

**VIETNAM
LAOS
CAMBODIA**



**MEDICAL &
SCIENTIFIC AID
NEWS BULLETIN**

www.msavlc.org

CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF AID

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60 YEARS!

This June MSAVLC will celebrate 60 years since its foundation back in 1965!

The Trustees would like to thank all of our supporters and readers for helping us reach this marvellous milestone. It is only by your continued support that the charity has been able to help thousands of sick, injured and disadvantaged people in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

It seems appropriate at this momentous point to look back over the past 60 years and review a few of the achievements of the charity, whilst also looking forward to continuing with our vital humanitarian work.

Many readers will know that the Medical Aid Committee for Vietnam (MACV), the forerunner of MSAVLC, was formed in 1965 following a visit to Hanoi by our founder, Dr Joan McMichael. This was at the beginning of the Vietnam War, and while she was there Joan learned of the terrible suffering of the people as a consequence of a shortage of medicines and surgical equipment. On her return to London she contacted as many medical professionals and influential individuals as she could, and in June 1965 at a meeting in the House of Commons, MACV was established. Within weeks more than 100 people prominent in academia, the church, medicine, politics, the arts and trade unions became sponsors. Campaigns and fund-raising activities were organised, including artistic performances, concerts, talks, appeals and art exhibitions.

The stated aim of the Medical Aid Committee for Vietnam was "to



The endowed bed in memory of Dr Joan McMichael-Ashins, in the British Friendship Hospital, Ky Anh, Vietnam.

send medical aid to where the bombs were falling and the casualties were highest". At the time that was to the National Liberation Front areas in South Vietnam, and the first consignment of medical supplies, antibiotics, was sent to the Liberation Red Cross in November 1966. Shortly after, the Committee sent mechanical ventilators 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 were sent to both South and North Vietnam.

Throughout the 1960's and 1970's MACV provided funding for many projects to aid the stricken people of Vietnam,. They ran a blood-donation campaign, and by the end of

1971 a total of 6,567 pints of blood had been flown to those who were in dire need of it.

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.

MACV became a registered charity in 1967 and a constitution was created. However, in 1979 the constitution was revised to reflect the fact that aid was also being given to Laos and to Kampuchea (as Cambodia was then known), and Medical and Scientific Aid for Vietnam, Laos and

Cambodia came into being.

In February 1969 the idea was put forward to build and equip a hospital in Vietnam, near the 17th parallel, and a special British Hospital Committee was set up to organise and finance its construction. Many problems had to be overcome, but the British Friendship Hospital in Ky Anh, Ha Tinh Province, was eventually opened in September 1980 by Dr Joan McMichael. For the past 45 years MSAVLC has provided thousands of pounds worth of equipment and medicines for the hospital, including surgical equipment, x-ray machines, incubators, beds, an ambulance, a staff incentive prize, and equipment for a paediatric ward and an intensive care unit.

In 1979 MSAVLC began the 'Mother and Child Campaign' to give support to midwifery training, post-natal care and a cervical cancer screening program throughout Vietnam, and it was subsequently extended to Cambodia and Laos. Thousands of pounds were sent over the next ten years and the impact of the campaign was most effective.

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 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 grandchildren. In the last five years the charity has provided over 2,000 wheelchairs which have been distributed to Agent Orange victims in provinces throughout the length and breadth of Vietnam.

In the 1990's the charity established an artificial limb project using the 'Jaipur limb', a prosthetic made in Vietnam. Thousands of people injured in accidents or by landmines benefitted from the fitting of these arms, legs and feet throughout the 1990's.

MSAVLC subsequently began supporting the Disability Development Services Program in Cambodia. It is one of the few NGO's providing services to disabled people, and is based in Pursat, a poor rural province in central Cambodia. Its objectives are to enable disabled people to access services to improve their quality of life, and to raise awareness among communities about disabled people's rights and opportunities.

Between 2003 and 2019 MSAVLC funded courses to train traditional village midwives in modern methods in the remote Northern Highlands of Vietnam. Over 1,700 midwives have received training and as a result, countless mothers and babies' lives have been saved.

The charity's Annual General Meeting, held in the Houses of Parliament in 2006, saw the launch of our website (www.msavlc.org), and whilst it has been subsequently adapted and upgraded, we are most fortunate that it was devised and has been developed by skilled volunteers



Former Honorary Secretary, the late Dr Madeleine Sharp MBE, with a young victim of Agent Orange.

at no cost to the charity.

January 2014 saw the death of one of the charity's most influential leaders, Dr Madeleine Sharp MBE. Madeleine was the driving force and an inspiration as Honorary Secretary between 1987 and 2012. Such a pity that she was not able to see the Fifty Years of Aid celebration of the charity's founding, which was hosted in 2015 by the Vietnam Embassy and held at the Houses of Parliament.

Over years the charity has been run by a small group of enthusiastic volunteers, who have raised over four million pounds in large and small donations given by our supporters. We continue to support in Cambodia: an audiology and ear health project, disability services in Pursat Province, a health program for former sex workers, and a first aid project based in a children's home. And in Vietnam; emergency disaster relief and equipment for Agent Orange victims.

Trustees from the charity visit South-East Asia normally every two years to monitor and evaluate our projects. As a result, lasting friendships and a strong bond of trust has been built between MSAVLC and our project directors and staff, government officials and translators.

The Trustees look forward with enthusiasm to the coming years and are firmly committed to make the most effective use of the funds given by you, our donors.

*Peter Lidgard
Chair of Trustees*



In 2015 we provided water systems for villages in Jumpet District in Laos.

LANDMINES IN CAMBODIA

Cambodia remains one of the most heavily mined countries in the world, due to decades of conflict including: civil war, the Khmer Rouge regime, American bombings and Vietnamese occupation.

Since 1979 landmines have caused over 65,000 casualties, including more than 19,000 deaths, and injuries to over 45,000 others. Dozens of people are still killed or injured every year, and landmines are found all over the countryside, in the rice fields and on the roadsides.



One landmine survivor is Mr Bun Chanthorn (pictured above) who Peter and I have met several times on our visits to Cambodia. He stepped on a landmine in 1985 and his legs were blown off from the thighs down. He has just two small stumps left and he shuffled about on two small wooden blocks.

We first met Mr Chanthorn in 2011 when he was working as a rush-weaver and selling his mats in Thailand. He worked incredibly hard, it took him a week to make one mat, but over the years the cost of rush had increased enormously and he had to put the business on hold.

For many years he was then supported by the Disability Development Services Program, (DDSP) funded by MSAVLC, and he was supplied with chickens, ducks and cows. He grew oranges and fished from a small pond. On our last visit to Cambodia in 2023 we were privileged to meet Mr Chanthorn again. He had

now retired, he has a wheelchair and is living in a small village in the countryside.

Mr Chanthorn was one of the more fortunate ones, and although his life has been incredibly hard, he has survived against all odds. Many others were not so lucky, and today civilians are still being killed and maimed by landmines in Cambodia. It was hoped that by 2025 Cambodia would become a mine-free country, but the date has been put back several times, and there are still many areas to be cleared.

The Cambodian Mine Action Centre and other organisations are working to clear these mines, along with an amazing man called Aki Ra. (pictured below). Aki Ra's parents were both murdered by the Khmer Rouge when he was about five years old, and he went to live in the jungle with other children. He was captured and forced to join the Khmer Rouge army, where he witnessed some appalling atrocities and was "educated" by them and indoctrinated into their way of thinking. They were able to control the minds of many young orphaned children through fear and cruelty. These children thought that the whole world existed like they did, and the brutality and hardship, the starvation, torture and killings became their normal world! He watched some of his friends making fatal mistakes whilst handling live ammunition, and their bodies were discarded into the river and washed away downstream.

When the Vietnamese army arrived, Aki Ra was again captured and then forced to fight for them. Eventually, when they pulled out, he was conscripted into the Cambodian army who were still fighting with the remaining factions of the Khmer

Rouge. During his time in the army Aki Ra was taught to lay thousands of landmines, and he witnessed the dreadful consequences of his actions. He saw many people mourning the loss of loved ones, and losing everything that was dearest to them. When a peace settlement was declared in 1991, he was determined to dedicate his life to clearing and defusing the landmines, some of which he had placed himself.

At first, Aki Ra set to work with just a pocketknife and a sharp stick. He defused the mines with his bare hands and with no protective gear. Later, Aki Ra and his team of helpers were trained in the latest, more modern and more effective technologies. Aki Ra works tirelessly to this day and has cleared over 50,000 landmines from the ground. He works in the villages that other organisations class as low priority as their funding is low. He is determined to clear these villages, enabling the farmers to return to work on the land and in the rice fields, and making it safe for the children to walk to school.

When he had defused the ordinances, he would bring home the empty casings and sell them for scrap to fund his work. He later opened a museum displaying all kinds of mines, mortars, guns and weaponry. This museum seeks to educate visitors about the impact of mines and the importance of clearing landmines in Cambodia. The money raised goes to further his activities.

Aki Ra lives alongside the museum with his wife and children and many homeless and abandoned children who he found while working in the villages.

...continues overleaf



...landmines continued:-

In the past they were mainly landmine victims, but now they also include children born without limbs, polio victims and some who have parents who cannot afford to raise them. The children are given love, food, shelter and an education.

We are full of admiration for Aki Ra for his compassion and dedication in helping to save the lives of so many Cambodian people who are still at risk of injury.

Mary Lidgard
Honorary Secretary

DATA PROTECTION

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Or email:

msavlc.treasurer@gmail.com

DAVID SMART R.I.P.

It is with great sadness that we have to report the death of David Smart, one of our oldest and most loyal supporters. David trained for the Army, but subsequently forged a long career in teaching geography, culminating in around twenty years at Dulwich College.

He began supporting MSAVLC in 1988 and immediately became involved with the running of the charity. In 1989 he became Assistant Secretary to Dr Madeleine Sharp, working closely with Professor Ted Shellard, who was our Chairman.

David was keen to fundraise for MSAVLC, and as a passionate environmentalist, he opened his garden in Dulwich every year and donated the entrance fees taken. He represented MSAVLC at many events: despite his advancing years and difficulty in walking, he attended the Annual General Meeting at the Vietnamese Embassy in 2022, travelling from Dulwich on his mobility scooter!

The Trustees send their condolences to his family and friends.



MEDICAL AND SCIENTIFIC AID FOR VIETNAM, LAOS AND CAMBODIA

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING and 60th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

to be held at
Charlton Kings Social Club
Church Street, Charlton Kings,
CHELTENHAM GL53 8AP

on Saturday 14th June at 2.00 pm.

There is adequate free parking behind the club.

If you would like to attend this year's AGM and Celebration, please contact Peter Lidgard at enquiries@msavlc.org or at the address below.

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