

MEKONG

CIRCLE INTERNATIONAL

APRIL 2002



LAOS

REUNION

August
2, 3 & 4
2002

New
York
City

AIR AMERICA
BIRD & SON
CONTINENTAL
ECCOIL
OB
USAID



OH, IF ONLY THE WALLS CAN TALK!

For most of the 1960s and up till May 1975, OB House was home and first stop for OB Laos volunteers when they arrived from Manila. Located at the corner of That Luang Road and Nong Bone Road, it housed the bedrooms, dining hall, and behind it, additional quarters as well as a dormitory for Lao student nurses. In front was a cemented basketball court. At the time of their visit in March 2002, former OB nurse Joji Naranjo and social worker Bing Gaborne Belicena, shown above, (together with former OB Project Manager Vitoy Naranjo) no one was in the house. A long red and white banner stretching across the iron rails of the front fence that read "Lao People's Revolutionary Party" seemed to indicate that it is now a government facility.

Across the street diagonally from the OB House was the OB Annex, a two-story building where as many as 15 male volunteers lived, dormitory-style. Today, the ground level apartments are now street front stores selling noodles, cigarettes, soda.

Only a five-minute walk away are the grounds of the That Luang and the golden spire of Laos' grandest temple. Here, during five days of every November, most everyone of the more than 400 OB volunteers who passed through OB House

and OB Annex, experienced the country's biggest religious festival.

At one end of Nong Bone Road where it meets with Phone Keng Road, (and still within a five-minute walk from the living quarters) stands the OB Hospital and a new sign "Ministry of Health, Maternal & Child Health Hospital" (see next page). When the 60-bed facility was opened on June 30, 1960, the sign had read "OB Vientiane Hospital, A Project of the Jaycees of Laos and the Royal Lao Government." From a tour of its empty wards, rusting beds, dusty tables, and deserted nurse's station, Joji (shown standing in front) surmised it was no longer in use; for how long it could not be determined. And somehow it also became known as the Settathiroth Hospital. The Vientiane Times of Feb. 20, 2001 wrote "people feel a great deal of affection toward the old Settathiroth Hospital. However, the building and its facilities had become obsolete to provide appropriate care for patients."

Right across the hospital is the Administration Building (see next page). From the locked front entrance, Vitoy Naranjo could glimpse chairs, tables and typewriters stacked together.

During our August reunion, Vitoy, Bing and Joji will present a slide show of their March visit to Vientiane. See what the city looks like today.



Entrance to the Administration Building which looked unused.



Front of the former OB Vientiane Hospital in March 2002

WE REMEMBER...

An email last month told us of the passing of Genaro Aguilar in California. Dentist "Gene" was best remembered as one of three OB doctors (the others were physicians Juan Reyes and Teofilo Ocampo) who chose to stay at their 50-bed hospital in northern Sam Neua in September 1960. The town became the target of fighting between government and Communist forces which eventually captured the town and detained the doctors. They were let go after six days and managed to return to Vientiane. (Their ordeal is vividly described in Fr. Miguel Bernad's book "Filipinos in Laos" to be reprinted for distribution at our reunion).

Gene's passing brings to mind many others who died over the last 45 years. Here then, in no particular order of names, are some, not every one, whose passing was reported to us. Details on dates and circumstances are sketchy and often unavailable. We do know that they were very close OB colleagues.

Physicians Pedro Assidao, Rodolfo Arreola, Sining Azul, Cesar Medina, Ramon Pablo, Primo Guevara, Pedro Joaquin, Maximo Baltac, Vic Wycoco, Jose Palisoc, Jose Alejos

Registered Nurses Abner Jornada, Wilhelmina Comia, Lita Delaon, Aurea Joaquin, Violeta Salarda, Lydia Conte Babasa, Vicenta Calderon, Adel Pimentel

Med tech Emmanuel Canonizado

Administration Oscar Arellano, George Alba, Jose David, Bienvenido Natividad, Fred Navera, Carlos Peralta, Delfin Ballo, Bernie Nantes, Noel Extremadura, Connie Ramos, Lorenzo Siguenza

REPORT FROM THE 2002 REUNION ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

This month your Committee marks its first anniversary. The first time it convened, on April 7, 2001, the call went out for a "brain-storming" session -- no agenda, no subcommittees, no idea who will turn up. After all, the number of active Mekong Circle members in the East Coast could fit inside a nine-seater van (California's membership roster, in comparison, filled two and a half tightly packed pages of the 2000 San Francisco souvenir program). Eleven members answered the call to gather around a table at the Lemon Grass Grill on Liberty Street under the shadow of the World Trade Center -- Val Handog, Becky Tayaban, Cora and Tony Sazon, Conse Sotia, Vilma Valenzuela, Florence Ongkingco, Walter Voradeth, Mart Martell, Pete Fuentesilla and Sas Sayong. Walter, perhaps OB's longest lasting Lao employee, and a cashier at the restaurant, was our host, who dutifully served fiery Thai selections from the menu and familiar Lao dishes not on the menu. Moreover, he took off 15% from our lunch tab.

Then after a four-month no-meetings-at-all interval, the Committee hustled to catch up by meeting every month, beginning September 8, once again at Lemon Grass Grill, three days before it was crushed under a seven-story heap of rubble from the WTC collapse. (Walter was at home in Queens, getting ready to work the day of the terrorist attack). Subsequent pot luck lunch meetings moved from residence to residence in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The last gathering at the residence of dentist Bac and Lao wife Joy Bacorda in Philadelphia, on April 13, was particularly special -- the first day of Laos' three-day New Year celebration. Joy served a heaping table of lao lap salad, sinsavana (fried dried beef), khao phun (that uniquely Lao concoction of herbal vegetables, white vermicelli and sauce), sticky khao niao rice as well as dinuguan.

In due course, the major elements for the August event were put in place -- chartering a yacht for the dinner dance, reserving blocks of rooms at a Manhattan hotel, coordinating with our Philippine office. Fred Mendoza, former OB controller and former OB project manager Vitoj Naranjo, our point men there, hope for the largest delegation yet to attend from the Philippines.

The Committee has always maintained that this year's reunion is not an East Coast show on its own but a project of the association as a whole. It appreciates the support it is receiving from the Mekong Board and officers. As one measure of how things are going: pledges to attend are close to the Committee's goal of 150 attendees.

A reminder to all:

- Send in your registration fees NOW in order to hold your dinner reservation.
- July 5 is the last day to reserve your room at the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York at our discount rates. Call hotel at 800 223 8585 and mention Mekong Circle.

Reunion Update

PROGRAM

DATES TO REMEMBER

WE NEED PHOTOS

Friday, August 2, 2002

10 am Baci welcome ceremony
12 noon Lunch. Lao food
2-4 pm Project presentations. We invite proposals from members for Mekong sponsorship.

Saturday, August 3

Morning Open for tours
10 am Board/Officers Meeting
6:30 pm - 11:00 pm River cruise and dinner dance aboard yacht around Manhattan

Sunday, August 4

Morning Brunch (tentative)

June 30, 2002 Last day to register. We now have close to 150 members who have signified they are attending. The yacht can hold only 200 persons. Send in your registration (see below) to hold your place. Don't wait till June 30. This is also the deadline to buy ad space in our souvenir program.

July 5, 2002 Last day to reserve rooms at New York's Hotel Pennsylvania at our discount rates. Call hotel at 800 223 8585 and mention Mekong Circle.

"Filipinos in Laos" is a 173-page account of Operation Brotherhood written by Jesuit historian Fr. Miguel Bernad. Issued in 1974, it is out of print. We are reprinting the book. Mail or email to fuentecila@aol.com photos we can include. Provide names, dates, details. The book will be offered for sale at our reunion together with other souvenirs -- videos, paintings by OB artists of Lao themes, and lots of other good stuff. So be sure to be there.

For regular updates, visit our website: www.mekongcircleonline.com

MEMBERS ATTENDING (as of April 13, 2002)

California: Pete & Mila Ariez, Pinky Sabaot Casher, Ernie Felix, Manny & Penny Villarica, Angie Maralit, Bik & Anita Marquez, Jojo Pablo, Rosalie Pablo, Casto & Gloria Pingul, Isabel Savellano, Pete Tabor, Tony Vicia, Jess Ramos, Manivanh & Somchai Savangsy, Bounthanh & Phengsy Pachanh, Pining Torres, Manding and Cecile Datu, Joe & Josefina Barcelona, Wilma & Fidel Padayao, Jun & Claire Ilustrisimo, Thelma Gric, Sivilay & son, Pol Custodio, Blanquita Guevarra **Florida** Minerva Erese Will, Ramon & Flora Ortiz, Ben Babasa, Ben & Emma Cala, Pete Gonzales & family. **Illinois** Linda Masibay, Pete & Edith Paluay, Dick & Lily Abad, Joe & Lina Luna. **Washington:** Lydia Palma, Bob & Asil Monserrat **Pennsylvania** Rinaldo & Joy Bacordo, Valentin & Lita Ildelonso, Cesar & Linda Mendoza, Kip Mendoza **New Jersey** Evelyn & Boni Alon, Soledad Gabral & family, Red & Edith del Rosario, Sas & Alita Sayong, Tony & Cora Sazon, Teddy & Lydilla Parreno, Conse Sotio, Visitacion Aquino, Esther Benitto **Texas** Baby & Angie Angelo, Artemio Linchangco **Ohio** Bert & Melanie Reyes **New York** Marie Aguilos, Becky & Tom Ciborski, Val Handog, Florence & Prod Ongkingco, Vilma Valenzuela, Pet & Pete Fuentecilla and family, Walter & Khampheng Voradeth, Teresita & Jack Finlay, Carmelito & Joceliee Banag, Zny Laygo **Hawaii** Sabina Fajardo-Swift, B.J. Reyes. **Maryland** Vic & Sining Capiling. **Colorado** Patrick & Michelle Reyes Hillmeyer **Canada** Joe & Fely Guevarra, Ato & Ofie Pangilinan, Ruth & Rey Zamora, Bert & Irene Sobrevinas **Australia** Terry & Marites Kempis, Vic & Cely Lagleva, **Philippines** Jun & Bing Belcena, Fred Mendoza, Nita and Fruto Bingcang, Vitoy & Joji Naranjo, Frisco San Juan, Mehilinda Sison, Renato & Lydia Mapua, Bayani Suarez, Edna & Souphanh Savady, Jovit & Ben Revilla, Isagani Bautista, Eva Guevara, Bill Comia & 3 daughters

Mail your registration fee **today** to the New York office if you have not done it yet.

Mekong Circle International • 2002 Reunion New York City USA • August 2, 3 & 4, 2002

YES, I'll Be There!

Date _____

NAME _____ NICKNAME _____ Yrs. in Laos: _____
(Print) Last First 19__ - 19__

ADDRESS: _____

Tel (Home) _____ Tel (Work) _____ Email _____

Employer in Laos: Air America Bird & Sons Continental Air Services ECCOIL
 Operation Brotherhood OB USAID Other: _____

I will be attending with:

Name: _____ Relationship: _____ Worked in Laos Yes No

Name: _____ Relationship: _____ Worked in Laos Yes No

Name: _____ Relationship: _____ Worked in Laos Yes No

Enclosed is my check in the amount of \$_____ (\$80 per person) payable to Mekong Circle International. This will cover the costs of the yacht rental, dinner and dance. To cover other expenses for the reunion, we welcome any monetary donations which are tax deductible. To help us in our planning, cut out and return by June 30, 2002, to:

Mekong Circle International, 216-27 Spencer Avenue, Queens Village, New York 11427 USA

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CIRCLE INTERNATIONAL

216-27 SPENCER AVE., QUEENS VILLAGE
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We'll see you in
New York City
REUNION
August 2, 3 & 4
2002



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