



PROJECT PHONGSALI 2010

For the past three months, WHWV has labored in Phongsalı Province, Laos, helping villagers rid their fields and gardens of unexploded ordnance left over from the Indochina War. Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, we were able to improve the lives of hundreds of villagers. We probably saved some lives, as well.

Sop Houn village is home to 528 people. The village has 96 houses and 58 bomb craters.

Until WHWV arrived, it also had an ugly assortment of unexploded ordnance left over from a war that ended over 37 years ago.

Sadly, like so many villages throughout Laos, life in Sop Houn was controlled by the presence of life-threatening mortars, rockets, cluster munitions, land mines, and bombs. The ordnance, mostly American-made, dictated where people could build their homes, where they could garden, where children could play, and even where villagers could bury their dead.

WHWV was the first humanitarian organization to offer UXO clearance to these villagers since the war ended. Family members from 40 of the village's 96 households led us to ordnance that they hoped we could remove. Check out our blog at webhelpwarvictims.org for a full report!



For a change, villagers were happy to hear bombs explode!

Villagers in Sop Houn are accustomed to the sound of exploding bombs; accidents have claimed many lives and limbs over the years. Even as we worked, we could hear ordnance exploding in the fields that villagers were burning to clear land for planting. In contrast, our explosions were controlled demolitions, designed to destroy dangerous UXO.



Cluster Munitions Ban: 106 Nations Have Indicated Support; Thirty-one Have Ratified The New Treaty!

This news from the **Cluster Munitions Coalition:**

“On 1 August 2010, the Convention on Cluster Munitions formally enters into force and all of its provisions become fully and legally binding for the countries that have signed and ratified it. The clock will start ticking for these States Parties to meet their obligations, which include:

Declaring and destroying stockpiled cluster munitions within eight years;

Identifying and clearing cluster munition-contaminated areas within 10 years; and

Assisting affected communities and cluster munition survivors so that they can be fully included in society and enjoy their fundamental human rights”.

Treatment can reverse this boy's birth defect.



Every time we move into a new village to work with ordnance, word spreads that a humanitarian organization has arrived. In response, desperate villagers journey to our camp hoping that we may be able to offer help.

Pome, a one-year-old with club foot, is a good example. He faced a bleak future because his parents knew of no treatment for his birth defect. WHWV gave them hope.

We found a sponsor and transported Pome to a clinic that is treating his condition.



Our website: wehelpwarvictims.org

It's planting time in Wisconsin

The original impulse for starting a Hmong community garden in the Wausau, Wisconsin, area was to give elderly members of the refugee community an opportunity to pursue a healthy hobby that might help them combat feelings of isolation, loneliness and depression.



What we didn't see looming on the horizon was the worst economic crisis to hit America in seven decades. The current recession has been especially hard on refugee families. Increasingly, requests for garden space are coming not only from the elderly pursuing a hobby, but from displaced breadwinners who need help putting food on the dinner table.

This spring WHWV will double the number of garden plots offered last year, and will literally break ground for future expansion.



We Help War Victims is a registered 501 (c) (3) public charity under the US Tax Code.

WHWV is sustained by a broad network of friends and supporters. Financial support comes from individual donors and organizations such as school groups and religious congregations.

Contributions to WHWV are tax deductible.



Marathon City students meet and interact with Hmong elders.

Hats off to Marathon City Middle School

The town of Marathon City, Wisconsin, has no residents who are refugees of the Indochina War, and the town's school system has no students of Lao, Vietnamese or Hmong heritage. But teachers at the town's middle school were well aware of the fact that families in their community frequently travel ten miles to work or shop in Wausau, Wisconsin, a town that has many thousands of residents who moved to the United States from Southeast Asia.

Teachers at the middle school organized an ambitious six-week course of study for their students to help them better understand the diverse cultures represented in the area, and to promote an appreciation for diverse cultures. The study unit that teachers developed included lessons in language arts, social studies, art, music and movement.

WHWV was proud to share cultural artifacts from our museum collection and to bring Hmong and Lao resource people to the school to interact with participants at the culminating event: an evening celebration of diversity open to both students and parents.

Consciousness raising on college campuses:

Do you really have freedom of speech if you can only speak in the “Free Speech Zone

A year ago WHWV resolved to visit several college campuses in order to connect with alums who came of age during the long years of the Vietnam War. Logically, we picked universities where members of our Board of Directors attended college: institutions that frequently remind their alumni that they have a special relationship with their alma mater.

Our thought was that many graduates from the classes of 1959, '69, '79 (and many of the years in between) would need little explanation about how the Vietnam War affected the people of Southeast Asia. We banked on the fact that many grads from those distant times would find our current work with victims of war to be both interesting and worthy of support.

So... during the summer of '09 we accepted invitations to several college reunions. It seemed like a good idea at the time and, for the most part, it was. Almost without exception, alumni, students and staff at every campus we visited thanked us for our work.

What we underestimated was the manner in which the universities that host such events would restrict our movement, our speech, and our fundraising. Every university demanded that we remain in a “free speech”

area of its choosing (sound Orwellian?) --- an area that, without fail, was distant from the hustle and bustle of reunion activity. Sometimes the hostility to our presence was expressed in ways that were clearly beneath the dignity of a university. At one college, when we asked permission to stand under the eaves of a building to avoid a drenching rain, a smirking administrator pointed to a distant spot and told us “No, but you can stand under that tree.”

At another university, the weekend manager of the student union withheld permission for a table to display photographs and literature because she wasn't certain whether access to printed material was guaranteed in the free “speech” area. At Kent State, of all places, we were informed that we could only be in the free speech zone for the morning because a fraternity needed more space for a social activity and would be spilling into the area throughout the afternoon and evening.

In spite of the chilly reception by university officials, we persevered, and in the end, found new supporters among visiting alums. We even had modest success with fundraising.

One of the most heart-warming experiences occurred at Miami University when a police officer --- who was sent to inspect our display and to point out the boundaries of the “free speech” area --- apologized for the duty he had been assigned, took out his wallet, and made a donation!

So...here we are, anticipating the summer of 2010. Has anything changed?

Laos is still contaminated with American ordnance. Villagers are still dying from leftover landmines and bombs. Most Americans think that problems with old ordnance must have been solved long ago.

Someone needs to educate the American public about the legacies of war. Someone needs to clean up the mess America left behind in Laos. We'll do the dangerous work, if donors will provide support.

Facing campus police is far less frightening than working with landmines and cluster bombs. So...this spring and summer we plan to return to places where, as alums, we've been invited but are not truly welcome. We'll be there to educate fellow alums and to ask for their support.

Get ready, alumni directors. We'll be back!

If your alma mater is hosting a reunion for students who graduated during the years of the Vietnam War, and you would like WHWV to educate alums about the ongoing legacies of that war, contact us! We don't crash parties but, if invited, we'll attend and share facts about the ongoing legacies of that war.