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Central Intelligence Agency



30 July 1992

Washington, D.C. 20505

EGBERT  
#12  
9/30/92 ME

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Analysis of Surface Markings  
Near Muang Tan, Laos (C)

REFERENCE: Senate Select Committee Memo, dated 13 July  
1992, Requesting Analysis [Redacted] (C)

1. [Redacted] showed what appeared to be ground markings resembling possible numbers and letters in rice paddies 500 meters south of the village of Muang Tan, about 43 kilometers southeast of Xieng Khouang provincial town, on Highway 42. These markings resembled (depending on the orientation) "A5!", "K5!", "15Y", or "1SY" in one rice paddy, and in the other paddy either "07" or "L0". Although a conclusive assessment of the origin and the intent of these markings may never be achieved, recent analysis has provided some additional information that may be useful in determining whether or not these markings can be attributed to a possible American POW/MIA presence. (S [Redacted])

[Large Redacted Block]

3. Our review [Redacted] indicates that the possible markings most likely were associated with the rehabilitation of terraced rice paddy dikes.

[Redacted] shows the realignment of the rice paddy containing the possible markings resembling "07/L0". The "7/L" marking [Redacted] actually resulted from a shadow cast by the rising sun on

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[Redacted]  
SECRET

[Redacted]  
Classified by [Redacted]  
Declassify on: OADR  
Derived From [Redacted]

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an angular but--at the time--disconnected section of terraced dike. [redacted] shows a completed dike with the "7/L"-shaped angle incorporated into a lengthier terrace. The "0" (actually resembling a square with rounded corners) had disappeared by [redacted] but one side of this round-cornered square had been incorporated into a new terrace dike. However, this shape routinely occurs throughout rice paddies in this region, and may represent a small diked area employed in the growing, harvesting, or processing of rice.

- Similar analysis of the [redacted] terraced rice paddy in which the possible "A5!/K5!/15Y/1SY" marking was previously observed indicated that portions of the possible "5/S", the "!/1" and the "A/K/Y" were also part of an effort to rehabilitate and realign the dike. However, only a portion of the possible markings can readily be attributed to shadow caused by the buildup in height of a section of dike wall. The remainder may result from shadows in depressions--possibly caused by excavation of soil to rebuild the dike.
- [redacted] shows that much of the roughly 90,000 square meter paddy area containing the possible markings/shadows had been rehabilitated. The repair and rehabilitation of terraced paddies is a routine occurrence in Southeast Asia. This work generally occurs in the dry season (November through April), after the rice harvest. (S [redacted])

4. We also reviewed other sources to assess contemporaneous activity in the Xieng Khouang area in 1988.

- There was a small number of [redacted] reports during this time regarding either sightings or the lack of sightings of possible American POWs in Xieng Khouang Province. Evidence cited in many of these is inconclusive, and often contradictory. (b)(1)
- A few Soviet military advisors were involved--at least in the earlier stages--in a long-term effort beginning in

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1975 to upgrade the Xieng Khouang (aka Thong Hai Hin) Airfield. Some probably were still in the area in 1988.

- The Lao resistance was active in Xieng Khouang Province in 1987-1988, although the small size of the insurgency limited it to hit-and-run attacks against government outposts in the countryside. This may account for some reports of unusual activity.
- In 1986, the US Embassy Vientiane reported on an ongoing ordnance disposal effort by the Mennonite Central Committee. The Mennonites reportedly were given access to Xieng Khouang Province (and the western sections of Savannakhet) beginning in 1977, but we are unaware if this access has produced any significant reporting of a possible POW/MIA presence. (S )

**Attachments:**

1. Explanation of Graphics
2. Line Drawing
3.
4.