

TO: The ad hoc Editorial Board; The Ambassadors; Other
Interested Parties.

FROM: Ron Pulcini

SUBJECT: Publisher's Kit & New York Sojourn

DATE: 1 May 1985

I am pleased to inform you that I am one of approximately 50 participants selected by the Asia Society to attend its conference, "The Vietnam Experience in American Literature," to be held in New York from May 7th to the 9th. Harry Carr was most generous in underwriting my travel expenses. I have worked hard to prepare myself for this, in particular, putting together a publisher's kit to attract interest in "our" book. Ten representatives from various houses are to be participants, and there will be many others attending the open house functions. In addition, I will be beating the bushes around the bronze doors of some foundations for travel funds.

After the conference, I will go to Washington, D.C. where Mrs. Betsy Bailey (and the Colonel) will host a get-together that I might meet a number of Laotians; she is doing this with the gracious help of Mrs. Bounsou Sananakone. I will explain the project to them, and, if possible, even interview some.

I am certain you will enjoy reading the excerpts enclosed. Of course, I couldn't include excerpts from all the manuscripts I now have - there may be too much here as it is. There are more than 35 manuscripts promised.

I want to thank all of you for the tremendous assistance you've been these past months. Certainly, Harry deserves applause for his sagacious advice, moral support, and continuous follow-through. I will do my best to find a publisher for this potentially "good read" of a book.

Please be aware of my address change per the enclosed brown post card.

Larry Olsen, member, International Voluntary Services, Inc., stationed in Khone Sedone (southern Laos).

One of the rituals of being a Buddhist monk is to beg for food each morning. Those who give to him receive boun, a sort of blessing that assists that person's soul in it's seeking of perfection. Larry was the only American in his area to become a monk.

"After some help with the bowl and robe, I took my position in line and we marched barefoot in single file down by the river, around the provincial governor's house and back up through the center of town. We walked slowly, even sedately, stopping in front of each individual, or occasionally waiting for someone who was a little late, opening our robes to expose the bowls which we uncapped to receive a small wad of sticky rice or maybe a banana. We then covered the bowls and passed on to the next person waiting for us. This daily round was taught by Buddha and followed a social-religious tradition in India. It varies slightly in different parts of Laos and at different wats, or temples - usually in the degree of discipline. Our wat tended to be fairly lax. The monks at the end of the line sometimes chattered or laughed. Often, Atchan Mai, my religious teacher, talked to certain devout laymen concerning help with a particular wat affair, urging them to come and to bring others.

"I both feared and enjoyed the morning procession. I had a frightful case of crotch rot and walking was awkward and painful. But I was always interested to see who came out to give alms and what the reactions of my friends would be as they put rice in my bowl. I remember the cackling of some old ladies saying that I made such a good monk - so white and muscular - and that I should remain a monk forever."

Yang Kou, a Hmong tribesman.

Yang was a boy during the ten year period this book's stories take place.

"I used to watch an airplane pass over the mountains and I thought it was a big bird which landed on the mountain tops to find food. I hid myself under the trees when the airplane passed because I thought it might catch me as the eagle catches chickens.

"When I was about five years old, my father made a trip to Luang Prabang, the royal capital, to trade some goods and to tour the city. He returned home safely and with much exciting news. Every man in the village came to meet him. He told everyone about his trip and what he had seen from the day he left home until the day he returned. He began his trip by walking for two days from our small village to the Mekong River where he boarded a small engine boat. He described the danger and the fear when his boat had to pass through rapids along the Mekong. He talked about the beauty of the city, the Royal Palace, the many Buddhist temples and monuments, the roads, the cars in the street, electricity, and many other wonderful things that the villagers had never heard of or seen before. The most important news that scared everyone was about a friend of my father's who had moved from the mountains to be the servant of an American.

"My father's friend told him that the man he served was very big and tall. He lived in a very clean, nice house and that he did not eat rice like our people. He ate sliced meat from a big leg like a human's leg. My father's friend was sure that it must have been from a dead body. At each meal, he would slice a piece of meat from that leg and then place it between two pieces of bread and eat it! My father's friend also told about the many white priests telling people to bury their dead relatives as soon as they can and not to keep the body around too long as we did. My father's friend suspected the priests of going to the graveyard to take the dead bodies home for food, just like the one that the American kept at home for his food."

Richard French, USAID/Requirements Office

Supplying the Lao troops out in the field presented some unique problems.

"Moung Soui, Laos, designated L-08 in the Air Facility Data pamphlet, is located some 100 air miles north of Vientiane. It borders the Plain of Jars and was headquarters for the supposedly 9,000 Neutralist Army troops. It is situated at an altitude of over 3,000 feet, surrounded by beautiful pine trees, and, during the summer of 1965, the Pathet Lao Army. All logistical support was transported via cargo aircraft which landed at a superbly built, 6,000 foot dirt runway built under the supervision of USAID/Public Works Division. Motor vehicle spare parts, rice, clothing and personal possessions, vast quantities of ammunition, weapons (including large artillery pieces) and live water buffalo were brought in this way.

"Past procedure was to have the buffalo slaughtered at the airport in Vientiane just prior to shipping, butchered and placed in bamboo baskets for the airlift. But the Neutralist claimed they were not receiving the 'good' parts, the entrails, so it was decided to ship the whole things - live!

"The animals would first be walked into a large frame crate which was then forklifted sideways into a C-123 (eight per plane). The loadmaster, or 'kicker,' was provided with a .45 caliber automatic just in case one of these critters acted up. One time a buffalo crate was dropped by a forklift during the unloading at L-08, the crate broke open and the buffalo took off on a dead run never to be found again. To prevent any further loss of buffalo, several Military Police armed with rifles were stationed around the airfield while the buffalo were unloaded - they were going to be slaughtered anyway.

Wayne R. McKinny, M.D., Dooley Foundation volunteer doctor.

A Hmung tribeswoman, whose husband had been killed by the Pathet Lao, gave birth through Caesarean Section to a sickly child. After cajoling and even threatening the woman, the doctor convinced her to accept the child after it recovered - she had said her breasts were dry and that she didn't have enough money to take care of it properly. She reluctantly cared for the baby and went back to carrying rocks on a road crew with it strapped to her back. But things didn't work out very well.

"In a few minutes, we walked out the door onto the porch which served as the hospital waiting room. The woman was facing the mountains and I saw her only in profile; her face was a mask of tiredness. I turned to my interpreter.

"'Sai, tell her I'm sorry but her baby died. Tell her he was so sick that our medicine just couldn't do anything.'

"Sai spoke to the mother in Lao in a hushed voice but I noticed it was my wife who was crying and not the woman. Suddenly, I was filled with rage. Does nothing touch her? Is she, indeed, the world's most disreputable mother?

"Then I saw it. The single tear slowly glided down her cheek. I wept.

"She went into the hospital and picked up the baby's body, wrapped him once more in his dirty rags and left without saying a word. We never saw her again before we left.

"My wife never forgot that child, and every time she speaks of our experiences in Laos, I know she will become teary eyed. So I resist the temptation to talk about our work in Laos to our friends. I am a veteran who did not bring home tales from a war.

"Then later, when we found out we could not have children of our own, I think the memory of that boy made it worse for her.

"And somewhere in Laos in the foothills of the Himalayas is a woman whose heart is as empty as ours."

Harry Carr, Assistant Director/Management, USAID - Vientiane.

Practically all support and logistic operations came under Mr. Carr's responsibility - including the notification of the next-of-kin. He reflects on the realities of those life and death situations in which the latter won.

"I didn't think much about all this, to be honest. I was too busy. But the cruel deadly violence gnawed away like a cancer inside me as the messages kept coming in and actions had to be taken . . . Night of May 8, 1968, enemy fired a dozen automatic bursts up through the floor of Frank Gillespie's Lao-style 'stilt' house in Kengkok, miraculously missing him, his wife, and baby . . . April 24, 1969, Chandler Edwards, 23 year old IVS volunteer, killed in one bloody instant when his jeep was hit from ambush in Champassak, returning from delivering supplies to a rural school. They dragged his body from the jeep and pumped bullets in it, then shot to death the two Lao women accompanying him . . . May 12, 1969, at 0600, George McClatchey ambushed in his jeep driving to a project near Vang Vieng, escaped in a hail of bullets . . . August 5, 1969, Dennis Mummert and Art Stillman, IVS volunteers, stopped by enemy patrol near Paksane and shot to death with their two Lao companions after answering questions . . . Night of July 24, 1969, during a heavy enemy attack on Ban Thalot, Loren Waggoner, his wife and two kids, and two IVS volunteers hid in a "safe" room while enemy grenaded the house and compound . . . November 29, 1969, British Colombo Plan nurse, Therese Horsefield and her Vietnamese assistant stopped on road south of Vientiane, ordered out of their Landrover and shot to death . . . March 16, 1971, enemy stopped a taxi south of Site 272 and shot to death six civilians and a child . . . April 13, 1971, same area, enemy stopped a country bus, dragged out four civilian men, four women and a child and shot them to death . . . May, 1972, a young Dane hitchhiked a ride on a barge going down the Mekong from Luang Prabang - his badly decomposed body was pulled from the river near Sayaboury nearly two weeks later . . . October 28, 1972, enemy overran Kengkok, captured two female missionaries, Anderson and Kosin, Asian Christian Services - tied them back to back to a post under their stilt house and burned the house. Charred bodies identified a week later . . . These are the most vivid memories reconstructed from my desk calendar, some of the pieces of the gigantic, frightful mosaic. Check security. Rescue helicopter. Ambulance waiting. Body bags. Identification. Freeze room at Udorn. Personal effects. Next of kin. Final arrangements. Even though The Mission was not actually responsible for some of the victims, our considerable resources were made available whenever we were asked."

William H. Sullivan, U.S. Ambassador to Laos, 1964-1969.

Upon assuming his new assignment to Vientiane, Ambassador Sullivan learned how different the US Mission to Laos was from the one in Vietnam.

"It was not until November of 1964 that I managed to extricate myself from Saigon and get sworn in as Ambassador to Laos. By that time, neutrality had become a well-worn fiction. I moved in to head a 'country team' that was almost as deeply involved in 'counterinsurgency' as the team I had just left in Saigon.

"However, there were some sharp differences. For example, we did not have the large military headquarters and military presence that dominated American operations in Vietnam. Our only manifestation in Laos was a modest attache staff, larger than normal for such a small country, but not conspicuous for its size. It was able to stay that way because it acted, in effect, as the forward echelon for a larger military presence in Thailand that acted as our logistics organization and provided the supplies needed by Lao fighting forces. Similarly, as we became further involved in air support operations in Laos, we had a back-up air staff in Thailand that provided planes, pilots, and rescue helicopters to support the fighting effort.

"Our American combat force in Laos was nil, despite the fact that the Soviets, the North Vietnamese, and Time magazine were convinced that we had at least 10,000 troops clandestinely deployed there. Instead, all the fighting was done by Hmung tribal units, assisted by a few Thai special forces, coordinated by not commanded by a handful of paramilitary officers from CIA.

"But our efforts were not confined to military resistance against the North Vietnamese. In addition, we were engaged in a major effort to assist and develop the economy of that war-stricken country of nearly three million people. We therefore had a large AID mission, many IVS volunteers, and a whole covey of specialists in various fields to undertake this work of 'nation building.'

"Those who worked in Laos in all these various fields will tell parts of their experiences in this book, as will some who observed other features of the American presence from other perspectives."

G. Mc Murtrie Godley, U.S. Ambassador to Laos 1969-1973.

Ambassador Godley gives a brief assessment of a few of the cast of characters within the Royal Lao Government,

"The king resided in the royal capital of Luang Prabang which is situated at the confluence of the Mekong and Pakon Rivers in the mountains of northern Laos. Vientiane, the political capital, spreads along the same mighty Mekong in the lowlands 150 miles to the south. The Lao were a peace-loving, happy-go-lucky, gentle people, who gave primary loyalty to their local family leaders and village chieftains. The handful of political elite felt strong ties to the monarchy, and we were always surprised to find how these ties would manifest themselves and reveal their strength. For example, it was impossible to remove a provincial governor, whose veniality and total incompetence was of assistance to the enemy, because he was a cousin of the king. In another case, the Prime Minister kept after me on several occasions, and for unknown reasons, to bomb a village on behalf of the king. Needless to say, we did not comply with this request.

"The Prime Minister ran the country. He had little effective help, and we were impressed by the detailed matters he handled himself. It was a benign rule, and the old gentleman was often too harassed by dishonesty, inefficiency, or stupidity on the part of subordinates who he liked or who were part of the Laotian establishment. His most effective appointee was Sisouk na Champassak, heir of the once royal family of the southern kingdom. Sisouk, Minister of Finance and Defense, a conservative rightist, was well educated, spoke English, and had been in New York as the Laotian Representative to the United Nations. He was able, industrious and honest, but overworked and helped only by a handful of assistants. At times he would bridle under Souvanna Phouma's laissez-faire neutralist attitude, but basically he was loyal to the old gentleman in a quasi-filial manner.

"The Lao career military leaders, as a whole, were far from impressive. Among the exceptions were General Sou Chai in the South and Chao (Prince) Sinn in the North. General Vang Pao stood head and shoulders above his peers, but much of his power could be attributed to his Hmung position as a tribal chieftain rather than his military capabilities which were, nevertheless, remarkable. He was also personally courageous, a rather unique attribute among senior Lao military commanders. At the field grade and junior levels there were a substantial number of competent officers."

Larry D. Woodson, member, International Voluntary Services, Inc.; USAID/Education Division.

Larry's job with USAID/ED required that he travel around the country a lot. He relates the sort of hospitality you will get in a Laotian village.

"On one occasion, Charlie Wayland and I flew up to a mountainous area to visit with a group of village leaders to determine their needs. We arrived by helicopter at around 10:00 in the morning and had to walk several hundred yards through the jungle to reach the village where the meeting was to take place. All the nibans, village chiefs, were on hand to meet with us and discuss their villages' particular needs. The visit was suppose to be over by the afternoon when the helicopter would return to pick us up. But the rains set in and we didn't leave until three days later! So the Lao did what their best to entertain us.

"They killed a young pig and cooked it on a fire in the middle of the house we stayed at. They used the blood for a sort of pudding - some was served raw and the rest was used for another kind of soup. A few of the villagers served us their different brands of Lao hai, an alcoholic concoction we called 'white lightening.' You could tell what the quality of this stuff was by putting a match to it: if it burned a light blue color you knew you were in for a bad hangover. There always seemed to be this game the villagers would play with you about Lao hai - they'd place the prettiest girls next to you and have them keep pouring it in your glass. And they would act a little insulted if you didn't drink with them. And you had to drink a glass of it with each of the village leaders, too! The problem was that the glasses were the size of water glasses. Later, in addition to the roasted pork, pork blood, soup with more blood in it, we also ate bamboo shoots, a few vegetables, and other items gathered from the forest.

"As an American, you soon discovered that if it swam, crawled, flew, or moved the slightest bit, the Lao thought it was edible. I have eaten red ants, lizzard, snake, different birds, locusts, cicadaes, chicken embryos (the 13 day variety with tiny feathers), and a few other delicacies. The markets often had bear meat, bats, wild cats, deer, as well as buffalo meat. I remember that red ants tasted much like bacon bits, but I've conveniently forgotten how the cicadaes tasted (I do remember having to bite quickly before they flew or crawled around inside your mouth). And it took several glasses of 'white lightening' before I could look at the chicken embryos."

Lt. Col. Raymond C. Mullen, Jr.(Ret), US Army, advisor to units in the Royal Lao Army - Military Region V.

A combined force of Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese infantry units took the key junction where Routes 1 and 9 intersect in late 1972. It had a demoralizing affect on the Lao Army. A turn around was needed.

"One day after the fall of Sala Phu Khoun, I was near the village of Muang Kassi when my counterpart, Colonel Doungpy (now in a reeducation center in Pakse), came rushing out of no where and yelled, 'Tanks!' I said, 'Shit!' My Air Force FAC (Forward Air Control) officer said, 'No shit!' Two PT-76's were coming our way. Doungpy and I took off in separate jeeps, me in the FAC's \$10,000 jeep which had a 'magic box' for scrambling ground to air messages. I told my other people to get back to the airfield and warm up the Huey - just in case. Along the way towards the action, Doungpy and I confiscated some M-72 anti-tank launchers (the disposable type) and distributed them to the Thai mercenaries who had placed themselves on both sides of the road. Suddenly, up around the bend, this extremely large (it seemed then) muzzle of a canon appeared. I yelled to Doungpy, 'Let's get the hell out of here!' I wasn't about to let the \$10,000 jeep get destroyed or captured. Also, I was under orders not to get killed and I always obeyed orders! We fled back to the air strip, hopped in the chopper, and got up to 5,000 feet.

"As we flew over the tanks, I could see the engine of one smoking and its crew evacuating to the other - they had probably realized that their infantry had split. Although I had all kinds of stuff stacked overhead - Lao T-28's, Marine A-7's, Air Force F-4's, we couldn't call 'em in because of the cloud cover. Well, tank number 2 started retreating with his hatch open and a Thai got lucky with an M-79 grenade launcher shot right in the turret - stopping said tank. Doungpy and I landed about fifty yards away. There were Thai and Pathet Lao bodies scattered about (always smoke a cigar around the dead in warm climate). When I asked the Thai Lieutenant if anyone was alive in the tank he said, 'No.' But when Doungpy and I climbed up to take a look, I was face-to-face with a wounded P.L. We got him to a Filipino hospital in Vang Vieng.

"At that time, every Lao general around was asking for B-52 raids in that area. But I couldn't authorize them because of not having solid intelligence to pinpoint the enemy's positions. But this wounded tank driver gave us the poop we needed. So there I am one night at the Ambassador's residence, with the Army and Air Force Attaches, and a guy now called the 'bombing officer,' down on our knees, 'boxing' out a bunch of B-52 strikes. Damn, if we didn't get 'em! But the day after, the Lao general who had badgered me the most complained that they made too much noise!"

Lee Deffebach, painter - stopped in Vientiane to visit a friend and stayed a year.

Living a less structured life than the Americans with The Mission, Miss Deffebach was able to explore Laos on any level she pleased.

"I was also introduced to opium dens. The first time, I was taken to a place just off the town square. We entered through a long hallway to a small room and sat on the floor mats, ready to approach the man administering the pipe at the end of the room. Just then a customer came in dressed in a business suit and carrying a briefcase. He was French and asked if he could go ahead of the three of us because he was in a hurry (Je suis presse). Of course! So after he had smoked and laid back with a handkerchief over his face, and after we had smoked (my first time) and had sat around awhile, this Frenchman sat up and wanted to talk. He told us of the early days of French rule in Laos when most diplomats would take up opium, and on their home leaves would withdraw from the addiction on long voyages by ship. From Laos they carried a decanter of an opium derivative. Each night they would drink a glass of the derivative, filling the decanter back up with wine. By the time they arrived home, the decanter would be filled with straight wine.

"Later, we went to cheaper places. For ten cents you could spend a whole night in a 'den.' One of these was approached via a boardwalk to a shack on stilts over a canal. After smoking a pipe, you could move away, sit against the wall or lie down on a mat, and enjoy the effects: the visual treat of foreign things in a foreign abode; the cobwebs and shadows and light; often, the sound of the rain on a thatched or a tin roof and the drips on the floor; talking desultorily with companions. Early in the morning we would realize that we had to move in order to make room for the tri-shaw drivers and others wanting a hit before starting to work at the nearby market."

Marie J. Sullivan, wife of William H. Sullivan, U.S. Ambassador to Laos - 1964-1969.

In February, 1965, General Phoumi Nosavan attempted to lead a coup d'etat against Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma's neutralist government. There was some shooting, and like any mother, Mrs. Sullivan kept close track of her children.

"Suddenly, there was the sound of shooting, the roar of explosions; quiet Vientiane was at war. Unfortunately, a good deal of the action was right near the USAID compound. Soldiers with color-coded scarves around their necks, loyal to the government, had surrounded the Mann's house (USAID Director). It was said that those without scarves were on 'the other side. But for the children, it would have been hard to tell the good and bad guys apart! One of the girls staying with us suggested that the safest place in the house was under the stairs, so that's where the three little girls spent the battle.

"When the shooting died down, Charles Mann brought his wife and the three girls at their house over. Our boys, who had spent most of the day indoors - very resentful with me for not letting them go out to see the action - were glad to see company. As a matter of fact, we had a full house that night. Meg and Coky Swank were also there. The boys ended up sleeping on the couches in the library. That was the night Phoumi's house was blown up. Since it was right next door to the Swank's home it was just as well that they were with us.

"By the 4th of February, the battles were over. Phoumi went across the river to Thailand and the Prime Minister's government remained in control. Its affect, actually, was to make his position even stronger. In terms of casualties, it had not been a costly coup attempt. The Embassy received a certain amount of property damage, but the only American wounded was a girl who got a bit of shrapnel in her arm. Our cook's son (who did not live at the residence) suffered a much more dangerous wound when he was hit in the head by shrapnel. He had to be evacuated to Bangkok. Both children came through well.

"For me, the coup was something like an initiation ceremony. It had been a dangerous time, but we survived. I felt like a veteran who had earned her first battle ribbon. There would be other difficulties during our stay. Laos was certainly not an easy place to live. In some strange way, that coup gave me strength. Neither playing my role as the Ambassador's wife, or speaking at future orientations held the terrors I had felt earlier."

Mrs. Betsy Bailey, wife of Col. Broadus Bailey, US Army Attache.

While visiting southern Laos, Mrs. Bailey attended a baci, a ceremony given to welcome guests, seal a marriage, to celebrate a birth, to honor a death, or to say farewell to a friend. This baci was held in the home of the commanding general of Pakse, the largest city in the south.

"Typical of other Lao homes we had been in, theirs, although spacious, was very bare, almost spartan in its lack of accessories. The main furnishings were Germanic: large, over-stuffed leather chairs and things. There was a small stereo set with a plastic dust cover, a portrait of the King and some calendar art. For this occasion, the main room had been cleared and colorful grass mats covered the floor. In the center of these were three very large baci bowls, ornately hammered silver urns filled with bouquets of marigolds, gerbera, clover and crysanthemums. Interspersed were sticks from which hundreds of short lengths of white cotton string were hung. Under the bowls were the usual assortment of hard-boiled eggs, cookies and fruit (if it had been at General Vang Pao's house, the commander of the Hmung tribemen in northern Laos, you would have found a roast suckling pig, two cooked chickens and shot glasses filled with White Horse Scotch). We all sat on the mats and a maw pawn, a chanter who invokes the spirits, began his singsong litany on behalf of the honored guests - us. Some of the people carried on chatty whispered conversations during this part of the ceremony. But when the chanter, speaking in Lao, of course, spoke about the American Ambassador who was present, he said, ' . . . the Ambassador of the United States of Air America,' the whole room convulsed in laughter - Laotians and Americans alike.

"We then crawled on our knees to one another (by now in considerable discomfort from having sat on the floor in one position for so long) and tied the cotton strings around each other's wrists and wishing nice things - the typical Lao wish is for health, prosperity and happiness. While someone tied a string on your wrist, you had to balance an egg, an orange or a cookie in that same hand (at Vang Pao's there would have been one of those jiggers of Scotch!). Most of the Westerners there ended up showing a combination of expressions on their faces: on one side a little wincing from the pain in their knees and hips, and on the other, a lot of affection for those gentle people and their sincere good wishes."

Jerome Doolittle, USIA Press Officer, free-lance writer, novelist.

There were exceptions to the norm when it came to describing CIA case officers at their northern Laos headquarters in Long Tieng.

"Most of the agents were men in their late twenties or early thirties who dressed in informal, outdoors fashion. Nearly all of them wore the canvas and rubber combat boots used by the American soldiers in Vietnam, which was a useful aid in the game of spotting CIA men in Vientiane. Most of them were clean-cut, close-cropped, standard military types, although there were exceptions. Hog, for example.

"Hog wore a grubby, caked beard, an Italian net T-shirt and a thin leather vest, glowing dully from grease. For weeks (some say months) at a time, working on dusty airstrips, sweating, wading streams, hiking, he didn't wash at all. Set against a background of Hell's Angels, Hog would have become invisible.

"One day the London station chief for the CIA visited Long Tieng with his counterpart from Vientiane, the capital. On the other side of the mess hall was Hog, his beard and hair and face caked with red dust. The London station chief watched in growing nausea as this person hacked open a can of pork and beans with a knife. When Hog tipped the can to his mouth, cold pork and bean juice dribbled down his matted beard, running off onto his Italian fishnet T-shirt, making rivulets in the dust and caking.

"'Is that an American?', the London man asked.

"The Vientiane man admitted it.

"'Is that one of ours?'

"'Well, uh, yes . . . Actually, it is . . .'

"The visitor fell silent. The Court of St. James must have seemed very remote."

Jerome Doolittle, USIS Press Officer, free-lance writer, novelist.

At one point, Mr. Doolittle had a small office in the Lido Hotel where there was a favorite spot a number of men frequented.

"The Lucky Bar took up only a small part of the ground floor of the hotel, a block-long, three-story building with a wing running out to the rear. A long time ago the Lido must have been painted mustard color, inside and out. But the paint inside had powdered and moldered slowly away as the years passed, and outside it had washed off little by little in the rains. What color was left seemed organic, as though something had formed and grown on the building rather than having been painted on by men with brushes. All through the rainy season, as well as into the dry season, the hotel smelled of mildew, mold and decay. Only the floors were kept up. The wide planks, of a hardwood called mai doo, were polished smooth and black and gleaming every morning by houseboys who used coconut husks cut in half for scrub brushes.

"Most of the girls who came to the Lucky Bar looking for customers were not Lao but Thai. The next largest number were Vietnamese. This wasn't because Lao women didn't become working girls. Many did. But in bars catering to Westerners the gentle Lao tended to be shouldered aside by the more aggressive and ambitious girls from Bangkok or Saigon.

"It took toughness to prosper in the Lucky Bar - most of the customers had come to Laos to take part in the long war between the Pathet Lao and their North Vietnamese allies on one side, and the CIA backed guerillas and US Air Force on the other. The men who spent their money in the Lucky were American soldiers or airmen in civilian clothes, or were CIA case officers down from Military Region II for R&R. Some were Marine Guards at the Embassy, or pilots for Continental Air Services or Air America, the CIA's contract airlines. Most of these men were extremely well-paid by Lao standards, and many by American standards as well. Those in the military got combat pay - even the Embassy Guards. The civilian pilots usually made more than \$30,000 a year paying taxes neither to the Lao or US governments. In Laos, you could hire a top chef for \$100 a month and a maid for \$30. Many of the pilots wore identification bracelets, massive things, with their names carved in soft, reddish-yellow gold. The enlisted men spent their extra money on motorcycles, although the only sizeable stretch of paved road in Laos was the 15 miles or so of potholed blacktop between Vientiane and Thadeua where you caught the ferry to Thailand. Every night, the sidewalk outside the Lucky was crowded with shiney, powerful machines, 450 and 750 cc's in glittering yellow and burgundy, scarlet and silver and blue."