at 28 Coq-Heron Street.

*My First Trip to England.* After two days with M. Faidherbe, I told him that my knowledge of English had not caught up with that of my classmates and I needed to study in England for the two months of school vacation. I asked him to advise me of an English family who would be willing to let me stay with them. He said he did not know any English families and would be unable to help, so I decided to go by myself and find somewhere to stay when I reached England. I prepared my bags that very day.

I awakened in the morning and called a taxi to take me to the train station. The driver asked me which station. I couldn't answer because I wasn't sure which line, so I told him I wanted to go to England but didn't know which way was cheapest, and asked him to take me to the appropriate station. He took me to the Saint Lazare station and told me that this was the way to England by way of Le Havre and Dieppe. He said that passenger tickets weren't very expensive, but he didn't know which line was cheapest and said I should ask the ticket

seller. The ticket seller advised me to go to Dieppe because crossing the Channel there took less time than at Le Havre. When he asked me where he should punch the ticket to get off, I couldn't answer because I didn't know where to go, so I told him to punch the ticket for the English port opposite Dieppe.

When I reached Newhaven, which is across from Dieppe, I checked my bags at the railway station and went downtown to find a place to stay. I saw that Newhaven was very quiet and melancholy and I didn't want to stay there, so I returned to the railway station and asked if there were any towns close by that were larger and more prosperous. They told me that Brighton was much larger and was twelve kilometers to the west along the ocean. Then I bought a ticket to Brighton.

When I reached Brighton, I checked my bag at the railway station and began walking around to find a place to stay for the two-month vacation, but after I had walked a while I was troubled by having to urinate. When I looked for a place along the road, I didn't see any at all, which was unlike Paris, where there are many places for such a need.

After walking a long time, I had seen many people descend steps leading underground and a short time later come back up again. I went down after them and saw underground bathrooms unlike the ones along the streets in France. This method of putting the bathrooms underground is cleaner than in France.

After coming up from underground, I walked around all the streets looking for a room to rent, but I couldn't find any place at all. Then I came to a school that had a sign saying "Technical School." I went in and asked if they accepted people for the summer, but the person I asked didn't understand my question. He ran to find another person who spoke fluent French. When he understood my needs, he told me that he was the French teacher at the school, but the school had already finished the term and could not take people in. He said that if I needed a place to live, I should rent a room where he was staying, because it was inexpensive, the room and board was good, and the landlord was very proper. I asked the teacher to take me to his house to rent a room.

The house was on Church Street and the landlord was named Mr. Lemon, an astronomy teacher around fifty years old. His wife was in charge of the boarders. There were four daughters in the family. The oldest was married to Mr. Day, who worked in a bank, and they had a daughter about five years old. The second daughter was married to a Frenchman who was the owner of a vineyard in Tunisia. As for the other two daughters, the older one was named Ethyl and worked at home helping her mother. The younger one was named Dorothy and worked in a tailor shop.

Mr. Lemon's house had four rooms for boarders. When I moved in, there were two empty rooms which were later rented to two French girls. The landlord took care of the boarders himself, which pleased me very much because it was an opportunity to observe the customs and life of the English. Mr. Lemon knew that I was interested in astronomy and often took me up on the roof to look at the sky and to see the movements of the planets through his large telescope. My great interest in astrology after returning to Laos was the product of Mr. Lemon's advice about these matters.

*Studying at the Lycée Saint Louis.* At the end of September, I returned to Paris and entered the second year at the Lycée Saint Louis. I felt that my two months in England had helped my English a great deal because in the test I did better than dozens of my fellow students.

*Trips to England during Vacations.* When school closed for a week for Christmas and New Year, I went back to Brighton, and during a later vacation in March 1909, I also went back for fifteen days for the chance to speak English. In 1910, I took the opportunity to go to England every time school closed, and each time I went to London to see the English capital and its museums.

*Starting a Chinese Restaurant in Paris.* Once, in March 1910, I was sitting in Hyde Park and a Chinese man came up and asked me something in Chinese, because he thought I was Chinese. When he saw that I didn't understand, he spoke to me in English. His story was that he had been a cook for two years on an English merchant ship that travelled between Portsmouth and Shanghai, but now he had married an English girl and had given up his work as the ship's cook to be with his wife. However, he had not been able to find a new job and asked to be my cook. When I told him that I couldn't hire him as my cook because I was a student and ate with a French family, he asked me to help him find work. I told him I would help him as much as I could and asked him to give me his address so I could contact him in the future.

When I returned to Paris, I told the story of the Chinese man to several of the Vietnamese and Chinese students. A few days later, a group of Vietnamese and Chinese came to chat with me and said that most of the Asians in Paris rented rooms and ate in low-class restaurants because it was inexpensive, but the food wasn't very good and there wasn't enough of it. They said that if several people pooled their money, the unemployed Chinese cook could be hired to come and cook for us, and that would be better than eating in French restaurants. It would also be an opportunity to get Chinese food. We all agreed to start a Chinese restaurant for the Asian students, and promised that each of us would pay one hundred francs to pay the fare for the Chinese cook and his wife to come from London and to rent a place for the restaurant. The fund would also buy seasoning for the food from China. Anyone who came to eat at the restaurant would also have to pay one hundred francs to the fund. As for the cost of the food, we decided to work out a system later.

When we had agreed and had collected enough money for our needs, I wrote to the Chinese man asking him to bring his wife and come to Paris, where we had already rented a place for them. When the cook came, we gave him money to buy dishes and utensils for the food, and dozens of Vietnamese, Chinese, Lao, and Cambodian students ate there every day. The cook sent the leftover money to China to buy various seasonings such as dried salted fish, fish sauce, pickled bamboo shoots, and various other things.

*The Underground X-Ray.* When the Chinese condiments reached Paris, the Inspector of foodstuffs at Les Halles Market wrote me requesting that I come to his office to inspect the things that had come from China. He thought that they had an inappropriate smell and that he would not pass them. I took the Chinese cook along and went to see

him. When the inspector opened the odiferous package containing the fish sauce and dried salted fish, he said it was completely rotten and he couldn't pass it for our use. I explained that this was not the case at all, that the food was still good, the smell was perfectly ordinary, and it wasn't rotten. He was most amazed and wasn't inclined to believe my assurances. I compared the smell with that of the cheese which the French are so fond of eating and asked him if he thought French cheese was rotten. He finally passed the imports for our use and let us take them. Then he took us to see the laboratory in the basement of the market where there were many rooms for the inspection of the food that was sent to be sold in Paris. In the X-ray room, the inspector had the Chinese cook stand in front of the X-ray machine, and X-rayed his bones and body. When the cook saw his own skeleton, he was so terrified his face went pale and his entire body trembled. Having that opportunity to see the laboratory made me feel that the French take admirable care of their people.

Our first restaurant had to be moved within six months. This was because more and more Chinese came to eat there and because the landlord would not extend the lease. So we rented another place near the Odéon Theater.

*Temporary Return to Laos and Ordination as a Monk.* With the end of the school term in January 1910, I had finished the eighth year of secondary school, and my father asked me to return temporarily to Laos. When I had been in Luang Prabang for two months, my father asked me to enter the monkhood. I became a monk at Wat Nong Sakeo, which is around three kilometers across the river from Luang Prabang. To receive alms, I had to walk to the city every day, which was extremely difficult for me because I had worn shoes for many years. I had to walk barefoot, the morning mist was cold and damp, my robe was thin, and the monks had shaved off all my hair. Altogether, it was sheer suffering.

Because the Prince was reported to be a troublesome student for his French teacher, his dislike for the French increased, in spite of the fact that he was a monk and had increased patience in body and in spirit.[12] His heart had been resolute from a young age. Once, when he was eight years old and the present King was three years older than he, the King bullied him, and he fought back with his fists. The King lost and was afraid to fight him again. Refusing to give in when unfairly treated was a quality that the Prince had from an early age. Even when an older person bullied him, he wouldn't retreat. When the Prince was eleven years old, his father had an eighteen-year-old royal page who bullied him. Instead of going to tell his father to punish the page, the Prince kept his feelings to himself. One day he found an opportunity for revenge. A stallion and a mare were tied up under the house and were copulating there. The Prince enticed the royal page to come and take a look. To see clearly, he had to bend over. While the page was bent over absorbed in the view, the Prince took a stick of wood and cracked him over the head, which avenged the Prince's feelings. He had been waiting a long time for an opportunity to punish the page, since the page was bigger and the Prince couldn't reach high enough to hit him on the head.

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[12]From this point to the end of the chapter the Prince is referred to in the third person. (JM)

The conduct of Prince Phetsarath is a result of his acting with resolute determination. Thus he is a democrat. He has studied the customs and traditions of foreign countries such as England and France in the mother countries themselves, not from the colonial riffraff. He has seen what is good and desirable. In visiting the people, he mixes with them without consciousness of status. Even with the monks, he conducts himself as a good Buddhist. Thus he is beloved by the people, in contrast to their feelings toward other members of the royal family. Royal custom strictly forbids the people from coming close to the King, so they can only see him from a distance. In contrast, the Prince has a very different approach, and the people feel differently toward him. I need not say whom they love more.

*The Prince's First Marriage.* When the Prince was young, he was loved by many girls, and several of them wanted to marry him, including the woman who has since become Queen. However, he remembered the grace and kindness of the widowed King and knew that the King wanted this girl. He made the sacrifice of not becoming involved, and instead married the King's older sister who was a widow and was many years older than the Prince. He did this following the desires of his father, the Viceroy, who had long wanted to bind the split between the royal families of Luang Prabang and Vientiane. Thus the Prince's marriage to the King's older sister was done for political reasons and was destined according to the Prince's astrological fate. However, when the Prince spent eleven years in exile in Thailand in order to redeem the independence of Laos from the influence of the French, his chief wife did not accompany him. Some people thought that since it was not a marriage of true love, this absence would not be accompanied with great difficulty. However, in all fairness, it would have been difficult for his wife, who was the older sister of the King, to live in dishonorable poverty. She had to decide between two paths--love for her husband or love for her family honor. If she had come to Thailand out of love for her husband, she would have lost her family honor. She thus decided to remain in Vientiane. Later, the Prince fell in love with a Thai widow of high family, and she was the serious love of his life.

## The Royal Family of Luang Prabang

The sons and daughters of King Zakarine are as follows:

(1) *Princess Kham Wen* married Prince Phetsarath after her husband, Prince Bourapanh, the sixth son of King Mangthathurath, died.

(2) *Prince Khieo*, or Prince Sisaleumsak, was a few years older than the king of Luang Prabang, but his mother was a commoner.

(3) *Prince Settha* was born around the same time as King Sisavangvong, but by a commoner mother.

(4) *Prince Khao*, who became king under the name of Sisavangvong, was the second son of Queen Thong Si. (Her first son, Prince Duang Chan, might have become king, but he died while still young.) Sisavangvong's first queen, Kham Ouan, who died before reaching old age, had the following children:

(a) Prince Savangvatthana [King of Laos from 1959]

(b) Princess Khampheng (who drowned in the Mekong in a boat accident)

(c) Princess Samathi

(d) Prince Intharavong

(e) Prince Phanurangsi.

(5) *Prince Sisonsai*, younger brother of Sisavangvong, went to Thailand and had the following children:

(a) Prince Sisavath, or *khun* Sisavath, became a civil servant in Bangkok.

(b) Prince Sisaveng

(c) Prince Sisavai is now Lt. Gen. Savai Senyakam, the commander of the Second Army in Nakhon Ratchasima [Northeast Thailand]. You will note that he is a very important prince, who by right could become king without breaking the royal customs of Luang Prabang. His status as prince is equal to that of Sisavangvong, the present [1956] king of Lan Xang-Luang Prabang. The fact that Prince Sisavai has become a high-ranking general in Thailand pleased the royalty and people of Luang Prabang. It is appealing to the people of the east bank of the Mekong to increase their close ties with the Thai government.

(d) Princess Sutsanguan

(e) Princess Khamphiu, who is now [1956] one of the wives of the King of Luang Prabang.

(f) Prince Savath.

(6) *Princess Kham Fan* is the second queen of King Sisavangvong, her older brother, but has no children. Princess Kham Fan became chief queen after Queen Thong Si died.

(7) *Princess Kham Tun* was Sisavangvong's third queen and had a son named Prince Burattana.

Besides his three queens, King Sisavangvong also had concubines, including Princess In, who had two sons, Prince Sai and Prince Sisumang. The concubine *mom* La had two sons, Prince Khampan, who is the present [1956] Lao Ambassador to Thailand, and Prince Kham Hing.

Important Members of the Family of the Viceroy

It is interesting to observe that, from the beginning of the royal family until the reign of King Oun Kham, one first had to hold the position of viceroy before one could become king. Before one could be viceroy, one first had to be Ratsavong; and the Ratsavong was selected from among the Ratsabut, or royal sons. However, ever since the reign of King Oun Kham the crown has been handed down from father to son.

Consequently, the lineage of the Viceroy has been separate from that of the royal family of the king.[13]

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[13]The last two pages of this chapter, consisting almost entirely of lists of names, has been transposed above. (DW)

# CHAPTER 2

# THE JAPANESE SEIZE LAOS

Let me briefly relate the events of March 10, 1945, the day the Japanese seized Laos. No one in Vientiane knew that the army of the Rising Sun had reached the outskirts of the city. French and Lao intelligence officers were unaware that anything was happening. I don't know how they conducted their investigations, but there were no reports of any incidents. No one reported anything, and anyone who wanted to know what was happening had to investigate for himself. Even a visiting French commander on a routine inspection trip was arranging for a party and had already prepared decorations for the soldiers. At dawn, the soldiers went to target practice and met the Japanese army, which had already captured the target range. The Prince had received an invitation to the party that was being prepared. At seven o'clock in the morning, while waiting for his escort, the Prince heard the sound of guns from the target range. The sound did not seem to be the rhythmical shooting of target practice, and he became suspicious. Just then a pale-faced Prince Souvannaphouma came running in and reported that Saigon radio had announced that Saigon had fallen. The announcer's voice was that of a crying woman, and the announcement was that French soldiers should cease fighting. They then realized that the sound of guns from the target range was real fighting. Next some alarmed Vietnamese soldiers came running in to report that French officers had gone to review target practice, had met with Japanese soldiers waiting on the target range, and fighting had ensued.

The French High Commissioner then called a meeting at which the heads of the government divisions tried to persuade the Prince to remain in Vientiane as a friend, but the Prince told them it was necessary for him to go to Luang Prabang as quickly as possible. In this situation, the King must not be abandoned; the Prince must be with him. The High Commissioner asked how he could get to Luang Prabang, since the Japanese controlled the roads. The Prince answered that he knew the roads better than the Japanese and there were still many ways to avoid them. He asked if he could borrow the High Commissioner's car for the trip, but the High Commissioner replied that he needed the car himself to receive the Japanese. The Prince countered that when the Japanese captured the city, they would capture the car also, and asked to take it before that happened. The High Commissioner then agreed that he could borrow the car, but asked him to return it as soon as he was finished with it as he felt he was about to be captured and was worried about the car. Moreover, the High Commissioner sent a servant to get his formal uniform to prepare for a reception at his house--which was extremely humorous.

Although the High Commissioner invited twenty-four people to dinner, only four came: the Prince, the High Commissioner, his secretary, and his wife. Perhaps the others went underground either to fight or to flee. While they were eating, the High Commissioner asked

the Prince what he would do if the Japanese came. The Prince answered that since there were twenty extra places, he would invite them to eat since they probably were very hungry and would not object.

The Prince went by the Commissioner's car until he was seventeen miles from Muang Kasy. Then, because he was afraid the car would be attacked, he got out and went on foot with two royal pages, ten soldiers, and two horses. When he reached Muang Kasy, the Prince called a meeting of all the Lao civil servants there. He said, in summary, that the French and Japanese were fighting; that this did not concern the Lao, and that they should work as usual and wait for further orders. Then he went on to Kilometer 95-97 where he met some French soldiers guarding the bridge. They asked about the Japanese, and when the Prince had crossed, they blew up the bridge. He then went on to Kilometer 157, to Vang Vieng. There he met the French general who had come for the inspection. He was hiding there with several French families, altogether around sixty or seventy people. He reached Vang Vieng around 7:00 P.M. and called a meeting of the Lao civil servants at Ban Thao Lai. He gave them the same message as at Muang Kasy, and then continued on toward Luang Prabang. Rather than entering the city, he stayed outside at the Sieng Keo Palace. The people of the capital had evacuated the city, though the Japanese had not yet taken it. The Prince sent his younger brother to tell Crown Prince Savang Vatthana that the Viceroy-Prime Minister had returned, and that he should call a meeting of the Cabinet to inform them of events in Vientiane. He also explained that he had done this in each city he had passed, and that he understood that Xieng Khouang had already fallen to the Japanese.

De Gaulle's political party, which was the military party, had taken over the civilian powers of the High Commissioner, who had followed the Vichy government of Petain. However, when the soldiers of the Rising Sun came, the French method of defense was to retreat and run. They retreated so fast that the Japanese could not catch them, and the Japanese took over with little resistance. During the occupation, it was demonstrated that in a country ruled by a king, people will respect the King and will not behave arrogantly as they do in second class powers that do not have kings. The Japanese soldiers did not set foot in the palace, and though a few clumsily entered the palace gates, they were quickly chased out by their military officers. My fellow Thai: both during and after the war in East Asia we could see which foreign power treated our royalty with the greatest respect.

During their occupation of Luang Prabang, the Japanese searched out and inspected the political documents of Laos. The Prince saw a document which was the most important of his life. It was an accusation against him by the French, sent from the High Commissioner of Indochina to the High Commissioner of Laos, and read as follows:

"Prince Phetsarath will seek independence. Be careful of this Prince when the war is over, because he will join with Thailand to seek independence."

One hardly needs to explain how false this is. All of the Thai peoples want independence for Laos. Prince Phetsarath does not lead Laos by himself, for all the Thai give their cooperation in every way. Crazy people will not make Laos a part of Thailand. My Lao brothers:

please don't be distrustful! No one thinks like that. Thai-Lao culture from ancient times shows that by blood and marriage we are one family that has become separated. We Lao must carry our own responsibilities. Thailand has had its own share of troubles and does not need to annex Laos. Only dollar-seeking opportunists would think along this line. Such a plan would also be in violation of the United Nations Charter. Every Thai still remembers that the Lao people accepted the role of scapegoat and allowed the French to rule and exploit them for two hundred years. The memory of the two kings of the Ayuthia Period who built the Si Song Rak Chao reliquary in Dan Sai, Loei Province, is good evidence. This will be discussed in a later chapter so that the oath of our ancestral kings can be understood.

The Japanese entry into Luang Prabang was very clever. At first, they brought their soldiers by truck from Xieng Khouang. Then when they came near the city, the soldiers got into monk's boats at various monasteries and continued by water. The Japanese soldiers took off their hats and looked almost like monks going out to receive alms. The French watched only the roads and did not worry about phony monks. When they reached the French, the phony monks emerged from the boats with grenades and guns instead of alms bowls. The French surrendered, but before surrendering, they still deceived the people. They conscripted villagers to build a bamboo bridge [across the Nam Khan] to the airport and alleged that they would lead their army to defend the city. When the bridge was finished, the French crossed with their cars, and when all had crossed, they blew up the bridge. The people realized that they had built the bridge for the French to escape, not to fight. After that, the French conscripted villagers and civil servants to do the fighting. They distributed guns to fight to the death, but ordered that if the fighters heard a whistle, they should retreat. Some of the Lao fought, including Prince Phetsarath's younger brother, Prince Chintavong, who led the villagers in destroying two Japanese soldiers, but the French retreated first. The Lao fighters did not retreat at first because they didn't hear the whistle, but when they finally heard it, it seemed that the French had already retreated almost a kilometer. In their attempt to persuade the people to fight, the French urged the Prince to join, but he refused.

When the French prepared their escape from Luang Prabang, they urged Prince Phetsarath to accompany them, but he refused this also. If he had gone, the samurai would surely have decapitated him. He asserted that the King was still in Luang Prabang, and if he had to die, he would do his duty and die for his country as his grandfather had done. He let only his younger brother Chintavong escape because he feared that the Japanese would probably investigate his brother's shooting of Japanese soldiers. The Crown Prince also stayed, but he let Prince Thongsuk, his brother-in-law, escape. When the Japanese came, the Crown Prince worried about the King and asked to recall those who had escaped. He felt that the Japanese came to free the Lao from their yoke and drive away only the French; they would not endanger the Lao. The Prince knew that these people had already escaped to safety, so he equivocated by saying that they were French sympathizers and to let them go. The Crown Prince ordered that the arms and ammunition the French had left behind be sent to the occupying Japanese troops.

Later a Japanese military envoy from Saigon came to Luang Prabang and brought a letter for the Prince from Souphanouvong, who was building

roads in Vietnam. The message was that Prince Souphanouvong would cooperate with the Japanese in proclaiming independence. Later Prince Phetsarath and the Japanese envoy discussed the proclamation of Lao independence. The Prince realized that this was a highly significant issue that should first be presented to the King. Then, if the Prince were to proclaim independence, the Japanese would have to agree. However, Crown Prince Savang Vatthana was also at the meeting and asked to make the proclamation himself. Prince Phetsarath objected that this was the concern of the government, but the Crown Prince countered that the Japanese did not want to deal with the government and that he himself should make the proclamation. This was the opposite of the procedure used in Thailand, where in government matters the Japanese spoke with the Prime Minister and did not intrude upon the King. Because of his rank, the Crown Prince is not at government level. The government must receive the royal commands of the King or the Crown Prince, who acts in the King's place as the government's protector. Finally the Japanese and the Lao agreed, independence was proclaimed in April 1945, and on the evening of the proclamation there was a large independence celebration. Later the Crown Prince ordered Prince Phetsarath to go with the Japanese envoy to Saigon, but the Prince told the messenger to tell the Crown Prince that the Japanese didn't like to deal with the government, and that the Crown Prince himself should go. Afterwards, he understood that no one dared to tell this to the Crown Prince and thus other excuses were made.

Later Prince Settha came to tell Prince Phetsarath that the King had ordered him to go to Saigon, but he refused the King as well, and again told the Crown Prince to go. It was obvious that Prince Phetsarath was displeased that the Crown Prince had set himself up in place of the government. He should have put himself above politics so that the Japanese would honor him, but the Crown Prince thought that they already respected him. However, to speed things along, the Crown Prince finally went to Saigon himself. Along the way, he was attacked by an American airplane, but with luck he escaped and managed to reach the city. When the sirens wailed, everyone in Saigon, regardless of rank or status, had to stay in air raid shelters. Along with the Japanese, the Crown Prince made announcements on Radio Saigon.

Later, Colonel Ishibashi, the Japanese military commander, agreed to provide weapons and financial aid for distribution by the Lao government. This was unlike the case in Thailand, where the Japanese borrowed several hundred million [baht] and still have not returned it. The Crown Prince called a meeting of the cabinet to consider this matter, but Prince Phetsarath did not attend because he was not informed that it was being held. Later Colonel Ishibashi appointed *thao* Katay to be his secretary because he was familiar with the workings of Vientiane. Colonel Ishibashi also met with the King and told him that the Crown Prince's government activities were not proper, and that if the King did not favor the government, he would dissolve it. From then on, Ishibashi consulted directly with Prince Phetsarath, who acted with resolution. The Japanese did not involve themselves with the work of the government in Luang Prabang. However, in the other three Provinces [Vientiane, Savannakhet, and Champassak], they controlled things in the same way as the former French administration. The Prince discussed this with Ishibashi on two different occasions and requested that the four provinces be unified. However, the Japanese alleged that the French had administered the provinces separately and had refused Lao

requests to unite them; the Japanese would do the same. The freedom which the Japanese brought to Laos was just in word, not in deed.

The Prince received a letter from the French High Commissioner saying that he was happy that the Prince had returned to Vientiane, which was now independent, but that he was being kept in a Japanese jail. He described the various difficulties of life in prison, and asked the Prince if he could help alleviate matters. Out of compassion toward a fellow human being in difficulty, the Prince negotiated with the Japanese for the release of the prisoner into his custody. At first, the Japanese authorities refused, and claimed that the Commissioner was their prisoner. The Prince replied that Luang Prabang was now independent and that since Vientiane was a part of the Luang Prabang Kingdom it was not right for other countries to keep prisoners there; if they did so, their independence was counterfeit. He also told the Japanese that if they thought the Frenchmen were their prisoners, they should imprison them as they wished in some area that was under Japanese control. The Japanese asked time to consider the matter for a day, and then replied that they would turn over sixty French prisoners, including the High Commissioner, to the Lao Government. The Frenchmen who read this should be aware of the high principles of the Lao Government in their humanity toward the sixty prisoners. I don't know whether the Frenchmen realized the compassion of the Lao while they were still in the country. They probably were satisfied for only a short time. Later the Lao Government held the French in the Municipal Public Works Building instead of in prison. When the Japanese had been defeated, their authorities came to consult the Lao Government and told the government they should not release the French and should not insult the Japanese in their defeat or there would be useless slaughter in the streets. The Japanese surrendered on August 27-28, 1945. Prince Phetsarath announced that the Frenchmen who escaped to the forest could return to the cities. With this, the former French High Commissioner, who had been helped by the Lao Government and had been released from prison in the government's custody, put on his uniform and announced that on September 1, 1945, he would return to his duties as High Commissioner. The Lao Government was dazed. Prince Phetsarath, as Prime Minister, answered that the French had been unable to fulfill any of the conditions of the Protectorate, that they had lost to the Japanese, and that Laos was now independent. If the French were going to return, they would have to make a new treaty since the King had already proclaimed independence. The French had run away rather than protect Laos, and Laos had unilaterally declared its independence. Was it right for them to try to come back? When no agreement was possible, the High Commissioner tried another tactic and went directly to the King. Thus arose the events that led to the Prince-Viceroy's being dismissed and having to seek refuge in Thailand. The Prince's heroic performance can be understood by one word: "independence." This single goal took eleven years to realize.

To continue its oppression, the French administration tried to gain the support of the Lao civil servants by tempting them with remuneration and jobs under important officials. They aimed directly at the King, because they believed that if the King preferred French practices, they could administer with a free hand. In France, civil servants were affiliated with various political parties, but in the colony, Lao civil servants had to obey the High Commissioner and were not allowed to respect their own leaders. The King was close to his people

only in Luang Prabang and Vientiane provinces. In other areas, though the people knew there was a King, they had never seen him. They had seen only the French leaders. After World War II, the French had only two important political parties: Petain's Vichy party, the group that had surrendered, and De Gaulle's party, the group that fought to save the country.

The French civil servants' loyalties were divided into two camps. The Petain camp had followers both within France and outside it. De Gaulle's group, which loved freedom and truly fought regardless of the odds, never administered the country because it had never gained electoral victories. In the Petain group's acquiescence to defeat at the hands of the Germans, they joined the winning side and continued to rule France. The feelings of this group were widely expressed in Laos. Later, Prince Phetsarath's brother, Prince Souvannaphouma, held administrative power as Prime Minister under the French; his other brother, Souphanouvong, having feelings like De Gaulle's, lost authority but won the hearts of the people. With this, the Lao people began to know true freedom, because real freedom must be bought with blood and iron and not by words alone. Small nations with hearts strong enough to make the sacrifice can survive. This does not threaten other nations in the world and should neither offend people nor provoke their attacks.

According to the Chinese history of the Han Dynasty, before Han Sin became the hero of the dynasty he was challenged by villains, who said that if he refused to fight them he would have to crawl between their legs. Han Sin complied because it was a small matter and because the job of attaining independence for China was much more important. If he had fought the villains at that time and succeeded in killing them, he would have been arrested as a murderer. However, if he complied and crawled between their legs, the matter would be ended, and the tasks ahead could be accomplished. Prince Souvannaphouma might try to follow Han Sin rather than Petain. However, in this case it is a total and unending acquiescence.

## The Japanese Seize Laos, 1945
## (From Prince Phetsarath's Journal)

When the Japanese seized Laos, the newspapers in Bangkok carried many reports on what was happening, but these reports were not always accurate. It looked as though the writers had not experienced things themselves but were only reporting secondhand news.

When the Japanese took Laos from the French, I myself saw the capture of Vientiane and Luang Prabang and recorded what I saw and heard at that time in my diary. Here are the passages from what I wrote long ago:

### Tuesday, March 6, 1945

In the morning, I left by car from Luang Prabang to go to Vientiane to confer with the French High Commissioner of Laos about the government civil service. When I reached Muang Kasy (around 185 kilometers), I stayed with my brother, District Chief Chintavong.

Wednesday, March 7

I went to inspect the new road that I had ordered built from Muang Kasy to the villages along the Nam Kai River. The purpose of the road was to make connections with the highway more convenient for these villages and especially to facilitate transporting their surplus rice. I saw that the building of the road had progressed considerably and hoped that the earth fill would be completed before the rainy season. In the afternoon, I went on to Vang Vieng and stayed with District Chief *thao* Lai.

Thursday, March 8

I went to inspect the sanitation of the villages of Khoua Phan, Vang Vieng Kao, and Vang Vieng Mai, to see that the people there were following government orders, and to advise them to build new village roads to make it more convenient to travel by car. I saw that the villages were sanitary and ordered that the roads be finished by the first of May, the day I planned to return from Vientiane to Luang Prabang. When I had given this order, I went on to Vientiane and reached my palace at 9:00 P.M.

Shortly after I arrived, M. Brasey, the French High Commissioner, came to visit me, and we talked until 10:30 P.M. He told me that the next day, General Turquin, the military commander of Annam and Laos, would reach Vientiane to inspect the Vientiane battalion, and on the tenth he would have a reception and dinner to honor the General and the senior military officers; he wanted to invite me to join them. He said that the formal invitation card would be sent the next day, and I replied that I was happy to be invited and would surely be there.

Friday, March 9

At 10:00 A.M. I went to visit the High Commissioner and talked with him about the government. In the afternoon I talked about the government with several Lao leaders, including Governor *phanya* Khammao.

At 6:00 P.M. I saw General Turquin go to the High Commissioner's house, which is next door to my palace. I watched the reception from my second story window. When General Turquin had inspected the military honor guard, he asked the Major, "What have you prepared for me to see tomorrow?"

"There will be target practice at 6:00 A.M. for you to observe the soldiers' skills," the Major answered.

"Good! Pick me up at the appropriate time," the General ordered, then went into the High Commissioner's house where he was staying.

Saturday, March 10

At 6:00 A.M., I heard the sound of gunfire from the direction of the target range, which is six kilometers from Vientiane along the road to Nongkhai. The gunfire was not normal for target practice, but I did not take much interest because I thought they might have been shooting several overlapping rounds.

However, at 7:00 I saw a single soldier riding a galloping horse like a streak of lightning. He had a paper clamped in his teeth because he held the reins in his left hand and a gun in his right hand. His appearance made me suspect that something must have happened at the target range, and I went into the living room to send someone to investigate.

When I reached the living room, my brother, Prince Souvannaphouma, came in with an abnormally pale face and said, "A few minutes ago, Saigon radio announced that the Japanese have taken Saigon. Admiral Decoux, the High Commissioner of Indochina, along with the military officers and civil servants, have all been captured. The Japanese have taken over from the French. They order the soldiers and civil servants in all provinces to surrender to them because further resistance will be useless."

When Prince Souvannaphouma had told me this, M. Trudaille [?], the Assistant Director of the Vientiane Arsenal, came into the living room and told me the same news. Then both of them asked me, "What are you going to do?" I answered, "I must go to Luang Prabang to be with the King, and I will turn over Vientiane to Governor *phanya* Khammao and the government division heads. Beyond that, I haven't yet consulted with the High Commissioner and don't know what the plans of the French are."

Then I telephoned the High Commissioner to ask when I could see him. He replied that he had just heard the news and had called the French Division Heads to come for immediate consultations. He said he was sorry that he couldn't find time to see me right then and asked me to find him later in his office. I answered that I would be there at 10:00.

While I was talking with Prince Souvannaphouma and M. Trudaille, we heard the sound of an explosion at the Arsenal, which is around three hundred meters from my palace. Then, at 9:00 A.M., we heard the sounds of many explosions from the direction of Ban Phone Kheng. Shortly after, someone came and told us that the French had blown up the garage at the Arsenal there, and it was burning. They had blown it up to prevent the Japanese from getting the weapons. Someone else came and said that the French were evacuating their families by car from Vientiane to Vang Vieng.

At 10:00 I went to the High Commissioner's office for my appointment. When I reached the office of M. Cérida [?], the High Commissioner's secretary, I saw a group of Lao and French civil servants searching the files for various important documents and burning them. All of these documents concerned the Japanese.

When the High Commissioner heard me talking with the civil servants, he said he would receive me in his office immediately. When he spoke of the events in Saigon and Hanoi on the night of March 9 and 10, which was the time of the Japanese takeover, I asked him:

"As for us, what plans have you agreed upon with the military?"

"We have no hope of defending Vientiane because we weren't prepared for this. Therefore, the soldiers plan to fight outside the capital and along the communication routes. As for me, it is my duty

to stay. When the Japanese arrive, I will put myself at their mercy," the Commissioner answered. Then he asked me again, "What are you going to do?"

"I must return to Luang Prabang quickly," I replied, "because my position is that of Viceroy and Prime Minister, and I must be near the King. However, my car broke down yesterday. May I borrow one of your cars to send me to Muang Kasy? And can you send a telegram to the Commissioner of Luang Prabang and have him send a car to receive me in Muang Kasy tomorrow morning?"

"Yes," the High Commissioner answered, "but please send the car back to Vientiane as quickly as possible." His response puzzled me a great deal because I did not see any benefit in sending the car back to Vientiane when the Japanese were about to capture the city. When I sent it back, it would just be for the use of the Japanese. However, I answered that I would certainly send the car back to him.

The High Commissioner then asked, "How can you possibly reach Luang Prabang? The Japanese already have all the roads."

"That's right. I can evade them by leaving the car and walking along the mountains where I won't be seen," I replied.

While we were talking, the High Commissioner telephoned a servant at his house and ordered him to prepare his uniform and send it to his office. I asked him why he was bringing it there.

"In order to receive the Japanese in my position as High Commissioner," he answered.

I then took the opportunity to ask for the gold Buddha image and monk's requisites that I had kept in the High Commissioner's safe for several years. I did this to protect them from Japanese confiscation. The High Commissioner called his secretary to open the safe and bring the box to me. I gave him back a receipt for the goods.

These objects are very old. Besides the six-kilogram gold Buddha image, there are several other gilded Buddha images, two gold relics, and many other things that District Chief Khampha Souvannavong, the monks, the civil servants, and I had collected since 1917. We had planned eventually to put them in a museum, and they had been in my care from the beginning. However, when the incident between Thailand and Indochina developed in 1940, I took them to Saigon by airplane to put them in a French bank for safekeeping. I took the monk *lak kham* Keo along to witness their deposit. However, no bank would accept them because they were afraid that they would not be secure. I had to bring them back to Vientiane, but in order not to let anyone know that I was carrying such valuable things, I bought a leather suitcase to carry them in. When I got off the airplane, I told the people who had come to receive me that I had deposited the valuables safely in the bank, and they believed me. Then when I had to move my family, I went to Ban Hat Kieng, which was thirty-two kilometers from Vientiane. To secure the things from airplane and artillery attack, I took them along without letting anyone know. They have been safe ever since. When the political situation returned to normal, I revealed the truth and then put them in the High Commissioner's safe as I have told.

When I bid him goodbye, the High Commissioner asked, "When are you leaving Vientiane so I can send the car in time? One more thing; aren't you coming to my house for dinner today?"

"I have already said that I will come to the reception for General Turquin and I won't break my word. I'll be at your house at 12:00 as scheduled," I answered.

"I'm afraid that the group invited won't all attend," the High Commissioner added.

"That's all right; I won't refuse. We'll have a chance to talk more while we're eating," I replied.

When I had bid farewell to the High Commissioner, I had a secretary carry the box of Buddha images with me to the palace. The civil servants waiting there to see me were all pleased, because none of them had known about these things before. Then I ordered Governor *phanya* Khammao to call all the civil servants to come for orders at 1:30 P.M., after the dinner at the High Commissioner's house.

At the appointed hour of noon, I went to the High Commissioner's house. He said immediately, "It appears there won't be many guests at the party today because of the Japanese aggression."

The shooting was still going on, and it seemed that the sound of gunfire was much closer than in the morning.

For dinner that day, there were only the High Commissioner, the High Commissioner's secretary and his wife, and I myself--only four people. As for the General and senior military officers who were invited, not one was there. Even Governor *phanya* Khammao was not there, since he was involved with calling the Lao civil servants to come and receive my orders.

Although there were only four people at the dinner, we still had an enjoyable conversation.

"If the Japanese came while we were eating like this, it wouldn't seem appropriate," the High Commissioner commented.

"We could invite them to join us at the table," I answered. "They probably wouldn't object since they're undoubtedly hungry from fighting long hours every day."

"If they actually came right now, we would lose this good wine we're drinking, because they aren't noted for their good taste," he said.

"It's better to drink it up quickly than to give it to people without good taste," I answered.

Then the director of the radio office came in and told the High Commissioner, "I've been calling the station at Luang Prabang for a long time, but there is no answer. The telegram to send the car to receive the Prince tomorrow at Muang Kasy still hasn't reached them."

"Has Luang Prabang fallen to the Japanese?" the High Commissioner asked.

"If there's no car from Luang Prabang, that's all right," I said, "when I reached Muang Kasy, I can walk by way of the Meo villages. It's safer than going by car since the Japanese probably already control the road." Then I looked at my watch and saw that it was 1:30.

"If the Japanese have already taken Luang Prabang, as it looks now, you're sure to be captured before you reach the city," the High Commissioner asserted.

"It's not sure at all," I answered, "because the road I'm taking goes directly to my Sieng Keo Palace. I don't have to go through Luang Prabang."

After we had finished dinner, coffee, and some special brandy, I bid farewell to the High Commissioner, his secretary and the secretary's wife by saying that we would meet again soon if the Japanese didn't kill them, since the Japanese had no hope of winning the war.

When I returned to the palace, I told all the Lao civil servants waiting there: "The present crisis is the concern of the Japanese and the French. Fate will determine the winner. We must all carry out our duties as usual, and demonstrate our abilities. We cannot show any weakness. If you hear anything interesting, send a telegram advising the government as usual. As for me, I must be near the King, because it is the duty of the Viceroy and Prime Minister to be with the King at critical times such as this. Whether I will reach Luang Prabang in safety or not, I cannot guess, but I must try to reach the King."

At 3:30 I left the palace, driven by my old chauffeur, Daeng. The sound of gunfire was coming much closer to Vientiane, making me think that the Japanese had probably already taken the road to Luang Prabang, but when we reached Wattay airport and nothing looked out of the ordinary, I knew that there was no fighting in that area.

However, when we crossed the Nam Lik River and reached Kilometer 103, we saw an armed man crossing the road from left to right. I thought he was Japanese and ordered Daeng to drive slowly and then to stop the car. Then we saw two or three Frenchmen emerge from the forest along the road. I recognized one of them as M. Parisot [?], the police inspector for Laos, and stuck my head out of the car. When he saw me, he motioned to his followers in the forest not to shoot and yelled, "They aren't Japanese, don't shoot!"

Then four or five Frenchmen came out of the forest, one of whom was a Major. The Frenchmen's faces were pale as though they were bloodless. Apparently they thought they were about to fight the Japanese and the end of their lives was near.

When they saw me, they asked, "Have the Japanese taken Vientiane?"

"They still haven't come into the city," I answered.

"What time did you leave?"

"At 3:30, but at that time the sound of gunfire was very close to town," I answered.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm trying to reach the King in Luang Prabang."

"Then please stop in Vang Vieng and tell the news of Vientiane to General Turquin," they said.

"Yes, I'll stop and tell him the news," I finally answered.

Then the Major called the drivers of the three cars that were blocking the road in front of me to move their cars and let me pass, and I continued on. Apparently the French plan was to block the road with the cars to delay and inconvenience the Japanese. This was to prevent the Japanese from reaching Vang Vieng easily and to give the French time to fight for the protection of the Major and the French families who had sought refuge there that morning.

I reached Vang Vieng at 10:00 P.M. and went to the French bungalow to report the news of Vientiane to Major Turquin. There were many Frenchmen there, though I don't know how they all lived in that four-bedroom bungalow.

From the bungalow, I went to District Chief *thao* Lai's house to eat dinner, and then I ordered the Lao civil servants to continue with their duties, just as I had done in Vientiane.

When I had finished my business, I continued on and reached Muang Kasy at 3:00 A.M. on the night of March 10-11.

Sunday, March 11

I immediately ordered Prince Chintavong to call the civil servants to receive orders and conscripted a horse and eight porters to leave Muang Kasy at 6:00 A.M. When the civil servants gathered, I gave them orders to continue their duties, as I had done in Vientiane and Vang Vieng. Then I rested.

At 5:00 A.M., I ordered Daeng to take the borrowed car back to Vientiane and to hurry and fix my own car, which should be sent to Luang Prabang when there was an opportunity to do so.

The horse and porters came at the appointed time. I left Muang Kasy at 6:00 A.M. and went by the following route: to Ban Na Thong in one hour and ten minutes; to Muang Pong in twenty minutes; to Ban Ya Yao in three hours; to Ban Sen Sai in forty minutes; and to the foot of the mountains in three hours and thirty minutes.

Altogether it took eight hours and thirty minutes to travel around thirty-four kilometers. I stopped to rest in the forest at the foot of the mountains, but it was difficult as it was raining and there was no place to stay.

Monday, March 12

I climbed the mountains before dawn. The air was cool and invigorating, but I couldn't ride the horse because the mountain was so steep that the horse would have tired quickly. I climbed for a long time and reached the Nam Feuang River in four hours and thirty minutes. Then I crossed the water, climbed a little more, descended sharply, and reached the Yao village Ban Pha Khom in one hour and thirty minutes. There I ate, changed the porters for a pack horse, and continued on to the Meo village of Ban Pham Kalah, which I reached in two hours and thirty minutes. From there, I climbed a steep mountain, which took one hour, and then reached the Meo village Ban Pa Hok in another hour, and slept there at the village chief's house. Altogether it took ten hours and thirty minutes to travel around forty-two kilometers.

When I had passed beyond the mountains, I met a corporal who recognized me. He was leading six Vietnamese soldiers along the trail. When he had saluted me, he asked, "Why aren't you riding in a car instead of climbing the mountains? It would be faster and more convenient."

"I'm tired of traveling by car," I answered, "I haven't seen the Meo and Yao villages for many years, so I'm coming to see how their opium fields are doing. What are you doing in this region?" I asked.

"We're stationed with the brigade at Ban Na Muang. We have orders to come up here every month for inspection to see whether there are illegal opium merchants in the area," he answered.

His answer made me realize that he still didn't know that the Japanese had taken power in Indochina.

However, when I met these soldiers, I began to worry about the box with the gold Buddha image and monk's requisites on the pack horse following me. I was afraid that if they saw it, they would take it. Consequently, after we had passed, I stopped and rested to let the pack horse catch up before going on. If I hadn't seen the horse coming, I would have known that they had stolen it, but after waiting about ten minutes, I was greatly relieved to see the Yao keeper coming with the pack horse. Then I went on to Ban Pa Hok.

Tuesday, March 13

From Ban Pa Hok, I walked along the rolling but not too steep mountain ridge and reached the Meo village of Ban Nong Kham in one hour and thirty minutes. Continuing on, I reached Ban Na Leng in two hours, and then a short way further descended a long, steep mountain until I reached Ban Sao Lao on the Nam Sanan River two hours later. I ate lunch there and continued until I reached the road from Sieng Ngeun to Ban Na Muang, which I crossed after one hour and thirty minutes. I then climbed another mountain and reached Ban Houei Lieng in two hours. Altogether it took an even nine hours.

I slept at the village chief's house and gave orders for the village chief of Ban Pha Sok to come and see me, for I needed to find a fresh pack horse to change for the tired one I had brought from Pa Khom. At 10:00 P.M., the village chief of Pha Sok came with a pack horse to carry things for the next day.

Friday, March 14

I left the Yao village of Houei Lieng at night. The road was rocky, which made travel very difficult. I reached Ban Pha Sok (Meo) in one hour, and a little beyond it descended a high steep mountain until I reached Ban Nong Tok four hours later. It was a Khmu village situated on somewhat of a plateau. From there, I reached Ban Sat (Lao) in two hours, and then went on to the Sieng Keo Palace. Altogether it took eight hours and thirty minutes.

When I reached Ban Sat, I saw many families from Luang Prabang, and this made me think that the Japanese had already taken the city. But when I questioned them, I learned that it had not yet fallen, though the Japanese had already taken Vientiane, Xieng Khouang, and other provinces, and it wouldn't be long before they reached Luang Prabang. Knowing this, the people had left in advance to insure their own safety. This news was very satisfying, because it meant I would have time to do various things before the Japanese entered the city.

When I reached the palace, I had the military guards go tell the news to my brother, Prince Souvannarath, who was at my palace in Luang Prabang, and to invite the cabinet to meet with me that night.

At 9:00 P.M., the ministers Prince Souvannarath, Prince Settha, Uthong Souvannavong, and Phui Panya arrived, and shortly afterwards the crown prince, Savang Vatthana, came also. They reported the news they had heard from the March 10 radio broadcast and the situation in Luang Prabang at that time. The news from the radio was that the Japanese had seized power from the French in all the large cities of Indochina. There was French resistance only in the countryside and in the forests. When the French soldiers in Luang Prabang heard on the radio that the Japanese had taken over, they dismissed the Commissioner immediately and took control in order to resist the Japanese. This was because the military was on De Gaulle's side, whereas the Commissioner and civil service personnel under him were on Petain's side, which had surrendered to the Germans and joined the Japanese.

ศาลจำหน่าย

# CHAPTER 3

# DISMISSAL FROM POSITION AS VICEROY AND EXILE TO THAILAND

When the Japanese took Luang Prabang in April 1945, they accused the French of resistance and arrested them all; even surrendering French civilians were arrested. Since the position of the French had been destroyed, the conditions of the 1898 protectorate treaty, under which the French were to defend Laos--specifically the Kingdom of Luang Prabang--were abrogated. King Sisavangvong issued a royal order proclaiming the independence of Luang Prabang, and the Lao people were joyful. Prince Phetsarath maintained his position as Viceroy and acted as Prime Minister in the capital at Luang Prabang.

Royal Proclamation
of the Independence of the
Kingdom of Luang Prabang under
King Sisavangvong of Luang Prabang

In consideration of the present world situation and particularly the situations of the various countries of East Asia--

I hereby declare that from this day forward, our Kingdom of Laos, formerly a colony of France, is now an independent nation. Henceforth, the Kingdom of Luang Prabang will attempt to preserve its own independence like the other countries of East Asia, and will join with neighboring countries to build prosperity and progress following the principles of the Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

Consequently, in order to work with the Japanese Empire as a trusted ally, I hereby declare that our Kingdom has agreed to cooperate in all things with Japan.

This royal order is hereby proclaimed in Luang Prabang on Sunday, the eleventh day of the waning moon of the fifth month, 2487 (April 8, 1945).

In August, when Laos had been independent for four months, Emperor Hirohito of Japan surrendered to the Allies after the United States dropped atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The French, who had fled in defeat, then returned to swallow up the country and to assume authority over Laos as before. Prince Phetsarath was unwilling to go along with them because he maintained that French rights according to the 1898 treaty of Paris had ended with France's inability to protect the Kingdom of Luang Prabang. If they were to return, they would have to negotiate a new treaty. The Prince appointed Ngone Sananikone to make contact with Khammuane, Savannakhet, Saravane, and Champassak provinces and ascertain the people's sentiments regarding whether they preferred to join the Kingdom of Luang Prabang or return to rule by the French. Since the treaty had been abrogated, they had the opportunity to choose to join together. The Prince resolutely made up his mind that Laos must be brought together as one indivisible country.

Later, the Prince received word from the four provinces that they would join together in a single kingdom. While making this settlement, the Prince was staying in Vientiane. Subsequently, on September 2, the Prince, in his status as Viceroy, telegraphed the King, requesting that the four provinces be united in a single kingdom by royal proclamation, without regard for the French.

He waited for the royal proclamation until September 7, the day on which he received the following telegram from the Minister of the Interior in Luang Prabang:

Government Telegram

Luang Prabang, September 7, 1945. Minister of Interior to Prince-Viceroy. Vientiane Ministry of Interior, Telegram Number 223.
Please be informed that the King has called for the Kingdom of Luang Prabang to remain a French colony.

Receiving this telegram, the Prince thought that the French had forced the King to make this submission. If he followed the royal order, the people would have been dissatisfied and would have rebelled, since they would lose their only opportunity for integration. The Prince thus kept the telegram secret so that he could seek a later resolution. He feared that if the people knew, they might be angry with the King for his easy yielding of independence without regard to public opinion, and the King might be in danger.

At that time, the civil servants and people of the four provinces, in addition to Vientiane, were meeting together to accomplish the Prince's unification of Laos. No matter how much blood might have to be shed, the Prince believed that independence could only be bought with blood. A French return could be blocked since the Lao still had many weapons and the Lao people's blood was the hot blood of fighters. The Prince urged the civil servants and the people to wait until the fifteenth for orders from the King. If there were no answer by then, the Prince himself, in his status as Viceroy and Prime Minister, would declare the unification of the four provinces with the Kingdom of Luang Prabang. This action could not be considered rebellious, since the Prince believed that to take the country the French had governed, integrate it, and present it in independence to the King would be a desirable act. Time would judge whether he was right or wrong.

On September 15, having heard nothing from the King, the Prince's intense patriotism made him willing to risk his life for the people. Prince Phetsarath thus proclaimed the unification of Laos as one indivisible Kingdom, on the basis of strong public opinion, though without a royal proclamation.

Announcement

To our brothers, the people of the provinces of Khammuane, Savannakhet, Champassak, and Saravane:

For many years we Lao of the north and Lao of the south have desired to be united as one country, but there have been many circumstances that have prevented our desire from being successfully realized. Now the right opportunity has arisen.

Beginning today, the phrases "Lao of the North" and "Lao of the South" need no longer exist. We can join together to be one nation, to be one Lao nation as in the times of King Fa Ngum, King Setthathirath, and King Sourinyavongsa.

The government of the Kingdom hopes that all our brothers will welcome our cooperation on the basis of the following principles:

1. Lao integration will benefit the Lao people.
2. The Lao people's fulfillment will come about through a conference of the nation's representatives acting unanimously together.
3. A National Assembly will be established to deliberate politics, economics, culture, and national restoration.
4. In Asia, the new Kingdom of Laos will work with its friends in the region for prosperity, progress, and equality.
5. The Kingdom of Laos will protect and defend the lives and possessions of all foreigners. All regions have the duty to respect and to be under the administration of the national law.
6. The Kingdom of Laos can exist only with the support of the officials. The government will consist of people with qualifications and ability who have had experience as civil servants.
7. The government now is being modified as a coalition government and will be established in Vientiane.

May the Kingdom of Laos Prosper.
Vientiane, the 15th of September, 1945
Signed: the Prince Viceroy-Prime Minister Phetsarath

On October 10, the Minister of the Interior in Luang Prabang sent an official telegram announcing that the King had dismissed Prince Phetsarath from his positions of Viceroy and Prime Minister for following a political policy not in keeping with the wishes of the Lao people and for failing to consult with the King in advance.

Copies of Telegrams Dismissing the Prince-Viceroy

Luang Prabang, October 10, 1945. Minister of the Interior to His Excellency Uthong [Souvannavong], Minister of the Treasury in Vientiane. Ministry of Interior telegram number 285.

A royal command has been issued changing the Prime Ministership to bring it into political and administrative conformity with the will of the people. Without prior consultation with Prince Phetsarath, the King has dismissed Phetsarath from his position as Viceroy. You are therefore recalled to Luang Prabang to maintain your usual duties and position.

Luang Prabang, October 10, 1945.

Minister of Interior to His Excellency Phoui [Sananikone], Minister of Religion in Vientiane. Ministry of Interior, telegram 285.

A royal command has been issued changing the Prime Ministership to bring it into political and administrative conformity with the will of the people. Without prior consultation with Prince Phetsarath, the King has dismissed him from his position as Viceroy. You are therefore recalled to Luang Prabang to maintain your usual duties and position.

Please announce this royal command to the people, and please consult with H.E. Uthong to set up means of defending the people's lives and possessions. Please explain all of this to *chao phanya* Khammao so that work will continue in accordance with this directive.

Everyone who has the blood of independence, please consider who was wrong! What Lao people desired to return to the status of French slaves? As for the allegation that the Prince did not consult with the King, there is still a copy of his telegram as evidence. When the King did not answe. consider whether the Prince's action had broken the royal proclamation. The desire to place the Kingdom of Luang Prabang under the control of the French was the desire of the King alone. How could the King allege that it was public opinion since it was clear that the people begged for the proclamation of independence?

The situation that followed is explained in the writings of Prince Phetsarath:

"When I received the King's proclamation, I answered that I would obey his orders. Then I took the telegram putting the Kingdom of Luang Prabang under French control, together with the telegram dismissing me from my duties, and presented them to the civil servants and the Lao people, and explained that from that time on, I would have no part in the affairs of the country."

The civil servants and people of Vientiane showed great excitement and regret. They then joined together to form a Free Lao Government to integrate Laos and to fight the French for the preservation of independence as proclaimed by King Sisavangvong on April 8, 1945. When this government had been established, under the Prime Ministership of *phanya* Khammao, a telegram was sent to the King, requesting that he accept it as his government. The King was asked to reply within twenty-four hours, and was told that if there were no answer within the allotted time, the Free Lao Government would deal with him in the best interest of the country.

When no answer was received from the King, the Free Lao Government ordered that a military force be sent by boat to seize the royal palace. However, before the soldiers reached Luang Prabang, the people of the city closed the palace.

Later a popular revolt arose to seize the palace, but the Prince saw that the Free Lao Government could not attack because the French were strong in Luang Prabang and the King was helping them destroy his countrymen. At that time, the Free Lao were weak and would have crumbled. If they blundered, the King would be in danger, and the Prince would be blamed. There would be another opportunity to take revenge on the French, but in any event, the King had to be induced to agree with the Prince's policy. The Prince ordered the Free Lao Government to go into temporary exile in Thailand, and he followed later.[1]

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[1]There follows a detailed itinerary of the Prince's flight to Thailand which is not included here. (JM)

# CHAPTER 4

# ELEVEN YEARS IN THAILAND

Many people accompanied Prince Phetsarath to Thailand, including Prince Khamtan, Prince Khamphay, Prince Bounyavat (who took the palace at Luang Prabang), *thao* Bua Ket, and about forty royal pages. [They crossed the Mekong River at Luang Prabang and made their way to Uttaradit, Thailand.] When they reached the Lan Xang region,[1] they had to be evasive and avoid the roads because they knew that the French were following them. The French were checking the roads from the air but were unable to see the Prince and his followers, for they followed the Meo opium trails linking the villages along the mountain ridges.

When they reached Uttaradit, Prince Phetsarath met the Thai Minister of Interior, *luang* Chawengsongkram, who was there on an inspection tour.[2] The Prince had no money for the trip to Bangkok, but *luang* Chaweng vouched for him, and so he was able to borrow 600 baht from the Governor of Uttaradit. The Prince was not properly dressed and had only two changes of mountaineer's clothing. He stayed at Lap Lae [near Uttaradit] and sent Prince Khamtan to Nongkhai to meet those who had come by boat. These escapees, including *phanya* Muang Saen, a King's counselor, were staying at Chieng Khan in Loei Province in Thailand. Prince Somsanith had slipped away from Vientiane and had brought many clothes to distribute among the escapees. Before going on to Bangkok, the soldiers and royal pages stayed in Phitsanulok province with the Governor, Phrom Sutsukhon. On May 18, 1946, *luang* Chaweng found a house for the Prince and asked a woman named *mom* Aphinaphon to be his housekeeper. When times became hard, the Prince had the generous help of this widowed woman, with whom he fell in love because she was so completely dedicated to him even when he was ill. Their house was in Bangkapi in the Phra Khanong District of Bangkok. Around a year later, Prince Souphanouvong came to Bangkok, and it was necessary to rent two more houses from Police Lieutenant Chua Suwannason. *Thao* Katay Don Sasorith, the present [1956] Deputy Prime Minister, followed Prince Phetsarath to Lap Lae but did not find him there and came on to Bangkok. He brought news of events that had occurred in Vientiane after the Prince's departure. When *thao* Katay came, they rented another house since they also needed room for *thao* Kleuang, the present Minister of Information, and his family. There were altogether around fifty people. *Mom* Aphinaphon played a large part in supporting the Prince's group through a pawnshop in Bangkok. Later they moved to

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[1]"Lan Xang" was the Thai name for Sayaboury Province, which was under Thai administration during the period of World War II. (JM)

[2]In the period Phetsarath is writing about (May, 1946), *luang* Chawengsongkhram was an appointed member of the Thai National Assembly under the Pridi Government. He became Minister of Interior on August 23, 1946, under the Thamrong Government. (Virginia Thompson, *Biographical Files*; and *Liberty*, August 24, 1946.) (JM)

Thung Mahamek on Ngam Du Pli Lane with the families of Prince Souphanouvong, Prince Somsanith, Prince Khamtan, and *thao* Kleuang. *Thao* Katay went to live in Ban Chaiya, Hua Lamphong district with the help of *luang* Chaweng.

To work for his country, Prince Phetsarath arranged for weapons for national liberation. When the war in East Asia was over, there were many bootleg guns available. At first they were cheap, only 90 or 100 baht each, but the Prince had no money. *Mom* Aphinaphon borrowed 50,000 baht from *luang* Seriroengrit,[3] with whom the Prince was acquainted. *Luang* Seri understood that the money was to support the Prince's followers. Though ten years have passed, the Prince has not yet repaid the money and does not know how much the interest will be, but he firmly believes that *luang* Seri, in his goodness, will demand only the principal. The Prince said that when he returned to Laos he would repay the money, and he intends to honor that promise.

During the same period, Vietnam, Cambodia, Burma, and Indonesia were also thinking of national liberation. The leader of the Burmese national liberation group was named Bunchuai. The Cambodian leader was the Governor of Siem Reap. The Indonesian leader served as an ambassador after independence and was not able to achieve a very high status.

Since the national liberation movements of five countries competed in the purchase of guns, the prices of bootleg weapons increased manyfold. The Prince then arranged a secret meeting of representatives of the five countries, the outcome of which was an agreement on two important points:

*Point 1.* Investigation of places to buy bootleg guns: if any of the countries found weapons sources, they would be the sole buyers and the others would not compete. When their needs were met, the other countries would buy. Countries without money would be helped. For example, the Cambodian national liberation group found a source of weapons but had no money. The Lao group loaned them 5,000 baht. At that time, the Cambodians could not pay, but such help was to be repaid in the future.

*Point 2.* Because various groups in the five countries were doing different things for national liberation, it had been impossible to cooperate in the beginning and this was why the enemy had the advantage. However, it was clear that for Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia, France was the common enemy. In view of this situation, the following three subsidiary agreements were made:

1. Anyone from any of the countries could hide in the area of the other countries, but they had to be under the authority of that country. For example, if Vietnamese entered Laos, they had to be accompanied by Lao.

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[3]*Luang* Seriroengrit was an important figure in Thailand during the earlier Phibun government. He had successively been Director-General of the State Railways, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Communications. He resigned when the Khuang Aphaiwong government came to power. When the Free Lao came in contact with him in 1946, he was involved in the management of the Thai Niyom Phanich Company and was a member of the appointive upper house of the Thai Parliament. (Virginia Thompson, *Biographical Files.*) (JM)

2. Laos and Cambodia had small populations and were unable to fight large battles, but they would work as guerrilla bands seeking every possible opportunity to weaken the French. They would stay in Cambodia and Laos and not join forces with Vietnam. However, the Vietnamese, with their large population, would take whatever opportunity to use their strength on the battlefield to destroy the French in Vietnam. Whenever the Vietnamese fought a large battle, the Cambodians and Lao would begin guerrilla warfare to harass the French as much as possible.

At the beginning of the national liberation movement, the Prince did not seek the total defeat and removal of the French, but only to make them restore the independence they had stolen. Prince Phetsarath then sent Prince Souvannaphouma to contact Mr. [Edwin F.] Stanton, the American ambassador to Thailand, to request that he mediate with the French for the restoration of Lao independence. There were no results. Later Mr. Stanton was replaced as ambassador by Mr. [William J.] Donovan, and Prince Souphanouvong was sent to contact him. At first there was some hope from Col. [James H. W.] Thompson, and the Free Thai continued to help. Then Col. Thompson was dismissed and Lt. Col. Law became the military attaché. The Lao National liberation group contacted him many times, but the more they talked to him, the dimmer their hopes of securing American mediation grew. The Lao group finally concluded that America was reluctant to impose upon the French and would do nothing to make the French lose face.

Later, Prince Phetsarath appointed Prince Souphanouvong as head of military and foreign affairs. The Lao National Liberation soldiers stayed in Thailand. They were in the areas of Tha Bo District in Nongkhai Province, Chieng Khan District in Loei Province, and in the general area bordering Laos.

On December 1, 1946, *phanya* Khammao, Prince Somsanith, Prince Souvannaphouma, and the exiled government requested that Prince Phetsarath be Prime Minister. He argued that he could not accept since only four of the ten members of the cabinet had requested his participation, and he asked them to contact those who had not concurred with the plan. Later there was a written invitation signed by all except *thao* Sing, *thao* Tham, and *phanya* Oun Heuan. The Prince then accepted the position as head of the Free Lao Government. By this time, the government had no money, and to take care of their needs they had to borrow and pawn what they could. Prince Khamtan pawned a gold sword to the head of the Metropolitan Police for 20,000 baht, and Prince Phetsarath, through his new wife, *mom* Aphinaphon, borrowed money for the costs of national liberation from many sources.

The new government included Prince Souphanouvong as Military Commander, *thao* Katay [Don Sasorith] as Minister of Information, and Prince Khamtan as Treasurer.

Then there was a *coup d'état* in Thailand by which *luang* Thamrong Nawasawat was deposed from his position as Prime Minister and replaced by Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram [April 1948]. The situation in Laos changed immediately. The French government appointed Prince Boun Oum, who had been amenable to the French since the Japanese occupation, as Prime Minister. The American government and Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram's Thai government recognized Boun Oum's Government as the legal government of Laos. This meant that *phanya* Khammao's Lao National

Liberation Government had lost everything. The Thai government was unable to allow the government in exile to station soldiers in Thailand and ordered the Free Lao Government to return across the Mekong. Prince Phetsarath, to maintain friendly foreign relations, then ordered all the National Liberation troops to return to the east bank of the Mekong following the Thai Government's policy. The cabinet, however, remained in Thailand.

Later, in October 1949, Prince Souvannaphouma returned to Indochina along with *thao* Katay and *phanya* Khammao. Prince Souvannaphouma's wife, who was French, had contacted the French government and had negotiated their return to Indochina. Although Prince Phetsarath was not informed of this agreement, he did not punish them. The French agreed to restore the status of all the members of the Lao cabinet who chose to return and gave them 800,000 piasters for the trip. The Prince-Prime Minister felt that it was improper that they had made the agreement on their own without first consulting him. Consequently, he told the cabinet that he was the head of the Free Lao Government, and for those under his authority to make agreements without telling him was a breach of custom, especially since the soldiers had refused to surrender and were standing firm. *Thao* Khammeun, *thao* Tulan, *thao* Singkhapo, *thao* Sithon Ratchakhun, and *thao* Seum, for example, charged that the government had betrayed them. The Free Lao Government then dissolved itself, leaving the Prince in the position of being effectively dismissed as Prime Minister, since he no longer had a government. Thus Prince Phetsarath, the Iron Man of Laos, had been dismissed for a second time.

Later, when the Prince had been dismissed by his government, the French government of Laos began increasing its strength with great quantities of American money, weapons, and war materiel. The French in Indochina were given enough to force the Lion of the Sip Song Chu Thai [Prince Souphanouvong] into submission. However his fighter's blood of the family of Kings would not allow the Lion of the Sip Song Chu Thai to surrender. Since the French had outside help in their continued oppression of the Lao, the Lion Prince cast his angry glance sideways to find friends to help him fight. When America refused to mediate, the Lion sprang to shake hands with the Viet Minh, and joined them in fighting without making any time-consuming agreement. Prince Phetsarath was not informed about this, and at first he was angry. However, out of love for his younger brother, who was arrogant in royal honor and refused to be anyone's slave, he kept his feelings to himself.

The Free military side, which had no government, invited the prince to join them, but he came to the conclusion that he could join neither side. The eldest of his younger brothers [Souvannaphouma] was with the French, but the younger of his siblings [Souphanouvong] was fighting with the Viet Minh. The Prince foresaw that neither side would gain an absolute victory and that both sides were puppets without effective power. In the end, both Princes would have to turn to him as chief mediator. "For the time being, I will let you fight, my dear brothers, for your opinions are different; but in the end you will both have to come to me."

From that time on, the Prince took the middle road. He refused to join either side, and he remained in the Thai capital. The French continued in their attempt to persuade the Prince to return to Indo-

china, but he refused. The French Foreign Minister invited him to Paris as a guest, but he saw clearly that if he went, he would fall forever into the status of a guest and would never return to Asia.

A former High Commissioner of Indochina sent his envoy to consult with the Prince. M. Tucatier [?] and many other Frenchmen came and invited him to return to Indochina, but all were unsuccessful. The Prince knew well that the people were dissatisfied with both sides. They did not like Prince Souvannaphouma because he was a Francophile, and they did not like Prince Souphanouvong because his wife was Vietnamese. Even though she was high-class Vietnamese, the daughter of a District Chief, they tended not to like Vietnamese. Prince Phetsarath resolutely formulated his plan; he would return only when the people and representatives of all sides came to invite him. The Prince maintained his resolution for ten years, and it all came true just as he had predicted.

The fact that the Prince did not return to Laos was not because he worried about his new wife. It was not necessary to worry, for when he returned he would take her with him. However firmly he believed in gratitude toward his country, the Prince needed a wife. *Mom* Aphinaphon was of Thai-Lao blood, the daughter of a man of the Thai lineage of the Honorable *chaophraya* Surasak.[4] On her mother's side she was descended from the pure bloodlines of Luang Prabang which were intimately joined with the Prince's family. His wife's goodness was manifested in their eleven years in Thailand, from fashioning the Prince's clothes out of sheets in times of hardship to borrowing money to support themselves. She helped him in every way, from serving the government by finding money for national liberation to representing the Prince in political contacts and various other affairs both within and outside Thailand. She met King Sihanouk of Cambodia and went to Rangoon to contact U Nu, the Prime Minister of Burma. She represented the Prince in cooperation for national liberation with Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Burma, as though she were his Secretary and Foreign Minister. For these reasons, the Prince openly stated that when he returned to Laos, he would take his new wife along with his original wife, who was the older sister of King Sisavangvong.

## Concerning the Gold Buddha Image

While the Prince was working for national liberation under the *phanya* Khammao government, the issue of the gold Buddha image arose. This was the six-kilogram gold image that the Prince had retrieved when the French High Commissioner was seized by the Japanese. The Prince had brought the image to Thailand with him because he feared it would be lost if it were left behind. When he reached Thailand, the Prince gave the image to *phanya* Khammao, the Prime Minister of the government-in-exile.

Later, *phanya* Khammao's government gave the Buddha image to a Western company in Bangkok as security for a 200,000 baht loan. *Phanya* Khammao was personally responsible for the loan. However, his government spent all but 20,000 baht of the money while in Bangkok. Prince

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[4]*Chaophraya* Surasak (Choem Saeng-Xuto, 1851-1933) was a noted Thai general and cabinet minister in the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910). (DW)

Souvannaphouma wanted to spend the rest, but *phanya* Khammao stopped him; however, he later learned that it had all been spent anyway. When the money was gone, *phanya* Khammao invited the Prince to accept the position of Prime Minister to find more money for national liberation.

The Prince had acquired this ancient Buddha image forty years earlier, while he was still in power in Laos. In excavating for ancient artifacts in various wats, the Prince told the monks to take turns watching, and when artifacts were turned up, to make a list of these religious treasures. Formerly, the French had taken anything they had excavated back to France. Consequently, this Buddha image remained a national treasure. It was necessary for the Prince to bring the image with him to Thailand, for there was no bank in Indochina that would accept responsibility for keeping it. He had to carry it with him while fleeing the Japanese from Vientiane to Luang Prabang. Fortunately, no one knew he had it, and so he was able to take it out of danger. The Prince worried a great deal about using the image as security for the loan, because no one could redeem it. He considered it fortunate that this national treasure was still safe, even though it was in the hands of a large creditor as a result of the actions of Prime Minister *phanya* Khammao's government. When the *phanya* Khammao government gave the Prince the position of Prime Minister, he also assumed responsibility for this loan. The Prince was strict with the members of his cabinet. He did not allow them to spend money on extravagant pleasures as they had been doing and made them expend their sweat and blood on the serious work of national liberation. Consequently, the rumor that Prince Phetsarath still had the treasure had no foundation and was just a cruel effort to smear the Prince.

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# CHAPTER 5

## THE LION OF THE SIP SONG CHU THAI, LEADER OF THE FREE LAO, PRINCE SOUPHANOUVONG

Prince Souphanouvong was the ninth son of Viceroy Boun Kong, the father of Prince Phetsarath, but by a different mother. He received his early education at the Lycée Albert Sarraut [in Hanoi] and continued his schooling in France. He received a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Paris.

Later he became an engineer in Nha Tranh (Vietnam). Because the Prince had left his country alone while still in his youth, he could not find a girl of his own race. However, when he met a girl of honor and wealth, the Lion of the Sip Song Chu Thai, proficient in war, became a soft gentleman and fell deeply in love with this beautiful Vietnamese girl. He married her according to custom; as the saying goes, "Love knows no frontiers."

Normally he was a person who spoke little but worked hard. At work he was indefatigable. His praiseworthy personality inspired the trust of those who worked with him. When he reached middle age, around forty years old, he was sometimes still as hot-tempered as a younger person. He was not a policymaker, but he made decisions quickly and correctly. He was loved by Prince Phetsarath, and he returned the Prince's love. He sacrificed his happiness completely in his determination to eliminate French influence from Laos. No one else had such spirit.

Early in January 1946, Prince Phetsarath went to Luang Prabang and remained there until May 4, when he left for Thailand. If he had stayed longer, there would have been a bloodbath, because the people were dissatisfied with the King's proclamation of the return of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang to French administration. Prince Souphanouvong courageously went into exile in Thailand until December 1946. Then he sacrificed his life for his country and returned to the forests of Laos as commander of the Free Lao forces in order to struggle to eliminate the influence of the French. He replaced Prince Phetsarath, who was ill. Following Prince Phetsarath's orders, the Free Lao Liberation Movement began its work in 1946, but it still lacked both manpower and weapons. The members of the movement used all possible means to seek funds to buy weapons. Most of the weapons they obtained came from their ethnic brothers on the Thai side of the Mekong. Some of the politicians of Northeast Thailand also helped. Although this worked well in the beginning, the patriotic people of Laos could not truly understand those who claimed to be Free Thai throwing off the yoke of the Japanese in Thailand. When the war ended, the Free Thai grew like the flowers of the rainy season. They helped in various ways, such as in the capture of Vientiane. However, when it had been seized, they took away its riches, alleging that the French might attack; the Thai said they would help by luring the French into a trap. Actually, this

ruse was a trick to take things out of the country. In the end, they destroyed the evidence that they had taken things from Vientiane. Then the ingenious politicians who had disguised themselves as members of the Free Thai bribed their way across the border and sold this merchandise back to Laos--things such as electrical generators and the like.

It was the same situation with weapons. The Thai opportunists operated as brokers. Within Thailand, they shortened the lists of Free Thai weapons and then took the unrecorded weapons and sold them to the Free Lao at high prices. At the same time, they arranged for people to contact unpatriotic members of the Free Lao to buy stolen Free Lao weapons at low prices. This exchange kept up a flow of currency until there was a shocking decline in the strength of the Free Lao. It was quite a while before the Free Lao realized the situation, and until they did, the gun-running politicians of Thailand, who claimed to be Lao citizens aiding the Free Lao, got rich quickly. It was as the proverb says, "Honest people are stupid people."

The military officers under Prince Souphanouvong included *thao* Singkhapo, *thao* Khammeun, and *thao* Sithon, a chief of the Khmu[1] race from the Attopeu region. They used all varieties of guerrilla methods in the military resistance, yet they were good guerrillas and did not harass the civilian population. Whenever they entered villages, they were loved and were given food and water. The French soldiers, in contrast, caused trouble. Whenever they entered villages, they commandeered cows and buffalo and said they would pay for them, but for the most part they still have not been paid for. The Free Lao fighting spirit was long-lived because of the contrast between their actions and those of the French.

Early in 1950, America began giving military aid to the French. Though the French had good weapons and still had the advantage over the Free Lao, their morale was poor. The Free Lao forces included around a thousand men armed with inferior weapons.

The Lion of the Sip Song Chu Thai then contacted Ho Chi Minh to ask for aid. In the beginning, the Free Lao requested only weapons. Uncle Ho's side could not give weapons, but they sent men to help. By their agreement, for every three Lao there would be one Vietnamese, i.e., for every Lao battalion there was a Vietnamese company. The Vietnamese assisted in fighting, and they helped maintain the weapons they had loaned because the Free Lao could not afford to buy them. The Free Lao soldiers received no salary, only food and weapons. Some of their food was obtained from patriotic villagers, some was bought, and some was requested by individual soldiers who gained the respect of the villagers.

Later, political pressures increased, and though fighting dragged on through 1953 there was no sign of any victory. Ho Chi Minh's side had the burden of capturing Hanoi before they could establish a stable government. The condition of Uncle Ho's Free Vietnamese at this time was similar to that of the Free Lao in that both were lions in the forest who needed increased military aid in both manpower and weapons. Ho Chi Minh was concerned about the whole of Laos east of the Mekong

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[1]In fact, Sithon Kommadam is a Loven, a Mon-Khmer upland group inhabiting the Boloven Plateau of southern Laos. (JM)

River. As long as the French still had military influence there, it would be like a spear in Ho Chi Minh's side. It was necessary for Uncle Ho to defend himself by extending his forces into Laos.

On August 6, 1954, while fighting for Hanoi, Uncle Ho turned to request aid from the Red Chinese.[2] Ho poured in more than 100,000 men to fight in trench warfare at Dien Bien Phu. The French claimed three secure fortress areas that were important for their military strategy: Dien Bien Phu-Samneua, Plain of Jars-Xieng Khouang, and Seno-Savannakhet. In a short time, one side of the triangle was broken. Though the French claimed they would fight to the death, they had to admit defeat by the heroes of Dien Bien Phu. The brave French general ultimately became the prisoner of the great hero, Ho Chi Minh.

The French commander of Dien Bien Phu can be seen as a hero. He might have died, thus fulfilling his vow, but the Paris government did not want the French army destroyed. They assumed that in maintaining large numbers of French prisoners, Ho Chi Minh's expenses would be great and would ruin the internal economy of Vietnam. The French might have some future opportunity to restore their loss of face, and in any case they would not have to pay millions of francs in pensions to the families of those who otherwise would have died.

In May 1953, the Viet Minh, under the command of the dragon of Tonkin, mounted a lightning-like invasion which came to within four kilometers of Luang Prabang. Then they retreated without attacking or taking the city. Luang Prabang was a site for which the French army supposedly still had a defense plan. The operation was a Vietnamese drill in which the Viet Minh tested the effectiveness of their operations for real combat and also how well the Vietnamese refugees in Thailand could agitate according to plan. The result was quickly felt in Laos and showed the advantage of catching the enemy off guard.

In Thailand, the King's troops in the Northeast and the border police along the Mekong worked very hard. Administrative officials increased their strength in all areas where the 5,000 Vietnamese refugees lived. Internally, there was no activity among the Vietnamese. They behaved normally, which was a wise policy for those who depended on political asylum in this unsettled period.

Later, in December 1953 and January 1954, the dragon of Tonkin's Viet Minh troops crossed the borders of Laos once again. This time they quickly entered the Plain of Jars in Xieng Khouang. The French army resisted and defended themselves in a manner appropriate to military experts. The French soldiers, both whites and Moroccan and Algerian colonial blacks, fought fiercely. Some of these African soldiers were as fierce as beasts of the forest. While they were in Vientiane, the people suffered; their throats were cut and their blood sucked until they stayed away from these soldiers. However, the Lao people endured because they believed that they had come to help the country. Many of the soldiers were good, and military-civilian quarreling was not a big issue. The women realized the situation very well, and to avoid being raped to death they never went near the soldiers. The women in Laos were cleverer than the Thai women, who considered themselves brave: at the end of the war, foreign soldiers in

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[2]It would appear that 1950 is the date intended here. (DW)

Bangkok committed many immoral acts because of the brashness of the women there. This is a lesson that should be remembered.

The second column of Viet Minh troops quickly entered the Seno-Savannakhet stronghold. These soldiers divided their forces into columns. The longer column had the strength of a division of 3,000 and invaded like lightning. The army that entered Seno passed Mahaxay to the east of Thakhek. By the time the government side realized they were coming, they had already reached the outskirts of the city without entountering any resistance. The French commander ordered his troops to retreat, and the Vietnamese easily entered Thakhek. The government had brought 4,000 bags of rice there which it planned to distribute among the people. The Viet Minh carried it off like ants carrying away paddy rice, and in a short time it was completely gone. The extent of the chaos among the people of Thakhek could be seen by our Thai brothers watching in Nakhon Phanom. The spectacle of the air war between the French airborne commandos and the Viet Minh army began at this time and was a show the Thai could see without having to pay admission. The country was in a state of emergency. The Lao people experienced the loss of everything when Thakhek fell and Xieng Khouang was surrounded by the Viet Minh.

When fighting reached the outskirts of Xieng Khouang, to the east of Vientiane, the people fled. Those who did not have the money to hire vehicles had to run for the woods. Those with status boarded airplanes arranged for by the French. Those who had property had to abandon everything, even the diamong rings and gold necklaces they wore. The officials would not let people wear them because of their weight. I don't know by what criterion they calculated that rings and necklaces were so heavy the planes could not fly. The officials agreed to make a list of who had what. Everyone had to agree or he could not be a passenger. When the airplanes had left, the officials who had seized the riches were nowhere to be seen. When the people reached Vientiane, they had to knuckle down and struggle to survive. These actions of the French officials should not be taken as an example by our administrators. Please have mercy on people in difficulty. It would be better to cheat them when they are strong than when they are in difficulty.

Among the French civilians were many good men, and the French soldiers who fought the enemy were not completely bad. They may have acted that way because we are of different races. We administrators should not take this as an example, and our Thai brothers--please remember it! Do not let this kind of history come to Thailand!

However, on the good side, the writer must praise the officials and people of the Thai province of Nakhon Phanom and the people of the west bank of the Mekong for their incomparably high principles. For example, when the people of Thakhek sought refuge in the middle of a gloomy night, the Thai did not know whether they were attackers or just old people. Even though they got into boats and crossed by the thousands, they were not fired upon. If we close our eyes and imagine that the officials of Nakhon Phanom had been without principle, the situation of the escapees from Thakhek would have been dreadful. They would have been shot by the Thai border forces, and uncounted infants and children would have died. If this had happened, how could our Thai brothers ever have looked their Lao brothers in the face? More

than 3,000 refugees, including women, children, and old people, reached the Thai bank. The officials distributed the children until in the end all had households to take care of them. Those who had relatives were received with broad smiles, and those who did not know anyone were also greeted. I respectfully salute the principled people of Nakhon Phanom who acted with true humanity toward their Lao brothers.

Fighting continued in Laos, but it was not lion-like. The command of all regions was under the power of one man [Souphanouvong], though the Viet Minh was the decisive force. If the full fighting force of the Free Lao had been used, there probably would have been none left by this time. With the advice of the Prince, he decided to let the Vietnamese army, who hated the French to their black bones, go in and take the fullest measure of revenge upon them.

The Prince's southern army, commanded by the clever Khmu chief, Sithon, whose skin was tough as iron, made surprise attacks from Attopeu to Pakse. In the central region, Commander Sithon led the attackers to harass the French in the Xieng Khouang-Paksane area. The Vientiane region was the responsibility of Commander Sinkhapo. The Prince himself commanded the northern region from Phongsaly and Muang Sing to Samneua, but in all regions, he went to help as though he had wings. The news of his travels in directing battles spread far and wide. He seemed to be quicker than those who walked the earth and seemed to fly to various places.

The fighting at Dien Bien Phu lasted around two months. By the beginning of March 1954, it was an unyielding battle to win points in the unfolding Geneva Conference. The Viet Minh threw in their full force, more than 100,000 men, and lunged into the army of the sons of Napoleon at Dien Bien Phu, an historic Thai center from ancient times. The French opened every volume of their fighting manuals to set up the defense and fortify the battlefield. They built tunnels for the soldiers, for ammunition dumps, and for underground hospitals, and had artillery, tanks, and an airport surrounded by specially-built barricades. The Viet Minh lunged forward with a ten-to-one strength like a wave of humanity. Russian and Red Chinese units transported artillery battalions from Kunming. The Vietnamese surrounded Dien Bien Phu with mortars of all kinds. The sound of incoming and outgoing artillery and machine gun fire was heard twenty-four hours a day for more than a month and a half. The French fighting fulfilled their reputation as military experts. The rain gods helped repeatedly; rain fell until the battlefield was a sea of mud. The war between the races was dreadful. Neither side had any principles. They used all methods of killing, and both sides were destroyed on the ground as well as in the underground tunnels. Each side dug their tunnels into those of the other, and when they met, they killed each other until the tunnels were filled with corpses. They dug again and again like a battle of cave dwellers. Finally, the side that had been unfairly oppressed won the battle. Ten thousand sons of Napoleon surrendered to death and injury, and the Vietnamese lost around 60,000 men. General de Castries, the commander of the fortress who announced the surrender, had to submit to capture in order to save the lives of his soldiers, who had fought without food. Though the French lost the battle, they had never in their history fought with such courage. Even Napoleon's famous army never fought a fiercer battle than this. From this viewpoint, we should applaud those who have oppressed us Thai since 1893.

The battle of Dien Bien Phu honored Uncle Ho, the dragon of Tonkin, who now had the advantage in the Geneva agreements. The agreements contained many articles to stop the fighting among the Lao. Nevertheless, when the fighting ceased, on August 12, 1954, the strength of the Lion of the Sip Song Chu Thai still prevailed for two years, in spite of the accords. By the beginning of 1956, the military strength of Prince Souphanouvong was still the ruling force in all regions of Laos. The Free Lao and Viet Minh from Samneua reinforced the regions of Phongsaly, advanced into Muang Sua and Khun Neua, and fiercely attacked the government stronghold at Ban Hua Sai, north of Muang Kheun, forcing the government to retreat and abandon it. In addition, a Free Lao force of around 300 men from Samneua reinforced the strength of Phongsaly and harassed Muang Kheun.

At Khun Neua, the Free Lao had a Lao-Viet force of 600 men. There were many clashes at Muang Sua. The government side had to retreat to Pong Nang and the Free Lao used a strength of two armies in the continued attack. The Free Lao group that seized Muang Sua included Chinese and Thai Lue tribal peoples who reinforced the 701st and 589th battalions.

The region of Muang Sua had the 701st and 589th battalions, which were raised from various districts, including Sop Hum, Houei Yam, Pha Som, Na Song, Som Wan, Yang Teui, Pak Neua, Thiwok Lum, Ban Ping, Ban Mai, Sop Nao, Houei Hun, Sua, Sala Meo, Hat Hang, and especially Muang Kǫ, which had a force of around 500. Besides that, each place had a company.

In the Phongsaly region, the 597th battalion, made up of many races, including the Thai Yǫ, Thai Lue, the tribal Kǫ, the Black Thai, etc., had a strength of 300 from various villages. Ban Long Nai, Ngai Neua, Ǫ Thai, Hat Sa, Tang, Nam Pung, Muang Oh, Phieng Suriya, Mun Tai, Muang Hun, Sieng Hun, and Khun Neua had a combined force of 500 men. Besides that, each had a strength of one company. Altogether there were around seven companies and three squads.

In the Samneua region, Houei Thao had a force of two battalions, the 601st and 613th, which shot mortars that reached the radio operators of the Indian side and wounded them.[3]

Pani, Houei Pha, Pakha, and Houei Mon in the region of Sang Fu Lieo had a strength of two battalions.

The region of Muang Peut fought battles at Na Sala, Na Samǫ, Malibeng, and Muang Ham, and had the 609th and 605th battalions that fought at Houei Sai.

In the Southern region, Ban Sala and Ban Saleuy had two companies.

Samneua had the 601st, 613th, and 16th battalions, and it had ambulances.

Besides these, the 617th, 585th, and 705th battalions moved north towards Muang Sua and Phongsaly. In addition, there was also a mili-

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[3]These Indians were apparently staffing a radio outpost run by the International Commission for Supervision and Control. (JM)

tary training center at Muang Thu, which was where the Meo studied for the most part.

Four hundred Vietnamese from Lai Chau came to help at Muang Ngia, along with thirty Chinese. At Muang Temi there were 400 men of whom 250 were Chinese.

At Maliweng, Muang Sen, and Keng Khu, the Viet Minh helped with a force of one division. Stationed there were also the Lao and Phu Thai 925th battalion and the 359th division.

At this point, it can be seen that the army of the Lion of the Sip Song Chu Thai had the power to rule the region as its master. Is there any sacred thing that will bring about a reconciliation of the two brothers, apart from Prince Phetsarath?

## The Geneva Conference Concerning Indochina

When the Lao government and the Pathet Lao were fighting and increasing their appeals for aid, the Viet Minh joined the latter in this struggle. The Lao government then cried to the United Nations about the aggression of the Viet Minh and Pathet Lao. Finally, Thakhek fell.

Various countries of the world saw the necessity for calling a conference to end this dispute and appointed a joint commission of neutral countries. This commission agreed on the primary principles of a ceasefire that went into effect on August 6, 1954.[4]

> *The "Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Laos," concluded at Geneva on July 20, 1954, called for a complete cessation of hostilities to occur at 8:00 A.M. on August 6. Detailed provisions were drafted to govern military withdrawals to prearranged areas of military concentration and for the movement of military supplies. French forces were to be restricted in number to 1,500 men and limited to two base areas. An International Commission, composed of representatives of Canada, India, and Poland, was to be responsible for control and supervision of the application of the provisions of this "Agreement," while a Joint Commission of Royal Government and Pathet Lao representatives would operate to facilitate the withdrawal of foreign forces and pave the way towards political negotiations between the two Lao parties to the "Agreement."*

The Lao government and the Pathet Lao opened negotiations on July 15, 1954, as specified in the agreement. From then on they met three times a week for many weeks and agreed on extending Lao government administration in the provinces of Phongsaly and Samneua and on preparations for holding general elections.

The representatives of the Pathet Lao side wanted negotiations concerning the elections to be first on the agenda. The government side yielded in order to demonstrate its intention to unify and stabilize the country.

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[4]The original text gives this agreement in full. As it is not essential to the narrative, it has been omitted here. The italicized paragraph that follows summarizes the agreement in order to provide the necessary transition in Phetsarath's text. (DW)

The Pathet Lao side desired to allow women and college students the right to vote. They wanted to lengthen the time schedule of campaigning, i.e., to accept applications for candidates for the elections earlier than had been scheduled previously; and they wanted to have a joint commission to supervise the elections, i.e., a joint commission of the Lao Government and the Pathet Lao. The government side pointed out that they could not do these things, because the representatives in these negotiations could not revise the election laws. Only the National Assembly could do so, and it was believed that they would not comply. It was presumed that the reason the Pathet Lao requested consideration of the elections before anything else was to find various ways to slow down the process of establishing a functional administration in the two provinces.

On the issue of extending government administration to the two provinces, the government proposed that half the members of such administrations be appointed from each side. This proposal was not satisfactory to the Pathet Lao, who wanted things to continue as they were. The Pathet Lao held that the two provinces were their regroupment areas and that they would continue to hold them. To ease the situation, the government representatives vacillated as long as they could, but in the end they were unable to agree.

Later, the joint commission proceeded with the agreements on the issue of the ceasefire between the Lao government and the Free Lao, the French and the Viet Minh, and specified the strategic positions for the regroupment of forces and the withdrawal of foreign troops from Laos. The withdrawal of forces was to be completed by November 21, 1954.

The representatives of the Viet Minh were to regroup all of their forces in Laos by September 1954 in the following four temporary regions: Region One, the northern part of Phongsaly; Region Two, the eastern part of Samneua; Region Three, around 50 km. north of Vientiane; and Region Four, the area of Ban Ka Wak. These four designated areas had to have limited boundaries and had to be far from Route 13, which ran along the Mekong River.

The unit that was named the Pathet Lao (meaning the Free Lao) was not large and was to be separated from the Viet Minh army and regrouped in the following six areas: Muang Ngoy, Muang Feuang, Salavong, north of Ban Dong, and Phia Fai. This unit would be disarmed or otherwise would be sent to Muang Phongsaly and Samneua according to the principles of the ceasefire agreement announced by the Lao government on June 20 in Geneva.

Furthermore, it was understood that the process of establishing administrations in Samneua and Phongsaly Provinces would be under the jurisdiction of the king. The government promised to legislate the preparation of committees of special representatives for the two provinces between the time of the truce and the general elections the following year.

Concerning the army of the French Union, which had to retreat from Laos, the following five temporary areas were designated for their regroupment: the Plain of Jars, Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Seno-Savannakhet, and Pakse.

By the French-Lao accords, France would have the right to protect Laos by raising an army and helping in its improvement by means of military representatives with the function of teaching military arts. The French Union military force could be no larger than 5,000. The majority who would be left behind when the Viet Minh troops had withdrawn would be technicians.

The withdrawal of foreign military forces was scheduled to be completed by November 21, with joint military inspection commissions at Mahaxai in central Laos and at Paksong in southern Laos. Six joint commissions of military representatives would be set up at Nam Bac, Phone Hong, Lak Sao, Muang Fin, and Pakse.[5] Four joint units would be set up in the provinces of the northern Mekong region, Sayaboury, Xieng Khouang, Samneua, and Phongsaly.

## The Agreements

The agreements in these accords were done as specified in the Geneva accords, but some of their principles were not carried out. Some of the remaining French soldiers, beyond the number in the accords, took off their uniforms, became civilians, and worked as merchants and civil servants. The Free Lao side saw that the French were taking advantage of the situation. They then seized territory in the northern part of the kingdom, in the areas of Phongsaly, Muang Sing, and Samneua. The government side continued fighting. Laos was divided into two parts and the fighting continued. Each side made many accusations in the United Nations, claiming the other side was at fault. The fighting between the two brother Princes continued until August 2, 1956, when the two Princes met and agreed to lay down their arms and stop shooting. They followed the orders of Prince Phetsarath, who ordered them to agree among themselves, and if they could not agree he would return to his homeland and act as mediator. We can see then which opinion had greater effect on the two brothers, world opinion or Prince Phetsarath's. The Lao situation was a kind of family quarrel in which outsiders should not interfere.

# CHAPTER 6

## THE COMMANDER OF THE MEKONG VALLEY REGION, BOUN KONG MANIVONG

Boun Kong Manivong was born in the city of Pakse in Champassak Province on July 1, 1916. He was the son of *nai* Keopha and *nang* Pieng and was the second son of four children, two boys and two girls. His father died when he was six years old. The monk Keo, abbot of Muang Phone Thong, took charge of him and his elder brother Kham Yong. Two years later, his mother took the precepts and entered the wat as a nun. Boun Kong studied with the monk Keo until he passed the terminal examination for the elementary level. He then went on to continue his education in Pakse.

At that time, the French administered Laos. There were no Lao government schools in the districts, only in the large cities. The administration was in the hands of the French, and the Lao could be district chiefs only in small districts. The French administered the provinces as though they were Lord High Commissioners. The division chiefs were French, and the district chiefs were simply puppets. The Prince of Champassak administered only the city of Champassak, and the King administered only the city of Luang Prabang. The French applied the Roman principle "divide and rule." Some of the Kingdom of Laos was given to Cambodia and some to Vietnam. The Sip Song Chu Thai and the "Five-Six Hua Phan Cantons" regions, for example, were given to Vietnam. There was trouble in the Buddhist Order. Monks had to pay a poll tax of seven piasters each, and any monk who could not pay had to leave the order. Those who were recalcitrant were given such punishments as having to lie in ditches.

While he was in Pakse, Boun Kong took a teacher's certification examination on June 15, 1928, and passed third among the students of the province. He then went to stay with his uncle, Boun Chan, the District Chief of Phone Thong. His uncle liked deer hunting and went every day since he had no work as District Chief--the French did it all. When his uncle went hunting, he took his nephew along with him to help shoot the game. One day, they had hunted a full half day with no success. They were hungry and stopped to rest. A rabbit happened to run by. His uncle announced that whoever shot the rabbit would get a reward. Boun Kong grabbed his gun, aimed at the rabbit, and whether by good marksmanship or the help of the gods, he hit the crouching rabbit. When he returned to where they were resting, it was proposed that he ask for his reward. The District Chief asked Boun Kong what he would like.

At the same time, the District Chief, who was his uncle, called his daughter to approach. Then he turned to Boun Kong and said that she was the reward for shooting the rabbit. No one need ask any questions.. Any man in the world in this situation would restrain himself. Boun Kong's life from then on was that of the son-in-law of the

District Chief. Truly, this was not only because of shooting the rabbit. The District Chief saw Boun Kong's virtue in his honest service and his modesty and also saw that he had a future. This is unlike modern sons-in-law, who if they have a Mercedes-Benz can ask for the daughter of any family without objections being raised. It was fortunate that he was born in Laos, for if he had been born in Thailand he could not have won this girl unless he eloped with her. He tried to continue his education by studying with the monk Khun, who at the present time is the head of the Buddhist Order. He depended on food left over from the monks' alms bowls. His uncle took an attentive interest in everything: his dress, his travels, his food, and his education. He had to request permission to go with his friends, and if they were unworthy, he did not receive it.

Later he studied French in Pakse. The school director was a French woman and the majority of the students were Vietnamese. The teacher tried to prevent the Vietnamese and Lao from having any contact with each other. The school had a strange form of administration. A student council of eight, two from each class, was selected from among the good students, and Boun Kong was a member of this council. Each Wednesday and Saturday evening, the council had to meet with the head teacher and decide on the punishments for students who had misbehaved that week.

Punishments were given for various offenses, such as not studying well, leaving school, and playing around in the classroom. When the council ordered the weekly punishments and their degree of severity, the school director then ordered what those being punished should do and where. The work required was that, every Thursday and Sunday, students being punished had to dig and cut the grass in the teachers' rubber plots, which were 5 km. from the school. However, making flower gardens at the teachers' houses was not so bad. To put it simply, whatever work the teachers had to do, they made it the school's work.

## His Life in Government Service

Later, Boun Kong took up government service with the public roads section in Pakse, and he married the chief of the law court's daughter. When his wife died, his father-in-law gave him his wife's younger sister to replace her. Then he went to Vietnam and stayed in a small town named Kam Cho. There, a boy he did not know came and handed him a note that read, "Please receive Wapi Kamho." (Wapi was the courier for the Liberation Movement of Annam.) Wapi and a friend persuaded Boun Kong to help in national liberation. In the middle of the night, three Vietnamese girls came and met the three men. They made love that night, but among the three girls, there was one who would not change partners. Boun Kong told his friends that her name was Le Thi Hoy. Later he discovered that she was the second daughter of the head of the National Liberation Party of Vietnam. When he volunteered to join them to observe the work of national liberation, Miss Le Thi Hoy followed him everywhere except Saigon and Phnom Penh for about a year. She was both his mistress and his teacher in National Liberation. He saw that she had the patriotic characteristics of total bravery and endurance, and her fortitude gave the commander of the Mekong Valley the will to think of his own country's liberation. Later on, when he returned to Pakse to help liberate Laos, he met her again in the dress

of a Vietnamese heroine with the rank of Captain. Le Thi Hoy carried a pistol in her belt and commanded a company of troops patrolling in the Pakse area.

The people of the Vietnamese National Liberation Movement made sacrifices of all kinds. For example, Miss Le Thi Hoy sacrificed her virginity to a foreign friend for the cause of national liberation. We young Thai fixed in our minds that we wanted to be national liberators and tried to associate with people like Le Thi Hoy. There were many more like her and others were invited to study as Boun Kong had done. She did not behave like a prostitute and had no knowledge of sexual desire. She sacrificed herself to obtain money for national liberation and to take care of her parents. Also, if she was not treated fairly by low officials, she could get to know high officials by this method.

At Ha Tinh, Boun Kong started the underground Lao National Liberation Movement by forming a separate Lao organization, although its internal structure was similar to that of the Vietnamese movement.

## The Period of the Japanese Seizure and Administration of Laos

When the Japanese marched into Laos, the French had a force of fewer than 40,000 men and only around twenty airplanes remaining from the Thai Air Force attacks of 1940. Commander Boun Kong's National Liberation Team met and resolved that everyone should remain calm and let the two tigers wrestle; whichever won would then be the enemy of Laos.

The army of the Rising Sun seized all the Frenchmen of Indochina on March 6, 1945, and within an hour, the French sons of Napoleon were defeated and subdued. After their former arrogance, the French now were like blind chickens, and it seemed to be proper retribution that the Japanese captured them and put them in their concentration camps. The French had built their concentration camps for the Lao but had not had the time to pursue the National Liberators. The proprietors of the camps were the first to sleep in them; as the saying goes, "He who makes merit by building a wat shall go to heaven; he who does evil by building a prison will someday be imprisoned." At first the power-hungry soldiers of the Rising Sun seized houses in which people were living. When they became dissatisfied with these, they seized the monks' quarters. The monks had nowhere to sleep and nothing to eat and were forced to build roads for the Japanese. It was the misfortune of the Lao that they did not know how to fight and had no one to lead them to freedom. Both the French and the Japanese had great power, but the French were incompetent. Those Frenchmen who escaped to the forests did not live like lions, but lived as deer from one day to the next.

Even those Frenchmen who were cruel toward the Lao people had good luck. When the gods who uphold the world forced the unconditional surrender of the Japanese with an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, the deer in the forests came back to be French lion-kings. The commander of the Mekong Valley, following a decision of the party meeting, then persuaded his followers to crawl out of hibernation and resist the influence of the victors.

To overcome the bad character of the occupying Japanese, the party had one of the national liberators, Chuan Sitthilekha, become a monk. He knew French, English, and Japanese. He looked like a Japanese monk, and after entering the monastery he tried to make contact with the Japanese. The Japanese army in the region regarded him as their chaplain and listened to his sermons. They believed him and accepted him as a Japanese Buddhist, and through his influence their harm decreased.

The nationalist army tried to make the Japanese see that the Lao people's enemy was the French and tried to get the Japanese to despise the French and become the friends of the Lao. The Free Lao thus used every method their Thai brothers had used in dealing with the Japanese. Various sabotage units sprang up among the national liberators, and, whatever they did, they blamed the French in the forests. The Japanese believed the Lao, and whenever they were troubled they took revenge on the French.

When the Japanese surrendered, the disarmament took place in two regions. North of Savannakhet, the Chinese had the duty of carrying out the disarmament, and in the south, including Pakse, Saravane, and Attopeu, the British were responsible. As soon as the British came, the French deer leapt into the cities, but the nationalists still had open strength in the countryside. They mobilized 190 armed soldiers to defend themselves and waited and watched the actions of the returning French. When Boun Kong saw that the soldiers in the forest were prepared, he went to observe the Chinese-occupied region. There the Chinese troops forbade the French from entering the cities and gave the Lao permission to raise their own army as far south as Savannakhet. There were volunteer soldiers here and there, although the majority of them were Vietnamese. The Governor of Savannakhet explained the situation of the Chinese-occupied region to Boun Kong and advised him to meet with Prince Souphanouvong, Minister of Defense, in Thakhek. As soon as he reached Thakhek, Boun Kong realized that the situation there was the same as in Savannakhet. There were Chinese, Lao, and Vietnamese soldiers in the city, but French soldiers were surrounding them at a distance of less than 5 km. People could neither enter nor leave the city, vegetables could not be obtained, and life was in a critical state.

Boun Kong entered the city and presented his report. The Prince then gave him the rank of lieutenant and assigned him the command of a military unit in the south.

## Lieutenant Boun Kong Fights the Enemy

After he received the rank of lieutenant, Boun Kong returned to his unit and had many new experiences. Armed with completely modern war materiel, the French soldiers streamed into Laos like white ants. Swarms of airplanes were spread out on the airfields. The national liberation army was harassed by land and by air. Wherever French soldiers entered the villages, they cruelly arrested and killed people and burned their houses. The people were as fearful as fledgling birds at such actions of a great power toward a weak country.

It was clear that the French were not following the pledges of the three Great Powers that had been made at the Potsdam Conference.

Before the war had ended, they had said that independence would be granted to various small countries that had populations of more than 600,000. However, the French return to Laos demonstrated their intention to recolonize the country for all time.

The nationalists, whose hands were full of weapons they had accumulated when the French had run for the forest and the Japanese had surrendered, could not stand idly by and watch more cruelty. They divided their soldiers into specialized units for propaganda, logistics, intelligence, and combat. In their first experiment, a combat unit captured eight vehicles and nearly 100 soldiers, an experience which was very good for their morale. The nationalist soldiers fought in a variety of ways. They fought on the battlefield, disguised themselves as French soldiers and seized French camps, captured French vehicles and drove them into the camps, or waited and ambushed French military convoys. They could not repeat the same methods, and whenever the enemy had become familiar with their tactics they had to think of something new.

Ordinarily, when military convoys were sent, the French spaced their vehicles at intervals of 100 m. On any given day they released fifty vehicles making convoys 5 km. long. To capture their convoys, we had 100 soldiers placed at intervals of 10 m. for 2 km., a distance equivalent to twenty vehicles. The remaining vehicles had to be encircled and either attacked or obstructed. To do things properly, the entire convoy had to be captured. To shorten the fifty-vehicle 5-km. convoys to 2 km., people were sent to obstruct the road with logs and then cover the logs with leaves. They did this in several places around 300 or 400 meters apart, but it had to be done around 2 km. in front of where the soldiers were waiting. This tactic was used with very good results.

## Boun Kong Receives the Rank of Major

Three months after the Japanese had lost the war, French troops seized Pakse and Saravane. However, in the Savannakhet, Thakhek, and Vientiane areas, the French were in the forests, and the cities were controlled by Chinese and Free Lao troops. Communications between the Free Lao of the north and the south were still good. Prince Souphanouvong's inspection team was often sent to check on the areas occupied by the national liberation units. One day, the inspection team came, asked that the soldiers form a column, and read a report. When they had finished only half their report, Boun Kong realized that he had been rewarded for his work in national liberation. His reward was the rank of major, appointing him to command of the southern Free Lao forces. His Free Lao unit then changed its name to the "Saiyasettha III" unit.

At the beginning of 1946, the French soldiers surrounding Savannakhet, Thakhek, and Vientiane received permission from the Chinese troops to enter those cities. Fighting between the French and the Free Lao then broke out all over the country. In the south, the military situation had been very difficult, but it became worse because the French transported the majority of their soldiers to help in the north. The transportation involved convoys of 500 to 1,000 vehicles per day. On the average, there was a battle in the south every three

days, and every day at least twenty vehicles were destroyed. However, in the south the people had an advantage in that they were united. To whatever extent French oppression increased, to that extent the people's belief in the Free Lao also increased. Thus, when the Free Lao troops had good terrain and wanted to fight, they could fight, and when they did not want to fight, they could slip away. When they won a battle, they could seize the French soldiers' weapons and escape to the forest, and if they lost, they could also take to the forests. If they lost in the north, however, there was nowhere to go, since the forests were full of the enemy. The only way they could save their lives was by crossing the Mekong and seeking the protection of the Thai government, but losing and crossing to Thailand was the biggest defeat of all. The Free Lao side, from the government and soldiers to the civilians, had to cross the Mekong together. When they were out of danger, Prince Souphanouvong himself took the opportunity to come and visit the southern Free Lao unit and the commander of the column. The Prince, as supreme commander, then gave them a victory flag, in the middle of which was written "Saiyasettha III." The southern Free Lao unit thus received its new name at that time. As far as battle was concerned, the Free Lao unit was rearranged to be more efficient. The Prince sent the Vietnamese volunteers further south under the command of Sithon Kommadam, and all units came under the Prince himself.

## "Saiyasettha III" Seizes the Phone Thong Region

Each time a battle was concluded, those found dead on the battlefield were about 70 percent Lao. No matter how much they tried, they could not avoid this percentage, for each company had 150 Lao soldiers and only five Frenchmen. When there was fighting, the French sneaked back until they were around 3 km. from the battlefield; there they were beyond the range of the gunfire, and the Free Lao would have little success in pursuing them. The French just let the Lao fight and kill each other. When there were Lao casualties, the French took their guns and left the bodies, and they paid no attention to those who were wounded and cried for help. However, Lao soldiers were ordered to carry the French wounded and to take care of the bodies of French casualties.

To avoid this killing among the Lao, the "Saiyasettha III" changed their methods from fighting on the battlefield to guerrilla warfare. They became slippery as eels and nimble as butterflies and continually harassed the enemy, like mosquitoes. All of this could only be possible after serious training, but for this, they needed a large and secure base. As far as they could see, there were only two appropriate places. One was the area of Houei Meun, where they were, but the food supply was inadequate. The other was the Muang Phone Thong region, but this had been free from Thai government control for less than two months and was an area in which the French were most cruel and the people most poverty-stricken. If the Free Lao seized it, they would at the same time be helping the people.

When they saw the situation, the high command ordered Major Prasith Wangphot Thong to lead 300 soldiers to go and harass Saravane Province for as long as possible. Both the peace and stability of the Lao people in the region depended on the brave work of the "Saiyasettha III." From then on, things occurred as anticipated. The French,

stupidly wrapped up in their satisfaction at returning as Lords of Laos, assembled their troops. Besides the soldiers of Saravane itself, they called in reinforcements from Pakse, Savannakhet, and Thakhek, hoping to pounce on the 300 Free Lao. It was comical that they trained people who knew "Boun Kong" well to try to have them identify him. French soldiers who came from other provinces were tricked into fighting each other instead of the Free Lao and died in piles. In mobilizing for the Free Lao's decoy in the Saravane area, the French forgot about their rear and abandoned the Phone Thong region, leaving only three camps. Before this, each camp had had 300 or 400 soldiers, but now there were only forty or fifty per camp. Seeing this opportunity, 150 Free Lao soldiers were called to form an organized column. The Commander of the Makong Valley called for volunteers: "The independence of our country will be possible only through sacrificing fifteen of our lives. Are there any volunteers?" There was the sound of whispering among the soldiers, then one word--two words--"Willing to die."

Boun Kong stood dazed for several minutes. He had not dreamed that he would see Lao people, who the French said were cowardly, demonstrate bravery to such an extent. One hundred forty-seven out of 150 soldiers volunteered to die for their country. Only 3 men had not volunteered, because they had doubts about what their leaders were asking them to die for. According to the plan, 5 men per camp--altogether 15 men for the 3 camps--would burn the camps from within; the remaining men would wait outside for the fleeing enemy. There were more volunteers than were expected and these were divided equally among the three camps. They assembled and moved out at 9 o'clock on the next day--150 death-volunteer soldiers led by Lt. Suban. At the command post, the sound of applause rose when the news came in by radio that the three camps had been successfully seized. An administrative unit and three training units were then set up, and many men came for training. Altogether the three units trained nearly 2,000 men, including several village and district chiefs. For nine months, the people of the Phone Thong region lived happily, free from bandits, under a true Lao administration. Then the French gathered their strength and attacked heavily by land and by air with a fiftyfold advantage in manpower and weapons. Bullets and bombs fell like heavy rain. The Free Lao, masters of the country, had to leave Phone Thong, but luckily during the nine months of independence they had prepared the families of the area to stay in the mountains, at the border of the district. Nearly all of them surrendered to the French. This defeat did not involve much loss of life for the people, but around 3,000 houses and around 100,000 tons of paddy rice were burned. In doing this, the French aroused the patriotism of the Lao. Tens of thousands of Lao civilians had benefitted from local training programs; in various villages there were both local soldiers ready to seize any opportunity against the French and Free Lao guerrilla units familiar with the terrain waiting to help from within.

## "Saiyasettha III" Changes to a New Plan

The Free Lao soldiers were everywhere, and they increased their harassment daily. The poor French, free from being slaves of the Germans, came back with the hope that they could take the profits from Laos to support France. Instead, they found their exploitation blocked by the owners of Laos, and they had to invest heavily of their lives

and riches. Even though they brought five to ten tons of printed money, the Free Lao harassment increased. When it looked as though their position could not be saved, the French let Laos have its own government with elections for representatives to draft a constitution under the chairmanship of Bong Souvannavong. Though Laos had its own government and constitution, the French held complete power. The French character was such that they wanted nothing good; they only wanted to fight. When they were unsuccessful in battle, they tried giving concessions to appease the Lao.

Since our small force would have difficulty in attacking the French, who were aided by the Great Powers, the Prince Commander ordered us to resist them through harassment. This order meant that the internal government would accept the benefits of the French, but the Free Lao would continue as an active guerrilla force withholding their attacks until the enemy committed injustices such as commandeering people's cattle, buffalo, ducks, and chickens without payment, arresting people who had done no wrong, conscripting people without paying wages, and improperly bullying people. These injustices were to be found everywhere there were French soldiers. Thus the Free Lao were continually capturing camps and making ambushes.

## The Free Lao Turns to the Viet Minh

Those Free Lao soldiers who were armed fought the French who were still entangled in Laos, and those who were still unarmed waited for guns along the Lao-Thai border. When there were battles, guns were obtained from the French, and those along the border could then be armed. In some of the border areas, the soldiers grouped together for training so they would be better prepared for the battlefield. In other areas they were dispersed and had to find food as best they could. However, everyone followed the orders of Prime Minister *phanya* Khammao's government in exile in Bangkok, and Prince Souphanouvong herded the soldiers like a mother hen.

One morning, early in December 1947, a patrol unit brought two men to meet Boun Kong at the Nang District command post, a full three days' walk from the Mekong River. They told him to go to Bangkok as quickly as possible, and when he crossed the Mekong, Prince Phetsarath's representative was waiting there to accompany him on the trip. The Prince's government was in session at Ban Pak Chaiyo, and as soon as Boun Kong arrived, he received permission to join the meeting.

Boun Kong learned that Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram's post-*coup d'état* Thai government wanted to meet the Free Lao military commander. At the Thai government's first cabinet meeting, they had said that they wanted to meet a representative of the Free Lao government as well as the high commander of the military. At 10:00 A.M., a Thai major who commanded an armored unit came to receive Boun Kong in a military car. The major told *phanya* Khammao that the Thai government only wanted to meet with the military leader, and that their business was not the concern of the political leaders. Boun Kong then went with the major to Samsen, where he was introduced to a general. In this meeting, Boun Kong thought he was being accused of being an international rebel. The general attacked him for arrogantly trespassing on the borders, trespassing on Thai democracy, and trespassing in various other ways.

When the first general had spoken for an appropriate length of time, he took Boun Kong to meet another general. When Boun Kong had heard two or three words from the second general, he realized that the accusations against him were finished. The second general explained the internal and external Thai political situation, smiling jovially the whole time. Boun Kong said he was fortunate that he could sit before one with such high honor. Then the general led Boun Kong into Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram's office. In the presence of the Field Marshal, Boun Kong received notice with the explanation that Thailand's circumstances were complicated. Thailand was still unable to join the United Nations and wanted to straighten things out; therefore all the Free Lao troops secretly hidden in Thailand had to be removed. If they could not return to Laos, they could give up being soldiers and go to work as civilians. They were forbidden to assemble as before. In listening to another hour of the Field Marshal's explanations, Boun Kong felt he had been given another big lesson.

When he returned and reported to the government and the Prince-Commander, the command unit issued the order that all Free Lao soldiers should join the nearest military unit and then move as far away from the Mekong as possible. There were three training units of 700 soldiers each that were encamped along the border. Before they left, Commander Boun Kong spoke in the name of the soldiers of the Free Lao "Saiyasettha III" unit, thanking the people and officials of the Krasok, Savang, and Kong Chiam subdistricts for their generous help in the successful training of the Free Lao soldiers.

Such a great number of soldiers assembled that there was a shortage of food, and, most difficult of all, a lack of salt. The enemy knew they were short of guns and pressed them. They looked for a place to go, but there was nowhere, apart from the Annamite Chain. Fortunately for the country, their Vietnamese brothers came and helped alleviate their difficulties by sending them salt and rice. The Vietnamese also helped them set up military training units in several places, including in Vietnam itself. Boun Kong met Miss Le Thi Hoy for the last time, but this meeting was not one between husband and wife. It was a meeting between a starving commander and a captain sending supplies. The lady captain led her soldiers to supervise a caravan of civilians bringing rice and salt, and the meeting was part of this girl's difficult work. Captain Le Thi Hoy was shot by an enemy bullet and died at Ban Sam Moei (Tchepone) in March 1948. She left behind the heavy burden of a highly valued and unforgettable love.

## Return to Laos as Underground Leader

Four or five months after receiving notice from Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram, the Free Lao government in Bangkok dissolved itself, and its members moved back to Laos. The French, with a great deal of American financial and military aid, tried to drive out the Free Lao. Almost all Lao males between the ages of sixteen and forty-five were conscripted to be soldiers under the French. The Free Lao, harassed by land and by air, were in a tight situation. The Free Lao and the Lao under the French did not understand each other and cruelly harassed and killed each other.

In September 1949, Boun Kong received a letter from Prince Souphanouvong setting up an appointment. It was the last time they met.

Boun Kong sat in a boat in the middle of the Mekong and waited until 9:00 P.M., when another boat came floating along. When they had exchanged their prearranged signals, the boats pulled up alongside each other. The boat that had just come was full of bananas, for in his last several nights of travel the Prince had disguised himself as a banana seller. When the boats were alongside each other, the Lion of the Sip Song Chu Thai shined a flashlight on his face and asked to see the face of the forest-dweller, Boun Kong. In this unforgettable meeting, Prince Souphanouvong told Boun Kong that he was the only one who could resolve the country's internal difficulties and asked him if he had any objections. When Boun Kong answered that he would sacrifice all things for his country, the Prince gave him an M-3 rifle, and told him to take as many guns and soldiers as he needed. This meeting to receive orders from the Prince Commander lasted less than two hours, but a difficult situation arose while they were talking there. A spy came and reported that the enemy had come from the north and south and was about a kilometer away. Later he said around 500 m. away, and later still around 100 m. Then the boats divided into three groups. The first group advanced, and the other two fired to trick the enemy by drawing their attention from the Prince-Commander's boat.

## Making Contacts for Repatriation

Less than a month after receiving his orders, Boun Kong received a letter from Prince Boun Oum in Champassak proposing that they meet. Since Prince Boun Oum was respected by the people of the entire country, Boun Kong could hardly go against his wishes. Boun Kong brought sixty soldiers with him to the meeting. Prince Boun Oum had also invited the Chief Abbot and three French military officers named Maj. Gen. Sevigné [?], Capt. Montceneau [?], and 1st Lt. Rupy [?]. The Prince spoke to Boun Kong and his men about their relatives and passed on the news of several deaths and births. He also commented on the difficulties of years of living in the forests and jungles and asked if they would like to return to society. The French officers took a different approach. They sounded like political envoys of a superpower trying to shape the world. They spoke of the future and of the need for unification, and said that the French had returned to help bring about Lao independence. Finally they asked Boun Kong to stop his work for national liberation and bring his men back to the villages and cities. As a nationalist soldier, Boun Kong said that his men would return only under the conditions that there would be a general amnesty; that there would be no recriminations or arrests; and that those returning would be helped to find work.

Two weeks later, Maj. Gen. Sevigné, assistant military commander of the southern region, brought the amnesty decree and guaranteed everything that Boun Kong had requested. He wanted to know when the Free Lao soldiers would come and how many men there were. Later, 1,160 unarmed members of "Saiyasettha III" were received by French soldiers and transported by trucks for repatriation. Following this, Boun Kong and forty armed soldiers were repatriated at Ban Na Keo on January 2, 1949.

## Repatriation

The "Saiyasettha III" military unit was divided for repatriation. Boun Kong and the final unit of forty men reached the reception point at Ban Na Keo at 5:00 A.M. on January 2, 1949. Around 5,000 people came to receive them, including twenty French officers and many civilians. A merit-making (*baci*) ceremony was prepared in the monastery. During the ceremony, people came and asked permission from the Prince to approach the Free Lao. The Prince put the first group tying strings in order and then sent them off so a new group could come. This group, instead of just tying strings on their wrists and wishing them well, said various other things too. Many people came close, took their hands, stroked their arms and legs, and said, "My child, how have you had the courage to fight against the white French?" When the Prince finished tying the strings, the soldiers were ordered to form a line to get in the vehicles. Though the soldiers still held their guns and retained their military bearing, some of their faces were bathed in tears. An hour later, they reached Pakse, and the disarmament ceremony began. The Lao side was made up of only the Prince and the deputy governor. Two platoons of French soldiers formed a line, and the Free Lao soldiers formed a line opposite them. The complete committee was at the head of the two lines. When the Prince had finished the military ceremony, newspapers were distributed reporting that the southern Free Lao had totally yielded to the French, and the war was now over. Government handbills were spread over the entire country asking why anyone would want to join the Free Lao and take time away from their studies. The Free Lao were deprived of any status. It was clear from their accusations that the government feared the Free Lao like a mouse fears a cat, although the French military administration unhesitatingly received other Lao as soldiers.

People might have thought that Boun Kong was not a real lion because he admitted defeat for the Free Lao soldiers, who had always been tough fighters and had no reason to surrender so easily. However, that surrender had a reason. The repatriation took place because Prince Souphanouvong was farsighted. If the Free Lao had remained solely in the forest, there would have been shortages of both weapons and manpower, and they would have forfeited any chance for victory. Thus he ordered them to separate and work from within in order to recruit more followers. Prince Souphanouvong, the true lion in the forest, saw that Boun Kong was clever enough and assigned him to lead the effort. The Prince's hope for this part of the struggle was based on his trust in Boun Kong's abilities, and the end result of this work will be seen in the roles that Boun Kong played.

When Boun Kong had surrendered to Prince Boun Oum, the national liberation soldiers were assigned in successive groups to be soldiers in Boun Oum's army. The French often requested that all those who were repatriated become soldiers, but their request was not agreed to, and the soldiers returned to their villages as they wished.

Wherever there were French enemy soldiers, whether in camps or in mobile units, there were also underground national liberation soldiers. Commando units, legionnaire units, parachute units, and transportation units had underground people mixed in with them, waiting for an opportunity to strike. The underground also infiltrated various people in the villages and district centers, in the wats and temples, and in the

fields and paddies. The peoples' alertness to national liberation increased. The Free Lao on the inside forged propaganda in the name of the people in the forest and scattered it everywhere. Also various underground national liberation work was carried forward in the name of Prince Souphanouvong's Free Lao.

The arousal of the people was like an overflowing water jar. They used various methods in carrying out their duties. Lao soldiers in the camps volunteered to capture their enemy officers, tied their hands, and then carried arms and ammunition to the forest. They released Lao prisoners that the enemy had arrested and had them carry guns when they escaped. Underground soldiers in mobile units captured their officers and took them to the forest. Patrol units fired five or six shots, then had two or three men lead the French commanders off while the rest escaped. These were the methods the underground soldiers used for getting food and ammunition from the inside to the outside. They were used many times and in many places with very good results.

When the work of the underground was beginning, *thao achan samu* Lek and *thao* Mok, both of whom were from Savannakhet and had worked with Boun Kong before, came and met him. Boun Kong was shocked with surprise when the two men brought message No. 71 with an official Free Lao letter praising his work. He had never dreamed he would get a reward of such honor. The message of the letter was: "*Thao* Boun Kong Manivong is hereby appointed as my representative in restoring the independence of Laos and has full power in this work." Both the appointment and the letter of praise were signed by Prince Phetsarath, the head of the Free Lao. Boun Kong had never had the opportunity to meet Prince Phetsarath, but he knew by his reputation that he was the only Prince who was believed in by the Lao people of the entire country.

The soldiers on the inside and the Free Lao on the outside understood each other and worked together well. The people increasingly supported the Free Lao and increasingly despised the French soldiers. Lao soldiers in the French army escaped with arms and ammunition almost daily. They fought well whenever they attacked, and each time the French soldiers were broken and defeated. On one occasion, an underground spy learned that a French city policeman who was most cruel to the Lao was going with a convoy to Saigon the following day. An underground group went by a shortcut in order to seize this policeman. When the convoy of more than twenty vehicles reached them, they ordered it to stop and had all the people in the trucks get out and line up along the road. They confiscated all the weapons in the convoy, put them in one truck, and had it drive on. They put the ammunition in another truck to follow later. The underground unit then looked for the police officer in the line of people. When they found him, they called him to the front of the line, enumerated his crimes, and asked for his confession. When that was finished, they asked the people in the line what punishment he should receive. While waiting for the answer, he who was ardent in killing Lao and disposing of them like animals lowered himself until he was kneeling on the ground to ask for pardon, but no one would forgive him because of his cruelty.

## Establishment of the Lao National Army

The Free Lao increased its harassment, and the government asked for greater independence. Finally, on July 19, 1949, France called on

the Lao government to sign an accord of independence allowing the formation of a Lao national army. One day, in early April 1949, Boun Kong received a letter setting up an appointment with H. E. Kou Voravong, the Minister of Defense, who had business in Pakse. It was the first time he had met a Lao minister. This man had a very friendly disposition and spoke clearly of the government's political policy. Then he explained that he had come to Pakse because this region was very much in turmoil and that the national army would be established there first and then expanded over the entire country. He said that the government had approved ten million kip (piasters) to purchase guns, and consequently the spending must be planned so it would not exceed the budget. Then he asked Boun Kong to join.

Boun Kong saw this as a good opportunity for a base to continue the underground, and so he joined the effort of raising a national army; Kou Voravong assigned him to the planning unit. He then took 300 underground men who had not joined the French to become soldiers in the national army. They had only sixty guns, some of which they had kept from the inspection team. When the army was first raised, they lived, ate, and dressed like true Lao, but when their numbers grew, they were joined by three or four officers from the French side under Maj. Gen. Ailleron [?].

Later they made plans and preparations to seize Attopeu, but they were betrayed by an internal spy. He was a Vietnamese who secretly photographed the plan and gave it to the French. At that point Boun Kong could have escaped to the forest, but he worried about his followers, and so he went back home. He was surrounded and captured by the French. He was jailed in Pakse and the Lao government of that time turned him over the French.

The French used torture in trying to obtain a confession from Boun Kong. He was given electric shocks, whipped with leather whips, hit with machine gun bandoliers, stuck with pins under his fingernails, forced to kneel on hot bricks, bitten by dogs, and suspended with his head immersed in water. As long as he was still alive, the patriotic commander did not give up hope, no matter what they did. Finally they used the method called "flying Ho Chi Minh's airplane." Boun Kong was made to climb a wooden ladder which was leaning against a building. Then they questioned him. If he refused to answer, they kicked out the bottom of the ladder and let him fall. If he fell on his feet they would hit him. When he fell head first to the ground, the French clapped their hands and slapped their sides with joy. These were the civilized methods of interrogation used by the French in Laos.

When the news of this torture reached the Lao Governor of Pakse, he prohibited it, but the French commander would not stop. The Frenchman replied that Boun Kong had many followers and asked if the Governor wanted these followers to kill the French. The Governor charged that the French had broken their promise to use persuasion on the Lao and asked why they used such cruelty. The Governor and the Frenchman nearly came to blows. Later, when Boun Kong became conscious, he found that a captain had come to take better care of him. This man had human empathy, unlike the earlier beast of the forest. One week afterwards, a man mysteriously climbed into the house of the cruel French policeman and shot him dead with a submachine gun in broad daylight.

Some time later, Boun Kong was sent to prison in Vientiane. When he had been there for two days, two French officers came and introduced themselves as M. Pereira [?], the French High Commissioner for Laos, and Gen. Aknan [?], the French military commander. The essence of their conversation with Boun Kong was as follows:

Question: What are the aims of the Lao in fighting the French these days?

Answer: Laos is the heritage of the Lao people, just as France is the heritage of the French people.

The French people and France became a colony of Germany. The French people struggled against the Germans. Laos has become a colony of France and the Lao people must struggle in the same way.

Question: But Laos received its independence on July 19, 1949.

Answer: Lao independence is a paper independence, an independence with no guarantees.

Question: How can the Free Lao hope to win when the two sides are so unmatched?

Answer: Right! The Free Lao cannot win against the French army at the present time, but later they are sure to win. Look at the growth of the Free Lao from 1945-1946-1947 to 1950. In the past five years, the Free Lao have taken control of half the country. If they continue for another five years, what will happen?

Question: The Free Lao are dependent on the Viet Minh and have brought Viet Minh soldiers to Laos. Won't the Free Lao make Laos a colony of Vietnam?

Answer: Indochina has three countries, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. All three countries are the colonies of one master. Consequently, when there is liberation, they must all be liberated; no one country can be liberated alone. All three countries are allied to fight together for liberation. In 1945, Prince Souphanouvong, the supreme commander of the Free Lao, signed such a treaty.

Then the questioning turned to background information on the origins of Prince Souphanouvong. Boun Kong answered briefly what he knew. Prince Souphanouvong is the younger brother of Prince Phetsarath. The Frenchmen brought out many documents. Boun Kong was shocked with surprise when he saw Prince Phetsarath's message No. 71 in French hands. The Frenchmen questioned him about that document. Now that you have been captured, who will Prince Phetsarath replace you with? Who do you see as able to replace you? Why don't you use propaganda instead of force? The questions and answers of the accused Boun Kong with the high-ranking Frenchmen took two hours. Before the Frenchmen left, they asked about Boun Kong's needs. They told the guards to allow him all necessary conveniences and to let them know if he had any problems.

Boun Kong truthfully confessed to his friends that personally he was not the enemy of any Frenchman. The French themselves had not found anyone who believed that Boun Kong was their enemy. While he

was military commander, hundreds and thousands of Frenchmen were captured, and he gave them every convenience. They were free to choose for themselves whether to stay with him or whether to return. Now he was being held in a detention cell, but the French gave him conveniences to the point of a high official sacrificing his honor to visit him. It was true that the struggle had gone on for nearly twenty years. Those who came to invade Laos, which is by right the property of the Lao people, were fought. The Japanese came as aggressors and were fought. Now the French come as aggressors and it is necessary to fight. The Lao will fight anyone who wants Laos as a colony and will continue to fight. If the fighters are imprisoned, then they will fight in prison.

## Nearly Executed, Then Sent to Saigon

Boun Kong was put in prison in Vientiane. As a military prisoner, he was separated from the civilian prisoners by a high wall through which there was only a small door. Four civilian prisoners per day cleaned the rooms and brought water for baths in the morning and the afternoon. They also distributed cigarettes, food, and clothing as they had them. In time, they became friends. Boun Kong took this opportunity to teach them about politics. By asking them to take turns, four people per day, in three months the feelings of 181 prisoners were raised until they exploded. On October 4, 1950, the prisoners rose up and seized the guns of twenty-six wardens. They broke out of the prison and created a great deal of trouble for both the military and civilians.

In the end their action was unsuccessful, but it was beneficial in inspiring cooperation. It made the French aggressors and colonists realize that the Lao people had awakened to their condition of slavery under foreigners and were tired of French imperialism. Boun Kong was captured and put in a dark cell. At 11:00 that night three fully-armed men, one Frenchman and two Algerians, came into his cell and shackled his arms together. Then two French sergeants followed him to the door of the civilian prison. Boun Kong heard the exhortations of his fellow Lao prisoners: "Good luck, my brother" (Corporal Phong); "Good luck in the next life, my brother" (*thao* Bountoem Suknirandon); "Good luck, your brothers are still alive and will fight with honor" (Sub-Lt. Saisamon). The cries continued until the warden yelled for them to stop. Boun Kong knew that he was being taken to be executed because one hour earlier a French military watchman had walked back and forth in front of the cell, and Boun Kong heard his words distinctly through the transom: "Good people will die today. When they are dead, new ones will come to take their places. Give me your ring and watch and they will be sent home for you." He walked back and forth repeating the message. Boun Kong wondered what was going on, so he got up and took a look. The watchman saw him and said that Boun Kong was responsible for the prison rebellion. Consequently, he would be executed that night, and if he gave the watchman his watch and ring they would be sent to his home. Boun Kong thought they were tricking him into giving up his valuables, but it turned out to be the truth. The soldiers led him out of the jail, then to the left, the right, and then straight ahead toward Vat That Fun. Vat That Fun was a place of peace and calm for both the Lao and the French of Vientiane. This day, the day he was being sent to his end, was so cold that Boun Kong shivered. It was so quiet; there was not one person passing by. When they had

nearly reached Vat That Fun, the French sergeant looked at him and asked, "Do you know where I am taking you?" Boun Kong answered that he did not know, but he had a good guess. To move a prisoner from his cell at that time of night could only be to take him to be executed. If this were right, it would be better to die. Boun Kong had killed hundreds of Frenchmen; now he would die. He continued talking. It was good that he was allowed to talk in this way. Before he died, he would teach his executioner some important lessons. Many of Boun Kong's words were displeasing to the guard. He jerked Boun Kong's shackles and told him to be quiet, but Boun Kong persisted. Finally they reached Vat That Fun. In the lightning, Boun Kong could see a white sign telling where the dead were buried. The last minute of his life was very near. His last words would be spoken at the same time. Finally he brought up the subject of General DeGaulle who liberated the French people from the Germans. When he had summarized the General's good deeds the sergeant-executioner hesitated. He raised the strap of his carbine, shouldered the gun, and spoke angrily, "My parents never ordered me to kill anyone. I will not hire myself to kill for money. I will not take advantage by killing anyone." The French sergeant led Boun Kong back to his cell.

This French sergeant supported DeGaulle, and was a member of the Gaullist political party. When he heard Boun Kong's praise for the man he loved and respected, he let himself be jailed for forty-five days, dismissed from the military, and sent back home. However, he was proud that he had not done evil and glad that he had not died in Indochina.

Boun Kong had escaped death because there was no one to kill him. If the French wanted to kill, they would kill, if they did not want to, they would not. You can see the cruelty of their methods of execution. There was no law at all.

When the French failed to execute Boun Kong in Vientiane, they put him on an airplane and sent him to prison in Saigon.

## Thirteen Months in the Saigon Prison

Saigon had two prisons, the large prison and the Chi Ha prison. Altogether there were 11,000 prisoners, 1,400 women and the rest men. To control the prisoners, they were separated into sections. The political prisoners could not mix with the ordinary prisoners. Those who were only suspects were separated from those convicted of major crimes. The military and civilian prisoners were confined separately. The wardens were made up of about equal numbers of Vietnamese and French, but the superintendent and director were both Vietnamese. They worked in the large prison office and had a staff of around 200. All of them had houses within the prison walls, and even the family of the director himself lived there.

When Boun Kong entered the prison gates, police inspectors took him to the director's office to give him his papers. The papers contained his punishment record and the charges that he had killed 152 people. Then they searched him and asked, "Are you military or civilian? Where did you commit the crimes? Were you captured in the forest or in the city?" The director had one of the officials get the issue

of the newspaper *Extrême-Orient* that reported on his activity in the underground of Laos and his capture. He gave it to Boun Kong to read and then asked, "Is this report about you true?" Boun Kong answered that it was true. The director then stepped over, shook his hand and said, "I am Nguyen Van Tat, the director of the prison. Take your stay here as a vacation. If you have any trouble, let me know." Then he turned to the jail superintendent and had him take Boun Kong to cell No. 3 in a special section of the prison. This cell was next to the hospital room and not more than 20 m. from the director's house. When the red tape of registration was over, a guard took Boun Kong to his cell, which had been cleaned. The cell included a bathroom and the guard gave Boun Kong a convicted prisoner to clean the room and bring bath water to fill the tank. In this special prison section, Boun Kong met Miss Le Thi Hoy's father, Mr. Le Van Pham, the assistant chief of the Ha Tinh underground, who had been there for three years. In another three months, he would be free. Two days later, a French lawyer (Jacquemard) came to meet Boun Kong and said he had been hired by Miss Manivanh of Pakse. His words increased Boun Kong's happiness.

## The Prisoners' Harassment of the Colonialists

The situation of Vietnam was no different from that of Laos: the French held all the power. In the special prison section, the high political prisoners were confined in small cells. Two large cells were used as temporary resting places for those arriving and those being released. Every day twenty to thirty prisoners had to stay there for two or three nights before they were released. Also, forty to fifty new prisoners were brought there each day for two to three days' confinement. Then they were fingerprinted and sent elsewhere. Through this reception and release station, a group of more than ten friends in the prison's special section were able to contact every prisoner in both prisons. They also made contacts with the Saigon-Cholon underground and with the Viet Minh military unit in the south. Nguyen Binh had worked with them before, and the contacts went very well.

The method of contact was to use those who were released as messengers. When there was news from outside to get into the prison, the messengers acted as chicken and duck thieves and were arrested and reimprisoned. In the period of thirteen months that Boun Kong was imprisoned in Saigon, one such messenger was captured five to ten times. This method was very difficult to detect. During Boun Kong's period in prison, he joined in various activities with his friends. They fasted once to demand more food, soap, clothes, and free postal privileges, and other times they fasted to call for reduced sentences and for radios. By fasting, once for four days, they got everything they demanded.

## Eight More Months in the Vientiane Prison

Less than ten days after Boun Kong's third hunger strike, the director came and told him to prepare to return to Laos on December 18, 1950. There he was put in the Vientiane prison with more than thirty military prisoners, along with official spies for the French. The guards included six French military officers, who received him at the airport, and two Lao. They set up schedules for the prisoners. At

8:00 A.M., each prisoner had to carry a board plank (2 m. long, 10 cm. wide), and run two laps around the prison. Each lap was a distance of 250 meters. They took turns running, and when all of them had finished they started over again. At 11:00 they went back to their cells and waited for their food to be brought. The food was divided on plates for five people and put in the middle of the field where it was exposed to the weather, regardless of whether there was sunshine or rain. At 12:00 noon, the prisoners were taken to eat in the middle of the field. At 1:00, they were taken back to their cells and the doors were locked. From 3:00 to 5:00, there were various amusements such as track and boxing competitions. Boun Kong had never participated in boxing or fist fighting, but now he was forced to fight. However, none of his Lao juniors would box with him because they thought he was too old. This being the case, a French corporal, ignoring those who cautioned him against it, jumped in to box with Boun Kong. The Frenchman took off his clothes and walked over to challenge him. The Lao prisoners resolved that if the Frenchman actually hit Boun Kong, they would come to his aid. He hit Boun Kong on the shoulder, causing him to fall back, then followed him and tried to hit him again. Boun Kong stepped forward, and at the same time both his legs and small fists hit every part of the Frenchman's body. He pushed him against the wall, jerked his arm back, hit him in the stomach with his knee, and made him kiss the ground. Before the dogfight broke out, the boss ordered the boxing stopped. The evening meal at 6:00 was the same as at noon, served in the middle of the field.

Finally Col. Carton [?], who liked Boun Kong, reported to his government, requesting his release. Boun Kong was finally released and many honorable people, including his relative Miss Manivanh, were waiting to receive him outside the prison on July 15, 1952.

## The Underground is Restored to Life

Boun Kong was freed to live with his family, and three days after his release he found work in the Prime Minister's office. The problems of the Lao fatherland still remained. They were the responsibility of the masters of the country and had to be borne no matter how difficult the task or how many lives must be sacrificed. Wherever one looked, one saw only soldiers, whether foreign soldiers or Lao soldiers. The Lao soldiers were divided into two sides. One was the French Union Army which was directly under the French, and the other was the Lao National Army. This name was very pleasing to the ears, but in essence it was wide of the mark. Laos had no part in this army, and the Lao people had no status or voice in it. Lao sergeants had to respect French privates, and Lao captains were under the command of French sergeants. Simply speaking, the situation of the Lao soldiers was no different from that of servants in the French army. The commanders from the smallest to the largest units were all French. Although all platoons or companies were commanded by Frenchmen, when they entered into battle Lao people had to command Lao people to fight. After battles, the survivors returned to the camp, and the Lao commanders lost their authority. The French only used them to kill other Lao and to burn the houses of the Lao people. They lived from day to day, working in the morning to eat in the evening. This was the situation of the Lao soldiers in 1952.

In the government's depressing struggle, the civil servants nearly lost their minds. They hardly knew night from day, and hoped for only one thing, national independence and peace. The result, however, was an increase in the strength of the French army, and continued French control of Laos. The French frequently declared the independence of this or that Lao division, but in fact they only bound the Lao so they could not move. For example, when they turned over the customs administration to the Lao, they also set educational requirements that not one Lao could fulfill. Even the Frenchmen who work there now do not have the appropriate education. Everything fell to the French just as before.

Among the people, there was trouble everywhere. The Viet Minh accused the Lao of being French stooges and dragged them off and killed them, and the French accused them of being Viet Minh stooges and dragged them off and killed them. Their houses and their rice were burned and destroyed by both sides. In fear and starvation, the people shivered like small birds and begged for help and protection.

The year 1953 came, bringing the cruel war between the French and the Viet Minh. They fought endlessly without decisive losses or victories, like the earlier battles between the Japanese and the French. Those whose fate was loss and death were the Lao. Then the old problem of alignment arose. To ally with the aggressors in Laos is only to act according to the orders of their commanders who set themselves up as rulers. Such Lao forget their oaths and lose the capacity to see their fellow countrymen doing true national liberation, and they allow the enemy to trample on the country's sovereignty. With this realization, a group of more than forty soldiers, police, and civilians gathered for a secret meeting in a hut. The problems they considered were organization, contacts, finances, and a sure target. In their deliberations, the first point was easy, the second was difficult. As for money, they agreed that each would give according to his allegiance. In considering the target, they had a long argument over whether there would be any benefit in seizing the government. The government's work for the country was nearly dead. They also considered whether they should strike separately at the French. The French had a strength of 30,000. They had only 20,000, but it was enough to engage in battle if necessary. If they fought against the French, would they be accused of helping the Viet Minh? They argued these problems for a long time. Finally, when the vote was taken, the consensus was that they would take care of the French first, then later the Viet Minh if they did not observe the Lao-Viet Minh-Cambodian agreements of 1945. If there was aggression, they would strike again, no matter who the aggressor was.

## The Nationalists Attack the Viet Minh

In mid-1953, the Viet Minh advanced on the French army nearly everywhere. Samneua and Xieng Khouang were seized, and Luang Prabang and Saravane were surrounded. They sent almost 10,000 soldiers to attack Vientiane. The government shivered with fear and prepared to move to Savannakhet. The leaders in power scooped up the riches of the country and bought houses in France. Then they moved their families there and abandoned the poor to their misfortune.

This created a dilemma. They could not all go to France. They also could not let the Viet Minh attack without doing anything; yet

neither did they want to fight the Viet Minh. The nationalists then called another meeting and invited two representatives of the Viet Minh unit that was about to attack Vientiane. These representatives were Vietnamese who had taken the Lao names Bounthan and Saengchan. First they discussed only French plans and strategy. Then they asked the two Viet Minh representatives to answer the following argument: "The Nationalists are prepared to fight the enemy all over the country. Isn't this better than the Viet Minh coming to fight? If the Viet Minh fight the French in Laos, the Nationalist army will have French guns at their backs and will die if they do not fight. If they do not fight, won't they lose their honor as soldiers? If they do fight, they themselves will die rather than the French. Wouldn't it be better if the Viet Minh withdrew from the places they surround and let the nationalist soldiers do the fighting in Laos?"

Luck was with the Lao. One week after using this rather inexpensive strategy, they received the news that the Viet Minh would withdraw and let the nationalists applaud their departure.

## A Spirit Reveals Nationalist Activities

While the nationalists were preparing to attack the enemy, an evil spirit from the enemy side possessed one of the nationalists and through him announced that "The spirit of Vientiane is broken. The people will die. Blood will flood the capital." This devilish news put the leaders in turmoil, and much money was spent on festivals to appease the spirits. The news focused the attention of the opposition on the nationalists, but luckily the Viet Minh were there to be blamed instead. The Viet Minh were angry because their plan was revealed, and they said they would destroy the evil spirit. Such was the radio propaganda.

## A Person Reveals Nationalist Activities

At the beginning of 1954, the battle of Dien Bien Phu exploded in earnest. This was an opportunity for the nationalists to begin their work while the other side was engaged. Taking on the enemy would be better than remaining uninvolved, which produced no benefits.

The nationalists then scheduled another meeting, thinking that it would be their last. With the help of whatever fate or magic, the evil spirit finally fell. However, one of the nationalists unexpectedly brought a foreigner to the meeting whom he believed to be a trusted friend. Everything was agreed upon, and the time of raising the curtain was set; but two days later, on April 15, 1954, a Saigon newspaper reported that "There will be a revolt raised by the military in Laos." Two days later a Thai newspaper reported the same thing.

With news such as this, it was natural that the officials would investigate, and because of this, the nationalists were troubled and in turmoil.

## The Nationalists Change Their Plan from Attack to Harassment

The battle of Dien Bien Phu was still going on, with no sign that either side would submit. The nationalists' plan had leaked out. The officials discovered the source and prepared to arrest twelve important people. Apparently they had not yet done so because they still had not received permission from the government, although the twelve people, along with Boun Kong, were encircled by French Union military intelligence agents at every step. Whenever they moved, these people followed them. They were even watched in their offices. Contacts were broken and they could no longer meet.

While they were under this pressure, there came the news, started by whatever god, that "A group of Lao is going to seize Thakhek Province." In fact, the story came from the Thai police of Nakhon Phanom Province, who were watching people crossing to Laos to become mercenaries or to find work. The attention of all official units focused solely on this spot. Thus Boun Kong had an opportunity for a final meeting with two or three friends, but he was unable to see the commander, who had gone to inspect another province the week before. However, the opportunity could await no longer. While sitting in his office on Friday, June 11, 1954, Boun Kong saw the chief of military intelligence enter a meeting to request permission from the government to arrest the twelve nationalists. He received permission to make the arrests at six o'clock on Sunday, June 13, 1954. This meant that there was no way out, and there were only two days to think about whether or not to fight. The commander was absent. If Boun Kong fought and won, he would become a communist. If he lost, he and two or three friends in the same office would be ruined. Finally, he thought about the Conference on Indochina, which was going on in Geneva, and came to the conclusion that the actions of the nationalists should support the conference. This meant that they must make the French agree to stop the war, and harassment was the best course of action.

## Working on the Harassment Plan

The plan to arrest the nationalists had already been prepared. Their twelve houses were marked on maps with red pencil. In another forty-two hours they would be back in their prison cells. At twelve o'clock on June 12, 1954, Boun Kong left his office and was met by a military jeep.

Later, five of the nationalists met over the dinner table. They decided that first they should harass the enemy in support of the Geneva Conference to end the war, and secondly, they should do everything possible to defend the nationalists against arrest by drawing the attention of the leaders of military intelligence to something else. This assignment, as usual, was given to Boun Kong.

This work was unlike any that Boun Kong had done before. Previously, they had always used guns or people for harassment. This time the situation was different, and it was natural that they had to change their methods. This was fighting without guns, without bombs, and where people were not needed; but it would nevertheless work to the benefit of the nationalists.

In the last work of the National Liberation Party for the reduction of French power, they printed a newspaper to publicize the situation. News from the *Pathet Lao* newspaper of Vientiane, issue of June 29, 1954:

"King Sisavongvong of Laos, along with the Queen and the Crown Prince, went to Paris because of their concern and sorrow over the confusion and disorder created by revolutionaries. On the night of June 26, 1954, a grenade was thrown into a crowd watching a movie in the field at the Chinaimo Military Camp. Ten people were critically wounded, seven killed, and forty injured. The dead included two children and two ordinary civilians.

"On the night of Sunday, June 27-28, 1954, around 2:00 A.M., several soldiers escaped from the Chinaimo Camp and crossed to the Thai bank of the river. Then a group of the escapees returned and attempted to seize the camp with Thompson guns which belonged neither to the Chinaimo Camp nor to the French. They seized the office of the French military instructors by throwing five grenades at the sleeping French soldiers. Only one grenade exploded, injuring four men. Many people scattered when fighting broke out in the camp. The escapees were determined to seize the arsenal but were unsuccessful. In their attempt, one Lao sergeant was killed and two men wounded. Six soldiers in the camp were arrested as sympathizers.

"Those who started this revolt made their contacts long ago. The government was aware of this but treated them with indifference. The instigators of this revolt seek to bring communism to Laos. After the revolt, the Lao Government released the following announcement:

> "The Governor of Vientiane announces that due to disorder created by members of a certain party, the people are forbidden from using the Mekong River between Ban Kao Lieo and Tha Deua by day or by night. Anyone violating this order will be arrested by military or police officials for questioning and punishment. The river will be reopened for the use of the people only after a later announcement."

Boun Kong and six soldiers then escaped from Vientiane and went to the forest to wait for news from inside the city. An hour later another group of soldiers joined them. Following this the flight to the forest went on continuously, both night and day. On the second day, they counted ninety-one people, including soldiers, policemen, and civilians. They sensed a bad situation and feared a lack of food, so they crossed to the Thai side of the Mekong and hid in the forest in the area of Tha Bo district. The escapees came in both large and small groups. Those who escaped by day had better luck than those who escaped by night; the latter were always fired on by the enemy. On the third night, Boun Kong returned to Vientiane to observe things for himself. He saw soldiers arresting various groups of people. The forests were full of people preparing to escape. Finally the question of the arrests died down, although there was a reward announced for Boun Kong's capture. The price went up continuously, as though he were being sold at an auction. At first the reward price was 500,000 kip, then it went up to a million, later to two million, and finally to five million. The whole issue was finally ended when M. Mendès-France agreed to sign the Indochina peace treaty in Geneva on July 22, 1954, forty-two days after the nationalists' lightning-battle escape. They had shown the French

their craftsmanship and had left many French corpses. Within five days, more than 100 of the escapees who had fled and hidden were arrested by the Thai authorities and sent to concentration camps in Pak Thong Chai district, Khorat Province. Sensing a bad situation, Boun Kong prepared rice and put it in the packs of everyone still with him. Then they crossed the border into their fatherland and headed toward Phu Khao Khwai to resume the role of lions in the forest.

## Helping H. E. Katay Become Prime Minister

Two months after the ceasefire, the old government resigned, and a new government was appointed to replace it. Internal events were still in confusion, and the people were suspicious, afraid of war, and afraid that Laos would again become another country's colony. The Lao were still divided into the Free Lao side in Phongsaly and Samneua, and the nationalist side, made up of soldiers who had escaped from the French Union Army.

Because of this division and the confusion it caused, it was necessary to find someone who could bring the scattered Lao people together and make them one; someone to build peace for the people and lead the country to prosperity. Such a person was not difficult to find. Wherever one looked, the obvious candidate was Prince Phetsarath. All the peoples of Laos put their lives, their happiness, and their sorrows in the hands of this Prince, but what could he do? He was still in exile in a foreign country. They then turned to a man who was trusted by Prince Phetsarath to be Prime Minister during this transition. Since he was the one most trusted by the Prince, the nationalists supported him to become Prime Minister by using the pen to gain the support of the political representatives. They printed documents of national liberation asking the entire Kingdom of Laos, from the King to the civil servants, the civilians, and the elected politicans, to eliminate the influence of the French.

## Copy of Document

TO: The Respected Representatives of the People

Because our Lao politics have become your direct responsibility, you are the representatives who must be the voice of the people and must decide things according to your vow to serve the country.

Consequently, in the name of the nationalists, we submit to you the following petition:

In the recent war, many Lao people lost their lives and much of their property was destroyed. Now the war is over, but we Lao, who are small in number, are divided into various parties and groups: the government side, Prince Souphanouvong's side, and Prince Phetsarath's side. Each group holds that it has the perfect right to rule. This being the case, the territory of Laos is also divided, since no side will yield to any other. In this situation, it is natural that our nation will be troubled and confused, and Lao people will kill each other until one side or the other is destroyed.

In order to avoid this and free ourselves from national danger, we ask you, the voice of the nation, to support an appropriate candidate for Prime Minister of the new government. All our people are good, but good in their own ways. If you fail to find someone with ideals appropriate to the situation described, we will long be sorry.

Consequently, we advise that the best candidate in the present situation is H. E. Katay Don Sasorith. This man, who is capable of solving our national problems, is appropriate for your support as Prime Minister of the new government.

With respect,
The National Liberation Party

## Letter of the National Liberation Party to the King Prior to Elections to Limit the Influence of the French

We ask that this petition be conveyed to the Crown Prince of Laos.

Inasmuch as the situation of the country has come to the point where Your Royal Highness will take full responsibility for the destiny of the nation, the people request an audience to express their hopes.

Your Highness' small nation is at this time divided into two or three parts. The peoples' opinions and their trust are divided, such that apart from their trust in Your Highness, they still prefer Prince Souphanouvong and Prince Phetsarath. With the trust of the nation so divided, our country has fallen into a critically dangerous state. If Your Highness allows this situation to continue, the Lao people will continue to fight and kill each other endlessly, because each side holds that they are Lao citizens and that they are right.

There is a way for Your Highness to avoid this great danger without sacrifice. To demonstrate to the world and to history that Your Highness has the intelligence and ability to arrange the nation's peace, we ask Your Highness to choose a new government with the policy of uniting all the divided Lao people to build a country that is peaceful and prosperous and the equal of all civilized nations.

We ask Your Highness to sacrifice the partisan views of those who have brought trouble to the nation, and will bring new trouble at this time. This has come to be the burden of Your Highness. Your Highness alone has this responsibility.

The people trust and have put their lives in Your Highness' hands and have started no movements. We hope that Your Highness will be pleased to stop this trouble and that it will pass easily. We hope that Your Highness does not intend to let those Lao who are truly the servants of Your Highness' land become Your Highness' enemies. Thus we beseech Your Highness to select as head of the new government someone appropriate for the situation, someone who loves the nation, the religion, and the throne, and who wants true peace.

The majority of the people believe that H. E. Katay Don Sasorith is the most appropriate person in the present political situation. Thus we beseech Your Highness to let him establish the new Government.

May it please Your Highness.
The National Liberation Party.

The result of this petition was that the King instructed Crown Prince Savangvatthana to appoint Katay Don Sasorith to form the new government. The National Assembly, as the representatives of the people, approved it unanimously.

The government of H. E. Katay Don Sasorith was obstructed by the intrusion of other powers and was not able to manage things fully.

However, it was successful in passing an amnesty law and in setting the direction of the country to progress in peace and happiness. The Katay government survived for only fifteen months.

The Katay government was replaced by a new government under the ingenious Prince Souvannaphouma as Prime Minister. He united the Lao people to invite Prince Phetsarath, whom he held to be the glory of the country, to return to the people as the country's servant. The Prince unconditionally accepted the invitation on July 15, 1956. The government then opened negotiations with the Free Lao side (Pathet Lao), and on August 5, 1956, they unexpectedly agreed on all issues.

Then the era of the Commander of the Mekong Valley came to an end. He had been sold and resold; he had hired himself to dig earth and chop wood as a farmer, had had a price on his head, had been through many arrests, and had lived as a lion or a deer in the forests, without a country and without knowing how long he would have to remain there.

# CHAPTER 7

# THE OUTSPOKEN OFFICIAL OF VIENTIANE, BONG SOUVANNAVONG

Prince Souvannaphouma became Prime Minister in 1950, during a time when the French still had absolute power. The Lao government then was made up of officials who still preferred having the French there. In fact, the majority of the government leaders were Francophiles, such as Phoui Sananikone and Kou Abhaivong. These people took full political power, but in spite of this, there was still a counterbalancing opposition made up of many others, especially Bong Souvannavong, who had held the position of Chairman of the Assembly and now has the honor of being the representative for Vientiane. He was an official of clean hands and bold speech, a man worthy of the country in the present period. The reason he always took the role of opposition, even though the government was made up of people he personally respected, was because of the political situation.

Bong Souvannavong was the owner of the *Lao Mai* ("New Lao") newspaper, which startled the country and shook the throne of government with each issue that was published. Nevertheless, the government of Laos was one that politicians could respect, for the government did not respond violently but rather countered sharp speech by "inviting" the speaker to be confined for a while to calm him down.

Later during this government's tenure, there was popular dissatisfaction, movements among various young soldiers, and the beginning of a Liberation Group in 1953. For example, a minor revolt arose in Vientiane in June, 1954. Although Bong had no skill in using weapons, his words were better than swords, and his attacks shook the country. The final result was that the National Liberation Unit, although unsuccessful in overthrowing the government, which was protected by French influence, nevertheless won the hearts of the people. *Thao* Bong was accused of leading a nationalist movement and was sent to cool off in prison.

Later, there was the case of the murder of Kou Voravong, the Minister of Defense. The government's confusion continued to increase, and *thao* Bong's newspaper increased its attacks. The result was that he was imprisoned yet again, charged with collaboration with Lieutenant Boun Kong and *nai* Udom in committing this murder.

The government's ordering of *thao* Bong's arrest caused dissatisfaction among the people, who felt that Bong had to be innocent because Kou Voravong was his relative. Kou's wife was Bong's younger sister. How could Bong possibly have been involved? Although Kou was one of the Francophiles, his blood lines still linked him with Bong. Who would believe that he could have killed Kou? Even though the government tried to find a witness against him, the spirit of Vientiane still protested that he had been jailed without charges.

Later, another person who also spoke boldly appeared. He was the nephew of *thao* Bong, named Thammarath Souvannavong. He published a newspaper called *Sinlatham* ("Morality") which continually attacked the government. On May 1, 1956, the paper printed a strong article, and the government met and decided to arrest those responsible. They made the usual charges of revolt, and Thammarath Souvannavong shared the fate of Bong Souvannavong.

The article which resulted in action being taken against many men was as follows:

"Labor Day"

"Every year on the first of May, workers all over the world have a national holiday. Governments of foreign countries stop all work and close all offices. Regardless of whether they are civil servants or workers, all take a holiday supporting the customs of mankind. However, we have observed that our government has no generosity toward workers.

"Consequently, we of *Morality* invite all our brothers, whether workers or civil servants, unanimously to stop work on Labor Day in order to demonstrate our respect for labor and to demonstrate our good will toward the workers and farmers of all countries. . . ."

(The subsequent passage involved an attack on the Crown Prince's action in forming the government. The writer believes that it would be inappropriate to disseminate it as it would influence royal relations, and so it is not included here.)

"The following issues are public issues from the point of view of the people:

"Things Our Brothers Should Know

"Point 1. The Prime Minister, Prince Souvannaphouma, has taken money from the national budget to build a house on his own land in Nong Thevada, a sum of about 160,000 kip.

"Point 2. On the day that Prince Souvannaphouma received the endorsement of the Assembly as Prime Minister, his wife sent money to France, a sum of 11,250,000 francs.

"In the old days it was said that 'if you eat with ghosts, you will obey ghosts.' As in this saying, he who has a French wife will obey the French.

"The Problem of the Lao-Thai Company

"We have learned that the Lao-Thai Company cannot account for one million baht. We do not know whether this loss was in business deficits or whether it just disappeared, although we feel it is strange that the money missing is in baht.

"It is about time the government started controlling large companies, particularly the Lao-Thai Company, because this company may be a threat to the country.

"Mercantile circles report that there have been shortages of gasoline on the market for a long time. This has created difficulties for transportation, and although it has affected the national economy, it appears that the government has made no attempt to seek any solution.

"At the Bank of Indochina, kip have been exchanged for dollars and francs and are leaking out of the country. Specifically, on Saturday, the 28th of last month, 578,106 dollars (20,233,700 kip) leaked out by way of Bangkok; 18,180,000 francs (1,818,000 kip) by way of Paris, and 16,710 dollars (584,850 kip) by way of Germany. Altogether the amount was 22,636,510 kip.

"This money was used for things of no benefit whatsoever. This demonstrates to us the government's extravagance and leads the people to consider what effect this outflow of millions of kip per day has on the national economy.

"The rumor among merchants, both within and outside the country, is that dollars had already left the National Bank at the beginning of last month. *Thao* Bou, the assistant director of the bank, helped in signing and approving sixteen license forms for only one company. These license forms were released before those of other people, which were stopped by the Minister of Commerce. Within Laos, there is a rumor that Bou, the assistant director of the National Bank, has a great deal of money. If this is true, the officials should investigate to see where all of it came from.

"As for prostitution, the custom of Vientiane's present high officials, it appears that both prostitution and high society French ballroom dancing are plentiful these days.

"We have seen many things in the Sihom market, which is where the workers eat. We have observed that it is filthy. It appears that the government promotes only the wealthy restaurants such as the Lao restaurants beside Vat Ong Teu. If there were an outbreak of cholera, only the lower classes or workers would die."

(1) Later, on May 3, 1956, there was an afternoon cabinet meeting. Following the meeting, an arrest warrant was issued by *thao* Nhouy, the Minister of Interior, ordering the arrests of *thao* Thammarath, director of the *Morality* newspaper; *maha* Butdi, a merchant, who had been a candidate several times but was never elected; and *thao* Prasith, a civil servant in the Ministry of Interior. Of these three men, Thammarath and Prasith escaped. Only *maha* Butdi was arrested, because he didn't have sufficient warning. There was no evidence against him.

(2) On May 4, 1945, the following forty people were arrested: *thao* Si Muang, the Manager of the *Than Samai* ("Modern") newspaper; *thao* Khambang, a civil servant in the Post Office; *thao* Nou Pheuak, an officer in the Chamber of Commerce of the Ministry of Finance; *thao* Somchan, a contractor (who revealed the plan); *maha* La, of the Secret Police; Lt. Li, a military officer at Chinaimo, Communications Section; Lt. Sourat, military officer at Chinaimo, Infantry; *tasaeng* Sithan (head of Sithan Subdistrict); *maha* Sila [Viravong], from the Prime Minister's office; *maha* Pheuan, from the Information Division; *maha* Phrom, in the Secret Police; *thao* Maitri, occupation unknown; and *thao* On Chan, occupation unknown.

I do not know the rest of the names. It appears that those who escaped were as follows: *thao* Asa, son of *maha* Sila; and *cha tho* Pheng, head of the arsenal at Chinaimo.

(3) This group of people had been prepared for a long time by *thao* Thammarath, who was twenty-nine years old and the son of *thao* Nak. *Thao* Nak was the younger brother of *thao* Bong Souvannavong and had been a student at the German school. He wrote in the *Morality* newspaper, continually attacking the government.

(4) On April 30, 1956, before their arrest, the following people met to proceed with their affairs: *thao* Thammarath, *maha* Butdi, *thao* Somchan, *thao* Prasith, *thao* Kong, and *thao* Khambang.

*Thao* Thammarath announced at the meeting that a revolt would be staged, but *thao* Somchan would not agree. He argued that if violence erupted, he could not go along with it. In the end *thao* Somchan revealed the plan to the government.

Later the police announced the arrest of these people as rebels.

Announcement of the Police Department

"Because there is a group of people (including Thammarath Souvannavong, *maha* Butdi Surayasak, *nai* Prasith, and Somchan Pathomvong as leaders) who have formed a secret organization in cooperation with the enemy and with foreigners to create political disorder and disunity, they are the enemies of the throne and the constitution. These men have laid plans for rebellion to eradicate the present political and administrative order, have insulted the authority of the Crown Prince and maliciously smeared the Prime Minister and other ministers, and have done nothing but disturb the peace of the country. The official police have observed the activities of these men, and, seeing that they were in violation of the laws of the country, requested authority from the courts to arrest twenty-nine men on the morning of May 4, 1956. The most important of them are the following three men: Thammarath Souvannavong, the son of Nak Souvannavong, who lives in Vat Ong Teu; *nai* Prasith, editor of *Morality*; and Asa Viravong or *thao* Phit, the son of *maha* Sila Viravong, who lives in Nong Pla Nai District. They have escaped and are hiding in Vientiane and have not yet been arrested.

"Consequently, the populace is cautioned that if anyone sees these three men anywhere, they should report it to the official police. If they are captured we will be grateful and give a substantial reward. If anyone conceals them, he will be punished according to the law.

"Vientiane, May 4, 1956

"Director of the Police

"(Signed) Prince Somsanith."

Though they were arrested every time the political situation became critical, the people supported them and approved of them rather than fearing them. When *thao* Bong ran for election as representative of Vientiane, he did much better than the other candidates. *Thao* Phoui, who had complete power and spread piasters faster than he could

have printed them himself, was defeated by *thao* Bong, who spoke bravely through the newspapers. In one square foot of newspaper, his strong and eloquent words were sharp as the sword of *khun* Phaen.[1] Influence, money, and power lost to public opinion. It was the first step of the people of Vientiane to demonstrate to the colony-seekers that the people preferred good candidates to piasters. Even Souvannaphouma himself was not brave enough to run in the election.

Later on, America, the millionaire of the world, which had a heart like the mother goddess, sacrificed no less than $20 million to help Laos improve its economy. In this effort, America first gave a free hand to the government of that period. *Thao* Katay was the Prime Minister, but the Lao government had no experts in commerce. By analogy, it was like moving up from a helper in a store to the man behind the counter. In the end they lost to the tricks of the professional merchants. It was a lucky star for Thailand, since the Lao government opened the door for merchants from Thailand to come to Laos. Vientiane was full of merchants, 80 percent of whom were from other places. People using Thai names, such as *nai* Lek Chaidi, *nai* Thai Chaikwang, *nai* Ma, and *nai* Chang, all of them experts, flowed continuously to Vientiane. They moved at once to contact those with money and power. The way bribery was conducted in Thailand was imitated in the Vientiane market. The civil servants of Vientiane, whose hands were clean, because they had never had evil opportunities, began to have rotten spots on their hands, and the rot spread everywhere, to almost all places. Companies rose like mushrooms. Each wanted to get a handful of dollars and leave. They did not worry about the goods, and although the invoices showed high quality goods, what was in fact sent was different. The world has never seen such commercial practices. For example, things ordered for high prices turned out to be boxes of bricks. Goods such as fish sauce were only salt water with red coloring. The honest people of Vientiane opened the boxes and almost fainted. What was this? Instead of valuable hardware and metal, there was sand, because both sides, the senders and the receivers, had collaborated only for the dollars. They were not concerned about whether the goods sent were real or not. The good intentions of the American government were thwarted because of the officials and merchants.

*Thao* Bong, who spoke bravely, began heavy attacks against the government in the papers. His good intention was to attack those in the government who were spoiled with dollars sent to help the people. The amount which had been spent was equivalent to $10 or around 200 baht per person for the entire population; but as it turned out, the people received nothing of value and nothing to eat. *Thao* Bong, who spoke briefly, was retaliated against and was smeared as attacking the American government. He was charged with preferring the Red Chinese and with having become a communist. He was splashed with red paint and dirt, even though he was pure and was a clean democrat with whom no one else could compare.

When he was at the end of the road of newspaper attacks, the situation still had not improved. Corruption, dishonest commerce, and cheating in the administration all flourished. *Thao* Bong attacked the government heavily and was branded as a communist.

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[1]*Khun* Phaen is the swashbuckling hero of the nineteenth-century Thai epic *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*. (DW)

Then he changed his tactics and attacked by proposing that the government invite Prince Phetsarath, the iron man of Laos, to return to the country. This Prince was respected by the people like the image of a god. The Prince was invited to return with the support of the people of the entire country.

The results of the proposal reached the Assembly and echoed throughout Vientiane and the entire country, including the Free Lao side. The leaders of both sides, the Prince's younger brothers, grasped the sword to clasp hands for reconciliation among Lao brothers. When the news of *thao* Bong's invitation to Prince Phetsarath became known, the government sent representatives to make the invitation in Bangkok. When the iron man agreed to return to the fatherland, it was an auspicious sign for the Lao people, and their happiness increased immediately. Prince Souphanouvong, the young lion of the Free Lao, took an airplane to Vientiane and agreed to negotiate with his older brother, Prince Souvannaphouma, the present Prime Minister. The result of their brotherly agreement was that the spirit of the Lao people, which had been startled by the killing and the inducing of others to come and kill, calmed down, and there remained only the good spirit that protects the city and preserves the That Luang.[2] All of our troubles should end here. If there are other troubles in the world, they are not the concern of Laos. The job had been done according to the will of the people, and the outspoken official, *thao* Bong Souvannavong, has played an important role in the history of the nation. He belongs among those who have truly benefited the country.

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[2]The *That Luang* is the largest Buddhist stupa in Laos. It is traditionally regarded as the most sacred of Lao Buddhist sites and home of the guardian spirit of Vientiane. (JM)

24/VII
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# CHAPTER 8

## THE MURDER OF KOU VORAVONG, DEFENSE MINISTER OF LAOS

During a time of unrest in Vientiane--dissatisfaction with Prince Souvannaphouma's government, the scent of revolution among young soldiers, and revolution by the national liberators--an important event occurred.

On the night of September 18, 1954, Phoui Sananikone, the Minister of Interior, invited several of his close friends to his home for dinner. Among them were Kou Voravong and his wife. The dinner was to last from 8:00 P.M. until midnight, and it was during this time that the dreadful event occurred. Two gangsters audaciously entered the compound and hid near the window where the party was being held. With a pistol they shot and killed Kou Voravong as he was sitting in front of the window.

The government arrested and jailed Bong Souvannavong as a suspect. Officials believed that the gangsters, named Udom Luksurin and Mi, were hired killers, but they were unable to capture them. Later, in January 1955, the Thai municipal police arrested and imprisoned Udom Luksurin for a crime committed in Bangkok.

The death of Kou Voravong appeared to be politically motivated, and Phoui, in his position as Minister of Interior, quickly had Bong arrested. Later, Udom Luksurin confessed that Phoui was the one who had hired him, in a competition for influence. Bong was arrested on the charge that he had laid the plans with Lt. Boun Kong, the head of the National Liberation Unit in Vientiane, and the hiring of Udom as assassin was related to their plan to fight the government. The investigation, however, turned up no evidence to support these charges.

On September 26-28, 1955, the cremation of Kou Voravong was held at the racetrack at That Luang. The Thai government sent a representative to attend the ceremonies.

The Lao government sent a special commission to Bangkok to interrogate Udom Luksurin, who was imprisoned in the Thai Municipal Police Jail. Since Udom had been born on the Thai side of the river and was a Thai citizen, they were unable to obtain his extradition, even though he had volunteered to be a Lao government policeman and had already been jailed in Laos. Udom confirmed to the Lao government commission that Phoui had hired him as the assassin. Because of the internal logic of Udom Luksurin's testimony, everyone believed that it was the truth. Later, Kou Voravong's relatives, led by his wife, prepared the proper documentation and submitted the case to prosecute Phoui to *thao* Katay, the Prime Minister. Its text is as follows:

"We, the widow of *thao* Kou Voravong, *thao* Bounthong Voravong, *thao* Phoumi Nosavan (Maj. Gen. Phoumi Nosavan), *thao* Khamko Saiyaphum, *thao*

Phan Simukda, *thao* Nou-ing Ratanavong, Kukeo Saikose, *thao* Nouphat Chounlamani, *thao* Phouvong Nosavan, *thao* Phusong Nosavan, and *thao* Kampoui Phrachansith:

"Request to submit this document to His Excellency [Katay] for the prosecution of *thao* Phoui Sananikone and *thao* Oun Sananikone as those who plotted the death of H. E. Kou Voravong on September 18, 1954; the substance of which we will explain in the following:

"(1) On September 18 at 11:00 A.M., Phoui Sananikone ordered his secretary, Mrs. Somdi, to tell his wife to prepare for a dinner for that evening for twenty people.

"At around 12:00 noon, when Phoui left his office to go home, he asked Kou Voravong's wife if she would come to dance that evening.

"In the evening, Phoui sent a messenger to request policemen to come and guard his house. He asked for them by name but did not tell their chief what day they were wanted.

"(2) Later, at 8:00 P.M., Mrs. Ke Sananikone, Phoui's wife, came and said 'Please come: a lot of people have come already.' In a short time Kou Voravong and his wife appeared at the party.

"(3) The party at Phoui's house began with drinks, proceeded with dinner, and afterwards there was dancing until around 11:00 P.M. when the event in question occurred.

"From the time that dinner began until the time of the incident, many things were observed to be abnormal.

"(A) In planning this dinner, Phoui told his wife and Mrs. Somdi to make preparations at 11:00 A.M. the same day. Although this was not unusual, it was rather sudden. It appears that the occasion was prepared specifically to do harm which had to be accomplished within a limited time.

"(B) The fact that Phoui spoke to Mrs. Sunthon Voravong (the wife of the deceased Kou) when he came back to his house at noon leads us to understand that H. E. Phoui already had ideas concerning her family.

"(C) The request for policemen specified by name, without telling their chief exactly what time and what day, demonstrates that Phoui wanted only people that he knew and trusted to come to his house that night.

"(D) During the dinner, the host had a policeman, who was his nephew, sit to the right of Kou. This was inappropriate to the dignity of a minister. He needed his policeman nephew as a marker for the gangsters to conclusively identify Kou. Were it not for this reason, Phoui, whom all knew to be a very polite host, would not have disgraced Kou's dignity.

"(E) During the dancing, Phoui was the one who opened the windows, which normally were never opened, especially at night. When Phoui opened the shutters, Kou was sitting on a chair opposite

the window. When he had opened the window, Phoui came and sat with Kou for a short time, then got up and moved elsewhere. This leads us to suspect that Phoui intended to open the window for the gangsters. If he had opened it to let in fresh air, Phoui would have sat in the breeze opposite the window for a reasonable length of time, but he sat there only long enough to give the impression that he wanted some air, and then moved on.

"(F) During the dancing, *thao* Oun Sananikone walked in and out several times. Finally Oun went out for a long time and when he came back, he acted very abnormally. He told Mrs. Yisoun and H. E. Ounheuan's wife that he was tired and was going home early. Mrs. Sunthon, Kou Voravong's wife, overheard his remarks and teasingly suggested that he take some medicine to stay awake. A moment later the shooting took place. It is not necessary to use much profound thought to realize that *thao* Oun was the one who went out to give the gangsters the signal to go ahead with their work. Oun's final statement when he came back--that he wanted to go home--demonstrates that the incident was about to take place and Oun did not want himself and his wife to be present.

"(G) Throughout the dinner and the entertainment that night, Phoui's wife said that Phoui was acting abnormally, indicating that there was some danger afoot. Besides that, Phoui tried to follow his wife around and sit next to her at all times.

"(H) The shooting occurred immediately after Oun came in from outside, and took place through the window that Phoui himself had opened. A cement bench had been placed in front of the window for the assassin to stand on and reach up to fire the shot.

"(I) The movements of the assassin, from the time he left his hiding place to the time of the shooting, demonstrate that he had received explicit orders, enabling him to leave his hiding place and fire the shots immediately.

"If it had been a shooting without an inside accomplice, the gangster would have had to walk to where he could see the faces of the people in the house, and when he had identified the one he was to shoot, he would have had to take out his gun and shoot him. However, in this case, the gangsters were already prepared to shoot. One followed the other with the cocked gun in his hand, looking only for the bench to step up on and fire the shots. Consequently, it is a certainty that in shooting Kou, the gangsters acted according to the orders of someone in Phoui's house, probably none other than Oun and Phoui themselves.

"In summary, the above observations point to the conclusion that the intention to shoot Kou was that of Phoui and Oun themselves. They were the ones to organize it, from finding a hiding place for the assassin to prearranging the site of the shooting. Both the position and the time were calculated in advance, and the shooting was probably done

with Phoui's own weapon, since the gun that Udom used was a Colt 11-mm. army pistol, the kind that Phoui himself always carried.

"If one considers the evidence up until the time of the shooting, it could only have happened in this manner. However, there is other evidence after the incident occurred which further indicates that Phoui Sananikone had intended the shooting:

"(A) After Kou had been killed and his body had been taken to his home for the customary rituals, Phoui demonstrated total disinterest. He tried to hide in his house under the secure protection of the police.

"(B) Phoui, who was the Minister of Interior and held power over the investigation, expressed various objections toward the investigation, which he himself should have been the one to order.

"Phoui should have ordered a complete investigation to explain things clearly and cleanly. This should have been done, first of all, to insure justice, and, secondly, to clear up any misunderstandings, which for the most part concerned Phoui himself, as he was the host and it was in his house that the incident occurred.

"(C) Besides his refusal to have an official investigation, Phoui himself organized a private investigation with the primary intent of watching the activities of Kou's relatives. Phoui assigned this private investigation to people he already knew and who probably had already used Udom in secret work of their own. These investigators appear to have lost the gun used in the killing. When the military chief of staff ordered it sent to the arsenal, a false report was made saying that a communications officer had long ago lost it in a field somewhere and that it might have fallen into the hands of Udom.

"(D) Concerning the police who had the responsibility to provide security on the night of the incident, Phoui, in his status as Minister in charge of the police, took no interest whatsoever in criticizing them for deficiency in their duty.

"(E) The attempt to arrest Udom, who was officially understood to have been Kou's assassin, appeared to have been carried out more for Phoui's interests than for the sake of honest law enforcement. It was later learned that Udom hid in his own house in the village of Chieng Da. If Phoui had tried to arrest him straightforwardly, he probably could have come up with a plan and a sufficient force to do the job. Instead, he sent only ten men, who did a superficial job and gave Udom the opportunity to escape.

"The evidence of the second section again very clearly demonstrates that Phoui was the one with the intention to kill, because when he saw his plan succeed he tried to conceal it with a groundless investigation and with inadequate enforcement.

"Even stronger than the evidence already reported is Udom's straightforward testimony to the Thai police and to the special Lao commission, testimony which was sent when he was arrested and jailed in Bangkok. That testimony said that Phoui himself laid the plans for Udom to enter and do the shooting, and that Phoui himself was the one who compensated him according to the details that Your Excellency [Katay] knows from the report of the special Lao commission.

"On the grounds of what we have reported above and on the straightforward testimony of Kou's assassin, we request to inform Your Excellency that we guarantee that H. E. Phoui and *thao* Oun were the ones who laid the plans and who advised Udom to destroy the life of H. E. Kou. Consequently, we submit the documents of this case to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice to request that you proceed according to the law in order to provide us justice."

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The fact that Katay, the Prime Minister, still has not ordered the arrest of Phoui according to the petition of Kou's relatives has an interesting explanation.

(1) Phoui was an important person in government circles and had the full support of the French government. He also had support in the army. A quick arrest would have disturbed the peace.

(2) The fact was that Phoui, in the name of the Ministry of Interior, ordered the arrest of Bong, and proceeded with the charge that Bong had hired the assassin. Given this, the Prime Minister could not have proceeded with the case against Phoui immediately. It was the kind of dilemma that anyone in Katay's position could not have done otherwise. Thus the conditions of the case remained obscure, and it was left to people to pass judgment for themselves.

Due to political pressure, Prime Minister Souvannaphouma's Royal Lao Government had to wage seven years of continual war with the Free Lao Prince. Then the French tried to suppress Prince Souphanouvong's Free Lao movement and secure its unconditional defeat, but to the misfortune of the French their army was unable to win the battle. French morale declined, and they fought without purpose against Prince Souphanouvong, who was aided by Ho Chi Minh's forces. The bravery of the Free Lao increased along with their expertise and their endurance. On the government side, the conscription of soldiers increased, but their training period was short, and the majority were boys too young to fight in rough terrain.

In 1953, Prince Souphanouvong's Viet Minh force tested the government's resistance with military maneuvers verging on the environs of Luang Prabang. Then they retreated and in December 1954 and January 1955 marched a large army into Thakhek province, where they launched an offensive to test the resistance in the Plain of Jars. Then they withdrew their army to collect food in various places. These maneuvers sapped the strength of the government and lowered its morale. The fact was that the Lao government was unable to outdo the forces of the Lion of the Sip Song Chu Thai. Within, there was a reaction among the young soldiers in all of the government-held provinces. Their distress increased, and the national liberators waged revolts several times. Even

though the revolts were unsuccessful, they caused the government to lose a great deal of prestige. The national liberation unit had great numbers of civilians under Lt. Boun Kong as their chief knight, as was told in an earlier chapter. Given the pressing situation, the people's dissatisfacti..., and the propaganda attacks, the government suffered daily criticism. Various groups of soldiers were in continual revolt. Many officials of brave speech arose, from Bong Suvannavong to Katay, and attacked the government without respite. The government's position was comparable to trying to stand on a capsizing raft, and it was at that moment that Kou Voravong's murder occurred. On November 17, 1954, Prince Souvannaphouma's government, during whose tenure this incident had happened, came to an end, and the Prince resigned as Prime Minister. He was unable to maintain the situation and a new Prime Minister had to be chosen.

A struggle over this choice broke out after Prince Souvannaphouma's resignation. There were many candidates for the office. The people preferred Katay, the deputy chief of the party, who tried to bring together people from various parties. Those preferred by the French, especially Phoui, were supported by the influence of francs and piasters; but no matter how much money was poured in, the hearts of the people could not be won. Phoui tried everything possible to win political control, but he could not escape the judgment of the people who believed that he was involved in the circumstances of Kou's murder.

The Crown Prince, who served in place of the aged King, appointed four different governments. Katay was designated to organize the first government, but he saw that things were not ready and withdrew. The second time, Prince Souvannaphouma was appointed but failed to win the approval of the Assembly. The third time was *phanya* Khammao's attempt, but he too could not win the Assembly's approval.

For the fourth and last time, Katay was appointed to head the government on November 23, 1954. Katay's party had only eight votes in the Assembly, the majority of votes lying with Kou's and Phoui's people. However, there was great international political pressure, a chaotic military situation, popular dissatisfaction with those who supported the French, and young officer-led support within the army favoring the national liberators. All of these influences affected the situation that led to Katay's heading the government, for he was the adversary of the French sympathizers, he had been one of the Free Lao, and he respected Prince Phetsarath. Katay proclaimed that he would heal the split between the Free Lao and the Lao government and that he would invite Prince Phetsarath to return to the capital. The people were satisfied, and although the majority of the members of the Assembly were not of Katay's party, they gave him unanimous support for the sake of unity. The new government was proposed to the Assembly and announced the substance of its policies in the following terms:

The Economy

1. Rice production will be increased.
2. Rice production will be promoted with the use of machinery rather than human labor.
3. Other agricultural production will be expanded to supplement rice as the need arises.
4. Production will be promoted to increase exports.

5. Cottage industry will be increased.

6. Support will be given for the increase of light industry such as sugar factories, soap factories, and match factories.

7. Road construction and repair will be undertaken to increase the convenience of communications.

8. The transport of products and merchandise from the rural areas will be improved.

9. Economic relations and secure commerce with Thailand will be expanded.

10. Telecommunications networks will be improved and expanded. The use of telegraph lines will be stopped because maintenance is too expensive. Radios will be used instead and will be installed in all provincial offices.

This was a proud moment in Lao-Thai history. For a hundred years the Lao-Thai land and politics had been divided. Then they met again as brothers with Katay's announcement that Lao-Thai economic contacts would be tightened. This announcement echoed among the Thai people, who had been cut off from the Lao by French interference. From then on, the Lao-Thai had close contacts because of Katay Sasorith, the short, strong statesman who had lived in Thailand as a political exile with Prince Phetsarath's Free Lao Government in resisting the influence of the French.

[Katay's] Concluding Statement to the National Assembly

I have always sought the unification of our people, including those of the Lao national liberation group which has recently been named the "Pathet Lao" party. I hope to bring them together with the Lao government, but at present there is insufficient opportunity for contacts because of the political situation. We cannot live for long without a government, but with the confidence of our respected representatives in this government, we will get to work with honesty for our countrymen. The Pathet Lao Party can return to the Lao National family and make it stable for the future. I guarantee that whenever this important work is finished this government will resign, so that the National Assembly can gather together the Lao blood of Lan Xang, from all regions and from all sides, to serve the mother-land in complete happiness for all time.

May the Country of Lao Prosper!

*Thao* Katay won in the Assembly by a vote of thirty-two to nothing and became Prime Minister in this important period.

# CHAPTER 9

## PHETSARATH IS INVITED TO RETURN TO HIS COUNTRY: PROCLAMATION OF A JOINT COMMUNIQUE OF THE LAO GOVERNMENTS

Following the fall of the government of Prime Minister Prince Souvannaphouma and Deputy Prime Minister Katay Sasorith, the new government prepared an invitation to Prince Phetsarath to return to Vientiane. In April 1956, the government sent its senior statesman, *phanya* Khammao, who had been with Prince Phetsarath in the Free Lao government-in-exile ten years earlier, to sound out the Prince's reaction. Later, a Royal Counsellor, *phanya* Muang Saen, came for an audience at the Prince's home on Wireless Road in Bangkok. The outcome was that the Prince refused to return to Laos.

He refused to return because he saw that the invitation represented only the view of the government. The people were not aware of it, and the Prince might have thought that he was being invited to be used as a hostage. When the government was unsuccessful in gaining his return, it did not tell the Assembly, because, under the circumstances, it probably would have lost face. Thus the announcement that Prince Phetsarath would be invited to return had to be postponed.

Later the people's feelings toward the Prince strengthened. The people, including the Buddhist Sangha, saw the difficulties in Laos since the Prince had left. There had been continual fighting rather than peace, and the government soldiers were tired. The United Nations ceasefire commission appointed to work with the Pathet Lao and the Lao government had produced no results, though the ceasefire agreement had been signed long ago. Thus the people came and petitioned the Assembly for a direct vote on Prince Phetsarath's return. H. E. Bong Souvannavong, the chairman of the Assembly and the Vientiane representative, brought the issue to the Assembly for its consideration. The Assembly passed the resolution on July 11, 1956, and the Prime Minister appointed a government committee of four men.

In addition, the chairman of the Assembly, on behalf of the members, appointed a committee of nine men. They flew from Vientiane to Bangkok on Sunday, July 15, 1956. The invitation committee also brought a letter for the Prince from the Patriarch of the Sangha. The committee met with the Prince for two or three days. The diplomats let them stay at the Lao Embassy with the approval of the Lao ambassador to Thailand.

The proceedings were carried out in the manner of long-separated brothers. Though Prince Phetsarath's heart was strong as iron or diamonds, it had to soften in the face of popular and Sangha opinion. Could any man who loves his country more than his own heartbeat remain abroad while his people cried for his help?

When the conditions were agreed upon, the Prince announced that he would return to Laos when the King came back from his rest-cure in Paris, and he would do obeisance to the King as the senior prince; otherwise people might misunderstand him and think he was taking advantage of the opportunity to return while the King was absent.

Various evidence was exhibited for the world to witness. Peace was coming to a small but brave and patriotic country, and it was coming by the honest guarantee of the government and people acting in good faith. Each side made its announcements, and the Prince hoped that the negotiations with Prince Souphanouvong's Pathet Lao would proceed straightforwardly. If there were disagreements and objections, the Prince, with his residence in Thailand, could act as mediator, since he was the eldest brother and was like a judge. Any other settlement would have been inappropriate. If the Prince had made the agreement on either side's territory, he might have been accused of partiality to that side. However, it would be fair if done on neutral ground in Thailand.

It is the author's view that the Prince also wanted to honor Thailand. In this agreement, he hoped for 100 percent cooperation. Even when the world extended its hands to manage affairs, things still remained a dilemma. In whatever territory the agreement is successfully concluded, it will benefit the owners of that territory and will be valuable for their history.

The various testimonies in the following documents are the stories of the requests made to Prince Phetsarath to return to Laos.

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Document #1

The Royal Kingdom of Laos
The National Assembly
Vientiane

July 10, 1956

I, Pheng Phongsavan, Chairman of the National Assembly of Laos, respectfully request an audience with the Prince-Viceroy, former Chief Minister of the Kingdom of Laos.

I ask to take this opportunity to send a committee of representatives of Laos to have an audience with you, and to convey on this occasion my highest respect and regards to your great kindness.

I respectfully inform you that the present time is appropriate for you to return to the Kingdom of Laos, because the people of the entire country request your return in order to care for your people at a time when our country faces various important problems affecting its destiny and future.

The National Assembly, which is comprised of representatives who are the voice of the people of the entire country, has unanimously resolved to ask the government and the Assembly to invite you to return to the country.

As for your title and rank as Prince-Viceroy, we guarantee to resolve this according to your wishes when you have returned to the Kingdom of Laos.

In addition, if you have any other wishes, we shall also prepare all things, including your residence, etc.

At the same time, we are confident that this time you will be kind enough to retu.n in accordance with our request in order to help build our country and enhance its everlasting progress for all the people.

May it please Your Highness
Pheng Phongsavan

The Royal Kingdom of Laos
Vat Ong Teu, Vientiane
Office of the Patriarch of the Sangha
Number 213/2499 R.K.

Document #2

July 12, 1956

I, Phrakhru Khun Manivong, Patriarch of the Sangha of Laos, ask blessings for you, Prince-Viceroy Phetsarath, former head of the Buddhist Institute.

At this time, the National Assembly of Laos has passed a unanimous resolution to invite you to return to Laos, and a government committee led by Bong Souvannavong has been appointed to represent the people of the Kingdom of Laos.

Consequently, in the name of the Sangha of the entire Kingdom of Laos, I, as head of the Sangha, manifesting its unanimous wishes, think of your great compassion for the country and the religion in an earlier time. Now we have learned with great happiness that a committee of representatives will be traveling to meet with you. We would like to accompany this committee or appoint a committee of the Sangha, but this would be inappropriate. Therefore we have written this document instead, and have entrusted it to the representatives in order to request that you return to Laos to help the people of the country and to uphold the religion.

Furthermore, you have sacrificed your honor and prestige as a political exile living in a foreign country in order to work for full independence and for the maintenance of the religion, which all of the people of the entire country believe in more than in their own lives. Now all of these aims have succeeded through the power of your exertions and your compassion, which both in the past and at present have been the reasons why the people, including the Sangha, high and low, in every district, remember you and have unfailingly engraved that memory in their hearts.

With virtue and great happiness, I, in the name of the Sangha, send you our blessings with this document and request that you return to Laos in accord with the invitation of the committee of representatives and the Sangha in order to govern the country and glorify the Sangha in its everlasting progress.

May it please Your Highness
The Patriarch, Chairman of the Sangha
Phrakhru Khun Manivong

Document #3

Official Invitation to His Majesty,
the former Viceroy of the Kingdom of Laos, now residing in Thailand.

The committee of representatives of the people of Laos has brought this petition to present to you.

We, in the name of the people and the Sangha, in our position as representatives of the people of the entire country, with unanimous loyalty and concern for you at all times, come to ask you to receive our loyalty and request you to return to the fatherland, following the continual good wishes of the Lao people.

We have come to invite you in order to convey the wishes of the people of the entire country and the wishes of the King and the government, which were unanimous in the National Assembly. Consequently, this committee of representatives of the people and the government was appointed to meet with you in order to invite you to return to Laos. You have been in a foreign land for twelve years; you have sacrificed your happiness for the benefit of the country. The Lao people are proud and will not forget.

Thus we implore you to accept this invitation to return to Laos according to the wishes of the people, who at this time are waiting for you.

Your return to Laos will demonstrate to the people of foreign countries and to the Lao people your loyalty [and dedication to] the happiness and honor of the people of the entire country.

May it please Your Highness.

The Committee of Representatives of the Lao People with the Permission of the National Assembly.

H. E. *Phanya* Borihansuksa (Bong Souvannavong)
*Phanya* Paccanukvichit (Pao Vanthanuvong)
Representative Champa Phrommachan
Representative Bounthong Voravong
Representative Ouan Buntham
Representative Khamphrao Bouppha
Representative Ouan Vinayya
Representative Maha Kou Souvannamethi
Representative Soukhamthat Chounlamany

[Document #4]

(Copy)

Memorandum of the invitation to Prince Phetsarath to return to Laos. There were two committees that invited the Prince to return:

(1) On July 11, 1956, in a message from the Prime Minister No. 176/99, the government appointed Ngone Sananikone to head a committee consisting of H. E. Chao Somsanith, H. E. Thong Suthivongnonrath, and H. E. *phanya* Khammao.

(2) On July 12, 1956, in a message from its Chairman No. 11/99, the National Assembly appointed H. E. Bong Souvannavong as chief of the committee consisting of *phanya* Pao Vanthanuvong, Champa Phrommachan, Ouan Vinayya, Ouan Bountham, Maha Kou Souvannamethi, Bounthong Voravong, Khamphrao Bouppha, and Thao Soukhamthat Chounlamany.

Both committees met with Prince Phetsarath at his residence at 110 Wireless Road in Bangkok on Sunday, July 15, 1956, from 10:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M.

H. E. Ngone Sananikone presented the documents that had been prepared and said, "We of both committees, representing the government and the people, invite you to return to Laos.

"In accordance with your wishes and the wishes of the people, Laos will be independent and united. At this time, the following things have been successfully accomplished:

"1. As for unity, Laos has come together as one kingdom under the King as the supreme head.

"2. As for independence, all countries know that Laos is an independent country and has been accepted as a member of the United Nations.

"Recently, the Peking government sent an official letter inviting the Lao government to exchange visits of friendly relations between neighboring countries. The Lao government answered that it would do so and is preparing to go in a short time.

"Moreover, the Soviet government, like many other countries, sent an official letter recognizing the independence and unity of Laos and requested diplomatic, cultural, and economic relations.

"As for the internal political situation, there is relative peace, though there are difficulties in some places such as Phongsaly and Samneua. Concerning this, the government of the kingdom will soon open negotiations with Prince Souphanouvong in order to conclude an agreement in complete peace.

"Therefore, we of the two committees request the Prince to return to Laos in order to help the people."

H. E. Bong Souvannavong presented the following documents:

1. The document by which the chairman of the National Assembly appointed the committee;

2. The official letter of the Patriarch of the Sangha of the Kingdom of Laos, No. 213/R.K., dated July 12, 1956;

3. The official letter of the Chairman of the National Assembly dated July 10, 1956; and

4. The official letter of the committee of representatives who came to make the invitation. These documents were read in the meeting and have been excerpted in this memorandum.

Prince Phetsarath answered the two committees as follows:

"I extend my deeply-felt thanks to the two committees which have come to invite me to return to Laos, and ask you to convey my thanks to the government and the Assembly, who together came to present the invitation to me at this time.

"Restoring the independence of Laos has been my determination since the end of 1913, when I returned from France. It is not true that this has been my goal only from 1945. I will now tell you the circumstances from the beginning, since this is an issue about which I have never been able to speak freely. I entered the civil service in the Public Hall of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang in 1914. This was the first year that the French set up the civil service administration of all the provincial capitals of the colony of Laos, except for Luang Prabang Province, which was under the King. The important characteristic of this organization was that civil servants of each district had to be people who were born and had lived in that district. They could not serve in other districts, and all districts within a province came under the French Commissioner who served in that province.

"The organization was set up following our customs of administration of the time. The people of each district understood that their motherland had an area limited to their own district, and they believed that other districts were like other countries. This was the case because, apart from Luang Prabang Province, there was no royal administration left from earlier times. Consequently, each district considered itself independent and alone.

"In 1917, High Commissioner Garnier had M. Banneman revise the civil service administration and appointed me as an adviser. I used this opportunity to transfer civil servants in each province to serve in every district of that province according to the system used in the civil service administration of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang. This transferring and moving of officials was a new step which gave the civil service administration a much wider perspective.

"In 1920, when this administrative system had been used for three years, I revised it again, implementing the important policy that the service had the power to transfer civil servants to serve in other areas according to their needs. I also instituted country-wise secretarial examinations, though the Kingdom of Luang Prabang was governed by royal decree. Civil servants of all ranks and divisions changed their duties in all provinces, regardless of whether they were northern Lao, central Lao, or southern Lao. This allowed the Lao people to come to know officials of all regions and encouraged greater cooperation. Although there were some civil servants who did not have this broader vision, did not understand my objectives, and thought that I hated them because they were transferred far from their homes, I paid no attention to their criticism. From that time on, the administration of Laos has been systematic, the people have understood, and it is apparent that cooperation among the Lao people has increased.

"In 1928, France passed a resolution that the entire area of Laos, including the Kingdom of Luang Prabang, would become a French colony. On behalf of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang, I fought this issue with all my strength, for I saw that the French Commissioner was doing wrong.

I contacted many French politicians whom I had previously known, and was successful in stopping the resolution. Because of this, the King of Luang Prabang had the opportunity to protest the taking of Hua Phan Province (Samneua) which the French had given to Vietnam in 1895. After this protest, the province was returned to Laos and came under the King's jurisdiction in 1931 or 1932.

"In 1940 there was a dispute between France and Thailand which resulted in Laos losing all its territories on the right bank of the Mekong River. France saw that the Kingdom of Luang Prabang had lost territory, and in order that King Sisavangvong would not be disaffected, the French then consulted me and transferred Tha Khong and Phan Provinces to the King's jurisdiction. They planned to leave the area from Vientiane south for me to administer in my position as Viceroy. I did not agree, and asked them to put Vientiane Province under the crown of the King of Luang Prabang. As the King's Viceroy, I chose this route because I did not want to repeat the mistaken policy of our ancestors, who in 1707 divided the country of Lan Xang into Luang Prabang and Vientiane Provinces, a division which resulted in the Lao nation's losing its independence for the next 133 years.[1] I feared that in succeeding generations the territories might become enemies as before.

"Consequently, from 1940 on, the Kingdom of Luang Prabang was limited to three provinces. At the same time, I appointed Lao administrative governors, paired with French Indochina Commissioners, in Khammuan, Savannakhet, Saravane, and Champassak Provinces. I sought to join the kingdom and to unite Laos as it had been in ancient times. Twice I requested the French to do this, but they refused to allow it. From that time on, fighting for the independence and unification of Laos has been strongly on my mind.

"In March, 1945, the Japanese seized Laos and either expelled or arrested the French. When France failed to protect the Kingdom of Luang Prabang as promised in the 1898 treaty, the Japanese entered, and King Sisavangvong proclaimed the independence of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang, which delighted the Lao of the entire country.

"When the Japanese were defeated in August 1945, the French returned to govern Laos as before, but as Prime Minister of the government of Luang Prabang, I would not agree to this unless there was a new treaty with France. At that time, I sent H. E. Ngone Sananikone, who is sitting here now, to contact the governors and the civil servants of Khammuan, Savannakhet, Saravane, and Champassak provinces, and ask them if the people of those provinces would welcome being united with the Kingdom of Luang Prabang. I asked the governors to telegraph their answers to me as quickly as possible.

"When I received the answer that the four provinces welcomed union under the crown of the King of Luang Prabang, I telegraphed the king requesting a royal decree (on September 2, 1945). Later, on September 7, 1945, I received an official telegram from the Minister of Interior saying that the King had announced that the Kingdom of Luang Prabang would return to the French. I kept this telegram secret temporarily in order to prevent a bloody confrontation between the people and the King. There was popular dissatisfaction that the King had proclaimed

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[1]Below, p. 101, Phetsarath says 249 years. (DW)

a return to the French without listening to popular opinion, which supported an independent and united country.

"Shortly after I received answers from the four southern provinces, civil servants from those provinces serving in Vientiane came to ask me to organize the unification of Laos as quickly as possible. They were afraid that when the French returned they would obstruct such action, as they had done twice before. I waited for an answer from the King until September 15. When the appointed day passed and there was no answer, I proclaimed the union of the four provinces in my position as Viceroy and Prime Minister of the government.

"Later, on October 10, I received an official telegram from the Ministry of Interior of Luang Prabang announcing that the King had dismissed me from my position as Viceroy and Prime Minister with the charges that I had followed a political policy against the wishes of the Lao people and that I had acted without first consulting the King.

"When I received this proclamation, I telegraphed the King that I would follow his orders in every way. Then I took the telegram proclaiming the return of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang to the French, along with the telegram dismissing me from my duties, and gave them to the Lao civil servants and the Lao people. I announced that from that time on, I would have no part in the affairs of the country.

"The civil servants and people of Vientiane openly demonstrated great excitement and disappointment over this issue. They came together to form a Free Lao Government to resist the French in order to unite the country and to preserve the independence proclaimed by King Sisavangvong on April 8, 1945.

"When the Free Lao government had been formed under Prime Minister *Phanya* Khammao, who is here with us now, it telegraphed King Sisavangvong, asking him to accept the Free Lao Government as his government and requested that he give an answer within twenty-eight hours. When the deadline had passed and there was no reply whatsoever, the Free Lao Government ordered a naval military contingent to seize the palace. However, the people of Luang Prabang took control of the palace and closed it before the soldiers managed to reach the city.

"In early January 1946, I returned to Luang Prabang, where I remained until May 4. I then sought refuge in Thai territory and finally came to Bangkok, where the Free Lao Government had settled the month before. I no sooner reached Bangkok than the Free Lao Government asked me to lead our national liberation, because of my fame and influence and the long-time loyalty to me of people throughout the country. In December, I accepted the invitation of the Free Lao Government and worked to improve the military forces, which fought the French continuously until October 1949. At this time, without informing me beforehand, the Free Lao Government agreed with the French to return to Laos. When the agreement had been made and invitations received from the French, they informed me and asked me to join them. I felt that this action on the part of the Free Lao Government was incorrect according to custom. It was wrong to put their leader under the control of the government. Thus I refused to obey their orders, and they dismissed me as their leader and returned to Laos. The Free Lao soldiers, however, would not agree to return before independence. Consequently,

Prince Souphanouvong, whom I had appointed as military commander in December 1946, took the soldiers into the forests and continued to harass the French.

"As for me, I had stomach troubles, had an operation, and had to abandon both sides and remove myself from political affairs from then on. Though I had been dismissed twice, when I reflected on the good of the country, it was natural that I should think of returning to Laos if the political situation were appropriate. Would I be dismissed again, and would harm be done to me? If the future were such that the Lao people of the entire country unanimously requested me to return, with an invitation from the government and the head of the Sangha and with the approval of the King, I would be pleased and willing to accept their invitation and return to Laos to help build the prosperity and progress of our country.

"Moreover, Laos has just been united and has just recovered its independence after having been divided for 249 years.[2] This division into the Kingdoms of Luang Prabang and Vientiane cost Laos its independence and served only the private benefit of members of the royal family. It was this ancient separation of the country of Lan Xang that was the reason our independence was lost in 1707 and not regained again until our country was reunited in 1947. Laos had been dismembered and had lost its independence for a period of a full 240 years, longer than any other country in the world. Even Poland, which had been divided among Germany, Russia, and Greece from 1776 to 1918, had not lost its independence as long as Laos.[3]

"The fact that Laos is united and is an independent country equal to other countries is the reason I am pleased and willing to return to help you and all of the Lao people build our country in prosperity and progress. The timing of my return will depend on your agreement to certain minor conditions which I invite all of you to consider and to consult on again tomorrow. However, I want you to know now that my return to Laos will be only after King Sisavangvong returns from France to his own land."

## The Conditions [Memorandum]

1. Prince Phetsarath said that his return to Laos was not as important as the lives of the Lao people, who had suffered the fate of ten years of country-wide disorder. Consequently, he asked the government of the Kingdom and the Pathet Lao to come to a quick agreement so that the people of the entire country would be united and would have a good standard of living.

The committee replied that negotiations with the Pathet Lao would begin very soon, as soon as an appropriate site was decided upon.

Prince Phetsarath commented that according to his information, the negotiations would be held in Luang Prabang. Furthermore, if both sides invited him, he would be happy to be chairman of the negotiations.

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[2]I.e., from 1707 to 1956. (DW)

[3]Poland was partitioned between Russia, Prussia, and Austria (not Greece) in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. (DW)

2. Before returning to Laos, the Prince would first wait for King Sisavangvong to come back from France. This was to guard against any misunderstanding on the part of certain people who claimed that he sought the throne. As for this charge, the Prince had asserted many times, for example on November 13, 1947, that he sought independence for Laos with no hope of personal benefit. He did not seek to become king but only wished to act in accordance with public opinion for the benefit of the entire country. Following such opinion, he proclaimed the union of southern, central, and northern Laos, as he already explained above. He repeated again that even if there were some people who demanded that he become King of Laos, he would absolutely refuse to the day of his death.

3. Prince Phetsarath acknowledged the news from the invitation committees concerning the restoration of his rank and title as Viceroy. He said he would be pleased to return to Laos in the status of a citizen without first receiving the title and rank of Viceroy.

The Prince asked that the government and the Assembly consider whether the day of his return should be determined by royal decree or by law. The two committees gave unanimous consent to this request, and thanked the Prince for the manner in which he dealt with them.

4. The Prince announced that when his conditions had been met, he would set the date for his return to Laos. However, before leaving Thailand, he needed time to reach an understanding with his dozens of creditors in order to preserve his good reputation. The creditors' loans were for the needs of the Free Lao Government and its national liberation soldiers.

The committee of representatives asked the amount owed to the creditors, and the Prince replied that it was around 600,000 baht [then = US$30,000]. The committee unanimously guaranteed that it would consider paying this debt, which had been incurred largely in the cause of national liberation.

5. Prince Phetsarath asked the government to arrange aid for Lao exiles of every level, from commoners to civil servants, and to encourage their return to Laos to help to work for the country's prosperity. The committee guaranteed that it would direct its attention to this matter, which was also the wish of the government and the Assembly.

6. The committee guaranteed that the government would repair the Sieng Keo palace for the Prince and would also give him a palace appropriate to his honor in Vientiane. Prince Phetsarath said that this should depend on whether the government saw it as appropriate for the people and the country and gave his thanks.

This memorandum was completed in Bangkok in the Lao and French languages on Tuesday, July 17, 1956, and signed by Prince Phetsarath, the committee of representatives of the government, and the committee of representatives of the people at the Lao Embassy in Bangkok.

H. E. Ngone Sananikone
H. E. Chao Somsanith
H. E. Thong Suthivongnonrath
H. E. *Phanya* Khammao

Representative Champa Phrommachan
Representative *Phanya* Pao Vanthanuvong
Representative Ouan Vinayya
Representative Maha Kou Souvannamethi
Representative Ouan Bountham
Representative Soukhamthat Chounlamany
Representative Bounthong Voravong
Representative Khamphao Bouppha

The Lao Embassy in Bangkok Document #5

State Telegram
Lao Ambassador to Minister of Foreign Affairs in Vientiane
H. E. Ngone Sananikone to the Prime Minister.

Met the first time on Sunday 15/7/56 at 9:00 A.M.

Prince Phetsarath answered us that he would return under some conditions, specifically:

1. After an agreement with the Pathet Lao.

2. After the king returns. Various conditions were raised for later consideration. Prince will help in negotiations with Pathet Lao and government with official invitation from both sides. Prince wants negotiations to open in Bangkok in his status as older brother of both sides. Prince hopes for solution. Please give views on negotiations.

Signed: Ngone Sananikone
Signed: *Phanya* Nit Singharath

Document #6

Radio Telegram

Vientiane 28 16 1645 State of Laos

Prime Minister to Lao Ambassador / Bangkok

Agree with everything H. E. Bong and H. E. Ngone have done. I accept responsibility for Prince Phetsarath's conditions. I will explain these issues to Prince Souphanouvong.

Signed: Bong Souvannavong

Document #7

Announcement

A special diplomatic committee, officially constituted by the authorities, consisting of representatives of the people and the Ministers of Laos, reached Bangkok last Saturday to meet Prince Phetsarath, the former Viceroy of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang. The Prince was the head of the resistance for the attainment of Lao unity and independence, and has been in exile in the Thai capital since 1946.

The committee informed Prince Phetsarath about the present situation of the Kingdom of Laos, which is fully independent and united and is a member of the United Nations. In the name of the National Assembly and in the name of the government, the committee invited Prince Phetsarath to return to Laos to help with the work of bringing peace to all the people, from north to south, who have long awaited the Prince's return.

When the Prince saw the fully unified and independent status of Laos, and when he saw that all levels of the Lao people still remembered him and remained loyal to him, he was very pleased and gladly accepted the invitation to return.

The day of Prince Phetsarath's return to Laos had not yet been definitely set, but he will return after King Sisavangvong's return from France and after the government of the Kingdom of Laos has first prepared various things for his convenience.

Bangkok, July 19, 1956

(Prince Phetsarath)

(Bong Souvannavong)
Chief of the Representatives of the National Assembly

(Ngone Sananikone)
Chief of the Government Representatives

[Document #8]

Prince Phetsarath's Announcement

I, Prince Phetsarath, announce to my kinspeople of the entire Kingdom that I emigrated from my homeland and have sought refuge in Thailand for the past eleven years. Now a committee of representatives of the government and a committee of representatives of the people have come and invited me to return to Laos to cooperate with all of my people in helping to build everlasting prosperity for our country, which has been my wish from the beginning.

Especially at this time, our Laos is a country that has the strength to build itself anew and to accomplish the various tasks necessary to bring about everlasting progress and prosperity. I am pleased that I will have my hands full in serving my country again and in cooperating with all of the Lao people to the best of my ability. I have received the invitation of the committee of representatives to return to Laos and to support its independence and democracy for the everlasting security of all of my people.

I hereby announce to all of my Lao kin that before returning I will wait for King Sisavangvong to come back from France. When he returns, I shall set a definite date for my own return to Laos and will announce the day for all to know in advance.

In closing, I bestow blessings on my Lao kin of every district, north and south, that you will have everlasting happiness, day and night.

Bangkok / July 20, 1956

Prince Phetsarath

After the government and Assembly representatives asked the Prince to return in the name of the people, the issue was turned over to the cabinet to present to the National Assembly. The Assembly's vote of approval was unanimous.

Furthermore, to prevent any uncertainty among those who might criticize the Prince, he explained directly and openly that *mom* Aphinaphon, his new wife, would go to Vientiane with him and be received by his original wife. She had been his mate for eleven years through times of distress and difficulty, and the Prince had depended on her in various kinds of political work. She had always endeavored to give the Prince happiness, and he would never forget.

The government contacted Prince Souphanouvong's Pathet Lao proposing unanimous brotherly agreements. When the lion of the Sip Song Chu Thai heard that Prince Phetsarath had agreed to return to the Kingdom of Laos, he flew to Vientiane to make the accords. The day after the meeting on August 5, 1956, the two sides announced the following joint communique.

[Document #9]

Joint Declaration by the Royal Government of Laos
and the Pathet Lao Forces

The Royal Laotian Government Delegation, led by His Highness Prince Souvannaphouma, Prime Minister, and composed of Their Excellencies Ngone Sananikone, Oudom Souvannavong, Thong Southivongnorath, Nou-ing Rattanavong, *chao* Somsanith, Col. Ouan Ratikoun, Lt. Col. Phoumi Nosavan, Maj. Kouprasith Abhay, and Sisouk Na Champassak; and the 'Pathet Lao' Forces Delegation, led by His Highness Prince Souphanouvong and composed of Messrs. Phoumi Vongvichit, Nouhak Phoumsavan, Phoun Siprasoeth, and *thao* Ma, met on August 1-5 in Vientiane to seek the means to settle, in conformity with the Geneva Agreement, the problems concerning both the Parties in order to consolidate the peace, democracy, unity and independence of the Lao Fatherland.

For the past five days, the negotiations have been intimate and brotherly and there has been good understanding between the two sides. The chiefs and representatives of both sides have exchanged views and agreed that tension in the world situation has decreased, and similarly tension in the Lao situation also had decreased.

In the light of this internal and external situation, the two parties are agreed to adopt the foreign policy repeatedly stated by His Royal Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister Souvannaphouma, and according to which the Government is resolved:

To follow the path of Peace and Neutrality,
To apply sincerely Pandit Nehru's five principles of peaceful coexistence,
To keep good relations with all countries, in particular, with neighboring countries,
To desist from adhering to any military alliance, and
To allow no country to establish military bases on the Lao territory apart from those foreseen in the Geneva Agreement.

Such a policy is in conformity with the interests of the entire Lao People.

In order to create a good atmosphere for the negotiations and favorable conditions for the integration of all Lao citizens in the National Community, the two Parties have acknowledged the necessity of proceeding with the cessation of all hostilities in the two provinces of Samneua and Phongsaly. Pending the complete settlement of all the questions concerning the two Parties, the troops of each side must remain in their present positions. They must not undertake any provocative or encroaching activities; they must not increase their strength in the two provinces in terms of either men or armaments.

The Royal Lao Government Delegation guarantees to the 'Pathet Lao' Forces Delegation that an official announcement will be made informing the entire population that the Lao people have the democratic rights of freedom of speech, writing, propaganda, passage, and association, and that all Lao citizens, male and female, have the right to vote. Furthermore, the system of forcible corvée which was used in the colonial period will officially cease in order to give every person the opportunity to earn his livelihood according to his needs, following the laws of the Kingdom.

The two Parties agree that all the political organizations of the 'Pathet Lao,' such as the Front (Neo Lao Hak Sat), the youth, women, peasants, and other organizations can undertake their activities according to law as the other political parties do; that there be a guarantee of the civic rights of the 'Pathet Lao' and former participants of the resistance without discrimination; that the 'Pathet Lao' cadres and those of the former participants of the resistance be able to take part in administrative and technical functions at all levels according to their qualifications and after arrangement between the two Parties.

The question of elections and the formation of a National Union Government is still under study.

As for the peaceful settlement of the matter of the two provinces [Samneua and Phongsaly], the two Parties have reached an agreement on the principle of placing:

The administration of the two provinces under the higher authority of the Royal Government and reorganizing it identically with that of the other provinces of the Kingdom;
The 'Pathet Lao' troops under the High Command of the Royal Government and organizing them identically with those of the Royal Army.
The other details are under study.

The two Parties agree to set up a Joint Political Commission and a Joint Military Commission entrusted with the study and the settlement of the pending questions to seek the means to implement the agreements already reached. If necessary, His Highness the Prime Minister and His Highness Prince Souphanouvong will meet to endeavor to settle the questions under dispute.

The two Parties unanimously agree that these negotiations have produced beneficial results. The two Parties have come to understand each other in unanimity on many principles. The agreements have demonstrated an important victory for peace and independence for the Lao people.

Both the Parties express their joint satisfaction to the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Laos and especially to His Excellency the Chairman Samar Sen for the great efforts they have made in helping the two Parties. They hope that the International Commission will go on extending its help until all the questions are solved in conformity with the spirit of the Geneva Agreement.

| Head of the Royal Laotian Government Delegation | Head of the 'Pathet Lao' Forces Delegation |
|---|---|
| (Signed) Prince Souvannaphouma | (Signed) Prince Souphanouvong |

5 August 1956

# CHAPTER 10

## A CRITIQUE OF PRINCE PHETSARATH'S NEUTRALITY

Because of extreme difficulties in external politics, the present Lao government under Prime Minister Souvannaphouma proclaimed itself as strictly neutral, and, as a first step, opened contacts with Red China. Prince Phetsarath announced that he would establish ties with all countries, following a political policy of neutrality like that of Switzerland. Although some people were sympathetic, there were many critics. Opponents seized the opportunity to charge that Prince Phetsarath was proceeding with a communist policy, and alleged that Souphanouvong, his younger brother, was a Red; that he was backed by Red China and the Viet-Minh and wanted to go down the Red path. I, the writer of this history, should give a critique of Prince Phetsarath's ideas and policies. Whether they are right or wrong will be up to the future to decide.

There were six reasons for the Prince's pronouncement of neutrality:

1. He was the mediator between his two younger brothers, one of whom was interested in democracy, the other of whom was backed by the communist side. In such a situation, the Prince, who was like a heavenly judge handing down verdicts, could neither proclaim himself as white nor red. If conflicts arose between the two Princes, and he was on the white side, the other side would lose out. If the side backed by Red China lost out, it would be charged that he sided with democratic side. We can see why Prince Phetsarath could not return to Laos until the two sides had made an orderly agreement so that he could be strictly neutral.

2. The geographical situation is such that Laos has nine provinces which border on the territory of Red China and the Viet Minh. If the Prince proclaimed himself to be strictly white, how could the people of the nine provinces--Muang Sing, Phongsaly, Samneua, etc.--have any happiness? Only four or five other provinces have areas bordering the democratic side. From the time of our ancestors, the livelihood of the Lao people of the nine provinces has depended on taking forest products to trade for rice, salt, and clothing from the Red side. Thus it is necessary for the Prince to maintain a policy of neutrality for the happiness of all his people.

3. In saying that he could follow a course of neutrality like that of the Swiss, the Prince's words had deep meaning. Superficially, Laos does not look like Switzerland because its geography is very different. Switzerland is not a battlefield for the great powers to test their weapons. The geography of Laos, however, makes the country open for aggression, making it necessary to proclaim neutrality first and to be humble rather than boastful. Why conduct oneself so as to goad others into testing their weapons in our villages? We should rather

do good for all our neighbors so they will have compassion. If any of our neighbors are angry with us, we will be unhappy. How many dozens of years will it take to build ourselves and to bring happiness to our people? We are strict believers in Buddhism. The Prince has no desire to split our single Buddhism into separate denominations. The Lao people believe in Buddhism and a Sangha of one sect. They all believe with the same intensity. They do not choose between *vats* or Sanghas. We have seen that the Patriarch, in the name of the Sangha, issued an invitation to the Prince to return to the country. If the Prince were not firm in the religion and sincerely respectful toward the Sangha, the Sangha would not have been seriously concerned with inviting him back. Given this, how could the Prince be Red?

4. The sacred shrine of the Lao people is the That Luang, which was destroyed at the hands of the Haw, the same people as the Red Chinese of today. It is engraved in our hearts that the ancestors of the Red Chinese inflicted sadness on the Lao people, and it is a reminder to all present-day Lao. Who can be confident that the Red country will not again destroy the sacred things that the Lao people respect?

The story of the Chinese Haw destruction of the That Luang appears in the book *Surveying and Exploring in Siam* by James McCarthy (London, 1900). The Lao people encountered the cruelty of the Haw people, who burned Vientiane and other regions until they were as smooth as the surface of a drum, and they did not fight back. The history of Vientiane and the kingdom of Laos reminds us that since the ancestors of the Red Chinese built a monument of cruelty, the two races can never be intimately united in mind and spirit.

The Prince's neutrality proclamation, following the example of Switzerland, is not a challenge to Laos's neighbors. It is an instruction to the Prince's people with the objective of feeding and honoring them with a prosperous standard of living. He never dreamed of saying that the Lao were a race of warriors who would fight without retreating and would all be willing to die. In such a situation, increasing prosperity would be difficult. Slogans of all Thai races from ancient times aroused them to be warriors willing to die. They used to practice swordsmanship instead of working. If they follow this practice, how could they be prosperous like the rest of the world? When their ancestral blood lines have the blood of bravery, it is not necessary to awaken them to fight. It is more beneficial to arouse them to build their country. The objective of being neutral, like Switzerland, is to improve the domestic situation. The Swiss proclaim themselves neutral, but they have the blood of bravery. The Swiss army is as good as those of any of the great powers. Consequently, the Prince's objective is to instruct his three million people to lay aside their swords and take up their plows and harrows. Any people that has the blood of warriors and is aroused to bravery and pushed too far will remain troublesome, not earning a living, but becoming gangsters lording over their disapproving neighbors. This should not be allowed to happen.

5. Furthermore, Laos has been a monarchy for hundreds of years, from the time of the Kingdom of Nan Chao, and has respected its royalty like fathers and mothers. From ancient times to the present, we have referred to our king as "Lord of Life." Of the terms used, "Lord of the Land" and "Lord of Life," the latter carries more weight. Is there a king of any country in the world who has become a communist?

How could the Lao become a people who respect the doctrine of those who have destroyed *vats*? People like Prince Phetsarath and all

of the statesmen of Laos remember the same things, just as the Thai still remember the burning of Ayuthia or what the French did in 1893. If the Thai people do not forget, we can believe that the Lao and Prince Phetsarath will not forget these issues, either.

6. When Prince Phetsarath's grandfather was Viceroy, he fought against the Haw army, the ancestors of Mao Tse-tung. The Haw surrounded him and the Thai army was unable to come and help in time. The Haw soldiers captured him but were unable to injure him with their swords because he had a firm belief in the arts of magic and his tough skin was invulnerable. The Haw then stretched him out and impaled him with a spear until he died under their cruel hands. Who among this royal ministerial family of politicans, who are his descendants, could forget their anger and join the descendants of the Haw?

Neither Laos nor any other small country has the power to withstand the strength of communism if no one will help. If other countries want to help such small countries to remain free from the bamboo curtain, then it is necessary for them to give serious aid. Aid that is hesitant or haggling will have the harmful effect of just lowering the bamboo curtain of communism. Even if those seeking aid do not like gangsters but cannot find anyone else to give them serious help, they will necessarily become dependent like Prince Souphanouvong, the lion of the Sip Song Chu Thai. If Mr. Stanton or Mr. Donovan had given aid according to our petitions in their time, I, the writer, would not have a very long story to tell. The joining of hands with the Viet Minh was a necessity, which accords with the saying that "necessity knows no virtue."

In the future, if we carefully consider aid to Laos from the great powers, it is best to have a single creditor. No one likes to have many creditors.

In its close relations with countries at present, independent Laos has memories of the Phra That Sisongrak. In our history, King Phra Maha Chakraphat, the King of Ayuthia, and King Setthathirath, the King of Sisattanakhanahut (Lan Xang), entered into friendly relations and in 1560 began building a memorial stupa (*that*) in Dan Sai district, Loei Province, halfway between the Nan and the Mekong rivers. It was finished in 1563, equivalent to the year of the pig, 5th of the decade, on Thursday, the fifteenth day of the waxing moon of the sixth month, 391 years ago. The two kings made the following vow:

> In the year [Mahāsakarāt] 1482 [A.D. 1560], Year of the Monkey, 2nd of the decade, . . . the two kings, Phraya Dhammikarāja, king of Candapurī . . . [Vientiane, i.e., Laos], and Mahā Cakkavatti . . . , King of Srī Ayudhyā . . . [Siam], having in view the happiness and benefit of their countries, resolved to conclude a treaty of friendship. They convoked with them their heirs apparent, representatives of the Sangha, and the great officers of each country. . . .
>
> The kings brought holy water in crystal ewers, the heirs apparent in golden ewers, and the officers in silver ewers. The monks first intermingled the waters from the royal ewers, adding water from Pegu; then the water of the heirs apparent, and finally that of the officers.
>
> Next they pronounced the vow that Their Majesties the kings of [Laos] and Ayodhya, with their families and their officers, [thereby]

contracted friendship through the union of their families . . . for the happiness and benefit of the Sangha, brahmans, teachers, and all their common subjects, and that all their descendants might live in peace, one with the other, until the sun and the moon fall upon the earth. . . .

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