[redacted]

1 December 1987

Dear Larry,

Should you want to give your *Khao Lao* readers first-hand info this year about the status of LAOS: THE WAR NEXT DOOR, here it is, along with a copy of the proposal I've been circulating within the cement canyons of New York City.

In order to attract a publisher – either directly or through an agent – a writer must submit a complete work or a proposal. Because the project is predicated on interviews, I am restricted to the proposal format. But this also means that I must beg for an advance to do the necessary travel to finish the book. Not having published a prior book works against me.

Thus far, only five agents and one publisher have rejected this, the third version (the first and second were rejected by three agents and three publishers). The reason the number is so few is that they insist on seeing these things on an "exclusive basis." One agent kept the manuscript four months. From his accompanying note, and a follow-up phone call on my part, I think he came close to taking it on.

How strange it is that Laos should have been so much a part of the Vietnam War and not be known. One agent wrote: "I knew that Laos was involved, but had no idea how close it was. I'm sorry, but I fear publishers would not be intriqued with it."

I have applied for a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to complete the travel and interviews. Awards will not be made until mid-'88. In the meantime, I continue to send it out to another agent, another publisher. It is so time consuming.

I must ask you not to circulate the proposal. I hope you understand.

I've been wanting to send a letter to everyone – over 280 names – who's been supportive of the book, but I am trying to earn a living at being a reporter for the Bigfork *Eagle*, a weekly paper. Also, I am doing a creative writing project as a writer-in-residence with the Montana Arts Council at the local high school. And, too, I write occasional articles for Northern Lights, a literary magazine for the northern Rockies. These are not high-paying assignments.

Last year, I played "father-mother" to our daughter Rafaella (9/2/86) after Elide returned to her science teaching position at

Bigfork High. Andrea – 22 – is at Whitman College studying Chinese and art. Two lovely daughters.

In early October, Harry and Rita Carr came through Montana on their way back east for a wedding (an indirect route if there ever was one). Through the generosity of Rita's brother, the three of us went on a helicopter tour of the Bob Marshall and Great Bear Wildernesses, Glacier Park and the Swan Mountain Wilderness, all of which are within naked-eye distance from here, the Flathead Valley. They are two of the most adventuresome people I've ever met, so vital, so glad to be alive. At a gas station somewhere, a young fella said to Harry, "Hey, that's pretty neat about two old people having a Toyota sportscar!" Did Harry tip the lad?

Whoever asks: Pulcini is doing the book!

May you have a delightful Christmas Season.

Regards,

Ron

Proposal

for

Laos: The War Next Door

Editor: Ron Philip Pulcini

The format of this book is a chronologically arranged sequence of oral interviews. The subject is the Kingdom of Laos and its struggle to exist during the thirty year period after World War II (prior to becoming the Lao People's Democratic Republic). The proposed length of the manuscript is 550-600 pages. The interviewees are non-communist, communist, and neutralist Laotians, and Americans who lived and worked there during this period. The significance of this time and place has, of course, intimate links with the Vietnam War. Moreover, the characteristics of Laos (and the Laotians) is extremely unique compared to Vietnam and offer irresistible vignettes to a reader who is interested in this period and this war. Despite being inextricably tied to the survival of South Vietnam, the war in Laos was mainly conducted by civilians, particularly by the CIA. The connection to what is now happening in Nicaragua is timely: Eugene Hasenfus, captured by the Nicaraguan govenment in December 1986, once worked for Air America in Laos. And General Singlaub, the commander of the joint Army/CIA interdiction teams in Laos, is now running a "non-governmental" foundation to aid the Contras.

The story of how this small, insignificant kingdom came to be so important to the vital interests of the United States - within the span of a single generation - is an excellent example of overplaced emphasis by our, and other world leaders. It is also about the Sixties Generation, the one so impressed by Kennedy's inaugural address, and its eventual obsession with America's Indochina War. But this is not an ideological or religious polemic. The writer uses his experiences and training as a historian to allow the disparate voices in the book to air their individual opinions and perspectives - it is left up to the reader to decide the nagging moral questions of those times.

To date, the author has interviewed 35 people - in Washington, D.C., New York, Arizona, Los Angeles, Seattle and Montana. He has also collected 45 written statements with true-life stories about Laos. He is in contact with over 350 people who once lived and worked in Laos. He has full cooperation of the last three American ambassadors to Laos (1965-1975), as well as a representative spread of Americans and Laotians from the wide spectrum of

professions, agencies and geographical locations involved. In addition, the writer has cultivated sensitive and useful contacts for the purposes of gaining (legal) entry into Laos to interview the leaders of the communist movement who were there before and during the war. His knowledge of spoken Laotian and Vietnamese are invaluable tools for this assignment.

The number of additional interviews needed in order to have adequate material will range from 200-225 persons. To collect these interviews, it will be necessary for the editor to travel throughout the United States, to Mexico, France, Thailand and the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The estimated amount of on-the-road time for these trips would be approximately four (4) months. Lead time needed for travel and contact arrangements is approximately eight weeks (the visa for Laos may take longer). These trips would be divided as follows (but not necessarily in this order):

Eastern U.S.	Five weeks
Western U.S.	Four weeks
Mexico	One week
Paris/Bangkok/Laos	Eight weeks

Travel costs would reflect modest accomodations and the most direct form of travel.

Transcription services would be contracted in the editor's home town - Kalispell, Montana - at rates considerably lower than those presently charged in New York.

Completion time for the interviewing editing, writing and preparation of a finished first draft would be approximately 16 months. The editor would devote full time to this project.

The qualifications of the editor/writer are: Writer-In-Residence with the Montana Arts Council's (MAC) Artists in Communities/Schools program for the year 1985-86 (re-appointed for 1987-88); co-editor of MAC's anthology 1985-86, "How White Trains Rumble The Tracks"; completed one (unpublished) novel, "No Cause For Rejoicing"; published in the literary magazine Northern Lights (an article in the March/April edition explores gambling as a source of revenue for state governments in the northern Rockies region), the Los Angeles Times, L.A. Weekly, and Expressions magazine. He lived in Cambodia in 1963; Vietnam from 1963-65; and Laos from 1965-70. The writer has been planning and working on this project

since April 1985. He is married to Elinor de Lancey Pulcini, a high school science teacher. They have a baby daughter, Rafaella Elena Pulcini.

Sample pages from the book are enclosed:

Title page
Inscription
Table of Contents
Introduction
Biographies
Section III (samples of interviews)

For further details contact:

Laos: The War Next-Door

Oral Accounts by Its Participants

Written and Edited by

Ron Philip Pulcini

The voices of Americans and non-communist and communist Laotians remember the struggle which ended the Kingdom of Laos

Nobody must be surprised, if, knowing as well as anybody the past condition of that people, and having shared their life myself, I feel a burning desire for truth when I am spoken about them. When the progress of my history led me to study the questions of the day, and I cast my eyes upon the books in which they are discussed, I confess I was surprised to find them almost all in contradiction to my memory. I then shut the books, and placed myself among the people to the best of my power; the lonely writer plunged again into the crowds, listened to their noise, noted their words. They were perfectly the same people, changed only in outward appearance; my memory did not deceive me. I went about, therefore, consulting men, listening to their account of their own condition, and gathering from their lips, what is not always found in the most brillant writers, the words of common sense.

Jules Michelet
THE PEOPLE
translated by C. Cocks
B.L., London 1846

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INTRODUCTION

Another American and I sat on the polished floor of a Laotian peasant's porch in the village of Nong Bok. It was early afternoon and the air was stagnant and heavy. Four small children, seemingly strewn about us, were asleep where they'd been playing only moments before.

When we had driven in late that morning the peasant had climbed a tree, dropped some coconuts, and deftly cut away the tops of their green and white fleshy husks. As tradition demanded, he'd left a thin membrane over the hole in order that we, his honored guests, might expose the milk ourselves before drinking.

After we were seated on the floor of his meager wood and bamboo hut, he momentarily disappeared inside the house and returned wearing a stonewashed white dress shirt. He sat with his legs tucked under and behind him, wrapped within a black and white checkered *pha-sa-long* that was tied around his waist. Perhaps it was from asking so many questions about his village - part of a community development survey we were conducting - that the man allowed his curiosity about us to come out in the open. He knew a few things about America from having occasional access to a radio. But he didn't know how far America was from his village. When my colleague and I attempted to convert miles into kilometers, he said he would rather know how long such a journey would take. When we told him approximately 20 hours by plane, he looked at us intently and asked: "But how long does it take to walk to your country?"

Laos. Since 1975 it has referred to itself as the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Prior to that it was called the Kingdom of Laos, or "The Land of a

Million Elephants." For 600 years - despite bursts of territorial expansion or surrender - it languished mainly as a landlocked, feudal state along the banks of the Mekong River paying homage to Chinese and Vietnamese emperors. At one point it split into three rival kingdoms until in 1899 French colonial efforts subdued and reconsolidated them into a single "protectorate." It wasn't until World War II and its aftermath that Americans - and only a few - began to learn about Laos first hand.

OSS paratroopers landed in the northern regions of Vietnam and Laos to encourage resistance to, and organize the surrender of, the Japanese Imperial Army. It is no small irony that Ho Chi Minh and his compatriots were the local contacts in these operations rather than the Vichy French government *colons* who had collaborated with the Japanese (as did the neighboring Thais). When the war was over the Truman Administration backed away from Roosevelt's expressed support for the independence of Europe's colonies and aided France as it fought Ho Chi Minh to retain its precarious hold over Indochina. The Eisenhower White House followed suit with increased war material. But the debacle at Dinh Binh Phu in 1954 gave rise to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north, and the hastily formed Republic of Vietnam in the south. It also resulted in the creation of independent constitutional monarchies in Cambodia and Laos. To stem, what eventually would become known as the "domino theory," the US urged Britian, France, the Philippines, Thailand, New Zealand, Australia and Pakistan to form the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. A vague protocol placed Cambodia, Laos and South Vietnam under its protection. The US increased the sizes of its military training missions to the three nations and opened full-fledged embassies to conduct the affairs of state.

At the time, the mindset of the Eisenhower Administration, and particularly of its Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, reflected the suspicions many American leaders had of nationalist movements in the newly emerging, post-colonial nations. Ho Chi Minh was a founder of the Indochinese Communist Party which, of course, spawned the communist parties in Laos and Cambodia. Moreover, these were the days which corresponded to the so-called "loss of China" (1949), Senator Joe McCarthy's "witch hunting" with his accusative committee activities (early 50's), and the Korean War (1950-1953) and it's impact on the presidential elections of 1952. "Brinksmanship" characterized America's effort to contain communism. And the proposed price the American people were expected to pay in the ultimate scenario this policy forsaw was given in megatonnage ("Drop" drills were as much a part of my public school education as saying the Pledge of Allegiance every morning). "Counter-insurgency," "guerrilla warfare" or, "wars of attrition" were seldom-used terms.

Looking back, it would seem that the entire relationship, from the first military and economic aid program offered the fledgling semi-autonomous state of Laos in 1950, should have been recognized as a presage to the coming Vietnam War. The day before his inauguration in 1961, John F. Kennedy was incredulous over out-going President Eisenhower's opinion that the U.S. might have to go to war over Laos, because, if it fell, we would have to write off the whole area. The following year -1962- Kennedy did dispatch a battalion of troops (calling it a SEATO exercise), positioning them across the Mekong River in Thailand when it looked as though a combined Pathet Lao/North Vietnamese force would advance all the way to the capitol of Vientiane - the <u>first</u> post W.W. II U.S. expeditionary army to be committed to Southeast Asia.

The Geneva Conference of 1954 (called to settle the French Indochina War), and the Geneva Conference of 1962 (convened specifically to determine the status of Laos) considered the neutrality of Laos as the key-stone to peace in the area. But it was an insidious form of Realpolitik at work - the signatories simply wanted time. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam wanted a series of staging areas in place for its coming protracted war to reunite itself with the south. The Pathet Lao needed to build up a legitimate ethnic Lao communist party organization. In its newly, self-appointed role as leader of the revolutionary movements in the Third World, the People's Republic of China was dispensing arms wherever needed - including to its historical enemy, Vietnam. And the USSR, humiliated by its back-down over the Cuban missle crisis, offered carte blanche arms to all takers. Even Thailand, forced to return two Laotian provinces it had taken from the French during World War II, was beginning to worry about an insurgency in the north and a growing Thai communist party. What with all the hot spots in the world the United States simply wanted to put Laos on the back burner. It may be that the Laotians in the Royal Government were the only ones who took the word "neutrality" seriously.

The ensuing "civil war" (Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese versus the Royal Lao Government and its assisting nations) which began to heat up in the early 60's was a natural extension of the life-and-death political and military struggle for South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese Army used the Ho Chi Minh Trail through the south-eastern margin of Laos. Hmong tribal CIA financed SGU's (Special Guerrilla Units) interdicted the Trail from the west. Special Force's SOG's (Studies and Observation Groups) led forays against the Trail from the east. The Pathet Lao attacked wherever there were Royal Lao Government posts and airfields. The RLG's forces tried to

defend its territory. And the U.S. Air Force dropped massive amounts of bombs - from anti-personnel "bomblets," on up to 2,000 pounders which could destroy a village in one sortie. In other words, the war in Laos was a less publicized version of the war next-door. But with significant differences.

Prior to the 1962 Geneva Conference, you could tell the players by their uniforms: The French and American governments had military training missions out in the open; the North Vietnamese Army, "Red" Chinese advisors, and Soviet pilots ferrying supplies, were distinguishable from their Pathet Lao client comrades. The fourteen nation conference changed all that - on the surface at least. After 1962 you had to wade through terse denials by the US Embassy, which, by and large seemed to speak for the Royal Lao Government, and the egregious propaganda by the Pathet Lao and their North Vietnamese allies. And when tidbits of the truth did find its way to the American media, print and TV news editors reduced the stories to postscript proportions. Because the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese allowed very few Western journalists in areas under their control, information about their activities was sketchy. As for the vast US aid program to the Royal Lao government, even Congressmen and their field people found it tough going: By burying expenditures within the CIA's secret budget, and keeping reporters out of restricted areas, only a few programs - mostly legitimate civilian projects - were accessible and accountable to the public. It is no wonder that it became known as the "CIA's secret war".

Also, unlike Vietnam, the command structure was primarily civilian. Although the "country team" (which met each morning in the Embassy's double-walled acrylic conference room) included military attaches, visiting generals, and the CIA station chief, it was the Ambassador who was clearly

in charge. There was no COMUSMACV, (General Westmoreland's designation) or, as the case might have been, COMUSMACL, to challenge the political sensitivities and limitations under which the "country team" was required to operate as it prosecuted a war in this ostensibly neutral country. Furthermore, unlike the President's order to evacuate dependents from Vietnam in 1965, Americans in Laos were permitted to have their families with them - not only in the capitol of Vientiane, but in provincial towns and many up-country posts as well. This did not always guarantee complete understanding, but seeing each other's families up close, in casual conditions, more often than not brought about deep personal American/Lao relationships.

In choosing voices from the American community for this book, I tried to get a cross-section of professions and locations "in-country" - an individual who worked in an air conditioned office in Vientiane and lived in the "KM-6" housing compound may not have cared if he were living in Laos or Lagos. And being stationed in the provinces presented other significant circumstances. More importantly, many of the stories here might prove the term "Vietnam Veteran" to be a generic one; aside from those men killed in direct combat in hot pursuit across the Laotian border from Vietnam, there was a significant number of Americans who lost their lives in Laos. Some were in the wrong place at the wrong time such as unarmed civilians going about improving the conditions of a rural area with marginal security. But more than a few knew exactly what they were doing at the moment of their deaths - from pilots dropping rice and arms and ammunition out of Air America or Continental Air Services' C-46's, to those self-professed soldiers of fortune who led Hmong/SGU missions under contract to the CIA and died obscurely in the middle of the jungle. Some are still believed to being held

prisoner in Laos or Vietnam to this day. Their relatives and friends speak for them in these pages and more than a few feel that their fathers', husbands', sons' or friends' names should be etched on The Wall in Washington, D.C.

Few Americans who lived in Laos can honestly share the sense of defeat that the soldiers and officials feel who served with the Royal Lao Government. The Hmong warriors who fought for, and with the CIA, and the Laotians who worked in support services with the U.S. government, must be included as well - all of them share a loss that can be understood only through memories made painful by the status of being called "refugees." Neither can we appreciate the bittersweet victory which the Lao People's Party attained - they took over a nation after it had undergone thirty years of war, had been the target of over two million tons of bombs (more than dropped on Germany and Japan during World War II), and then, because of over-zealousness in "re-educating" their former enemies in the Royal Lao Government, found themselves unable to stop the flight of nearly half a million people, many whose educations and skills could have helped them rebuild their nation. It is the Laotians who understand the meaning of "attrition."

Life in Laos during the Second Indochina War makes for excellent story-telling. Whereas a large portion of Vietnam Literature tends to take on a fabulist, often pointedly surreal quality to explain the absurdities of that war, the narratives here depict those same qualities without artifice or exaggeration. Laos back then was a fanciful place unto itself: Characters who rendezvoued in sleazy bars drinking Pernod in the late afternoons seemed to have taken French Leave from the pages of Graham Greene novels left open on night tables; the way the existence of animistic spirits was as seriously discussed at cocktail parties as they were around campfires in the jungle -

everyone knew a Lao soldier who wore an amulet to repel bullets; how *gan-sa*, marijuana, was openly sold in the Morning Market by a little old lady who displayed a sign in English: "My pot will get you higher than the others"; the way the Pathet Lao and Royal Lao Government troops left escape routes open when they cornered one another - but when there were coup d'etats in Vientiane pin-point aerial bombing of an opposing general's headquarters resulted in numerous casualities; how for nearly ten years a tenth of the population was fed by rice drops and the way the children-recipients believed the rice grew in the airplanes which dropped it; how a retired Indiana farmer directed a multi-million dollar CIA civilian and military operation for the Hmong - a people he professed to love - in the end had to witness the sending of 12 year old boys to fight hardened North Vietnamese regulars; a country in which the American Ambassador had a "personal airforce" at his disposal; a capital city where the very countries aiding in the overthrow of its government had embassies (North Vietnam, People's Republic of China and the USSR), including a contingent of Pathet Lao soldiers billeted in a villa next to the Morning Market; and throughout it all, the Lao people seemingly never able to lose their graciousness, their harmony with nature, their seductiveness.

As with any complicated event in human history, like the Tale of Rashomon, we cannot recall it in singular fashion. But there are some conclusions which can be drawn from the following individual stories about Laos, lessons which, when we look at the situations today in Central America and the Middle East, appear to have been ignored, lessons which are not too late to observe:

Because Americans come from a free and open society, and will not tolerate being indoctrinated by their government, it is difficult for them to

take ideological or religious propaganda seriously (the power of nationalism will invariably equal the amount of derision given to it at the time). If political and military objectives of foreign policy must be pressed within the borders of another nation, then it cannot be done without taking into consideration that nation's language, culture and, above all, its history. A poor, weak country which has yet to pass into the 20th century will abdicate control over its own destiny when a larger, stronger nation piles massive aid upon it. Government personnel assigned to a foreign country for only one or two year tours have short attention spans. Covert activities devised on an eye-for-an-eye basis will eventually be found out and regarded as repugnant by the American people. ". .when in Rome . . " should never apply to how American military and civilian aid is distributed because corruption is inevitible thereby giving critics (or enemies) ammunition for their cause - "loss of face" should not alter "strings attached." If you do not bolster the infrastructure of the civilian agencies of a recipient nation in favor of its armed forces and police then you will get exactly what you deserve. If US government personnel in a foreign country allow themselves to identify with that country's elite, then its programs will come to represent the aspirations of that class only. When your government's commitment to a small country at war is a tentative "holding action," then you must expect your personnel to be bitter when the final pull-out is ordered, for in the end, they will have become more sympathetic with the people of the host nation and not the policy which got them there in the first place. And because of that, many of these same people will go on to practice their crafts in other countries until they think they've got it right. The names in the headlines from Honduras and Nicaragua - Secord, North, Blaufarb and Hausenfus - are all recycled right out of the defeat in Laos, belonging to people who are convinced that

their way is what will assure the overthrow of dictatorships or, as often is the case, to keep them in power.

With hindsight, it's easier to understand the wisdom the peasant was alluding to when he asked how long it took to walk to Laos. It's doubtful that more than a handful of the estimated 25,000 Americans who lived and worked there from World War II until 1975 would have made such a journey on their own. The fact is, they went there to carry out muddled foreign policy objectives, and in the process, discovered things about the world - and themselves - that would alter their lives, and the lives of others, forever. And this is their story and the story of the Laotians with whom they worked and fought against.

Ron Philip Pulcini
Kalispell, Montana
March 1987

Section III

1961 - 1973

January 20, 1961: John F. Kennedy's inaugural address: "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

Yang Kou:

I was born to a primitive society and taught to be friends with animals and the wilderness, and to live with all of it harmoniously and peacefully. I was told by my elders that the earth was flat and covered by the blue sky and that it only took days to walk to the end of the earth. No one ever mentioned to me that other races existed.

We didn't know about modern equipment and machines in our childhood. Our lives were rich with old stories and supernaturalism. There were spirits all around us. Trees lived amazing ages because angels dwelled in them. Huge mountains inspired awe because they were unmistakable evidence of powerful spirits within. Pregnant women avoided the lakes where baby-hungry dragons and serpents lay in wait. The prayers and rituals of shamans and herbalist took away our illnesses. When I was very small I watched an airplane pass over the mountains and I thought it was a big bird which landed on the mountains to find food. I hid myself under the trees when the airplane passed because I thought it might catch me as the eagle catches the chicken.

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 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 had walked for two days from our small village to the Mekong River where he took a small boat with an engine to go the rest of the way. They had to pass through rapids for a day or so. When he got to Luang Prabang he was amazed by its beauty - the royal palace, the many Buddhist *wats* and monuments, the roads, the cars, electricity and many other things which the villagers had not heard of before. But the most important news was what a friend of my father's told him. This man had moved to Luang Prabang from the mountains and had become a servant of the *falang*, or foreigner - an American.

He said that this whiteman was very big and tall and that he lived in a very clean, nice house. But he did not eat rice like our people. At each meal, he would slice a piece of meat off a big leg - it looked like it was a human's leg - and put it between two pieces of bread and eat it! My father's friend also said there were some white priests who told the people to bury their dead relatives as soon as they could after they are dead, and he suspected that the priests went to the graveyard and took the dead body home for food for the whiteman's sandwich. That's what he believed.

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January 29, 1961: Announcement over North Vietnamese radio that the South Vietnam National Liberation Front (SVNLF) had been formed on 20th December 1960.

February 18, 1961: The Soviet Union proposes another conference at Geneva to discuss Laos.

March 1, 1961: President Kennedy creates the Peace Corps by Executive Order.

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William H. Sullivan:

I was a strong Kennedy partisan; I knew the family somewhat so I was quite enthusiastic when he was elected. He had a transition team that he put in the Department of State - Harriman was one of the people on it. At the time, I was in the Southeast Asia Bureau on the Burma Desk. And word went out that the transition team was reviewing all policies that the US was pursuing, and that if anyone had any ideas they should submit papers. I submitted two: One of them was on Laos (the other was about The People's Republic of China being admitted to the UN). Actually, it wasn't my original idea, it was the Lao Desk Officer's, Tom Corcoran's - at least, he had the same views. Essentially it stated that it was ridiculous to push confrontation in Laos to a conclusion and get us into military action because it was a lousy place to fight a war. But Harriman had read the paper (in fact, Kennedy also read the paper) and had remembered it.

At this same time, I was part of the preparatory group for the 1962 Geneva Conference on Laos (begun in '61) but it had so many people on it that I decided to slip quietly out of it because it looked like it was going to be a mess. When Ken Young, who was heading the thing up, slipped out, too, that's when they brought in Averell Harriman - but not as the head of the delegation because that would go to Dean Rusk. Things got started off with great fanfare but in the course of time - about two weeks - Rusk got fed up

so he came home. Averell got into it and thought the whole delegation was too big and he recommended that I replace the Chief-of-Staff, Joe Cisco.

It was called a "conference on neutrality" and went through all these famous phrases about the independence, the neutrality, and the something or other about Laos. Up until '57, our purpose had been to exclude the communists - the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese - entirely from Laos. By the time I came along, and my paper had received some attention, it was fairly clear that what would be required to get the North Vietnamese out would be more of an investment than the U.S. warranted. Therefore, we should be concerned with trying to get a compromise - to make sure that the territory along the Mekong, was, in effect, sanitized, and that the forces there were friendly to Thailand. We called it the "Red, White and Blue" solution, which, in effect, was that you'd have three zones. And that's what we eventually worked out for the 1962 agreements. I don't think this made everyone happy in the three Lao delegations, but I think the general context in which we were addressing this within the Kennedy Administration was that Laos, to use a word more closely associated with Cambodia, was a "side-show"; the main conflict was taking place in Vietnam.

What I'm saying was, rather than attempting to draw a line and face the issue in Laos, that making a sort of a holding situation in Laos, and, at the same time building up the preparation to making a blocking action at the 17th parallel, we could sanitize South Vietnam and get the North Vietnamese out of there. And if that were achieved, then the assumption was that the North Vietnamese would be willing to retreat back across the 17th parallel in the north/south axis and would no longer have great ambitions to go east. Afterall, their interest in Laos was ancillary to their basic desire to take over

South Vietnam. Consequently, we were prepared to leave a section of Laos, the section east and most northeast - Phong Saly and Sam Neua Provinces - quite clearly in the hands of the Pathet Lao (knowing full well that the PL were a part of the North Vietnamese communist party in the first place). We did this providing that the Plain of Jars - the central section - would remain in the hands of the Neutralists and, that the section along the Mekong River fronting the Thai frontier, would remain in the hands of the people who were patently puppets of the Thais.

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March 31, 1961: Pro-communist forces control six provinces in Laos.

April 9, 1961: A Hanoi journal, *Hoc Tap*, declares that "socialist North Vietnam is providing good support for the South Vietnamese revolution and is serving as a strong base for the struggle for reunification . . ."

April 12, 1961: Yuri Gagarin is first person to orbit in space.

April 17, 1961: CIA-trained Cuban exiles launch unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion against Castro's regime.

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Jack Williamson:

The first thing that struck me was the French style architecture and the tropical vegetation. It seemed like such a quiet place. I got to travel a little bit around the country because I was on a six month contract with the United States Information Agency as a sports advisor. I was there to help prepare the Laotian team for the first Southeast Asian Games to be held in Burma in 1962. But while I was there I got hired by the Rural Development Division of the United States Agency for International Development. You see, the Geneva Accords had come up and all the military - the teams called

White Star - had been asked to leave. They had done public relations things like medical teams and such, so someplace it was decided to start hiring advisors to fill the vacuum.

At that time they'd recruited people for both Vietnam and Laos - it was the first time that State Department people were going to be stationed in provincial areas. I think I was the only guy who had actually been over there before. The whole group came together at the University of California at Berkeley for a six month course involving cross-cultural relations, geography and some counter-insurgency. The instructors were coming from a couple of perspectives - some from a developmental aspect. One instructor who was most memorable was Professor Whitly from the University of Chicago. He'd served as a District Chief in the Malayasia Emergency and had a sort of "Okay, snap to, Cadre" attitude. There was some discussion on tactics of population control and those kinds of problems related to terrorism. But a lot of it was cultural. I don't know if they were sure of themselves as to what we were going to do but they were concerned about the impact of the program.

My first assignment was Sayaboury Province. It's in the northwest corner of Laos, part of which is west of the Mekong River. I'm not sure, but I think the province had a total of one running vehicle. There was perhaps 20 kilometers of dirt roads and approximately 80,000 people, fifty per cent being other than ethnic Lao, or, Lowland Lao. There were Yao, Lao Theung but not many Hmong. There were even the People of The Yellow Leaves, an aborigine group that was still able to exist virtually on foraging in the rain forest, but nobody knew much about them.

As it turned out, I wasn't the first American to get there - there were two people from International Voluntary Services and they had a stove and all to cook on. Oh, yes, there was a noodle shop there, too. And further out in the sticks there were some Thai military teams doing basically what White Star had been doing, organizing military units to counter the infiltration that was coming into the country.

I had an assistant, so mainly it was setting up shop: Finding a place to put in an office, digging a well, getting the radio set up, getting a motor pool going. I started hiring people and traveling around the countryside to see where the roads went, meet the officials and learning the language.

The *Chao Muang* the District Governor, was a good guy - a half brother to the king and very down to earth. He had a very good touch with the people. He was an elderly man and because of intermarrying, all his kids were cripples. Looking back at him after many years of being in the country, I'd have to say he was the most understanding guy I'd ever worked with. He had a lot of hill tribes to work with and he really understood these people. He traveled extensively. And it was amazing because all he had was a bicycle. He'd strap a .45 around his waist and just go. In later years he received a lot of threats from the Pathet Lao.

Once I established a base, I tried to get a better idea of what was coming out of Vientiane; in the past it had been building schools, dispensaries, and medical programs, so I pretty much continued those. I looked over the old projects, to see what had happened before and in some places the unused cement had hardened and tin roofing had been delivered to the wrong places. There were some dispensaries and schools, so the

program in the past had done pretty well. But to get started I traveled around and just looked.

In northern Sayaboury Province there was this one Yao village that was particularly memorable. Generally speaking, the people in this area were poorer than in other tribal areas of Laos; they were on the fringes of the power structure of the tribes so they weren't well off. But this village was clean. By that, I mean, the horses and pigs were under control - you didn't have to walk through their messes. And since we'd come some distance to get there they invited us to take a shower.

The village was about 4,000 feet in elevation and the shower overlooked these valleys. It was enclosed in bamboo and this guy came over and swung this bamboo tube over me and this water came down from a mountain stream. The run-off went down into the pig-stys. And as I recall, I think they even brought us some hot water as well. In the meantime, dinner was being prepared.

It was surprising because in some of the other villages, like the poor Hmong villages, you'd sit around a fire, cave-man style, while somebody cooked something. But these Yao were a little more sophisticated as they had a table and some fine Chinese dishware. The girls were dressed in beautiful costumes, cotton yarn things that stuck out all over the place. And as I was eating sophisticated Chinese food - fried chicken, etc. - my glass was being continually refilled with *lao-lao* which is hill-tribe whisky. The first time I took some of it down I didn't think anything of it. But there was this little girl who stood right next to me and she refilled my glass all the time. And if I slowed down, she started picking this glass up and handing it to me. I tried

to be polite, but then finally, she grabbed the back of my head and pulled it back and poured it down my throat!

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May 5, 1961: Alan Shepard is first American in space.

May 6, 1961: Minimum wage raised to $1.25 an hour.

May 16, 1961: 14-nation conference on Laos opened in Geneva by Prince Sihanouk (Cambodia) under the co-chairmanship of Britian and the Soviet Union. Participants are: Burma, Cambodia, Canada, the People's Republic of China, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (north), France, India, Poland, Republic of Vietnam (south), Thailand and the United States.

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William H. Sullivan:

During the negotiations in Geneva a Marine battalion, under the guise of a SEATO exercise (there were a bunch of SEATO detachments including Australians and New Zealanders) was sent to Northeastern Thailand, right across the Mekong River from Vientiane. The Assistant Secretary for Southeast Asian Affairs, Roger Hilsman, felt that if the Kennedy Administration sent the right signal to Hanoi that they would get wise and change their tactics. They didn't move quite that way.

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June 4, 1961: President Kennedy and Premier Khruschev issue a joint statement at their meeting in Vienna which reaffirms their support for a neutral, independent Laos, under a government chosen by Laotians, and for international agreements ensuring its neutrality and independence.

June 22, 1961: Three Laotian princes, Souvanna Phouma (neutralist), Soupannouvong (communist) and Boun Oum (rightist) meet at Zurich and

agree - in principle - to a coalition government that would include all three factions.

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Thongchan Souvannovong:

My first boss was Dallas Warren. He had more common sense than anybody. He learned how to adapt to the villages and he could drink any kind of liquor and get drunk and be the best person I ever met. One day, he, my wife, Thong Chan, and I, flew down to Muong Xieng. It was their tradition to have ten girls waiting for you and each one had some flowers and one full glass of *Lao-Khao*. That stuff is made from corn and is very strong! It burns a blue flame when you light it! So I walked with Mr. Warren because he was my boss and the girls said nice things (they called us *Nya-Paw* to show respect), welcomed us with the flowers and made us drink one glass of that stuff from each girl! And when I got to the end of the line, I looked back and the damn airplane is dancing! But Mr. Warren is still alright!

He learned about the *Chao Muongs* before he met them. He studied their attitudes and who they are related to because those men have the power in the province! And sometimes those men are hard to deal with because they have another idea about a project. For example, in one place we had six wells and one school on the project list. But the *Chao Muong* wanted to send the materials to that village and let the people do it themselves. But our idea was to train the people how to do it, to make those things right. Sometimes, me and my American boss (I had 15 bosses in the years I worked for USAID) would have to do the project ourselves. I would go to the *Chao Muong* and ask where are the workers - the people we are going to

train - and he says nothing! So we have to ask the District Chief, the *Tasseng* for people and all we can get is two or three.

You know, we figured that you can use bamboo instead of rebar to help form the cement well rings. Then we would teach the villagers how to lower the well rings into the well: You dig a hole and put the ring in it - they are very heavy - and then you place another ring on top of it and scrape the dirt out from under the first one and it automatically lowers itself in! A hand-dug well is very dangerous without the rings because the walls collapse. But, you know, one time we had a problem after we finished a well: We forgot to give the well to the *Chao Muong* officially, so he wouldn't let the people use it! We were very busy and I guess we forgot.

One of my bosses, the Area Coordinator, was fired because he made too many mistakes with the *Chao Muong*. One time the governor ordered a plane to come get him but the plane was cancelled and the Area Coordinator didn't tell him and the governor went out to the airport and that made him very mad.

I think most of the Americans made a good effort to learn about Laos. Many learned how to talk, but only three I know learned to read and write Laotian. But Laos is a difficult place because there are maybe 150 languages; when you find someone who speaks Lao maybe you can't understand him because he speaks with a Hmong accent or something like that. Also, we have some formal language, too. For example, the royal family, they use different words. That's why it's good the Americans had Laotian field assistants so they learned to understand the situations, to communicate well with the local leaders. When I was a field assistant I always thought my boss

and I should become one person, to run like one person. We talked a lot late at night and learned to get along together and try to avoid mistakes; I felt protective of them, you know, like a mother and father.

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August 13, 1961: East Germany closes Berlin border and begins building the wall.

October 8, 1961: The three princes meet at Ban Hien Houp and nominate Prince Souvanna Phouma as Prime Minister of the proposed provisional government.

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William H. Sullivan:

The "country team" in a US Embassy was modeled on a board of directors of a large corporation. It was presided over by the Ambassador who acted as Chairman of The Board. It had more or less sovereign representatives of Washington departments and agencies who represented the interests of their headquarters, and it functioned to provide collective leadership, as well as harmonious direction to the execution of American policy abroad. With a little luck and good management, it did all these things effectively. But during the last years of the Eisenhower period Laos became a horrible example of how conflicts, confusion and catastrophes can ruin the idea.

Problems were particularly acute with the free-wheeling activities of the CIA, which manipulated its own favorites on the Lao political scene, and the United States military, which used its assistance programs to influence the military and political balance in the country. The climax to all this confusion came in 1960 when a military coup resulted in political divisions

among the Lao, with the Department of State supporting one faction, while the CIA and the Department of Defense supported another.

Shortly after Kennedy assumed office in 1961, he issued a Presidential Letter addressed to all Ambassadors abroad. This letter radically changed the Country Team concept of representation in other countries to one in which the Ambassador was placed unequivocally in charge of all official personnel operating within the country of his accreditation - except for those military units that were stationed or deployed components of a unified command. It wasn't until the middle of 1962, however, that events permitted the establishment of a truly revised system in Laos. Up until that time, the country was caught up in a civil war and the primary focus of attention was on the Geneva Conference on Laos. When I became deputy to Averell Harriman I came to know almost all the important personalities in Laos as well as the prominent members of the Kennedy Administration concerned with Laos.

At some point, I became the person primarily responsible for selecting the leaders of the new Country Team that would go to Laos after the Geneva settlement and for assuring that they were compatible with one another. I was given sort of carte blanche to get whom I wanted for it, and I persuaded Harriman to take my old friend, Leonard Unger, as Ambassador. I'd arranged for Unger to come and have lunch with Ave and me at the sports club and afterwards we went for a swim. I thought, let them alone for awhile while I went off for a swim at the other end of the pool. I remember swimming up to Unger and asking, "Well, did he ask you whether you wanted to be Ambassador?" He said, "No, he hasn't said a thing, yet." And so we swam around for a little longer, finally, Len and I were standing there and Ave

came swimming down (remember, he was about 75) - and puffing out of the water, sort of draining his face, and said, "You wanna be Ambassador?" Unger said, "Okay", and that's how he got him in there.

Then I got Bill Law in there to be the Army Attache - I thought it highly important that we get a military attache who knew the Lao and wasn't going to "Rambo" out there. He was heading a counter-intelligence unit out of Chicago, so I got him brought to Washington and Ave talked to him and said he looked like the kind of guy we'd like. I told Bob MacNamara, and he said fine, and sent instructions to the Defense Intelligence Agency, But they already had a guy whom they had been training for a year or so. When some major general called to say it couldn't be done, I said, well, it's being done. And as director of the aid program, I got Charlie Mann who was on vacation visiting some friends in Trieste.

So I got this all set up because it was understood that in another two years I would come out and replace Unger. In the meantime, LBJ got fed up with Vietnam and didn't want anything to do with it; he wanted to run the Great Society and let Max Taylor run the Vietnam show, so he decided to make Max ambassador and let him write his own ticket. Westmoreland would report to him and he could take anybody from the government he wanted. He chose Alex Johnson, who was then the Undersecretary of State for the Far East, as his deputy, and he called me to go out as his Chief of Staff- and I told him I was already designated for Laos. Just come for a month, he said, it was going to be a different sort of organization - an ambassador who was not only going to run an embassy, but also in charge of a military organization. So five months later, I finally got out. In the meantime, Unger had to wait.

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October 15, 1961: State of emergency declared in South Vietnam and President Ngo Dinh Diem voted exceptional powers by the National Assembly to make laws by decree in all matters concerning national security.

December 11, 1961: Kennedy sends the first combat-level troops, 400 helicopter crewmen, to South Vietnam.

December 14, 1961: The three princes meet at the Plain of Jars and reaffirm the Zurich and Ban Hien Houp agreements and agree to meet in Vientiane to discuss the formation of a coalition government and end the fighting that has continued throughout the Geneva Conference.

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Mark Pratt:

There were three "internal agreeements" which were included in the Geneva Settlement. Until you got the Zurich and Plain of Jars Agreements (the Ban Hien Houp agreement was basically an agreement to get to an agreement) you couldn't get a government of national union to sign the Geneva Agreements. And what this amounted to was that all three factions - the Pathet Lao under Prince Souphannavong, the Neutralists under Kong Le, (and his mentor, Prince Souvanna Phouma), and the Rightist under Phoumi Nosavan (and Prince Boun Oum), would have a tripartite arrangement - decisions had to be made in concurrence, and that gave the North Vietnamese a veto. And if things were going to be done by a majority, well, the North Vietnamese had that by effective control over the Pathet Lao, and, at least a good hold over Souvanna Phouma and the Neutralists.

In order to conduct an investigation of violence the International Control Commission (ICC - set up by the Geneva Agreements) had to have the permission of the Royal Lao Government (RLG). Now, our interpretation was,

that in signing the Geneva Agreements, the Royal Lao Government gave its assent for the ICC to conduct an investigation whenever it wanted to. But that was not North Vietnam's interpretation. They said that a request must come from the RLG and that request cannot come unless all three factions agree.

Our role was to make sure these agreements resulted in what we wanted which was basically to neutralize Laos and not to get our own military forces in. At the time, people thought of having a greater integration between the two armies of the Right and the Neutralists, but there were no illusions about getting the Pathet Lao into the Royal Lao Army. Clearly, it was a North Vietnamese show. And, too, it was Thailand we were concerned about. They used to come around whining about what was going on in Laos and that it was very dangerous. Remember, we were, not at that point (1961-62), sufficiently involved in South Vietnam, nor did we see that the North Vietnamese utilization of Lao territory was at that time a key aspect. The major concern which Bangkok had was primarily for the Northeast - it was Vietnamese connected and fed through the "short-line" at Thakhek where Laos is very narrow and it's not far from the Vietnam border. You had a school going in Hanoi where there were Lao and Vietnamese instructors for people coming in from Northeast Thailand. Many of these people were ethnic Lao, but also of mixed blood: Vietnamese-Thai, Chinese-Thai. And the Chinese at that point were the dominant faction within the Thai Communist Party. The Thai military was itching to get in (Laos) from the beginning and we were trying to keep them out. When we did begin to let them operate somewhat, it was all in a clandestine way, and, basically, in protection of Thailand by letting them have an advanced position in Laos.

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Janurary 29, 1962: Test ban talks between the United States, U.S.S.R. and Britain in Geneva collapse after three years.

January 18, 1962: It is announced that the Vietnam People's Revolutionary Party had been formed by "representatives of Marxist-Leninists" in South Vietnam at a conference on 19 December 1961.

January 19, 1962: The three princes meet at Geneva but reach no agreement because of objections by the right-wing group.

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Valdimir Petersen:

International Voluntary Services didn't have any formal language training in those days - this would have been around mid-1962 . I was given a young fellow by the name of Rabien for my assistant. He helped me learn Lao. We learned to read and write by studying the Lao characters and all their combinations. Soon after, I got involved in a couple of programs in Vientiane. One was with a guy by the name of Lawry who had come over to develop a rat control program for the rice fields.

Every seven years, or whatever, you'd have a rat infestation and it would wipe out everything. He had a big mixer that he'd made down in Bangkok in which we'd mix the rat bait and then ship it out to the provinces along with instructions and suggestions on how to use it. What you'd do was mix the poison with rice and fish oil - and a little charcoal to make it look ugly so no one would eat it - and put it inside a bamboo tube. The rat would go inside and it worked pretty well.

Then at one point, I worked with Harold Volkner to delouse Hmong refugees with DDT. It came in 100% strength in barrels and we'd dilute it

with talcum powder - I can't recall the mixture. Anyway, we were living in this building over on the road by the Mekong River and we had those square woven hemp mats all over the floors and they were infested with fleas. So we took some of this powder home - 100% strength - and spread it all over the place. We had enough sense not to go around barefoot, but it sure got rid of the fleas. Remember: Nobody knew then that it was bad stuff.

You see, I was the original "generalist" with IVS - my major in college was political science - so they also gave me the job of supervising rice drops out at the airport with Air America - at least until the Geneva Accords were put into effect. At that point USAID had to get out of the rice dropping business because it was sort of like supporting the war and USAID wasn't suppose to be doing that anymore. When they closed that down - and I went up to Luang Prabang - they turned it over to the CIA. So for awhile there, I was working with the CIA because they were dropping rice off to the guerrillas - the teams out there who were doing the actual fighting. This was ironic in a sense and caused me some consternation.

I went over to Laos as my alternative service to the draft, and here I was trading planes with the CIA all the time. I was dropping rice to civilian refugees - there's nothing wrong with that - and the CIA was dropping rice to the military guys. But what caused me the problem was, because we only had so many airplanes, and just so many people, and so much rice, I would sometimes have to borrow a plane from them in order to get all my rice out in time. In return I would have to loan them a plane. We had at least one C-47, often two, and sometimes three of them dropping rice all day long, seven days a weeks. They carried six tons on each load. So in a way, I was directly cooperating with them. I managed not to face it fully because I was

busy doing four or five of these jobs simultaneously. I was aware of it, but I didn't have time to sit down and . . . I knew the alternative would be to just go home. I figured, well, I don't really believe the end justifies the means, but, in this case I wasn't sure whether getting rice to the refugees wasn't as important as the flip side. Technically, I was involved directly with the civilian families and whether I was doing it, or someone else was, it was something that needed to be done.

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February 8, 1962: Military Assistance Command (Vietnam) (MACV) takes the place of MAAG (Military Advisory Assistance Group). By mid-1962 American strength in South Vietnam totals 12,000 men as compared with under 700 in 1961.

May 6, 1962: The town of Nam Tha falls to the Pathet Lao in the north-west province of Laos. 12 American advisors evacuate by helicopter. 4,000 Royal Lao Government troops scurry towards the Mekong River to get to Thailand.

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Yang Kou:

A couple of years after my father's trip to Luang Prabang, a few young men from other villages, and our own village, began to propagandize everyone about building an airplane runway on the mountain top. They said the whiteman's steel-eagle will land and then fly from one mountain to the other and make a bridge just like the spider. Every man in the village took a couple of days off from his work to help those younger men do the work. About a month later, a small airplane landed and it was the first time everyone saw the steel eagle close by.

The whiteman sent a couple of Thais to the mountain top to build a military camp and to recruit all the young men in the village to be soldiers. That was the end of our peaceful way of life.

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May 17, 1962: Kennedy announces the ordering of additional troops to proceed to Thailand at the request of the Prime Minister. He stresses there is no change in US policy to Laos. (In a communique issued after the Thai Foreign Minister's visit to the US in March, the US had reaffirmed that it would fullfil its obligation to Thailand within SEATO without waiting for the other signatories to act.)

June 2, 1962: In a special International control commission (ICC) report, the Canadian and Indian delegates (the Polish delegation abstained) find that there was evidence to show that armed personnel and supplies were being sent from North Vietnam into the south to carry out hostile activities in violation of articles of the Geneva Agreements. It also takes the view that the establishment of a US Military Assistance Command in South Vietnam in February, as well as the introduction of a large number of personnel beyond the stated strength of MAAG, amounted to a factual military alliance which was also prohibited.

Jun11-15, 1962: Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) holds its national convention at Port Huron. The "Port Huron Statement" is issued calling for a focus on the neglected problems at home after a generation of cold war obsession.

July 23, 1962: Geneva Agreements formally signed to establish a new settlement in Laos. A statement of neutrality by the new Laotian government (established by the three princes on 23 June), and a declaration signed by the other 13 attendant nations affirming their intention to respect the sovereignty, independence and neutrality of Laos are incorporated into the agreeements. A protocol is also signed which arranges the withdrawal of foreign armed forces from Laos.

October 23, 1962: Kennedy orders blockade of Cuba during missile crisis.

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Mark Pratt:

I was in Hong Kong from 1960 to 1963, and as one of the few officers there who knew French, I was asked to get to know the various French-speaking people in the consulates, and some of them were from Laos. Phoumi Nosavan's brother had just been named Counsul General there because that was a key place for many of the top Lao to launder their money, to buy things and have them shipped home under our aid program and such.

When he first arrived, I invited him to my place for dinner, and when he came he said that had he known there was such a long flight of steps he would have declined the invitation. An example of the straightforwardness and basic honesty of the Lao - no Chinese would have ever said that sort of thing.

Not long after this, Mike Forrestal, who was working on Asian Affairs with the National Security Council, was coming through the Far East on his way back from Vietnam and called up (we had been classmates at Exeter and I looked forward to seeing him again). So I met him at the Star Ferry and took him up to my place. I'd just given him dinner in my beautiful house overlooking both the harbor and the bay to the south - the highest private house on the peak in Hong Kong - and we'd had good food by a good cook, and we were sitting by the tennis court, looking at the blue China hills and talking about how fascinating Laos was. And then he says something about how it really was the place I ought to be. I told him that this was a gross ingratitude on his part - after having shared my hospitality and seeing how splendidly set up I was - that he was going to try to send me off to a place way up river. But he said we needed more people up there. Six or seven

months later, I was not surprised to find that I was going to be posted in Laos, in the political section of the Embassy.

When I arrived in July of '63, we had a double task of supporting Souvanna Phouma, to neutralize things his way, and we had, therefore, to be supportive of the military side of this, which meant often, trying to persuade Souvanna that this was a key aspect to keep neutralism going his way. This was part of the Harriman perception that Souvanna Phouma would be someone who would come over to our side - with all of his people with him - and he wanted that. In other words, he felt that Souvanna was a capable person and that he could rally a broader spectrum of support from the Lao than could people like Phoumi Nosavan for whom Harriman had the greatest contempt. And this was a key part of our effort.

Another important part was to make sure that we'd retain sufficiently close contacts with the Lao military, to be able to support them where they needed support on the Rightist military forces, and try to get assistance also over to the Neutralists. The break had already taken place in the Plain of Jars and the Russians had already shut off supplies to Kong Le and the Neutralists, switching it to the Pathet Lao and the Vietnamese.

So what you get is the U.S. believing that Souvanna Phouma was the best solution and the neutralization - we were not going to utilize Laos against Vietnam, or anyone else - would make sure others were not using Laos either. When I got there, one of the principal things to be debated was how we would get the Royal Lao Air Force going again. The whole question of the introduction of military equipment and the rest of the cease-fire. This meant setting up things with General Ma in Savannakhet and crating up the

remaining 6 T-6's which couldn't fly and shipping them out of the country so that 6 T-28's could be brought in to replace them. Of course, we eventually brought in many more, this is how escalation works - you begin small - and we even used some Thai pilots at that particular time because it was difficult to get enough Lao pilots. By using some of the northeast Thai they could be passed as Lao because they could speak the language. But the major aspect was the equipment: how could you get T-28's in? It meant that we had to get Souvanna Phouma's approval, we had to get this to look like a one-for-one and therefore not an increase in military equipment because that would be contrary to the cease-fire agreements, the Geneva Accords etc., etc. We had to get these so they could begin again to be used for areas such as Attapeu and Saravane which were under attack by the North Vietnamese.

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January 2, 1963: UPI reports that 30 Americans have died in Vietnam combat.

April 1, 1963: The Laotian Foreign Minister, Quinim Pholsena, is assassinated. Prince Souphannouvong and Phoumi Vonvichit, two communist ministers, withdraw from the government in Vientiane. The Prime Minister, Souvanna Phouma, holds their portfolios in case they return. They never do.

April 2, 1963: MacDonald's has sold more than one billion 15¢ hamburgers.

June 26, 1963: Kennedy delivers his "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech at the Berlin Wall.

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Col. Robert F. Tyrell:

I felt that it was a feather in my cap to be transferred to Laos because they were withdrawing the attache offices from Vietnam and sending all the dependents home. I knew Ambassador Unger because I had been accredited to Laos and I used to go up there once a month while I was attache in Saigon. I knew it was a very primitive place but I was very glad to be going up there because I think Ambassador Unger was certainly well aware that Laos was being used to transport supplies down into South Vietnam. And in his opinion, although Vientiane was, at that time a very peaceful city, very remote from the activities going on in Vietnam, that things were going to heat up in Laos, and that we should certainly have an Air Attache - there was an Army Attache there - because of the expanding war that was going on down there in Vietnam.

When I would go to visit Laos from Saigon, I would always have a conversation with the Ambassador, and also with the Laotian Air Force people, including the commander, General Ma. General Ma, I think, had a very good understanding about what was going on - he was very anti-communist - and he would tell us about Laos being used by the North Vietnamese, but he didn't have anything to back it up. In other words, we couldn't evaluate what he was saying.

You see, in Laos you were a Northerner or a Southerner and they pretty much stuck together. General Ma was a Southerner. The generals in those military regions down south had a lot of intelligence out into the panhandle where the Ho Chi Minh Trail existed, and Ma was very close to them, including Prince Boun Oum, who lived down there in Pakse. Prince Boun Oum had a very good intelligence network for a Lao, and seemed to have a lot of contacts. I had several long conversations with him and he

would tell us, over and over, that all the supplies were coming down through Laos. But the generals with their outposts on the western side of that boot, were content to just maintain the outposts as they weren't anxious to get in any conflict with the North Vietnamese coming down that trail.

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Sally Ross McCafferty:

I first went to Laos in February, 1963 when I was in the middle of the 4th grade. The American School at K-6 was just one small building and there were very few kids in each grade. There was little for kids to do but I liked it better than the States. I think this is mainly because there weren't many kids there to begin with and you had more in common in a sense - we were all in the same situation and you made friends with each other or you didn't. More kids came the longer I stayed, but things didn't change too much.

Before they put air conditioning in the classrooms at the school, we went to school from 7:30 AM to 12:30 in the afternoon. It was way too hot to stay in school in the afternoon. The American Community Association pool was one place we'd go to most all the time, if not for the entire afternoon. We had a teen club and since we didn't have television or radio that's where most of the kids would hang out - playing cards, and ping pong, listening to records, and reading comic books were the big thing. We were always behind on the current music from the States so the summertime was really great - the older kids would come over to see their parents and bring the latest music. The ACA also showed movies in the afternoons and since it was only twenty-five cents, we saw a lot of them - and some over and over and over.

We had to boil our water all the time and then run it through a filter system before drinking it. Then we'd fill up water bottles for the refrigerator. It always took some getting used to when we'd come back to the States and you had to learn that you could drink water out of the tap again. We also had to soak fresh vegetables in diluted clorox then really rinse them off before we could eat them raw - like salad and things. Fresh milk was something you didn't get there. We could get quart cans in the commissary sometimes or cans of frozen milk that you added water to, like making frozen orange juice. They both tasted just awful. I got used to drinking iced tea all the time, and to this day, I hardly ever drink tea anymore.

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August 5, 1963: U.S., U.S.S.R. and Britain sign the first nuclear test ban treaty.

August 28, 1963: Rev Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech concludes the march on Washington.

August 30, 1963: U.S. - U.S.S.R. hot line is installed.

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September 10, 1963: In the presence of the British and Soviet Ambassadors, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma and representatives of the Neo Lao Hak Sat (Lao Patriotic Front) meet and it is agreed that the NLHS should remain in Vientiane and that their security would be guaranteed by General Phoumi Nosavan in collaboration with the ICC.

November 2, 1963: South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, are killed in a coup d'etat by military officers.

November 20, 1963: U.S. Army military personnel in south Vietnam number 16,800.

November 22, 1963: John F. Kennedy assassinated in Dallas, Texas.

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Janet Mitchell Garcia, Mary Mitchell & Michael Mitchell:

There were five of us kids, including our grandmother, too. People were quite impressed with our luggage alone. When we first got to Laos, we lived in KM-6 for a year or two, then we moved out to Salakoktan, out near Chinaimo, not far from the river. We can remember when we first got there, there was a whole group of elephants that walked through KM-6. The owners or trainers would stop and let all the American kids come out and look at 'em all. Once we rode to KM-9 on the back of one.

We lived in Laos from 1963 to 1970. I think we just accepted being there because we were so young. We had maids and gardeners - they fetched and bought for us and did our laundry. I think we were always nice to them. At Christmas time and birthdays we'd take care of them - like part of the family.

Once we dared our gardener to eat a spider. So he took off its legs and popped it in his mouth. And they'd take a bunch of grasshoppers and bundle them up in paper and torch it then eat them. Also, they'd take lights outside at nights and go by the trees and attract all those termites and put them in the water to take off their wings and then eat them. And we had chinchucks, those little lizards, and geckos, the ones that made that noise in the night, in our house. This one gecko actually got hold of a broom for a day and half until he finally let go of it.

Two days a week we went for tennis lessons right after we got out of school. This Lao man was an excellent tennis player and had a French wife.

We remember that he was good - in fact, very good. His name was Vilay. We would do piano on two days a week also.

We were very close to the Lao kids there, what you would call the "royal Lao", the Sananikones, etc. We were black sheep in the American community because we went out with them. Surivanh Sananikone introduced us to her friends and we got involved with them. And we used to hang out at her house all the time. We had dinner at their house often and we went on picnics, too. All of us were the die-hard starters of those sandbar parties, 'cause that was our beach. We walked down the street and over the hill and there we were, right on the Mekong River. We can remember going out and playing on this barge that was out there and it had bombs on it and they kicked us all off and my dad had a fit. But we haven't kept in touch with those kids, I guess because we just left.

We can remember when they built the bowling alley and the new kids couldn't believe that we'd lived without one. We were lucky to be getting one with five lanes. All you could listen to on the radio there was Laotian music. And we didn't have MacDonald's. And instead of going to the Dairy Queen, we went to the noodle shop. Bowls and bowls! And our friends here say: "Noodle shop! What were you doing in a noodle shop?" We used to eat all the fruit off the push carts, too.

In the 60's they were talking about war and stuff in the States, but that was far from us - we weren't thinking about that. Drugs and peace - we never heard about stuff like that. We didn't protest the war because of our father - you didn't embarrass your family, that's for sure. It was a case of giving your dad extra points for being good children. We had one person

approach us with weed, but we said, "No, we're in the fourth grade and that was it . . ." Unfortunately, we missed that.

Given the opportunity back then we would have run away and found a way to get back to Laos. We didn't like it here when we returned, and we still don't like this country. We're not unpatriotic, but we feel Laos is our roots. We grew up there, so to be brought over to somewhere else, was like, a foreign place. We didn't like it here. We talk constantly about it, about being over there. When we talk about our roots, people have a hard time understanding that because they can't see the things that we saw. That place had a very profound affect on us.

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January 29, 1964: Heavy fighting breaks out in central Laos

February 9, 1964: Ed Sullivan hosts the Beatles for their US debut.

April 19, 1964: Royal Lao Government Generals Kouprasith and Siho attempt a coup d'etat in Vientiane.

July 27, 1964: US ups Vietnam commitment to 21,000 soldiers.

August 2, 1964: The USS Maddox is attacked in international waters off the Gulf of Tonkin by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. US forces retaliate.

August 7, 1964: Both houses of Congree approve the "Tonkin Gulf resolution" supporting LBJ's action and authorizing further military action if needed.

November 3, 1964: LBJ re-elected by a landslide.

William H. Sullivan:

I managed to get sworn in as Ambassador to Laos in November 1964. By that time neutrality had become a well-worn fictive. I moved in to head a

Country Team that was almost as deeply involved in counter-insurgency 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 military 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 operation in Laos, we had back-up air staff in Thailand that provided planes, pilots and rescue helicopters to support the fighting effort.

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Col. Robert F. Tyrell:

"Water Pump" was a very mobile training detachment developed down there at Eglin Field, a Special Air War unit. They had all their training gear packed in such a way that they could move from one place to another. As a matter of fact, during WW II, I was in the Second Air Commando Group where we first started that concept. We moved from India to Burma on one day's notice to start operations. That was their concept, so they moved these training people over to Udorn just like that. They came in as their own unit attached to the 7/13th to provide operational support for Vientiane.

The commander of that group when they first came over was Barney Cochran - he was a real goer. And I'll never forget when I first met him, I flew over to Udorn, and Barney walked out, a sort of heavy-set fella, and I told him "I hope you're ready to go because things are going to heat up in Laos," and Barney said, "We're here to do whatever you want." He was a tiger.

They were operational when the Pathet Lao initiated their offensive against Khong Le and his Neutralists on the Plain of Jars. I remember going over to talk with Barney because General Ma had tipped us off that this operation would start, this was about May of '64 - we asked Barney if we could have some of his training airplanes to support Khong Le up there . We put the Lao insignia on these T-28's in nothing flat and; I've forgotten how many planes they turned over to us for the operation, but I think it was about 6 or 7. We flew the pilots over to Udorn and they briefed them and they flew back to Vientiane- all Lao pilots.

There were a few missions flown up there by the Water Pump people - I don't remember how many missions were flown - Barney Cochran flew, too. It didn't get out of hand, but it almost did; they were so eager to participate in this. In my opinion, they were the difference between Khong Le being able to hold on because they came across the Plain of Jars and expected the Neutralists to disintegrate. They didn't. And I think the Lao Air Force did a good job.

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February 3-4, 1965: Another coup attempt in Vientiane against Souvanna Phouma's government. Generals Siho and Phoumi versus General Kouprasith.

Mrs. Marie J. Sullivan:

On the night of January 31, 1965, we hosted a dinner for 16 at the Residence. Rumors were that there was trouble coming. Phoumi Nosavan, our genial host at a birthday party the previous week, was said to be plotting a coup against the government of Prince Souvanna Phouma. Some of our guests were so nervous they had to be escorted home. For two days many things were put on "Pause" - social functions were called off and there was an 11:00 p.m. curfew. But people went to work everyday and school was open.

February 3rd seemed to be another quiet day. The school bus came by at 6:30. At our house, it picked up our children, John, Mark, Peggy, and Soraya na Champassak (who had spent the night with Peggy). The next stop was the Mann's, outside the USAID compound. Young Susie came out at the bus' toot to inform: "You don't go to school when there's a coup." Soraya stayed at the Mann's, but John, Mark and Peggy were brought back to the Residence. Later that morning, Sally Mann came to see me, and ended up taking Peggy back with her to play with Susie and Soraya.

It was less than an hour later that the fighting began. Suddenly, there was the sound of shooting, the roar of explosions. Quiet Vientiane was at war. Unfortunately, a good deal of the fighting was right near the USAID compound. Soldiers with colored scarves around their necks (they were the loyalists) were all around the Mann's house. Those on the "other side" were not wearing scarves. At Susie's suggestion, the three little girls spent most of the battle huddled under the stairs - she said it was the safest place in the Mann's house.

When the shooting died down, Charley Mann - the USAID Director - brought his wife and the three girls to our place. Our boys, who had spent most of the day indoors - very resentful with me for not letting them go out and 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 that General 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 was across the river in Thailand. And Prince Souvanna's government was in control, in effect, much stronger than before. Although we in the Embassy knew that the situation was well in hand, many of the town's citizens did not. For the next few days, streams of refugees - their possessions piled on carts drawn by water buffalo - moved steadily out of town, fleeing south. By Sunday the 7th, they were coming back and life resumed its normal pattern. For the diplomats, that meant a cocktail party at the French military mission and a reception at the Marine House Sunday Night. Monday, I took the children to the health unit for their shots. But there was one other thing.

One of my duties as the wife of the Ambassador was to be a part of a program for newcomers to The Mission - "orientation". I had to speak on "Living in Laos" and the thought of it really made my knees shake - to say I was unqualified would be generous. But after the coup attempt, when Tuesday's "orientation" program came, I stood up and spoke with hardly a tremor.

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February 7, 1965: In response to a Viet cong attack on a US installation in Pleku, South Vietnam, President Johnson orders the first sustained air attack on North Vietnam.

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Col. Robert F. Tyrell:

The Royal Lao Air Force had six T-28's but they'd never been used for bombing. They had .50 caliber machine guns and they did use those for strafing. But when I was transferred up there there were 100 100 lb bombs in a warehouse, but our government wouldn't turn them over to them. I think because they didn't feel they were capable of handling those bombs. I think Ambassador Unger started the policy of keeping the bomb fuses separate from the bombs - as far as I know. USAID Requirements Office controlled them. The fuses were kept in Vientiane and the bombs in Savannakhet - in case any hostilities broke out between the rival factions because the T-28's would be a battle factor.

We will never forget the first time we attended a party in one of the homes that was surrounded by a traditional stone wall, and the first thing we noticed when we arrived were all the armed soldiers walking around with machine guns hanging on their shoulders on the outside. And when we went in, it seemed like a prison because everybody was standing around the walls so nobody would be behind them. And that's the reason for it - they didn't trust each other (laughter). The Neutralists, the Right, and the Left were all orbiting in their own little circles . . .

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Edwin ("Win") McKeithen:

The whole US Air Force was a disaster in Laos. They couldn't hit anything. We always hoped that if we had gotten in a jam that the Lao Air Force would have been available. Because, number one, they flew small enough airplanes that they could see what they were flying over and they knew the terrain. You could talk to them in English, too, by the way. But the USAF never seemed to know where it was - for years they were never given accurate information about where the friendly lines were in Laos. And, because we supposedly didn't have any aircraft in Laos - too sensitive, you know - I saw one guy - flying an AE-1 - die at Sam Thong because he had been denied permission to land at Moung Soui! He'd gotten shot up over the Plain of Jars and even though they had this huge airstrip at Moung Soui, they waved him off on his final approach - "You can't land here," they told him. When he got over Sam Thong he passed out and crashed in the hills.

Another time, I saw a guy land at Long Tieng and have no idea where he was. He was dragged out of his plane by two American nurses who took him to a dance at Vang Pao's house that night and it was a mind-boggling experience for him. I mean, to him, everything north of the Mekong River was "Indian Territory." So that proves what little information they had. The USAF was good at shooting down other planes, but nothing else.

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William H. Sullivan:

The main problem was that the Trail was under triple canopy. In fact, General Thao Ma took me down on the Trail once, my two sons and me, when they briefly captured a piece of it - I caught hell from Washington. It was a well-kept road and from a helicopter, you just couldn't see it. So the main

problem was not only spotting, but then, what the AF was using to try to kill them with, these high-speed jets, no Gatling guns or anything else - just 500, 750 pound bombs. They'd come zipping in at 700 knots and miss things by hundreds of yards - so that was the big scrap we had between Hymie Aderholtz and General Moimar. We used slow moving planes, in fact, we took a C-130 and put on a 105 cannon in there cross-wise, anything that could come in slowly and shoot up a truck and basically blow up the engine block and put the truck out of business.

Basically, strikes in the Trail were 7th Air Force out of Saigon. The intelligence gathering on the movement of convoys were joint, pooled operations. If these convoys were supplying elements in Laos on the Bolovens Plateau, or, moving over into the areas west of of Attepeau, then Hymie Aderholtz's Group 56 would take care of it.

The problem was that "Spike" Moimar had chaired a commission which produced a report that claimed that jet aircraft could do everything for the Air Force, that they could phase out all types of cover aircraft, I guess prop-driven aircraft, so he wanted to scrap them and he wanted nothing to do with the Aderholz group. And that was formed at my request because I wanted some slow moving aircraft - wasting all that ammunition on trucks. Give me some A-1's and B-26's, and they did, and they cut this group and put Hymie Aderholtz in charge, and he was a firm believer in this. So the hell with Moimar, I found a guy that was sympathetic with me, got the ear of my boss, and by-passed Moimar - and Moimar didn't like being bypassed. The 7/13th was a somewhat different thing - it was designated to basically work as a logistics operation.

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Col. Robert F. Tyrell:

The idea to have the Royal Lao Air Force (RLAF) bomb the Ho Chi Minh Trail first developed at a SEACOORD meeting. This was the group formed in Saigon consisting of American military representatives from Thailand, Laos and South Vietnam. It was held in General Westmoreland's staff conference room once a month and included the ambassadors and attaches from those countries as well. The station chiefs [CIA] did not attend - this was strictly military. The purpose of SEACOORD was to coordinate some of the military efforts because they knew things were coming into VN and what could Thailand and Laos contribute to the overall effort. Saigon wanted more than anything to interdict the trail; they knew the main supply line was right down there through Laos. This would have been November 1964.

I don't remember exactly if it was Ambassador Sullivan's feeling that politically they didn't want the USAF to come in at that time or not . . . before that, they were just running reconnaissance missions. I guess the feeling was that Washington wouldn't approve of aircraft going in at that time because this would open a new phase in the war and, hopefully the RLAF could do enough damage for awhile. The Ambassador asked me to coordinate this with the Lao military region commanders. Col. Melgard was commander of the Savannakhet Air Operation Commmand, so he personally contacted the people in his region, as well as Pakse, and he got their approval. We had originally set up 22 targets - known targets that we had photography of, but we had to turn the photography over to the Prime Minister's office. Of course, that's where things went awry because his office was penetrated.

When the bomb damage assessment photography was presented at the next SEACOORDS meeting, it was clear that just about everyone of those targets had been dismantled before they'd been hit. So they knew that they had penetrated the plan and moved out of the target areas.

I can't remember the code name for that first operation. We didn't feel that it was a failure however, because the Mu Gia bridge was the LAF's greatest victory - it was sort of a choke point. I'll never forget when those T-28 pilots landed at Savannakhet, and this one kid, as he taxied by the operation's building where we were standing, just stood up in his cockpit and raised his thumbs up and said, "We got the son-of-a-bitch". They were pretty happy. They were proud of themselves. Because it was the first real operation they'd participated in.

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William H. Sullivan:

My powers as the Ambassador were much larger in nature than in other posts and was probably due to a number of combination of factors. One, Laos was so off the wall, so complex, so complicated that nobody that was not on the scene could really make much judgement about it, so they pretty much left it to me. Second, I had come to Laos after two years of being a direct assistant to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and I had made 11 trips to Vietnam with MacNamara. And the people whom I knew, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Max Taylor, the CINPAC Commander, Admiral Sharp, Westmoreland, all the civilians such as "Mac" Bundy, everybody in DC, the President, knew me quite intimately, which is rather unusual, I think, for a career foreign service officer - maybe you're known to

the Secretary of State if you're lucky. It was a rather unique situation, I think. And LBJ didn't want to have anything to do with it - about every six months he'd call me back and give me more money - he wanted to keep it out of his hair.

You see, Laos had been a horrible example back in the days when Harrow Smith and Jack Parsons and what not were there; you had military, and CIA and State absolutely at one another's throats. So everybody was resolved that they were going to do it right. I knew everybody's boss. They knew that if push came to shove that they'd be the one who would be shoved. My CIA Station Chief was literally assigned to me by the CIA Director who told me he was sending him to me because he was a damn good man but that he needed to be disciplined, "I want you to take care of that", he said. So I had absolutely no problems in the four years I was there. It was a pretty happy team - I always feel that when you work in a mission with more work to go around it keeps everyone compatible; it's when they're not busy that they begin worrying about their turf. I met with all my heads of sections every morning - everybody knew what everybody else was doing.

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Dick French:

I was in the Army in Bangkok in '63. And in '65, I decided to retire. And since I was with the support group that supplied the Requirements Office (RO) in Vientiane, I asked about the possibilities of getting a job with them and I was accepted. I put in for early retirement and went to Laos on the first day of July 1965. I went into the "black" for sixty days which means

I didn't go through the Lao immigration authorities. I went through Udorn, took a Helio and flew over to Wattay airport in Vientiane. A few days before my retirement date, I went back to Bangkok, signed all my papers, got my final pay, and got on the commissary run back to Vientiane, legally.

We warehoused everything in Udorn. All our material - you name it: guns, ammo, jeeps, uniforms, everything - would come in by ship or plane into Bangkok and then be shipped up to Udorn. When we wanted something, we'd send a message: Send up ten generators or, a thousand guns. We didn't give the Lao military much control of things because it'd disappear so goddam fast. It would be sold right back across the river as fast as it get there in Laos! They caught General Kouprasith and his number one hatchet man, Colonel Bounao, taking three two and a half ton truck loads of vehicle spare parts back to Thailand to be sold to the Thais. And the shit had only been received two or three days before! The embassy gave them a slap on the wrist.

I always felt that, militarily, taking it with the 20 years I had with the military, and dealing with American officers, I would have to say that the Lao were far too involved with trying to make money - with all that corruption. And politics. And so they never seemed to have enough time for what they should have been doing, and that was directing and supporting the troops. I think it was the corruption that defeated them.

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William H. Sullivan:

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 had a large AID mission there, many volunteers, and a whole covey of specialists in various fields to undertake this work of "nation building."

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Harry Carr:

We called it The Mission. We were as diverse as the whole American population. We were not only career bureaucrats, we were also doctors, agriculturists, aviators, engineers, warehouse managers, carpenters, electricians, teachers and mechanics. There were economists, political analysts, and intelligence agents. Our advisor-experts to the Royal Lao Government were in narcotics control, counter-insurgency, customs enforcement, refugee assistance, police work, hospital management, military supply, public information, air traffic control, irrigation, secondary education, agronomy, telecommunications, and other fields. Besides the Department of State, there were Department of Defense attaches, people from the Agency for International Development, U.S. Information Agency, as well as elements of such Federal agencies as Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, Customs, Public Roads, and Reclamation.

As the Executive Officer of USAID, my office - Management - was in charge of practically all the support activities for The Mission. We took care of its electrical generation needs, the phone and telecommunications sytems it used throughout the country, its motor pool(s), the warehouses, all the

refugee relief commodities purchases, maintenance for the offices and housing, mail delivery, translations, housing, personnel problems, procurement of every imaginable kind, on down to the removal of its trash. And one of our most important functions was negotiating with the subcontractors.

The planes would not have flown except for our hard-nosed encounters over the bargaining table in Taiwan, with Air America on one side and Management's contracting officer leading the "customer" team on the other. CIA was one of the customers, along with USAID and Defense, and although the CIA also owned Air America that did not affect the tough negotiations over each year's contract -- fuel costs, "dry wing" versus "wet wing", composition of crews, hazardous flight pay, maintenance schedules, financing of capital outlays, safety and security measures.

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Val Petersen:

The last part of my first tour, about a year and a half, I spent in Luang Prabang, the royal capital. In fact, I was the American representative (although there were a couple of other Americans there). This was when they discovered that the supplies in the Lao government warehouses were all short. What was suppose to be in the provincial warehouses wasn't. You see, for the rural development programs - for building schools, digging wells, and so forth - the American aid program provided primarily roofing sheets and cement, also nuts and bolts. The *Chao Khouengs*, the provincial governors, had control over these things. There were no inventories and no audits had been done by anyone for years. And just before the USAID people

had somehow come upon this, the thing blew up because somebody went to check something in the Vientiane warehouse - I don't know how many tons - and there wasn't anything. Actually, in Luang Prabang, ours was in better shape than any of them. But they were all short. You see, the *Chao Khoueng* is a politician who's got a lot of pressures on him to keep a lot of people happy in his province. And in Luang Prabang, you have the King. Keo Vipikhone, who was the Minister for Social Welfare, was close to the royal family, and the King would say, "Fix the street up, " and you'd fix the street up! You never asked: "Where am I going to get it?" And when I saw this going on I wrote a memo because I thought there should be some kind of joint inventory done every year. So I was assigned the job of counting all the stuff that was supposed to have been used in the construction of schools - and a lot of them had been reported as having been completed. But a lot of them were half-built. So the head of the Rural Development Division of USAID asked me to take a memo over to the *Chao Khoueng*, something in essense that he had stolen all this stuff, or was lying about it, and here I was, just a young IVSer! So what happened was that USAID went to the extreme and put their own warehouses in every province and kept sole control over these things themselves.

I had a lot of respect for the *Chao Mouangs* and *Chao Khouengs*, they had fairly good educations; a lot of them had even studied in France, or Saigon or Hanoi. To come back and live and work in the structure they did, for no money and very little prestige, caused me to respect them quite a bit. Prince Boun Oum did a lot of that - selling off supplies for building villas and such - and probably all of them did that to some degree. But for example, on my second tour in Thakhek, when we set up the joint control warehouse, I

felt it necessary to give the *Chao Khoueng* a little elbow room because he was expected to do a lot of entertaining and his salary certainly wouldn't pay for any of that. So what we did, because there was a dribble in of refugees - some days a lot, some days a little - is that he had a little building by his office where he had the day-to-day supplies, and he kept track of that. The main warehouse was joint control, and my Lao counterpart that we set this up with, would sign out a certain number of shirts and skirts and ten sacks of rice for that little building so the governor would have things to deal with for his entertainment supplies.

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December 4, 1965: US troop level in South Vietnam totals 170,000 men.

December 24, 1965: LBJ orders Christmas bombing halt in North Vietnam. Planes released to attack sites in northern Laos and along Ho Chi Minh trail.

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Susan Boyles Swain:

My mom had been married to my dad for 25 years when he was shot down. I was 13 years old, and Mr. Duncan, who had flown with my father, came down to the school and told my brother Billy. Then I was called into Mrs. Stevens' office and they told me that my father was dead. He had called in a Mayday about 7:15 a.m.. I fell apart. When I got home, my mom was waiting outside for me and the Air America guy was there and a doctor just in case I needed something. And she told me that, no, he's not dead, he's just missing. So that kinda gave me a little more hope.

He was shot down by Thakhek, in Laos, about six miles away from the air force base in Nakorn Phanom. He was shot down by a Russian heat-seeking missle. His kicker got out - a Lao guy who jumped out with his hands over his eyes so he didn't see any other parachutes. My dad, who was with the Air Force for 25 years, always sat on his parachute. There were a few sightings that he was taken prisoner, once by another Air America pilot who was flying over in a smaller aircraft and he saw two men in grey uniforms being taken away from the crash site. They couldn't get in right away because there was enemy fire from the Pathet Lao, the ones that had shot him down. Finally, when they did get to it, the cockpit was in the ground, and they expected to find bodies, but they didn't and the chutes were gone. So he was taken prisoner. Now, whether he died in captivity - he had wounds - we just don't know; I don't think we'll never know.

After he was shot down, I wanted to go out to Air America at the airport - I wanted to see what he flew, because at that point in my life my father and I weren't on very good terms. It was a funny age - you can't do this, you can't do that - and I just felt like I wanted to be closer to him. My mom went down to Thakhek in 1974. She took a bus and went to the crash site - his plane had crashed in a rice paddy. And that rice paddy was just taboo - the people there would not go near it. And there were parts of the plane still left even though they had stripped most of it away. She stayed on in Laos after dad went down, right up to 1975 .

The kids in the States who lost their fathers in the Vietnam War, they were thousands of miles away and they didn't know what the war was like; they had no comprehension of what the Oriental people were like. I guess I feel that my father's name ought to be on the Wall in Washington because I

consider Laos to have been a part of the Vietnam War. And they should be acknowledged, not forgotten.

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John Graham:

The Air America families didn't mix with the USAID people. For some reason, they didn't like them, there were never any people from USAID at the big parties. "Oh, those USAID 'honkers,'" that's what they called them.

They had these big parties and those Air America pilots would have to get up at 4:00 a.m. the next morning and have to fly and they'd all gotten bombed the night before and I don't know how they did it! Most of the time they'd find out first what the schedule was by calling the Air America office to see how late they could stay up.

Nancy Newell:

Alcohol was pretty widespread. They all did it. I heard from some of the girls that their mothers had problems with alcohol. I think our maids were sort of like surrogate mothers so the problem was accelerated.

Liz Newell Senser:

That's all they had to do! They didn't have anything to do. They didn't have places to go shop . . .

John Graham:

It was a way to deal with the situation . . . and the pilots, too, in their off time.

Liz Newell Senser:

They had a completely different perspective on Laos. And I don't think any of us realized the pressure they were under. Booze was cheap there!

John Graham:

That's why they called the street we lived on "party paddy".

Liz Newell Senser:

There were about ten families in "party paddy" - all Air America.

Michelle Halstead Boyd:

There was a continuous consumption of alcohol there. Everybody. Probably pretty bad. The women were bored. I remember there was always an excuse for a party. As a teen ager, what could you do? Do you look at your parents, your friends' parents and say what you're doing is totally irresponsible? Because you shut your eyes to it. And we didn't know better. This was way back before the de-glamorization of alcohol - drinking was okay. The 60's was a time of toss-up: Why isn't it okay for me to smoke pot if you can drink?

Liz Newell Senser:

I remember one funny thing about "party paddy," I think it was in '69. The city didn't have enough generators to run the electricity and the power would go off at six in the morning, you could hear the fans stop, right? And you could feel the heat settling in on the room immediately. And it

would be off all day long and we basically lived out of ice chests - there was always an ice chest in the kitchen and it would have to be refilled. Then at night, you'd see the candles get lit, and in "party paddy" there'd be one house where all the adults would congregate, and they'd have a get-together. Finally, us kids would go to bed - we'd be dying, just lay there dying, with all the mosquitoes - and then about 11 or 12, the power would go on. And you'd be half asleep and you could hear all the adults, the power would start, going like this: zzitt, zzztt, then, urrr, you could see the lights start to flicker, and the adults would start screaming, Yea!, yea!! You could hear this for blocks. For months we lived like that.

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Valdimir Petersen:

There were some areas where *falangs* were offered a girl for the night in a village, but they weren't really expecting them to accept it! It was a super-polite formality, that's really all.

I didn't realize it at the time, but, once you are formally, officially engaged, then it's okay to stay together, even before you get married. You don't back out of an engagement, so the ceremony is just a ceremony.

Lao customs about marriage are not that different from American customs - if you go back to when people lived on the farm. The families involved usually do some negotiating. But because I didn't have any family this friend of mine did that for me, he acted like my father and contacted Intha's family. The first thing, of course, is getting permission to court her and to ask for her hand. Her step-father was away, probably in Vietnam is

the best I can figure - he was working for the CIA teams way out somewhere - and we wanted to try to get him to the wedding but we couldn't arrange it. So first, we went to her mother, but then we had to go down to Savannakhet to see her older brother. The second step was the right price - this goes back to when things were more stable and everybody had a little wealth stashed somewhere - bars of silver or something like that. Then her mother contacted some village elders who had to decide when the auspicious days were. We knew approximately when we wanted to get married, but there has to be an auspicious day - it's an astrological thing. As a matter of fact, when we went up there (her village) it turned out that it was the day I arrived which was auspicious, and not the next day as we had planned. So we had a short, small ceremony the day I arrived and a bigger ceremony the next day as planned.

Getting married to a Laotian put me in a uniquely good position to learn the detailed Lao customs at all levels. And since I was the kind of guy to always correct her pronunciation of English, she was always hard on me about the customs, say, being careful about sticking my feet out, or, the thing that took me a long time to develop an awareness of, was walking behind someone to do something - you have to ask their permission. Say there was a hat on the wall back there, I would have to ask your permission to walk behind you and take that hat off the wall. It's because of the head. It's also that way with the bowing - the way you bow your head when you walk by someone who's facing you. That comes from the politeness of not wishing to interrupt that person in what they're doing.

By comparison to the Lao, the ordinary American acted kinda boorish; I think we have a very distinct lack of manners. But the thing is, the Lao are

so tolerant that it probably doesn't even really bother them quite as much, and secondarily, they're so polite that it's not proper to let any one know you are rude.

In general, because the Americans in Laos were there in some official capacity, they tended to be regarded as government officials, therefore they were automatically accorded respect. The Lao also have the same color consciousness as there may be in this country, where, historically, the darker the skin, the lower you were on the totem pole. In Laos, there's this myth, I forget exactly, which says that all the people in the world came out of this big pumpkin, I think the lighter skin people came out first, and the Lao think of themselves as having come out soon thereafter and that puts them at the top of the scale; the darkest ones would probably be the aborigines, what they call *Kha tong luang*; it means yellow leaf, because these nomadic people built their lean-to's out of dead leaves. But there are those curious things about color and Lao, generally speaking. For example, the Haitian guy who was an IVS volunteer, he learned to sing a lot of Lao songs very well, and the Lao loved him. Whenever they had a *bouz* they'd drag him out there on the stage to sing.

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Lee Deffebach:

From my perspective, the Americans had very little to do with the Lao people except for those who were household servants or who were employed by the American government. A few of the USAID people who worked directly with refugees, some agricultural advisors, and those in International Voluntary Services who spoke the language, were the ones mostly helping

the Laotians. The majority of the Americans were there to support the American colony.

The living quarters for most of them was six kilometers north of Vientiane (it was called KM-6). There was a guard at the gate (with no weapon) just off the main road. It looked like suburbia, with individual bungalows, houses with yards to keep up, a club house, the American school for the kids, a swimming pool, and tennis courts. The houses were air-conditioned. All built for Americans. You couldn't drive out of Vientiane much further than this place, but the Americans had cars to get to town (and a bus service, too). When they did go to Vientiane it was to eat at the French restaurants or to shop for local craft items; or to go to movies, dinners, parties at the American compound. They had free privileges on the commissary flights to Bangkok and some special planes that went to Hong Kong.

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Harry Carr:

All official Americans overseas are entitled by law to suitable quarters, education of their dependent children, full medical needs, shipment of personal effects, and assistance in operating cooperative commissaries and recreational facilities. I see no reason to defend this, even if some idealists say that Americans should live as the "native people" do. We generated our own electricity, at about 2.5 cents per KWH, before the oil price crunch, and maintained our own lines. This made it possible to air-condition all offices and bedrooms. In a country where heat and humidity are oppressive most of the year, this pays for itself in improved well-being, morale, and

performance. And since we provided housing, we furnished it as well, so that newly-assigned personnel brought only a minimum of personal effects and no furniture or major appliances. We figured that it cost AID an average of $92,000 [late 1960's dollars] to put a foreign service American at post for two years (salary, allowances, transportation, housing, etc.), and I'm sure many posts cost more.

Operating in our favor, of course, was "economy of scale." A small mission could not provide full support that we did and save the government money. Take "KM-6." We built 140 housing units there and installed a power plant, water supply and sewage system, roads, a fire station, and telephones, over a period of years, for $3,405,000 - $24,321 per family unit. Annual operating costs were $244,000 - $1,740 per unit.

The critics scorned KM-6 as a "golden ghetto" and sniffed that USAID Americans should be willing to "live on the economy." The theory being that Americans make a better impression that way. On the contrary, when an American family moves its standard of living into a Lao neighborhood, it is just as likely to make the wrong impression. Multiply by a hundred or two hundred and you multiply the possibilities of increasing resentment, creating incidents, attracting burglars and hooligans, and offending people unintentionally merely by our affluence, our cars, our parties, our stereos, and our exhuberant kids. Anyhow, when we started KM-6, no one knew any better way to house scores of American families in provincial Vientiane, where there were only a few paved streets and no indoor plumbing, and there was barely enough electricity to keep bulbs burning.

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Larry Woodson:

The Peace Corps came back with an offer of a poultry program in India and International Voluntary Services offered a teacher-training school advisor position in Luang Prabang, Laos. When my parents learned of my decision they immediately drove to the campus at Kansas State University and tried to talk me into changing my mind. Afterall, the newspapers periodically carried articles about the war that was being waged in Laos. There was fighting and bombing taking place on Route 7 which was only some 50 miles south of the place I was going to.

My housing consisted of a small wooden building up on stilts located at the end of the city. It was some 50 yards off the road and the landlord used this area for storage of gasoline drums for part of his business. The house had one room that consisted on two windows and one door and a tin roof. The cracks in the floor were 1/2 inch wide which allowed for good circulation, let the mosquitoes in, or simply made it easier to sweep the floor. There was a porch on the north and west sides. There was a wicker couch on the north side, and on the west was the luxury of a kerosene-run refrigerator. On the back porch was a 50 gallon water barrel which served as the shower. A six-ounce fruit can was nailed on a stick about 14 inches long and was used to dip water out of the rain barrel to pour over yourself. I used a loin cloth - a *pa-sa-nam* - because of not having any privacy. On cool mornings, I learned how to bathe with only eight cans of water: Two to get wet with, two for sudsing, and finally, four to rinse off with. On hot days, I took two or three showers a day.

The toilet was about 30 feet to the rear of the house and was part of the generator shed. The roof was only five feet high in front and four feet in the rear. I think the whole shed was only five feet square. It was a water-seal pit toilet, and you had to pour water from a five gallon kerosene can down the bowl to flush it. It was the squat-type the Asians use all the time. I never enjoyed using it, or, for that matter, adjusted to it - my ankles and knees were not built the same as those people (I think Asians could squat for hours and be as comfortable as an American sitting in a chair). For most of the eleven years I lived in Laos, that was the kind of toilet I used.

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January 31, 1966: US resumes bombing of North Vietnam.

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Edwin "Win" McKeithen:

I'll tell you about the famous "PL Air Force Incident." This happened at Phou Pha Ti or, Site 85, on top of this butte, at somewhere around 6,000 feet. Very close to the North Vietnamese border in Sam neua province, not too far south of Dinh Binh Phu. It was a US Air Force operated radar facility, actually a "Tac-Can", a fancy sort of VOR. It allowed the radar operators there to vector the war planes hitting targets inside North Vietnam in IFR conditions and at night, too. Not in great precision, but in a fairly small generalized area. It was run by ITT employees on contract who had been promised at least 24 hours advanced warning by the CIA in case of any threat of the place falling.

Well the North Vietnamese didn't like this kind of vectoring and after a series of unsuccessful ground assaults the Pathet Lao, the North Vietnamese, decided to send their "air force" against it which consisted of four Russian AN-2's. An AN-2 is a big, single engine biplane used for heavy agricultural work. They attacked just after a couple of supply choppers had landed on top of the butte. Well, the chopper pilots couldn't belive their eyes when they saw these things approaching. Suddenly one of them dropped a forty pound bomb that they'd somehow slung onto the thing and it went off and didn't hurt anything. And then another made a run and then all the guys on the ground, both the Meo and the few Americans there, started shooting at these things. Two of them immediately disappeared back to the east, but the two that had dropped their bombs started heading on up to Dinh Binh Phu which was pretty much northwest. One of the Air America choppers took off in pursuit and the flight mechanic shot it down with an AK-47! It crashed and burned. Meanwhile, on the ground, this one guy had emptied his .38 at the other and wounded the pilot who crashed but his plane didn't burn.

Then the North Vitnamese began building a road up to the south end, to the foot of Site 85 because they were going to get that motha regardless. Then they hauled their 130mm artillery up there and staged a series of ground assaults and finally took it. I think that was in the fall of '68.

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May 15- June 5, 1966: The King and Queen of Laos and Prime Minister Prince Souvanna Phouma visit the U.S.S.R

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Yang Kou:

After I had been away at school for awhile, I went back to visit my family in my little village during a vacation. While I was there a missionary whiteman passed through to convert one family into Christianity because many children of that family had died of an unknown disease and they believed they were cursed by an evil spirit. The whiteman's interpreter said that practicing ancestor worship was enslavement to one's ancestors and it was evil to worship ancestors and supernaturalism. Believing in "Yesu" was good and when the believers died Jesus would save them by taking their souls to the happy kingdom.

After we learned about Jesus, my father and the other elders in the village sat around our fireplace and talked about what they learned. They laughed and said they might be slaves to their ancestors but someday they themselves would be ancestors of their descendents. They said they only offered food or animals to their ancestors a couple of times a year, but in believing in Jesus, one must close the eyes and pray before eating, before sleeping, or even before going to bed with one's own wife. And you must go to church every seven days and give money to the person who teaches in the church and must obey the church and the whiteman. So believing in Jesus was simply being a slave of Jesus, of the whiteman who looked at his book and told you what to do. He might tell you to close your eyes and when you open your eyes, he has your wife but all you have is that book.

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October 21, 1966: General Thao Ma and some of his fellow pilots attempt a coup d'etat against the Royal Lao Government by bombing army headquarters in Vientiane. Ma seeks refuge in Thailand when other army officers fail to support him.

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Margaret Ross:

Our house was across the street from the USAID compound in town. At about 8:25 a.m., some T-28's flew over the town. Suddenly, I heard four explosions came from the direction of KM-6, but I never associated the direction as being the Lao army's headquarters at Phone Kheng which was about half-way between the compound and KM-6.

Then the planes were circling over our house and knowing what their aim reputedly was, I found it wise to duck under the dining room table to avoid flying glass, However, their aim was to be complimented: They hit exactly what they were aiming for. Unfortunately, this included some other T-28's on the ground at the airport, the army camp at Chinaimo, and another straffing run over Phone Keng, the headquarters. You could hear the machine guns going and that caused our houseboy, Tu, to say, "I go home." and take off like a scared puppy. The bombing was over by 8:50 but the mission received word that another flight of planes was due over at 10:20. So we all sat down to wait. Fortunately, that attack never came.

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Sally Ross McCafferty:

I was sitting in my 8th grade science class at the American School at KM-6 and Miss Blanner made us all get under our desks. I can't remember if it was during the bombing itself or after that we heard the planes coming but it was all over so quickly that no one knew what was going on. We were kept at school for several hours until it was safe to start home. The bus ride home was something I'll never forget. I was sitting in a window seat and we were stopped in front of Phone Kheng at the checkpoint and they still hadn't

covered the dead or what was left of them. Sometimes I can still picture it as if it were yesterday. I think that was the worst experience of my life.

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February 2, 1967: A group of 20-30 Pathet Lao sappers raid the airport at the royal capital of Luang Prabang and destroy nine RLAF T-28's.

February 5, 1967: US warplanes bomb a village in southern Laos by mistake.

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Jack Huxtable:

To be accurate, I'm going to refer to some letters I wrote to my sister. What happened was this:

The weather was clear. It was early February 1967 at about 7:00 in the morning. The small street market in the village of Phalane - which consisted of about 80 families - was about to close. Three F-105 fighters from the US airbase in Udorn, Thailand, each ladened with six 750 pound bombs, made a high pass over the village. The jet's roar didn't concern the villagers because they were accustomed to the noise of a variety of aircraft what with the interdiction going on against the North Vietnamese convoys on the nearby Ho Chi Minh Trail. On their second pass, however, all three jets came back upon the village in a screaming dive and six bombs were released.

Three exploded in the vacant school yard and three with delayed fuses entered the ground. In the 25 seconds it took for the jets to turn around, the villagers dove for cover. The next pass was even more deadly resulting in four houses being completely destroyed and 30 or so others

being partially damaged by the shrapnel and fire. Lew Sitzer, an IVS volunteer, had just returned to his place from the market and cranked up the generator and made several fruitless attempts to radio USAID headquarters in Savannakhet. He then sent an SOS to Vientiane. To this day we don't know how the information got to the US command in Thailand. It could have been passed on by USAID or by the pilots themselves after realizing their error. How such a mistake could have been made in clear daylight we will never know. Anyway, by nine o'clock Air Force jolly green giant helicopters were circling overhead. After a confusing hour of finding the wounded victims, they headed back to a base hospital at Nakorn Phanom with fifteen terrified people. Miraculously, only three people and one buffalo were killed.

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Jack Williamson:

I'd started running a refugee program in Sayaboury back in '63. At that time, whether these people were displaced, or dependents wasn't an issue. We weren't very sophisticated, really. The last time we'd heard about people being displaced from their homes was in Europe and we called them refugees, so that's what they were called. But they really weren't refugees - I didn't learn this name until later - they were displaced people. At that time, they claimed it was from communist insurgents, but you didn't know for certain - it might have been conflicts between political groups that they didn't want around certain areas. And some of it could have been they were hungry because their crops had failed. I guess, also, in a lot of cases they were just military dependents. What was happening was that the recruiting efforts, which were expanding very rapidly, for regulars and irregulars,