

October 1, 1973

To : Dr. Robert M. Martin, Chief of Party, UH Team

From : *John W. Rantala*
John W. Rantala, PLO/UH Team

Subject: Monthly Report for September, 1973

PROBLEM: Fa Ngum School Maintenance

It is with some hesitancy that I continue to "harp" about the Fa Ngum School Maintenance Problem. Nevertheless, I will repeat that USAID/Education and the UH Team have not succeeded in bringing the problem of school maintenance into sharp focus at the I/E level of the RHC.

Two examples of how breakdown maintenance was handled at the Fa Ngum School Phone along during the month of September, 1973 will clearly illustrate "where we are at" in our expectation that MOE personnel, posted at the school, are ready or willing to take on the responsibility of operational and repair maintenance.

Example #1

On September 13th Director Louphit made an urgent telephone call reporting that his diesel-powered generators had failed and he would appreciate repair services ASAP. I followed up the call to determine the nature of the breakdown and to make recommendations on what should be checked/tested. I was assured that it was not a fuse failure; there was no alternative but to visit the site, so on Sunday, September 16th I made a call at the school. A close check revealed that gridders had shorted the main circuit by crawling across the fuse terminals in the generator house main switch box. An electrical surge had burned the fuses over the transformer 150 yards removed from the generator house.

I was not able to determine whether anyone had checked the fuses or whether the generator operator/janitor/bursar or Industrial Arts teacher were not able to determine whether the fuses were burnt. It appeared to be a case of no one feeling it was his responsibility. I did find out that the School Director had replacement fuses locked up in his desk and he was in Vientiane. I might add that I know Mr. Zeis had demonstrated and explained to the generator operator, Mr. Noi, and to the Industrial Arts teacher, Mr. Bounkaum, how to check for burned out fuses and how to replace them. I will repeat, it is apparently a case of the MOE not specifically and authoritatively assigning maintenance duties and responsibilities in accordance with a clearly spelled out job description and position classification for a school maintenance technician.

We, USAID/UH, cannot contend that the USAID-hired generator operator has school maintenance responsibilities. There is a limit to how far Industrial Arts teachers will go beyond their teaching assignments to carry out maintenance repair tasks. The Bursar is supposedly responsible, but this, too, is an unrealistic expectation when he has no one to assign the tasks to. It is hardly necessary to say that he cannot assign semi-skilled, technical tasks to an uneducated, untrained, non-skilled janitor. Yet this seems to be the level of understanding about Pa Ngum School Maintenance that prevails at the MOE. I will be very frank in saying that there seems to be a strong reluctance on the part of USAID/EDU and the UH to bring the MOE to a full realization of what the technical, logistic and staff requirements are for maintaining the facilities and equipment of the Pa Ngum Schools.

Example #2

The following is a crite of an urgent request for maintenance services from one Pa Ngum Director.

- Subject: 1. Tractor tire
2. Electric Water Pump from the reservoir
3. Electric Water Pump from the well

Dear Mr. Rantala:

One of the front tractor tires and tube blew off yesterday and both of them could not repaired, so please order a new set for us.

Electric Pump at the reservoir stopped running since last Friday after having pumping for 15 minutes.

Water Pump next to the science classroom doesn't seem to be pumping at all. After pumping for sixty hours with a closing valve we still don't get even 1/4 of the tank. This would cause a lot of trouble when school opens next week. Therefore, I am writing this letter to inform you to have someone come out and get them ready before the opening.

Thank you for your help.

s/Director

First let me say that in no way does the above request suggest negligence on the part of the School Director and/or School Bursar. It is, in fact, to their credit that the breakdowns have been identified and a repair request submitted. It is the fault of the existing system which does not provide the Bursar with a qualified maintenance technician to whom he can assign the repair tasks.

The repairs were actually accomplished by the following method.

1. The replacement tire and tube were requisitioned from common use and delivered to Fa Ngum School Phone Hong by Mr. Khamnony and me. On arriving at the school at 3:30 p.m., Friday, September 28th, we discussed the problems briefly with the Director and went directly to the tractor. The replacement tire & tube could not be mounted because the rim of the tractor wheel was bent. I briefly instructed Mr. Bounleum how to straighten the rim. Inspection showed that the other front wheel rim was also bent. The second tire will also soon need replacement. The existing tires are 5.50 x 16 - 4 ply rating. Replacement tires carried by SMD are 6.00 x 16 - 6 ply rating. It was decided to replace both tires after the Industrial Arts and Agriculture teachers have straightened the rims as instructed.

2. We next went to the irrigation pump that had run 45 minutes and stopped. This is a strong indication of burned out fuses, malfunctioning switch, or pop out of the circuit breakers. We quickly determined that the circuit breakers had popped out (off). This was, in all, a twenty minute repair procedure that the Industrial Arts teacher was fully acquainted with! As near as I could determine, no one had told him to repair the pump! This was probably due to the fact that he was already fully engaged in constructing the Faculty House. The Director and/or Bursar apparently did not want to burden him with an additional task.

3. The reciprocating pump for potable water was still running on our arrival; in fact, it was running very hot and squeaking and in obvious need of grease in the motor bearings. We could not grease the pump motor while we were there, for Mr. Noi, the generator operator had the accessories necessary for greasing the motor locked up and he was himself in Vientiane.

We quickly determined that the pump was raising water from the well but not pushing it up to the tower. The force pump driven by the reciprocating mechanism of the pump was obviously not functioning. We decided that the leathers were worn out.

I know that Mr. Zaus has instructed both Mr. Noi and Mr. Bounleum in how to replace the leathers in the force pump. I thought that I would leave the replacement leathers with Mr. Bounleum, but he declined. I could not leave the pump unrepai red, so I requested Mr. Bounleum to leave the Faculty House construction and accept the help of Mr. Khamnony and myself to help him replace the leathers. We completed the job by 7:00 p.m.

I think Mr. Bounleum was within his rights to decline the job, under the circumstances. The generator operator and the Bursar were not able or willing to assume the task. The Bursar had all the tools supplies provided under the General Maintenance Training Program, which he attended, locked up under his care. We could not get to the tools as he was also in Vientiane. We had taken some tools with us and the remainder we borrowed from the Industrial Arts shop so we were able to master sufficient tools to accomplish the task.

It is clearly not within the prerogatives of USAID or UH team members to assign maintenance tasks to MOE people. The MOE Bursar has no technically qualified people to whom he can assign full time maintenance responsibilities. He has no time or inclination to perform the tasks himself as he is a school administrator, not a skilled worker. The MOE is not aware of the specifics of the Fa Ngum maintenance problem for it has been virtually sheltered from the problem. USAID and the UH have been performing the repair maintenance. Fa Ngum School Phone Hong is supposed to be on its own with respect to operation and repair of the school facilities and equipment. The fact is it cannot for there are no MOE maintenance technicians to make that expectation a reality.

My August monthly report suggests how the problem of adequate staffing for Fa Ngum School maintenance might be handled.

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