

English teaching in the secondary school.

The Lycee is the French equivalent of the American High School. As the French developed the secondary school system in Laos, the name has been given to the secondary schools which extend seven years beyond the six-year elementary level. The French still almost completely staff these schools and control the curriculum. IVS involvement in these schools came from the French inability to continue to supply enough English and academic teachers. It was agreed that the French would supply the same overall number of teachers but instead of English teachers, they would provide more academic teachers and IVS and other American and 3rd Country agencies would provide the English teachers. During the 1965-66 school year IVS staffed four of these positions.

The Lycees are located in the four largest provincial capitals: Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Savannakhet, and Pakse. There are also 10 Colleges in Laos. A college differs from a Lycee in that a college has only a Four year program while a Lycee has a six or seven year program. There are other American A.I.D. and I.V.S. people living in each of these locations, although the I.V.S. English teacher is usually the only American teaching at the school. The housing provided in these locations is generally excellent and living conditions are quite comfortable.

The usual teaching load for the IVS/Ed. personnel assigned

to a Lycee is about 20 teaching hours per week. This is a light load and IVS'ers find themselves teaching extra courses for especially interested students, evening classes and sometimes working with extra curricular activities. What they do and how much depend upon the individual IVS'er and the needs of the school and community.

The Lycee English teacher, as differentiated from the English teacher at the NEC in Vientiane, works as an individual in a program instead of as one of a team of about fifteen teaching in one school like the ESP. His opportunity for personal contact with French faculty members is greater. As the Lycees are smaller than the ESP this teacher has greater opportunity for individual student contact. The Lycee teacher lives in the local community. This allows, in fact necessitates, closer identification and contact with the local people.

The following is what Paul Altemus had to say after two years of teaching at a Lycee in Savannakhet :

"Your generation is the first since the last war which has looked outside itself for something to fasten its ideals upon. It will be remembered for things like civil rights, volunteer work overseas, and the struggle against poverty. You are very fortunate to be a young person at this time. Take advantage of it! These words, plus other thoughts of somewhat a less lofty nature were often turned over in my mind as I began my work as an

instructor d'anglais at Lycee Savannakhet, one of the few secondary schools the tiny Kingdom of Laos can claim.

"Instructor d'anglais at Lycee Savannakhet, teaches in a French school as secondary education in this very poor little country is in the hands of the French, who once administered Laos as part of French Indochina before the "winds of change" took away the control of most of the underdeveloped world from European hands. The French exit from Laos left few things directly in French control, but secondary education was one of these ; because there were simply no Lao to fill the position held by French teachers, and because the spread of French culture, transmitted by a French secondary school system, was what the former colonial power was most interested in continuing.

"I was to be the only American in a school for Lao students where the teachers were all French and where the language and system of instruction was, of course, French. I was admittedly surprised at myself that I did not consider this such an imposing order. I might well have, for I was the first American to have ever been placed on the staff of one of the provincial Lao secondary schools. At times I was aware of the responsibility this involved in terms of accommodating myself to a different way of doing things, and, really, a different philosophy of education from that which I had been used to back home in the United States.

"However, I soon found myself a part of the school and its staff of teachers, all of whom seemed very ready to accept me on my own merits as a teacher, rather than on the basis of the standard qualifications under the French system. I slowly became the American who taught with other French in the Lycee, not just the American who taught English at the Lycee.

"And the students - To them, I am Mister Paul, not Monsieur Chazal or Madame Harel, as the French teachers are usually addressed. To the Lao, this use of the first as opposed to the last name implies that they recognize me as not being French and put me in a place of my own, not above or below the other teachers at the school in terms of respect, but just separate and different. It is shown in their less formal attitude toward me, and reflects perhaps a realization on their part that I have not come to their country to simply earn a salary. It is such an attitude on the part of those Lao with whom you work which makes the task of the volunteer teacher enjoyable (I do not use the overworked word-"rewarding"), for he soon learns to substitute this for the pleasure of seeing class after class of knowledge-hungry students clamoring for an understanding of the golden tongue English, which will carry them to all kinds of unheard of successes outside of their country. Such students in such numbers do not exist, and he who thinks his students will consider his presence a sacrifice and a gift from above is mistaken. The person who volunteers for

such work to see things done and to be the one responsible for all kinds of progress within his programs will be unhappy in Laos, for though results may come, they will be too small to justify two years as a volunteer. Enjoyment must, as it has for me, come from the experience itself, from living in and learning to enjoy a different environment and culture, and from the knowledge that you are different enough from others who do not have the desire or courage to try.

The little world of Savannakhet (no smaller, really, than that of the suburb of New York from which I come) has been a very enjoyable two year interlude for me. An interlude because I do not plan to continue in teaching when I leave Laos. But it has not been an interlude from becoming a more aware and fuller person. Only the person who does not have the courage to become so would say that. My time spent here has been satisfying to me because I have been put into a situation free of the "succeed or fail" kind found at home, but not free, by any means, of a different kind of succeed or fail responsibility. I have found that I have learned the art of taking pleasure from that which I am trying to accomplish and from that which I find around me, be it because of the fact that I alone am responsible for its success or failure, or be it because of its newness or exotic nature. One can never "lose the business" as a volunteer, but one can fail to reach a rapport with those one wants to help, or with the milieu in which one finds

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oneself. This is what I have seen to be my responsibility to others and to myself as an English teacher at Lycee Savannakhet. Trying to meet this challenge has been an experience not easily forgotten".