

WE HELP WAR VICTIMS



IN FEBRUARY OUR CLEARANCE TEAM WILL BEGIN REMOVING ORDNANCE IN PHONGSALI.

WHWV heads back to northern Laos!

Last spring as the rainy season began in northern Laos, we left Phongsali Province but promised villagers that we would return during the dry season to help them clear their land of bombs and other old ordnance left from the Vietnam War.

People in Phongsali have never had help with clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO). As a consequence, many have been injured in accidents while working their fields and planting their gardens. Some villages still have huge bombs sitting next to homes.

In addition to clearing ordnance, we have pledged support for impoverished schools, medical clinics, and for villagers who are in need of medical care or physical rehabilitation.

Jim Harris, Co-Founder

Wehelpwarvictims.org



ROCKET IN GARDEN



500 LB. BOMB IN VILLAGE



CLUSTER BOMB

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The people in the picture below know that it is a bad idea to swing hoes on uncleared land. They know that some people in their village have been killed or injured working that way. I advised the man to use a shovel instead of the hoe, but he said he couldn't use a

shovel because he doesn't own shoes. The hoe, he explained, can be used barefoot, while the shovel cannot. The woman explained that every family in the village had pledged to dig a certain number of holes for the planting of a banana plantation.

Everyone who does their part will get a share, and she doesn't want her family to miss out on a good opportunity.

BECOME A FAN OF WE HELP WAR VICTIMS ON FACEBOOK. FOLLOW OUR WORK IN PHONGSALI!



YOUR HELP IS NEEDED



BOMBS IN GARDEN



SLOWLY GOING BLIND



UNTREATED LEPROSY



BIRTH DEFECT

A boy rolls a cluster bomb under Yai's bed!

Nakai District

Khammouan Province

Lao Peoples Democratic Republic

It wasn't the first time that someone has walked into our house and tried to hand over a bomb, so you would think we'd be more practiced, patient and understanding. Truth be told, it's not the sort of thing you ever get used to. And it's especially irritating when it happens on your day off.

Yai and I work seven days a week.

Then, theoretically, every four weeks we have a week off. In practice, we seldom take our breaks. Call it superstition if you will, but I dread an accident occurring when I'm away from the job. Yai, always willing to take one for the team, follows my schedule without even a hint of complaint.

It was a Saturday and Yai and I were both bushed. We'd been working for nearly six weeks straight and we both needed either a day off or, at the very least, a change of pace. The night before, Yai and I made a pact and agreed to observe a perfect, guilt-free Saturday: sleep late, linger over breakfast, savor two or three extra cups of Lao Mountain coffee, laze around till lunch, and then cap off the morning with a siesta. The afternoon? "Hey! Let's not get into long-range planning. Let's just take it a half-day at a time".

Maybe it's all the coffee I drink, but although I talk about the pleasures of an afternoon nap, I can rarely settle in and enjoy one. Yai, on the other hand, has a talent for sleeping; he can will himself asleep any hour of any day and

he doesn't need a horizontal surface to pull it off.

So... there we were after lunch, each of us kicking back in our preferred style: me upstairs pecking away on my computer; Yai downstairs, under our stilted house, asleep on the wooden platform that doubles as both our eating table and guest bed.

Next thing Yai knows, a child's voice wakes him from his slumber: "Big brother. Big brother. I've got a bomb for you."

Yai blinks himself awake and sits up sleepily, only to find himself staring cross-eyed at a cluster bomb held an inch from his nose. The tennis-ball-sized bomblet was in the hand of a small boy, perhaps seven or eight years of age, who had probably heard us lecture at his school: "If you ever find a bomb you should immediately tell Mr. Jim or Mr. Yai."

Luckily, Yai doesn't rattle easily. Speaking slowly in the gentle, courting voice that the Lao call "sweet mouth," he asked the boy to carefully set the device on the ground beside the bed. The boy did as asked, but he and Yai were not yet out of harm's way. There was a dramatic increase in "pucker factor" as Yai watched the bomblet roll down a depression in the earthen floor and disappear beneath the bed.

I suspect that when Yai finally realized that he wasn't about to die instantly, he permitted his face to show the shock and dismay that must have been coursing through his mind. Yai is a cheerful, handsome sort, but it could only have been a fearsome look on his face that caused the boy to spin on his heels and bolt from the house.

All Yai could do was to call to the fleeing figure: "Next time come and get me! Don't bring it here!"

You might well ask, "What do you do with a bomb under your bed?" Yes. You might well ask that question. In fact, that is exactly the question that Yai and I asked ourselves.

Bombs that have been moved without detonating have not proved themselves to be safe. In fact, we consider bomblets that have been handled to be a greater risk than those left undisturbed.

Actually, our decision making was fairly simple because the standard operating procedures that all clearance companies follow permit few choices. The bomblet, a BLU (Bomb Live Unit) 26 contains 85 grams of high explosive and 300 steel ball bearings. If it detonated under your bed, you'd end up missing more than your nap. Too dangerous to move, the only choice we had was to destroy it right there on the dirt floor beneath our house.

Yai and I could only laugh at ourselves. What losers. We'd tried to play hooky from work and ended up spending the afternoon dismantling a bed, filling sandbags, and building an earthen wall around a bomb. And when that work was done, we had to go looking for the little boy who brought us the bombie: a well-intentioned little daydreamer who only heard half of our safety lecture. And not even the most important half!

**From Jim's blog at:
wehelpwarvictims.org**

FREE GARDEN SPACE FOR ELDERLY REFUGEES



BOOKS ABOUT LAO REFUGEES

1. OUT OF LAOS: A STORY OF WAR AND EXODUS, BY ROGER WARNER, 1996
2. I LITTLE SLAVE: A PRISON MEMOIR FROM COMMUNIST LAOS, BY BOUNSANG KHAMKEO, 2006
3. THE LATEHOMECOMER: A HMONG FAMILY MEMOIR, BY KAO KALIA YANG, 2008
4. BAMBOO AMONG THE OAKS: CONTEMPORARY WRITING BY HMONG AMERICANS, EDITED BY MAI NENG MOUA, 2002
5. SKY IS FALLING: AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE CIA'S EVACUATION OF THE HMONG FROM LAOS, BY GAYLE MORRISON, 2007

Our work is not limited to victims overseas. We help refugees in the US

The Indochina War ended over thirty years ago, but that distant conflict still impacts the lives of millions of people in both Asia and America.

At the conclusion of hostilities, hundreds of thousands of people found themselves displaced from their homes. Many left Laos for uncertain life in refugee camps in neighboring countries and ultimately made their way to the United States, France, Australia and other nations. Today, many refugee families in America still struggle to build productive lives. Many work low-paying jobs and live in poverty, often in crime-infested neighborhoods.

Many elders within refugee families possess limited English language skills and little understanding of our rapidly changing American culture. Often they feel isolated and lonely.

WHWV works within the US to educate Americans about the refugee experience. We visit schools and universities to lecture and display our extensive collection of Lao and Hmong artifacts. We provide garden space for low income elders.

To learn how you can help, please visit our website:

wehelpwarvictims.org