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Letters by Frederic Benson. 1970

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1 January 1970

Vientiane

Greetings,

Christmas & New Year's went off alright.
I spent Christmas at Waseyone's house
& am spending New Year's here.

Tomorrow I go to Luang Prabang
for a few days. Also, I hope to get
up to Ban Houei Sain.

About the pictures - the one of the
tree lined street as in Vientiane, the one
with the building & guard is the P.L.
headquarters in Vientiane - the guard is
a P.L. The one of the stupas is also in
Vientiane - that is Luang. The water festival
is in Vientiane, as is the one with the mountains.

I have reserved ~~everything~~ you sent -
thank you

I still am not sure about what will
happen with USAID & IVS.

There is nothing new to report, as life
in Vientiane is not all that exciting.

Enclosed is a check of 500 Kip in
P.L. money from the Plain of Jars.

JRB

22 January 1970
Uentiane

Greetings,

I have just come back from a second trip. I went to Sam Thong on Monday afternoon and came back to Uentiane late Tuesday afternoon. I spent most of Tuesday flying around to different sites in Xrenykhouang province - the Plain of Jars, the extreme northeastern part of the province north of the Plain of Jars and a few miles from Sam Nua province, and the northwestern part of the province.

On the first trip to the north I went to Juang Prabang and Ban Houei Sai. While in L.P. I went to a Meo refugee site north of L.P. In the Houei Sai area I went to a village called Ban Kung located three hours north by boat, and also to a refugee site called Moung Mougne located near the Burma border. At the latter site there are numerous ethnic minorities.

The purpose of these trips has been to find certain refugees to bring to Uentiane for a one week information gathering session. The purpose being to find out what various types of refugees think about various things.

this program will begin in about two weeks.

I cannot send all of the pictures that I have taken because I don't have envelopes to send the film in. Send some envelopes as soon as possible.

The Weygovers had a daughter on the 17th My monthly check of \$125 will from now on be sent to you directly from Washington.

Recently (one week ago) I moved to a new residence, an apartment located on the same street as the Constellation Hotel.

John

2/19/70

Vientiane

Greetings —

I have been extremely busy for the last couple of weeks. Immediately after returning from Sam Theng (which is located, by the way, a short distance SW of the Plain) I began preparing for the program which I explained before. The participants - certain individuals from the various sites I visited - arrived on the 6th and stayed until the 11th.

On the 12th I went to Bangkok, and from there to Pattaya on the Gulf. After 5 days in Thailand I returned to Vientiane.

I am presently preparing to get a second session of my program underway.

The Plain of Jars was evacuated of most of its inhabitants a couple of weeks ago - these were the ^{same} people I visited on two occasions, at site 72 in October and at Latzen on the Plain last month. All 15,000 of them are being resettled on the Vientiane plain.

The Plain of Jars itself is presently under heavy attack by the NVA and chances

are that it will be lost again in spite of airstrikes. Pakse was hit again by rockets, and Paksane was attacked recently.

Concerning income tax. Since I have been working abroad for over 18 months as a contract employee of the govt I do NOT have to pay income tax, the taxes which I paid last year should be refunded - that is, the taxes on my income in Laos.

As for my trip home I have not yet begun to think about it. Although I am presently inclined to graduate school (I am awaiting a reply from Berkeley), I am not entirely ruling out staying over here if a 6 month contract for the right job presents itself. When I do return, however, chances are that it will be through Europe.

By the way, I cannot send film until I have some envelopes to send it in.

John

3/5/70

Vientiane

Greetings

Tomorrow I go to Ban Houei Sai and Luang Prabang for about a week. While in Houei Sai I will go back to Moung Moudge (the place pictured on the accompanying slides) and one or two other places.

The situation here is not getting any better. Moung Sori fell without a fight, and there is nothing left on the plain, although we still occupy some of the surrounding hills. It will probably be another week or two before the N. Vets make their next push, probably toward either Sam Thong-Long Cheng or Sala Phou Khoun.

located at the junction of Rts 7 and
13, west of M. Soui and north of
M. Kassy. The Luang Prabang
airport was mortared a few days
ago, and the ^{outposts at} Vientiane airport will
probably be next. Phoukhou
Khouei, a mountain near ~~Halat~~ and
Ban Keun, was also attacked recently - I

went there several times. There is a possibility
that this place might go also. <sup>I will send clippings
about recent events
when I return from my
trip.</sup>

I still haven't the faintest idea of

what my trip plans ^{will be} ~~are~~, that is, provided
I come back in July which will be the case if I
don't get a contract. It also depends on whether or
not my application at Berkeley comes through.
It should (as it was merely a matter of reactivating
my application), but I haven't yet heard from them
after more than a month.

The Wagners will probably be returning to the
US next month. I have not seen the Taggarts lately.

My work is coming along well, and it is ~~becoming~~ becoming
more and more interesting. All for now

July

25 March 1970

Vientiane

Greetings,

I got back from my trip north about a week and a half ago. I went first to Houei Sai, where I spent three days. While there I went to Moung Moung (near the Burma border) to check up on a couple of people who came down to Vientiane for my program. I then went to Luang Prabang for a couple of days.

I am now getting ready for the second session of my program which will begin on Friday. The participants, ^{- six in number -} will be people from the Plain of Jars - I will probably be working with these people (who ^{have been} ~~are present~~ living on the Vientiane plain ever since their evacuation from the PDS in February) for the rest of my stay. These people lived under the PL for 6 years.

There is not much sense in talking about the military situation in Laos as it is getting world publicity. Sam Thong has now been lost, and Song Cheng (5 minutes by plane from Sam Thong) is now under attack. Whether or not Song Cheng will be taken ~~down~~ remains to be seen. The weather, ^{which is an} ~~is~~

Important factor, is now clear after three days of rain - usually it is extremely heavy at this time of year - which will hopefully enable numerous successful air strikes, which ^{against the Viet.} ~~is~~ the determining factor.

There are now between 40 to 50 105 personnel in Laos now - most of them aren't doing anything of value. This is due primarily to the fact that 105 is now a geco organization.

At what number is the draft board now??

I understand in certain areas all 365 will be drafted.

Waggoner will be leaving for the ~~US~~ US in about 2 weeks. His mother is presently here visiting - she will return to the US with them. His departure will not affect my work as I have not been working with him since I began working with Refugee Relief in October.

I have not yet heard from Berkeley, but should soon. I have just sent in my vacation application for the American University in Wash DC. If I go there I might study International Relations.

Accompanying this letter is a bunch of articles on Laos, also enclosed in that envelope is the PL version of the attachment that.

In a couple of weeks John Elk - who went to study in Blomfield with me - will be here for a visit. He is presently on a trip around the world.



16 April 1970
Vientiane

Greetings —

There is nothing to report do to the fact that nothing of importance has happened. This past week has been Lao New Year.

What is my present draft status? at what number is the board at in their selections? How many numbers per month? I want to have this information as soon as possible.

As there are no jobs with AID I will be returning to the US sometime between the middle and end of June. That is, I will be leaving Laos then. I intend to fly directly to Europe and spend two months there. (Send me ^{small} a guide book of Europe).

I still have not heard from Berkeley. Try to find me the graduate school catalogue from both Berkeley & the American University & send them. I had them at home.

Would you also send me two
prints of the best picture of the
wedding ceremony.

Did you get the clippings I sent??
all for now

Paul

4/29/70

Vientiane.

Greetings -

Next week I am going to Thailand. On the 2nd I will go to Bangkok for a few days. Dick Koch - at St. Olaf with me - will be there for a few days while on vacation in SE Asia. He is in the Navy & cannot come to Laos. I will return to VTE for a couple of days and then go to Ban Houei Sai and Northern Thailand with John Elk, who is presently in Laos. We intend to go to Chengsen, Mae Sai (extreme northern Thailand), Chiangrai, Nan, Chiangmai, Fang and Mae Hong Son. Then I will fly back to Chiangrai and go to Houei Sai and then VTE. I intend to take about two weeks.

I intend to leave Laos on 27 June. I will then fly direct to Europe on 1 July (Bepre) My last week in Laos will be extremely busy checking out & preparing to leave. This should be considered in planning George's trip -

Nothing to report about Laos

P.S. I am still waiting for info. on draft situation... also, could you send me film, some Kodachrome II and Ektachrome II.

I have yet to hear from Berkeley, but probably won't go there even if accepted. I believe I heard from the American University but expect to in about a month.

10 May 1970

Vientiane

Greetings -

I returned from Bangkok a few days ago. Elk and Koch both came along, and left after a couple of days here.

My plans have changed again. On the day of my return from Bangkok I was offered a job with USAID collecting and analyzing statistics on all refugees in Laos.

In spite of the 10% cutback in personnel this position was established on an emergency basis due to the increasing number of refugees (total: 260,000) and the increasing interest in Washington concerning these refugees. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to establish a new department in the refugee relief branch which has as its function the collection and evaluation of data concerning all refugees in Laos, on a week by week basis. If I take this job (\$12,000/year) - and I think I will - I will head up this department and have working under me seven people (Laos), two in Vientiane and five in the field. I will be stationed in Vientiane with occasional travel in the field to check up on things.

My reasons for taking this job:

- (1) Payoff for the last two years experience
- (2) Financially I would be able to save at least \$6000 over the course of a year (it would take 4-5 yrs to save this much in the USA given the present economic situation)
- (3) I would be in a good bargaining position for my next job, in terms of salary and experience.
- (4) Interest in the job
- (5) I see no need to rush back to graduate school at this point in time, given the situation at the various universities.

My contract will be for six months, with the option ~~to extend at the~~ to extend at the end of this time. I will make the transition from IUS to USAID as soon as my contract papers are processed, probably about a month or so. I will begin working on this project immediately, however, since it will be necessary to present detailed information on refugees to a couple of senators who will be coming to review the refugee situation next month.

The guy who got married is from Marengo, Ill. He came to Jerro with me. He married a secretary at the IUS office. He is presently out of IUS and on contract to AID for a year. They will go to the USA in a year or so.

Wayne took about a one-week trip home. He will attend the U. of New Mexico.

The silver bowl will be coming in the near future - I have priced it, etc.

Due to my change in plans, there will be no problem with regards to George's visit here. When he comes I would like to have him bring me a 9mm Browning automatic pistol, ^{plus three extra clips.} or something comparable, and a hundred or so rounds of ammunition. There should be no difficulty in his carrying it over here.

Well, this is it for now, more later



Ventiane

16 May 1970

Greetings,

The answers to the enclosed form should be completed and returned to me as soon as possible,

All of ~~my~~ the papers which must be filled out for job applications are done, and it is now a matter of waiting a few weeks until processed.

I have already started on the job however, ~~the~~ in my present IUS status, there is nothing ^{else} new to report.

Do not forget to get the ^{9mm.} Browning automatic that I requested. There should be no problem in having him (George) hand carry it ^{over} here - check, however, and see if a special permit is necessary. Also, it is possible that he will have to check it with customs when entering a country en route to Laos.

Well for now -



27 May 1970
Uentians

Greeting,

I am presently working at my new job (although my contract is not yet ready). The first task has been to determine the total no. of refugees in the country and the breakdown of the total on a site-by-site basis. It is necessary to write a weekly report on refugee totals, refugee movements, etc for the Mission Director. Last week I took a chopper trip to the various PDI refugee sites on the Uentian plain. On Saturday I went to Houei Sai for a couple of days and then to Luang Prabang. I returned yesterday. Tomorrow I fly to Ban Xon - located SW of Sam Thong - which has been the center of operations since the fall of Sam Thong. On Friday I have to write up the weekly report and the recap for the month.

This week-end I have to prepare a map of all refugee sites and an accompanying report denoting information on the various sites to be used by the Director on his forthcoming trip to Washington. In short, I have been extremely busy, and will continue to be extremely busy. My efforts should result in a gross yearly income of \$13,000 once I sign my contract.

As far as I am concerned ^{as far as I am concerned} Nure's Cambodian venture was a mistake. ^{we captured a lot of} We captured a lot of ammo etc. on the P.D.J. and the NVA still took it - also, Nure's move probably led to the fall of Attapeu, and maybe Saravane will also go. The bad guys might make another big ^{in retaliation} move one of these days - such as take Luang Prabang - and there's not much the US could do about it now. Aside from the South things have been relatively quiet, but another big move is on the way, possibly.

The rainy season has started here, and it is raining almost everyday - more than usual.

George's itinerary looks all right, but 1) I don't think it's possible to fly direct from Chienymai to Bangkok, and 2) one day in Calcutta would be sufficient. Also, a trip to Cambodia probably wouldn't be too good.

all for now

[Signature]

14 June 1970

Vientiane

Greeting

Last week I took two trips.

Saturday I went by chopper to
refuge sites (PDD refugees) in the

Phone Hong area. Last Monday

I went to Pakxane for a day to see

refugees from the south western corner

of Xeng Khouang Province. While there

we drove to ^(or Perikane) Muong Cao (north of

Paksane) and flew over some sites

midway between Pakxane and N. Vietnam ^(Ban Thu Si area)

looking for ~~the~~ spots where rice could

be air dropped.

In another couple of weeks I hope to

go to Pakse. While there, I want to go

and see ^{the} refugees in extreme S. Laos (Khong

island area) who came from Cambodia.

On the 9th the PL/NVA took Saravane

in Southern Laos.

I have still not signed my

contract, but assurances have been

given me that it will probably be ready in a week or so. Washington has to concern first.

What is the status of my mutual fund: how much money is in it now, dividends etc.



I finally heard from graduate schools. I was accepted at the American University, but not Berkeley.

Note change of address -
Same, except drop IUS:

USAID/RDD, not

USAID/IUS/RDD

6 July 1970
Uinthen

Greetings,

George and John were here for about a week, three days of which were spent in Luang Prabang.

They departed by train for Bangkok last Wednesday, their air flight being full.

I signed my contract on 1 July, so am therefore on the payroll. I will be paid bi-weekly, so will send one check to the mutual fund, and the second to you - half of this check could go into my checking account, and the other half into my savings account.

What is my status with regard to health / accident insurance? I am not covered by the government, instead, they give me a check for \$100 to

be used for this purpose. Do you know
of any insurance companies which
would write a policy for someone
working in an area such as Laos?

I am presently quite busy. I
have four people working for me in the
field collecting information on refugees.
My primary concern is to make sure
that these people will send me the
information I need. Therefore it has been
necessary to go around and check upon
them. I went to Luang Prabang
last week for two reasons, and was there
for one day during George and John's
visit to L.P. Next week I intend to go
to Savannakhet, and the week after that to
Pakse. My travel schedule is somewhat
hampered by the fact that I have to
be in Vientiane every Friday in order to
write the weekly refugee status report.

- be sure to note my
change of address -
drop IUS from it.



22 July 1970

Vientiane

Greetings,

I just got back from Pakse, where I spent several days. I have one man there who is collecting info. on refugees who have come from the Savanane area. While in Pakse I went to Kchong Island (on the Cambodian border) - the situation there is not too good, the NVA controlling the area ^{in Cambodia} across the river from Kchong, and PL-NVA units all around Kchong in Laos. There is a possibility that we will soon get some refugees from there.

Last week I went to Savannakhet for a couple of days. I have another person ^{working} there. At Seno, ~~west~~ east of Savannakhet, there are refugees from the Muong Phine area, east of Savannakhet near the border.

Next week maybe I will go to Sayabouy for a day or so.

Pictures: the one with soldiers is in
Vientiane taken on Army day. The fort is
in Ban Houei Sai, as are the ones of the
boats.

The refugee situation in Laos is presently
being investigated here by representatives
on the Kennedy Committee on refugees.
They are investigating all aspects of the
refugee program, and will be here for a
couple of weeks.

Next Monday I go up to Ban Xon, the refugee
center for all refugees in Xeng Khouang Province,
located at the SW ^{corner} of XK. Also, I hope to
take a trip to Vang Vieng, Muong Kassy and
Sayaboury next week to check out refugees
there.

27 July

Today I went to Ban Xon. Hopefully
I'll get the other trip in this week so I can
go the B. Houei Sai and L. P. next week.

This weekend I'll probably move out of
my present residence into a new place
located at Km. 6, north of Ute. (a couple of miles
north of the city limits).

JRB

12 August 1970

Mentiana

Greeting,

I have been doing a lot of travelling lately. Two weeks ago on Saturday I went to Vang Vieng, Muong Kassy, Sayaboury and Muong Phiang. The following Monday I went to Ban Hanoi Sai for a couple of days. The next Saturday I went to Luang Prabang for four days. and today I went to Pakxane. The purpose of these trips was to 1) check on the refugee situation, and 2) to check ~~up~~ on the people working for me collecting information on the refugees.

Pictures taken on these trips, etc. accompanying this letter. The last set of pictures as taken at Phou Chia, located about 40 miles south of Luang Prabang. Some of the pictures show rice being dropped from a plane. Most of the refugees in Kieny Khouang, Luang Prabang and Hanoi Sai areas receive ~~the~~ rice by air drop - that is, the refugees living

in isolated areas.

Next week I hope to spend some time going to different sites in Xieny Khouang Province.

There is some speculation as to whether or not Vientiane will get flooded this year. The water is up quite high. In the event that Vientiane does flood our operation will ~~be~~ move to Udon (Thailand) - that is, all rice which is dropped will have to be flown out of Udon - most of the rice we give to refugees is dropped.

Enclosed is a check for \$600 +. It is money from US for my plane ticket to the U.S., and I would like to have it put in my savings account.

I would like to have all deposit slips, ^{etc.} from both Savings account, checking account & mutual fund sent here as soon as received. This also means cancelled checks, as well as any type of correspondence to me from these places.

all for now

By now you should have received several checks from AID - They send one half of each check; that is, one check every two weeks.

Split this check & put half in savings acct & half in checking acct.

31 August 1970

Vientian

Greetings -

I have been quite busy lately - yesterday was my first day off in two weeks. I went to Udorn (Thailand) yesterday morning and came back early this morning. On Saturday I went to Ban Xon (the refugee operations center in Xiang Khouang Province) and went to a couple of refugee sites north of the P.D.T. Last week I was engaged in helping to prepare a briefing paper on the refugee situation for the Director.

This week I intend to go to Phone Hong for a day in order to square away one of my employees, who will be going with me. He will be working with refugees from the P.D.T. living in the Thalat area. I'm also hoping to take a trip up to Xiang Fom (SE of B. Houei Sai) along the

Thai border) for a day. Then maybe
on Saturday I will go down to
Savannakhet for a couple of days.

Could you send me a new supply
of checks - my supply is almost
depleted. I would also like to request
2 pairs of green jeans for working -
about 36" - 30"

There is not much news. There hasn't
been much military activity (and there-
fore not too many new refugees) due
probably to the fact that "peace talks"
are being considered. Souvanna Phouma
will send Peng Pongsavanh to Khamay
Khay (located on the PDD - now held by the
enemy) with a delegation to open preliminary
talks with the P.L. No date has been set.
After these talks, perhaps Souvanna Phouma
and Souphannavong (the boss of the P.L.) will
meet.



17 Sept 70

Greetings -

I've done quite a bit of travelling the past couple of weeks. Last week I went to Vang Vieng for two days in order to investigate the refugee situation. Then I went to Ban Xon for a day, and to Muong Moc and Muong Nham. M. Moc is located in SE Xiang Khouang Province, North west of Pakxane along the Vietnamese border. M. Moc was retaken a couple of weeks ago, and a lot of the inhabitants of the M. Moc valley are returning. It will probably be lost again soon, however. M. Nham valley is located a few miles west of M. Moc.

This week I went to Pakse for a couple of days.

The status of refugee relief has risen. It is now an "office" instead of a "branch" - The Office of Refugee Affairs (ORA). Pending the appointment of a USAID direct hire ~~of a branch chief~~, I am acting ~~branch~~ chief of the "Administrative" branch. My duties remain unchanged, however.

Have you been receiving all my pay checks? You should be receiving 2 per month - about \$200 each. The other half - 2 per month - go to my mutual fund. Has the mutual fund been ~~receiving~~ sending receipts. Also, did you receive the \$600 check I sent - my airfare from US?

I have not yet received my cancelled checks from the bank - I want them sent here to me. also, all mutual fund correspondence.

P.S. I need new checks as soon as possible as my supply is depleted



11 Oct. 1970

Vientiane

Greetings,

Things remain quiet as usual. Last week was my first full week in Vientiane for about 6 weeks. I had to prepare a briefing on ^{the extent of} population displacement in Laos during the last 10 years for ^{presentation to} the Director of the Mission and the provincial directors of USAID (Area Coordinators [AC's]) during their annual conference.

Two weeks ago I went to Sayaboury and Luang Prabang. Tomorrow I go to Pakse for a couple of days.

The dry season began a couple of weeks ago. It is quite possible that this dry season will be quite active militarily. The PL/NVA will probably take almost all government held areas east ~~of~~ and south of Pakse, east of Savannakhet, and very possibly knock off remaining sites in Xieng Khouang.

Province (and maybe even Vang Vieng and M. Kassy). If they succeed in pulling this off they will be in a good bargaining ~~position~~ position. Enemy activity has also stepped up considerably in Thailand, especially in northern Thailand (they recently killed the governor of Chiang Rai Province and several other high provincial officials).

I received the package which you sent.

15 OCT

I went to Pakse on Monday and came back Tuesday afternoon. Yesterday I ~~gave~~ gave the same briefing mentioned earlier to members of the Country Team, the ambassador and heads of all agencies. Today and tomorrow are holidays, the boat racing festival. On Saturday I plan to go to Xiang Khouang for the day, and will probably spend all of next week in Vientiane.

Did you receive the \$600 check which I sent a couple of months ago? There was no indication that you had.



17 November 1970

Vientiane

Greetings,

There have been no significant occurrences during the past several weeks. I have spent all of my + nine in Vientiane organizing materials etc. etc. The last week or + two has been spent working on a briefing for one of the big shots from AID Washington. The sooner I can start getting back out into the field ~~away~~ now and then the better.

I am presently residing at Rm. 5 in a duplex. I have a maid/cook.

Around Christmas I am considering taking a week's vacation to Burma. There are now weekly direct flights to Rangoon on AeroFlot as it returns to Moscow from Hanoi. I have a total of + two weeks vacation.

I don't need anything for
Christmas, by the way. If I
get around to it during the course
of the next few weeks I'll send
the bowl you have requested.

J.P.

8 Dec 1970

Vientiane

Greetings,

I got back on Sunday from a one-week trip to B. Houei Sai (I flew up on Sunday, the 29th). On Monday, the 30th I went to Muong Ngeun (located between Hong Sa and Xeng Tom, south of BHS on the Thai border) to see some people who we are giving rice to. The chopper didn't come back to pick us up in the afternoon so we ~~had to~~ spend the night at the army outpost there. We were finally picked up the next afternoon. On Tuesday went up to Xeng Khu Kha (located SW of Nam Tha) for a look around. On Friday we went to Ton Pheung (across the river from Chueny sen, Thailand) intending to go to Mae Sai in northern Thailand. However, since we didn't have our passports, the Thai wouldn't let us go (unusual) and we spent the night in Chueny sen and returned to BHS the next morning by boat.

I will send a roll of pictures that

I took in M. Ngun, They might not be too good, however, since I forgot to set the ASA on my camera.

The enemy offensive has started. The Bolovens Plateau east of Pakse is on the verge of going down the tubes, and SE Xromy Khouang is being lost (the NVA took Muang Mue a couple of days ago). They are also threatening Pak Ou, just north of L.P. The peace talks between the P.C. and the Lao Govt. will probably get going in a month or so at Khang Khay, on the P.D.T. (presently under PC control).

15 December

On Saturday I spent the day up at Ban Xon, and took a trip to Muong Mham (west of M. Mue). I'm spending this week in Vientiane getting caught up on paperwork. Unless I go to Bangkok (unlikely), I'll probably spend Christmas here.

Merry Christmas

