

INTRODUCTION

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HOW WALT HANEY BECAME INVOLVED IN THE ISSUE OF BOMBING

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INTRODUCTION

This paper recounts a story that is both old and new — a story of U.S. bombing of Laos during the Indochina War and how it came to affect one young volunteer, namely, myself. I'll first recount how I came to be in Laos in the late 1960's; how I ended up becoming concerned about the bombing of Laos; what I learned about the bombing in the early 1970's after I returned to the United States; and more recently, what I've learned from recent accounts of the war in Laos — about the magnitude of the bombing of Laos and how munitions, literally millions of tons of bombs dropped on Laos, continue to kill and injure Laotians, a quarter of a century later. Finally in closing, I will recount how the experience in Laos and what I subsequently learned about U.S. government lying about the bombing has affected me.

HOW WALT HANEY BECAME INVOLVED IN THE ISSUE OF BOMBING

Straight out of college and very green, I went to Laos as a teacher with International Voluntary Services (IVS) in 1968-70. I taught for two years at the Ecole Superieure de Pedagogie in Ban Dongsapanmuk. After getting kicked out of IVS, I became a civil servant for the Royal Lao government, teaching at the Fa Ngum Comprehensive School in Vientiane, Laos, in 1970-71. During the summer of 1970, I helped organize a program to enable Lao students to work during their summer school vacations. The program was funded by USAID-Laos and organized by IVS-Laos in the Lao Ministry of Youth and Sports.

A number of students in the summer work program were teaching refugee children in four camps near Vientiane. The refugees in these villages were part of approximately 15 to 20 thousand who were evacuated from the Plain of Jars in February 1970. From their involvement with these refugees, the students in the summer program learned a great deal about the refugees' lives prior to their evacuation from the Plain of Jars. As the students told me

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of their experiences with the refugees, I became increasingly disturbed about what they had learned of bombing in the Plain of Jars.

As a result of what I learned, I wrote a letter to the U.S. Ambassador to Laos, McMurtrie Godley, protesting what had evidently been the bombing of innocent civilians. In November 1970, Ambassador Godley invited me to discuss the matter with him personally. In a discussion on November 23, 1970, Ambassador Godley received me cordially and expressed his deep concern over the question of bombing innocent civilians. He explained that American aircraft in Laos adhered to strict rules on engagement which proscribed the bombing of inhabited villages, except under highly unusual circumstances. Ambassador Godley suggested that most of the information I had gleaned from students working with refugees was second or third hand information and might well have been affected by Communist Pathet Lao propaganda while the refugees were on the Plain of Jars. I won't recount more of my conversation with Ambassador Godley because it is described elsewhere (Haney, 1971, p. 67). But in effect, Ambassador Godley told me to mind my own business and go back to my work as a teacher.

Nonetheless, I was sufficiently concerned about the apparent bombing that I undertook a survey of refugees in ten refugee camps. I conducted the survey over a period of ten days during my Christmas holiday break from school in 1970. To try to prevent bias in the survey, I did not ask specifically about bombing. Rather I asked refugees about immediate members of their families who had been killed when they were on the Plain of Jars. To document the cases, I asked interviewees their name, the village and district, the name of the victim and relationship to the narrator, when the incident happened and why the person died, and what was he/she doing. I collected accounts of close to 200 incidents. During the first few months of 1971, I analyzed the results of my interviews in order to summarize causes of civilian deaths on the Plain of Jars. As a result I learned a number of things I never would have thought to have asked refugees about; for example,

poisons and napalm that had been used on villages. But the overall conclusions of my survey were that:

- (1) Aerial bombardment was the primary cause of civilian war casualties among refugees from the Plain of Jars while under Pathet Lao control 1964-1969.
- (2) Contrary to the policy statements of American officials, bombardment of the civilian population of the Plain of Jars by aircraft, including large numbers of American jets, was extensive and caused large numbers of civilian casualties. (Haney, 1971, p. 100)

Just before leaving Laos, I distributed copies of the report on my survey to both the U.S. Embassy and the Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Upon returning to the United States, I also went to Washington to try to alert officials there of what I had learned of the extensive bombing of civilians in Laos. I visited a number of Congressional offices and was astounded to find that most officials, including Senators from Michigan (which had been my home state), by and large, said there was nothing they could do about what I had learned. The only office that took any action concerning my survey was the *Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapees of the U.S. Senate*, chaired then by Senator Edward Kennedy. This Committee entered the text of my survey into hearings of the U.S. Senate and questioned both U.S. Department of Defense and Department of State officials about the survey results (Haney, 1971). But, green though I had been when I went to Laos, I was dumfounded at how little impact my findings seemed to have on officials in Laos/Washington.

Subsequently I became involved in antiwar ^{work} Project Air War, founded by a remarkable former IVS volunteer in Laos name Fred Branfman. Fred's book, *Voices from the Plain of Jars I Life Under an Air War* (1972), is a volume I highly recommend. The book consists of accounts of life under the air war in Laos by refugees from the Plain and contains a remarkable set of drawings depicting what life had been like under the air war. Unfortunately the Branfman book is long out of print, but it remains, as far as I know, a

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unique account by Laotian villagers who had lived under an automated war for nearly five years.

WHY DID THE BOMBING HAPPEN?

After returning to graduate school, I became involved in a project organized by Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn. Chomsky and Zinn sought to collect a set of critical essays concerning the Pentagon papers which had been released recently. By the late 1960s, even the U.S. Department of Defense had come to realize that U.S. involvement in Indochina had come to be a disaster. As a result, a secret internal study had been commissioned to review the history of U.S. involvement. The study pulled together a range of secret government documents concerning U.S. involvement. One of the analysts who worked on the study, Daniel Ellsberg, in a act of conscience, released the study, which became known as the Pentagon Papers and was available in three versions. The most complete version was the Gravel edition published in four volumes by Beacon Press. The project that Chomsky and Zinn organized was to produce a fifth volume of the Gravel edition of the Pentagon papers – a set of critical essays on the Pentagon Papers by people who had been actively involved in opposing U.S. military intervention in Indochina. I was lucky enough to have been invited to contribute a chapter to the 1972 volume edited by Chomsky and Zinn. Basically I tried to trace the history of U.S. involvement in Laos from around 1950 until 1970, and in particular to read through the Pentagon Papers to try to figure out for myself why the widespread bombing of innocent civilians in Laos had come to happen.

I will not try to recount here all of what I learned about U.S. involvement in Laos (Haney, 1972a), but I will recount one remarkable finding as to why U.S. policy in Indochina led to massive bombing of innocent civilians in Laos, a circumstance of which most people in the United States are, regrettably, still unaware. On March 31, 1968, President

Haney, *Bombing of Laos*, 10/97, p. 6.

Lyndon Johnson announced a partial bombing halt over North Vietnam. He had presented this bombing halt as a U.S. initiative for peace, but in fact Pentagon papers revealed that the day before the announcement, the State Department sent a cable to U. S. Ambassadors in Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, the Philippines, South Korea, and Laos. The cable revealed that, "In view of weather limitations, bombing north of the 20th parallel will in any event be limited for the next four weeks or so, which we tentatively envisage as a maximum testing period, in any event. Hence, we are not giving up anything serious in this time frame. Moreover, the airpower used North of the 20th can probably be used in Laos where no policy change is added" (Gravel edition of Pentagon Papers, vol. 4, p. 595; quoted in Haney, 1972a, p. 275).

Johnson's claim of a substantial reduction in the level of hostilities was completely disingenuous. The planes which were no longer bombing North of the 20th parallel were diverted to bomb Laos.

The same pattern of deception was repeated in November 1968 after the complete bombing halt over North Vietnam. On the night of October 31, in announcing the total bombing halt over North Vietnam, President Johnson proclaimed, "The overriding consideration that governs us at this hour is the chance and the opportunity that we might have to save human lives on both sides of the conflict." If such was the overriding concern of Johnson, his concern did not extend to the lives of Laotians. As a Cornell University Air War Study Group noted, "Following the bombing halt over North Vietnam in November of 1968, the U.S. increased its air activity against Laos dramatically, taking advantage of the sudden increase of planes available" (as quoted in Haney, 1972a, p. 275). As one U.S. official put it, 'We couldn't just let the planes rust.'"¹ With the vastly increased sortie rate in Laos and the departure of William Sullivan as ambassador in March 1969, the ostensible

¹ This quote, cited in Haney, 1972a, p. 275, comes from an article by T. D. Allman, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 12, 1970.

Haney, Bombing of Laos, 10/97, p. 7.

controls on U.S. air attacks in Northern Laos designed to avoid bombing civilian targets were substantially relaxed. In April of 1969, the town of Xieng Khouang on the Plain of Jars was completely leveled.

In January and February 1970 when an attack on the Plain of Jars was imminent, all civilians from the area around the Plain were evacuated to areas around Vientiane, thus creating 15-20 thousand refugees. Despite saturation bombing by B-52's the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces regained complete control of the Plain in March 1970. The evacuation of refugees from the Plain of Jars provided the first opportunity for western observers to learn what life had been like under the Pathet Lao. It was among these refugees that my students had worked, and from them, Branfman, I and others learned about the bombing. Perhaps the most concise account of the bombing in northern Laos was given by a United Nations advisor in Laos, George Chapellier. After interviewing dozens of refugees in Laos, Chapellier wrote:

By 1968, the intensity of the bombing was such that no organized life was possible in the villages. The villagers moved to the outskirts and then deeper and deeper into the forest as the bombing reached its peak in 1969, when jet planes came daily and destroyed all stationary structures; nothing was left standing. The villagers lived in trenches and holes or in caves and they only farmed at night. All informants, without any exception, had his village completely destroyed. In the last phase, bombings were aimed at systematic destruction of the material basis of the civilian society. (quoted in Haney, 1972a, p. 276)

As Fred Branfman wrote,

... after a recorded history of 700 years, the Plain of Jars disappeared. ...

[T]he society of 50,000 people living in and around the area no longer existed. ... History had conferred one last distinction upon it: The Plain of Jars became the first society to vanish through automated warfare."

(Branfman, 1972, pp. 3, 20)

I recount the story of U.S. bombing of northern Laos because I think what happened there is still remarkably little known in our society. Also to try to put a human face on what happened to thousands of civilians in northern Laos, I append to this paper pictures and accounts of some of the refugees I interviewed. As one of them described life on the Plain of Jars in the late 1960s, "Life was very difficult then, because the planes came all the time. We had to live with the pigs and eat with the dogs."

RECENT ACCOUNTS OF THE WAR IN LAOS

I had not done serious reading or research on Laos in about twenty years. So last summer in preparation for a seminar at Keene State University, I tried to catch up on more recent literature concerning the war in Laos and what had happened there. I read four books which I'll mention here only briefly:

Christopher Robbins (1987), *The Ravens: The men who flew in America's secret war in Laos*;

Timothy Castle (1993), *War in the shadow of Vietnam: U.S. military aid to the royal Lao government 1955-1975*;

James Parker (1995), *Codename Mule: Fighting the secret war in Laos for the CIA*; and

Roger Warner (1995), *Backfire - The CIA's secret war in Laos and its link to the war in Vietnam*.

What I learned from these books – even ones depicting the war from the perspective of CIA and U.S. military personnel involved directly in Laos – essentially confirmed what I had learned first-hand twenty-five years ago about the massive bombing of innocent civilians. For example, from Christopher Robbins' book about U.S. forward air controllers in Laos:

The Ravens alone could not control all of the fighters, which led to the utilization of Fast FACs. Fast FACs came out of Thailand flying high speed jets at great height. They did not know the territory and could neither remain over target long enough or fly low enough for pinpoint accuracy. The result was a number of indiscriminate bombings that later would have far-reaching political consequences. Friendly troops had

pushed so far forward so fast that an imaginary line had been drawn from east to west across the middle of the plain, and it was stipulated that no U.S. air independent of Raven control should be put in south of it. It was a line every Raven carried in his head, but Fast FACs were not so finely tuned.

Early one morning one of them spotted a helicopter pad and tents out in the open. Assuming the camp to be North Vietnamese, they attacked and the result was the death of twenty friendly troops. (Polifka ran into the pilot after the war at Elgin Air Force base, "Absolutely no regrets at all. Didn't give a shit. Just Asians are Asians and they're all enemy." He was sickened and infuriated to learn that certain of the Fast FACs purposefully saved ammunition so they could strafe villages for fun on the way home.) In other incidents over a three-week period at the end of August and into September, three hundred friendly troops were lost to errors made by Fast FACs. A village was hit and 250 women and children were killed. Ravens could make mistakes, too, but they were infrequent and never of this magnitude (Robbins, 1987, p. 191, italics in original).

Also of interest is Warner's 1995 book *Backfire*. Warner recounts that during 1970-71, 440 thousand tons of munitions were dumped on Laos, which was nearly twice the amount dropped on South Vietnam and twenty-five times the power of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. It was simply impossible to imagine there weren't twenty-five mushroom shaped clouds rising east of the Mekong and the Plain did not appear twice as cratered as Vietnam although parts of the Ho Chi Minh Trail looked like a moonscape, craters everywhere, all the leaves and branches blown off the trees (pp. 295-296).

Warner also reports,

In the Sullivan and Godley years, from 1964-1973, the U.S. military dropped almost 2 million tons of bombs on Laos which worked out to two-thirds of a ton for every man, woman, and child. Few Americans allowed the bombing of Laos to enter their consciousness but it was even worse than the horrors next door in Vietnam (p. 337).

Warner also tells, by the way, the story of Fred Branfman's remarkable effort to bring the air war in Laos to the attention of the public in the United States after he was evicted from Laos. Quoting from a column by Anthony Lewis of the New York Times, Warner says,

The human results of being the most heavily bombed country in the history of the world were expectedly pitiful. They are described without rancor — almost unbearably so — in a small book that will go down as a classic. It is *Voices from the Plain of Jars*, edited by Fred Branfman in which the villagers of Laos themselves describe what bombers did to their civilization. No American should be able to read that book without weeping at his country's arrogance (quoted in Warner, 1995, p. 337).

Warner notes that Lewis condemned Sullivan and Godley as war criminals for having "played a decisive part in what must qualify as the most appalling episode of cruelty in American history, the bombing of Laos" (Lewis, quoted in Warner, 1995, p. 337). Warner ends this section of his book with a passage I especially like:

... a strange sort of justice had been meted out in the establishment press. Two career foreign service men had been condemned, and scruffy, rebellious Fred Branfman had been raised above them and praised. (Warner, 1995, p. 337)

THE BOMBING CONTINUES

In my search for more recent information on the bombing in Laos, I also searched the World Wide Web (WWW). There, I came upon the web site of the Mennonite Central Committee and a home page on the Committee's Laos Bombie project:

<http://www.mbnet.mb.ca/mcc/misc/laos-bombie/index.html>.

Bombie is the Laotian word that I had learned 25 years ago, to refer to small antipersonnel bombs, tons of which were dropped on the Plain of Jars. What the Mennonite work makes clear is that, regrettably, the bombing in northern Laos continues even now, twenty-five years after the formal withdrawal of the United States from the Indochina war, to yield a deadly harvest. Unexploded munitions in northern Laos continue to kill and maim hundreds of Laotian civilians.

According to the Mennonite Central Committee web site, children under fifteen make up a disproportionate number of the victims of the unexploded munitions in Northern Laos. Because of their natural curiosity, the children

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of Laos of the 1990s are frequently drawn to play with the strange "bombies" they find. The Mennonite Project is attempting to teach children to understand the dangers of bombs, and to make a small start on the huge job of bomb removal. As I think others attending this conference or reading this paper might be interested, I attach a copy of the text of the Mennonite committee web site to this paper.

THE BROWNING OF ONE VOLUNTEER

What my country did in Laos shames me to this day. It is most unfortunate that more people, even now, do not know of the extent of U.S. bombing of innocent civilians in northern Laos. I hope in some small way this symposium will help to make others more aware of this little known, but continuing tragedy.

In closing, I offer a personal note on how what I learned about U.S. bombing in northern Laos in the early 1970's has had a dramatic impact on me personally. Though this experience changed me in many ways, one major impact is that I am left with an enduring suspicion of the arrogance of power. Now, whenever I encounter a dispute between some entrenched authority – be it a large company, influential organization, or well-established scholar – and persons of lesser power, my instinct is always to distrust often self-serving accounts of authority and to give credence, at least tentatively, to the views of those less powerful. Also, as a result of my search for answers about the bombing of Laos, I know that getting to the truth may take some digging and getting one's hands dirty in the process. Over the years, I've been involved in a number of disputes between those in power and those less powerful, but here I will briefly mention two recent cases.

The first has to do with obscure statistical methods for detecting possible cheating on standardized tests. I became involved in this issue quite by chance in 1991 (Haney, 1993a). But after several years work, including digging out and reading a 2000 page trial transcript, I ended up concluding that the world's largest testing organization, Educational Testing Service

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(ETS), was being irresponsible and unethical in the way it was accusing individual test takers of cheating. Without going into the details of this story, let me say that in 1993, having received no satisfaction in direct communications with the President of ETS, I called on three professional organizations to investigate what I took to be serious, ongoing ethical violations by the world's largest testing organization. Having learned well from Fred Brantman, I also went public and sought to get my charges publicized in periodicals such *USA Today*, and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Haney, 1993b). While I can't be certain, after several years I think that my efforts persuaded this large organization to change its test security policies. (I remain unsure, as I'm not terribly popular with this organization and have not been informed on changes in its test security procedures).

The second example is a case on which I am still working. It's a case – which I call the story of the sneaky kid and the crafty professor – of work by a widely esteemed and award-winning scholar. Regrettably, I have come to view several of his works as misleading and unethical. As a result of my concern, I asked that one of this scholar's studies be withdrawn from a publication of a major professional organization. Not surprisingly, the organization did not accede to my request. So I am still digging on this case. I won't get into any details here but it's another instance, I think, where the entrenched interests of authorities have unwarrantedly prevailed over the interests of the less powerful – in this case the research subject of an esteemed professor's writings. I don't know where this case will end, but after more than a year I have had some success in digging out independent views of what happened between the crafty professor and the research subject whose life he chronicled as the "sneaky kid." I will not explain more about this case save to note that as became apparent when I dug into the issue of U.S. bombing in Laos, what happened in this case is worse than I ever imagined.

In conclusion, my experience in Laos and my involvement in discovering the extent of the U. S. bombing and then trying to do something about the U.S. bombing, left me much older and much less green than when I

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was a young teacher in Laos. In recent years, several friends, noting my habit for regularly getting myself in trouble via crusades against wrongdoing, have kindly chided me for my foolhardiness in challenging established authority in my own professional circles. Rarely is there time to explain, but basically having learned a lot about the arrogance of power from my work on the bombing of Laos, I feel that my more recent crusades are truly minor stuff. Having, in my youth, challenged my own government over the killing of thousands of innocent civilians, now browned and even grayed, well into middle age, it seems like pretty small potatoes to challenge a professional organization or the world's largest testing company over matters of much less import. But what I have learned is that in matters of import it is vital to dig to get at the truth, and where serious wrongdoing is discovered, it is often necessary to go public to try to correct those wrongs. If I have learned anything from my study of the bombing in Laos, it is that there are few self-correcting mechanisms to balance the arrogance of power. But one of them is the simple decency of most people who, when exposed to fundamental wrongdoing, will see it and name it for what it is, and not dissemble like too many large organizations too often do to protect entrenched interests and reputations.

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Haney, Bombing of Laos, 10/97, p. 15.

recounting not just the war in Laos, but also something of the war at home against the war in Laos.)

Regarding sources of information, I should mention that there are now many resources available on the World Wide Web (WW) concerning the Indochina Wars. Last summer (7-22-97), I did a few quick searches of the WWW simply to illustrate some of the things available. A search via the Yahoo search service on the words Laos and War yielded 5 category matches and 119 sites matches. A search via Alta Vista on the words Laos and War yielded over 30,000 matches. While I have not by any means been able to explore all of these avenues, I mention one WWW site as a useful link to many other resources:

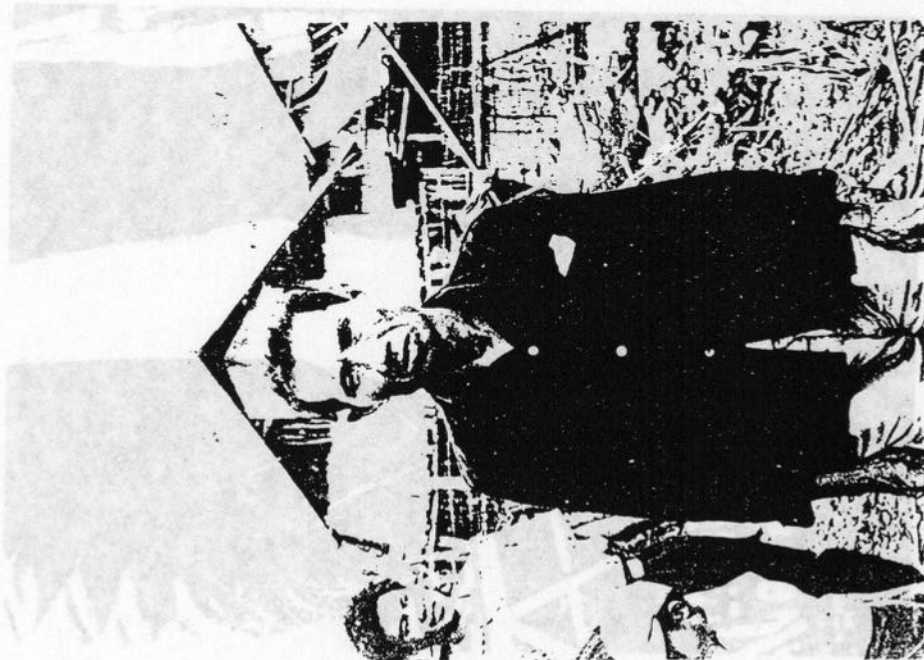
the Vietnam Research Page
<http://204.249.212.251/shsira/Vietnam.html>

recounting not just the war in Laos, but also something of the war at home against the war in Laos.)

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the Vietnam Research Page
<http://204.249.212.251/shsita/Vietnam>

APPENDIX A



Chan Panya, Ban Phou Houm.

Chan Panya described how his 13 year-old son, Thao Van was killed by a bomb fragment on April 11, 1968. "The planes shot up the houses but my son did not reach the holes in time. There were no soldiers in the village."



Nai Phouang, village chief of Ban Bouak.

This village chief described how his 12 year old daughter, Sao Ba, and his young nephew, Bai Enly, were killed by big bombs from T-28 aircraft in December 1965.

"The children had been playing in the sun. Sao Ba was wearing a white blouse. The plane saw them playing in an open space. We had told the children not to run back to the big holes when the planes came because they would see where the big shelters were and then everyone would die. Both Sao Ba and Bai Enly were killed. There were no soldiers around.

Life was very difficult then because the planes came all the time. We had to live with the pigs and eat with the dogs."



Sao Chanta drew this picture in the dust. It was this kind of plane which dropped the 'big bombs' which killed her husband and three daughters.

Luigi Casaburi, 2nd Vice-Chief of Police of Bergamo, Italy



Than Champhet, Sub-district chief of Tasseng Thai

"All of the villagers had to live in holes for two years-- 1968 and 1969. The planes shot everything, the houses and the buffalo, just everything, it all burned.

"In 1966 only the T-28s came to bomb. But by 1968 there were more jets than T-28s. There were two kinds of jets, F105s and F-4-hats. In those last two years we had to stay in our holes all the time. We dug a hole 10 meters into the side of the mountain.

"The planes shot up our village 12 times. T-28s and jets. On the day that nine villagers died there were 22 planes. First there was an Ellier 19 which shot smoke bombs. Then there were two T-28s and the rest were jets. They came at 9 in the morning and shot all through the day. There were no soldiers around, only villagers. A large group of villagers, maybe 30 people, had gone to get rice in the rice-field near Ban Chuay. When they were returning to the holes a spotter plane saw three of four of the villagers and must have ordered the jets. They probably thought that there were many people in the hills on both sides of the valley. That day they dropped mostly 150 kilogram bombs. Twelve of the villagers were caught in the valley halfway between the ricefield and the holes. ...

"The planes didn't know if they were villagers or soldiers or what. So they just shot, shot everything. Our life was very difficult. We didn't have any money or gold or houses. Just our own bodies and our lives. We were lucky not to lose our lives."



This Laotian boy went fishing one day in the summer of 1971. He accidentally set off what villagers thought to be an "air-dropped mine." Unlike others, this boy survived.



Pho Phouang, village chief of Ban Bouak.

"Once in 1968 a jet dropped butterfly bombs on our village. They were very small like a leaf. If you stepped on one it would explode and blow off your leg. These bombs came in two different colors, green and brown like the color of a dried leaf. No they weren't the same as bombs. (At this point, Pho Phouang cut two leaves one green and one dry and brown in order to show me what the butterfly bombs were like.) They only dropped these bombs once. And only one plane. But there were many. A thousand. More than a thousand. Ten buffalo were killed from stepping on the butterfly bombs. When the jet dropped the butterfly bombs there were no soldiers in the whole area. The bombs were very dangerous but we learned that it was safe to pick them up by one of the three corners. If we touched either of the wrong corners the bombs would explode and we would be killed. Yes, they were very dangerous.



Thao Khan, Ban Bouak.

Thao Khan described how his 15 year old daughter, Nang Khong, was killed by a 500 kilogram bomb dropped by a jet in December, 1967.

"Three children had gone to look for fish when the plane came. But the plane, an F-4-hat jet, dropped big bombs in the area of the hole where they had hidden. The children were afraid and they ran out and Nang Khong was killed and the other two were wounded."



Xiang Pa, Ban Bouak.

Xiang Pa described how his two daughters, 3 year old Nang Khamphanh and 2 year old Nang Phon were killed in May 1967 by "big bombs" dropped by a jet.

"Most of the adults in the village had gone to work in the upland ricefield. Khamphanh and Phon were in the village. They hid in a hole when the jets came. But the jets dropped big, big bombs-- 500 kilogram bombs-- and both of my daughters were killed. There were no soldiers around. They never came to stay in the village."

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APPENDIX B

A Deadly Harvest

Exeichl writes this promise for the nation of Israel... a promise of security and peace, of deliverance. But it speaks of the need for all people, everywhere, to be free from fear... to live in peace.

The fields of northeastern Laos are yielding a "deadly harvest." Pictured here are unexploded Vietnam War-era cluster bombs, known in Laos as "bombies." These can turn up just about anywhere, sometimes lying under the soil, other times lying on top of the ground or within reach of a shovel. Nearly every family in the province of Xieng Khouang (SEE map) has experienced the death or injury of a family member.

Children

"I really worry about my children," says Mrs. Vongsy, pictured here. "I know this area is infested with bombies." She recently discovered her son Bouasay, age 5, (the boy in the blue shirt) playing with a bombie. He had picked it up, thinking it was a ball. Fortunately, it didn't explode.

She tries to teach her children not to touch bombies, but the younger ones don't understand. Children in Laos have few ready-made toys so they are always on the look-out for balls, plastic bags to make kites or other materials they can turn into toys.

Mrs. Vongsy and her husband dug a foundation for their house (pictured in the background) and removed 10 bombies. They carefully carried them up the hill and into a forested area well off the path. There they lie in a pile under a tree where children and passers-by aren't likely to find them.

Unfortunately, other families have been touched by tragedy as the bombie explodes. Many of Mrs. Chanthala's dreams were shattered when her son struck a bombie at the beginning of the planting season in July 1993. The explosion burned her body and

<http://www.mbnet.mb.ca/mcc/misc/laos-bombie/index.html>

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Ezekiel writes this promise for the nation of Israel... a promise of security and peace, of deliverance. But it speaks of the need for all people, everywhere, to be free from fear... to live in peace.

The fields of northeastern Laos are yielding a "deadly harvest." Pictured here are unexploded Vietnam War-era cluster bomblets, known in Laos as "bombies". These can turn up just about anywhere, sometimes lying under the soil, other times lying on top of the ground or within reach of a shovel. Nearly every family in the province of Xieng Khouang (SEE ang Kwang) has experienced the death or injury of a family member.

Children

"I really worry about my children," says Mrs. Vongsy, pictured here. "I know this area is infested with bombies." She recently discovered her son Bouna Lay Sy, age 5, (the boy in the blue shirt) playing with a bombie. He had picked it up, thinking it was a ball. Fortunately, it didn't explode.

She tries to teach her children not to touch bombies but the younger ones don't understand. Children in Laos have few ready-made toys so they are always on the look-out for balls, plastic bags to make kites or other materials they can turn into toys.

Mrs. Vongsy and her husband dug a foundation for their house (pictured in the background) and removed 10 bombies. They carefully carried them up the hill and into a forested area well off the path. There they lie in a pile under a tree where children and passers-by aren't likely to find them.

Unfortunately, other families have been touched by tragedy as the bombies explode. Many of Miss Chanthalie's dreams were shattered when her hoe struck a bombie at the beginning of the planting season in July 1993. The explosion burned her body and

caused permanent blindness. Her younger sister, who was working at her side, was struck by shrapnel in the chest. She died instantly.

Laos

Laos is a land-locked country south of China, bordered by Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Burma. Seventy-five percent of the Lao population are farmers. Pictured here are rice fields; planting and harvesting rice is labor intensive, as individual plants are started and placed in the soil by hand. This essential life-giving task requires the assistance of all family and community members. The big, gentle water buffalo are hitched to plows to cultivate the rice fields.

Most Lao people live in small villages, making almost all of the items they need for daily life. Most do not have electricity.

What has happened to this rural people is a tragedy. More than 20 years ago when the United States was at war with Vietnam, fighting spilled over into neighboring Laos as the United States attempted to cut off the North Vietnamese army's supply roads. The United States also wanted to support its ally, the Royal Lao government, by trying to destroy the social and economic infrastructure of areas under the control of the revolutionary Pathet Lao forces.

The United States dropped some 300,000 tons of bombs on northern Laos from 1964 to 1973. During this period, U.S. bombers flew more than 580,344 missions over Laos, an average of one bombing mission every eight minutes around the clock for nine full years.

Cluster Bombs

- 1.F-15 fighter-bomber begins bombing run. Drops cluster bomb unit.
- 2.Explosive charge detonates, separates upper half of bomb, air pressure clears it away.
- 3.Cluster bomb contains 650 bomblets, each 2 1/8 inches in diameter.
- 4.Bomblets are armed by spinning motion generated by air resistance on ridges.
- 5.Bomblets shower on target, exploding on contact.

Cluster bombs were not meant to destroy vehicles or buildings; they were designed to explode and kill people. Many did not work properly and today live bombs litter hundreds of thousands of acres. Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) workers were among the first Westerners to visit post-war Xieng Khouang Province in November 1977. There they found that although the war had ended, the killing and maiming had not. Farmers feared cultivating their fields.

Education

The first ever systematic accident survey of Xieng Khouang Province, Laos, has revealed that children under 15 make up nearly half -- 44 percent -- of the victims. The MCC-supported MAG effort to clear unexploded bombs includes an educational component. Posters and other programs are designed to help children understand the dangers of bombs and to teach them what to do if they find a bomb.