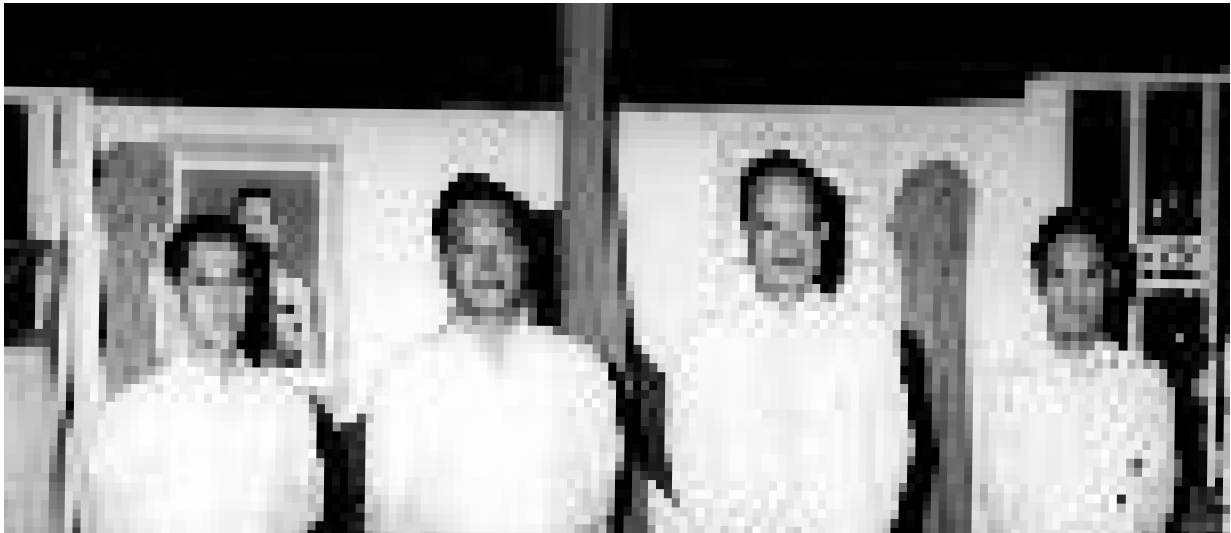


Welcome to the 56th Issue of our Newsletter



From left, Consul Rodolfo Sanchez, Dr. Pedro Assidao, president of the Filipino Association of Laos, Ambassador Felipe Mabilangan, Association vice president Leonardo Hilario. Photo taken in the mid-1960s when the Philippine Mission opened a permanent Embassy in Vientiane, Laos.

How Our First Resident Diplomat Survived

“What A Post! Meeting the best and the worst of my constituents” says Rody Sanchez

When news flashed around the world in September 22, 2025 that the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Netherlands had officially charged former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte with crimes against humanity, my memory zipped to another country six decades ago and another Filipino whose name closely resembled Rodrigo.

His name was Rodolfo Sanchez, the country is the Kingdom of Laos in mainland Asia, and he was once Philippine Ambassador to The Hague, headquarters of ICC. He arrived in Vientiane, Laos's capital on September 17, 1965 as the first resident consul of

the Philippine Embassy, Foreign Service Officer, Second Secretary, Class III. In a short while, Ambassador Felipe Mabilangan would be arriving as the first resident chief of the Philippine mission. Before they took up their posts, diplomatic relations between Laos and the Philippines were conducted via the Philippine mission based in Bangkok, Thailand or in Saigon, South Vietnam.

It was time to establish a permanent, not a substitute presence, in the Kingdom. By the 1960s, the Filipino residents there had ballooned to more than 900. Before the mass migration of the Overseas

Filipino Workers (OFW) program in the 1970s that now numbers some two million migrants all over the planet, the Filipino expats in Laos felt they were the pioneer OFWs, certainly the most numerous at that time and in that place. Most were recruited as technicians by American military and civilian agencies to help staff a vast economic and military aid program to keep Laos from falling into Communist hands. This was after all the height (depths?) of the Cold War -- the Berlin Wall, insurgencies in Latin America, and most threatening of all that faced weak, impoverished Laos -- a bloody hot war cascading across its borders from North and South Vietnam.

The first Filipinos arrived in 1957 -- accountants, clerks, doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers, administrators. Soon they were joined by Filipino army veterans skilled in maintaining the American-supplied tools of war to train the Lao armed forces in their use. Attending to their consular needs, Rody served them as "my constituents, within the jurisdiction of the Kingdom. I recall, rather proudly that I had a first-name relationship with many of them," he said. The major employers were the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Operation Brotherhood (OB), the military advisers from Manila-based Eastern Construction Company and Air America, the chartered airline of the Central Intelligence Agency and USAID..

Rody remembered vividly the day he accompanied the Ambassador to present his credentials at the King's palace in the royal capital of Luang Prabang. It was raining. His formal Barong Tagalog attire spotted with raindrops as the strains of the Philippine national anthem was played for the first time officially. The lyrics wafted towards the majestic splendor and embrace of the misty forested hills around the capital. An awesome experience, he said.

In Vientiane, he was a familiar sight in his black bow tie and white Fiat sedan, dashing here and there, attending to his constituents. "What a post!" he once said during a 1967 interview. "Prob-

lems ranging from love to money to lawsuits to job seekers. This is some group here. You have the worst representatives of our people and you have the best. I shall never be thankful enough to those who have made my work easier."

Indeed being the new boy in the block, he had the pick of old-timers always generous with advice on navigating the street smarts of an evolving city.

He noted that the Filipino record in Laos, having been around for 10 years, "stands out as very satisfactory on the average." There were indelible memories as well.

"One involved a young man from Batangas (a Philippine province) who shot a Lao military officer one night in Vieng Ratty (night club in Vientiane). He came to me in the middle of the night after the incident. And I ended up hiding him in my house. Lest I be charged with obstruction of justice and be expelled, I later surrendered him to the police authorities. This was towards the end of my term. I was able to visit him in prison before I left. In another case, in the OB Vientiane hospital, I held the hand of another Filipino, dying from a gunshot wound, feeling so lonely and fearful of death in that faraway land. I learned later that he was a fugitive from justice in the Philippines." He stood alone in vigil in the Wattay airfield as his body was shipped home.

After the Pathet Lao established a new government in 1975, normal diplomatic relations paused with the Philippines. The once numerous Filipino residents dwindled but began coming back in the 2000s. Recent exchange of state visits occurred in 2016 by Duterte and in 2024 by Ferdinand Marcos Jr. who was surprised to learn that almost 2,000 Filipinos lived and worked there.



The Embassy was our most gracious host for our November 2018 Mekong Circle last reunion in Vientiane, arranging the courtesy calls to high

ranking Lao officials and the reception dinner at the Lao Plaza Hotel.

Before his Laos posting, Rody served for three years with the Philippine Embassy in Rangoon, Myanmar (formerly Burma). It was a tranquil assignment reporting on political affairs, a world away from the stupefying stew of political intrigues of the 1960s cold war Vientiane, its various combatants promoting their competing agendas. A former Filipino military attache in Rangoon, Bonifacio Gillego, had served in the Embassy. Both met later in Vientiane when "Boni" was assistant project manager of OB. Small world. At our Mekong Circle reunion in Chicago, Illinois, USA August 7, 2004 Rody was our guest speaker. He passed away on January 28, 2006 in Manila at the age of 72.

In the 1967 interview, he remarked that his deepest disappointment during his two-year Laos sojourn was missing a deep friendship bond with any one Lao, as much as he wanted to. The needs of his constituents took precedence. That, after all, was his paramount job in Laos before his subsequent diplomatic postings as Consul General in Chicago, then as Deputy Representative to the United Nations, and finally as Ambassador to the Hague, retiring in 1999. Had he been there in 2025, one of his duties would be to keep an eye on Rodrigo Duterte, being kept in an ICC detention cell, awaiting a trial. As president he oversaw a nationwide crackdown on drug use and earlier, as mayor of a southern city, he encouraged vigilante killings, both campaigns resulting in thousands of deaths.

At left, Rody Sanchez in 2006

Related features in our website mekongcircle.org

Vientiane: How Charm Gave Way To Commerce (January 2004) https://www.mekongcircle.org/Data/Newsletters/2004/8_January/08_January_2004.pdf

Returning to Vientiane (May 2018) https://www.mekongcircle.org/Data/Newsletters/2018/35_May/Mekong_Newsletter_May_2018.pdf

Last Day Efforts Fail to Keep Operation Brotherhood

The revolutionary victors ordered all foreign aid personnel to leave, no exceptions, including OB

The Indochina wars ended with a bang and a whimper. The first, from 1946 to 1954 between France and North Vietnam, took the lives, civilian and military, of over 842,707. The second phase from 1955 to 1975 which involved North and South Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, the USA and its allies Thailand, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand killed an estimated 4.2 million.

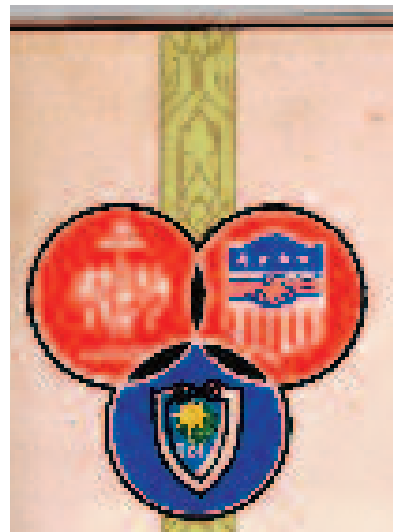
Beyond these horrific numbers was the manner the wars ended. The second phase ended with a bang when North Vietnamese tanks stormed into Saigon on April 30, 1975; days earlier on April 17, Cambodia's Khmer Rouge guerrillas captured Phnom Penh, the capital, and forcefully emptied it, at gunpoint, of its residents. In Laos, no tanks, no Pathet Lao communist insurgents surged through Vientiane streets. Instead, on December 12, 1975, about 40,000 residents massed at the National Stadium where the victorious Pathet Lao proclaimed a new government under their rule. (You can watch the event at Youtube -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ddPzBTOLLm>.)

In truth, their ascent to power caused some 60,000 Lao lives. It began as early as 1954 against the French, then against the Japanese in World War II, followed by the American intervention from 1956 to 1975. Over the years, they gained more territories, won parliamentary seats, in effect they were in virtual control of the entire country by 1974. High ranking government military and civilian officials had fled. There was no need for a bang up takeover finale.

"The handwriting was on the wall" said Christian Chapman, the U.S. Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission in 1975. The victors wanted the Americans out as well as other foreign aid organizations. In a series of telegrams to the State Department in Washington DC, he named as Pathet Lao targets the "Tom Dooley Foundation, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, World Vision, Asia Foundation, the Japanese Peace Corp, the British V.S.O. "

Chapman was particularly concerned about the fate of Operation Brotherhood.

Since 1964, USAID had been fully funding its work. Some 120 Filipinos and 550 Lao were on the payroll at six hospitals -- Ban Houie Sai, Sayaboury, Vang Vieng, Vientiane, Keng Kok and Pakse. He expressed his concerns in a



Top, in the morning of September 14, 1974, Lao workers at the Vientiane Hospital barricaded the hospital and issued demands for better working conditions. Above, the tripartite symbol of the Lao government, USAID and OB is displayed on hospital buildings staffed by OB Filipinos, such as the one below in Sayaboury province.



telegram to Washington on May 14, 1975:

"We have been very much alive to the problems confronting OBI operations in Laos, the difficulties of planning its future and the uncertainty of the (government's) attitude towards its continuance. Acting USAID's Director Ramsey and chief of USAID's Public Health Division Dr. Kennedy have been chasing Minister of Health Khamphai Abhay and Secretary of State Dr. Khamlieng Pholsena on the subject for sometime. Fortuitously for him, Khamphai had to leave on May 8 for a W.H.O annual conference in Geneva. Dr. Khamlieng, in a meeting with Dr. Kennedy, on May 12, equivocated. Today...this was one of the questions I raised with Foreign Minister Phoumi Vongvichit.

"I cited OB as an example of the uncertainty of the present situation. The fact that the Filipinos were understandably very concerned for their security and it was impossible to give them any meaningful assurances that unless the government took a clear decision that it wanted the maintenance of these hospitals and would provide the necessary security. I said there were six hospitals in Laos. The operations had been going on for twenty years. They had, I believe, provided im-

portant humanitarian services to the Lao people and very personally deplored the prospects of closing one or all down. Phoumi answered that the (government) appreciated the services and welcomed the maintenance of these hospitals. However he recalled that there had been some friction between the Filipino and Lao employees. He said that Filipinos who worked in these hospitals should be told to respect and treat the Lao well. I answered that I could not agree with him more but as far as I can determine there were only isolated cases of personal friction.

"I closed the topic by saying that given all that has transpired over the past two to three weeks, it would not be enough for him to simply tell me that he wanted the maintenance of these hospitals but that the government would have to take positive actions to reassure the Filipinos and make possible the operations of these hospitals."

The Pathet Lao non-violent takeover unrolled after weeks of street demonstrations and strikes. Students mobilized disaffected urban workers -- sam-lor and taxi drivers, policemen and teachers, municipal employees -- with particular focus against "imperialist" USAID's dominant presence. OB Lao

nurses in Vang Vieng struck on August 14, 1974, complaining that their 8,000 kip salaries cannot compare with Vientiane's 14,000 kip. On September 14, banners went up and OB Lao worker prevented entry at the Vientiane hospital. One banner read "We don't want a person with American head, Filipino face, Thai feet, Vietnamese heart and Lao hip." Their communiques listed grievances against some Filipino employees, low pay, better treatment of Lao employees.

The Vientiane Hospital strike was settled after five days. But it sparked the security concerns by the Filipinos that Chapman relayed to Vongvichit. No matter, the new leaders had made up their minds -- OB, USAID and all other foreign aid personnel must leave. The slogans on the banners reflected their real motive behind the urban uprisings they orchestrated. Ostensibly a movement for improved livelihood conditions, it was really a call for nationalism. Inspired by the Vietnamese and Cambodian revolutions, now was their turn to drive out all the oppressive foreign influences that, through the years, have dominated their lives and blocked their efforts for true independence. A new future based on self reliance would commence..

Where Have All The "Bush Hospitals" Gone?

Over the 18 years that Operation Brotherhood served in Laos beginning in 1957, it established 19 outposts in most of the provinces. They have all disappeared. An outpost meant a physical structure - a clinic, an outpatient dispensary, a two-bed "ward" beside the health team's dirt floor, thatch roof living quarters.

An advance three-person team of a doctor, nurse and an assistant arrived in November 1956 to set up a first aid clinic inside a prefab "model home" displayed on the grounds of the That Luang shrine during a festival.. It was meant to test the local reception before a bigger group of 13 volunteers would arrive in January 1957. Within the next five weeks, 44 more landed in Vientiane before they were deployed to provincial stations. There they found the legacy of French colonialism and a civil war that left an understaffed, under-quipped, underfunded health care system. In Fr. Miguel Bernad's "Filipinos in Laos" (2015), volunteers described mostly dilapidated government clinics staffed

by Lao infirmiers or male nurses. Where there was a large army garrison, soldiers expanded the dispensaries. Eventually, the OB teams, with local labor and donated materials, built "modest structures" apart from the government facility, some with multi-bed wards. But to call these hospitals in the Western model would be a stretch of reality. Some non-OB reports called them "bush" or "bamboo hospitals"

But there was one facility that came close to Western standards-- the 100-bed That Luang, renamed Setthathirath, opened in 1960. It had an operating room, pharmacy, clinical laboratory, X-ray, dietary service, an outpatient department and specialists in obstetrics, pediatrics, internal medicine, radiology, dentistry. It was demolished in November 2002. Having served for 42 years, a landmark popularly known as "Ion moh pilipin" (the Filipino hospital), it was declared no longer serviceable by the government..

Why Tony Bourdain's Laos Travelogues Are Different

To describe him, as the avalanche of tributes did after his 2018 death -- celebrity chef, culinary critic, travel writer, foodie icon -- does not fully give credit to what he accomplished during his lifetime. For one, his global spanning travels are head spinning -- 80 countries, 438 places or locations -- mostly shot for two of his widely viewed series -- "No Reservations" from 2005 to 2012, and "Parts Unknown" from 2013 to 2018. He completed 68 episodes for "No Reservations"

Some countries so enchanted him, he visited them twice, Laos in 2008, returning in 2017. As in most of his Asian episodes, there he goes zipping around the dirt roads in remote Xiengkhouang village, on a motorbike without a helmet, or squatting on a plastic stool on a sidewalk in Luang Prabang, slurping a bowl of noodle feh.

"The motorbike, the only way to see this part of the world, the thick unmoving air, the smell, past rice paddies, water buffalos, what feels like another country. Laos is the kind of place that can easily capture your heart and not let you go."

But he couldn't let go of the issues that he raised in his first visit in 2008. He said then "Let us assume the best of the (CIA) intelligence officers who served here, of the pilots and bombardiers who ran missions over Laos, that they were doing their duty as they saw it, that they believed they were serving the interests of their country. That still leaves us with the generations later, the UXO or Unexploded Ordnance, remain a huge problem." How huge? In his field notes for the show, he listed the numbers -- "260 million number of bombs (dropped) between 1964 and 1973; 78 million that failed to explode; 7 million Lao population; 20,000 killed or maimed since the conflict in Laos ended" (in 1973).



Bourdain (left) interviewing a villager 2017 in Xiengkhouang.

what do you think it was all for. Are you angry?", he asked the farmer.

His rustic life far removed from geopolitics, he replies "I don't know what the reason was. It does not matter. They hurt us. But they also sent the doctors."

Actually, during the 1964 to 1973 period when the American bombing was the most intense, the Lao population was estimated at only three million. That made the country the most bombed on a per capita basis in history, more bombs than were dropped on Japan and Germany combined during World War II. I met Vivi Saensathit, a 24-year old Lao student in New York City in 2005, who told me "my parents remind me about those times, and how they struggled during the war...living in caves, avoiding the bombs, separation from family members and friends, months and months in the jungle, hunger.."

I introduced her to another Lao, Channapha Khamvongsa, who organized Legacies of War, a New York-based advocacy group that lobbies for more funds to clear up the contaminated landscape.

"The war in Laos was secret," Bourdain narrated in 2017. "The Russians knew about it, the Chinese, the Vietnamese, the Laotians certainly knew. The only people who didn't were the American public and Congress."

This feeling so overwhelms him, he had to bring it up when he returned inside a dimly lit thatch hut in the northern Xiengkhouang province to interview a Lao farmer:

"Here on the one hand, Americans dropping bombs, blowing up children, your houses. And (you) tell me that (CIA) doctors came to treat the people who got injured. I mean, all of the bombing, all of the deaths, all of the suffering,

This is how Bourdain's work is light years ahead, surpassing the bland travel and culinary journalism so prevalent in books, television and social media. The seamless blending of history, politics, culture with captivating camera work, colors and haunting music has been described as visual poetry. Several episodes have won best television Emmy technical awards for cinematography and editing. For those of us who have spent years in Laos, watching his images that were so much a part of our cherished experience, is like seeing them again for the first time. Many, many thanks Tony. (Catch his episodes on Manila and Cebu).

(In 2016 U.S. President Barack Obama announced \$50 million for bomb disposal during a visit to Vientiane where he shared a restaurant snack with Bourdain. In January 2025, as part of a sweeping worldwide freeze on American foreign aid, President Donald Trump suspended the project. The U.S. State Department said it has invested more than \$391 million in Laos since 1995 to destroy UXO, funding 210 Lao disposal teams in 2024 which cleared 155,000 pieces of UXO and 116 landmines.) The Lao's videos can be viewed here:

2008 episode

<https://therokuchannel.roku.com/watch/9c0387f056f15767b92ebe6bd83f39ae?source=google>

2017 episode

<https://therokuchannel.roku.com/watch/0dca20f1fe975a3e8dda3a8fcb819290?source=google>

Our Mekong Circle biennial gatherings started in 1995. Because of the Covid epidemic and dwindling attendance, we closed the circle in Vientiane in 2018, altogether 12 reunions. Five were celebrated in California, USA because that's where most of us settled after our exodus from Laos in 1975. The other venues - Chicago, Illinois; New York City, Las Vegas, Manila and one aboard a cruise ship to the Bahamas. Attendance ranged from 100 (Vientiane) to 310 (Chicago). Our reunions were usually three-day affairs -- a welcome "baci" ceremony and reception the first night in a hotel; a dinner dance on the second; a picnic on the third. The themes -- to remember, to reunite, to rejoice -- were consummated to the brim. We thought our 10th in Las Vegas, Nevada, October 17-19, 2014 not only combined the usual festivities, it introduced a number of novel elements that gave it extra memorable points. Here's a look back as published in the April 2015 of our Newsletter.



Celebrating A Historic Tenth

To mark its distinctive character, our reunion October 17-19, 2014 in Las Vegas offered a historic flavor in order to entice attendance. Organizing a 10th edition of a biannual event that began in 1995 posed some challenges. The ranks of our membership are slowly but surely being chipped away as age, wobbly legs, COPD and yes – deaths – have decimated our hardcore attendees.

As 1960s Lao expatriate **Ducky Paredes** said, most of us are bidding time in what is known as the predeparture lounge. So the enticement to attend was not merely for sentimental reasons, it was existential – come now, this maybe your last. We were in our 20s during our times in Laos. Now in our late 70s, it is easy to dismiss another reunion -- “I’ve been there once, twice ...even three times...done it”. Moreover in this Internet age, the bonds formed in the Kingdom are conveniently nurtured with Skype and email and Facebook. **Becky Tayaban-Ciborski** disagrees. “No virtual, social media can match real hugs, face-to-face, hands-on renewal of all the stuff that make for lifelong friendships.”

And so on October 19, 2014 in Suite 1 of the Grand Ballroom of Ballys Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada, close to 110 participants came “to reunite, to remember and to rejoice,” said **Marie Aguilos** of Hempstead, New York. There was much to remember. Eighteen years of our Laos experience and four decades after our exodus -- how to package all that in one evening of hugging and lamvong-ing among members who flew in from Laos, Australia, Canada, the Philippines and many parts of the USA.

Well, **Joe Barcelona** of Los Angeles brought a series of thick binders. A monumental collection of photos, definitely a meticulous labor of nostalgia hard to match. And on the wall, we placed an array of more photos. “There I am” said **Khamsey Siharath** of Oceanside, California, pointing at herself, seated so solemnly with her Vientiane Hospital nursing class of 1964. She then proceeded to identify each of her 17 classmates, missing only one name.

A representative of the 1963 class, Bounthan Oudom, arrived from Vientiane for her third reunion appearance. While many of the school’s graduates emigrated, Bounthan opted to stay and worked with the country’s premier Mahosot Hospital in Vientiane. She brought with her two other Lao Mahosot nurses

Latsamy Vongnalath and **Sonevilayvanh Panyasli**, their first trip to America. What can you say about Las Vegas, we asked. Busy with their cellphone cameras, they had to show the folks back home the dancing fountain waters of the Bellagio Hotel. surely a wondrous sight not seen in Vientiane or anyplace else.

In another historic touch, T-shirts each silk-printed with the logo of the last nine reunions (except one), custom-designed for each occasion’s theme, lined another wall.

We invited two speakers who framed a historical perspective to our work in Laos. In the early 1960s, **Dr. Karen Olnes** of the Public Health Division of the United States Agency for International Development was one of only three pediatricians practising there at that time; the other was the late OB doctor **Laling Endriga**. Since 1991 her Minnesota-based non-governmental organization Health Frontiers has been conducting a pediatric and internal medicine residency program in Vientiane that has graduated 82 Lao pediatricians and 63 internists. Volunteers from Mekong Circle with medical experience are welcome to join.

Frederic “Fritz” Benson, a USAID Laos Office of Refugee Affairs officer in the 1970s, drawing from the extensive records at the University of Wisconsin’s Southeast Asian collection, described the historical ties between USAID and OB in Laos. OB’s official records remain missing in the Philippines. Hence the University’s USAID archives are one of the few sources for historians seeking OB and USAID references from 1969 to 1973. And they are available online.

But at the Las Vegas reunion, attendees could hold in their hands a small piece of our history recorded for the digital age. Fritz, working from his home in Greensboro, North Carolina and **Pete Fuentesilla** from Queens Village, New York, produced a CD that digitized 24 issues of “Balitang Laos” our Newsletter from 1964 to 1966.

Written from our perspective, the issues described in intimate details the work we did, if only for three years out of an 18-year long service, among a people and a country that transformed our young lives. At \$10 a copy, the CD sold at a fast clip. Paper version of the Newsletters are hard to come by. A copy of the CD has been sent to Wisconsin, in case their archivists decide one day to open a separate Mekong Circle collection. A few more copies are left. For a copy, email fuentesilla@aol.com.

(Reprinted from the April 2015 Mekong Circle Newsletter).

Medical Missions On The Mekong River



<https://1drv.ms/v/s!AtOfKHnJfFcF4HJsctAS0zmd5mfH?e=Zw5yDV>

The link above is a ten-minute long video about a time and a place in Southeast Asia that show some images no longer there today.

It's the early 1960s, the place is the Kingdom of Laos, barely five years independent as a former colony of France. Its poor two million inhabitants mainly survive on subsistence agriculture and are hemmed in by thickly forested mountains. Passable roads are mostly non-existent. But a great waterway called the Mekong (Mother River), flows down from China's Tibetan highlands in the north and empties to Vietnam's southern delta into the South China Sea. Three fourths of its 2,700-mile length winds through Laos.

For Lao generations, it provided food and served as its principal transport route. A young country whose growth was stunted by poverty and a civil war, Laos' minimal medical services rarely reached remote villages. But since many Lao lived along the river and its tributaries, a floating clinic could visit them. And so the "Mutya Ng Mekong" (The Lady of the Mekong), a barge laden with medical supplies and staffed by a Lao crew and Filipino nurses and doctors, braved the river's strong currents on medical missions that are described in an issue of our Mekong Circle Newsletter, August 2020. The video reproduces the front cover of the issue, then skips to pages 6 to 7 for details of the missions.

These were epic journeys that lasted weeks. The video highlights the visitations, the ceremonial receptions ("baci"), the bamboo reed flute melodies and the "mohlam" singers. This particular mission was led by Filipino doctor Rodolfo Bacani Arreola. Born November 4, 1930, he earned his medical degree from the University of Santo Tomas in Manila in 1956. His wife Felicisima Parial was an elementary school teacher who later finished a Masters in Education and taught at the National Teacher's College.

"I was about four years old when my Dad left for Laos," said Maria Theresa "Marites" Oteyza, one their three children. "My

mom told us that he left for Laos, then came home, and went back and returned sick. I remember he came home the first week of September 1960, was hospitalized in St. Luke's Hospital, underwent an open and close exploratory laparotomy. The doctors found out cancer had spread all over his body. He passed away October 1, 1960. My mom said that he wanted to serve the people in Laos who did not have any good access to medical services."

After Mrs. Arreola passed away on January 11, 2010, her son Arnold found the video photos among her belongings. Arnold, 62, is a retired Post Office Supervisor living in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA. A brother Rodolfo, 65 years, works for a security company in Las Vegas. Marites, 67, is a retired registered nurse in Vallejo, California, USA. Together, they composed this video as a tribute to their late father. Too young to remember him fully when he passed away, they have reached out to Mekong Circle members to find out more about him and his service in Laos. The 60-year old images of village thatched huts and barefoot children are indelible, as much as the memories of gliding past the ageless panorama of Lao riverine life. The missions had ended by the time the Filipino volunteers left Laos in 1975 after an 18-year sojourn. Dr. Arreola was one of more than 100 Filipino physicians who served during that period as part of a medical aid program called Operation Brotherhood (OB)



Top: "The barge "Lady of the Mekong". Above, Dr. Arreola (with eyeglasses). On his right are OB nurses Pet Duruin and Raquel Tolentino at left.. They are being welcomed at a baci ritual in one of the villages along the Mekong river.

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