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## Letters by Ernest Kuhn. 1970

Kuhn, Ernest

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8 Jan. 70

Dear Mom and Dad,

<sup>12</sup>  
<sup>prose</sup> ~~Got your letter (I have written in 2~~  
~~part the other day. Sorry to hear about~~ ★  
~~so many people dying. In the 3rd grade~~  
~~I remember I really had a "crunch" on Diana~~  
~~Walker. Sent her a big fancy Valentine's Day~~  
~~card. Orville was <sup>not</sup> too much of a surprise~~  
~~because he had been so bad lately. It's~~  
~~funny about Mrs. Taylor. I was surprised~~  
~~that she was even alive and dead~~  
~~at 76. She must have taught me in~~  
~~1947-48, is 23 years ago - and I always~~  
~~thought she was about 65-70 then!~~  
~~Funny how eyes can when you are~~  
~~little. Even worse when you get~~  
~~older. I can't believe I'll be 30 this year.~~

Age is kind of silly anyway. Phaytheanne  
told me the other day that she is  
really 23 and not 21. Say, the records  
of her birth were lost in a fire and  
when she started school the date  
was recorded wrong and no one  
caught it for several years - then it was

Sao Lali! ~~Also top of that she said~~  
~~on day she could have been born in~~  
~~Thailand - but everyone always said~~  
~~Lao~~. The older brother and younger  
sister both live permanently in Thailand  
and her mother lives there  $\frac{1}{2}$  the time. So  
I could have used her passport for  
Thaume and bypassed the problem of  
marrying a Lao in Laos. Anyway, there  
doesn't seem to be much problem  
now.

We started evacuating the last  
of the 10,000 Sam Neua refugees out of  
Sam Neua down south of Sam Thong.  
At first the Embassy said no they  
wouldn't give us the necessary  
aircraft for the move - would take  
20-25 days! Then I wrote a 5 page  
background report - secret - and sent  
it to Mr. Mann, the AID Director. He  
in turn sent a copy to the Ambassador.

The Ambrosada came to Sam Thong on Sunday and talked to us. When he got finished he said to me - OK go ahead and make the move starting Monday morning. I never thought much of the new ambrosada until then - but he asked some intelligent questions and actually seemed interested in what our "little" guys had to say. Later, Blaine Jensen told me that when I was in there he told Blaine to tell me that the only reason the move was taking place was due to my paper I had written. The county team (Ambrosada, Div of USDAO and USIS and the attachés, AIRA and ARMA and heads of ORS) are all fairly new and had no idea of the history of these people and their backgrounds. Then too I broke down the cost of aircraft per year to support them in the north and how much we

... to ...  
... much ...



would save by putting them in the south (i.e. south of Sam Thoy, not south too). Since the country team was all new, they couldn't think of any justification to send back to Washington or to why the move should be made. My paper filled the gap and I understood the entire paper was sent to Washington. Of course I don't know whether it went in under my name - or if the Ambassador said he wrote it. (?)

Well the Air Force came through with '10 Jolly Green rescue helicopters - they move 30 people at a time! Was real great. Monday night, the first day of the move, the weather got real bad. I came back on a jolly and we tried to get into Sam Thoy and couldn't because of rain and low cloud coverage. Went back to Mung Laine to refuel. The security

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was too good up there and there says  
didn't want to stay & had but the  
weather was lousy. Each chopper had  
4 men with M-16's and pistols, plus each  
chopper 1 M-79 grenade launcher and 2  
M-60 mini guns so we had plenty of fire  
power if we were ever attacked.

Finally they decided to return to Udorn.  
at 1805 a jolite came in through the swamp  
and landed to pick me up. We took  
off at dark and Jollies also left after  
dark. We got to Ventiane OK and the  
Jollies returned to Udorn safely.

On Tuesday the weather was lousy.  
By mid morning I was getting real  
bad pains in my stomach so bad they  
doubled me up - and I was gagging  
but nothing ever came up. I have had  
this gagging sensation for 6 months  
now - Particularly in the morning before  
breakfast and then before lunch. Also  
I usually felt lousy after heavy drinking

or smoking. Well, the past week there  
gagging bouts occur day and night.  
And on Tuesday the stomach pains really  
became severe.

Anyway, Wednesday morning I  
took a Helio and flew down to Udon to  
the 432nd USAF hospital for an examination.  
The doctors in Laos all said sounded like an  
ulcer. I've had all kinds of tests so far  
including the Barium test. The  
preliminary looks at the photos didn't  
show an ulcer, but the doctor did say  
they were severe "spasms" in the lower  
part of my stomach. I'm on a bland  
diet (you know, no fats, grease etc, the  
meat tastes like cardboard, only drunk  
milk, etc) Also have to take little pills  
4 times a day and at noon they brought  
in a bottle of chalk like gelosol for  
stomach acid etc. I have to drink 2  
tablespoons every 2 hours for 24 hours!

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The doctor has not told me this evening  
whether they have given me the photo  
again or not. If it is an ulcer I don't  
know if I can return to my old job or  
not. Last Saturday I landed ~~at~~ #184  
and the enemy began to mortar the  
place. I got out 2 hours later, but I  
wonder if this may have helped cause  
the increase in stomach pain and the  
random gagging now. But don't worry,  
dads & seem serious. Another young guy  
~~for~~ who is a USMC medic nurse at  
DoA came down last week with a  
bleeding ulcer. I eat lunch with him  
and he felt fine after one week. Still on a  
bland diet but can smoke with no  
pain. Blaine Jensen, at Sam Thory, had an  
ulcer in college at 20 years of age -  
9 months later he was on a normal  
diet, smoking and drinking. Is this



doesn't worry me much. Only worry is about my job - whether AIO will allow me to stay at my old job - just have to wait and see.

Maybe you can ~~call~~ call Harriet Getty. Pop had been sick last month with malaria. I think I wrote you we were in the hospital before Christmas at the same time. Well, Pop came back to Sam Thong on 25 Dec and Jan 1 to and Dor Weldon were walking along in a village near Sam Thong when Pop collapsed. I flew him to Vientiane where he was in the hospital for several days but he is out now and staying at Dor Weldon's house. Apparently he is OK now but needs to rest for 2 or 3 weeks. I wrote Harriet a little note last week but Pop was still in the hospital then so maybe you can call her and let them know that Pop is OK and resting.

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Have been in close contact with Neal. Seems a group in Japan is interested in me writing some little articles etc for them etc. Neal seems real excited about my prospects of working with them and of course he is thinking of scholarships in 2 years. He has really gone to a lot of trouble for me. I don't think that we are going to Japan. It would cost us at least \$2000 minimum for the trip and I think we can use the money for some thing better. Neal understands and they will probably stop here on the way to the states. We never did get to Cambodia.

~~Phaythoun and I have to admit~~  
~~me also - Have gotten the urge to buy~~  
~~some land. Phaythoun's family especially.~~  
~~He has more land and gold as security.~~  
~~that fact that Phaythoun would get my~~  
~~insurance etc doesn't seem to make~~  
~~much difference. We have looked~~  
~~around - the best piece belongs to~~

~~a General Bunting - his wife was an orphan and raised by Phaythone family as they are considered relatives.~~

The general has a big section of land around his house - he has a huge home, gardens, swimming pool etc. He will only sell to a relative. So I don't know. I hate to tie up money in Kientane especially as we don't know what the status of Laos will be 10 years from now. If I knew there would be peace and Americans could safely live there I wouldn't mind - how ?? I don't know.

~~I bought Phaythone a \$2000 diamond ring for Christmas. I wanted to buy her one in Ceylon (the mine then, then) but she said she didn't want one - but then I really didn't know her well enough to know which one's were really no good and which one really meant~~

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~~you also went back. I talked about  
 people, the stars and then we got to  
 Japan and she didn't even want to look  
 at them. However I think she just didn't  
 realize just because she always  
 wanted to say things in English when  
 people are pretty right just because her  
 cousin always taught her that. Now  
 she realizes that diamonds come from  
 Congo and pearls from Japan!~~

~~I guess I told you that I  
 bought a little Volkswagen a week ago.  
 It's really nice to have something to  
 get around in. When we come to Houston  
 the way people drive in Houston I haven't  
 even suggested that Phyllis try to  
 drive. She has driven a jeep that was in  
 heavy traffic.~~

~~Well, guess I'll drive for  
 now. Please send me interest from~~

~~the best interests. If there is  
some one you like Newell who does  
tax and is not too expensive  
may send you everything and have  
a pro do it. I just found out I can't  
file regular joint return. I am taxable  
as "unmarried head of household." The  
category includes "non-resident  
alien spouses." So~~

~~Well I am now 6 months  
in medicine and dining. Well  
write again soon.~~

Love

Ernie

11/3/70

Dear Mom, Dad & Jim,

~~Have not received a letter for a while but assume everything is ok.~~  
I am feeling fine - what with a quart  
a more of milk and 1/2 gal of ice cream  
a day I've gained a little weight,  
mostly in <sup>my</sup> bulging spot! Phaythone  
is fine. We are still in Vientiane and  
will be going to Ban Houei Sai the  
first of the week. ~~My checking account~~  
~~has been paid up. I have written 2~~  
~~checks. I put 3 weeks of living exp.~~  
~~Here I'm owed. Can you send me~~  
~~again how much you're putting out~~  
~~when?~~

~~4. A big question is my savings~~  
~~account. How long does it take to~~  
~~withdraw money? Phaythone and~~  
I may buy a piece of land here in  
Vientiane. Would probably be  
around \$2-3000. ~~Please let me~~  
~~know soon how I can get~~  
~~the money if we have anything.~~



The price of land is really going up here. 2 or 3 years ago a square meter was 200-300 kip (40 to 60 \$US).

Now most land is a dollar to 3 dollars a square meter. The piece we want is about 2000 sq meter and the price was \$1 per sq meter but

complication arose and the owner decided not to sell. Now we hear that it may have been a ploy and that they want \$160 per sq meter. We have another get together on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

We've looked at several places. The 2000 meter place was just about right. It is about 70 m. x 30 m.

(meter is 39.3 inches). It was just right to build a house and have plenty of space for fruit trees and gardens etc.

There is another place 6 miles out of town owned by a General Baunteng whose wife is related

to Phaythana's family: He has a piece  
 of <sup>good</sup> 7200 sq m. (120m X 60m) which  
 is really nice except one, at end of  
 town and he wants \$1. per sq m.  
 and we certainly can't afford  
 \$7200 for land. When the big dam  
 is finished and railroad comes into  
 town the land will certainly be  
 worth a lot of money but we just  
 can't tie up all our savings in one  
 chunk. He offered us  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the lot  
 which is somewhat reasonable. The  
 general lies next to the "lot". He  
 has private basketball court, a  
 big swimming pool (with fish), high  
 flower gardens etc. He was the first  
 to offer to go to the US for a year  
 training in the early '50's. He and his  
 wife are extremely nice people and

He keeps telling us that we could  
 miss the pact the socialist court,  
 etc. As families are like that, sometimes  
 relatives just move in for days, a week -  
 or years!

~~Got a nice letter from Uncle John~~  
~~the other day.~~ Also a letter from a  
 fraternal brother who is now in  
 Cincinnati and he said a real good  
 friend of ours from DPA lives in  
 Grinnell with his wife. I didn't  
 know either one was close to New York.  
 Really mad I didn't see them.

~~We are not going to Japan.~~  
~~as the cost for 2 would be pretty~~  
 high and 2nd, with the Osaka  
 Fair we just didn't want to fight  
 the thousands of tourists that will  
 be in Japan. Real verate last week  
 they will be in Bangkok on 10 May.

Phaythame and I, a month  
I brought 6 Buddha statues from  
Basma last week. 2 are wood  
and 4 are metal (brass). They are  
supposed to be "old" and I think  
they are.

I suppose the paper has the  
big evacuation of the Plains de  
Jars. 20,000 refugees even  
plain and last week. What a  
mess. All the NVA "big shots" and  
Rev officials who never leave  
Vientiane had to get in on the  
act. We just stayed out of it.  
The people are being resettled  
around the Vientiane plain  
area. The Vietnamese are reported  
to be really moving on the  
east edge of the Plains de Jars  
and everyone expects the big  
hammer to fall any day now.  
The North Vietnamese have now

practically all of North Laos.  
It really seems like one of the  
tragedies of history that a small  
peaceful country like Laos is  
being mauled by a big country  
like North Vietnam and 95% of  
the world doesn't even know  
what is going on even care. I  
would personally like to see  
Sen. Fulbright fall down an  
elevator shaft. What a real black  
head he is, I sometimes wonder  
which side he is backing, the  
US or Vietnam.

Well, it's getting late and  
playhouse, ~~so he has been~~  
~~my hand~~, just fell asleep.

Will write again soon.

Love  
Ernie  
PP ~~don't forget to let me know how long it~~  
~~takes to get money and get the money out.~~



7.

P.D.S. In that box of cuff links,  
is there was a coin wrapped  
up did you find it? I want you  
could check and see if those  
coins are worth anything and if  
so, does anyone want to buy them.  
I thought maybe Pagan's coin  
section might know.

I ~~guess we got all the~~  
~~boxes. you, is it, Pagan,~~  
~~ask you etc.~~

Bye again. I mean.  
~~of the bag and counter red~~  
~~was from Pagan's, right~~  
~~He thought it was for left for~~  
~~the store but somehow it never~~  
~~got sent and was from the and~~  
~~not so - to name~~

Alum  
Alum } same  
Alum } ?  
land is an interest with - too.

21 November 1970

Dear Mom and Dad,

Please <sup>new</sup> the typewriter but I just got a new one, a big Royale 440 last month and I need all the practice I can get on it. Got a letter yesterday from ~~you~~, the one about Jeff and Jim being promoted. Will drop him a line soon. Phaythoune is coming along fine. We are going back to Chiengmai in three days for her last checkup. She is going to stay in Chiengmai and I will come back to Houie Sai for a couple of weeks until closer to the time of delivery. We just didn't want her flying the last three ? weeks. Sure hope the baby is born before the first of the year. I get a raw deal on Federal income tax because I have to file not as a married man but as the unmarried head of household which includes people whose spouses are non-resident aliens. The rates are higher than normal married types for some reason.

Our last trip to Chiengmai 2½ weeks ~~ago~~ ago we found a store that specializes in baby clothes, blankets bottles etc. so that you wouldn't have had to buy the stuff in the states after all. It was just a new store and we hadn't seen it before. The doctor in Chiengmai has said that there shouldn't be any problem. She could have the baby here in Houie Sai at the Lao/Operation Brotherhood (Filipino) Hospital but they don't have a blood bank if something should go wrong or incubators etc. At the hospital in Chiengmai they have a regular maternity section. Phaythoune will have a private room with 2 beds (one for me when I come over to visit her), toilet, bath etc., with plenty of doctors and nurses on duty at all times for \$2.50 a day including 3 meals a day. She will just live there until the baby is born. Hopefully her sister can come up and stay with her. The hospital is MacCormack Hospital which I believe is a Presbyterian hospital, or least it was when it was founded years and years ago. There was an American doctor named McDaniels who had delivered children of several people I know, but he is in the States and the "maternity" ?? doctor is now women Thai doctor who everyone says is excellent. Our last trip to Chiengmai we heard of several Americans whose wives had just recently had babies delivered by her.

Things in Laos here are really rather quiet. Like in Vietnam RLG casualties are very low compared to past years. Noone seems to know what is going on. Suspicion is that the RLG and the Pathet Lao are conducting cease-fire talks very quietly between themselves. But of course the North Vietnamese are the deciding factor. But again, no one really knows.

A month ago I came down with another case of malaria again. the first time in about 3 years. Wasn't too bad however and I spent two weeks at home in Houie Sai and then took two weeks easy. Now I have a little head cold and sore throat. Doesn't seem to be too bad however. I have another American working with me now, Wayne Johnson. Makes it a lot easier on me because he can do a lot of the field work and I can stay with Phaythoune.

As you have probably noticed we have been spending a lot of

money lately. If we just spent money on food etc we would probably not spend \$59 a month but you know I like to collect things. Houie Sai is a fascinating place to pick up things. I have bought 7 old bronze drums. I'll get some photos made and send them to you. They range from about 15 inches high to about 30 inches and on the top anywhere from 18 to 36 inches. They are very old, some of them, the most recent being 2-300 years old. On the top they have a star in the center with concentric circles enclosing fish, birds and geometric designs. Then on top at 4 points there are raised frogs, single, one on top of another or ~~three~~ three on top of each other. I have six now, all different. The collection gets to be expensive... So far I have paid \$100, \$100, \$110, \$140, \$150 and \$160 for the six. Then last March we bought a little bronze stool called a Chuang stool because a mythical people called the Chuang ~~supposed to~~ were supposed to have made it 900 to 1000 years ago. It is about 10 inches high and 18 inches across the top. The Chuang may also have "made" the famous stone jars on the Plaine des Jarres. In short anything unexplained in Lao history was done by the Chuang. The Lao make a point of adding that the Chuang were not people like people today... maybe more like the Age of Heroes in Greek mythology. Then we bought recently 2 Chuang bracelets... one for \$60 and one for \$100. They are large copper bracelets with 19 figures raised around the outside. The figures range from people embracing to scorpions, rice stalks, snails, elephant etc. They are extremely rare and I have heard that they were worn centuries ago by minor warlords in south China but I can't verify that. Then we bought the other day an old Yao (a people similar who used to live in China... in fact several million still do) bracelet with the two open ends dragons heads. The heads are very elaborate with bulging eyes, horns etc. They have been cast and molded in such a way that the mouths of both dragons have teeth etc and the jaws are partially open and inside is a small ball of silver that rattles around when you shake it. This bracelet is solid silver and on the two heads there is the remains of some colored baked enamel so the original condition must have been brightly colored with baked ~~enamel~~ enamel. Too bad the enamel has chipped off. The balls in the mouths are supposed to signify that the dragon, with his closed teeth, is protecting your wealth. Then a couple of months ago I bought for \$20 a bronze chicken about 3 inches high. Very few people have seen one and obviously goes back several hundred years. My other big binge was buying opium weights and old money. I now have about 90 opium weights of all sizes and shapes. I will enclose a photo of them. They come in shapes of ducks, lions, chickens elephants etc. My old money is old north Thai/Lao money... some is copper and some is silver. Some of the stuff comes from China. The money in the opium weight picture is mostly copper bars shaped like dugouts used on the Mekong. The one in the upper left of the photo. The bars on the upper right and right are silver bars.

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All the other figures are opium weights. Also enclosed are two photos taken through a magnifying glass of a duck and a "lion". I will obviously have a very interesting collection on of these days. The problem is what to do with it. The drums are big and heavy. In some antique shops in the States...New York and D.C....the bronze drums are selling for \$1500! I guess that is about everything. I also "found" an old manuscript of the history of the Sip Song Pan Na which was a "kingdom" of 12 districts, mostly of Lahu people in south China. Most people don't realize that south <sup>China</sup> has almost no ethnic Chinese...mostly Meo, Yao, Lahu, Thai Dam (Black Thai who are tribal as distinct from their related Thai ~~Thai~~ in Thailand, Lahu, E-Kaw etc. Of course the Red Chinese have installed Chinese in the area but they are certainly the minority. Anyway, this history goes back several hundred years supposodely and is written in Lahu unfortunately, which few people can read. The old secretary to the last ruling prince of the Sip Song Pan Na has taped half the book for me but I need someone to then translate it into Lao. Very difficult. Well, guess I'd better stop for now. Will write again soon. There will be a good chance that the Christmas presents won't arrive on time but that is nothing unusual for me. Anyway we will draw pictures of what we send or something. Also, I still a box of stuff that is birthday presents for ~~some~~ everyone. Lets see, we sent Mom a pocketbook, nuts, I'll have to find my list. Anyway, we do have our christmas cards  $\frac{1}{2}$  done.

Bye for now

*Don*  
*Emmi*