



**\*\*TV-PREMIERE ON arte\*\*  
FEBRUARY 17TH 8:15PM**

## The most secret place on earth

The CIA's covert War in Laos

after touring Germanys cinemas now on **arte**

A documentary by Marc Eberle

52 min

*"There is reason for huge respect for the work of Marc Eberle, he gets very close to his witnesses and makes them open up, and contrary to a BBC approach he does not take the official line and make politicians speak and make statements."*  
(Tue Steen Müller - filmkommentaren.dk)

The Vietnam War was the most intensely mediated war ever. However, next door in neighboring Laos, the longest and largest air war in human history was underway, which eventually made Laos the most bombed country on earth. What's more, outside of Laos no one knew.

The Secret War was the largest operation ever conducted by the CIA, yet to this day, hardly anyone knows anything about it. Critics call it the biggest war crime of the Vietnam War era and point to striking similarities to the present conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan; similarities that were tested and set in motion back in Laos in the 1960s. The use of private contractors, mercenaries, as well as the exclusion of Congress and the press gave the executive branch a free hand to wage unlimited warfare as they saw fit. During the Secret War a bomb load was dropped on Laos every eight minutes over a period of eight years – 2.1 million tons of bombs fell onto this small landlocked South East Asian nation altogether, more than on Europe and the Pacific theatre combined during World War II. Until today much of the countryside is poisoned by Agent Orange and littered with unexploded ordnance. Until today the country has still not found peace and remnants of the CIA's secret army of Hmong hill tribe guerillas continue to clash with Lao government troops.

In The Most Secret Place On Earth, key players of the Secret War – former CIA agents, American pilots, Laotian fighters and American journalists – take us on a journey into the physical heart of the conflict: Top secret Long Cheng. Long Cheng was an almost uninhabited valley deep in the jungles of central Laos, where the CIA built its headquarters in 1962. Four years later, 40.000 People lived in Long Cheng and it was from this base that the Secret War was largely planned and executed. Yet, Long Cheng was never marked on any official map. In the early days, Long Cheng was run by Tony Poe, who is claimed by his colleagues to have served as a template for Col Kurtz

in Coppola's Apocalypse Now! At the height of the war, a few hundred CIA officers and the civilian airline Air America – covertly owned by the CIA – coordinated and supplied up to 50.000 indigenous troops in the field, and the US Air Force bombed Laos back into the Stone Age, while being entirely unaccountable to Congress and the American public. As the war dragged on, Long Cheng became the busiest airbase in the world and a major center for the global opium and heroin trade. Candid interviews with past and present players combined with previously unseen footage from the war as well as from the current struggle in Laos tell a story that hasn't been documented in history books. As we journey into Long Cheng for the first time – the site has been off limits to the outside world since the end of the war in 1975 – the film reconstructs the gripping story of the operation and illustrates its relevance to current American military conflicts.

**Nominated for:**

HISTORY MAKERS AWARD 2010  
NORDDEUTSCHER FILMPREIS 2009  
GOLDEN PANDA AWARD 2009

**Festivals**

ONE WORLD FILMFESTIVAL  
FIGRA - FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL  
DU GRAND REPORTAGE D'ACTUALITE  
TIBURON INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL  
UNHCR REFUGEE FILM FESTIVAL  
DOCUDAYS BEIRUT  
DOK LEIPZIG

Director **Marc Eberle**

Script **Marc Eberle** and **Tom Vater**

Camera **Richard Ladkani** **bvk**

Editor **Oliver Stammel**

Sound **Bert Bartel**

Music **Nils Kacirek**

Line Producer **Eva Rink**

Producers **Christian** and **Reinhardt Beetz**

Commissioning Editor **Ulrike Dotzer (NDR, arte)** and **Felix Kuballa (WDR)**

A production of **gebrueder beetz filmproduktion**  
on behalf of **NDR/arte/WDR**

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