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Survivors of Laos' 'forgotten war' beset with bombs, economic problems

By Bill Allen

One of the biggest problems facing the survivors of the "forgotten war" in Laos is only about the size of a tennis ball.

Small bombs pepper the countryside of this small Indochinese nation and spread fear among farmers trying to reconstruct their lives after the war. This is according to Roger Rumpf and his wife, Jaqui Chagnon, who have spent the last 3½ years living in Laos as field directors for the American Friends Service Committee (Quakers), and who are now on a nationwide speaking tour recounting their experiences.

At a Monday press conference, the couple said the reason for their trip to Laos was two-fold. They went to help the Laotian people and also to educate Americans about conditions in Laos once they returned to the United States.

Chagnon said that since 1964, in the Xieng Khouang Province alone, more than 4,700 people have been killed by the small "bomblets."

According to Rumpf, these bombs were not meant to have enough power to even blow a hole in a truck tire, yet they were very effective for their main purpose — maiming humans.

The couple said apathy of the U.S. government is a major problem in Indochina. Rumpf said the U.S. Congress has banned sending direct government aid to Indochina and has even made it difficult for private humanitarian groups to aid the people.

As an example, Rumpf said AFSC has asked the government to give information on how to set off the small bombs.

Competitors pawns for chess champ

By Eric Peterson

Nebraska's college chess champion has been playing the game since he was 8 years old. Mike Matthews said a neighbor lady taught him how to play chess, and then he taught his own parents how to play the game. Since then Matthews has devoted a lot of time to chess, playing in tournaments and organizing them. He entered his first tournament in high school. By his third tournament, he won first place.

"It was only \$10, when the entry fee was something like \$15, but I was really proud of it anyway," Matthews said, grinning. Matthews attended Lincoln East High School and was president of the chess club there.

Matthews has gone to tournaments in New York and Atlanta, among other places.

"The summer after I was an undergrad at Wesleyan, I just kind of bummed around, going from tournament to tournament," Matthews said. He will graduate from UNL with a master's degree in educational administration this spring. He graduated from Wesleyan in 1978 with a bachelor of science degree.

Matthews said he wants to be a media specialist in a public school. It is possible to play chess for a living, but the lifestyle is somewhat unusual, he said.

Chess brotherhood

"Tournament chess players are definitely kind of a brotherhood," Matthews said. It's customary to let out-of-town chess players stay in a host's house during a tournament in that town, he said. The typical chess player is in the mid-20s.

An actual chess tournament is physically demanding, Matthews said.

"It's very draining," he said. "You have to be in good physical condition." Matthews usually prepares himself by reviewing some of his own favorite game openings and reviewing some of his opponent's past games.

"I work to get myself in a chess frame of mind," he said. Concentration is the most important quality in tournament play, Matthews said. He was playing in a Lincoln tournament once when a fight broke out and a table was overturned, yet he didn't know about it until the game was finished.

Matthews looks at chess as an art rather than a science.

"I'm more of an instinct player," he said. "I don't just play a game, but I play my opponent." Matthews said he once beat a player in eight moves who had won every other game in the tournament.

Crowd appeal

"I love it when a crowd — a fairly quiet crowd —

In response, the government cordoned, or enclosed, the danger area and denied access to it.

If done properly, Rumpf said, that would mean cordoning a third of the country.

The couple passed around several pictures of farmers and children with missing limbs or other injuries received when they stepped on the bombs.

Rumpf said the bombs are just one of the factors that create a "push-pull" effect that brings many of the country's refugees to the United States.

Economic problems also tend to push the Laotians out of their country, Chagnon said. She said many of the younger people recognize the better opportunities elsewhere.

Rumpf estimated that between 5 percent and 8 percent of the pre-1970 population of Laos has resettled in the United States.

Both Rumpf and Chagnon said this emigration is a major problem for Laos because it drains the country of much-needed technical personnel.

"Our contention is many of them would stay if the U.S. would help the people of Laos," Rumpf said.

The couple's program covers other areas of concern in Indochina and also is meant to educate the people of the United States about the war.

Rumpf said Americans knew little about the war in Indochina, especially in Laos. He described it as a "secret war run by the CIA."

Rumpf and Chagnon said they also hope to provide some basic information about the country, such as its culture, foods and art.

Chagnon is the co-editor of two anthologies of Vietnamese poetry, and has had articles published recently in the *Bangkok Post* and the *S.E. Asian Chronicle*.

gathers to watch," he said.

Matthews said some world tournament players carry the drama too far; for example, by hiring hypnotists to confuse the opponent. Nevertheless, ethics at chess tournaments are generally good, and there is a kind of camaraderie," he said.

"U.S. and Soviet (chess) federation relations are a lot better than relations between the governments, I bet," Matthews said.

Matthews sometimes plays simultaneous games with as many as 20 people.

"The idea is that I would have five to 10 seconds to decide on a move, and the others would have quite a lot longer," he said.

Matthews also directs three or four chess tournaments a year. Commissioned by the U.S. Chess Federation as an official tournament director, he is hired by local chess groups to run tournaments. He said he has directed about 40 Lincoln tournaments but has given directing up until he gets his master's degree.

Nebraska has had quite a few talented chess players, Matthews said. This includes an international chess master, John Watson, and three candidate masters — himself; Douglas J. Greenwalt, the current Lincoln city chess champion; and Kent Nelson. Being a candidate master means you should be in the top 3 percent of chess players in the country, he said.



Photo by D. Eric Kircher
Mike Mathews

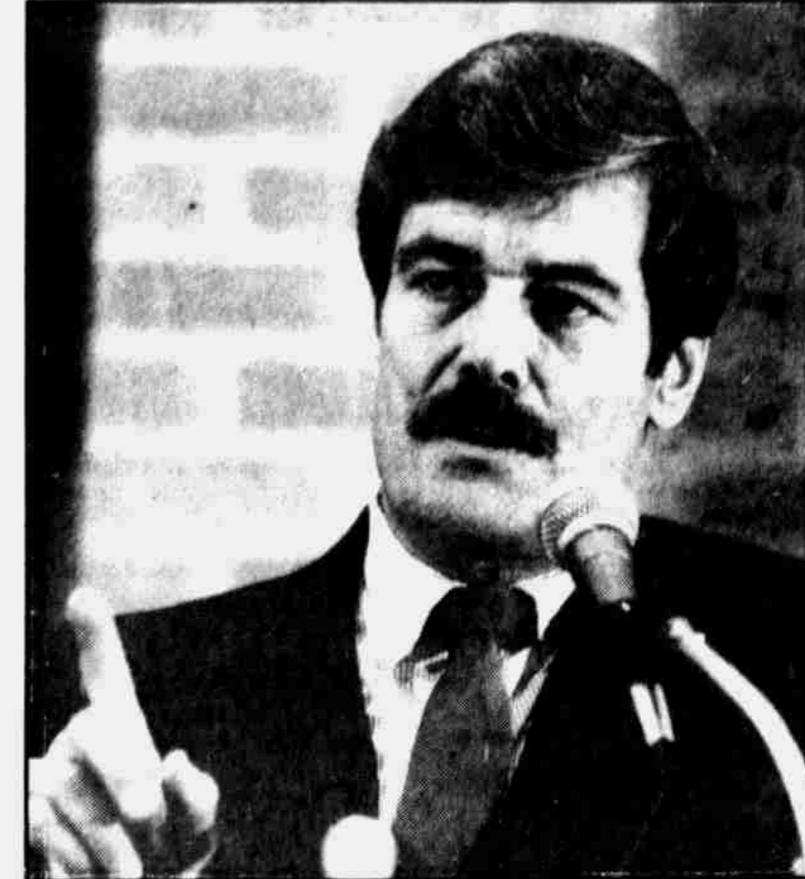


Photo by Dave Bentz

Phil Crane

Speaker addresses foreign policy, says budget on right track

By Pat Higgins

If the government of El Salvador falls, communist subversion could spread through the rest of Central America and Mexico, Rep. Phil Crane, R-Ill., said.

Crane, a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination in 1980, was invited to speak at UNL's East Campus Union by the Young Americans for Freedom.

Crane spoke to about 50 people Sunday night, primarily about U.S. involvement in foreign countries.

Jimmy Carter's policies encouraged de-stabilization in El Salvador, Crane said, adding that the long term policy should be endorsement of the Monroe Doctrine.

The Monroe Doctrine, passed in 1823, was President James Madison's mandate prohibiting colonization of American land by European powers.

"President Reagan should consider a quarantine against Cuba similar to what John Kennedy did in 1962," Crane said.

In that year, Kennedy ordered U.S. warships to confront Soviet vessels that surrounded Cuba in protest of Soviet missiles stationed in Cuba. Kennedy's move prompted the Soviets to remove the missiles.

Crane said the U.S. policy concerning Nicaragua should have been to support the Somoza government despite the fact that he was a dictator because Somoza was more friendly to the United States than the current Sandinista government is. The government of Anastasio Somoza was overthrown in 1979.

"What is worse to have," Crane asked: "Somoza, who was someone we could possibly influence for the better, or a communist dictatorship?"

Crane praised Reagan's emphasis on the Soviet threat. The Soviet military build-up is the biggest since Nazi Germany days, he said, adding that agreements with the Soviets are unreliable. Crane said the U.S. defense budget in 1980 was 23 percent of the total budget and should be increased to one-third of the budget to match the Soviet build-up.

Crane also praised the Reagan administration's economic policy. He said the inflation rate is coming under control as the 1980 rate of 13 percent will be cut to 7 percent this year.

The proposed Reagan budget of \$100 billion is manageable, Crane said. But he said he will not vote for a deficit budget.

"The media draws comparisons to the Depression, but they ignore what would have happened if the trends of the Carter years would have continued," Crane said.

Interest rates are still disturbingly high but the tax cut will improve matters, he said. The U.S. government and American people have been living beyond their means for the last 50 years, Crane said.

"The traditional virtue of saving has been made a vice by Keynesian economic policy," Crane said.

The tax cut has created positive rewards for saving, Crane said.

"The IRA (Individual Retirement Account) savings plan provide the most significant incentives for saving in my lifetime," Crane said. Increased saving lays the foundation for economic growth, he said.