

NOTES ON BENGKOK: A TOWN OF GENERAL LACC

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by

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This report consists of miscellaneous information pertaining to the town and area of Bangkok, Muang Champhone, Town and District of Lacc, gathered by the author while he worked there as a Community Development Advisor, February to July, 1968. The facts presented were gathered from a variety of sources and cannot be guaranteed. Opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. Agency for International Development. Spelling of Lao names is not to be considered authoritative.

Some of the Lao hold that the land was once occupied by a race of giants. They tell of an ancient skeleton, parts of which were uncovered as a stream eroded an ancient mound. Rib bones, so old that they crumbled at the touch, were as wide as a man's three fingers put together, and the height of the skeleton was estimated at four to twelve feet. The stream finally washed away the remaining fragments. In 1968, a farmer plowing a field near Ban [unclear] dug up what appeared to be an ancient pot, six feet high and fit for a giant. This is reported to have been placed in a vat and has remained there ever since.

Eight kilometers west of Kengkok, on a small rise bordered by rice paddies, stands a small, crumbling ruin dating from the Khmer or Champa empires. The main structure is 5 x 18 meters, set atop a larger flat platform with a terrace extending to the east. Three bays, evidently intended for religious images, have caved in. Laterite stone blocks used in construction, and carved sandstone door jambs and lintels, do not appear to be from the area. Similar isolated structures are reported as standing at Nuong Palane and at Ban Nam Fou, near Lahanan. The "Ban Ku" is an enigma to the people living in the nearby villages of Ban Thong and Ban Nam Gau. They occasionally leave small religious offerings on the terrace although no one knows of any Buddha images found here. The names of these villages translate as "brass-colored" and "old gold," and might indicate a link with the ancient builders of the ruin.

Another link with ancient empires is a structure at Ban Nam Hin ("Stone Building Village,") on the Mekong river directly west of Lahanan. This is a much larger structure, composed of table-size blocks, and in better condition. The main building is in a courtyard surrounded by a substantial wall, according to reports.

Three hills figure prominently in a semi-legendary battle of the 16th or 17th centuries. Two armies, armed with swords and spears, were engaged on the hills of Phu Thau Hot, Phu Nong Hoang, and a smaller hill. A single cannon was also set on each hill, and one leader is remembered as "Thao Khattanam." One army may have been Lao Theung. But the reasons for the battle, the composition of the armies, and the outcome of the battle, if there was one, are not remembered even by the old men, the village historians.

Ban Xakan, on the Xe Champhone River, was the original home of the peoples of Kengkok. This small district figured in diplomatic and military maneuverings between the principalities of Nakorn Phanom, Nakorn Champasak, Nakorn Ubon, and, to the east, Nakorn Phanom. The military tradition has always been strong and most Kengkok families have any close relatives in the army even today. At the time of US intervention from southern China, possibly in the 1700's, the king of Vientiane recruited many soldiers here. And soldiers from Ban Xakan were with probably in the army of Chao Anouvong of Vientiane when he was defeated by the Siamese on the plains of Nakorn Rachasima (present-day Vientiane) in the 1820's.

After the Siamese defeat of Chao Anouvong, the victors began to relocate the Lao from the left bank of the Mekong in what is now northeastern Thailand, so that they could more easily be governed and would not again prove a menace to Siam. Families from Ban Xakou were resettled near Udon in a village called "Kudkarari". Their leader, Prat Insexiengmai, died during the Siamese exile. But after 17 years, many families returned to settle in another town before moving to the site of present-day Kengkot. The new leader during the return was Shampompakdy, the nephew of Prat Insexiengmai. It is from these two men, Prat Insexiengmai and Shampompakdy, that the two great families of Kengkot have descended.

A Lao "History of Xakou" was written by Loth Kusoch of Thailand several years ago. Now out of print, it relates the stories of Thao Khavon, who was a ruler of Ban Xakou, of his younger brother Thao Oun, and of their political involvements during the Siamese exile in Udon province. Families who finally decided to return to the Ban Xakou area discovered a beautiful pond in the forest where the jungle animals watched: the elephant, the wild bull, the water buffalo, the cow, and the lizard.

The Colonial Period

Under French colonial rule, the city of Savannakhet was established as the commercial center for south-central Laos, and attempts were made to tie Siam-oriented Laos, chiefly the southern part, with the Vietnamese states of Annam and Tonkin. Colonial Route 13, built primarily along the left bank of the Mekong river, was diverted inland more than thirty kilometers from Savannakhet. It today forms the western boundary of Muong Champhone.

Attempts began around 1909 to construct a road from Savannakhet to Muong Phine and thence to Vient-Van, running through Kengkot. Villagers were drafted to dig ditches and prepare the roadbed along the proposed right-of-way. Several years after work began, French officials from Vientiane were agast to find that sizeable bridges would be needed across the Xe Champhone and the Xe Xang Xoy rivers before the road could ever be used the year around. A second, more favorable route was given priority and pushed through to Muong Phine through Dong Hone and Muong Phonsavath. When France became involved in World War I, the French effort into Laos practically ceased. All road work stopped in 1917 and was resumed only during the 1920's.

In 1914, raising Ban Xakou to the status of a muong, named Muong Lan Mao, the French government had constructed a government office, a school for the Chao Muong and his assistant, and the first school in the town. But since the town was not on the proposed Savannakhet-Muong Phine road and access was difficult, the capital was transferred to Kengkot in 1919.

A large livestock industry developed in Kengkok which was a source of cattle raised in the fields and forests and put to use in the districts of Saigon, Hanoi, Cambodia, and Thailand, as well as a growing need for transport, and draft animals. Early in the 1930s the industry was organized for protection, and drove several hundred animals. Each night the animals were held in a solid crude corrals, light fires, and a stand guard to keep dogs and thieves away. Drives took up to two or three months and involved a large element of danger. If not set upon during the drive, drives might be attacked and robbed after they sold the cattle and were returning to Kengkok.

Cattle purchased for five to ten piastres in Kengkok - "the big for the better animals," - sold in Saigon for about twice the price. The seller took cash in the form of the heavy Indochinese silver piastres or a lot of paper money, and traveled by bus back to Kengkok. "There was," recall old farmers, "a lot of shooting, killing, and robbery, at which the Thai were especially adept," but profits made up for the losses. Buffalo were chiefly exported to Thailand; the bulk of the cattle were driven to Saigon and Hanoi.

With the coming of World War II, the cattle drives ended and have never been resumed. Cattle, buffalo, and pigs raised near Kengkok are now driven only the fifty-three odd kilometers to the Savannakhet market.

During World War II and the fall of Indo-China, several detachments of Japanese occupied Savannakhet. The villagers of Kengkok found themselves caught between the Japanese and the "Free French" forces who retreated into the forests and hills to the east. The Japanese threatened death to anyone who aided the French; French guerrillas promised to kill anyone who helped the Japanese. One detachment of ten Vietnamese soldiers, under the command of two Japanese officers, drove to Kengkok by road and trooped on to Bang Keng in an unsuccessful attempt to capture some French. En route back to Savannakhet, they arrested a Siamese missionary and had lived in Kengkok for years, accused him of operating a secret French base, and imprisoned him in Savannakhet. While the Japanese and their troops, the French were aided by "Kha" soldiers from Kengkok, who smoked water pipes and had earlobes discolored from wearing earplugs.

When hostilities ended in 1946, the road to Ban Song Veng and Ban Phine reopened to traffic, but this finally closed to highway traffic. The Viet Minh and French increased in Viet Nam and eastern Laos. There has been no traffic over the road since 1946 and much of it is now overgrown to forest and paddyland.

EO Administrative Changes

Recent administrative changes under the leadership of the Government of Laos have affected Hmong Changphou. Since the Hmong are so numerous in such a high population, five hessouys were split up in 1960.

the new district of Muang Saraporn, which adjoins Muang Champhone to the northwest. Despite this, Muang Champhone continues to rank first in terms of population among the districts of the province, with over 20% of the population. The government survey of March, 1960, showed a total population of 38,579 - 20,329 women and 18,250 men - a fall of 12,000 more than the next muang. The official statistics for Savanhnakhet province are:

Muang Champhone	38,579
Muang Santaboury	24,150
Muang Outanporn	22,417
Muang Ataporn	21,305
Muang Hong	19,715
Muang Souriyakhan	14,529
Muang Palano	13,327
Muang Sarpanthong	11,064
Muang Phoumchady	7,000

Kengkok has for several years been considered as the possible site of a new province in the event that Savanhnakhet province is divided for administrative purposes. In anticipation of this, a new town, Kengkok Nonsa (North Kengkok), is slowly coming into being on a small hill north west of the town. Traveaux Publique laid out the town and constructed a network of roads covering a square kilometer, and building lots were sold by the government. Landowners have constructed a number of houses in a slow but steady growth which will continue whether or not Kengkok does become a provincial capital.

The Ruling Families of Kengkok

As in other towns and cities of Laos, there are a few traditional ruling families in Kengkok whose family lines are so intermeshed as to present a bewildering array of relationships. The town has contributed far more than a normal share of government officials and military personnel for posts throughout the kingdom and certain positions have been continuously held by one or another family in a sort of political "musical chairs."

Since the area was normally part of the old Lao kingdom of Vientiane, the grand patriarch is in His Excellency Prince Souvanna Phouma, General of Laos, who frequently visits Kengkok and has his residence and mansion in the east part of town. He without doubt wields a considerable amount of power and is regarded with fond respect and awe by a number of the traditional families only in that he is married to a daughter of the Shomphouakd, family.

The foremost family is the widely-known Foremanphong family, the descendants of Phat Inveriangsak. Their ancestral home is in the northwest section of Vientiane - an area of some 2000 acres. They have large land-holdings in the vicinity. This is their present

*Spelled, in addition, "Phaxiengphong" *
 ** by alternate generations

the socio-political hierarchy is Luam Inxienengai, present Minister of Education and Deputy Prime Minister of Laos.

Ranking a close second to the Inxienengais is the Somphephakdy family, who trace their history back to King Somphephakdy, the King of Laos's nephew. Their sons and son-in-laws are in various posts of honor and military positions. They include, in addition to the present Minister of Education, the Representative from Savannakhet, Representative from Vientiane, and King of Kengkak, a former Chief of State of Laos.

A third family, somewhat lesser in traditional prominence is the Haisithithedeth family. The head is Thao Toum, whose name is listed in the book of King of Kengkak, Siam. Thao Toum is a vigorous, energetic, and somewhat widely respected and powerful person. His family relationships and positions are exemplified by the fact that he is the father of Representative Yoon, PAR Colonel Haisith of Siam, the former Chief of Kengkak, father-in-law to the Chief of State of Laos (Phoukdy) and father-in-law to a sister of General Phoukdy. He is also the father of Lu Agricultural Research. He is younger brother of the former Chief of State of Laos, and more distantly related to other members of the family.

Certain incomplete family trees, given in the text, show some of the inter-relationships, military and civilian, and the geographical extent of the families of Kengkak.

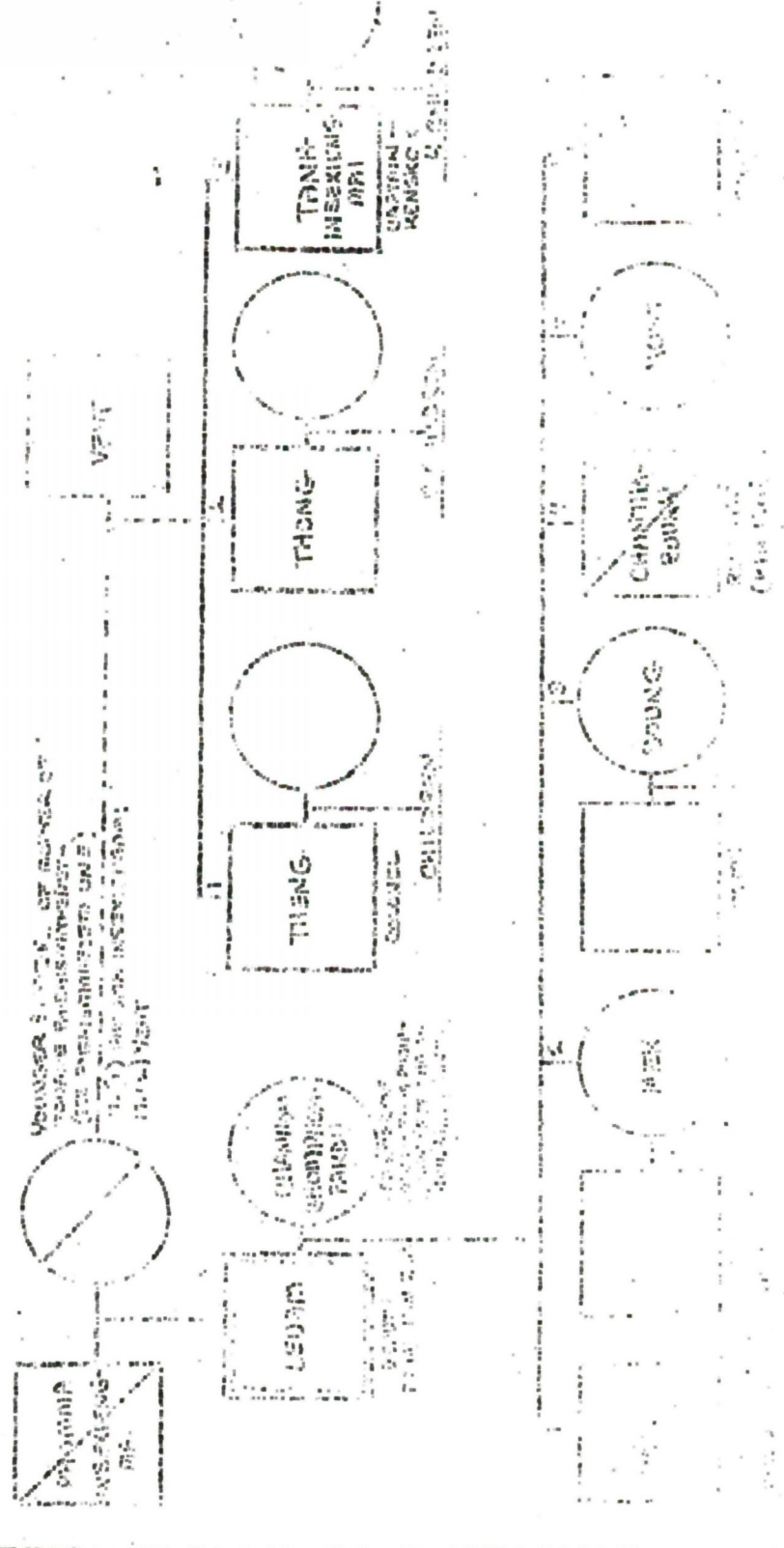
Description of the town

The town of Kengkak today is a pleasant surprise. It is a small population center at its finest in Laos. The town is situated on the west, over a good dirt road from Savannakhet, with the road leading to the right and overgrown roads leading away to the left and right hill side of Kengkak. One passes the temple of the town, the field and the large central market, before a large number of wooden houses into the end of a charming little village with large, gnarled trees. At one end of the street a large market, the old market was stood, the terraces of the town, and down shady lanes; at the other end the plastered walls of the wall of Kengkak's main wall and face wall, and a bridge across the street. This road continues north past the town to the ford across the Nam Ouay river, where the road ends. One sits in the shade of the trees and old houses and...

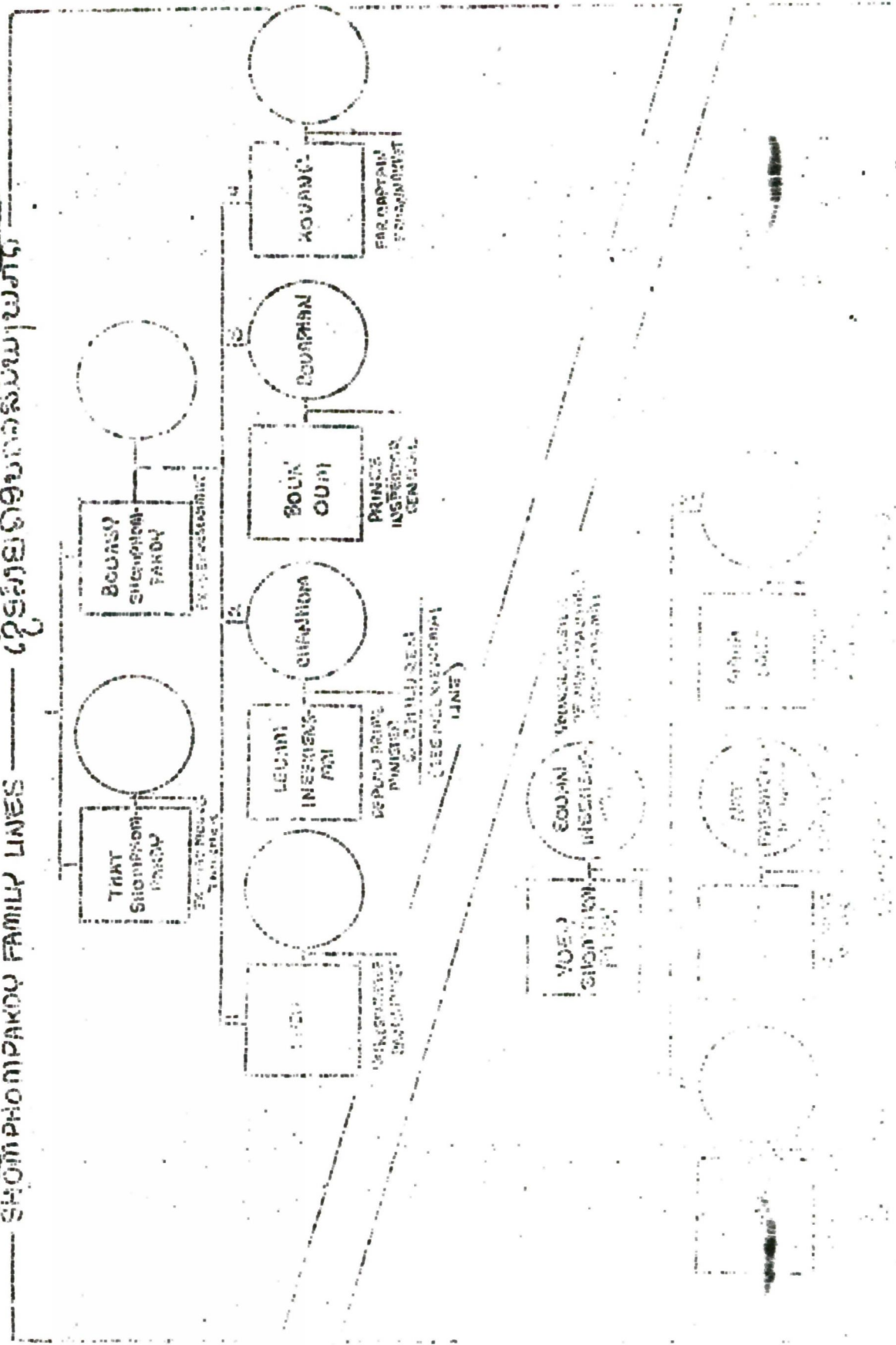
Variations in spelling include "Kengkak" and "Kengkak".

* The name is spelled "Kengkak" in the text.

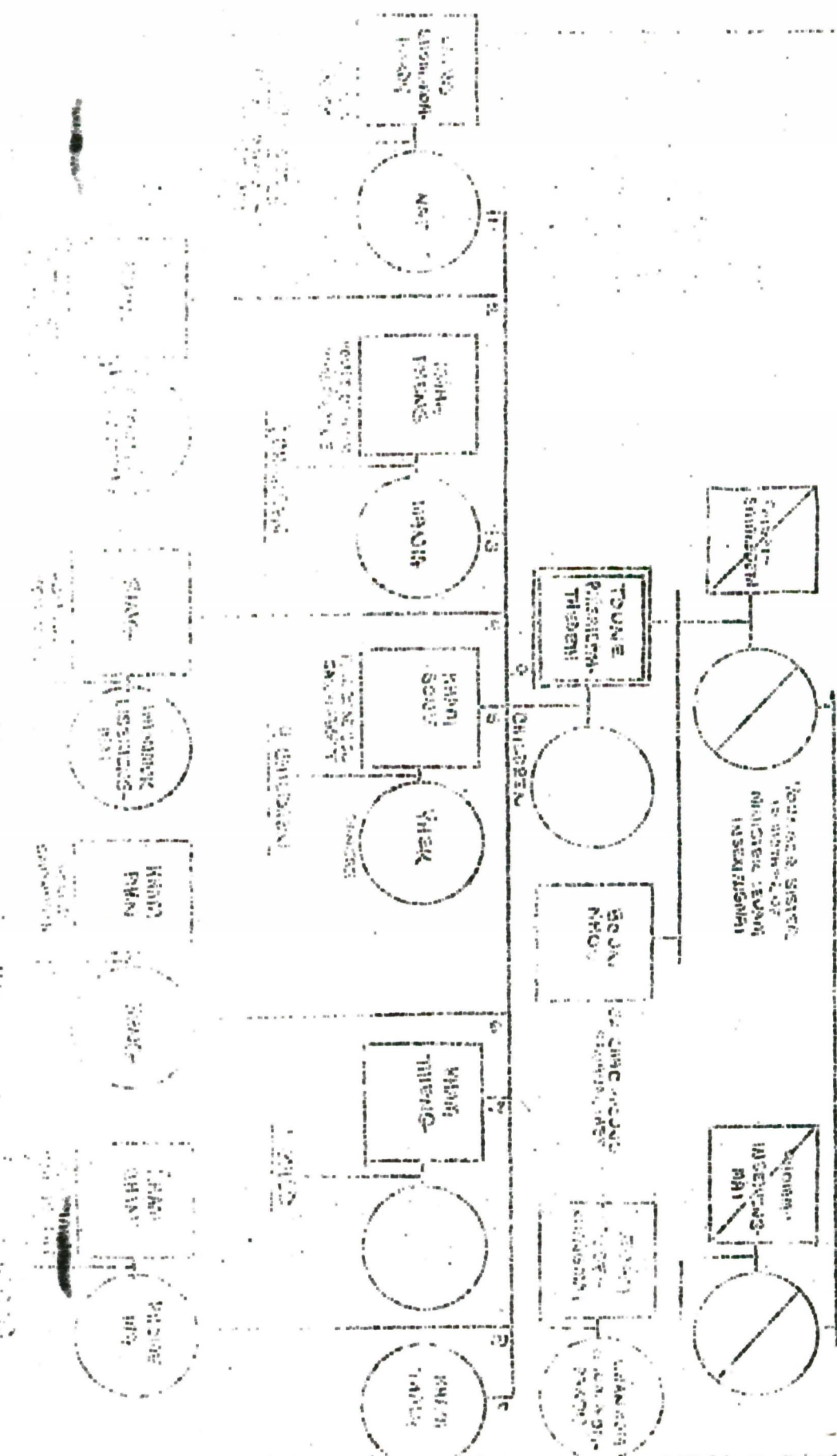
FAMILY LINE OF LEUM INSENIENGMAL - *Qe'eha, Mese, Busay, ...*



SHONPHOMPAKOU FAMILY LINES ———— ខ្ញុំស្រឡាទាមកាល់សិរីរាជ្យ



FAMILY LINE OF TASENG TOUANE PAISAI SITHI THEDETH *တေဉ်ဂေဝ်းတေဉ်ဂေဝ်း*



The Chan Mung's office sits further in town, at the end of a long grassy block. Four old French stucco buildings, the primary school and the RLG rural dispensary, occupy some of this area, but they may some day be removed, leaving a long town mall with a new community center and basketball court at the end towards the center of town.

The lokban or "center" of Kengkok sits at one side of the hill, bordered in behind the house of Tasseng Toano. Formerly a simple wooden post marked the spot, and officials made to this the libation ceremonies of the spirits of the town. A large concrete monument was constructed several years ago by cement workers from Ban Talet. Their efforts created a squat obelisk with Pali religious writing on its four sides. At each corner of the base stands a statue, realistically painted, with shiny glass eyes, of animals of Kengkok legend: a white ox, wild bull, water buffalo, and a cow, with a large lizard mounting steps to one side. Four snakes rear their heads from the backs of the animals; their tails are linked above the obelisk to support a basil bowl which in turn holds a book of Buddhist scripture.

Two large natural ponds lie to the northwest and southeast of town; homes of Prince Boun Oun and Minister Lavan face one pond. Operation Brotherhood hospital lies in a small woods at the east end of town. There is another small woods south of town, flanked by a demonstrable farm, now largely run to grass, and agricultural offices. The American missionaries Lee live near this and work at a Christian church located in a small congregation, primarily Lao Theryng.

The population of Kengkok in 1968 included 4,226 persons in four villages: Kengkok Noua (1,076), Kengkok Tai (1,429), Kengkok Long (1,091) and Ban Dong Wong Khung (330) which was originally a separate village but now being absorbed into Kengkok since the new town is built out on the hill. Of these 4,226, 65 (about 1.5%) were foreigners, the largest of the foreign groups is Chinese, with 52. There are also 10 Filipinos, all with Operation Brotherhood Hospital. Some French teachers with the college, and two American missionaries work with the Mission Evangelique. Strangely, considering the large Vietnamese population in Savannakhet, there are no Vietnamese living in Kengkok.

Commercial Activity

Commercial businesses in Kengkok are concentrated along the main cross-streets in the center of town, shaded by huge Albizia trees which bear seed pods like miniature herzog rifles. In hot days these pods burst, showering a rattle of seeds on shrubs and the people. Here there are general stores selling a wide array of consumer commodities from Thailand, Japan, and Hong Kong, in addition to such local products as rice, charcoal, candies, matches, cigarettes, shoes and hats.

imported goods include kerosene, bolts of cloth, sewing machines, sewing materials, soap and toothpaste, writing materials, umbrellas, powdered soap, paint, nails and bolts, lanterns, bicycles, tools, plow points, rubber sandals, and similar household items. More expensive items include colored goods, soft drinks, radios and watches.

More specialized shops include several barber shops and hair dressing establishments, a few open-air barbershops, a radio repair shop, a bicycle maker's, a small rice mill, a bicycle repair shop, a shoe repair shop, several small fruit stands, and an enterprising shop that sells lanterns, solar lamps, gas, and oil for use in motor vehicles.

There are two noodle shops and several smaller shops. One is the largest noodle shop, featuring Chinese-style dishes, soups, soft drinks and beer, and a limited variety of dried goods.

Fresh fruit, vegetables, meat, and some prepared foods (such as phoan and Vietnamese egg rolls) are sold daily from small stalls in the market, open from early morning until just after noon. Pigs and chickens are slaughtered in the open on the same day that the meat is sold.

The major merchants are Chinese; the earliest of these came to the town as far back as 1919. Chinese-Lao relations are good, but there is a feeling where in that the Chinese are the merchants, with a higher standard of living than the Lao villager, emphasizing education for their children with a reputation for driving hard bargains and taking advantage of the expense of the buyer. The fact that the largest rice mill is located just outside town, contributes to export and a limited amount of rice does not impress people as much as the fact that the village, which came from somewhere else, settled down and hearkened away from the mill but from a general store, raising pigs and chickens in other ways. A second merchant was logging trucks which came from from Sawankhet sawmills to outlying villages.

While the food at the noodle shop of a Chinese is superior to the coarse food of an uneducated Lao villager, the second has a great preference for the food that it is Lao-owned and operated.

There is no official association of Chinese merchants, but the leading merchants represent the group that is represented on occasion by officials and politicians and expected to contribute financially to community projects.

* A very poor reference report on commerce of a town in a province made by Smith, R. Stafford, "Visits to the Province of Laos, a Province in Southern Laos," 1957/58, p. 10.

All merchants appear to be taxed monthly and yearly by the government, although specific statistics on the amounts and income were not available.

Transportation between Savannakhet and Kengkok, for both commercial goods and passengers, is primarily provided by a series of small bus lines. Goods are occasionally brought in by chartered trucks, but small amounts, escorted by a member of the merchant's family, appear to account for most of the items put up for sale. During the seasonal export of such products as rice and watermelons, many trucks make the trip to Savannakhet, and these may return with large amounts of commercial goods. The close proximity of Kengkok to Savannakhet does not require the merchant to keep large inventories of goods since he can readily obtain more. Stock on hand is adequate for periods of several weeks in most cases. During a recent cholera scare in Savannakhet, when movement of people and vehicles was severely curtailed, the main items which quickly disappeared from stocks or were in short supply were soap, matches, and soft drinks, which are perishable and/or fast moving items. Some other items (i.e. candy bars made in Savannakhet) disappeared within a short time, but were not missed as such.

Bus cargo rates are three kip per kilo (roughly \$1.00 per 2 pounds) for heavy items such as bagged rice, and four or five kip for lighter but bulky cargo such as eggs, cloth, clothing, handbags, etc. Rates may vary according to vehicle, cargo being shipped, and personal relationships established between bus drivers and shippers.

Bus passenger fare to Savannakhet is posted as 170 kip, but normally 200 kip is paid. The extra 30 kip charge is explained as a surcharge for being picked up or dropped off elsewhere than at the Savannakhet or Kengkok terminal points, however, it was stated that government officials or police might upon request be given the 170 kip posted rate, which indicates that the price might be set by the government. There are less than twenty private or government passenger vehicles in Kengkok, and villagers do not hesitate to ask for free rides with regular payment to Savannakhet.

The "Kengkok Association"

One of the most unusual aspects of Kengkok is the existence of a large and well-organized public service organization, somewhat akin to a 'Lion's Club' or 'Junior Chamber of Commerce.' This is the "Kengkok Samphon Vathanattam" (ສັນຖານສັນຖານສັນຖານ) which can be translated as the "Association of Bringing Together Culture/Progress of Many Characters."

This homegrown association, strongly featured by Minister Isuan Inso-kiengmai, has come about partially because, as one member noted, "Kengkok has a lot of people who've been educated abroad." The constitution and bylaws have been laid out along western lines and meetings are conducted in approved parliamentary fashion.

Basic purposes of the association are to support and aid members at times of need and to develop Kengkok. "Aid" comes through direct help and financial assistance of members as needed. This has included direct assistance to a member after his home burned down. Occasional financial grants are made to further the education of members' children. Aid development includes some community planning and securing of funds for public projects such as utilities, educational and health institutions.

A typical meeting, in March, 1969, had such items on the agenda as plans for Lao New Year festivities, a festival being held at a local school, progress in constructing a community basketball court, the need of a city slaughterhouse and the need for a morgue at the OB hospital. (On the last item, representatives of the association visit and help when there is a death in a member's family. In cases where gravesites at the hospital, it is impossible to leave the body in the ward, yet Lao custom - and transportation problems - do not permit retaining the body here for the wake and cremation preparations. Hasty burials have been arranged in several cases.)

The June meeting noted a contribution of \$10 and a request for a \$1000 donation for refugees in Xieng Khouang, a report from the OB hospital on activities sponsored by the association, and a request from the OB hospital that the association take over sponsorship of the 'clubhouse' library.

Members include nearly all government officials, school teachers, police, some military men, and area natives, physicians, and women. A number of women are members; a "Kengkok Women's Association" is being formed as an auxiliary organization. (President and vice-president are both of the Chao Mueang and a representative.) Membership appears to be almost wholly Lao: a Chinese-Lao member is considered "Lao" since his wife and children are Lao. It has been reported that the association has branches in each of the major cities of Laos: Vientiane (about 100 members), Luang Prabang, Savanakheth, Pakse, Saravane, and Champasak.

Financial support for the association comes first through dues of 50 kip per month, although many members appear to be overpaid in arrears. The greater part, however, comes through contributions from members - 20,000 kip from Minister Loum for the general treasury, a sizeable sum from a Savannakhet official for the purchase of athletic shoes for the soccer team, and 300,000 kip from General Vangpou for the college construction program. The treasurer keeps records and makes a periodic financial report to the members.

The "Kengkok Association" is a most remarkable development in Laos. It represents a considerable step forward in community organization and self-aid efforts. The organization is growing, solving problems, and taking on new responsibilities. The focus of projects within the Champhone itself, coupled with the widespread membership, has reinforced family and regional ties requiring attention to an unexpected bond, and implies the building of a strong regional political bloc.

Education

The primary education system based in Kengkok constitutes a small empire for the Primary School Inspector, Siphong Chamsavong, with some 11,830 pupils in 182 villages scattered throughout five provinces. A number of the 290 teachers are provisional "UBEC" teachers, who have had a few years of schooling, who are located by villagers and put on the government payroll at a token 1,500 kip (US \$3) per month. These UBEC schools are open from 7-12 A.M.; the teacher usually spends the afternoon as a farmer. Regular teachers teach four hours in the morning and four in the afternoon.

There has been a remarkable increase in the number of schools available, due to NIG support and USAID assistance. There were only six schools - Soudaires - schools with six grades - in the area when the present PFI took the job in 1965. There are now 15. USAID activities from 1964 to 1969 included the construction of more than 70 schools, many of which were new schools but generally to replace dilapidated old structures. In many cases, due to the rapidly-expanding student population, the old structures were patched up and used alongside the new ones to help cope with the overflow of students. With an increase in graduates from the teacher training institutions in Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Houayxay, and Savannakhet, the number of teachers increased to 290 in 1969.

370 sixth-grade students passed the final examinations in 1969 and received certificates. Perhaps 70 of these will continue their education in higher institutions - the rest will become farmers, merchants, teachers, or housewives.

An educational-assistance program at the local level was started in January, 1967, with the founding of the "Soudaire Parents' Association" (Soudaire PARENTS ASSOCIATION) or "Association of Pupils' Parents". The operation of this American FTA without the teacher involvement was a significant development.

290 in urban Kengkok. Dues are 100 kip per couple per year, and most, if not all parents of schoolchildren are automatically included. The president is ex-Representative Chiem Pagsayavong. Meetings are held to discuss building needs and to solicit funds for school repairs. Currently, with 29,000 kip in the association treasury, 74,000 kip is being sought for repair of a 3-room building in the Kengkok Group School.

A series of village associations for school maintenance and repair exist on a more informal basis throughout the district, "one everywhere there is a school." Assistance on school repair projects or construction of new classrooms is frequently requested by the villagers or teachers through the Chao Muang and/or the PSI, who forward such requests to USAID. Most projects of this sort require merely 30-50 bags of cement for a school floor, some hinges, locks, and nails, plus supervision, which is increasingly being furnished by employees of the Consulate for Foreign Affairs assigned to the Chao Muang.

In secondary education, Kengkok has the College in Kengkok, constructed in 1965-66. Two French and four Lao teachers provide a three-year course to about 150 students. Tentative expansion plans are to provide a four-year diploma by adding four more rooms to the present four-room structure, and complete it as a college. The Royal Government has allotted several million kip for construction, and the "Kengkok Association" is seeking additional funds.

The "Kengkok Association" is also contemplating an official request to USAID and the Ministry of Education for a comprehensive high school to be based in Kengkok. The Fa Ngum school, the first such comprehensive Lao-language high school, was established by USAID in Vientiane and teaches both an academic curriculum and practical arts such as agriculture, Home Economics, and crafts. Success of this school has led to proposals for five additional schools, the first at Nam Song. The establishment of such a school in Kengkok, in the event that it is able in the realm of possibility, would be a definite step toward a new education.

Health

Curative health facilities in Muong Chaphone are better than those for most rural areas, but preventive programs are still limited.

A Lao state dispensary was established in Kengkok in 1964. It now consists of three old buildings near the center of the town, under the supervision of a Lao Infirmary Chief and a staff nurse. The ward, under an arrangement with Operation Extension of Benefits, is for tubercular patients, since there is no isolation of contagious cases in the hospital. Drugs for these patients are supplied by the government. Midwives are reported as being stationed at the village of Ban Nam, Ban Talo, Ban Lao Mat, and Ban Sang Nong. Health centers are also located at Ban Sakhan Kham.

Operation Brotherhood of Health, and was established and operated by the Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Bangkok in January, 1961, as an OB medical hospital staffed by a team of OB hospital, under contract with the staff and facilities of the Ministry of Health. The first small building was constructed of five concrete and masonry structures on the site. The facilities include a 25-bed ward, with all necessary services, delivery rooms, X-ray department, clinical laboratory, and patient and dietary services. In addition, public health services at the OB hospital involve regular weekly visits to the nearby villages.

The eight-man OB Pharmacy team includes two pharmacists, a nurse, a dentist, medical technologist, and fiscal agent. The fiscal agent, paid by the RUC, works in close cooperation with the head of the OB doctor. The Lao staff includes practical and auxiliary nurses and technicians trained by Operation Brotherhood of Health.

Five outlying dispensaries were established by USAID Public Health Division at the height of the cluster program, in Ban Si Thuang, Ban Na Thoui, Ban Pak, Ban Houat Sai, and Ban Phoua Thong. Locations of these dispensaries received USAID medical supplies, and are on the health map roll. They give basic medical care and send patients, if necessary, on in to Bangkok to OB for more extensive treatment. USAID supplies all equipment and medicines. The village health centers at Ban Na Thoui and Ban Pak are slated for USAID renovation and replacement in late 1969; a new activity plan is being developed for a building at Ban Si Thuang. A dispensary built by villagers at Ban Phoua Thong in 1965, since it was never planned, was never stocked and is not stocked.

Preventive health programs have included a malaria control program by the RUC and the World Health Organization. Spraying of sprayed homes in Bangkok and surrounding villages was conducted in 1958, and 1962. The program has been discontinued. Malaria immunization is taken by the RUC dispensary. After a major outbreak in northern Thailand in mid-1969, cases were confirmed in Bangkok. A joint conspiracy effort was made with the participation of the OB hospital, RUC and USAID dispensary personnel, and local health officials, to contain possible spread of the disease and to vaccinate as many people as possible. Roadblocks and check points were set up to prevent persons traveling to and from Bangkok and to vaccinate persons until most persons in Bangkok and the border area had been vaccinated.

American Assistance Programs

After a United States Operations Mission was set up in Laos in the mid-fifties, a number of assistance projects were carried out in Savannakhet province. No records remain and it is not now known which projects were carried out in Muong Champhone: a single 1959 chart prepared at the USOM Rural Development Division listed 67 rural self help projects in the entire province. These included 32 schools, two dispensaries, seven wells, sixteen trails, and ten community centers. To meet cash, strength, cash and commodity grants were made to HIG officials who applied them to the projects. USOM personnel occasionally visited the area.

The Kengkok "Cluster" program was initiated in 1953 as one of the three areas under the USAID "Cluster Village" program. Development emphasis under this was placed on selected economic and social "clusters" of ten to forty villages. American and Lao personnel based in each village could work throughout the entire area to provide maintenance development from a concentrated input of personnel and equipment.

IVS Activities

A five-man team from International Voluntary Services, Inc. moved to Kengkok in 1953. This included Richard Gardner (Team Leader), John A. Zig (Agriculture), Phillip Buschler and Bob Lowan (Construction, engineering, surveying) and Carol Falk (Home Economics). Later Doris Murphy (Public Health) joined the team.

The IVS programs in Kengkok formed the nucleus around which all USAID cluster activities were based. The team worked under the leadership of the IVS Chief-of-Party in Vientiane and in direct cooperation with the Area Coordinator based in Savannakhet. Programs covered agriculture, health and school construction, teaching of home economics and public health.

Kurtzig worked with HIG agricultural men to set up a demonstration area where crops could be tested. Pig pens were built, the first of their kind. Stock brought in and distributed to farmers, and a water pump installed. A windmill was installed on a drilled well to provide water for irrigation and gardens. USAID also constructed a community health center which became the HIG/IVS training center and office.

Carol Falk worked with HIG Home Economics agents in the area program and her assistant, Laddie, established excellent relationships with the women in improving local weaving and seeking assistance from HIG in Vientiane for increased production.

Buschler and Lowan taught villagers the method of digging wells with concrete well rings. USAID and HIG also built and equipped a number of schools, both wood frame and corrugated metal. These were at first largely experimental as far as the concrete well rings were

and got into full swing only after the arrival of IVS'er Frank Bawtie, an experienced construction man, who organized and perfected the building technique later used elsewhere in the country. Six soldiers from a US Civic Action worked with him on construction. The buildings had a very favorable impact, were fit for long service, and villagers readily learned the skills necessary. As experience was gained an earnest self-help campaign, FWD technicians began to backstop additional schools and clinics modified to allow villagers a greater self-help input. In 1967, USAID adopted the policy of requiring villagers to furnish all the building

The "Team" aspect of IVS was one which had been developed to meet the needs of development at that time. As USAID expanded its operations and provided equipment and commodities to various provinces, officials gained skill in their areas, and as rural areas developed, IVS "teams" were gradually replaced by a group of local men assigned to areas of neediness. The group of IVS men who served as team members completed their tours, went home, and were replaced. Wade Chubbuck replaced Kurtzig for work in a general area, and was replaced by IVS'er Jerry Nell in 1967. Other personnel were placed with a man and wife team was assigned to Kengkok in 1967 but remained only several weeks before resigning.

The "Cluster Program"

Beginning in 1965, a succession of USAID Community Development workers were assigned to Kengkok to direct cluster planning and activity. They were:

- (1) Paul D. Larson (April - September 1965)
- (2) Jim Kraus (1965-1966)
- (3) Jack (Jacob) Billman (January - November 1966)
- (4) Frank Gillespie (November 1966 - October 1967)
- (5) Galen Beery (February - July, 1969)

Larson, hired as a contract employee, worked in Kengkok for a year in Savannakhet. His main job was to familiarize himself with the area, develop local relationships, and organize activities which were already underway. He worked directly with the villagers. His assistant was assigned to an administrative post in Kengkok. At the time his tour ended, he reported improved relationships and a number of self-help projects to be completed through June, 1966.

The Kengkok "Cluster" program reached its zenith during the tenure of CDAA's Jim Kraus and Jack Billman. As Cluster Manager, Jim Kraus developed plans for projects, secured funds, and organized the work to it that projects were carried out. With the arrival of Billman from Savannakhet, the cluster became a major self-help project. Projects - schools, dispensaries, and agricultural projects.

Agriculture work - a swine distribution program, a dairy demonstration farm, and several vegetable gardens. The program tried out in the initial stages of the self-help program. It was found to needs of specific farmers at the local level. If such were not needed

Construction programs boomed, with schools, a community/multipurpose building, and completion of the Kengkok police station. Health and sanitation improved as USAID set up new dispensaries and stocked them with medicines and medical supplies, new wells were dug, and four drilled wells were put in. Villagers produced water-seal toilets.

Training included aid to military civic action teams, agricultural mechanic training courses, and training for five men from the Committee for Rural Affairs, in Vientiane. A cluster newspaper was published to help the villager at the local level aware of the potential and progress of the cluster program, and to bring him news of the kingdom.

Emphasis of the cluster program began to shift in 1965, probably as a result of heavy concentration on physical projects such as schools, wells, roads, and dispensaries. The Inter-Agency (IAG) Working Group ("Cluster") Coordinating Committee, set up to coordinate all cluster programs, recommended a new concentration on (1) training, (2) agricultural development for economic growth, and (3) preparation of the clusters throughout Laos for eventual takeover by the HVA. As an embassy official noted:

"In evaluation of cluster programs, it would be more meaningful to report changes in villager attitudes and the willingness to assume responsibility for projects than the current almost exclusive emphasis on construction of schools, wells, and water-seal privies, and on breeding and vaccination projects such as pig stock. More questionable programs - like wood-saw projects and the school milk program - should be played down or abandoned. Concentration can then be placed on encouraging local handicrafts (like weaving at Kengkok) and small industries... to increase villager income so where one can buy his own piggy and milk, he wants them."

While Kengkok and other "clusters" throughout Laos are still known by this designation, it is evident that the "cluster program" has since peaked and passed. With spreading of "forward areas" and the growth of "forward areas," there has been a gradual dismantling of programs in the old "cluster" perimeters in favor of new programs in general, where they are needed.

USAID programs throughout Savannakhet province were particularly restricted during the 1967-1968 dry season because of frequent attacks on persons and projects. An IVS'er, Fred Chapman, was killed north of Doug Heng. The CDAA there, Jack Herxleben, was wounded and fled to Lahouan. In April, 1968, PL troops entered Lahouan, and he and his wife fled, and ransacked his house and village before fading back into forests to the south.

Frank Gillespie, a former Education Advisor, leaves Laos in 1967 and lived in Kengkok with his wife and children. He had their house on the outskirts of town when the PL entered in 1968.

who riddled the building with bullets while Gillispie and his family huddled on the balcony floor. No one was hurt. The PAVN moved on without encountering local military or police opposition. Gillispie and Jerry Wolf, who lived in a house nearby, were in Savannakhet thereafter worked in Kengkak only on a visiting basis. With the exception it was noted, the houses of every American GDA in Kengkak or elsewhere in Savannakhet city had been attacked. Gillispie and Wolf were aware that local authorities had not counterattacked, and the situation had drawn wide publicity. Various government elements in Kengkak were also aware over what they feel were charges that they should be held responsible. It appears clear that this was not so. The groups, including the PAVN, engaged small PL units north of the town, and several hundred of them during the rainy season.

Programs from this time were restricted to some extent to the remaining IVS'er elements from Savannakhet. During this period, the PAVN harassed Lahanna, and two GDAs of Lahanna, John H. Brock and Barney Chessin, stayed at Kengkak at night for safety.

Gillispie went on home leave in October, 1963, and shortly thereafter to Viet-Nam. Two HQ Field Assistants, Vichien and Saphong, handled daily operations in Kengkak; Vichien later went to Thailand for training, and Saphong ran the program.

In February, 1964, GDA Galen Beery was transferred from Savannakhet to Savannakhet, with responsibility for Kengkak. He first intended to move back into Kengkak. Beery's work involved reorganizing and giving a fresh look at the program, which had become somewhat overgrown. Thirty activity plans which had been approved, only sixteen of which completed. Four more were written to cover uncompleted projects, and an unofficial memorandum declared, while completion of other projects was emphasized. Bell's contract expired during this time, and he went off working in the area. By the time Beery left, most of the planned work was continuing or several months behind schedule, and the program postponed due to not enough transportation facilities and other related problems.

In reevaluating the Kengkak "cluster" program, it appears that more emphasis has been placed on "cluster" programs to give evidence of American/RGO interest in the village level. An infrastructure survey which future programs can be based on was completed in 1964 and July, 1969. 30 activity plans and several other projects were approved. (See Appendix B) They show a total budget of \$1,000,000, including 71 classrooms, a community library, a health center, a police station, 65 dog walls, a dispensary, 30 agricultural training, agriculture, breeding and other programs.

* A number of these projects are not complete, and some of them have been postponed pending the next day. The details of these projects in both schools and in the community are given in Appendix B and details on various of Appendix B are

US Military Civic Action Effort

Indications are that military civic action activities in the mountain provinces have been among the most successful of these programs. An example is the leader in Savannakhet and Khammouang provinces, Colonel Naphot Daohuang, from Ban Thachong, who received much military experience and know-how working with the U.S. Army, supported the MAAG program from 1959 through 1962. This MAAG program provided training for soldiers trained in such fields as agriculture, medical, religious, educational, who were assigned to villages where they were doing work on community projects.

The MAAG program continued after American military forces left the country, in 1962, and was soon discontinued. It was soon discontinued when the soldiers were redeployed. The USAID initiated similar civic action programs, providing training for soldiers at USAID centers at Nong Phouk, Laos, and providing them on a per diem basis, and stationing them at various locations. Funds were originally secured from Kengkok Activities. More recently some were secured under Savannakhet AP's.

The "Teams of Six" concept reappeared in 1956 when General Naphot, head of FAR Groupe Mobile 18, set up Civic Action teams. These were primarily in the fields of construction and engineering, and provided specific but unplanned benefits to projects in the area. When all the needed schools, they cut logs in public forests, which were used to build a sawmill set up at Ban K-35, and the lumber was used for school construction. Excellent wooden school buildings were erected at Ban Ngok, Ban Teud, and other villages. Naphot's teams, with U.S. assistance, constructed a complete fish-breeding station at Ban Dong, a small lake west of Kengkok, where the G.M. was stationed. Much of the lumber used to repair roads. Six men or more helped IVN's French troops to build cement block schools.

The Civic Action teams had a very good record in their projects, the populace, with goodwill fostered by the good work done, reciprocated through active support of the MAAG program, and countering enemy efforts. However, when a few years ago the FAR, the Groupe Mobiles were disbanded and soldiers assigned to other units.

Presently, a number of Civic Action soldiers are working on projects on a per diem basis, with funds provided by the MAAG. The sawmill, lying idle at K-35, is still being used by the MAAG and be reactivated for future projects with a little help with engine parts and truck tires and gasoline.

CRA Development

A long-time goal of the USAID Rural Development Division has been the establishment of a corps of Lao government cadres who can work with villagers on rural development projects. The RIG (Ministry of Rural Affairs) has employed an increasing number of young Lao men as "CRA Village Workers." Remnants of an earlier and generally less successful program, Fundamental Educators (employed under the Ministry of Education), were integrated under the CRA in 1967. Training both in Thailand and at Ban Amone training center in Vientiane has supported by USAID.

Five CRA workers, assigned to Kengkok in 1967, have previously been working in the villages on the type of projects formerly carried out by IVS'ers and their assistants. They have been able to establish a satisfactory working relationship under the Chao Huong, and organized and assisted villagers on Activity Plans on dug wells, watermills, school, school-dispensary construction. By 1969, the dug well program was left completely up to the CRA men in Kengkok. They received technical assistance from the CDAA and vehicle transportation and consultation by the USAID Field Assistant. In Jan., 1969, as work went down due to the rainy season, they went to Vientiane for a two month training course.

The CRA men in Kengkok provide a ready and adaptable corps of men able to work in local situations at the village level. In order, they must remain an integral part of all future programs in the area. It appears, however, as if their usefulness will be seriously curtailed unless the local government, the Commission for Rural Affairs, and the can continue support and assistance for them, primarily in financing transportation and vehicles, and commodity input for self help projects. USAID help in furnishing bicycles and motorcycles, and repair for these vehicles, has been cut off even though the CRA has not yet taken up a program. The CRA men in Kengkok will be reduced to local activity within a limited radius unless there is a change in plans. Repair of a motor jeep to the Chao Huong will help somewhat, but USAID PD also has declined not to support repair of this, and the RIG has not yet provided funds for repair and maintenance in the budget.

Agriculture

The history, progress and potential of agricultural development in the Kengkok area deserves special attention. The present status of the area is limited since the author was involved primarily in rural extension and construction projects and planning.

Agriculture in Muong (Muang) area, as with most of Laos, is based on lowland rice farming, which is expanding due to increased irrigation and availability of improved tools, better seed, and fertilizer. And to USAID Agriculture and the RIG Ministry of Rural Affairs credit for promulgating new ways of thinking to develop lowland agricultural methods.

irrigation of vegetable gardens. Completion of a road running through and joining these villages provided culverts which were blocked so that the roads acted as dams. The survey has indicated that a sizeable dam might be used for water storage if these culverts were rebuilt and improved (they have washed out every year). Farmers to the south are already enjoying dry season rice and expanding their paddies. A total of 200 hectares appears evident. (4) A single pump site on the Nam Bui north of Kengkok could irrigate 20 hectares. A single pump site at Ban Kadan could probably provide water for another 40 hectares.

While large pumps are planned for, it is through the use of small pumps that farmers have pumped water up for small dry-season crops. Over 200 hectares was irrigated in 1968-69 dry season, and more is still being brought in and set up primarily on an individual farmer basis or that of several farmers. These could be termed "small cooperatives" since they involve several farmers (relations or close friends) who develop the idea together, go together to purchase the pump, and farm jointly. Thus, as in areas such as Khamyabouly, one farmer with capital might pay for 75% of the pump cost and take the responsibility of operation, while his co-partners, with less of a financial stake, provide most of the labor. The crop in such a case may be divided on a 60-40 or a 70-30 basis, according to the decision of members of the "small cooperative." While USAID has in the past emphasized development of large cooperatives, these have taken a great deal of time and effort, large contributions of machinery to farmers, and are riddled with community discord and traditional political jockeying and graft. It seems logical to assume that the natural growth of the small cooperatives may lead to mergers of two or three nearby cooperatives, and to the wearing out of the small pumps (giving them a 5-6 year life span) and cooperative purchase of one large pump to do the work of several small ones.

The rice-growing potential of the Khamyabouly area is great. The survey indicates that the area within Muang Chaphou valley is about 200 square kilometers. The northern extension, including the yaihen is an additional 70 square kilometers, and the basin between the paddy land in Muang Outeppou, geographically a part of the same valley area, is around 20 square kilometers. The Muang Chaphou valley paddy area can be estimated at 52 square kilometers. These figures, however, are estimates and undoubtedly a great deal of non-productive land, forested areas, etc., is included, but they do indicate the size of the Muang Chaphou valley's potential. The total area may be the second largest in the region next to the Vientiane plain paddy area.

Vegetables

Vegetable crops, although overshadowed by rice and other crops, deserve consideration. Primary production occurs in the small irrigated areas planted at the end of the rainy season, generally along the banks of the river banks. These are usually small plots and produce vegetables for family needs plus a small amount for market sale.

Forest Products

Timber in the forests near Bengkok has been exploited by the villagers for generations. In many areas it is because of the lack of a road of a size which can be used for horse packs. Villagers must go far into the forests to find such desired woods as oak, or other hardwoods and softer woods.

Several private sawmills in the Savannakhet area appear to be exploiting larger stands of timber along the Savannakhet-Bengkok road. A sawmill owned by Prince Nor Oun at Kilerkay is now a shell and has been closed since the death of Prince Nor Oun several years ago. Another sawmill at Naphet of PVA several years ago. Naphet is still in operation and for a period cut forest logs for sale in the area. The sawmill in the area, as far east as Ban Keng Nyal is now closed. The sawmill broke down in 1957 and has not been up to date.

A portable USAID sawmill was taken into the area in the first half of 1956. Undeveloping stands of timber are to return to the area to continue lumbering operations for schools and dispensaries at Ban Nak, Ban Nathani, K-35, Ban Thant and Ban Thantong.

There are still large stands of timber north of Bengkok which have not been exploited considerably since they lie on the west side of the Champhone River. A new road from Ban Thant to Ban Thantong, with the consideration by USAID, would open up this area.

One merchant in Bengkok owns a logging truck, but this is used only for transporting sawed beams and lumber from Bengkok to the outlying villages for use in construction. Another logging truck was used by USAID for a short period in 1955 to transport logs from Ban Nak and Ban Nak.

The major problem in forest exploitation lies in the fact that private firms should be able to exploit the public forest lands. It appears that in Savannakhet the private companies have made exploitation agreements from the Government. The Government is logging in the public forests.

Roam of the up hill (bank) and by using these to make a hole in the trunk of a tree, burning the hole and allowing the sap to drip into this and burn. The dried wood is used for charcoal kiln for use in making beams and making other products. The wood has practically no potential for further commercial use. The substitutes are available and these large stands of timber are not for timber.

A fruit, the "Savannakhet" has been a very important contribution into the area 20-30 years ago by a large number of the largest trees in Bengkok and other forest products.

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The Future Direction of Kengkok Development Programs

From the history and growth of the development programs in the Kengkok area, it appears that future programs would best be concentrated in the main areas.

1. Road Construction

Leuan Insixiengxai, Deputy Prime Minister, stated to USAID Director Mendenhall in January, 1969, that it would be useful to study the development of roads around the perimeter of Kengkok. His view was that correct construction of all-weather roads into the village areas is largely overlooked part in growth. Where the road goes, the market soon follows, laden with merchandise, and the capital of each village soon begins. Transportation affords a contact with the outside world which makes the villagers aware of local, regional, and national markets, but constantly expanding needs. As needs change, people, attitudes, and static, traditional patterns begun to adapt to meet the changing needs of the twentieth century world.

Construction work should be done on these main routes in order to provide all-weather, year-around access to several more populated parts of Muang Champhone and adjoining districts.

(A) Kengkok - Ban Buang Xang Road - First and most important project in terms of opening up a new area would be to straighten and all-weatherize the road from Kengkok to Ban Buang Xang. The old French road was built very badly. Two bridges are needed: one to span the Xe Champhone river near Kengkok, the other to cross the Xe Xang Xay river at the dry lake. This project would complete the Kengkok road network to the water, to the muong, and provide access for another route across the muong. Its importance is that it would open up Muang Xang, a border area with 13,715 people, to rural development efforts and economic growth.

(B) Ban Taleo - Ban Lamchan Road - This road is a 12-km road from Ban Taleo north about 18 kilometers to Ban Lamchan, passing through or near 12-14 villages which have a total population of 10,000. In addition to ending rainy season isolation of these villages, this road would provide direct and immediate access by road to the border area where Pathet Lac troops and bandits have long since shown their presence.

(C) Ban Nong-Ing - Ban Lamchok Road - A third road would be a road from Ban Nong-Ing south and east some 14 kilometers through a series of small villages to connect with Ban Lamchok, which is a border area with Laotians. Total population of the villages which would be served is around 5,500.

Completion of these three roads is a first step in opening up Muang Champhone and Muang Xang to economic growth. Unfortunately, it appears that USAID road programs are currently limited to work of a more strictly reconnaissance nature in the country. TP work has been programmed to be limited to the

road, but the FP budget for 1970 is reportedly being trimmed, and a decline in operations is expected.

2. Agricultural Development

The second main field for development, given the agricultural base of the economy, is agriculture. Various steps in development are not spelled here, but it is obvious that a continued and increasing emphasis on such programs is vital to the economic growth of the area.

3. Rural Self-Help Projects in Huong Phong

As may be noted from the appendix, very few of the projects which exist under the Kengle cluster program have gone to the benefit of the villagers of Huong Phong. Several school construction projects have been started, and dug wells have been dug, but most have not been completed. An emphasis on completing unfinished projects in Kengle is a major factor is that the Pengich-Kim Long Kang road is extremely poor and must be repaired and rebuilt before good access is possible. Some school construction, however, might be started while road construction is in progress.

While the areas above are those where the greatest development is needed, actual programs must depend on a host of other factors. The first of these is the future direction of the "clusters" program. "This is a Lao Buddhist proverb, 'As like a cart wheel it moves in the direction it comes.'" And following this axiom, it appears that the Kengle cluster program, after reaching a peak of activity, has been long in the making. There is a need for reevaluation, new decisions, and new direction.

"Clusters", as a term introduced in 1967, "were not intended as an unending U.S. sponsorship and presence to create a permanent dependency." With this in mind, several proposals have been made to provide the necessary authority for several elements to the Commission on International Development (RIG), and to withdraw USAID staff and personnel. The only other element mentioned here has been the Kengle, and the other two.

The clusters were originally developed to

- (a) provide minimal transportation, communication, health, education, and welfare facilities and services, which are commensurate with the needs and which will provide a solid base for personal and community development,
- (b) encourage democratic, representative government, and to strengthen the ability of local government to manage its own affairs and to take action to improve local conditions.

(c) These villages are to be developed as self-sufficient units and should have their own schools and health centers.

The English village is a self-sufficient unit. It has a school, a health center and three other buildings. The village is a self-sufficient unit. It has a school, a health center and three other buildings. The village is a self-sufficient unit. It has a school, a health center and three other buildings.

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To be examined by
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(Note: "Need to obtain
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