

Vitoy Naranjo
Pioneering OB Leader was 78



Jovito J. Naranjo, Jr., one of the few remaining Operation Brotherhood-Vietnam veterans who made the transition to OB Laos and served in both countries from beginning to the end of the programs, died July 10, 2007 in Jaro, Iloilo City. He succumbed to cancer at the age of 78.

Mang Vitoy as he was called, first joined OB in Vietnam in April 1955 as its Personnel and Operations Officer, then functioned in the same capacity when the program transferred to Laos in January 1957. Beginning in 1962, when he was named Project Manager, he was the overall supervisor of an operation that at any one time consisted of 130 Filipino professionals providing public health and community services in Laos. By the time the program ended in 1975, more than 400 personnel – doctors, nurses, social workers, agriculturists, nutritionists, engineers and administrators --- had served in Laos, in 12 of its 16 provinces. Its six hospitals in various parts of the country had a combined capacity of 370 beds.

As a field administrator, Mang Vitoy helped set up most if not all of the provincial outposts, then closely supervised all aspects of its activities. This included cultivating relationships with Lao officials from village heads and governors to Ministers as well as with administrators of the U.S. Agency For International Development – Laos. USAID began funding the Laos program beginning in July 1963. Previously it was supported by the Philippine and Lao Jaycees. His hands-on style of management endeared him to the Filipino volunteers and to the 600 Lao support staff.

To prepare for the transfer to Laos, Vitoy was instructed to look for the first provincial sites to assign incoming medical personnel. Thus began a three-month epic journey that took him across several provinces of the Buddhist and animist Kingdom. It can be said he may have been

the first Filipino to set foot on these isolated towns. At each stop by plane (the only way to reach each site) he would confer with Lao officials and do a survey. Christmas eve of December 1956 found him stranded in the northern town of Nam Tha. The "Beaver" plane pilot that brought him there could not find the heavily fogged airstrip to fetch him out. He passed the night on the upper floor of a police station, the loneliest Christmas he ever spent, he said. (The fog lifted the next day for his return to Vientiane).

When Mel Granada, OB-Vietnam and OB-Laos first project manager invited Vitoy to join OB Vietnam, he introduced him to Oscar Arellano, the Jaycee officer who launched the Vietnam program. After the interview, Oscar asked: "When can you leave?" At that time, Vitoy was assistant executive secretary-treasurer of Inter-Island Labor Organization in Iloilo City, the Philippines. Negotiating labor disputes with industrial companies honed the skills that became necessary later on in Laos.

Smoothing personnel relations among and between a multinational (Filipino, Lao, Thai, Vietnamese) multi-professional set of employees was a key demand in running the program. Indeed, keeping the volunteers harmoniously working for months on end while living under one roof in remote outposts was crucial to management success. Austere, if not hazardous, working conditions were also factors to contend with. During his 18 years in Laos, ten OB Filipinos lost their lives. The Kingdom honored his Laos services when the King conferred upon him the Order of the Million Elephants and the White Parasol of Laos with the rank of Chevalier on February 1965. In 1963 he was a nominee among the Ten Outstanding Young Men (TOYM Awards).

"There are personnel incidents, too numerous, that are not described in that book" he told his wife Joji, an OB nurse, referring to "Filipinos In Laos", an account of the exploits of the 900 Filipinos who by the mid-1960s composed the largest expatriate community in Asia.

When all foreign agencies which employed the Filipinos left Laos in 1975 after the takeover of the country by the Pathet Lao, Vitoy received several offers to tap his experience. One came from a Saudi Arabian-based company to manage a shipborne hospital. Another was a consular job in Bangkok. An unusual request, said Joji, came from a Filipino United Nations official to help conduct a UN agricultural program to replace opium poppy growing in the "Golden Triangle" region where the borders of Laos, China and Burma intersect.

Heeding Joji's appeal that it was time to settle in the Philippines and spend more time with their children, Vitoy rejected the offers. Joji and their children (all boys from a year to three years old) had joined Vitoy in Vientiane from 1962 to 1967 before returning to Iloilo where Vitoy stayed for two months after every two years in Laos.

Back to his Jaro hometown, Vitoy plunged into community service, joining the local Lions chapter, and then the Jaycees. They installed a water system for a barrio school. In the busy Plazoleta Gay street circle of the city stands a Jaycee monument inscribed with passages from the Jaycee international creed ("... the brotherhood of man transcends the sovereignty of nations..." He was also help manage the family-owned fishpond business. He served as

Treasurer for ten years of the Iloilo Fish Producers Association, consisting of about 200 producers from the whole island of Panay.

At 3:30 in the afternoon of each day after several sets of tennis with his friends, they gather for beer and grilled bangus (milkfish) from his ponds. He was playing up to two months before he fell sick. Two months after a quadruple bypass heart operation in 2000, he was on the tennis courts of the National Food Authority. Tall (five feet nine), white-haired and with a permanent tan sheen, he appeared at every U.S. reunion of Mekong Circle, including the sixth one in Florida-Bahamas in August 2006.

Born October 18, 1928 in Jaro, Vitoy was the son of a former secretary to the Governor of Antique province and Jaena Presbetera.. Vitoy's survivors include his wife Josefa "Joji" Dumadaug, sons Jonah a Manila architect born in Laos; Josel who manages the fishpond business; Joshua, a PhD mathematician who teaches at the Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA; and Nemesio, an adopted son; a sister Nilda Hueler and brother Jose. He has eight half brothers and sisters, among them Ofelia who married Ato Paglinawan, a former OB office staff member. Joji's sister Melanie Dumadaug was an OB nurse married to Bert Reyes, an OB agriculturist.

He graduated in 1951 with a Bachelor's degree in Education from the Central Philippine University in Iloilo city.

Last rites will be held at the family residence compound located in Arayat Extension, Alta Tierra, Jaro, Iloilo, the Philippines. Tel. 033 329 4921. Burial is scheduled for Tuesday, July 17. Email messages can be sent to jawnz@hotmail.com (son Jonah) or naranjo@wmich.edu (son Joshua).

Obituary written by [Pete Fuentesilla](#)

Additional remembrance of Vitoy:

Remembering Vitoy and the "Boys"

Mel Granada was the first Project Manager of OB Laos. When he was PM of OB Vietnam he recruited Vitoy Naranjo to join him. Here is how he remembers those days. He can be contacted at melgranada@hotmail.com

Upon learning from Cecile Salarda Datu of Vitoy's passing away on our Tuesday, the 10th, Mart Martell who now lives in Manhattan called up. Add this to your write up about Vitoy and us the Casseloup Loubat boys. He reminded me that when we were in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh city) there were four of us who manned our headquarters 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at 25 Casseloup Loubat (later Hong Thap Tu or Red Cross in Vietnamese). Vitoy, Joe Alejo, Mart, Rene Maglaya and myself manned the fort and shared the same room. Joe went ahead and joined the Father in Heaven. There are three of us left among those who lived in the same room

with our telephones beside us at all times to respond to any emergency from any of our 12 stations all over South Viet Nam -- Mart, Rene, who is now somewhere in New Jersey working with Veterans or the Elderly, and myself -- the survivors of this group of Oscar Arellano's elite. Mart reminds me that we were young then, and never minded threats to life and limb. We all later went to Laos. Vitoy with me, as my man Friday and loyal assistant and chief trouble shooter. Rene was our first Team Leader in Paksong, while Vitoy founded our Team in Thakkek, and traveled to Vientiane via Savannakhet where the airport was.

Since our original Laos patron was the Royal Family, we in Vientiane worked with the Crown Prince, those in Luang Prabang and north in liaison with the office of His Majesty the King. In Pakse we worked with Prince Boun Oum Na Champassak. Of course our liaison with these Royal Offices were the Laos Jaycees, Inpeng Suryadhay who was the Laos Junior Chamber President was the Secretary of State at the Prime Minister's office. Chao Sopsaisana, JC Laos Vice President, was the Director General of the Office of the Crown Prince. Dr. Khamphai Abhay, JC Laos Vice President, was the Chief of the Pharmacie Generale du Laos and Secretary of State of the Ministry of Public Health. Thianethone Chantarassy, JC Laos Secretary General was the Deputy Director of Customs. I as a Laos JC member, and awardee of Outstanding 1957 Vietnam Jaycee was named country manager of OB Laos. Vitoy became a Laos Jaycee as did most of our OB Laos management and administrative staff.

We were young then. I turned 18 in Vietnam, and spent most of my late teen years there. Vitoy, Rene, Joe and Mart were in their early 20s. Cesar Climaco, our boss in Vietnam, who was a devout Catholic, kept us under strict supervision, checked on our after dark affairs. The order was we could not date any of our female companions and because Saigon was a war zone then it was unhealthy to have any serious affair outside of our premises. We fell in love with our OB Vietnam colleagues but we had to wait until we returned to the Philippines to seriously do any serious courting.

All the Casseloup Loubat boys later married OB ladies. Vitoy with Joji Dumadaug, a nurse who was assigned in Hue in Central Vietnam, Mart with Offie Leano, a nurse from our Saigon-Bien Hoa team, Joe Alejo with Mely Kagahastian, a nurse with our Tay Ninh team, Rene Maglaya with Carol Mabilog, a social worker with our southern teams in Camau, and I with Nati Mercado, a dentist with our Tay Ninh Team. We went to Vietnam in 1955 and in 1957 to Laos, We were all settled family men.

This was OB of our late teens and early 20s.