

## **Aussie supports innocent victims of war ravaged Laos**

by finch *Saturday, Dec 6 2008, 9:35pm*

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The turn of the 20th century is noted by REVELATION - not the escapist fairy tale variety of gibbering religionists -- BUT HARD REALITY IN THE REAL WORLD. Real revelation EXPOSING the most heinous and vilest criminal state in the world today - America!



***Bomb Harvest***

The widespread belief that American war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan are aberrations of an otherwise civilised society are ERRONEOUS; America's vile and heinous crimes of mass murder, torture and other crimes against humanity date back to civil war prisoners, the annexation of the Philippines and numerous interventions in Latin America.

The world has seen no change in the practices of the world's leading terrorist nation. America has a killing and destruction record equal to, if not exceeding, the most grotesque 'efforts' of the world's most infamous mass murdering regimes. In a few decades America has consciously murdered 4 million innocent civilians in Indo-China - indiscriminate carpet-bombing - and 1 million in Iraq and Afghanistan. FIVE MILLION innocent dead (and counting) ranks up there with Pol Pot and Idi Amin; America should be seen for what it is, a criminal, terrorist state. The REAL America, not the fantasyland Hollywood and Murdoch feed you.

The Australian ABC recently televised a much lauded documentary first released in late '07, "Bomb Harvest," which graphically portrays the toll of the (illegal) American bombing campaign on Laos during the criminal Vietnam war.

The doco is set in present time and follows the exploits of an Aussie army engineer living in Laos and assisting locals in the deadly harvest of unexploded American cluster and other megaton munitions/'ordnance,' illegally dropped 30 years ago by Henry Kissinger and the CRIMINAL U.S. Air Force!

A recent story by a Laotian living in America prompted the writing of this piece - know you are not alone brother; the more the Americans murder, steal and destroy and attempt to hide their crimes, the more ground they lose in the war against WAR! The end is fast approaching for that criminal nation, of that you can be assured. It will no doubt be razed to the ground, a fitting and deserving end for a nation of murderers, thieves and deniers.

Many Laotians have settled in Oz particularly in SA and they are welcome, as are ALL peace-loving, freedom-loving people.

Conservative racists and xenophobes represented by John Howard, Pauline Hanson and Kevin Rudd represent only a tiny and diminishing minority; do not be deceived by propaganda and lies - never forget we are ONE! The Aussie engineer in the doco personifies the REAL Australian character; he is an ambassador for a nation that is FRIEND TO ALL, as distinct from the murdering, assassinating, Kevin Rudd-led ADF of today, wantonly killing like criminal Americans! Those bastards tarnish the good name of Australia -- their legacy will forever be remembered with shame and regret.

The following story and link to the very viewable documentary, "Bomb Harvest," is included for your convenience:

### **Drawing the Future From the Past**

by Channapha Khamvongsa

The bombing was relentless. From 1964 to 1973, the United States dropped more than 2 million tons of ordnance on Laos. That's a planeload of bombs every eight minutes, 24 hours a day, for nine years. Laos has the unfortunate distinction of being the most heavily bombed country in the history of the world.

"In the area of Xieng Khoang, the place of my birth, there was health, good earth, and fine weather," one survivor, a 33-year-old man, recalls of that period. "But then the airplanes came, bombing the rice fields and the forests, making us leave our land and rice fields with great sadness. One day a plane came bombing my rice field as well as the village. I had gone very early to harrow the field. I thought, 'I am only a village rice farmer, the airplane will not shoot me.' But that day truly it did shoot me and wounded me together with my buffalo, which was the source of a hundred thousand loves and a hundred thousand worries for me."

For nearly three decades, the U.S. secret war in Laos and the impact of the most massive bombing campaign in the world was nearly forgotten. For those who remembered, the events seemed surreal. They witnessed the reckless destruction of a people and their land, and careful efforts by the U.S. government to conceal it. For those too young to know, gathering information and knowledge of this history was scattered and fragmented. It seemed the secret war in Laos and its aftermath would remain a secret.

But then a remarkable set of drawings and eyewitness accounts came to light. Laotian villagers put their memories on paper in the 1970s to depict the secret bombing of their country. This trove of reminiscences became the inspiration for Legacies of War. Founded by Laotian Americans in 2004, the project raises awareness about the history of the Vietnam War-era bombing in Laos. Using a unique combination of art, culture, education, community organizing, advocacy, and dialogue, Legacies of War also works for the removal of unexploded bombs in Laos, to provide space for healing the wounds of war, and to create greater hope for a future of peace.

### **A Secret War, a People Scattered**

When the United States withdrew from Indochina, the "Secret War" in Laos was lost to history. But the legacy of the war lives on. Up to 30% of the cluster bombs dropped by

the United States in Laos failed to detonate, leaving extensive contamination from unexploded ordnance (UXO) in the countryside. That translates into 78 to 130 million unexploded bomblets. Over one-third of the land in Laos is contaminated. These "bombies," as the Lao now call them, have killed or maimed more than 34,000 people since the war's end, and continue to claim more innocent victims every day. About 40% of accidents result in death, and 60% of the victims are children. UXO remains a major barrier to the safety, health, livelihoods, and food security of the people of Laos.

The war also displaced up to one-third of the Lao population. Nearly 750,000 would eventually become refugees in France, Australia, and Canada, among other countries. Over 350,000 refugees from Laos came to the United States after having experienced war, destruction, death, imprisonment, family separation, loss of homeland, loss of identity, and loss of control over their destinies. Many had undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder. But these weren't things Laotian refugees had the luxury to contemplate, for basic economic survival trumped all other needs.

### **Drawing on the Past**

Between December 1970 and May 1971, Fred Branfman, an American, and Boungoun, a Lao man, collected illustrations and narratives in the Vientiane refugee camps, where bombing victims fled. The drawings and narratives represent the voiceless, faceless, and nameless who endured an air war campaign committed in secrecy. Drawn in pencil, pens, crayons, and markers, they are raw and stark, reflecting the crude events that shaped their reality. The simplicity of the narration and drawings emphasize the illustrators' identities as ordinary villagers who bore witness to a devastating event.

For instance, an 18-year-old woman remembers, "In the year 1967, my village built small shelters in the forest and we had holes in the bamboo thicket on top of the hill. It was a place to which we could flee. But there were two brothers who went out to cut wood in the forest. The airplanes shot them and both brothers died. Their mother and father had just these two sons and were both in the same hole with me. I think with much pity about this old father and mother who were like crazy people because their children had died."

Each of the illustrations demonstrates the violence of warfare. However, the images of blood and death are contradicted by the memories of the scenic and peaceful village life these survivors once lived. Scenes show farmers tending to their rice fields, monks praying at the temple, women going to the market, and children playing in the schoolyard. The drawings capture the very moments when their lives and society were forever altered. The illustrations and narratives are at the heart of the Legacies of War National Travelling Exhibition, which is accompanied by historical photos, maps and other relevant documents to give context to the decade-long bombings.

Only a small circle of individuals knew of the existence of these illustrations. The pictures hadn't been seen in decades, not since the end of the war. A fortuitous meeting between me and Institute for Policy Studies director John Cavanagh led to the return of the illustrations to the Lao American community. In the last several years, thousands of visitors have seen the illustrations through the Legacies of War travelling exhibit and other community forums. Although most Laotian Americans didn't experience the same horrors depicted in the drawings, the illustrations invoke memory of their own stories of refuge, survival, and resilience.

The reaction to the drawings was instructive to Legacies' work. Initially considered an artefact, the illustrations have become a living document. One at a time, each drawing tells the story of a survivor. Although the illustrations were from four decades ago, they inspire others to share their stories, contributing to a collective narrative that began long ago in Laos, but continues today through the voices of Laotian Americans.

Following a viewing of the illustrations at an exhibit in Lowell, Massachusetts, a Lao woman in the audience stood up to speak at a community forum, "The illustrations made me remember. I have not shared, not even with my family because I didn't think it was important. When I was a young woman in Laos, I worked as a nurse to help people hurt by the bombing. Every day, the airplanes would come: Boom! Boom! Boom! And then one day, it came so close to us, we had to hide in the cave and we hear right outside the cave, the sound so loud. It scared me so much. I feel so lucky I did not die. The pictures made me remember. I am so sad that today, people in Lao are still being hurt and dying from these bombs." The woman, whose husband had spoken on several occasions about his experience, had never shared hers. The illustrations and community forum gave her a chance to tell her story for the first time in 30 years. Today, she remains engaged in educating people in the Boston-area about the bombing and its aftermath.

These new voices and stories are captured in various ways through Legacies of War: interactive exhibition pieces, community programs, oral history interviews, theater performance pieces, and new commissioned works of art. Based on oral histories collected from Laotian refugees and their descendents, the Refugee Nation theater piece reveals connections between U.S. and Southeast Asian history, and the unique challenges faced by political refugees and their American children. Touching on themes of identity, globalization, and activism, it brings a Laotian voice to a growing part of the Asian-American Diaspora that is yet to be included in the American experience. <

The integration of storytelling, art, and performance are critical in breaking the silence. By creating multiple access points of engagement, Legacies of War facilitates the connection of personal stories to a collective experience in recognition that we are not alone in our experiences, that we are connected to a larger narrative and a larger context. The acknowledgement of a shared journey and struggle could lead to collective strength and power.

Since the end to the U.S. wars in Southeast Asia, many other wars have been waged, in other parts of the world, in new terrain, villages, and communities. Yet, the wars in Southeast Asia lingers. And for the people living in Laos as well as those who became refugees, the lingering impact of war remains ever present in their daily lives. Although war and conflict created the refugee community, they don't have to define it. Through the transformative power of stories, art, and performance, Laotian Americans are evolving from victim to agency of change. "Now that I know about the secret war," said a Lao American student in Seattle, "I have to do something about the horrible things that are still happening to people. As Americans, we must do something."

Another victim, a 37-year old woman, reflects, "Our lives became like those of animals desperately trying to escape their hunters . . . Human beings, whose parents brought them into the world and carefully raised them with overflowing love despite so many difficulties, these human beings would die from a single blast as explosions burst, lying still without moving again at all. And who then thinks of the blood, flesh, sweat and strength of their parents, and who will have charity and pity for them?...In reality,

whatever happens, it is only the innocent who suffer. And as for other men, do they know all the unimaginable things happening in this war?"

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<http://www.fpif.org/fpif.txt/5719>

<http://www.abc.net.au/atthemovies/txt/s2041982.htm>

Bomb Harvest:



<http://tinyurl.com/6a3var>

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Cleaves Alternative News. <http://cleaves.lingama.net/news/story-1346.html>