

Author: Ryan Wolfson-Ford	Lesson Unit: US Foreign Policy During the Cold War	Lesson Title: The US Involvement in Laos during the Vietnam War
Age / Grade:	11 th Grade	
Duration:	1 Class Period @ 47min.	Date: 7/3/2018
Content Standards:	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11–12.4: Present information, findings and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed and the organization, development, substance and style are appropriate to purpose, audience and a range of formal and informal tasks.</p> <p>CA HSS Learning Standards:</p> <p>11.9.Students analyze U.S. foreign policy since World War II:</p> <p>11.9.3: Trace the origins and geopolitical consequences (foreign and domestic) of the Cold War and containment policy, including The Vietnam War</p> <p>11.9.4: List the effects of foreign policy on domestic policies and vice versa (e.g., protests during the war in Vietnam, the “nuclear freeze” movement).</p>	
Language Standards:	<p>CA ELD Standards:</p> <p>PI.11–12.3: Offering and justifying opinions, negotiating with and persuading others in communicative exchanges</p> <p>PI.11–12.9: Expressing information and ideas in formal oral presentations on academic topics</p> <p>PI.11–12.11: Justifying own arguments and evaluating others’ arguments in writing</p>	
Objectives:	<p>SWBAT: State their opinion on (agree or disagree with) US involvement in Laos during the Vietnam War era, and describe its legacy on US foreign policy up to the present, citing facts from in-class video and readings.</p> <p>Students will examine the War in its regional context and its effect on neighboring countries. Students will learn about the lesser known involvement of US and North Vietnamese in Laos, which shows how the war expanded to involve bordering countries. Students will understand why the war in Laos was</p>	

	‘secret’ and address questions surrounding the US bombing campaign in Laos and its legacy.
Method(s)/ Strategies / Supports	Small group discussion (collaborative learning), graphic organizers, instructor modeling.
Expected Evidence of Learning (Assessments)	Ability to accurately present facts from the video and readings as support for their opinion on the War and clearly express their position on the War during debate and small group discussion. Ability to correctly identify its influence on US foreign policy.
Procedures using Gradual Release of Responsibility [Model, Guided Practice, Independent Work, Assessable product]	<p>1. Individual: Students read packet materials to prepare for discussion of contrasting views on the issue, independently organizing information in note-taking guide while viewing video and reading, identifying and evaluating sources in each media format. (Model writing down points on organizer.)</p> <p>2. Small Group: Students in support of a resolution assemble in one group, those against in another group. Students discuss the debate and write-up their positions and responses to likely positions of the opposition. (Instructor will demonstrate before small group discussion.)</p> <p>3. Large Group: The class holds a debate on US involvement in Laos; the Secret War. Each student shares their response to the debate. Students discuss the merits of each position.</p> <p>4. Homework: Students write to the local newspaper about whether the US should pay for the removal of unexploded ordnance (UXO). Also consider: should the US sign the international treaty banning cluster munitions (http://www.clusterconvention.org)? Or, write a pop song to convey your feeling and to express it to others, or draw a political cartoon.</p>
Resources / Materials:	<p>-Video (1:45-3:50) to be shown to class: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9va3Ms2kgZo</p> <p>-Packet: (see below)</p> <p>-Writing prompt: homework</p>
Differentiation strategies:	Students have the option to choose creative or traditional assignments for HW.

Learner Background:

The student will expand on previous lesson(s) covering the U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War, including the Vietnam War and the US Civil Rights movement, including the anti-war movement.

STUDENT PACKET: US involvement in Laos during the Vietnam War

Part A: Lao Secret War Bombing Fact Sheet

Time Line:

From May 1964 until March 1973, USAF flew 580,000 bombing missions over Laos, including Operation Barrel Roll (December 1964), Operation Steel Tiger (April 1964) and Operation Commando Hunt (November 1968).

Intensity:

405 bombing missions per day in Southern Laos 1968-1971

300 bombing missions per day in Plain of Jars, Laos 1969

Total bombs dropped:

2.1 Million tons

Munitions used:

186 types of munitions

19 types of cluster bombs

examples: white phosphorous, fragmentation, ball-bearing flechette anti-personnel, and cluster bombs (release 600-700 bombs)

Unexploded Ordnance:

78 Million bombs left in soil that failed to explode during war

37-50% of Lao territory is contaminated

1/4 of all villages in high risk area

10 years aid has cleared .4% of UXO

Casualties: 1970s – 1500/year

1980s – 600/year

1990s to present – 300/year

Total estimated at 50,000 casualties from UXO

Unknown amount of casualties during the war,

A quarter of population (approx. one million) displaced by bombing

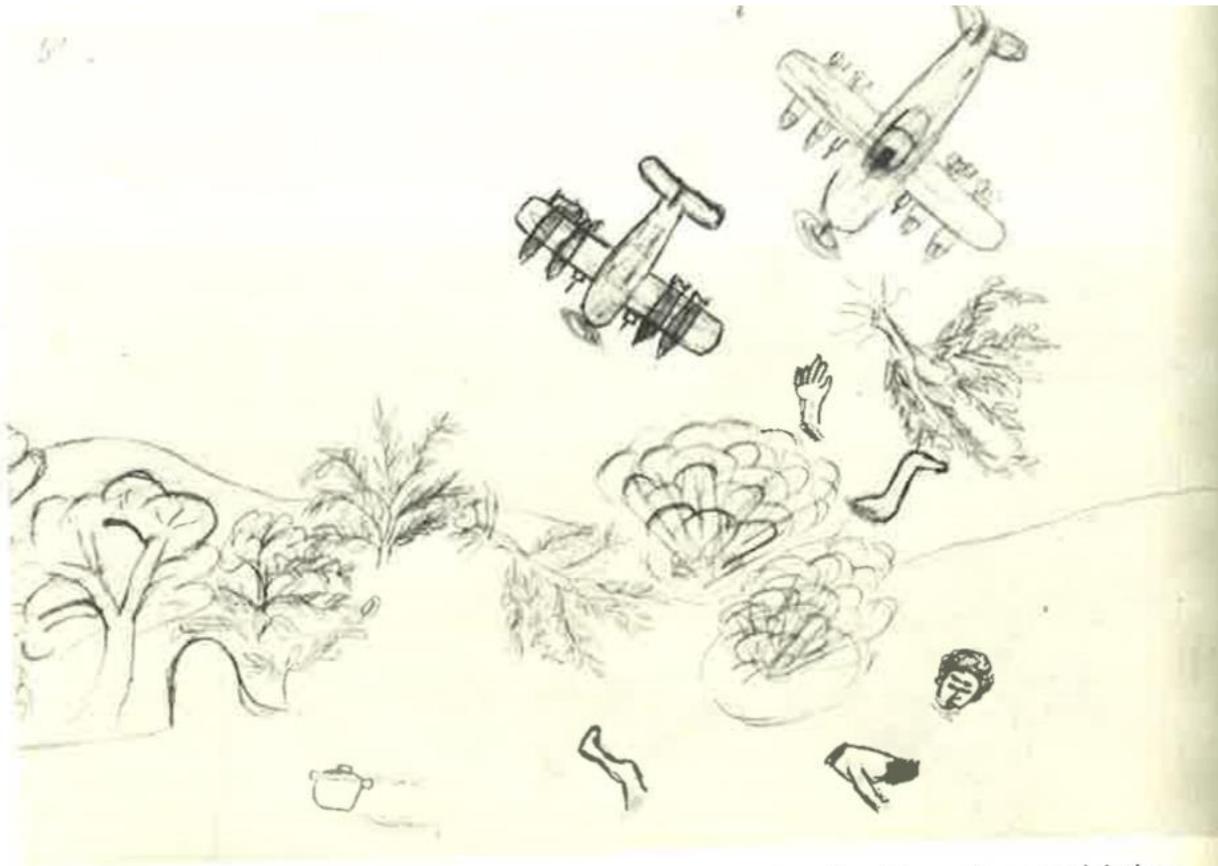
Part B: Lao Witness Accounts (source: Fred Branfman, *Voices from the Plain of Jars*)

Quote:

“Our lives became like those of animals desperately trying to escape their hunters... Human beings, whose parents brought them into the world and carefully raised them with overflowing love despite so many difficulties, these human beings would die from a single blast as explosions burst, lying still without moving again at all. And who then thinks of the blood, flesh, sweat and strength of their parents, and who will have charity and pity for them?... In reality, whatever happens, it is only the innocent who suffer. And as for other men, do they know all the unimaginable things happening in this war?”

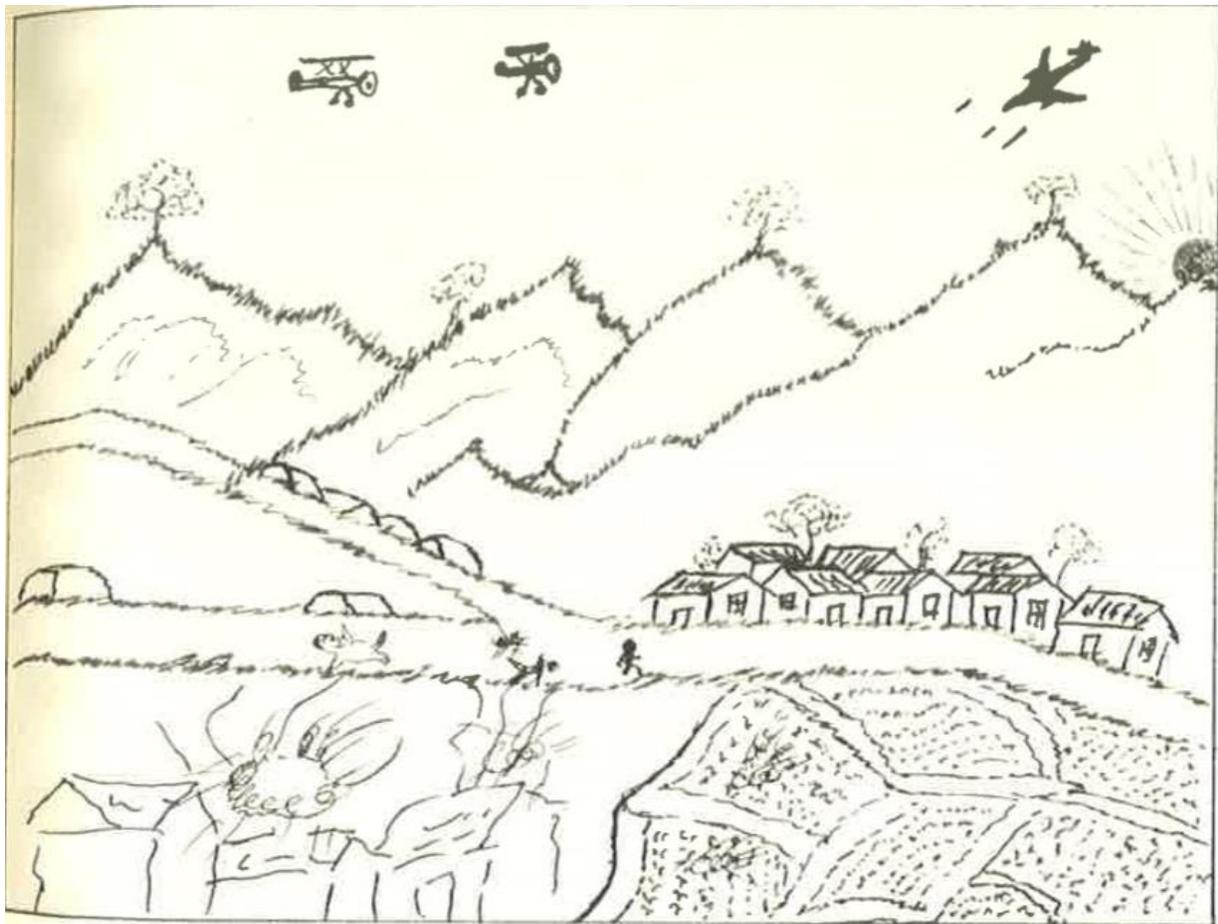
-a thirty year-old woman refugee

Drawings and quotations from Lao refugees of the war:



One friend of mine went to the village to get rice for his mother and father to eat. He crossed the field to the hill and the airplanes saw him and shot and killed him so that you couldn't even see his body. It was scattered all over the field.

—Artist: a twelve-year-old boy



My village stood on the edge of the road from Xieng Khouang to the Plain of Jars. There were ricefields next to the road. At first, the airplanes bombed the road, but not my village.

At that time my life was filled with great happiness, for the mountains and forests were beautiful: land, water, and climate were suitable for us. And there were many homes in our little village.

But that did not last long, because the airplanes came bombing my ricefield until the bomb craters made farming impossible. And the village was hit and burned. And some relatives working in the fields came running out to the road to return to the village but the airplanes saw and shot them—killing these farmers in a most heart-rending manner. We heard their screams, but could not go to help them. When the airplanes left, we went out to help them, but they were already dead.

—Artist: thirteen years old



These two, father and son, don't have hands and feet on account of a bomb dropped by the airplanes that didn't explode right away. They thought it would never explode and went to pick it up to look at. It exploded, hitting them as shown in this picture. Now they can't do anything. But this father and son pair did not come away with us. The father said that he would not go anywhere even if he was killed for it, because he regretted the loss of his land, ricefields, cows and buffalo. Even though they couldn't work, they could still look. So they refused to come, and they said that it was because of having been hit by the bomb. Leaving wasn't any good. Better to die in the village. This was the decision of these two, father and son.

—Artist: a twenty-four-year-old man



Such is the life of the monks in the region of Xieng Khouang, a region of war. This truly I did see with my very own eyes: there was an old monk wounded and much blood flowed out, coloring his body red. For, one day he was in the pagoda, not having yet gone into the holes. And an airplane came and bombed and he was hit, along with a villager, who thought of and worried about this old monk. His elder came to pray over the old monk, whose death saddened the hearts of the villagers.

—Artist: a twenty-two-year-old woman

Part C: US Policy Statement

President Richard Nixon's March 6, 1970 Statement on U.S. Policy and Activity in Laos:

In light of the increasingly massive presence of North Vietnamese troops and their recent offensive in Laos, I have written letters today to British Prime Minister Wilson and Soviet Premier Kosygin asking their help in restoring the 1962 Geneva Agreements [on neutrality] for that country.

As co-chairmen of that conference, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union have particular responsibilities for seeing that its provisions are honored. My letters note the persistent North Vietnamese violations of the accords and their current offensives; support the Laotian prime minister's own current appeal to the co-chairmen for consultations; urge the co-chairmen to work with other signatories of the Geneva Accords; and pledge full United States cooperation.

Hanoi's most recent military build-up in Laos has been particularly escalatory. They have poured over 13,000 additional troops into Laos during the past few months, raising their total in Laos to over 67,000. Thirty North Vietnamese battalions from regular division units participated in the current campaign in the Plain of Jars with tanks, armored cars, and long-range artillery. The indigenous Laotian communists, the Pathet Lao, are playing an insignificant role.

North Vietnam's military escalation in Laos has intensified public discussion in this country. The purpose of this statement is to set forth the record of what we found in January 1969, and the policy of this Administration since that time.

When we came into office, this Administration found a highly precarious situation in Laos ... There had been six years of seasonal Communist attacks and growing U.S. involvement at the request of the Royal Laotian Government. The North Vietnamese had steadily increased both their infiltration through Laos into South Vietnam and their troop presence in Laos itself. Any façade of native Pathet Lao independence had been stripped away. In January 1969, we thus had a military assistance program reaching back over six years and air operations dating over four years.

Since this Administration has been in office, North Vietnamese pressure has continued. Last spring, the North Vietnamese mounted a campaign which threatened the royal capital and moved beyond the areas previously occupied by the Communists. A counterattack by the Lao government forces, intended to relieve this military pressure and cut off supply lines, caught the enemy by surprise and succeeded beyond expectations in pushing them off the strategic central plain in north Laos known as the Plain of Jars.

The North Vietnamese left behind huge stores of arms, ammunition, and other supplies cached on the plain ... The size and nature of these supply caches the Communists had emplaced on the plain by the summer of 1969 show clearly that many months ago the

North Vietnamese were preparing for major offensive actions on Laotian territory against the Royal Laotian Government.

During the final months of 1969 and January 1970, Hanoi sent over 13,000 additional troops into Laos and rebuilt their stocks and supply lines. They also introduced tanks and long-range artillery.

During January and February, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma proposed to the other side that the Plain of Jars be neutralized. The Communists' response was to launch their current offensive, which has recaptured the Plain of Jars and is threatening to go beyond the furthest line of past Communist advances.

The prime minister is now once again trying to obtain consultations among all the parties to the Geneva Accords, envisaged under Article IV when there is a violation of Lao sovereignty, independence, neutrality or territorial integrity.

In this situation, our purposes remain straightforward.

We are trying above all to save American and allied lives in South Vietnam which are threatened by the continual infiltration of North Vietnamese troops and supplies along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Hanoi has infiltrated over 100,000 men through Laos since this Administration took office and over 500,000 altogether. Our air strikes have destroyed weapons and supplies over the past four years which would have taken thousands of American lives.

We are also supporting the independence and neutrality of Laos as set forth in the 1962 Geneva Agreements. Our assistance has always been at the request of the legitimate government of Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, which the North Vietnamese helped establish; it is directly related to North Vietnamese violations of the Agreements.

We continue to be hopeful of eventual progress in the negotiations in Paris, but serious doubts are raised as to Hanoi's intentions if it is simultaneously violating the Geneva Agreements on Laos, which we reached with them largely on the basis of their own proposals. What we do in Laos has thus as its aim to bring about conditions for progress toward peace in the entire Indochinese peninsula.

I turn now to the precise nature of our aid to Laos.

In response to press-conference questions of September 26, December 8, and January 30, I have indicated:

- That the United States has no ground combat forces in Laos.
- That there were 50,000 North Vietnamese troops in Laos and that more perhaps were coming.
- That, at the request of the Royal Laotian Government, which was set up by the Geneva Accords of 1962, we have provided logistical and other assistance to that

government for the purpose of helping it to prevent the Communist conquest of Laos.

- That we have used air power for the purpose of interdicting the flow of North Vietnamese troops and supplies on that part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail which runs through Laos.
- That, at the request of the Royal Lao Government, we have flown reconnaissance missions in northern Laos in support of the Laotian Government's efforts to defend itself against North Vietnamese aggression and that we were engaged in "some other activities."

It would, of course, have posed no political problem for me to have disclosed in greater detail those military-supported activities which have been initiated by two previous Administrations and which have been continued by this Administration.

I have not considered it in the national interest to do so because of our concern that putting emphasis on American activities in Laos might hinder the efforts of Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma to bring about adherence to the Geneva Agreements by the Communist signatories. In recent days, however, there has been intense public speculation to the effect that the United States involvement in Laos has substantially increased in violation of the Geneva Accords, that American ground forces are engaged in combat in Laos and that our air activity has had the effect of escalating the conflict.

Because these reports are grossly inaccurate, I have concluded that our national interest will be served by putting the subject into perspective through a precise description of our current activities in Laos.

These are the facts:

- There are no American ground combat troops in Laos.
- We have no plans for introducing ground combat forces into Laos.
- The total number of Americans directly employed by the U.S. government in Laos is 616. In addition, there are 424 Americans employed on contract to the government or to government contractors. Of these 1,040 Americans, the total number, military and civilian, engaged in a military advisory or military training capacity numbers 320. Logistics personnel number 323.
- No American stationed in Laos has ever been killed in ground combat operations.
- U.S. personnel in Laos during the past year has not increased, while during the past few months, North Vietnam has sent over 13,000 additional combat ground troops into Laos.
- When requested by the Royal Laotian Government, we have continued to provide military assistance to regular and irregular Laotian forces in the form of equipment, training, and logistics. The levels of our assistance have risen in response to the growth of North Vietnamese combat activities.
- We have continued to conduct air operations. Our first priority for such operations is to interdict the continued flow of troops and supplies across Laotian territory on

the Ho Chi Minh Trail. As commander and chief of our armed forces, I consider it my responsibility to use our air power to interdict this flow of supplies and men into South Vietnam and thereby avoid a heavy toll of American and allied lives.

- In addition to air operations on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, we have continued to carry out reconnaissance flights in north Laos and fly combat-support missions for Laotian forces when requested to do so by the Royal Laotian Government.
- In every instance our combat air operation has been increased only as the number of North Vietnamese in Laos and the level of their aggression has increased.

Our goal in Laos has been and continues to be to reduce American involvement and not to increase it, to bring peace in accordance with the 1962 Geneva Accords and not to prolong the war.

That is the picture of our current aid to Laos. It is limited. It is requested. It is supportive and defensive. It continues the purposes and operations of two previous Administrations. It has been necessary to protect American lives in Vietnam and to preserve a precarious but important balance in Laos.

Peace remains the highest priority of this administration. We will continue our search for it in Vietnam. I hope my appeal today to the Geneva Conference co-chairmen will help in Laos. Our policy for this torn country will continue to rest on some basic principles:

- We will cooperate fully with all diplomatic efforts to restore the 1962 Geneva Agreements.
- We will continue to support the legitimate government of Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma and his efforts to deescalate the conflict and reach political understandings.
- Our air-interdiction efforts are designed to protect American and Allied lives in Vietnam. Our support efforts have the one purpose of helping prevent the recognized Laotian Government from being overwhelmed by larger Communist forces dominated by the North Vietnamese.
- We will continue to give the American people the fullest possible information of our involvement, consistent with national security.

I hope that a genuine quest for peace in Indochina can now begin. For Laos, this will require the efforts of the Geneva Conference co-chairmen and the signatory countries.

But most of all it will require realism and reasonableness from Hanoi. For it is the North Vietnamese, not we, who have escalated the fighting. Today there are 67,000 North Vietnamese troops in this small country. There are no American troops there. Hanoi is not threatened by Laos; it runs risks only when it moves its forces across borders.

We desire nothing more in Laos than to see a return to the Geneva Agreements and the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops, leaving the Lao people to settle their own differences in a peaceful manner.

In the search for peace we stand ready to cooperate in every way with the other countries involved. That search prompted my letters today to the British prime minister and the Soviet premier. That search will continue to guide our policy.

Further Resources

General works:

Evans, Grant, *A Short History of Laos* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002)

Savada, Andrea Matles, ed. *Laos: A Country Study* (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1994) (URL: countrystudies.us/laos/)

Stuart-Fox, Martin, *A history of Laos* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

Second Indochina War in Laos:

Branfman, Fred, *Voices from the Plain of Jars: Life under an Air War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013). Some documents from Branfman may be found online:

<http://legaciesofwar.org/programs/national-traveling-exhibition/illustrations-narratives/>

Castle, Timothy N., *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam: United States Military Aid to the Royal Lao Government, 1955-75* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995)

Conboy, Kenneth, *Shadow War: The CIA's Secret War in Laos* (Paladin Press, 1995)

Dommen, Arthur, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002)

Hamilton-Merritt, Jane, *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999)

Oudone Sananikone, *The Royal Lao Army and U.S. Advice & Support* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Chief Historian, 1984)

Viliam Phraxayavong, *History of Aid to Laos: Motivations and Impacts* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009)

Literature-in-translation:

Outhine Bounyavong, *Mother's Beloved: Stories from Laos* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999). See especially the short story "Death Price."

Documentary Films and Videos:

The Betrayal (Nerakhoon)

Written and directed by Ellen Kuras and Thavisouk Phrasavath, this documentary film follows a Lao family immigrate to USA in aftermath of Secret War. It won the official selection from the Sundance Film Festival and was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary. 60 minutes.

Bomb Harvest

Dir. Kim Mordaunt, follows a UXO disposal team in the field.

Bombies

dir. Jack Silberman, shows how the issue of UXO affects real people

Bombing Missions Over Laos From 1965-1973:

www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/03/laos-vietnam-war-us-bombing-uxo

This video provides a visualization in a short clip of all us bombing missions on Laos using data from the US government records.

Vietnam: A Television History, Part 9: "Cambodia and Laos":

www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/series/pt_08.html

Part of a PBS documentary. This film covers US involvement in Laos from the early 1960s, outlining events that led the country to be engulfed by the war in neighboring Vietnam.

Photo archives:

Joel M. Halpern Laotian Slide Collection:

<https://uwdc.library.wisc.edu/collections/seait/laos>

Over 3000 images taken by the noted anthropologist Joel Halpern in the years 1957, 1959, 1969.

Organizations & Associations:

Legacies of War: www.legaciesofwar.org

Lao National Unexploded Ordinance Programme: www.uxolao.org

COPE: www.copelaos.org