

# THE NATIONAL NEWSLETTER OF THE MIVAC TRUST



**MIVAC** started its public life as a small group in Hobart, with big challenges ahead of it. Now, almost ten years later we have completed nearly twenty projects in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos.

**Kai's Village Orphanage in Cambodia** was the recipient of water pumps to help supply clean water for the children at the orphanage. **Mike Roberts**, our Project Officer in Cambodia carried out the work and also helped to set up a self-sustainable vegetable garden to provide the children with fresh vegetables.

**Gillian Paxton**, MiVAC Trustee and Secretary visited Kais Village Orphanage in December 2009. This is her Report.

## CAMBODIA

### Report on Visit to Kais Village Orphanage, 5 Dec. 2009

**Kais Village** is an orphanage that is located about 86 kms west of Phnom Penh in Cambodia, along the Sihanouk Ville Road. I met with **Walter Kopek** (MiVAC member) and we visited the orphanage on Saturday, Dec. 5th, 2009. We took with us two 50kg bags of rice (as a donation to the Orphanage from MiVAC) and 20 baguettes (for the children). The orphanage uses eleven 50kg bags of rice a month, so this was a very useful donation.

At this time there are about 60 children, ranging in age from babies to 18 years olds. The older children attend the local school. The babies and toddlers are housed in a nursery. At the time of

visiting, the accommodation building for the boys had been demolished as it was unsafe, but there are plans to rebuild it using local labour and donated money. In the meantime, the boys are housed in one end of the dining area. There is also a Girls House, a School House, a Medical Centre and separate boys' and girls' toilets.

Impressively, the orphanage is working towards self-sufficiency. It is in this area that MiVAC has made its greatest contribution (in the form of helping to fund a vegetable garden) and a member, Mike Roberts, has made a large contribution in labour and financial assistance. He has also contributed to the running of the orphanage and the well being of the children. The vegetable garden is known as the '**Kitchen Garden**' because it grows many of the vegetables used in cooking (such as watermelons, greens and herbs). Other crops are grown for sale (to make money for needed food that cannot be grown). The orphanage keeps several pigs, which are penned so that their droppings can be collected for bio-gas for the kitchen. Unfortunately, some of the machinery is not in use now that Mike had to leave for health reasons.

Several of the children are orphans due to landmines. Often babies get abandoned in hospital due to the parents being unable to afford their care. The orphanage is also working on care and sponsorship of children affected by HIV/AIDS. There is obviously an enormous amount of humanitarian aid needed in Cambodia.



**Gillian at Kais Village Orphanage**

The babies and toddlers in the nursery are cared for by local nannies. These women do a good job, and are kind and caring, but there seem to be more children than can be given the sort of individual care needed. One toddler needed to hold on to Walter's legs for a long time before she felt enough trust to be picked up. Another demanded attention straight away. Another child lay passively on his back on the floor, but held my hands tightly and moved them from side to side. Feeding, changing nappies, putting to bed etc. would take up a large amount of the nannies' time, and it must be hard to cater for individual emotional needs.



**Meeting one of the toddlers Kais Village Orphanage**

After visiting the nursery, we spent time with the older children, reading and talking. Apparently, children nearing the end of their time at the orphanage receive training for their chosen job. Sometimes their ability in speaking

English, learned while at the orphanage, gives them an advantage when seeking a job.

As well as attending the local school, the children receive schooling (especially in speaking English) at the orphanage. Due to donations, at this time there are enough school items to last several months, but specific items (such as colouring books) are still needed.

### **Recommendations**

There is an obvious need for humanitarian aid for the children of Cambodia, especially those with disabilities and special needs. With its limited finances, MiVAC needs, however, to focus on small projects, which will achieve the maximum benefits for the recipients, and these should be projects that are linked to the negative effects of landmines on individuals and communities.

In the case of Kais Village Orphanage I would like to see:

(i) Sponsorship of children who are orphans due to landmines or other remnants of war;

(ii) Active encouragement of people who wish to contribute to volunteer at the orphanage for an extended time;

(iii) Donation and installation, in consultation with those who work at the Orphanage, of equipment that is straightforward to use and that contributes to self-sustainable operation;

(iv) Ongoing contact and consultation with the managers and workers of Kais Village, especially in the use of financial donations made specifically to the Kais Village Orphanage.

(v) Consultation on what is needed at the present time (e.g. baby clothes are not needed, most school equipment is not needed at present, colouring books would be a welcome donation).

I was impressed with the efforts of Kais village staff to provide for the children's needs, and I would like to see continuing appropriate support.

**GILLIAN PAXTON**

**MiVAC Trustee & Secretary**

## LAOS

### Ban Xai and Kohai Projects

**Rob Woolley**, Project Officer, reports that 2009 saw the MiVAC/Phoenix Clearance Limited partnership very successfully clear 48 hectares of land in **Ban Xai** and **Kohai**, including areas around several schools, villages and rice fields including a mine field contaminated with landmines and UXO's. Some of these leftover remnants of war included M16 bounding mines, mortars set up as land mines, cluster bombs, white phosphorus bombs, and many other types of UXOs including large bombs.

### Kohai Schools

**Michael Hayes** from PCL says that because the Company had local experience in the area, a proposal was drafted and accepted for a MIVAC - PCL UXO Clearance Team to deploy for 5 days to the area of **Ban Kohai** village of **Khamkert District** of **Bolikhamxay Province** to clear the Kohai primary and secondary schools.



**UXO clearance Kohai rice fields  
Blue markers indicate UXO's (35)**

The villagers have long lived in fear when farming the communal field which although known to contain UXO's the villagers had no choice but utilise or starve.

No UXO clearance has ever been conducted upon the communal rice field (approx 20ha in size) and unfortunately due to the size all could not be cleared in this project.

Utilising MIVAC and PCL resources well

the project was able to UXO clear 8ha of the most heavily contaminated land closest to the school and the village. Over the last few years there have been UXO accidents in these fields something that will never occur again on this field thanks to this project.

Between the dates of 23rd – 31st January 2010, PCL UXO Teams conducted UXO Clearance in an area of **Ban Kohai Village Communal Rice** lands, a known UXO threat area.

Between the 23rd and 31st January 2010 PCL/MIVAC cleared the first 80,000sqm of an approx 200,000sqm of rice fields and destroyed 87 UXO.

The team also performed a level 1 UXO technician training course for the 6 locals that have been used

in the past two PCL/MIVAC projects and will be working with PCL in upcoming projects outside their home district and province. The village as a whole is extremely grateful for the employment opportunity.

On 31st January 2010 the work was concluded with the site being handed over to the village in an official ceremony.



**M16 Jumping Jack mine cleared from  
MiVAC/PCL project Laos 2009**

The villagers again were highly appreciative of the MIVAC/PCL effort that has reduced the potential for Landmine or UXO accident in the village; again they were amazed that someone actually came to help them because simply for the past 10 years they have been asking for help but no one ever came.

They say that they now have a better understanding of the threat that the UXO poses and the action required personally to reduce the threat. The village community donated accommodation electricity and water to the team, something that is almost unheard of. Some may say "big deal! we are helping them so they should provide assistance" but for a poor community to be in a position provide anything is very rare in Laos and just goes to show the level of appreciation the villagers have for the MIVAC/PCL UXO action. They also have an understanding of what would be required to completely remove the UXO threat from their land and as such have requested that MIVAC/PCL return and assist them by removing subsurface UXO from the rice fields and surrounds. Finally the village gave a vote of thanks to the MIVAC/PCL team for employing and training 6 locals firstly as site labourers then as trained level 1 technicians during the action all of which showed promise and have now been recommended as PCL UXO technicians with the prospect of working full time for PCL.

**MICHAEL HAYES**

**Phoenix Clearance Ltd**

**Robert Rands**, Trustee & Chairperson of MiVAC recently visited our projects in Laos and we look forward to reading his report in the next issue of The National Newsletter

## **VIETNAM**

### **MiVAC Road Project**

**Derek Smith**, visited the site of the **Kon Katu** crossing project only to find the latest typhoon had wreaked havoc on the area. Here is his report:

We visited the site of the project at Kon Katu. The flooding as a result of **Typhoon Ketsana** (28/29 September) had eroded the road leading to the

crossing. It could take a 10 ton truck, now it was only trafficable by motorbike. It was clear that the damage had put the project well beyond our scope and finances.

We then visited **Vinh Son 5**, one of the three orphanages that had been under our radar until earlier in 2009. To access VS5 we had to cross a creek known as **Jackfruit Crossing**. Here was a possible alternative project for MiVAC, depending on how things panned out. As it happened, we had a meeting with **Mr. Ha Ban, Director of the Province of Kon Tum** (like Premier) and **East Meets West** people.

Mr. Ha Ban advised that the Government was going to undertake the Kon Katu job (from typhoon relief funds I think) and he asked if MiVAC could repair another crossing. We agreed and then set off to this new site.



### **Jackfruit Crossing**

It did not take long for me to realise that we were going to Jackfruit Crossing. Ironic! So now new plans have been drawn up and have been passed back to the Peoples Committee (28 Dec 09). Given that the Government has asked MiVAC to do this work, I feel approval will be given in the very near future. We could not do anything about the impact of the typhoon, but I reckon the end result is far better for the people of Kon Tum.

**DEREK SMITH**  
**MiVAC Member & Project Officer**  
**VIETNAM**

## STATE NEWS:

### NSW

NSW members have been active over the last few months and the word is now slowly circulating about MiVAC. So much so that we have been approached for a feature article to appear in the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age. We will certainly keep members informed as to when this will be happening.

We are proud to welcome several new members including the **Rotary Club of Leichhardt** and the **Lions Club of Rockdale**.

We have now completed the review of NSW MiVAC members and clarified what they want to receive and hear about from MiVAC.

**David Sturmer** reports that he is liaising with **Daryl Westrup** in Western Australia on a new, modern, interactive website for MiVAC.

Meanwhile **Sandy MacGregor** and I are progressing our programme of speaking at Rotary and Lions clubs. This is a great opportunity to spread the word about MiVAC and the issue of the legacies of conflict to educated audiences who are already deeply involved in serving their communities locally and globally.

**PAUL JEFFRESS**

**Trustee**

### MET SCHOOL VISIT MEADOWBANK. NSW

It was a proud day for MiVAC and myself as this relatively small school assembled to present their contribution to helping kids in Laos less fortunate than themselves. All of this started a couple of years ago when I was asked to speak about the Vietnam War to the students who study this history in year 10...as time progressed and I began to understand this was a very strict and different religious school. Our interactive talks began to show these young Australians were deeply concerned, and as kids help kids around the world, these guy's were no exception. From a MiVAC leaflet left behind after a talk it was a

pleasant surprise to be asked to return and receive their contribution, the kids had gathered on a sports day in 2009 and gave freely from their hearts.

**DAVE STURMER**

**MiVAC Member NSW**

### TASMANIA

Tasmanian members will soon be starting a State Branch with meetings to be held in the Kingston area. If you are interested in attending meetings or being part of our Social Committee please contact 62641485 for details of time and place.

During this past year **Rob Woolley** has spoken to **Legacy**, several **Rotary Clubs** and **schools** about MiVAC's work. He also attended the **Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans Association Conference**, which was held in Hobart in January 2010.

Our **Lazy Sunday Afternoon** fundraiser, which was held on October 25th 2009 at the **Brookfield Vineyard**, was a great success and I am pleased to include in this newsletter an article by **Don Knowler**, a journalist, who agreed to be "auctioned" to help raise some much appreciated funds for the Kohai School in Laos. We would like to thank all of our **Mystery Guests** who really entered into the spirit of the occasion and were auctioned by our MC for the day. Also thanks go to the **Choirs** and **performers** who gave their time and talents to entertain everyone and help further our cause. Thanks are also due to all the people who donated prizes for the raffle, including the **Hon. Alan Griffin, Rob Blakers and Michael Grace**.

January 2010 saw several members travel to **Launceston** to meet with **Donny Paterson** and view the Tasmanian Premiere of "The Third Wave". **Ric Marton** who organized the screening of the film writes the following:

## THE THIRD WAVE

The Third Wave: a volunteer story was screened on January 17, 2010 at the **Launceston Tramsheds**. The Launceston community was very lucky to get this exclusive screening ahead of an official US tour of the film. We were also able to welcome **Donny Patterson** who was a feature volunteer in the film about his story and any extra perspectives not already shown in the film. With thanks from LAFM, The Examiner Newspaper and a little bit of Facebook, we attracted over 120 people (including state and federal politicians) to see this powerful story. Even better news was that our profits from the night went to the good work of MiVAC Trust. This film showed the value of volunteers working hands on which is a perfect fit with the down to earth, efficient and very effective nature of MiVAC Trust. **Rob Woolley** also shared some of his stories, experience and upcoming features of the projects currently rolling out and of those to come in the future. Overall this was an inspiring night, sending out the message that in some way, many different ways "**Everyone is needed**".

*On a personal note, Donny Paterson gave me the film 'The Third Wave' just prior to Christmas after we shared the stage as speakers at a Professional Breakfast. I was so moved by it that I felt a burning responsibility to show it to the wider community. From that screening more people have changed their focus, deciding to give a little more consideration, and structuring their lives to be a part of proactively caring for others who appreciate and need it so much. My company Coyote Events was more than happy to sponsor and deliver this film as a community initiative and I am so glad we could inspire the community and raise funds for a hardworking organisation such as MiVAC Trust. Thanks to Rob and all of the MiVAC representatives for joining us, and Donny Paterson for making his*

*way down from Newcastle to share the story.*

**RIC MARTON**

**Coyote Events**

## MINEFIELD OF MEMORIES

The auctioneer's voice rang out "Now, what am I bid?" I was about to go under the hammer. The **bird watching columnist** of the **Mercury** has found himself in some pretty strange environments during his nearly 10 years in the job, but being part of a celebrity auction for landmine victims was the most unusual so far.

I tried to tell the charity concerned that I was hardly a celebrity, but was overruled by one of the committee members who likes birds.

And there was added pressure. My wife was concerned that no one would bid for me, and she had prepared a bid just in case, to save the Knowler family from embarrassment.

The prize for the winning bidders was to have one of the number of celebrities sit at their lunch table during a fundraiser day for the Mines, Victims and Clearance Trust (MiVAC), an organisation started by **Tasmanian Vietnam War veterans**, their families and supporters. The money was for one of the Trust's projects, helping to clear a school of unexploded bombs and landmines in **Laos**.

The winning bidder I was told, would obviously want to talk birds, but it just so happened I had a few mine stories of my own if the conversation, inevitably strayed that way.

I spent a decade as a newspaper correspondent in **South Africa**, covering several conflicts there in the 1970's, including the war of independence the former **Rhodesia**, and the **Soweto** uprising in South Africa.

Before the fundraising day at the **Brookfield Winery** in **Margate** last month, I went to my cuttings from my South African days to refresh my memory.

I still carry troublesome memories of my own from those times and don't usually talk of the more harrowing mine experiences, but all the same some of the incidents were not without irony, and a little humour. Before travelling a frequently mined road in **Eastern Rhodesia** one Saturday afternoon in a mine-proofed vehicle, a local farmer and myself stopped at an off-licence to pick up a couple of crates of beer.

It didn't occur to us at the time that in the confines of an armoured vehicle hitting a landmine, shards of shattered beer bottles would not be the sort of thing you'd want flying around you.

On the other side of the country, at the **Victoria Falls** resort town on the **Zambezi**, the Rhodesian army had laid a minefield around the entire township.

It was designed to stop insurgents crossing into the country from the neighbouring, black-ruled **Zambia** and **Botswana**, but in truth it only served to maim big game and lesser creatures living along the banks of the mighty river atop the Victoria Falls.



*Bomb removal in Laos*

I would lay awake in my room at the **Victoria Falls Hotel** at night hearing

the mines going off in the not too- far distance.

I won't go into the grisly details of elephants straying into minefields, but the vultures were also victims.

The vultures when landing would not be of sufficient weight to trigger mines designed for humans, but once they had gorged themselves on mine-kill, usually smaller antelopes and baboons, the bird's added weight would trigger the mines as they ran to take off.

Though landmines and their legacy from wars past and present appear to be human issues, a quick span of landmine websites reveals animals both wild and domestic, suffer too.

On a human scale, the mines not only kill and maim innocent people, they hamper agriculture and deter tourists who might otherwise bring much needed foreign currency to developing nations.

A case in point is the **Falkland Islands**, a known birding hotspot. Birding tourists visiting the islands are restricted from travelling to many places because of minefields laid by the Argentine military during the **Falklands war** with **Britain** in the early 1980's.

All this was food for discussion at the landmine lunch. Arriving for the luncheon, I had suffered a mild panic attack when I saw that there were genuine celebrities lined up for the auction, most of them federal and state politicians.

But much to my wife's relief, I received the highest bid but one, and that was for **Ross Butler** a Labor MHA for Franklin.

**DON KNOWLER**

**Reprinted with the kind permission of The Mercury and Don Knowler.**

The MiVAC Trust is the initiative of Australian Vietnam Veterans who cleared landmines during the Vietnam War and witnessed the devastation caused by these indiscriminate weapons. MiVAC is primarily a fundraising body, a voluntary organization allocating much needed funds to projects identified to the MiVAC Trustees by Australian deminers, or others who are, or have been, involved with demining, health or education projects overseas. Membership of the Trust includes veterans from other conflicts, humanitarian aid workers, members of the peace-keeping forces and other service personnel, and of course the many civilians who have been touched by the plight of those living in war torn countries.

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