

Only Dr. Bill Taylor stationed at Sayaboury was working out of Vientiane. How our IVS numbers and dispersion and promise have improved since then!

My two week visit from October 18 to November 1 required a complete mental readjustment, especially in regard to the VARDA or Rural Development Team. In contrast to 1962 we now have, not seven, but forty IVSers on board. The five women and thirty-five men are dispersed from Ban Houei Sei, close by the Burma and China border in the North, to Khong Island in the South where one looks across to the mountains of Cambodia. Our people are occupied in the smaller provincial towns such as Sayaboury and Phone Hong; the larger cities of Vientiane, Pakse, Savannakhet, and Luang Prabang; and in out of the way villages that bear little known names like Houei Khong, Borikhane, Sam Thong. This last is a village in Xieng Khouang province not far from where the first IVS team was located seven years ago.

To account for this recent deployment of our staff, so right for IVS and so satisfying to the volunteers themselves, I will report on conversations with Charles Mann and Leroy Wehrle, USAID Mission Chief and his Deputy, and Walter Coward, IVS Chief of Party. They brought me up to date on USAID's major policy and program shift, a shift from the previous shotgun attack to a new, more precise, more effective "Cluster Village" approach. USAID has supported a large assistance program in Laos ever since the French withdrawal and the 1954 establishment of independence. Much of this assistance was admittedly scattered and ineffective: a bridge built here, a Training Center there, an airstrip somewhere else; USAID personnel largely anchored in Vientiane; the IVS teams centered only in the major cities.

The new program is labeled "Mu Ban Samaki" meaning "Village Cooperation." It represents a different approach to the ever-present problem of making economic aid intelligible and effective among rural village people. These are the ones who most need assistance and who have the most to contribute to national unity and economic health if Laos is to progress beyond her present precarious state. Jungle land must be cleared and more rice grown; vegetable gardens must be increased to add needed variety to the diet and to provide additional cash crops; roads must be built, bridges constructed, and airstrips laid out to link isolated tribes and villages; schools and dispensaries to insure medical and educational benefits; security must be established to counter the Pathet Lao threat.

USAID and the Royal Lao Government have, therefore, identified and established six initial cluster areas. Additional areas will later be developed but these six are sufficient for the early tentative steps. The basic principle is to concentrate U.S. assistance and U.S. Lao Personnel in a given cluster area. Where roads are built, bridges constructed, schools and dispensaries put up, airstrips provided, or livestock and gardening programs inaugurated, these concentrated, specific goals outlined relevant to the needs of each area, and maximum impact and effectiveness will be sought.

Mr. Wehrle spoke to me of the "two main pillars of the cluster program". These are IVS and USAID staff and resources. The IVS men will actually move out to the cluster villages as many of them have already done. They will live there

in teams of two or three, often alongside Lao Fundamental Education counterparts, to provide a continuing presence as the program develops, to offer technical advice, and to insure the ultimate follow-through. Their living will be primitive and their physical facilities limited. Language competence is a requisite. The volunteer must possess at least one or, better yet, a variety of technical skills along with a genuine appreciation of village people and a desire to help them. The second pillar is USAID personnel and resources. There is to be a USAID Area Coordinator in each of the six areas. He is the man to whom the IVS Team Leader most directly relates. From USAID's various divisions and departments (Rural Development, Agriculture, Public Health, Education) will flow the supplies, the medicines, the cement, the equipment, and the professional technical backstopping.

Let me give a brief illustration of how IVS is presently functioning in one of the main cluster programs in the South, in the Pakse region. Resident in Pakse is Oliver St. Pee, IVS Team Leader who has finished his first two year tour in Laos and is starting on a second tour. He works closely with John McQueen, USAID Area Coordinator. Within recent weeks four IVS volunteers have established themselves in two cluster villages. John Steele and Gary Studebaker are at Khong Island, 70 miles due south of Pakse, while Win McKeithan and Pete Natale have moved into a vacant village house at Houei Khong.

Khong Island is just that, an island twelve miles long and six miles wide, one of a score of islands nestled in the mighty Mekong at the southern tip of Laos where the river moves on into Cambodia. There are fifteen villages on the island with a population roughly estimated at 3,000. One hundred other villages are within easy reach along the river banks on either side of the island. Clearly a boat would facilitate travel. Khong is a good place to work. Security as in most of Laos is not perfect but it has to date presented no major problem. The Chao Khouang (Province Chief) is a responsible official interested in his people. The people have shown a willingness to work, and the IVS men were invited through local, not outside, initiative. We visited several villages. In one, Sen Hat, a school to house 80 pupils has recently been completed boasting a cement floor and impressive wood construction. This was a self-help project on the part of the nearby villagers as are a series of bridges that now enhance the main road traversing the island. One of the bridges which John Steele designed and helped to build is an A-frame model which has won high praise and will be copied elsewhere in Laos. By a strange coincidence the initials, I V S, carved in bold letters meet one's eyes when first approaching the bridge. Steele with his construction skills will be aided by Studebaker who will be getting involved in vegetable, crop, and animal projects. These two could strengthen their contribution and their outreach with two additional IVSers, another in construction work and a second with agricultural technical skills. They will have help from several Lao Fundamental Education workers. A total of two hundred of these F.E. workers are being trained through a U.N. sponsored effort.

East of Pakse some thirty five or forty miles in a much more jungly and forbidding area lies the village of Houei Khong. The flight from Khong Island to Houei Khong along with Coward and St. Pee in a small four passenger Helio plane was exciting. The Air America pilot needed help from these veteran IVSers as he circled over dense forests to find the cleared landing strip. We were suddenly in a world right out of the pages of Lowell Thomas or the National Geographic.

The natives of the area are not Lao but belong to two ethnic tribal groups, the Lavane and the Nahuin. Win McKeithan and Pete Natale have been living in the main village for about a month where they are taking a survey aimed at revealing more about the people, their life, manners, mores, and needs. McKeithan, already a prodigy with Lao and Meo, is busy mastering the Kha language which these people speak. Another tribal group living in a village seven or eight miles away have, entirely on their own, cleared away the trees and undergrowth to fashion a road so the boys can visit and work with them. There are plans for garden projects, a dispensary, roads, and the establishment of a Co-op to free the people from the monopoly now exercised by a local Chinese merchant. The men have a radio sending and receiving set for keeping in touch with USAID officials in both Pakse and Vientiane. Security is maintained by local civil militia force. Practically every able-bodied male villager we saw had a carbine slung over his shoulder, and a reputation for knowing how to use his weapon. They boast of never having lost their village to recent invaders, whether French, Vietnamese, or Pathet Lao.

Our four-hour stay in Houei Khong was one of the most enjoyable of my visits in Laos. McKeithan and Natale are two men who have proved themselves in previous assignments and who are full of enthusiasm for this new opportunity. They couldn't wait to take us on a visit to the two villages where their survey has centered, to drive us over the rough but adequate road so recently cleared by the villagers, themselves, to show us the two sixty-foot bamboo poles which were erected to carry the radio aerial, and to let us see for ourselves the warm and ready friendliness that these people display. We clambered up the stepladder to their one-room stilt house to eat a lunch of venison and rice washed down with Japanese beer. The beer was purchased just across the way from the Chinese merchant, the one they hope the Co-op will put out of business. What a mixed-up world. There we were, five Americans sitting down to lunch in a Nahuin village house in the middle of Laos, accessible across mountains and forests and a 300-foot waterfall only by a small heliplane, and drinking imported Japanese beer sold by a Chinese. Another highlight of our visit came when we viewed a huge tiger skin stretched taut on a rack. The tiger wrapped in that skin was killed only the day before by one of the village men who shot it with a carbine. He mistook it for a barking deer!

We flew late that afternoon back to Pakse. The next day I visited the Rural Teacher Training Center. Ben Bachmann is the IVS contribution in a one-year teacher training course for seventy Lao students. He will soon be replaced by Rod MacRae, one of our recent arrivals. Also at Pakse is Ken Lewis, an agriculturalist. Ken is busy at the moment with a livestock program (goats), vegetable growing, and helping out at the school. However, it is planned that he will serve as a resource person to lend his skills as needed at both Khong Island and Houei Khong.

Here we have the beginnings of a cluster program with IVS as one of the pillars. St. Pee is the Team Leader. He works directly with Mr. McQueen, the Area Coordinator for USAID. Their relationship is good with respect and cooperation on both sides. St. Pee has administrative duties in relation to USAID, his

IVS Chief of Party, and his team members. He is involved in the work of the Rural Training Center and has other irons in the fire in Pakse itself. But he must also be free to help in inaugurating new programs and new outreach to the cluster villages, such as those at Khong Island and Houei Khong. He must assist these men in the field as they develop their programs and see that they get the required support. This pattern is duplicated in four other parts of the country, as follows:

In Savannakhet Dick Carter serves as Team Leader to a group of three IVSers along with three counterparts. The group includes Arnold Radi in Agriculture, Doris Murphy, R.N., in public health, and Carol Falk in home economics. The entire team is Savannakhet-based. They travel by day to villages accessible by jeep and also do work of a teaching and training nature in the city itself. This is especially true of the two girls. Radi reports that in his agricultural work he finds the people willing to work, to experiment with new methods. He travels as much as fifty miles a day. The program benefits from effective cooperation and reinforcement from the local Lao Agricultural agent who works hard to keep interest alive among the farmers, from USIS which uses its specialized films as a means to arouse interest, and from Mr. Krause, the USAID Community Development specialist who has helped to set up committees of local officials and farmers where decisions are made picking crop trial areas, marketing facilities, etc.

At Borikhane, Chet Brown directs the work of three volunteers in a new area where the program is just getting started. The town, if such it can be called, is reached only by way of the river (a five-hour journey up from Paksane providing the boat doesn't break down) or by helicopter. There is as yet no landing strip for other aircraft. Haldeman, Clifford, and Lewin are all living at Borikhane and unite as a chorus to praise their location, their early acceptance by the villagers, the unbelievable village response to their suggestions. Their chief problem has to do with priorities - what to do and in what order? Shall they work at helping on the rice shortage caused by earlier flood damage...get the people's help in clearing fields for vegetable crops...get a youth program going...work on the model house that is planned...study language...assist with the school...or spark the building of a dispensary which the people want?

The two remaining areas are at Phone Hong which is a brief, but risky, driving distance from Vientiane, and at Sam Thong, in Xieng Khouang province. Brooke Green and Gus Carlson are living and working at the former, Brooke in agriculture and Gus in construction. At Sam Thong are Blaine Jensen in agriculture and Brian O'Connor as an educationalist.

We have VARDA teams located at three other important centers which have not as yet been designated as cluster areas. Discussions and studies are now in progress and they may shortly be drawn. The three areas are Ban Houei Sei, Luang Prabang, and Sayaboury. The nature and scope of our work in these areas will undoubtedly be affected by whatever decisions are made. I only regret that time and space do not allow for description of our team activities in these three areas, all of which I visited, and where we have some outstanding volunteers.

It will be necessary to recruit an additional twenty-five men for Laos between now and next June. This would allow replacement for those who will have completed

their tours as well as for the additional men to bring the present contract up to full strength. If security does not deteriorate and the USAID/RLG cluster program proceeds as hoped there will come requests for an additional fifteen volunteers in 1964-65.

A report such as this requires more of the writer and the readers than mere reporting. We must be aware of the problems, for problems there are. I will mention five in order of importance:

Security

There should be no doubt that our people are at different times in extremely isolated and upon occasion, insecure positions. I am satisfied that all due precautions are taken both by our supervisory staff and by the men themselves. The fact that I was able to interview every member of the team and visit all but two of the stations is indication in itself that communication and travel are possible. With but one exception, all travel between stations is done by air. The aircraft are provided by USAID. Their contract with Air America is a reported ten million dollars per year, aircraft of various kinds being used to haul cargo, supplies, and personnel. More and more flights are being scheduled to allow for regular links between the major towns and cities as well as the more isolated areas. In a few cases roads and rivers provided a limited access. We must not forget, however, that constant air travel, especially in a land like Laos, involves risk. The most eloquent testimony of this is the fifty to sixty thousand dollars per year paid to an Air America pilot.

A second important link which the boys have with the world beyond their stations is through the short-wave radios. They are required to make a daily radio check at a scheduled hour. However, radios break down, parts need repair, and generators sometime fail to function. During one three-day period while I was in Vientiane we had word that the radios were "out" at both Borikhane and Phone Hong. The only recourse open is for the man or men to pack up and head for a contact point; at Phone Hong they would drive to Vientiane, while the Borikhane team would take to their boat and travel down river to Paksane where the AID Area Coordinator is located.

While speaking of security, it is interesting to report that at one location the men monitor a nearby Pathet Lao broadcast where they hear themselves described in detail as well as their work. The P.L. leave them unmolested. Their "game" is not the IVS men who are, after all, helping the villagers but rather the R. L. G. soldiers and military equipment.

Morale

Morale has been a serious problem within IVS ranks during the past year. It has been due to a variety of causes which can be mentioned in passing: misunderstandings as to their relation to AID, involvement in work they did not think important, high cost of living, poor selection in the case of some volunteers who went to Laos with wrong motivations and attitudes, and a few instances of failure in leadership. I am greatly encouraged as of the moment. Three of the chronic troublemakers have either been dismissed or have resigned. Adjustments are

being planned for a slight increase in the maintenance allowance. And with the development of the cluster program and the deployment of our people to areas and work they are best suited for there has come a clarification of the IVS role vis-a-vis USAID. I should stress, to the credit of the IVSers in Laos and our improving selection process at home, that it is not isolation, lack of physical comforts or hard work that gets an IVS man down. Quite the contrary, morale goes up to the degree that the volunteers get out of Vientiane and get directly involved in challenging work with needy village people. Those of you who serve on the IVS Board would have been thrilled if you could have been with me during this visit. You would have found, as I did, in place after place young Americans made of stern stuff who are not asking what they can get from Laos but what they can give.

In one interview a boy described to me in a note of rapture his recent experiences in one village: "We asked for ten people to help us clear a field for planting and when the time came we had not ten but fifty-three!"... "We started planting a garden at our IVS house and shoveling up buffalo manure as quickly as it dropped for fertilizer. Within a few days other people were starting gardens and there was suddenly a shortage of manure..." In the short time that we have worked in this village the response of these people has given me enough satisfaction to last for the remainder of my tour."

Leadership

We have some good Team Leaders in Laos and in Walt Coward we have a Chief of Party par excellence. Walt has provided for the VARDA team a more efficient administration, a steadiness of purpose, wise counsel, and an outstanding personal example. Not all of the team leaders demonstrate these qualities. Some have been preoccupied with their own concerns and complaints at precisely the time when they should have been reinforcing their men.

Laos is no place for an untested man, especially in a leader role. Here as in our other countries we must try to find team leaders and chiefs of party from among our present volunteers. We must try to secure men who have proved themselves and with whom we take little risk when we ask them to lead other men. Our IVS Teams will most often be only as strong as their leaders.

Married Couples

We have to recognize that in Laos today the married couple will be the exception, not the rule. Here are a few general considerations that the men in Laos seem to be agreed on:

1. Usually single people are to be preferred.
2. Married couples with small children create added and, sometimes serious complications. There are complications in housing, team living, security, and adjustment. Their presence is normally not fair to either the team or to the family.
3. If a couple is sent because the man is outstanding, then the wife must be subject to close scrutiny herself. The wife, as much as her husband, needs proper motivation and skills.

4. Occasionally a married couple will be recruited where both have skills, where there are no children, and where both will be employed as volunteers. In such cases we need to be sure that both pass the test. It will not do to pass a wife because we mainly want the husband, or the reverse, to create a job for the husband because we really want the wife.

The National Education Center

I apologize for the length of this report. It should be concluded, but that would be unthinkable without some reporting on our Education Team at the N.E.C. Incidentally, the name is being changed from the NEC (National Education Center) to the ESP (Ecole Superior de Pedagogie).

My first three days in Laos were spent almost entirely at the NEC, located nine kilometers from Vientiane. Most of you know from previous reports the history and purpose and program at the Center. It is the educational establishment in Laos. The Center that may someday provide Laos with its first University is at present a composite of four different schools being aided with funds and personnel from the United States, France, Britain, and Laos.

There is a one year Teacher Training course, similar to the Regional T.T. schools at Pakse and Luang Prabang. Our IVS teachers are deeply involved with this group of young Laotians as they prepare to take up teaching assignments in rural village schools following their year of study. They show the highest motivation and eagerness because they know that this one year of training is all they will receive. Their course work takes them into such fields as arts and crafts, carpentry, science, English language, gardening, animal care, and public health.

The bulk of the nine hundred students are involved in either the French or the Lao or the English sections, and are enrolled in curricula referred to as the Three Year Course, the Four Year Course, and a projected Five Year Course. Our volunteers are at work in part in these other Courses, either in classroom teaching or in their practical demonstration work. In almost every case the IVSer in both teacher and worker.

Our NEC Team numbers twelve. The scorecard reads as follows:

Bernard Wilder, Chief of Party
Harold Daveler, Associate Chief of Party and Electrician
Jackson White, Science
William Rufener, Animal Husbandry
Henry Schumacher, Gardening and Crops
Dell Johnson, Plumbing and Masonry
Pat Basler, Auto Mechanics
Beth Nelson, Arts and Crafts
Caroline Gerhold, Home Economics
Dianne Dick, R.N., Public Health
Robert Van Nest, Carpentry
Sam Floyd, English language

There has been an IVS team working at the NEC since 1960. We owe a large debt to Amsey Bollinger who served as the first Chief of Party until his return

to the States this past summer. Mr. Bollinger developed excellent relations with the USAID Education Division, and he was instrumental in guiding the team through many of its initial difficulties. Some of these difficulties remain such as the continued delay in securing needed supplies (a brief tour of the warehouse revealed ten thousand unused rulers but not one extra blade for the carpentry shop's lone bench saw), a continuing problem with local labor (only half a dozen coolie laborers instead of the forty or fifty which are required), local salaries as much as three months in arrears, overcrowded accommodations for the students with needed buildings way off schedule, and the lack of administrative coordination that one would expect of an institution where so many hands are stirring the broth.

Despite the problems, I have come away from this visit to the NEC feeling entirely encouraged. I can say without fear of contradiction that we have nowhere an IVS Team better selected, more qualified, harder working, with a higher morale, or more ably led. It was just plain fun to be with them whether talking over the program and the problems with Chief of Party Wilder, or enjoying a Lao meal one evening with the team and their Lao counterparts, sitting in on a few of their classes, listening to Dell Johnson recite poetry (see appendix) or to Sam Floyd singing, playing chess when a free moment offered itself, noting the steadying influence of both Harold Daveler and Bill Rufener who have returned for second tours, listening to Jackson White describe the Science Exhibit his students have prepared for the That Luang, observing Van Nest and Nelson as they worked to design a small toy train set that could be produced for village children, and watching Hank Schumacher get the students started on their school gardens.

I want especially to commend Bernard and Shirley Wilder for the easy way they have moved into the Chief of Party responsibilities. They have been instrumental in securing for the IVS group a wider recognition and role at the NEC. More classroom teaching has opened up. Closer relations are developing with the French and British faculty. And Bernie, with his impressive array of professional skills in the field of technical and vocational training, has shown an ability to work out with both the teachers and the administration their technical problems; has been a forceful troubleshooter in support of his team; and offer to the various individuals a relaxed and happy home where they can retreat when group living wears a little thin.

Dell Johnson, our "senior" IVS volunteer from upper New Yorker state, features himself a poet. Time will tell whether his talent and reputation ever spread beyond Laos. However, the weary reader may at this point appreciate a light touch in conclusion. I offer "Ode To A Travelling Executive" - a bit of verse Dell composed to mark my arrival in Laos.

Oh, the air was very quiet
In our compound at K 6
No one swore at the table
And we dared not play our tricks.

Since the plane set down from Saigon
Like a bolt from out of Heaven
We were there at five to meet him
But he didn't come till seven