



1961

SYNOPSIS

THE INSURRECTIONIST ISSUES OF LAOS

FROM 1961-63 and 1974-76



1974

Treatment: A study of stamps issued in 1961 by the “Neutralist” alternative government of the Kingdom of Laos and the 1974 separatist Communist Pathet Lao issues. This exhibit contains all Neutralist and Pathet Lao issues along with some pre-production artwork; proofs; and purported First Day Covers. Given the remote location in Northeast Laos where the stamps were intended to be used, coupled with an extremely low literacy rate and lack of economic activity, genuine personal local mail bearing these issues is non-existent. Laos was not a nation of writers and readers and covers bearing these issues that did go through the mail are almost entirely because of the efforts of foreign philatelists, without whose efforts these issues would remain practically unknown. No other exhibit of this kind is known in the US. **Laotian mail franked only with Royalist Kingdom of Laos stamps between 1961 and 1974 is NOT a part of this exhibit.**

Importance: The history of Laos since postal independence in 1950 has been constant political tension between pro-Western Royalists; Neutralists; and the Communist Pathet Lao which led to numerous attempts to form coalition governments in 1957, 1962 and 1973. These attempts all failed and twice within a quarter century, (1961 and 1974), the Kingdom of Laos witnessed the appearance of insurrectionary issues that challenged Royal authority and sovereignty. Both these Neutralist and Pathet Lao stamps were issued to make political statements about governance and control of territory.

The 1961 Neutralist issues arose in the aftermath of a military *coup d'état* conducted by Neutralists within the armed forces on 9 August 1960. Forced out of the capital Vientiane in December 1960, they fled to remote Northeast Laos where they issued eight stamps valid for use throughout the entire country. These Neutralist stamps were tolerated by the Royalist government as they still bore the name “Kingdom of Laos” and depicted the Royal flag. They were less tolerated by *The American Philatelist* where, in August 1962, David Torres wrote: “We strongly recommend . . . that catalogue editors refuse to recognize these [Neutralist] stamps and that collectors refrain from purchasing them” as it just puts money “into enemy coffers.” (Nowadays, the only money spent on these issues goes into the coffers of stamp dealers). These Neutralist (and Pathet Lao) issues were never “Black Blotted” by the APS.

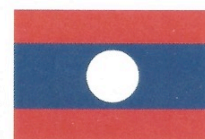
From 1963 to 1975, Laos was a proxy battlefield in a war conducted by local pro-US forces and the North Vietnamese army. This gave rise to the CIA’s “Secret War” in Laos and the “not so secret” bombing campaign conducted by US airpower that made Laos “the most bombed country in the world.” Almost as secretive is any information about the insurrectionist issues of the Pathet Lao, described in philatelic literature but seldom seen. The collapse of the third attempt at a coalition government in 1973 and the growing strength and influence of the Pathet Lao, where they controlled half the population and 60 percent of the country, led to the issuance of seven Pathet Lao stamps in 1974 (and two follow-on stamps in 1975). Making no attempt to imply any allegiance to the Kingdom of Laos, any intended use was limited to areas controlled by the Pathet Lao.

Philatelic/Subject Knowledge: What little has been published on these two issues has appeared in *The Indo-China Philatelist* and the French-language *PHILAO*. Published articles were reviewed in order to separate the possible from the probable from the speculative, being especially cautious of single source items that cannot be verified by other publications. Two examples within the available literature were that the Neutralist issues were printed in Czechoslovakia (they were printed in China) or that pocket calculators were provided in exchange for examples of the last two Pathet Lao stamps not otherwise available to the public (unverifiable). This exhibitor was successful in purchasing all nine Pathet Lao stamps in the 1980’s from a dealer in Hong Kong.



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1974

PURPOSE: A single frame exhibit of stamps produced by the two Laotian insurrection movements and their limited use.

BACKGROUND:

- The history of Laos since independence in 1950 was marked by constant political tension between pro-Western Royalists; Neutralists; and the Communist Pathet Lao.
- A military *coup d'état* in the administrative capital Vientiane in August 1960 put Neutralists in power. Routed by Royalist forces in December, the Neutralists fled to northeast Laos, established an alternative government, and issued eight stamps in 1961 accepted for use throughout the country.
- The Pathet Lao gained *de facto* but not *de jure* control of parts of eastern Laos after the Geneva Conferences of 1954 and 1962. By 1973, they controlled half the population and 60 percent of the country. In 1974, the Pathet Lao issued seven stamps, purportedly for use in areas solely under their control.

SCOPE: This exhibit contains all Neutralist and Pathet Lao issues (including two Pathet Lao follow-on stamps not available to the public). Neutralist issues were printed in China under obscure circumstances, and no preproduction material such as essays and proofs has ever become available to philately. The 1974 Pathet Lao issues were printed in Hanoi and some preproduction material for them is known; this exhibit contains two unique preproduction essays. Postal usage of both issues was limited, and genuine use of these stamps on mail is due to efforts of collectors with US government connections in Laos, and also foreign collectors who had access to local officials or who resided in other Socialist countries friendly to the Neutralists and Pathet Lao. Without their collective efforts, we would not have any archival items or postal history from these elusive issues.

IMPORTANCE:

- Both insurrectionist issues were making political statements about governance and control of territory.
- They add a complex chapter to the philatelic narrative of a country once viewed as the original key to halting Communist expansion in Southeast Asia.
- This exhibit contains all significant items known to philately from these two issues.



Neutralist, 1961
Armed Forces on the
Plain of Jars - Xieng Khouang



Pathet Lao, 1974
Proof with printer's guidelines
Battle of Xieng Khouang



Map courtesy of National Geographic Society
Used with permission

EXHIBIT PLAN:

1. Neutralist Issues
2. Pathet Lao Issues
3. Epilogue

Key items are outlined in Red