

VIETNAM LAOS CAMBODIA



MEDICAL & SCIENTIFIC AID NEWS BULLETIN

www.msavlc.org

Formerly the Medical Aid Committee for Vietnam

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THIS YEAR MSAVLC PROUDLY CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF AID GIVEN TO THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH EAST ASIA.

In June 2015 MSAVLC celebrates 50 years of giving aid to the wounded, the injured, the sick, the poor and the most vulnerable people in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

It was in June 1965 that a meeting was held at the House of Commons where the decision was made to establish the 'Medical Aid Committee for Vietnam'. Founders Dr Joan McMichael and Renee Short MP, had been members of a delegation of 50 British women at the World Congress of Women in Moscow in June 1963. There they met representatives from both North and South Vietnam, and heard from them accounts of the terrible sufferings of the Vietnamese people, in a war which was escalating as a result of greater participation by the United States forces.

The following year Joan McMichael visited Hanoi, where she met a number of doctors and nurses who provided further evidence of the deaths and injuries resulting from the military activity.

On her return to Britain she had discussions with many of her medical and political friends about the ways in which help could be given to the Vietnamese people.

Seventy-four people with interests in the arts, science, medicine, politics, religion, trade unions and the theatre, agreed to become sponsors of a Medical Aid Committee. Three days later a press conference was held at the House of Commons to inaugurate the campaign.

Lord Boyd Orr accepted the office of President, and Professor Dorothy Hodgkin FRS agreed to become the Vice-President. John Rankin MP was elected Chairman and Dr Joan McMichael was elected Honorary Secretary.

The stated aim of the aim of the Medical Aid Committee for Vietnam (MACV) was "to send medical aid to where the bombs were falling and the casualties were highest". At the time that was the National Liberation Front areas in the south, and the first consignment of medical supplies, antibiotics, was sent to



A little girl wounded by U.S. steel pellet bombs during the December 7th raid on Ky Lam village Ky Anh district, Ha Tinh province.

A picture from one of MACV's earliest Bulletins. The caption reads: "A little girl wounded by U.S. steel pellet bombs during the December 7th raid on Ky Lam village, Ky Anh District, Ha Tinh Province."

It was the terror and hardship suffered by the brave Vietnamese people that prompted the founders to set up the charity.

the Liberation Red Cross in November 1966. Shortly after, the Committee sent an artificial Lung Respirator to help save the lives of people with crush injuries resulting from the escalation of the bombing in North Vietnam. From then on medical supplies and equipment was sent to both South and North Vietnam.

...continued overleaf

It was not long before people all over Britain were giving their support, and by the end of 1965 local committees had been established in many towns.

Specialist committees were established for Finance, Medical, Press and Publicity, Trade Union, Churches, youth and children as news of the war spread. Concerts, exhibitions and film shows were organised, all of which brought in considerable income. In 1967 a Blood Transfusion Unit was established and at many centres throughout the country volunteers gave blood which, after processing, was flown to Vietnam. Within six years of the establishment of the charity, 6,567 pints of blood had been sent to help injured Vietnamese people.

In February 1969 the idea was put forward to build and equip a hospital near the 17th parallel, and a special British Hospital Committee was set up to organise the finance and its construction. Many problems had to be overcome, but the British Friendship Hospital in Ky Anh, Ha Tinh Province, was officially opened in September 1980 by Dr Joan McMichael. At this ceremony the Medical Aid Committee was presented with the Vietnamese Order of Friendship.

During the Vietnam War MACV's support included medicines, medical equipment, books and journals, blood, food and clothing. When the war ended the Committee had expected to gradually close down, but they found that support was needed as much as ever because of the stringent economic embargo imposed by the USA and its allies. This embargo even included medical supplies, and was not fully lifted until the mid-nineties.

It was in 1979, following the liberation of Cambodia from the genocidal Pol Pot regime, that MACV began providing medical aid to the people of Cambodia. The charity decided to change its name to reflect the fact that help was being given to Cambodia and Laos. A new constitution was approved by the Charity Commission and the organisation became Medical and Scientific Aid for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

As well as medicines sent to Laos and Cambodia, MSAVLC began the "Mother and Child Campaign" to give support to midwifery training and post-natal care. The campaign also supported a cervical Cancer Screening Programme in South Vietnam.

1985 saw the charity launch a Campaign for Vietnamese Victims of Chemical Warfare. Soldiers and civilians had been severely harmed by the spraying of toxic chemicals (known as Agent Orange) in Vietnam by the American Forces during the war. Victims, suffering



A public education poster in Thanh Hoa Province. Note our logo, bottom right.

respiratory difficulties and cancers, were helped by the charity, as the perpetrators took no responsibility. It is an ongoing problem for the victims, because birth defects and deformities are passed on to future generations, and the charity is still providing aid for those worst affected, their children and their grand-children.

During visits to South-East Asia the charity's officers became aware of the plight of the many people in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia who had lost limbs, during the wars, or afterwards, due to landmines and unexploded ordnance. In 1991 the charity established an artificial limb project using the 'Jaipur limb', a prosthetic made in Vietnam. Thousands of people benefitted from the fitting of these arms, legs and feet throughout the 1990's. Also at that time the charity established the 'Hare Lip and Cleft Palate' Campaign in Thanh Hoa Province, Vietnam. This birth defect was widespread in the province, due to the effects of the spraying of Agent Orange. Funds were raised and a total 800 children received life-changing operations as a result.

Following this campaign the charity became aware of the problem of trachoma, the commonest form of infective blindness, which was affecting many children in Thanh Hoa Province. MSAVLC was awarded funds by the National Lotteries Board to help deal with this problem through a combination of public education and provision of thousands of face towels.

Ethnic minorities who live in the remote Northern Highlands of Vietnam have benefitted from the charity since 1991. MSAVLC has sponsored courses

run by The Highland Education Development Organisation (HEDO) to train traditional village midwives in modern methods. To date 1,600 midwives have received training. As a result countless mothers and babies lives have been saved in these remote villages.

Some of the charity's more recent projects include:

- Provision of medicines and equipment at the British Friendship Hospital, including equipping a paediatric ward and an intensive care unit.
- Medical equipment for Ha Tinh General Hospital, including incubators and surgical equipment.
- Audiology equipment and training in clinics run by All Ears Cambodia, throughout Cambodia, and in Pakse, in Laos.
- Support and equipment for victims of Agent Orange in two children's residential 'Peace Villages', and in the provision of many wheelchairs.
- Support for street children in an orphanage in rural Cambodia.
- Ongoing support for paraplegics and quadriplegics in Pursat Province, Cambodia.
- Construction of wells and clean water systems in northern Laos.

Over the past 50 years, a total of £3,110,040 has been raised in Britain and sent by MSAVLC to fund our projects in South-East Asia. Re-valued to the present day, that represents over £10.3 million.

It is thanks to you, our generous donors, past and present, that we have been able to help so many of those less fortunate than ourselves.

BERNARD BARRY

We were contacted recently by Rica Bird, who told us that her father Bernard Barry, had sadly passed away in November, last year. Although I never knew Bernard, I gather that he was a lifelong supporter of MSAVLC and a remarkable man. His obituary appeared recently in the Guardian and the Morning Star.

Bernard Barry died in November 2014 in Wirral, Merseyside, aged 94. He was a veteran member of the Communist Party and an active trade unionist.

The only child of poor Jewish working-class parents, Annie, a dressmaker, and Reuben, a glazier, Bernard was born in the Strangeways area of Manchester, and educated at local schools.

At 15 he joined the Youth Front against War and Fascism, becoming a member of the Young Communist League when the two organisations merged. He was an active campaigner in the 1930s against fascism and for Spanish republicans.

Bernard later wrote the booklet 'From Manchester to Spain', about Manchester comrades who volunteered for the International Brigade. This was published in 2009 by the Working Class Movement Library, where Bernard was a voluntary researcher.

Yiddish had been Bernard's first language at home, and he also learned Hebrew. During the second world war, he was posted to North Africa as an interpreter, and used his schoolboy French to communicate with Italian prisoners of war, who in turn taught him Italian.

After the war he worked in a factory, where he was a shop steward for the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers. Bernard then undertook emergency teacher training, rising to be deputy head of Higher Openshaw Secondary School. As housemaster at Birley High School in Hulme, Manchester, from 1967 until 1980, he recruited more than 50 staff to the National Union of Teachers.

Bernard was active in the campaign for peace in Vietnam. He was treasurer of the North-West British-Vietnam Association, which despatched thousands of pounds of relief aid during the war, and he helped raise funds to build the British Friendship Hospital in Ky Anh.

He was the right-hand man for an



Bernard Barry who died in November last year, was a great supporter of MSAVLC

extended period to Jack Askins, and together they helped to establish North-West Britain Medical Aid to Vietnam.

Jack and Bernard were good comrades, and had been for many years since before the Second World War. In the early years of the North West group, Jack often asked for Bernard's help with translating Vietnamese material from French into English. They collaborated together keeping membership records of that group, encouraging and maintaining donations, and running fund-raising activities. Bernard also got to know Dr. Joan McMichael, following her and Jack Askins' marriage. After Jack's death, Bernard continued to work together with Ken Sharples, supporting MSAVLC, in North-West England. In later years he maintained his interest and he still read the Bulletin until 2012, when he began to find the print too small.

After retiring, Bernard expanded his knowledge of languages, learning Russian, German and Spanish. He also passed a computing exam. He volunteered with the WRVS – now called the Royal Voluntary Service – until he was required to stop at the age of 70.

He continued to enjoy outdoor hikes and often joined Kinder Trespass anniversary events. Bernard remained steadfast in his political beliefs throughout his life.

Bernard's first wife, Bertha, whom he married in 1942, was a founding member of her local group of the National Assembly of Women. She died in 1962.

Bernard felt himself lucky to have had a second happy marriage, with Vera, whom he married in 1993. She died in 2011. He is survived by his daughters, Rica and Judith, and three granddaughters, Jo, Emma and Sadie.

Dr Madeleine Sharp MBE

Following the death of our much-loved and sorely missed Joint President in January 2014, many people made donations in her memory. We received an impressive £2,361.80, to which we were able to add Gift Aid on eligible donations, bringing the total amount to £2,744.30. Many thanks to those who contributed.

In May 2014, as announced in an earlier Bulletin, we sponsored a bed in Madeleine's name at the British Friendship Hospital in Ky Anh at a cost of £1,030.

This leaves us with £1,714.30, and the Trustees will now decide where to spend these funds. We will choose one (or more) of the projects Madeleine held dear, and we will keep you all informed via the Bulletin.

John Firth, Honorary Treasurer

"50 YEARS OF AID" CELEBRATION

The Trustees have given some thought recently as to how to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the charity in 1965. We want to include as many of our supporters as possible, and to hold a celebration in London.

The Vietnamese Embassy has very kindly agreed to host the event for us, in the beautiful Churchill Room in the House of Commons in Westminster, on Wednesday 10 June 2015.

The reception starts at 7.00pm and will include drinks, a few short speeches, a buffet supper and an opportunity to meet others who have supported the charity over the past 50 years.

The charity's Vice-President George Howarth MP has helped us hire the room. It promises to be a glittering occasion and dignitaries from South-East Asia, the charity's officers and former officers, Trustees and former Trustees have already agreed to attend, along with some of our long-standing friends, donors, fund-raisers and supporters.

If you, as a supporter of the charity, would like to join us, please contact me,

*The Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam
in the United Kingdom
and the Trustees of MSAVLC*

Invite you to attend a reception to celebrate
"50 Years of Aid"

*On Wednesday 10th June 2015
From 7.00 pm to 10.00 pm*

*In the Churchill Room
The House of Commons
LONDON SW1A 0AA*

Lounge Suits or Traditional Dress

Peter Lidgard as soon as possible, with your name and address; either by telephone: 01242 516134, or by email, thelidgards@hotmail.co.uk

Admission will be by ticket only, and they will be sent out on a first-come first-served basis.

The Trustees do appreciate that some

of our long-serving and loyal supporters will not be able to attend an evening event in London, but we would like to thank you sincerely for your support over the years.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Our Annual General Meeting cannot be held in London this year as the Vietnam Embassy is due to be refurbished. We felt it unnecessary to hire a hall in London to hold the meeting which, at best, attracts less than a dozen supporters.

As most of the Trustees live in Gloucestershire, the Annual General Meeting this year will be held at St Mark's Methodist Church Hall in Cheltenham on Saturday 28th February.

There is adequate parking behind the hall, which is two minutes walk from Cheltenham Spa Railway Station. We are hoping that many of our supporters will be able to attend.

Refreshments will be available.

MEDICAL AND SCIENTIFIC AID FOR VIETNAM, LAOS AND CAMBODIA

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

WILL BE HELD AT

ST MARK'S METHODIST CHURCH HALL
GLOUCESTER ROAD, CHELTENHAM GL51 8PX

AT 2.30 ON SATURDAY 28th FEBRUARY 2015

Everyone welcome.

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