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## Letters by Frederic Benson. 1969

Benson, Frederic C.

[s.l.]: [s.n.], 1969

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9 January 1969

Greetings,

I am now in Uentiane to get a shot and buy some things. I came with The Waggoner on the 7<sup>th</sup>, and will go back to Thalaat tomorrow.

If everything works out I hope to move into my house next week, as perhaps I said before this house is located half way between Thalaat and Phone Hong. It is owned by the wife of a general (who was killed last year). She lives next door, and operates a weaving cooperative. There is also a ~~some~~ action school in the village, and therefore a certain number of soldiers.

Christmas eve, Christmas and New year's I spent at the Waggoner's house (which is located next door to the place I am living in now). They have recently added a new room, <sup>which is made out of adobe!</sup> to their house. In this room they have a fireplace, & had a Christmas tree. The room has large doors (teak - 1200 lbs approx) at each end (2 doors per end), one of which opens to a porch overlooking the river.

As I indicated before I think I will be spending a lot of time working with the ~~land~~ training centers. The purpose of the training is to ~~go~~ teach local leaders about nationalism and about the Bao government. My job, as it stands now, will be to study about the area from which the leaders come (economics, politics, social conditions) and then help design a curriculum for training. This work should be quite interesting. I hope to spend as much time as possible in the villages talking to local leaders, etc.

The P.L. have quieted down but they are still there. On Dec. 23 there was a battle about 7 km, <sup>(4 miles)</sup> away which lasted all night - at least the artillery of the Thadaat army camp (on a hill in back of where I live) ~~it~~ was fired all night.

I received the envelopes that you sent. Enclosed is a check (Have you received all of the checks that I have sent thus far?). I also received the terms that the clauses sent. (The check is for \$25 less than the others - we have received a cut in pay)

all for now  
RUB

31 January 1969

Greetings,

I have just returned from several days in Vientiane-- IVS had its annual meeting last week. It was necessary to fly in and out of Vientiane because the road is closed. The P.L. blew up a large ammunition dump 17 km from Vientiane a couple of weeks ago, and there have been P.L. troop movements near the roads which lead to Vientiane. After the blowing up of the ammunition dump there was a fight in Vientiane between some Lao army soldiers and the P.L. The fight took place in the morning market; the P.L. go to the market every morning to buy food etc--the P.L. have a delegation stationed across the street from the market. Things were quiet, however, during my stay in Vientiane.

Everything is fine here. I have pretty much defined my job by now. As perhaps I mentioned before I will be concerned primarily with designing training curriculums.

The main emphasis of the training will be to teach people how to work with the government, about development principle and how the dam will affect them, and about nationalism. The main emphasis will be placed on training in nationalism (a touchy subject for many Americans here).

I have still to move into my house due primarily to all the red tape that must be contended with in Vte. Within one or two weeks I will be moved in, and will be able to get down to the real work.

Loring W. and me were planning to spend two weeks in an area near here in order to meet the local leaders who will come to the next training session scheduled for next month (I will only observe this session). This trip has been delayed, however, since this area is traditionally P.L. and is serving now as one of the staging points of the P.L. for the recent weeks activities. At any rate, I will be spending the next several months working on a training plan which will be implemented in six months or so.

Your travel itinerary sounds satisfactory. I would recommend, however spending three days in Bangkok instead of two--there are more things to do and see in Bangkok than Vientiane. Whether or not I could make it to Bangkok is another story. I will have to wait and see what the situation is here before making any definite plans.

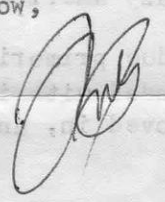
I received the film you sent. I am sending two rolls.

The refugees who came from behind the dam site are being resettled in areas near Ban Keun and Thalaat.

I have one request for Christmas--a subscription to the National Geographic. I don't know when I will send the few items that I have procured thus far--the times I have been in Vte have been quite busy and, since the post office hours are few, I have been unable to pack and send them.

Ban Na Nine--pictured in the one roll of film--is moderately P.L. (a P.L. trail passes near the village, and the head of the P.L. in this area comes from there). I walked into this village with a couple of people this week. The village is located on the NN river 5 or 6 km downstream from Thalaat.

All for now,



I have still to give into my house...  
Within one or two weeks I will be moving...  
able to get down to the real work.  
...and we were planning to spend two weeks in...  
an area near here in order to meet the local leaders...  
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will be spending the next several weeks working on a...  
training plan which will be presented in six months or...  
so.

Ban Thalaat, Laos

22 February 1969

Greetings,

About the only newsworthy thing that has happened around here since I last wrote is that the PL attacked the village where my house is located. About 20 PL came into the village at 10:00 pm and stayed in the village for 30 minutes. The village, which only has about 15 houses, is the site of a military civic action "school". The PL shot up the house of the officer in charge of civic action while he, his wife and six children hid under a bed. The PL also fired a couple of rockets into his office, and burned down one of the buildings. Of the seven soldiers who live in the village, 4 of them took off when the PL came, and two stayed on and offered some resistance. There were no casualties. Fortunately I had not yet moved into the village (the attack was on the 9th) and at present I do not intend to. I am in the process of looking for a house in Thalaat.

Also on the 9th the PL attacked and nearly took Moung Soui (located west and a little north of Xieng Khouang), a very strategic site. In the attack a couple of American military attaches were killed.

The report you saw on TV about the refugees was the one originating here. The village that was shown was Na Sang Nga--I took a number of pictures when we were there. This is the village where we took out the body of the Lao soldier who was killed by the PL (see picture).

The Wag oners are presently on vacation in Thailand. They left here a week and a half ago, and will return in another week and a half.

I am presently working on my first project, the forming of an information team which will go about to different villages and show movies. On the team will be a person who shows movies, one who tells stories and one who plays a "violin" and sings. The purpose will be to tell villagers about the changes which will be brought about by the dam, about Laos and about the countries bordering on Laos. The training programs have been stopped for now because area from which the local leaders for the next will be drawn for the next program



6. March 1969

## Greetings

The only newsworthy thing that has happened around here of late is that CBS came up and took some pictures of this area. It is possible that some of these pictures will be on Walter Cronkite news program. It is also possible that I might be on as I was interviewed.

I spent the weekend in Ventiane. While there Steve Prescott - who was at St. Olaf with me - came to Vte for a visit. He will be in Bangkok for a few months & will get married to a Thai.

Concerning the <sup>US</sup> Ambassador to Laos, I have met him only once, in October. At this time I did not have an opportunity to speak with him.

Whether or not you will be able to come up here when you arrive in Laos depends on the security situation. Right now it is not too good - the PL <sup>are</sup> moving around in this area rather freely, and a couple of nights ago they shot up some equipment belonging to the Japanese, and



Things will probably not get any better  
for a while - The PL say they will take over  
Yunnan province.

We are getting the first rain today in a  
couple of months. As a result it is cooler and  
the dust (which there is a lot of) has disappeared.

I got the clippings etc. that you  
mailed.

I have found a house in Thailand. As this  
house is just now being built I will  
probably not be able to move in for another  
month.

As there is not much more to say, all  
for now



17 March 1969  
Ban Thaleat

Greetings,

I have received your recent letters etc. Everything has been quiet here since I last wrote. The only thing that is new is that I am presently working on a training program for village leaders which will be held in May.

Concerning your trip, it is quite possible that I will be able to meet you in Bangkok. I can get a free plane flight to Bangkok on Tuesdays or Thursdays. Therefore I would like to know when you will arrive in Bangkok and how long you will be there. I will probably be able to get on your flight to Ute, without difficulty. If I can't I can get on a free USAID flight on Wednesdays or Fridays.

When will you arrive in Laos and how long will you stay, there is not a great deal to do in Vientiane, but it is possible to wander around without being bored for a day or two. If the security situation is not too bad here it will be possible to come here for a day without difficulty.

It is possible that I will take a trip during the last week of this month & the 1st week of April to Moung Pheng and (hopefully) Juang Prabang and Houe Say (in the north) to check out some training programs.

Enclosed are several documents which I have signed.

PS Where will you stay in Bangkok and Vientiane?



6 May 1969  
Ban Thalal, Laos

Greetings,

I have been extremely busy ever since you left trying to get my information program organized. This has required that I spend a good deal of time in Vientiane running around seeing different people, etc. But I am now back in Ban Thalal, and the program is due to get under way next week. There will be four one-week sessions, which will take me through the first week of June. During the latter part of June I will probably take off on my vacation.

It has been extremely hot here lately, but we gained a respite last night when we got the first substantial rain of the season. It is continuing to be rainy and cloudy today.

Accompanying this letter are two rolls of film.

I have been doing most of my travelling to Vientiane and back by air now; there still continue to be a goodly number of ambushes along some of the roads.

Have you sent the blank checks yet? If not, send them as soon as possible as I am in dire need of them.

There's not much more to say at present as not much has been going on lately,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'John', is written in a cursive style. The signature is located in the lower center of the page, below the main body of text.

Ban Thalat  
27 May 1969

Greetings,

Everything is alright here. I have been quite busy during the course of the last two weeks due to the fact that my training programs have begun. The second one is presently underway, and the third and last one is next week.

After this program is over I will draw up the plan for the next one which will probably begin in August. The next program will be for the refugees who came from behind the dam.

I will probably take off on my vacation for three weeks during the latter part of June. On my way back to Laos Waggoner and I intend to meet in Bangkok and spend a week visiting a training center near Bangkok for Thai government officials.

We are also hoping to visit the city of Xieng Khouang, recently captured from the PL, sometime during the next couple of weeks.

The rainy season has begun here. It has rained everyday for the last week.

PL activity in this area picked up for a few days, and then dropped off. About fifty PL entered a village a few kilometers away to take rice. There was also a couple of soldiers killed nearby in an ambush. There has also been a couple of nights of artillery fire, directed at points a short distance away. But everything is ~~XXXX~~ quiet now.

I am presently armed with a carbine presented by the army.

Nothing else to say at present,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'John', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Ban Thalat, Laos

23 June 1968

69

Greetings,

I have been extremely busy as of late. My training program finished during the first week of this month, and I immediately began planning for the next one, scheduled to begin in August. It will be a national unity program for the people who come from the area behind the dam. About 80% of these people are PL. Have you read the book Reported to be Alive by Grant Wolfkill? It is in the library at home. It is about his experiences in a PL prison in Laos; his plane went down in the area behind the dam, and some of the villagers from this area were his captors (we asked them).

We are also presently negotiating with USIS to get a radio transmitter up here to broadcast programs about the dam, etc. Also, we hope to begin a newspaper.

The Prime Minister (Souvanna Phouma) and the Crown Prince came to Phone Hong a couple of weeks ago to dedicate the road from Vientiane to Luang Prabang (the road was recently completed). The last role of film I sent has pictures of this event, as does the role of film I am sending today. The Crown Prince is the man with the mustache.

with L. "aggoner

I have made several trips by plane to visit Meo refugees on a nearby mountain. Most of these refugees are PL, but they left their old homes on the mountain due to bombing raids. USAID is now providing them with rice, etc.

There has been no fighting around here for about the last month (about 50 PL went into a village about 5 km away to get rice at that time). There has been a lot of artillery fire the last couple of nights, however, at PL about 6 km away (behind the dam).

We have had a lot of rain lately and the water level of the river has risen considerably--there is a picture of the river in this role of film.

I am going to Indonesia next week (on the 26th). I will fly direct from Vientiane to Singapore. After a day in Singapore I will go to Bali for about a week. Then I will go overland to Jogjakarta and Djakarta. Then back to Singapore for a couple more days before going back to Laos. I will not go to North Borneo because I don't have enough time; I can only take two weeks on this vacation because I have a lot of work here.

By the time I return from vacation I will move into my new house. It is due to be completed in a week or so.

All for now. I will send a letter from Bali,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Paul', is written in the center of the page. The signature is written in dark ink and is somewhat stylized, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

7 July 1969

Vientiane

Greeting,

Neither the digger nor me will return to Ban Thalat. The P.L. have been continuing to cause trouble in the area. Last Friday they attacked some soldiers about 4 km. away. On Saturday a suspected PL post was bombed by T-28s, about 5 km from Thalat. There are some pictures of the bombing on the roll of film I sent today (I have been to Ban Thalat 3 times since the attack). Yesterday PL were spotted along the road between Phonsavang & Thalat in the middle of the day, & they told the villagers that they are in the area to stay. Their command post is in the village I walked to about 6 mo. ago. At any rate, I will not be returning again to Thalat.

The situation in fact is steadily deteriorating. During the past couple of days IVS has evacuated people from ~~two~~ <sup>three</sup> sites. Two days ago two IVS (including one staff member) were killed in an ambush as they were driving on a road near Pakxane. Vang Veng & Muong Kasay will probably be taken by the PL before the year is over, as will certain other areas.

I am presently looking for another area to work in, probably some provincial capital or Vientiane. Looking for a job will enable me to do some travelling. Tomorrow I will fly to Luang Prabang for a few days. I will then hopefully make it up to Ban Houei Sai. In a couple more weeks I would like to go south to Pakse and possibly Savannakhet.



Where I will end up I don't know, but it will probably be in one of these cities in Vietnam. Security in these cities is good.

I received the film that you sent.

~~Enclosed is a check. How much money is presently in my checking account, by the way?~~

All family



25 July 1969  
Vientiane

Greetings,

As you have probably already deduced from the messages from the State Dept & IVS, we recently (July 24) had some problems in Ban Thalat. To be exact, we were under attack for 3 hours during the early morning of the 24<sup>th</sup>. At 1:00 am I was awakened by the sound of gunfire (which is not uncommon), and soon realized that it was probably the PL as I heard a couple of bullets thud against the wall. I immediately jumped out of my bed, ~~got up~~ and went to open the trap door to my escape tunnel which is located in the bedroom. The trap door is only temporary, about 1 yd long & 3 feet wide, with a nail at each end for a handle. I spent about 2 minutes trying to get this trap door open (without success, due to the fact that it's very heavy & snugly fitted) with my hands, and finally a machete, which was bent up & broken in the process. Finally, after throwing the knife away, I grabbed both nails & yanked it up & proceeded to jump into the tunnel, which runs from my bedroom into the kitchen, where there is another trapdoor. There was much shooting at this time (1:10) at about 1:20, the shooting stopped & I thought the PL had gone away. I remained in the tunnel, and about 1:40 I heard some people approaching the house - I assumed they were some of our soldiers,

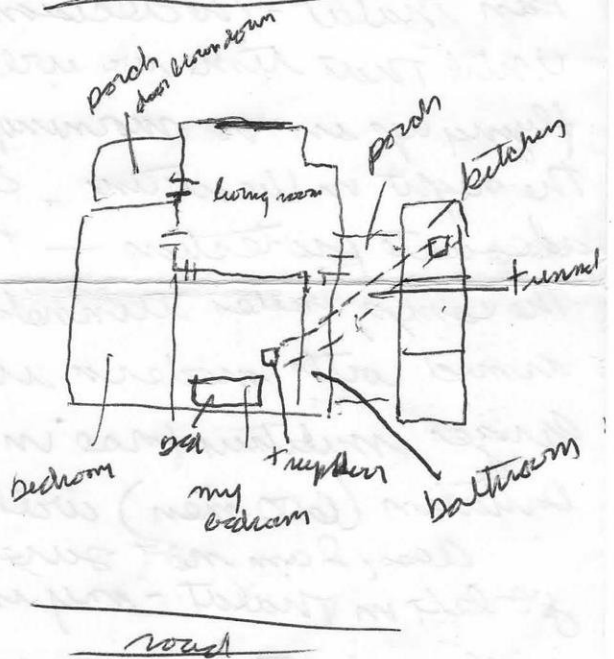
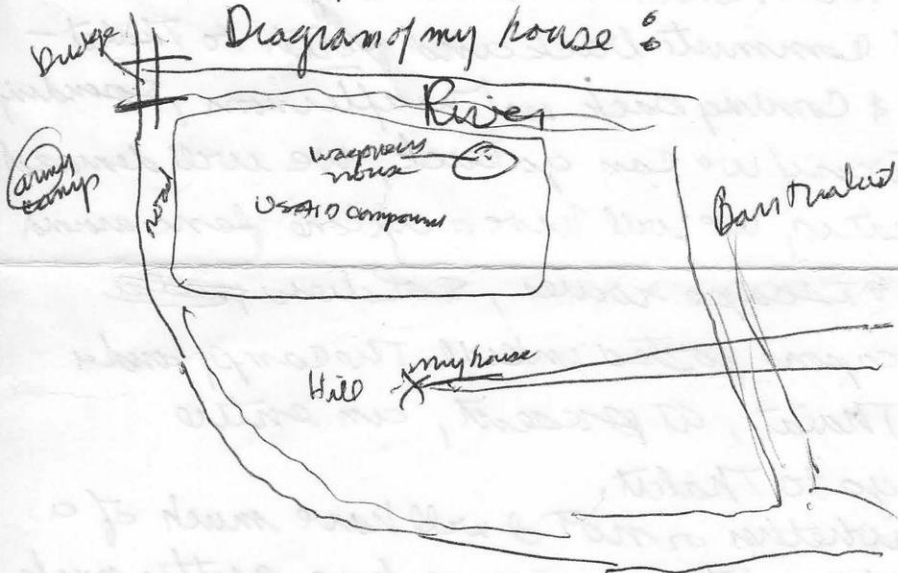
coming to say that the PL had left. As they approached, however, I realized they weren't our soldiers (they shouted, etc), especially when they opened up with their AK-47s (automatic rifle), shooting a couple of bursts into the house. They then went into the kitchen (see diagram below) & stole a little bit of food. That is, they were walking over my head. I could hear them talking, etc. (There were 3 or 4 PL). A few minutes later I heard a large blast, ~~and~~ more shooting (by them) and breaking of glass. They had entered the house by blowing down the door (which was locked) with a bomb. They then entered the living room & proceeded to wreck everything. They did not enter the bedroom - if they had, they probably would have seen my trap door. [I was sitting in my tunnel, carbine in hand ready to shoot] <sup>just to be quiet?</sup> Then, all of a sudden, everything was quite - I assumed they had left (2:00 am). I remained in my tunnel as heavy firing continued in the area for about one & one half more hours. Then everything was quite; I assumed that either the PL had left or that they had taken the place (i.e., the 2 army camps). I remained in the tunnel ~~to~~ until 5:30 when I heard one of our Jao staff calling my name. I waited for about five minutes before answering, because I thought that he might of been a PL - I still didn't know for sure which side was in control. However, I finally came out of my tunnel into the daylight & found it to be one of our staff.

Throughout the entire night I had no idea what was going on, except for the 20 min or so that the PL were in my house. When I came out of the tunnel, however, I found that the living room of my house was a complete mess. They blasted the door clean across the room, broke everything, burned up my motorcycle, stole my radio & sunglasses, and thrown my new taperecorder (\$190) out of the window, broken the screens & windows.

As I proceeded down to the camp, I saw that our two vehicles were blown apart, our two generators burned up, other buildings full of bullet holes, and Waggoner's house wrecked - it is a wooden structure <sup>by dynamite, rockets & gunfire.</sup>, however, the Waggoners were alright - They also have a tunnel. Not was anyone on our staff killed or wounded. Only one villager who lived nearby was killed.

USAID camp

Diagram of my house



What had happened to this, according to initial reports.

The army was notified at about 11:30 pm (July 23) that Ban Thalat would be hit. However, they did not notify us about this. Why, thus is, we don't know. At any rate, reinforcements sent from Ban Kurn were ambushed by some PL a couple of km. outside of Thalat. Shortly thereafter all of Thalat was hit. They stormed the main army camp successfully, putting out of commission the 75 mm cannon & blowing up the ~~army~~ vehicles. They also blew up the two armored cars at the camp near our camp. They then hit us, & also fired mortars into our camp. They had all the time in the world, but finally left.

We received word that about 100 PL were seen going through a village on their way out, carrying two dead, one Vietnamese was reportedly killed. Today the area where they retreated was heavily bombed.

As for us, we left Phalat by chopper about noon. Tomorrow we will eat lunch with the new ambassador (by the name of Godley) and the Director of USAID/FAO.

We are not yet sure as to whether or not we will return to Ban Thalat - The decision will have to be made by the Ambassador. Until that time we will commute back and forth to Thalat - flying up in the morning & coming back in the afternoon, spending the night in Uentham. Even if we can go back, we will demand adequate protection - that is, we will have a cyclone fence around the camp, better tunnels & escape routes, soldiers ~~armed~~ armed with modern weapons posted inside the camp, and a larger military force in Thalat. At present, an entire Battalion (600 men) will go to Thalat.

Also, I am not sure whether or not I will have much of a job left in Thalat - my information program has pretty much fallen apart as a result of it.

(3)

I will go back to Malat for a while, and if my work doesn't pick up I will request to be transferred to another post.

The purpose of the attack was probably to divert <sup>Jao</sup> troops from the frontier areas of Jao between Vang Veng & Luang Prabang. The PL are intent on taking Vang Veng & points north, & then negotiate.

Well, this is all I have to say for now. I am interested to know what is in the newspapers in the US concerning this.



P.S. By the way, could you have a new pair of sunglasses sent? I will be reimbursed by USAID for all my losses.



U.S. AID MISSION  
TO LAOS

EMBASSY  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

VIENTIANE, LAOS

July 28, 1969

Mr. Fritz Benson  
IVS  
c/o IVS/Vientiane

Dear Fritz:

I wish to express my heartfelt relief that you survived without harm the destructive attack on Ban Thalats the other night. Even more important, I commend you for your coolness and your courage in a truly terrifying situation.

The effectiveness of American efforts undoubtedly drew this vicious assault, and this is in its way a tribute to you and the work with which you are associated. It is the kind of commendation I am sure you would not wish to have repeated.

We are constantly apprehensive of the dangers that you and other IVSers face, along with their colleagues from USAID and other aid-giving agencies, and we are well aware of the limitations on our ability to help you in the presence of hostile forces. It weighs heavily upon us. I thank God each time one of you survives a close call, and I and my associates hurt deeply each time one of your number falls.

Thanks, Fritz, from the bottom of my heart on behalf of all of us. Your exemplary behavior in the face of grave danger has helped strengthen the resolve of both Lao and American people, and we are very proud of you.

Sincerely yours,

Charles A. Mann  
Director

AUG 4 1969

# International Voluntary Services, INC.



C/O USAID/RD APO San Francisco, 96352

July 30, 1969

*from  
JVS Head in Laos*

Mr. Arthur Z. Gardiner  
Executive Director  
International Voluntary Services, Inc.  
1555 Connecticut, Avenue, N.W.  
Washington D.C. 20036

Dear Mr. Gardiner:

Ban Tha Lat is a village about 70 kilometers north of Vientiane and the location of a dam project. A week ago it was populated with a Japanese construction crew, a USAID CDAA and his wife and two children, four members of the Asian Christian Service and Fritz Benson, as well as the local populace.

In the early morning hours of July 24th a force of Pathet Lao-Vietminh, now believed to have been close to battalion strength, entered the area without any American foreknowledge. Several of the unfriendlys went to the AID compound and after some loud shouting and screaming, began shooting at buildings housing Americans. When they entered Fritz Benson's house he had already fled into a tunnel connecting his bedroom and kitchen. He remained in the tunnel from about 0130 to dawn.

Although they didn't enter his bedroom and thus never saw the tunnel entrance, they did confiscate several items and damaged the house with AK fire and explosives. The same was done to the CDAA's house (he was in his tunnel with his family and with the ACS people).

One man, a driver for the Japanese, was killed. Later, several RLG soldiers were killed when their relief column was ambushed. The bridge crossing the river to the Japanese camp and the dam were not objects of attack. The Americans, and their effectiveness in the area, obviously were.

At this time Fritz and Loring Waggoner, the CDAA, return to the area during daylight hours. They leave before dark and sleep in Vientiane. And this will continue until some questions are answered, and until security becomes a reality. Most important among these questions are items involving the inaction by local FAR garrisons and warnings which preceded the incident by several hours. These were received by the Japanese and by the local troops, but never reached the Americans.



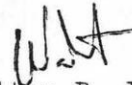
Personally, the noise before the attack and the limited searching during the shooting suggests to me that an effort was made to avoid meeting the Americans. There was no real attempt to locate the occupants. But, we still have to say that we were very, very lucky.

Fritz is in good shape. A few bruises from his hasty movements into the tunnel and a couple of days of what can be expected from someone who has crouched in the darkness and listened to soldiers rampaging through his house. They ate his bread, fired rounds through his brick walls, took his radio, smashed his tape recorder, left with his shaving things and then dropped a crude grenade at his front door.

On Saturday, the survivors of Ban Tha Lat, and Art and myself, had lunch with the Ambassador, swam in his pool, and the early morning of the 24th became just another bad memory.

I expect it'll be months before we go back there at night.

Sincerely,



Walter B. Johnson  
Director of IVS  
Vientiane, Laos

WBJ/bls

*International Voluntary Services.* INC.



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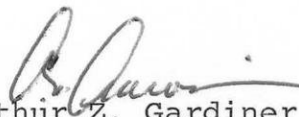
August 4, 1969

Mr. Fritz Benson  
IVS/USAID  
APO San Francisco 96352

Dear Fritz:

I have just received a copy of Director Mann's letter to you of July 28th and the report of the incident at Ban Thalal in Walt Johnson's letter to me of July 30th. Let me say how proud we all are of you for your courageous conduct and I can do no more than echo what Mr. Mann has already said. IVS is proud to have you in its ranks.

Yours sincerely,

  
Arthur Z. Gardiner  
Executive Director

AZG/md  
cc: Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Benson  
Mr. Walter Johnson

7 AUGUST  
7 July 1969  
Vientiane

Greetings,

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Where I will end up I don't know, but it will probably be  
in one of these cities or in Ventura. Security in these cities is good.

I received the film that you sent.

Enclosed is a check. How much money is presently  
in my checking account, by the way?

All yours



DI18915 PATHET LAO NEWS AGENCY (CLAMP STINE) IN ENGLISH 0645 GMT

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(TEXT) SAN NEUA AUGUST 10 TEN (KPL)--GUERRILLAS IN VIENTIANE PROVINCE IN A VAYLAD (AS RECEIVED) ON AUGUST 5 FIVE ON HIGHWAY 13 THIRTEEN LEADING FROM VIENTIANE TO PAKSANE KILLED 2 TWO AMERICAN SPIES DISGUISED AS MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE IN LAOS AND 2 TWO PUPPET OFFICERS ACCOMPANYING THEM.

PAGE 2 RUMOPBA 0014 UNCLAS

THIS, TOGETHER WITH THE WELL-DESERVED PUNISHMENT IMPLICATED ON AMERICAN ADVISERS AND PUPPET TROOPS STATIONED AT THALAY ON JULY 24 TWENTYFOUR, HAS CAUSED ALARM AMONG THE U.S. AND THE VIENTIANE PUPPETS.

TO HIDE THE ODIOUS CRIMES OF THE U.S. SPIES IN LAOS, THE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT ON AUGUST 6 SIX CLAIMED THAT THEY WERE ENGAGED IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS OF BENEFIT TO THE LAO PEOPLE.

BUT, THE LAOTIAN PEOPLE AND THE WORLD'S PEOPLE HAVE LONG SEEN WHAT ROLE THE AMERICAN PEACE CORPS OR INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE HAVE PLAYED IN LAOS AND OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD. TO PUNISH THE U.S. SPIES ENGAGED IN ACTIVITIES AGAINST THE INDEPENDENCE AND PEACE OF THE LAOTIAN PEOPLE LIES WITHIN THE LEGITIMATE RIGHT OF SELF-DEFENCE OF THE LAOTIAN PEOPLE. 110645 ERICKSON LP 110921Z AUG

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NNNN

4 Sept 1969

Vientiane

Greetings,

I have just recently come back to Vientiane after a one-week trip in the south. I went to Pakse, Houei Komy (East of Pakse on the Bolaven Plateau), Savannakhet & Thakhet. I went on this trip primarily to see what kind of work is going on in the south. I am sending pictures of this trip.

Upon returning to Vientiane I received word that the Taggarts had arrived in Ute. I went to see them at their house, and last night I took them out for supper. They are in the process of getting adjusted & settled in.

As of now I am still without a job. However, it is possible that in the near future I will work with the USIS in the field operations section. I would be doing work similar to what I was doing in Ban Thalat. That is, I will be working with information programs: how to improve them, etc. If this job comes through I will be living in Vientiane, & probably be making occasional trips into the field. If this job does not materialize (or should work out) I will probably resign from US and get a contract with USAID.

As a result of the deteriorating ~~situation~~<sup>security</sup> in Laos US is withdrawing all of its people in field stations located outside of the major cities. The problem now is to find positions for the people who are being withdrawn.

→ answer your questions;

- 1) The person who appeared in shorts in a recent picture is Waggoner's assistant in Ban Thalat.
- 2) The Waggoners are presently in Ute.
- 3) The dam project will continue.
- 4) The USA from Illinois who was killed was not in my group. However, of course I knew him.
- 5) There should be pictures of the USAID compound in Ban Thalat after the attack.
- 6) I will take the pictures you requested.
- 7) The picture of the ambassador was not in the pictures of the road dedication.

I may be taking a vacation in a couple of weeks to Bangkok and to northern Thailand - Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, etc. If I don't make this trip, I will probably spend a couple of weeks in Cambodia in early November.

Enclosed is a check.

Love for now,

28 September 1969  
Vientiane

Greetings,

I have recently (last Monday) returned from a trip to Bangkok, Rangoon and Mandalay lasting about 9 days. I went to Bangkok for several days & then flew to Burma for three days. I spent one night in Rangoon, a full day & a night in Mandalay, & another night in Rangoon. It was an interesting trip to Burma - until only about a month or so ago it was possible to stay in Burma only 24 hours; now one can stay for 72 hours. I flew ~~to~~ Mandalay & back. In doing so having an opportunity to see much of the territory between Rangoon and Mandalay from the air, and stopping at several cities, Magwe, Pagan, Prome & Sandaway. Mandalay was quite interesting - numerous temples, etc. I will be sending pictures.

I am still sitting in Vientiane without a job. If IUS doesn't have something for me ~~within~~ by the middle of next week I will seek to be terminated. I will then get a short-term contract (3 or 5 months) with USAID/refugee relief division. I have been offered a job. This would be much

better than staying with US, since the pay is much higher, (possibly about \$900/mo.) and the work which I would be doing is to my liking.

On Tuesday I will be going to Pakxane for a couple of days in order to investigate a training program. I will probably go by road through Thailand, and then fly back on Thursday.

John Waggoner will be going to the US on Thursday <sup>on Laos</sup> to testify before the Senate foreign relations subcommittee. He will be in the US for several weeks. It is possible that he will be stopping in, or going through Chicago on his way back to Laos at the end of October, in which case he will try to contact you by telephone.

Could you send me about five pairs of grey socks - my supply is getting low.

I ate supper with the Tayperts two nights ago. They are becoming adjusted to Laos and seem to like it here.

The pictures of the waterfall, were taken on the Bouleavans Plateau in the south, east of Pakx.

The pictures that you sent to the Waggoners have been received - I saw them the other day.

all for now





20 October 1969  
Vientiane

Greetings,

I am still with IUS, unfortunately, and doing the same work that I would have been doing with USAID. My job is to assist develop a program whereby a cadre of individuals is trained and sent to work in certain areas where refugees are living. The cadre will be concerned primarily with explaining the refugee relief program. I have been working on this job for the last couple of weeks.

Last week I bought a motorcycle. I got sick and tired of taking taxis wherever I went and I figured that considering how much money I would have to spend on taxi fares over the course of the next months it would be ~~cheaper~~ <sup>cheaper and</sup> more convenient to buy a motor cycle & then sell it when I leave.

Hopefully I will soon be getting my own house. I am still living in the IUS guest house and I am extremely anxious to move out.

Did you get the driver's license renewal application in time? When you receive it, send my new license to me.

Enclosed in this letter is a check.

23 October

(Friday)

Tomorrow I will take a trip to Sam Thong (located in Xieng Khouang Province almost directly east of Muong Kassy). I will be going there in connection with my work, and return to Vientiane on Saturday. Sam Thong is located in the mountains and is inhabited primarily by Meo.

I think I mentioned that I flew to Paksane a

couple of weeks ago and spent a day there.

Today I found a place to live - an apartment in the center of downtown Ventura. I hope to be able to move in sometime next week. It consists of one room containing a bed, desk & chair with an attached bathroom. It should be quite satisfactory.

When you get a chance in the near future send me some film, a few rolls of Kodachrome II and some Ektachrome.

ditto for now



I received your letter saying that you had talked to Weygoner. Ann Weygoner said today that she received your letter, also.

8 November 1969  
Mentiane

Greeting,

Loung Waggoner returned to Mentiane yesterday and I went to meet him at the airport. He told about his visit to Ottawa, which he enjoyed a great deal.

My trip to Sam Thong a couple of weeks ago was quite interesting - I sent the pictures I took already. In addition to Sam Thong there were pictures of a large refugee site (5000-6000) - the people living there were from the Plain des Jarres (the site is just south of the plain) and they have been living under the P.L. for the last 6 or 7 years. Unfortunately I didn't get to see the plain - perhaps the next time I go to Sam Thong I will get there, provided we still control it.

I am hard at work on my new job, which is quite interesting. I will probably be taking another trip up north in two or three more weeks.

I have finally moved into new quarters - it is not the apartment that I mentioned

earlier, but a house. I am living in it with  
one other person who is also in IVS.

All for now



P.S. Look in my desk and see if you  
can find the letter ~~sent~~ of  
acceptance sent to me from  
the American University and  
Berkeley. I would like to have  
them ASAP.

Also, send my ~~jaco~~ jacket as  
soon as possible - it's beginning  
to get quite cool here in the  
evenings

26. November 1969  
Ventiane

Greetings,

There is not much news to report. Last week was the That Juany festival, the biggest festival in Sao, which lasted for one week.

Tomorrow, Thanksgiving, I will go to the Taggart's house.

A couple of weeks ago some IVS board members came to Sao to review the situation and, after they returned to the US, make suggestions how IVS could change. Among other things, it was brought up that the work I am now doing is too "political". Therefore, I now have another opportunity (I think) to get out of IVS and get a USAID contract. I should know in another week or so whether or not I will be successful.

enclosed is a check. Have you sent my jacket yet? It is getting quite cool here. Yes, I received the film, books etc.



17 December 1969

Vientiane

Greetings -

I have been quite busy the last couple of weeks with the program I am working on. A meeting was held a week ago in which all of the participants on the Lao and American <sup>sides</sup> decided ~~on~~ on the program. Since the program has been formalized I have had to meet regularly with everyone concerned and coordinate their activities. We are now at the planning stage.


I have received everything you have sent thus far. We have a maid who cooks, etc - she is not the same one who was my maid in Thailand. Yes, I would like to have the Nat'l Geographic subscription renewed. Gen. Vang Pao does not have his HQ in Sam Thong but at a place over the hill called Song Cheng. The Waygoners have not yet sold their articles to the Reader's Digest. The Taygarts are all right - I see them occasionally. Dr. Taygart, at the time when I last saw him, has not had to travel - he expects to <sup>have to</sup> go out now & then, however. I also received the driver's license.

By the way, what number am I  
on the list of draft lottery drawings?

I have sounded out USAID about  
a contract and I should be able to  
get one provided ~~the~~ my  
position is approved by the personnel  
office and provided IVS will let me out,

I will probably be in Ute for  
Christmas & New Years. I intend to go  
north to Ban Hwei Sai early in January.  
Also, I want to go to Cambodia for a  
couple of weeks in late January or early  
February.

all for now

Mary Kmas  




U.S. AID MISSION  
TO LAOS

EMBASSY  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

VIENTIANE, LAOS

Mr. Frederick C. Benson  
Operations Officer  
ORA - Vientiane

JUL 29 1971

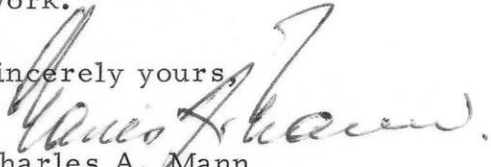
Dear Mr. Benson,

During the past twelve months there have been large and historic movements of refugees in Military Region II, the Vientiane/Paksane area and the Pakse and Luang Prabang areas. The success of these large movements of refugees to areas of safe haven can be attributed to the outstanding performance of USAID personnel, such as yourself, who were engaged in the initial and subsequent phases of relocating the people during the spring and early summer months of 1970.

Concurrently with the relief and relocation program a requirement for timely and accurate information on refugee population and movements became evident. A weekly reporting procedure to fulfill this need was established per my request in April 1970 and for the first time in the long history of USAID/Laos refugee assistance regular reports have been submitted and made available to all interested parties. The major task of training, organizing and positioning Lao personnel in the field together with the collection and evaluation of information for the weekly report has rested with you.

I wish to commend you on the organized, intellectual and professional manner in which you have approached and implemented this new and important task. You are also to be complemented on your preparation of briefing material and maps which are extremely helpful on keeping up-to-date on a constantly changing situation. Your outstanding performance and dedication to your task is highly appreciated by me and everyone concerned with the refugee assistance program. I am certain that your continued splendid efforts will result in the further refinement of the reporting system and will provide the most accurate information possible. Keep up the good work.

Sincerely yours,

  
Charles A. Mann  
Director





U.S. AID MISSION  
TO LAOS

EMBASSY  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

VIENTIANE, LAOS

September 23, 1971

Mr. Frederic C. Benson  
ORA

Dear Mr. Benson:

I wish to express my sincere appreciation and satisfaction with your exceptionally fine performance when you and one other officer bore the brunt of the displacement operation for the Office of Refugee Affairs when the airfield refugee support element was moved to Udorn during the flood period 17 August to 10 September 1971.

Your part in this complicated, collective operation which enabled uninterrupted air support of refugee operations to be conducted from Udorn reflects a high degree of initiative, imagination and energy on your part. During my visit to your temporary activity at Udorn I was thoroughly impressed with its efficient layout and the fact that it was maintaining essentially the same refugee support impetus as the permanent ORA activity that normally operated at the airfield in Vientiane. All of this speaks extremely well of the fine job you did.

A copy of this citation has been placed in your personnel file.

Sincerely yours,

Charles A. Mann  
Director