This report is an attempt to provide a single, complete summary of American aid programs in Saravane Province, Laos, as a record of partial and full achievements and failures, a report of activities, and as an aid to future planning.

Having at hand records of prior activities can be an invaluable source of information to persons working on rural development activities and aid programs throughout Laos.

Early records on activities are fragmentary; those that do exist are often incomplete and it has been necessary to piece scattered bits of information together to try and present a complete picture.

This attempted reconstruction of programs as they existed overemphasizes some aspects and neglects others, due to availability or lack of information.

Opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect opinions or policies of USAID Laos.

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Saravane Province

Saravane is the name of a province lying in the southern panhandle of the Royal Kingdom of Laos, and is also the name of its capital city. The province borders Savannakhet, Wapikhamthong, Sedone and Atopean provinces in a wide curve to the north, west, and south. South Viet-Nam lies to the east.

The activities covered by this report have been in the lower western quadrant of the province, chiefly within the curve of the Sedone River, where the seat of government lies and most of the 125,000 population live. This area consists of gently sloping clay and laterite plains, cut by streams and partially covered by brush and forest, encircled by mountain ridges. To the east are the mountains of the Annam Cordillera.

The chief ethnic group is the Lao, who farm rice paddies in the lowland plain of the Sedone. Other groups include the Souai and T'oui, who have in some villages become highly Laotianized, and a dozen or so tribal groups such as the Nghe', Loven, and Alak, who farm upland rice in the higher hill areas. Many of these have moved nearer the provincial capital due to warfare in the mountains.

The city of Saravane itself is probably the seventh or eighth largest Lao city and the largest Lao town not on or near the Mekong. As an independent municipality, historical Saravane paid tribute to Saim and the kingdom of Champassak.

Under French colonial rule, the province was ruled by an administrator who is reported to have considered it his personal fief, and once succeeded, for no less than five years, in escaping administrative duties by being away hunting while his superiors visited. But under the French, roads were put in, government buildings were constructed, and a basic administrative and school system was set up.

The French rule ended temporarily when Japanese marched from Hue to Moungh Phine and down to occupy Saravane. The French administrator killed his two wives and committed suicide. After holding the city for several months, the Japanese troops marched out as they had come, and the French returned. Laos received its independence in 1954. Seven governors have ruled the province.

As fighting continued in Viet-Nam, North Vietnamese began to pass through the eastern part of the province on what has become the Ho Chi Minh trail. The city itself has been threatened many times, but never taken, although PL and VC troops have more or less controlled various parts of the lowland. The RLG in recent years has extended the limits of its control so as to bring Saravane and the accessible parts of the province under what military protection it can offer.
Early American Aid Efforts - 1954-1957

Shortly after Laos became a full-fledged nation, the United States set up an Embassy in Vientiane and began economic aid programs under the International Cooperation Administration (ICA), the forerunner of the Agency for International Development (AID). The larger part of aid programs during this formative period consisted of providing funds for projects developed and administered by the Royal Lao government. There were excesses, bungled programs, and outright corruption. Large amounts of funds earmarked for public works road-building were reported to have "simply disappeared." This led in 1959 to an investigation by a Congressional subcommittee which resulted in the censure of a number of officials.

Apparently the earliest program which received American aid in Saravane province was an RLG-initiated program known as the "Saravane Canal." Original planning was evidently to put in a diversion dam on the Houei Laha, a stream 8 kilometers west of Saravane. Water from this dam would be diverted through a canal to paddies near Ban Phao and as far north as Tasseng Keng Kaxa. The project may have been initiated in the early 1940's and stopped during the Japanese occupation. Traveaux Publique surveyed the project in 1949. In 1955, to assist RLG plans, ICA supplied funds for material and payment of workers. A Thai or Vietnamese contractor received the contract for the dam and canal work.

The dam was built in 1955-56, and villagers began to dig the canal by hand. The work went along somewhat erratically, and, in 1959, the workers encountered large areas two or three meters higher than surveyed. Subsurface layers of sandstone made digging impossible, and work ended.

Years later, villagers near Saravane ruefully remember this project. They were promised, they claim, regular pay and the opportunity of irrigation water for their paddies. Some of the funds paid for the cement used in the dam, but the rest disappeared. The amount of water in the canal proved to be inadequate to irrigate the 600 hectares envisioned by planners. The workers received neither pay nor water. It was not until 1967, some eight years later, that work on the canal was reinitiated by USAID.

Diversified Projects - 1958-1962

An ICA Area Coordinator, Mr. Arthur Niehoff, was assigned to Pakse in 1958 to direct and better coordinate aid programs in the southern region. He was joined by Charles Dibbs of the Rural Development Division, and other personnel.

During this period, RDD sponsored "Rural Self-Help" projects in all provinces of the Pakse region. Dibbs had the responsibility of visiting Chao Khounings and Chac Moungs, who planned self-help projects with his guidance. Lists of materials required were submitted to ICA for consideration, and kip funds made directly available for those projects approved.

While records for this period are not complete, it appears that substantial numbers of schools were erected or completed. Many were constructed
with materials purchased with ICA funds; many required merely some nails or a few sheets of roofing. Construction of several markets and other public structures was considered, and a number were evidently built.

An RDD chart made up in 1959 shows ICA Rural Self-Help Projects in Saravane at that time as six schools, two dispensaries, 30 trails, and 17 community centers. It is not now known where these projects were or if they were actually completed. A number of the schools villagers built at this time are believed to have been involved in repair programs in 1967-68.

Military Assistance - 1960-1962

In 1959 or 1960, groups of American soldiers were stationed in Saravane and Thatheng, 20 miles south, as part of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) program. These teams, known as "White Star" teams, trained the Lao military and engaged in some ground-level economic development programs. A series of rural cooperative stores was set up under the "White Star" program. Manufactured goods and staples were sold to members at lower or equal cost than at local retail stores. The program was ostensibly a cooperative, but backed heavily and operated with military support. After the MAAG teams were withdrawn from Laos in October, 1962, under the terms of the Geneva accords, the fledgling coop store set up in Saravane began to wither on the vine for lack of support.

Increase in Programs - 1962-1965

Work in rural development in the Pakse area increased after the military withdrawal. ICA's name was changed to the Agency for International Development (AID), and there was a growth of interest in Saravane province as part of an area-wide program. Assistance came through American advisors working in a variety of fields - rural development, education, public works, public health, and refugee resettlement - who flew to Saravane on one-day visits. John MacQueen of USAID took over from Niehoff and served until 1966 as area coordinator.

Refugee Resettlement - The work of relocating refugees became a fulltime job as increasing numbers of villagers left the eastern half of the province, fleeing Viet Cong troops who used the Ho Chi Minh trail. The majority of these were mountain tribespeople known as 'Lao Theung' (Upper Lao), a polite name preferred by the government, or vulgarly as 'Kha' (Slaves). They practice 'slash-and-burn' agriculture of upland hai rice rather than traditional Lao paddy farming methods.

A refugee center was set up in the village of Ban Nong Boua, east of Saravane, to handle problems of the refugees. Working through provincial officials, Charles Dibbs of RDD provided airdrops of rice, cooking pots, salt, and cloth. Since the town was five hours by foot from Saravane, he convinced villagers and refugees to hack an airstrip out of the brush near town. He triumphantly reported it in a monthly report:
"We were able to finish up 250 meters of Hello strip in three days with the help of refugees and people of Nong Boua. We believe this to be an all-weather strip. 15 bottles of Lao whiskey were drunk with our counterpart workers in three nights, plus a pig barbecued on the last night. A Hello has since been able to land safely to take us in and out."

Dibbs' work in refugee resettlement in Saravane and Attopeau provinces was later taken over by Harold Voelkner, a German-American IVS team member, who had himself been a refugee in World War II. He kept close tabs on USAID-supplied commodities to make sure they reached the people. Mike Murphy, a former Malayan PCV, took over activities around 1965. Under the refugee program, people were resettled in a number of locations and aided by donations of food, tools, and clothing until they became self-supporting.

A Nge' man, Mr. Pleng, was appointed by the RLG in Saravane to handle Social Welfare activities there. He worked as counterpart to Murphy in resettlement and feeding of refugees in two villages west of Saravane, Ban Houei Soung and Ban Lak Sao. Other refugees were resettled in Ban Houei Sai, a former French plantation area south of Thatheung on the Saravane-Sedone border.

Roads and Bridges - USAID Public Works and Bureau of Public Roads personnel began during this period to assist officials of Lao Travaux Publique. They advised on equipment, established channels for securing spare parts, and helped keep equipment rolling as part of the continued effort to open up and maintain good public roads. To open up the area for increased air traffic, Public Works and TP men extended the small Saravane airstrip and surfaced it with rock. It is now the seventh longest strip in Laos and can accommodate DC-3's, C-46's and F-123 aircraft as well as smaller aircraft.

Village Cooperative Stores - The ailing chain of cooperative stores left by White Star was revitalized in 1964 by John Doolittle, an IVS'er with experience in business administration. Visiting all the stores, Doolittle shuffled managers, instituted better bookkeeping methods, and began to upgrade stocks of merchandise. Large scale purchasing of wholesale commodities in Thailand made it possible to keep prices low. The store in Saravane and one which was set up in Nong Boua to aid the refugees, provided a counterbalance to sometimes excessive prices set by local Chinese merchants.

The leadership of this "Village Development Association of Laos" (VDAL) was later assumed by Harvey Neese, formerly an IVS'er in Viet-Nam, working with the Community Development Counseling Service. Under his direction, the association began to engage in other profit enterprises benefiting the people en masse. In Pakse and Houei Kong, VDAL invested in tractors, backed demonstration of new rice varieties, and aided farms growing vegetables for FAR consumption. Occasionally large amounts of staples such as rice were sent into areas to be sold slightly above cost in support of refugee assistance, as in Lao Ngam in 1967 when rice was scarce. VDAL's name was changed to the "Association Development du Laos" (ADL) in 1968.
Education - In a land where 90% of the people were illiterate, a vast increase in educational resources and materials was clearly in order. Ralph Jones, an AID education advisor, began working with the Primary School Inspector of Saravane to upgrade primary schools in the province. A number of schools were constructed or repaired through the Education Division before this aspect of self-help began to be taken over by RDD and CRA workers in 1966. Cases of school supplies and equipment were airlifted into Saravane and turned over to the PSI to stock the schools. Jones' place was later taken by Dick Costantino, AID education advisor with years of experience in Cambodia.

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During 1963 and 1964, AID programs in Saravane consisted largely of direct financial aid to Lao government programs, but there was a continuing move towards supplying things - not funds - so that they would end up in the hands of those for whom they were directed. Even within largely USAID programs, such as refugee relief, there was a decided attempt to work thru local officials in distributing goods and planning the program.

Despite this, AID contact with people on a local level was limited. First, AID worked through the Lao government and officials. Second, in order to show the people that their government was behind them, and quickly, USAID began to concentrate on "force-account" projects which were put thru by USAID with little or no support by the villagers. Another aspect was that there were no permanent AID personnel assigned to live in Saravane. Americans working on various projects flew in and out in the small "Helio-Courier" aircraft of Air America, an AID-chartered airlines. During short conferences, plans were worked out for shipping of AID commodities. In some few cases personnel stayed for several days, but only in conjunction with a specific project.

One reason for the delay in stationing personnel in Saravane was, in addition to a lack of experienced men, that the town lay in what was referred to as a "pink" area of safety, part of the wide strip separating the western part of Laos, held by forces of the Royal Government, and the eastern part, held by the Neo Lao Hak Xat ("Laos Patriots Party) or 'Pathet Lao' (PL) and Viet Cong troops.

USAID "Forward Area" Programs

American aid personnel were first stationed in Saravane in 1965, when a "Forward Area" team of two men began rural development work there. These "Forward Area" teams began when the USAID Rural Development Division, with the success of the 'cluster' program, felt that it had reached temporary limits for intensive RD concentration. They decided to expand assistance programs to the front-line areas by setting up small teams of two or three men, mostly members of USAID International Volunteer Service a USAID contract organization. Additional men - usually former Peace Corps workers from Nepal, Thailand, and other southeast Asian countries, were signed on for one-year contracts. Both IVS'ers and contract employees were young, single, could pick up a good grasp of the language, and could work with their hands in a variety of fields at the village level.
Saravane was the second choice for this "Forward Area" team. (They were originally scheduled for Ban Houei Man, in Savannakhet province, but the security situation was too poor.) But the town proved a better than average setting for a forward area program. It was an established center - economically, socially, and administratively - for the entire province. There had been little work on the people-to-people level. And while the security did not permit an intense program, the team could lay the foundations for future programs.

The "Forward Area" team was one of the crossbred ones - it contained both an IVS'yer and a former PCV. Charles Hitchcock, who had been in the Peace Corps, began to set up a village worker program within the RLG. And Steve Green, an IVS'yer with a farm background, worked to improve livestock.

**Village Worker Program**

One country-wide benefit initiated by this team was the setting up of a national program for training and using young Lao men in rural development work. Hitchcock, who had worked with government men on the village level, felt the RLG could take a step forward in rural work by developing a cadre of Lao village workers. Such a system had been set up in 1964, under the Ministry of Education. "Fundamental Educators" had been recruited and trained in Vientiane, and were sent to the provinces to work in development under the Primary School Inspectors. Despite a good beginning, the role of these men was misunderstood, and plans seldom put into effect. Most of the FE men ended up as office assistants, working for the PSI's on maintenance and other 'coolie-type' jobs.

Hitchcock's approach was to work with the Chao Khoueng to recruit six men in the province. Arrangements were made with RDD to train them in Vientiane, and they returned to work closely with Hitchcock. Their first task was to help governmental records by making an extensive survey of village populations and economy. Hitchcock emphasized the fact that he was to be in Saravane for only a short time, and the provincial staff assumed responsibility for administration. The Deputy Chao Khoueng gave the men specific job assignments and started program planning.

The RLG Commission for Rural Affairs awoke to the program and its possibilities when other areas began to request similar workers. RDD worked together with the CRA to initiate the program on a country-wide basis, provided funds, and helped set up recruiting procedures and training. 58 positions were approved for CRA men to work in provinces throughout Laos. Hitchcock left when his tour of duty was over, but the program has continued through the CRA and RDD. Fundamental Educators are presently being transferred over to the CRA.

The six CRA workers have become well organized within the framework of the Saravane administration. In 1967, when they began work on repairing schools with the villagers, the CDA's function was merely to give some guidance and advice, and to furnish transportation. A Lao USAID assistant,
Pheth, was given responsibility for making vehicles available. At one time an IVS'er between assignments was asked by the CDA to temporarily assist the CRA men. They, however, had so far progressed in carrying out the program by themselves that they felt his presence less than necessary. His job elsewhere fortunately came through at this point. The CRA men continued at their own rate and that of the villagers, somewhat slower than force-account, perhaps, but longer lasting in the sense of true self-help involvement and governmental support of felt needs.

Livestock Vaccination and Breeding

IVS'er Steve Green worked to implement the RLG/USAID agricultural emphasis on swine breeding and livestock vaccination. His Saravane counterpart was Mr. Chom, head of the provincial Lao Veterinary Service. USAID-imported pigs and ducks had been placed with villagers throughout Laos on a basis of "you raise these and return some of the offspring to us." Green carried on a widespread program in Khongsedone and in Saravane oversaw the placing of two purebred Yorkshire boars with villagers in Ban Keng Kaxa and Ban Bung Saa.

Results of the program were mixed. Many local swine and the Keng Kaxa boar died from a plague. But the offspring fathered by the dead boar included 21 females and six males which showed superior qualities, and the owner has continued to raise crossbred swine. The second boar, in Ban Bung Xa, failed to perform and was considered "homosexual" by the villagers. (His problem has been determined as a painful rupture.) But he continues to exist since the LVS has not indicated that the animal can be destroyed.

The program emphasis on livestock breeding ended shortly after Green's departure. When in 1967 the Saravane LVS head and CDA Galen Beery attempted to revitalize the breeding program, with a plan for a coordinated program based on securing several young boars, there was no interest shown by the RLG of USAID agriculture. The program, therefore, continued merely that of livestock innoculation, the LVS chief making his rounds with government supplied vaccines and a pickup secured through USAID.

The Sedone Valley Development Program

As already indicated, USAID program emphasis in 1963 and 1964 focused on the establishment of "clusters", to concentrate AID projects in natural economic and social groupings of from five to twenty-five villages. The cluster in Wapikhamthong province grew to encompass the entire province and finally became an expanded "Sedone Valley Development Program" including much of Wapikhamthong, Saravane, and Sedone provinces.

Cluster operations began in Lakhonepheng, Wapikhamthong province, in October of 1964, under CDA Bruce Bailey. Six months later a coordinated security development program was set up and the area of security soon enlarged. In May, 1965, the entire province was declared a cluster area to enlarge the sphere of development.
There was a continual and rapid expansion of program and projects in Wapikhamthong. The work developed along two lines: (1) the impact phase for security, and (2) the development phase as areas became more secure. The overall plan was simple: to expand into areas militarily secure and do "impact" work on fringe areas, while intensive and social development was carried out in the secured areas.

The ultimate purpose of the program was to assist the RLG to develop operational capacities required to conduct a rural development program. For this, it was felt necessary to build up a basic development staff - agriculture agents, Fundamental Education and CRA workers, home economists and veterinary agents - under the Chao Moungs, with direction from the provincial and regional technical services.

The Wapikhamthong cluster program included construction projects such as schools, dispensaries, wells and dams, and agricultural programs such as livestock vaccination and vegetable raising. The Royal Lao Army participated by training and arming villagers in a defense system at the village level, the Auto Defense Corps (ADC). All activities were coordinated with the governor, CRA personnel and other technical services, the USAID CDA, and IVS team members.

As the Wapikhamthong development program grew, sights were raised to include goals in the adjacent provinces of Sedone and Saravane. The name was changed to the Sedone Valley Development Program. The region involved was broken down into four areas: Area I - Wapikhamthong Province, Area II - Sedone province including Pakse and Paksong, Area III - the western half of Saravane province, and Area IV - the left bank of the Sedone and the northern part of the Bolovens plateau, including Lao Ngam. Area I received the most "concrete" projects: it took until 1967 before the SVDP began to really move into Area IV.

Wapikhamthong work was marked by a proliferation of schools, drilled wells, dispensaries, and other projects. Most of these were on a "force account" basis, wherein USAID contributed most, if not all, of the materials, and construction foreman, and villagers were hired to do the work. Roads and bridges were put in to open up the area, and the ADC village militia and the FAR kept the area militarily secure.

Bailey noted both the material progress and the need for a greater RLG and village involvement in a 1966 planning document:

"Definite progress has been made in a greater identity of the local villagers with the RLG and USAID. The assignment of energetic Chao Khouengs has been the greatest factor to accomplish this... However, a drawback is that too much of the program is visualized by the villagers as an American program, a perception which is impossible to overcome considering the amount of involvement by the U.S. government. In contrast to the start of this program, the RLG is taking a more active interest. The technical
services are more active than previously. The Agriculture and Veterinary programs have been approved by the Cabinet. The province of Wapikhamthong has been designated as a "model" province by the Prime Minister, which has encouraged greater interest and participation by the Lao functionaries in carrying forward this program. There has been at the same time a significant increase in the operational capacity at the regional and provincial level, but there is much room for improvement."

With the expansion of the Sedone Valley Development Program, all projects in Saravane were considered part of the overall regional effort. Activities of Forward Area team men and CDA Curt Swezy, who was assigned to Saravane in mid-1965, were part of this program.

The SVDP was one of the larger regional programs which has been developed in Laos. Bruce Bailey, in cooperation with the USAID Program Office, was highly involved in much development and planning. In mid-1967, however, when both Bailey and Swezy finished their terms and left Laos, there began a decline of this regional viewpoint. Support was withdrawn from the ADC teams and they were largely relieved of their weapons on the premise which now appears unfortunate, that the area was been military secured. The SVDP became largely a dead issue and remains so.

Considered in terms of development, the SVDP on a provincial basis did no more than individual CDA's and the RLG khoueng staffs could do. But where the SVDP shone was that it created and forced an organized planning of all development groups, a contemplation of regional action and a framework involving military, economic, health, educational, government training, and social programs of development.

Well Program

SVDP work in Saravane included a program of drilled and dug wells to provide year-around sources of potable water. The area is underlaid with layers of sandstone, particularly in the Lakhonpheng area of Wapikhamthong province, and it was necessary to drill, rather than dig wells. In Wapikhamthong, jackhammers and dynamite were used in order to pierce rock layers before the decision to drill wells was made.

The drilled well program in Saravane began in 1966 when a Longyear well drilling rig operated by FWD personnel was brought in. The rig was old and subject to breakdowns; only four wells were drilled in six months. The next year a failing rig was brought in and 15 wells drilled, 13 in villages and two in Saravane. Each well was equipped with a simple hand pump.

For routine maintenance, a crew of three men in each village was trained in maintenance and simple repairs. Small kits, including pliers, wrench, and grease, were made available to villagers at cost, 3,000 kip. ($6) This, however, was the only input by the villagers other than labor and some sand and gravel for the well platforms.
Since there was little self-help and placement of wells was subject to whims and personal desires of local officials, a new policy was worked out by AID PWD and the RLG late in 1967. PWD would continue to drill wells free, but villagers would need to contribute 36,000 kip ($72 US) to buy the hand pump. Parts and installation were to be made available through Travaux Publique at nominal cost. TP had no crews who could do this, and it was soon decided that local merchants might more feasibly retail pumps and pump parts, and train pump crews for maintenance and repair on a profit basis. USAID advisors developing small businesses and industry visited Pakse early in 1968 to arrange for involvement of merchants.

Six wells were dug, rather than drilled, in Saravane on a small activity plan worked up by CRA Curt Swezy in 1967. CRA men worked under the Deputy Chao Khoueng and directly with the villagers to complete the wells. Five wells were programmed and finished; the sixth was an afterthought and used up some extra cement, but enthusiasm disappeared and, in the absence of village interest, CDA Beery terminated additional support.

An activity plan was drawn up in the last months of 1967 to provide 23 drilled wells which villagers requested, as usual, through the Chao Khoueng. Each site would first be tested with a hand auger to see if it would be feasible to dig a well rather than drill. But this plan was never submitted, due to other circumstances.

Educational Assistance

The primary purposes of the educational assistance furnished by USAID to Saravane's RLG educational system have been two: (1) to maintain the loyalty of the people to the RLG in secure areas, and (2) construct additional classrooms and provide furniture to accommodate an increasing enrollment.

The original "Education Development Program" began in Wapi Khambthong province in early 1965, when 22 schools (totaling 29 classrooms), were built by PWD Force-Account. Following this, in 1966, an Activity Plan (#9) was written up covering three provinces under the SVDP. It provided for 12 schools (totaling 32 classrooms) in Saravane. Two were six-room Groupe Scolaires, two more were demi-Groupe Scolaires - 4-room structures. These were all force-account schools. Two one-room schools were also built under Activity Plans written up under the Education Division.

In 1966, CDA Curt Swezy supervised five Lao students in a "Summer Student Training Program", sponsored by USAID to give college students summer employment and a chance to learn through experience. Two students joined the CRA men in making a survey. One ran a sports and youth program, and two taught classical dancing. The later program was not so well received, but the survey went well and the sports program was enthusiastically received. In 1967, eight more students were employed under CDA Galen Beery as teachers. Two taught in the college in remedial French and math courses, but the other six were assigned to schools reopening in Lao Ngam, where the PSI was unenthusiastic about assigning regular teachers. The students performed capably, teaching primary grades for three months.
The Primary School Inspector, Mr. Thanh, was selected by the Lao Ministry of Education and USAID Education Division for a 3-month visit to schools in the United States, in mid-1967. A modern warehouse/office was built with USAID funds under OICC supervision, and school materials, which had been stored in wooden crates under the dubious protection of overhanging eaves, were moved into this building.

Upon his return, Mr. Thanh held a summer workshop for the remaining of Ch££ teachers. These teachers are provisional, frequently with no more than three or four years of primary school education. Their certification is necessary due to the lack of college-trained qualified teachers. In the workshop, the CEA noted that the PSI explained new methods and techniques in education that he saw in the US, and used many of the new textbooks he brought back to Laos. (Mr. Thanh was assigned to Vientiane in 1968).

In assistance independent of AID, a Fulbright scholar has been assigned each year for the past three years to Saravane as a teacher at the College. USIS administers this program. The last two Fulbright teachers were Mr. Tim Jones and Mr. Arthur Recchi.

The Move to Self-Help in RD Work

The goal in community development work is to set into action the forces in a community, so that the villagers organize, plan, and carry out projects by themselves with a minimum of governmental assistance.

The initial projects in the Sedone Valley Development Program were definitely not community development - they were "force account." That is, they were financed and constructed entirely by USAID and villagers participated only in furnishing labor. In many cases, the villagers had little or no say in what the project was. When a school was to be built, for example, the PSI looked at his overall plans and the need and indicated where it was to be located. USAID Public Works Division would draw up plans, send in the wood and cement, purchase sand and gravel, and hire villagers as coolies to aid in construction. The program in Wapikhamthong province was marked by a proliferation of schools, drillweddells, dispensaries, and other projects on this basis.

Early projects in Saravane were on such a force account basis as the SVDP grew, but the 'self-help' aspect that the villagers had known in 1962 and 1963 was reintroduced in 1965 by CDA Curt Swezy. As the "force-account" schools and dispensaries were phased out as they were completed, the program was put on this 'self-help' basis. By 1968, all Saravane programs were on this basis except for a market and a dispensary which had not been completed earlier.

Swezy, visiting villages to check on programs, made the first commitment for an actual self-help project in Ban Bung Xai, 20 kilometers west of Saravane. This village was slated to receive a four-room school by "force-account", and the Chao Khouang wanted USAID to build a dispensary there by the same means.
Swezy found that villagers had a dispensary already available. This was a partially constructed building that they had built several years before when it seemed that the MLO would furnish a medic. Because this building already existed, he told the villagers that AID could not build another structure, but would assign two medics as soon as the building was completed. This would permit AID to build a force account dispensary in another village. The Chao Khoueng was convinced and gave a long pep talk to the villagers about bettering their lives by themselves. In three weeks, the villagers completed the dispensary by 100% self-help, and USAID PHD placed two medics and medicine in it. The cost to the villagers was an estimated K210,000. If USAID had built the dispensary, it would have cost the US about $2,000.

The same combination of force-account and self-help construction was also put across in Ban Sapone. Although the Chao Khoueng was against switching this projected dispensary to self-help, villagers constructed it with only 7½ roofing sheets and three wood beams coming from USAID. USAID cost was about $100; the village contribution was about K17,000.

Looking at projects from the aspect of USAID and village contribution, several delineations can be noted. These divisions grew up with the gradual turn of USAID from involvement on a basis that some Americans laconically referred to as "handout" or "help yourself", to a growing "self-help" basis. The first projects were true "force account" - USAID furnished all construction materials and carpenters, and paid villagers to build the schools. The next step was for AID to furnish only construction materials and carpenters, and for the villagers to furnish their labor as their contribution. Gradually, they were required to furnish materials - wood for the beams and siding, sand and gravel, and so on.

The overlap in projects at each stage of change created problems. In Ban Bung Xai, USAID built a Groupe Scolaire by complete "force-account" methods. Shortly afterwards, villagers at another project down the road were requested to furnish their labor free. They naturally grumbled and reports have it that a great deal of governmental pressure was necessary before they would work on the school.

Something similar occurred in 1967, when the CRA men began helping villagers repair 1½ schools under a new AP (#29), entirely on a self-help basis except for some commodities. These schools, mostly one-room, were built by the villagers themselves, some under USAID assistance in 1961-63, but all needed repair. AID had by this time taken galvanized iron roofing off the list of commodities available. Villagers at Ban Beng were informed that USAID would furnish only cement and hardware to repair their school. Their immediate question was "Why doesn't USAID furnish everything - wood, roofing, cement, and hardware? You just built a school that way at Sen Vang - two kilometers down the road!"

In this case it was explained that things had changed in USAID. Since it was the villagers' school, it was pointed out, it was their responsibility to contribute something besides labor. And, besides, USAID would still contribute hardware and cement for the floor. The villagers mulled over this, agreed, and decided to go all out and expand the building by extending it and replacing old board walls with new milled planks. In two weeks they
had purchased a sizeable amount of lumber and much new roofing, and work was ready to go ahead without any complaints and a great deal of enthusiasm. This village has a good income from exporting peanuts, and has a great deal of community spirit: "This isn't any ordinary town - we're on a road junction and this town is going to grow!"

Agriculture Programs

There is little information as to what USAID assistance to RLG agriculture programs consisted of before 1966. In that year, the "Agriculture Development Organization", a government supported business organization, was set up to make farm loans and stimulate use of new farming equipment. Robert Griffin of ADO/Pakse contacted Mr. Khao, the RLG/Agr Extension Chief in Saravane, and worked through him and a staff of five agents in arranging loans for purchase of buffalo.

Under the agreement, farmers received a loan of from 20,000 to 25,000 kip ($40-$50 U.S.) for purchase of buffalo for plowing. ADO and the RLG supervised the transactions. Over 126 farmers bought buffalo through these loans and returned over eight tons of paddy rice and kip in payment. A number of problems arose with regard to the loans and collections, but ADO reported these as "fairly well solved." Farmers understood credit, realized obligations, and attempted to repay loans.

In August, 1967, a second ADO buffalo loan was made, with the assistance of Wayne Johnson, ADO/Pakse. Only four buffalo, at 22,000 kip each, were purchased and delivered to four villagers, former refugees, from Ban Houei Soung. 16 other buffalo promised were not secured since villagers with buffalo were prevented by the PL from bringing them in to sell.

ADO has also made arrangements with a Saravane merchant who acts as ADO commodity agent, selling fertilizer and farming equipment at a lower than normal price.

A farmers training program was planned early in 1967 for Thatcheng, south of Saravane, where the RLG has an experiment station and the soil is good. Mr. At, chief of the station, was very enthusiastic about the program and worked out plans with CDA Curt Swezy. Before further action could be taken, Mr. At died in an automobile accident. The program was dropped for lack of a capable agriculturist.

RLG agriculture in Saravane began demonstrating new varieties and methods of growing rice. During the '67 dry season, Mr. Khao worked with a farmer at Ban Phao to raise .37 hectare of rice, using water from the Saravane canal. The 685 klio/hectare average yield was less than the normal 860 klio/hectare yield during the rainy season, due to bird damage, but, as the farmer observed, "I never before planted at this time of year, so it's a 225 klio (total yield) gain for me."
In September and October, plans were made to double-crop during the coming dry season. 27 farmers, including 7 naibans, attended a week's training course in Saravane held by the RLG. 14 farmers at Ban Phao and Vieng Kham, agreed to try planting and irrigating IR-8 rice.

IVS'er Gary Davis was assigned to Saravane in July and did a good job assisting the RLG personnel in collecting rice for ADO loans, harvesting and measuring IR-8 and local rice production. In November he switched to organizing farmers to repair and use the Saravane canal. Roger Harter, another IVS'er, arrived to replace him in agriculture but had no more than started a good working relationship than the security problem forced evacuation.

After December 15, all government officials were justifiably limited in travel. Without direction and assistance, farmers in Ban Phao and Vieng Khan abandoned any attempt at double-cropping. Another farmer interested in pump irrigation also dropped the idea.

Medical Assistance

The public health program in Saravane is noteworthy as being the only one in Laos operated totally under the supervision and direction of the RLG Medicin Chef, with only commodity and moral support coming from USAID PHD.

As a provincial capital, Saravane enjoys the facilities of a government hospital set up some years ago. Six outlying dispensaries were established in the early 1960's by Medicin Chef Dr. Phou Ngeun, with the assistance of Mr. Roy Moffett of USAID PHD. Most of the dispensaries were along the Saravane-Khongsedone road, although one was in Thateng.

These dispensaries have carried on medical assistance more or less consistently until the present. A number have closed and later re-opened, depending on a fluctuating military situation. The dispensary in Ban Sen Vang, for example, lies in a security-poor area, and closed its doors in 1966 after a French teacher was captured by the PL in the village and held prisoner for ten days. The dispensary was re-opened a year later.

In 1963, Dr. Weldon, head of the AID Public Health Division, visited the area and realized the potential of the Saravane dispensaries. He offered AID support for the dispensaries if security permitted. Most of the dispensaries were soon covered by AID-supported medicines. With the gradual extension of RIG military control, dispensaries such as Keng Sim became secure and assistance was extended. New dispensaries were set up further from Saravane. A dispensary in Nong Boua was set up shortly after the airstrip was put in, and the four medic-trainees soon treated an average of 60 persons daily. USAID force-account dispensaries went in under the SVDP at Lao Ngam, Ban Bung Kham, Ban Sapone, and Ban Vieng Kham. When RIG troops finally held the area around Keng Sim, in 1967, that dispensary was also given support. A dispensary in Toumlane, created and supported by the ADC, was taken over in July, 1967.
Under PHD support, medicines were packed by PHD Pakse and sent by Joe Fox, medical advisor, to Saravane to Dr. Phu Ngeun. He took the responsibility of getting medicines, the medic's salaries, and other supplies to the outlying dispensaries.

To strengthen the RLG hospital in Saravane, an Operation Brotherhood medical team was given the go-ahead in mid-1965, by the Prime Minister, to join the staff. OB, an independent Filipino medical assistance organization which had worked in Laos for some time under USAID contracts, supplied two doctors, a dentist, and three nurses. The Chao Khouchung turned the old Government Guest House in Saravane over to OB for housing and storage of medical supplies.

The OB team, under the direction of Dr. Caesar Medina, worked alongside and in cooperation with the RLG medical staff. In addition, team members were frequently invited by the Medicin Chef to join him on trips to village dispensaries. OB support personnel oversaw additions to the hospital: a new wing, generator shed, a beginning on X-ray facilities. (Under the leadership of Dr. Caesar, OB stimulated formation of the "Saravane Association," a JC-type service organization which constructed two playgrounds and stocked them with equipment.) Dr. Caesar died late in 1966 and Dr. Johnnie Reyes became the head of the OB team.

When FAN pacified Lao Ngam and settled troops there, RLG medical work was expanded to include the area. Beginning with the Lao Ngam dispensary, the Medicin Chef set up 4 dispensaries in satellite villages whose populations had been expanded by relocation of villagers. The total number of dispensaries in Lao Ngam and the valley towns, reached 19 by December, 1967.

An incident in Ban Keng Kaxa shows the regard villagers had for the medical assistance. PL soldiers entered the town and began to ransack the dispensary, carrying medicines off into the forest. The naiban reprimanded them: "You must want us to die," he said, "because you're taking the medicines furnished to keep us in good health." The enemy troops soon brought back everything, and the medic continued work as usual without hinderance.

The overall program was considerably reduced after December's fighting. After the attacks on Lao Ngam, FAN G.M. 802 troops were pulled back to reinforce the town itself, and the satellite dispensaries were closed. The Chief Medic, Thao Poht, was killed in the fighting and has not been replaced. FAN medics were moved in to take care of Lao Ngam civilians. Many valley dispensaries were closed due to the presence of the PL. As a result of hostilities, only six remain in operation.

In Saravane, OB personnel were pulled out, but the Medicin Chef has carried on operation of the hospital and kept seven dispensaries running. Credit for the program must go to the enthusiasm and hard work of Dr. Phu Ngeun, described by a knowledgeable American as "The best damn Medicin Chef in the country," and the assistance of USAID's Joe Fox.
Irrigation Programs

Saravane Canal - Early in 1967, CDA Curt Swezy and the Chao Khoueng tackled the job of completing the Saravane canal, which had lain only partially completed since 1959. A PWD crew with a bulldozer and scraper was sent in to continue the canal from where the contractor and villagers had left off digging. After work resumed, the sandstone ledges which had halted the earlier work were rediscovered. It was necessary to punch the canal through by using dynamite.

After the main part of the canal was finished, it was calculated that the available water was still insufficient for the paddies to be irrigated in the dry season. Equipment was moved to the south to put in two more diversion dams on nearby streams. Several hundred meters of canal connected the waters of these streams with the main canal.

An IVS'er, Gary Davis, was assigned to Saravane and tackled the problem of putting the canal into use. In cooperation with Mr. Khao, RLG head extension agent, he walked the indistinct line of the canal and noted the need for organized repair, maintenance, and utilization. Farmers were recruited to put the canal into better condition, and an organization to carry this out was being planned when the security situation changed and prevented further work.

As the canal stands, a conservative estimate of the area that can be irrigated for double-cropping is 150 hectares. A complete renovation of the system and a program to provide maximum utilization of stream flows could perhaps double this hectarage.

Xe Set Project - Thomas Ramsay, a USAID Agr/Irrigation expert, with wide experience in the Near East, was assigned to Saravane to continue and complete the Saravane canal. At the request of the Chao Khoueng, he investigated an old request of the villagers at Ban Bung Xai for a dam and canal from the Xe Set River to their paddies. The potential of the year-around Xe Set was so great that AID approved a complete preliminary survey of the irrigation possibilities. Three Thai engineers and 20 Lao trainees spent several months on the survey.

While this preliminary survey ended abruptly in December, enough information had been gathered to outline the potential for an extensive irrigation system. Ramsey's report pointed out that, with a dam across the Xe Set above Bung Xai, water could be brought through two main canals to irrigate paddies north of the town. A second canal system could open up large areas of virgin land west of the Xe Set and tie in with the Saravane canal system. CDA Beery, working with CRA men, compiled statistics and made a report on human resources available for development of the project.

Ramsay also found that trainees lacked skills, and began to set up an organized training program. An RLG house was being renovated as a training center when the irrigation teams were sent to Pakse.
All USAID irrigation work in Saravane was unilateral, with the knowledge and consent of the local authorities. There are no RLG irrigation personnel in Saravane. When security permits resuming of plans for development of the Xe Set project, RLG Ag/Irr personnel should be involved from the first.

Saravane Market

Early USAID programs often included construction of markets in provincial capitals and smaller towns, but, although some may have been constructed in the Pakse region, somehow Saravane's old market was ignored until recently. A large masonry structure with a decrepit shingle roof, the market has been too small for the crowds of vendors, who have had to spread wares on the grass of a nearby sports field.

During the visit of an AID official in 1963 or so, the Chao Khoueng requested that AID build a new market. There was an immediate verbal commitment. Later, USAID reevaluated the promise and cooled towards such a project. In February, 1967, after a number of reminders, AID told the Chao Khoueng that a new market should be approved through the Ministry of Rural Affairs.

Since USAID had made this prior commitment and built markets elsewhere, an Activity Plan was drafted, and, after some delay, approved late in 1967. The RLG allocated 1,350,000 kip for the necessary lumber, sand, gravel, and labor. USAID imports were roofing, hardware, cement, and a construction supervisor.

Despite military problems in December, the Chao Khoueng saw to it that materials were delivered to the site. USAID commodities were delivered in January, but it was not until March, 1968, that carpenters were sent to Saravane. They were withdrawn and sent back in April. Work on the market continues—slowly, due to transportation problems—and should be finished before the summer of 1968.

The American Presence

With the growth of a variety of programs, and the influx of American AID personnel to work on them, a 'sub-area' colony of Americans gradually grew up in the city of Saravane.

CDA Swezy had fixed up a large, two-story Lao house, and Beery took over this. The IVS'ers who were assigned to Saravane—Gary Davis, Roger Harter, and Rick Barth—were also housed here, and it served as a guest house by visiting advisors from Pakse and other transients.

Another wooden house, on a main road leading into the city, was rented as a "Guest House" and some attempt was made at fixing it up. Basically, however, it was used as housing for a Lao assistant and his family, who "put up" irrigation trainees in an informal dormitory-arrangement. The POL dump, warehouse, and a work area for repairing vehicles were on the ground level. This served as a center of activity for daily dispatching of personnel and vehicles.
An office in the khoueng office building was provided the CDA by the Chao Khoueng. CDA men worked here. A shortwave radio at the OB team house permitted daily radio contact with Pakse.

A close working relationship sprang up with the Chao Khoueng and other government personnel. Americans were made part of the social community and were involved in get-togethers, boun and religious festivities, and occasions such as the visit of the Crown Prince. This close association on a working and informal basis was in marked contrast to the "fly-in, fly-out" aspect of earlier programs.

Programs in Lao Ngam

Lao Ngam, a moung in the southeastern part of Saravane provinces, falls under Saravane administration but can be considered a separate area because of its location and situation. The area includes parts of Sedone and Wapi-khamthong provinces as well.

Lao Ngam is on the northern edge of the Bolovens Plateau where it slopes down to the Se Done River plain. The people include several different tribal groups including Soun, Th'oi, and Gatheng. There are few Lao other than the Chao Moung, some officials, teachers, medics, and neutralist soldiers of G.M. 802. Crops include hai rice - no paddy - some coffee, cotton, peppers, and other plantation-type crops.

Because of the access to the Bolovens plateau through the gentle rise of Lao Ngam, it has long been on the route for marauding bands of Pathet Lao under the command of Sihan Komandam, a PL leader. Komandam, a Loven, has considerable respect among a number of highland tribal groups.

FAR troops began in 1965-66 to gradually extend the limits of their control into the hinterland, moving west from Khongsedere and east from Saravane, to bring the Khongsedere-Saravane road under control. ADC, the village militia groups, assisted in expanding and consolidating this control. By February, 1967, when PL began political harangues in certain villages, villagers chased them away with gunfire, and the PL began to avoid the road by day.

Units of the Forces Armee Neutral (FAN) were brought from Moung Souei and moved into Lao Ngam. Soldiers and planes of FAR's tough Groupe Mobile 21 had moved villagers from a large area east of the Se Done River, bringing them into the Pakse area and to the vicinity of Lao Ngam for resettlement. It was the responsibility of the neutralist's G.M. 802 to keep them under protection and control. Villagers who fled into the forests were assumed to have become PL.

The first government objective was to establish an effective control over the area by relocating villages within zones around Lao Ngam. Seven village areas absorbed from 10,000 to 15,000 people from villages farther away. This, it was felt, would cut contact with the PL, protect the people from PL demands and cut off the enemy from food and lodging. Villagers were issued passes and permitted to leave the security zone for several days at a time to harvest and plant rice at their old farms.
Since this was a forced relocation, the RIG wished to provide services to the population to show government concern for their welfare. The second objective was therefore to take a survey of the people and their needs. This was done by FAN personnel, civilian authorities, and several CRA men assigned on TDI. Propaganda operations were conducted by Military Information Teams, consisting of several soldiers and a leader, who visited villages and tried to determine needs of the villagers and their attitudes towards the government. The teams tried to find out how attitudes could be improved. Movies were shown and information handed out.

The third objective was to link the Lao Ngam area with Saravane and Pakse by re-opening roads built under the French colonial administration. The road southwest to Paksong was overgrown and bridges had rotted away. USAID PWD was given responsibility for reconstructing this road. They pulled in equipment from Ban Houei Kong and Pakse and began to install the road and install a series of Bailey Bridges. The road from Saravane to Lao Ngam was placed under the responsibility of Traveaux Publique, aided by PW and BPR men. The chief contribution of TP was rebuilding a wooden bridge which the PL burned near Sen Vang, and respanning the Xe Set river with a Bailey bridge. PWD finished their road, culverts, and bridges to Lao Ngam by late 1967. As of June, 1968, the Xe Xet bridge was not yet in although the footings had been poured.

When military operations in Lao Ngam cleared the roads, merchants in Pakse and Saravane once again sent buses and trucks into the area. Buses ran on a fairly regular basis from June into November, except for brief periods when the Xe Set rose too high to ford, and short periods following PL ambushes.

The forth objective was to re-establish government dispensaries and schools. Under Dr. Phm Ngeun, Medicin Chef of Saravane, and Joe Fox, USAID PHD, dispensaries were set up in four of the relocation villages. These were bamboo structures built by the villagers. PHD supplied medicines and medics they had trained. The chief medic assumed responsibility for medics in outlying villages and ran the Lao Ngam dispensary.

When it came to re-opening the schools, the PSI of Saravane was not too enthusiastic about assigning regular teachers. The solution was to increase the number of CREC teachers – provisional teachers with only a few years of primary school. 12 new CREC teachers, plus 10 old ones, were picked by the PSI to receive training in a summer workshop in Saravane. During the summer, six Lao students hired under the USAID Summer Student Training Program filled the gap. Although none were yet qualified to teach, they performed credibly in a learn-earn situation and gave the children supplemental teaching to partially make up for an earlier lack of schools.

Lao Ngam once had a 6-room Groupe Scolaire with a concrete floor, but this was destroyed in 1960 during FAR-FAN fighting. AID programmed a new school to replace this, and lumber was secured two or three times, but always ended up somewhere else when the situation prevented building the school.
Under USAID Refugee Relief, Mike Murphy set up a blacksmith program at several villages in Lao Ngam. RR furnished metal and blacksmiths turned out simple machetes and hoes which RR purchased to use elsewhere. Several men were trained at Van Amon, Vientiane, and became blacksmiths when they returned.

The rice supply for villagers in Lao Ngam became short just after the resettlement. The rice crop had first been poor because of a drought the preceding year, and many villagers had either been prevented by military action from harvesting rice or had been unable to bring it with them to Lao Ngam. Commercial prices soared, and the rice shortage became a priority problem.

To solve the problem, rice was supplied through several different agencies. VDAL purchased several hundred bags of rice and transported it to Lao Ngam by AID-hired commercial trucks. The selling price was enough for VDAL to make a slight profit, but much lower than regular commercial prices. RR trucked in and air-dropped tons of rice and Bulgar wheat, and distributed this free. To prevent irregularities in rice sales - such as the army buying all the rice and re-selling it for a profit - VDAL salesmen and RLG officials kept tabs on sales. The rice problem ended in September and October as new rice ripened.

American aid in Lao Ngam was made on a visiting basis until the middle of 1967. Robert Majoros, a tall IVS "Forward Area" man, was assigned to Lao Ngam and made several trips there. But under a new IVS policy, it was decided that it was not secure enough for assigning an IVS'er, and he was transferred elsewhere.

In August, a former PCV man from Thailand, Charles Whalen, moved as a permanent CDA into a small bamboo house which FAN built for him near the airport. He soon established good relations with both local civilian and military personnel.

Whalen's first project was to acquaint the influential naibans and taussengs of the area with the idea that their national government supported them. He escorted a group of naibans and taussengs to Vientiane in an 18-day trip, where they visited RLG and USAID offices and became more familiar with the workings of the government on a national level.

When he returned, Whalen explored a variety of potential development programs. In return for rice, refugees near the town cleared a small piece of land by a stream as a possible demonstration farm. Ag/Irr personnel where scheduled to be called in to survey a possible diversion dam about a kilometer from the city, to divert a stream into new land near the airport. This would permit year-around irrigation of vegetables and possibly paddy rice. Fish ponds in the area were visited and restocking planned. An activity plan for drilled wells was written up but delayed by PWD for testing each site with a hand auger to see if dug wells would be preferable.
Despite the potential for development, it was difficult to develop any real RD program. During the period that Whalen worked in Lao Ngam, there were continued encounters with PL groups by the FAN, as clearing and holding actions were carried out. RALF T-28's frequently bombed and strafed PL staging areas within earshot of Lao Ngam. Whalen's travel at all times was restricted to certain areas and he visited villages only with a military escort. While the situation appeared to finally be stabilizing, it was still fluid.

The Military Situation Changes - 1967

The village militia system, the Auto-Defense Corps, set up in Wapikhamthong and Saravane under the SVQP, proved its worth in the securing of the south-western quarter of Saravane province. Pathet Lao troops had for years passed unhindered across the Saravane-Khongsedone road, pausing to deliver political harangues and 'tax' the villagers for rice and livestock. As the ADC was set up, at the villagers were armed and trained, they began to resist the PL.

In January, 1967, when PL troops came into Ban Nong Xai and began to deliver a speech, the male villagers slipped away to get their weapons, and chased the PL from the village with a barrage of fire. In Ban Bung Xai, not far away, villagers received USAID medicines and a medic for a dispensary which they had built. PL troops appeared across the river one morning not long afterwards and riddled the dispensary with small arms fire. The villagers here also returned the fire. After several incidents of this type, the PL moving through the forest, off roads and away from villages.

Because of the success of the defense program and apparent securing of the area, the ADC program was terminated. FAN troops had moved in to tighten RLG hold over Lao Ngam, completing the third side of a triangular 'boundary' enclosing the PL.

PL and Viet Cong troops began to appear in force as the year wore on. PL troops attacked Thatheng, killing 11, and during a week in late July, retook Ban Phone, 22 kilometers west of Thatheng, which had been the limit of FAR expansion. A month later an estimated 150 PL, including some Viet Cong, walked into and took over the town of Bung Xai as the Tasseng and Naiban fled from the other end. The occupation of the town lasted for three hours before they returned to the forest. The Deputy Chao Khoueng and irrigation personnel were stranded on the far side of the town but received warning and were not endangered. Since this move had met with no resistance, enemy troops became bolder. 8 FAR soldiers on patrol were killed in an ambush at Ban Bung Kham, further along the road, and a charge was placed to damage a FWD tractor just across the border in Wapikhamthong province.

A sudden escalation in fighting with the move into the province of large numbers of enemy troops brought international attention to the situation in December. On December 10, an estimated 150 PL and VC attacked Lao Ngam. The USAID-built dispensary was hit and burned during a mortar attack and the medic killed. FAN military headquarters at the airstrip and the CDA's house were partially destroyed during the fighting, which continued for
several days. Whalen, fortunately, was in Pakse. His assistant emerged from the bushes after the fighting was over and drove the team's M-37 truck and some belongings on into Pakse. Whalen's personal belongings were all either destroyed or lost to pillaging soldiers of both sides. Since the situation in Lao Ngam had completely changed, he was reassigned to the Oudomsouk refugee area in Sedone province, and USAID activities in Lao Ngam were ended.

During the fighting in Lao Ngam, PL and VC troops moved closer to the town of Saravane. Toumlane, a northern outpost across the Se Done River, was attacked and overrun, and the enemy troops moved south to take Keng Sim. It began to appear that about three battalions of Viet Cong were in the area, perhaps remnants of the troops involved in the battles at Dak To, Viet-Nam. Three theories were advanced for their presence: (1) to forage for rice, which went on at San Phone and in the Toumlane area, (2) to move out as rapidly as possible and secure more land, as a better bargaining position for peace talks in Viet-Nam, and (2) to perhaps attack and take Saravane itself.

USAID Moves Out of Saravane

As the number of military clashes increased, it became impossible to continue USAID work under any degree of security. All irrigation surveys were stopped and on December 14, all of the Agriculture/Irrigation men, surveyors, trainees, and their families, were airlifted out to Pakse. Information was received the next day that the three battalions of Vietnamese might be in the area. All USAID, IVS, and Od personnel, Fulbright teacher, several missionaries, and Air America radio operators stationed at the airport were also evacuated to Pakse.

Lao government officials were placed in an emergency status, donned uniforms, and began rifle practice for the expected attack on the city. Their families and those of many townspeople were sent to Pakse by road and plane. Both military and civilians pitched in to dig trenches and build bunkers at three forts, manned by the military, the police, and the officials. Under the circumstances, RLG support of projects outside the city proper ceased. Visits to schools ended. Plans for double-cropping along the Saravane Canal died since the RLG extension agent were restricted to the city limits.

Only two USAID projects were continued into 1968. Two PWD carpenters remained to complete an isolated school in the village of Vieng Kham, and returned to Pakse late in January. In March, after some visits to the beleaguered town, USAID decided to continue work on the market, both as a boost to morale and because it lay within the city itself and work posed no particular security problem. Work on the market continues, slowly due to lack of road transport and its low priority.
Future USAID programs in Saravane province depend largely on a satisfactory conclusion to hostilities and the departure of enemy forces. The situation is presently almost that of 1964, when Saravane lay in the middle of a "No Man's Land" and its continued existence was in question. When and if USAID can return, programs should continue along the lines of a complete provincial development, working from secure areas out further into the countryside as less secure areas once again come under RIG control.

USAID operations throughout Laos have varied according to the area, the political and military climate, strength of the RIG administration, and felt needs of the people. In Saravane, USAID programs have been shaped by a number of basic factors:

First, Saravane is a historical center of Laos and has a long history as a distinct Lao province. It is the sixth or seventh largest Lao city and may be the largest in Laos that does not lie on or near the Mekong River. Because of this and the fact that it has been cut off from the rest of the Kingdom by enemy action, it has more or less developed on its own as a small but definite separate area. Individualism is shown even by a dance, the renown "Saravane," which is the main variation to Laos' traditional "Lamvong."

Second, progress has occurred primarily in the lower western quadrant of the province, lying along the Sedone River. Here the land is fertile and irrigable, road transportation exists, and the majority of the population lives in this area. The other three-quarters of the province are mostly mountainous, without roads, away from any year-around river, and sparsely settled.

Next, there presently exists an extensive, well-developed government bureaucracy, with the governor as the highest official. Many RIG functionaries work in agriculture, health, education, livestock, public roads, and similar service agencies.

The Chao Khoueng of Saravane, Sithat Sithibourn (who has recently been transferred to Champassak), is regarded as one of the best in the country, and has vigorously championed progress and development programs. Other officials, the Deputy Chao Khoueng, the Medicin Chef, and the Primary School Inspector, deserve particular note as being active and interested in progress and the welfare of citizens.

(Credit should also go to USAID personnel who let capable men run their own show. Curt Swezy, CDA 1965-1967, initiated the practice of using Lao honorifics of "Kanoy" and "Doy" when speaking to the Chao Khoueng, Deputy Chao Khoueng, and Colonel, and his successor continued this practice. This had the desirable effect of letting both the speaker and listener become aware that the advisor was, truly, an advisor, and that the honored was the man who made the decisions.)
Saravane province has a high proportion of tribal groups, many of which have become Laoised in language and customs. Colonel Vuk, a Nghe, is one of the few non-ethnic Lao members of the National Assembly. Other non-Lao have positions as minor officials. During a recent visit of the Crown Prince, the Chao Khoueng secured tribal entertainers. All of this points to an interest in tribal groups and their continued integration into the social and political structure.

Because of the presence of a relatively strong provincial government, USAID has been able to take the proper supporting role, advising and assisting the established officials. This is unlike Ban Houei Kong, for example, were it has been necessary for USAID, with RLG agreement, to set up and run practically the complete development program.

What should be the course of action for future American assistance in Saravane province? In light of past programs, and taking factors noted above into consideration, it appears clear that future programs should attempt to achieve as much as possible through actual community development, on the "people-to-people" level, but through the existing RLG framework. Goals would be to:

1) Set up the program as much as possible within the present governmental structure, aiding established officials to work out the programs and carry out day-to-day operation and decision-making.

2) Build up the ability of the RLG to provide services to the people. Helping establish and get into operation the Commission for Rural Affairs workers as a corps of village workers, and assisting the Medicin Chef in provincial public health are two examples of the type of work that can be done in this field. It also includes such basics as helping organize transportation, supply of POL, and repair of vehicles.

3) Pass from "crest-of-the-wave" programs, which are developed on a wave of excitement, reach a crest, subside and gradually are forgotten, on to a plane where a variety of programs can be assisted concurrently. The lasting effects of programs such as the "raise ducks and pigs" program should be evaluated to see if their impact has continued. Results of some of these "one-shot" programs would seem to indicate that a closer concentration should be made on meeting the felt needs of the people with programs individually tailored to meet their needs and requests.

4) Obtain as high as possible support from the people in 'self-help' type programs. And if they should, in mid-project, change their minds or lose enthusiasm, such projects should be calmly dropped or put on the shelf until an opportune time for reinitiation.

4) Stimulate development thinking of provincial officials and local sociopolitical councils, concentrating on all-over planning, doing "test runs" of new ideas on a small scale to see if they work, gradually increasing them and continuing on an organised basis. Limits should be set at the start, and, when work is completed, the development councils should evaluate successes and plan for the future.

Galen Beery - Pakse, Laos - June 1, 1968