

# **BULLETIN NUMBER 200**

It is almost fifty-five years since MSAVLC was founded, in response to the carnage of the Vietnam War (or the American War as the Vietnamese call it). The Medical Aid Committee for Vietnam (MACV) was established in June 1965 by a group of concerned individuals under the formidable leadership of Dr Joan McMichael and Renee Short MP. The first News Bulletin was published in October 1966 to help raise funds at home and to keep supporters informed of events abroad. Two hundred editions later our mission is still the same.

As a way of celebrating our 200<sup>th</sup> Edition, I thought that readers would be interested in looking back over the past editions of the Bulletin, just to see how far we have come. The charity's collection of old Bulletins from the early days is rather sparse, but I have been able to pick out a number of milestones from past editions which may interest you.

**BULLETIN No. 1** was dated October 1965 and it contained the text of a cable from Vietnam. It was from Professor Ton That Tung, a world-famous surgeon and Vice-President of the Vietnam Red Cross Society, acknowledging the arrival of a 'Barnet artificial breathing machine, anaesthetic apparatus and other equipment requested'. It also reported that the Ambulance purchased by the Printers Movement for Peace had been shipped in September filled with first aid equipment, anaesthetics and blood plasma substitute.



**BULLETIN No. 3** was circulated in April 1967 and contained two eye-witness reports from Dr Phillip Harvey of St Stephen's Hospital, and Martin Birstingl, consultant surgeon at Guy's Hospital, who had been invited to Vietnam as medical experts. Both consultants reported on the numerous casualties they had examined who were suffering from the effects of newly introduced anti-personnel weapons. The Bulletin also reported on the first Exhibition of Contemporary Art, organised by MACV and opened by the Mayor of Camden and John Pilger (one of our Vice-Presidents). It further reported on the first blood donor session held in North London, which enabled the charity to send 56 pints of blood to East Germany, where it was processed

as dried blood plasma, and flown to Vietnam.

**BULLETIN No. 7** Announced in September 1968 that 2,950 pints of blood had been sent to Vietnam, but disturbingly it noted the increased use of phosphorus bombs and delayed-action anti-personnel bombs which looked exactly like oranges. This edition carried five pages of photographs of children burned by napalm and phosphorus bombs (left).

**BULLETIN No. 10** was published in July 1969. The front page proudly announced: £100,000 RAISED FOR MEDICAL SUPPLIES FOR VIETNAM. The inner pages include articles about funds raised by Trade Unions and youth groups and a fundraising social attended by Peter Cook and poet Adrian Mitchell. There were also war reports and an article about Mme Nguyen Thi Binh's visit to Britain, with a picture of her meeting the Bishop of Coventry.

**BULLETIN No. 39** from autumn 1978, reported on the aid given to the newly-liberated Kampuchea. This included three ambulances, equipment for the maternity section of Kampot Hospital and thousands of pounds worth of antibiotics.

**BULLETIN No. 45** Published in February 1980, celebrated the opening of the British Friendship Hospital in Ky Anh by the Honorary Secretary of MSAVLK (Kampuchea), Dr Joan McMichael. Joan had been the driving force behind the concept of building the hospital. The hospital has now been extended considerably, but still recognises her invaluable contribution towards its creation.

**BULLETIN No. 50** was published in February 1982. The front page celebrated the achievements of the charity in providing equipment to hospitals in Vietnam. It included details of a 11,000-signature petition to the European Commission demanding that food aid be sent to Vietnam's hospitals.

**BULLETIN No. 61** appeared in November 1984. Under a title of: **OUR HELP IS NEEDED AS NEVER BEFORE**. The Bulletin gives a harrowing account of 'babies born blind or grossly deformed following exposure to Agent Orange by one or both parents' Editor Joan Mc Michael featured a call by the European Parliament for compensation from the U.S. Government to the Vietnam War Victims. One of the motions sponsors was R. Balfe MEP (Now Lord Balfe, our Vice-President).

**BULLETIN No. 81** published in November 1989 was edited by Professor Ted Shellard. It was devoted entirely to Dr Joan McMichael-Askins, who had died in August 1989. There were tributes to her life and work for MSAVLC written by many of the charity's prominent supporters including Mme Nguyen Thi Binh, then Vietnam's Vice-President.

**BULLETIN No. 100** was published in August 1994 with a picture of a bed endowed in Joan McMichael-Askins' memory at the British Friendship Hospital in Ky Anh. The main article reflected on the progress that had been made by the charity in thirty years, but it also announced funding for a new venture: a £12,000 grant for equipment for the clinic being built at Giao San in Lai Chau Province in Vietnam. Our project partner would be The Highland Education Development Organisation (HEDO) under the direction of Trinh Ngoc Trinh.



*Dr Madeleine Sharp with staff at Ha Tinh Provincial Hospital*

# VIETNAM

## MEDICAL & SCIENTIFIC AID NEWS BULLETIN

**No. 61 November 1984**

**10p**

**OUR HELP IS NEEDED AS NEVER BEFORE**



*School of Midwifery in the Nam Ninh Province*

**BULLETIN No. 149** announced in November 2006 a **RED-LETTER DAY** IN OUR CALENDAR. MSAVLC had moved into the digital age with the launch of the charity's website, which was unveiled at the Annual General Meeting in the Palace of Westminster. Following the AGM the BBC TV "Inside Out" feature, telling of Dr Madeleine Sharp's visit to Vietnam, was shown.

**BULLETIN No. 178** from February 2014 showed a picture of Dr Madeleine Sharp

MBE, who passed away in January that year. Madeleine had been a supporter of the charity since its inception. She was Honorary Secretary between 1987 and 2009 and she was awarded Vietnam's Order of Friendship in 1992.

**BULLETIN No. 182** from February 2015 was the first to be printed in colour. The front page celebrated **50 YEARS OF AID** given to the people of South-East Asia, in bold red print. It gave a brief history of the charity and the £3 million which had been raised and spent in the previous half-century.

**BULLETIN No. 184** published later that year gave an account of the '50 Years of Aid' celebration held at the palace of Westminster, courtesy of our Vice-President, George Howarth MP, and Vietnam's Ambassador Nguyen Van Thao. At the event MSAVLC was presented with the President of Vietnam's Order of Friendship, the highest award that can be given to foreign organisations.

Without doubt the charity has come a long way since that first Bulletin published in 1965. Thousands, possibly hundred of thousands, of sick and vulnerable people have been helped by our charity over the years. The present Trustees would like to pass on their thanks to you all for your donations, however large or small. Thank you, two hundred times **THANK YOU**.

# CORONAVIRUS

At the time of writing the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is causing havoc around the world.

However, the fact that we are effectively in lockdown has not stopped the vital work of MSAVLC, simply because the Officers and Trustees continue to work from their homes, as we always have done. Communication with each other is via telephone, email or Skype call. Similarly we are able to keep in contact with all of our projects in South-East Asia.

The report on Page 4 tells of the remarkable, but largely

unreported, success that the Vietnamese government and people have had in coping with the pandemic. According to the WHO, so far there have been no corona-virus deaths in Vietnam. And whilst we are not aware of the pandemic sweeping across Cambodia and Laos at present, the basic healthcare system in those countries will not be able to cope with the virus if it does spread into the densely populated areas.

It seems that the majority of cases identified so far in Cambodia and Laos have been either tourists or migrant workers returning from Thailand. With borders now closed the hope is that the contacts of those

people with the virus have been identified, and the spread is contained. Only time will tell if they have been successful.

The Trustees are aware of the precarious state of the people in South East Asia who benefit from our aid projects. They recently agreed emergency funding for the New Hope Children's Home to purchase essential items; first-aid equipment, masks, hand cleanser, noodles and rice.

Our projects may need further help as time goes on, and we are ready to provide emergency assistance to project directors should they need it.

*Peter Lidgard*

# REPORT FROM PURSAT

With the complete shutdown of international travel, it is encouraging for the Trustees to receive regular reports from our project partners. Recently, Pheng Samnang, the Director of Disability Development Services Program in Pursat, Cambodia, sent us his report on the Paraplegic and Quadriplegic Rehabilitation (PQR) project for the half-year ending in December 2019.

Readers will probably be aware that MSAVLC has been funding this project now for nearly ten years and during that time DDSP has consistently provided both narrative and financial reports which give a full explanation of exactly how and where our money is spent. The following information is taken from the latest report.

One of the most important aspects of DDSP's work involves linking with government and non-government organisations who are also working with people with disabilities. DDSP works with very closely with the Department of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation: the Department of Health: and the Department of Education, Youth and Sport, in Pursat Province. They also partner with the Spinal Cord Injury Centre in Battambang, the International Red Cross and Cambodia Trust. The latter two organisations being very helpful with the provision of wheelchairs and other rehabilitation equipment, their maintenance and repair.

During their regular visits to



*Senior Physiotherapist Tep Buntha with a DDSP client.*

PQR clients, DDSP staff have provided counselling, assistance with medical problems and physiotherapy. Many clients have also been provided with financial assistance from the project's revolving fund, to help with small business start-ups and income generation. Four new ceramic water filters have been provided for clients and four accessible latrines have also been constructed during the reporting period.

Equally important to the success of the PQR project are the peer-to-peer meetings which have been arranged in different locations throughout Pursat Province. Fifty-six clients and key

workers were involved in these activities which gave opportunities for disabled people to come together, to discuss common interests and problems, and to support one another. Furthermore, they gave many of the disabled clients the confidence to involve themselves in local social activities and gain respect within their communities.

The Trustees of MSAVLC are most grateful to Pheng Samnang and all his staff for the incredible work which they do, and for the careful way in which they account for the spending of the charity's funds.

# HOW VIETNAM HAS COPED WITH COVID-19

How does a nation with limited resources confront a global pandemic that has brought many developed countries' healthcare systems to a breaking point?

That's the challenge facing many of the world's poorer, developing nations - including Vietnam. But while it might look like a foregone conclusion that the coronavirus outbreak would ravage such a country, Vietnam has instead stood out as a beacon of how to do more with less.

So far, Vietnam has reported 268 COVID-19 cases, and no deaths. This is because since February everyone entering the country has been tested for the virus. Anyone showing signs of infection was put into quarantine for two weeks. All their contacts were identified, tested and quarantined. Shops, restaurants and schools were closed.

But as a result of the social distancing programme, many small businesses have been shuttered and thousands of people temporarily laid off from work.

As a result, according to Reuters' Yen Duong, a Vietnamese entrepreneur in Ho Chi Minh City has invented a 24/7 automatic dispensing machine providing free rice for people out of work, following the ongoing nationwide lockdown.

The machine distributes a 1.5kg (3.3lb) bagful of rice from a small silo to waiting townsfolk, many of whom are street sellers or people who earned a living from cash-in-hand jobs like housekeeping or selling lottery tickets. Hoang Tuan Anh, the businessman behind the idea, had initially donated a batch of smart doorbells to hospitals in Ho Chi Minh City before turning his technological expertise to food distribution.

Similar 'rice ATMs' have been set up in other big cities like Hanoi, Hue and Danang, according to state media. Anh told state media he wanted people to feel they still had access to food and resources, despite the current economic difficulties they found

## BOOK SALES AT THE FARM SHOP

The Organic Farm Shop in Burford Road, Cirencester is now selling second-hand books, and is donating all the profits to charity.

The books are donated by farm shop or café customers, with half of the proceeds going to 'The Farm Project' which hosts residential visits for children and young people predominantly from inner cities.

The other half will go to MSAVLC projects in South-East Asia.

The Trustees are most grateful to Hilary Chester-Master and David Smethurst who maintain the bookshelves, and who have produced a notice board which gives information about MSAVLC and about the Farm Project (see below).



themselves in.

"I refer to this machine as a 'rice ATM' because people can withdraw rice from it, assured that there are still good people out there who want to give them a second chance," he said.

While many in the Communist-ruled country can rely on a social safety-net, and the government has introduced an economic stimulus package designed to help society's most vulnerable, some people living on the margin, like Ly and her family, still need extra support.

"I read about this rice ATM on the internet. I came to check it out and couldn't believe it came out for real. I really hope the sponsors would keep doing this until the end of the pandemic," said Ly, adding that her family's biggest problem was now paying their rent.

## DATA PROTECTION.

MSAVLC is committed to making sure that our communications with you are secure, considered and welcomed. We promise to respect any personal data that you share with us, we will keep it safe, and we will not share it with third parties.

If you no longer want to receive the Bulletin and want to be removed from our mailing list, please contact:

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