

Central Intelligence Agency
National Foreign Assessment Center
Office of Imagery Analysis7 January 1981
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MEMORANDUM FOR: [REDACTED]

SUBJECT : Detention Camp East of Thakhek, Laos (S NF)

1. A detention camp is located in central Laos, 67 kilometers east of Thakhek at 17-30-46N 105-25-19E. It is in a relatively isolated area. The camp was established between April 1978 and September 1979, and has been occupied since at least 10 December 1980. The identity of the persons being held in the camp cannot be determined [REDACTED]

(S [REDACTED])

2. The camp is located in the northwest corner of a large cleared area of slash and burn activity. What appears to be a low fence is present at the tree line around part of the clearing. The camp consists of an outer area and an inner area, each of which is enclosed by a fence. (S [REDACTED])

3. The outer stockade-type fence is about 2-2.5 meters tall and encompasses an area of about 18,200 square meters. Between this outer fence and the inner fence, there are guard force quarters, a trench, an automatic weapons position, two observation towers, row crops, and what appears to be the number "52" on the ground. Also located between the two fences is a stream with two earthen dams used to impound water, probably for the row crops. The observation towers appear to be positioned for observing the inner compound. The towers are thatch-roofed and each has a platform estimated to be 3 to 4 meters above ground. The only entrance through the outer fence is at the southwest corner. A trail leads from this entrance to Route 12, about 500 meters to the west. The trail is wide enough for vehicles but no vehicle tracks are observed on December 1980 or January 1981 [REDACTED] The trail appears to be lightly traveled by foot traffic. On both 30 December 1980 and 2 January 1981, foot traffic was noted on Route 12 in the vicinity of the detention camp. (S NF)

4. What appears to be the number [REDACTED] is visible on the ground in the row crop area between the inner compound and the stream on the east side of the camp. Each numeral is 1.5 to 2 meters wide and 3 meters

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high. Both numerals can be seen on ☐ of 10 and 30 December 1980 and 2 January 1981, although the shape of the center portion of the "2" appears somewhat different between 10 and 30 December. The two numerals appear to be shallow depressions, possibly with low vegetation along some of the outer edges. We believe that if the numerals had been formed by vegetation, growth since 10 December would have enhanced their shape. This has not been the case. The location of the numerals is such that they most likely cannot be seen from either of the two observation towers because of trees located in the line-of-sight. ☒

5. The inner compound is located near the center of the camp. The compound encompasses an area of about 2,800 square meters and is enclosed by a stockade-type fence about 2-2.5 meters in height. The main entrance to this compound is near the southwest corner, with a second entrance near the northwest corner, and probably a third near the northeast corner. The inner compound contains five buildings, several sheds, and various unidentified structures/objects located mostly along the compound perimeter. The two largest buildings appear to be barracks and measure 6 meters by 26 meters by 5 meters in height. Approximately 25 people were noted within this inner compound on 30 December 1980. On 7 January 1981, two parallel fenced corridors (not visible on the attached photographs) can be seen extending from the southeast corner of the inner compound to a building in a cluster of trees. We cannot determine the function of the area under the trees. ☒

6. A gently sloped, nearly square, cleared area of about 760 square meters is located about 40 meters east of the camp. A tree was left standing in one corner of the area and a possible automatic weapons position was recently dug in another corner. This cleared area's function is unknown. A third earthen dam is located outside the fenced camp on the stream that flows through the east side of the camp. Some row crops are located along this stream outside the fence. A few buildings, which could have some relation to the camp, are located in the forest south of the slash and burn area around the camp. ☒

7. The assessment that this facility is for the detention of personnel, rather than to keep out personnel or animals, is based on several factors. First, the two stockade-type fences are not typical of defensive measures in the area nor do villages in the area commonly use fences of any type. Second, the observation towers are located outside of but near the inner compound, providing a good view of the compound but only a limited view of areas beyond the outer fence. Third, the camp is located near the edge of the slash and burn area and the vegetation has been allowed to remain against the outer fence on the northern side. Fourth, the facility was not built on high ground for control over the surrounding terrain. Finally, the low level of activity between the camp and the surrounding villages and Route 12 indicates little contact with the outside. ☒

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8. In April 1978 only a narrow foot trail, used by the villagers in the area, passed by the heavily forested area that now contains the camp. By September 1979, the primary structures at the camp had been constructed but the camp did not appear to have been completed. (S NF)

9. Enclosed are graphics showing details of the camp and the apparent numerals. If you have any questions, [REDACTED]

Attachments:
As stated

Distribution:

Original and 1 - Addressee (w/attachments)
1 - Director, NFAC (w/attachments)
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1 - [REDACTED]
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