

**USAID'S PATRICK J. LEAHY WAR VICTIMS FUND
CAMBODIA, LAOS & VIETNAM**

The photographs and interviews presented in this booklet were collected by Noah Hendler. Noah was commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development to visit Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in April 1998.

All of the people photographed and interviewed have benefited from assistance that has been provided through the efforts of U.S. private voluntary organizations which receive funding from the USAID's Patrick J. Leahy War Victims Fund.

The War Victims Fund provides support for civilian victims of war in 14 countries. The program helps develop indigenous capacity to provide long-term, sustainable prosthetic assistance for victims who have lost limbs as a result of landmines and other war-related injuries. In this context, the Fund considers children who contract polio as a result of interrupted immunization programs to be victims of war. The Fund also supports the strengthening of local capacity to provide medical assistance, rehabilitation and other types of assistance needed by civilian war victims.

The photos and testimonies in this booklet reflect both the terrible cost of war and the resilience of individuals.

*Lloyd Feinberg
Manager, Patrick J. Leahy War Victims Fund*



Tens of millions of landmines litter the globe. In fields, schoolyards, and by the side of the road, they can strike with a terrible randomness and brutal efficiency. Through the leadership of Senator Leahy in establishing the War Victims Fund, and with the bipartisan support of the Congress, USAID has assisted more than 200,000 people disabled by mines since 1989. Our efforts focus on helping these innocent victims of war regain their mobility and to once again become productive members of their social and economic communities. These innovative programs are carried out with the help of some of America's most dedicated and talented technicians and private voluntary organizations.

USAID Administrator J. Brian Atwood

A century ago, the majority of war casualties were combatants. Today, they are overwhelmingly innocent civilians, caught in the crossfire. Many are victims of landmines left over from past wars. The Leahy War Victims Fund is the U.S. Government's response to this calamity. Its purpose is to help rebuild lives shattered by conflict, and in doing so to rebuild whole societies. USAID uses the fund where the humanitarian needs are greatest, in the best spirit of the American people.

Senator Patrick J. Leahy



Long Saran has lived without legs for 12 years. The wheelchair he currently uses was manufactured at a USAID-funded rehabilitation center in Kien Khleang, Cambodia.

“When I first got out of the hospital I only had wooden blocks to walk with. These blocks lifted me off the ground and helped me walk on my hands. My trousers were torn all the time, and my bottom was numb. I was always depressed, and I wanted to kill myself. My friends would never let me near a gun.

Owning a wheelchair has changed my life: It has made me want to live. With a wheelchair I have freedom. I can go for a walk or visit my friends—I don’t have to wait for them to visit me. Before I received the wheelchair, I was single. Now that I have one, I am married and have children. Now I want to live—I want to take care of my family.”



Bun Neang has three children. The youngest, Som Bot, is 6 and was born with severe birth defects. She recently received her first prosthetic leg from a USAID-funded rehabilitation center in Prey Veng, Cambodia.

“Som is growing up, and it is difficult for me to raise her. Without her leg, she cannot stand and is totally dependent upon me. I have to bathe, carry and feed her. Sometimes she cries because she is not able to walk to her friend’s house. She wants to enjoy life but is too young to understand her problems.

Without a leg Som would have to hop or crawl to get places by herself. Now with her new leg, Som, slowly, is beginning to walk.

I will have to care for her until I die. If I do not care for her, who will? No one else will love her. I do not think anyone will want to marry her because she does not have hands. Without hands, how would she care for her own children?”



Yous Pisei remembers stepping on a landmine at 3 pm on October 1, 1990. She now makes seats for wheelchairs at a USAID-funded rehabilitation center in Kien Khleang, Cambodia.

“I went to Poy Pet, near the Thai border, to sell garlic and other food. I did not know there were any mines around. I was unlucky. I was walking to the pond where everyone bathed every day and stepped on a mine. I don’t even remember the sound of the explosion. All I remember is waking up in the crater of the mine and seeing half of one of my legs missing and the other barely attached to my body.

My husband carried me to the hospital, but, since it was located in a refugee camp, he was made to leave. He was working in Cambodia and was not considered a refugee. After my operation my husband was not allowed near me. Since the day of my accident I have neither seen him nor has he ever come for me. I think my husband lives in his home province now and is married again. I am not angry with him nor do I blame him. This was my fate, my accident.

It was very difficult for me to live in the refugee camp. I tried to commit suicide once by taking a lot of medicine. But the people in the camp brought me to the hospital.

When I returned to Phnom Penh, I lived with my mother and two sisters. My family helped me: they did not want me to feel like I was a burden. In my mind, I was a problem: they had to do everything for me.

In November 1994, I came to this rehabilitation center and was given a job. Having a job has changed my life. Now I live by myself and do not have to ask other people for money. With this job I can support my mother, sisters and myself. They no longer support me. This is why I feel like living.”



Lê Văn Nhân is 23 years old and lives by himself in a village outside the city of Thanh Hoa, Vietnam. An outreach worker from a USAID-funded rehabilitation center in Thanh Hoa often visits Nhân.

“I was 11 years old when the accident happened on the way to school with some friends. We saw the bomb: it was round and small like an orange. We had no idea what it was. Huù picked it up from the side of the road, and we played with it like it was a small piece of fruit. We wanted to see who could throw it further. It exploded when Huù threw it.

I did not know what happened. Seeing my friends lying on the land and a lot of blood frightened me... I remember someone running from the village and picking me up.

My father cared for me in the hospital for three months. He fed me, bathed me, brushed my teeth and brought me medicine. I was very sad. My life didn't mean anything to me. With my father's encouragement I overcame the biggest difficulty in my life. I was afraid that I might not be a useful person.

Soon after I came home from the hospital, both my parents died, and I went to live with my brother and his family. At the time, I was unable to move on my own so I stayed inside. If I wanted to go anywhere, my brother had to carry me on his back. I couldn't go to school because I had no way to get there.

Now, I have two fake legs, but it's rare that I use them. When I try to walk with them, I get very tired. My brother, sister and neighbors support me because I can't earn money on my own. They provide money and rice. Sometimes I borrow money from neighbors and then ask my brother to pay them back. I can't find a job, and I don't think any are available for me.

This is a consequence of war. It's unfair for me to be injured by a weapon from a war in which I did not fight. I want to say to the people who make these weapons, they are making crimes. These people have destroyed my life. I was a child at the time of my accident, and now, as an adult, I have to face a lot of difficulties. I have no job, I can't make any money to feed myself, I am never happy. I am not a useful person.”







Kim Samonn was 16 years old in 1976 when he stepped on a landmine. Now, Kim is employed as an outreach worker for a USAID-funded rehabilitation center in Kien Khleang, Cambodia.

“When I got my first prosthesis I was 23 years old, living in a Thai border camp. It was a heavy wooden leg and difficult to walk with. The organization that gave me this prosthesis also gave me a job making braces for children with polio. That is how I started working with other disabled people.

I have always liked working with disabled people because they see hope in me. A few weeks ago I visited a boy who had recently lost his leg. He refused to believe the doctors and nurses when they explained he would still be able to work. I told him that I don't have a leg either but I am still able to do my job. When I showed my prosthesis to him, he believed me. Now he understands that he will be able to work.

The most difficult question for disabled people is how will they find work and earn money?”



Ban Kunthy was a 17 year old soldier fighting near the Thai border when he stepped on a landmine in 1985. He now lives outside of Phnom Penh, Cambodia, with his wife and two children. His prosthetic leg was provided by a USAID-funded rehabilitation center.

“When I was a soldier, I thought that if I ever stepped on a landmine and survived I would be too ashamed to live. I thought I would never be able to work without legs.

In the hospital I was surrounded by other people who had also stepped on mines. I realized I was not alone and decided to live.

When I walked with crutches my hands were not free. But now that I have a leg again—I earn money washing motorbikes and am able to provide for my family.”

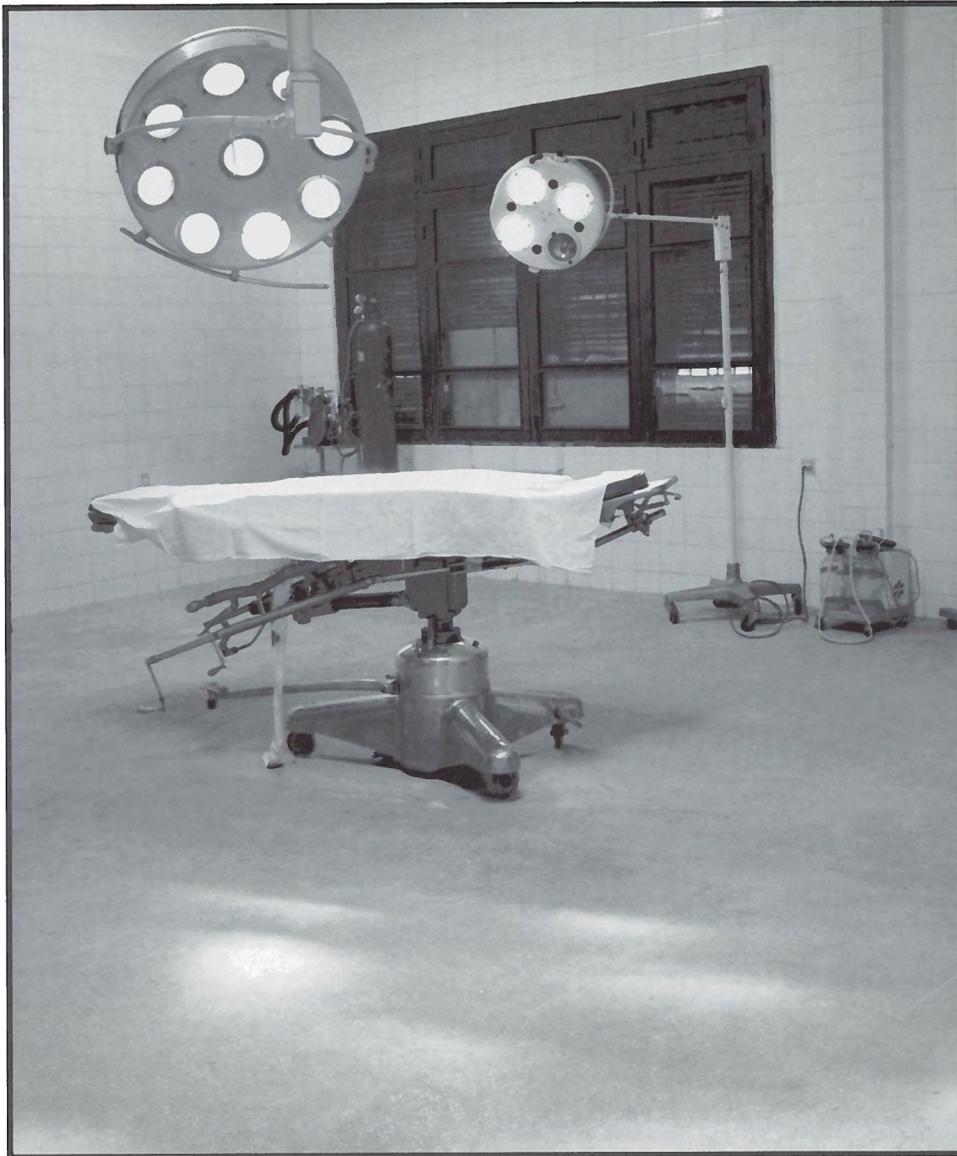
Nguyễn Duè Hàu was injured when one of the 6 people he was farming with swung a hoe into a buried bomb. The explosion killed four people. Four years later, Nguyễn is being fitted for his first prosthetic leg at a USAID-funded rehabilitation center in Vinh, Vietnam.

“From my accident I have learned a lot about love and overcoming difficulties in life. Before my accident I had the most important role in my family, working in the fields while my wife stayed at home taking care of the children. Today things are different; it is my turn to be home.

I didn't think a man should stay at home with the ducks, pigs and chickens and let his wife go to the fields to do the heavy work. About two months after my accident, my family sat me down. My wife and children told me not to worry. They told me we are one family and take care of each other. I feel very fortunate to have a family like this.

My hope is that my new leg will allow me to work in the rice fields again. It's funny to think that I may have forgotten how to farm, since I was born and raised in the rice paddies. I love farming, and I miss it. I don't have to worry about bombs anymore because four years have passed since my accident, and the land has been worked every day.”





Dr. Somsavay Manipakone is the director of the provincial hospital in Xieng Khuang, Laos, where in the first three months of 1998, eight people were killed and eight severely injured by unexploded ordnance (UXO). Since 1996, USAID has provided funding for the provincial hospital to treat UXO victims.

“UXO victims are normally very poor people. They are the people who work the fields or try to earn money selling scrap metal. In the past, if a person survived a UXO accident, it was very difficult for them to pay their expenses. The electricity needed during surgery costs about 6,000 Kip per hour (\$2.50), and medicine is also very expensive.

Now, UXO victims receive free treatment. The USAID fund provides for the cost of electricity, medicine and transportation. When we have to send a patient to Vientiane [the capital city] for specialized care, the fund covers all the costs.

The fund saved Phoovieng Kham's life. He hit a bomb while digging a foundation for his home. One of his hands had to be amputated. His leg and abdomen also were severely wounded, and he lost a lot of blood. We could not replace his type of blood here so we immediately sent him to Vientiane. If the fund did not exist, he would surely be dead.”

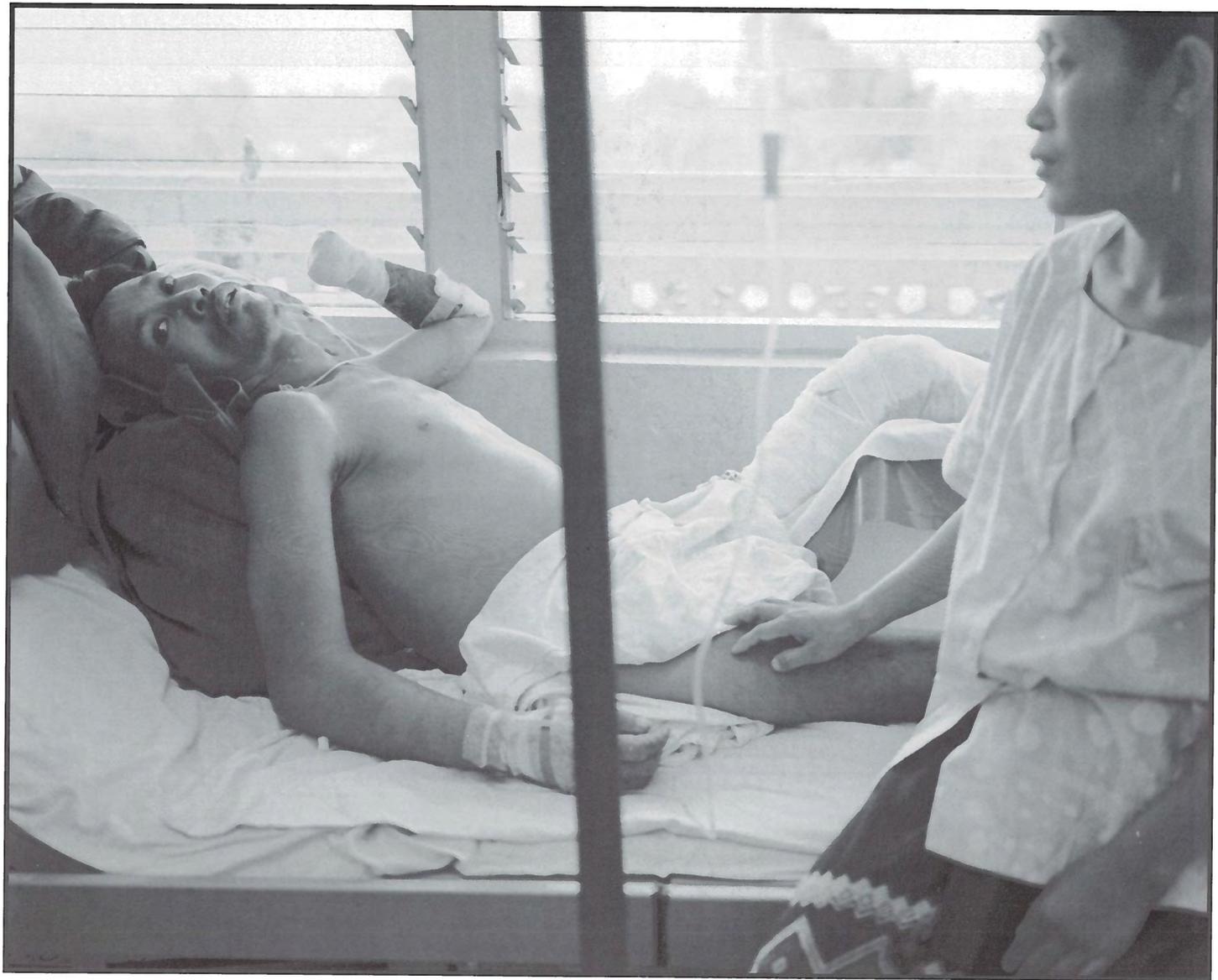
Phoovieng Kham lies in a hospital bed. His wife, Mai Pet, sits beside him with her hand on his leg. She stares into her husband's eyes and listens as he struggles to speak. Phoovieng's medical bills, transportation costs and his wife's daily living expenses are paid for with money from USAID.

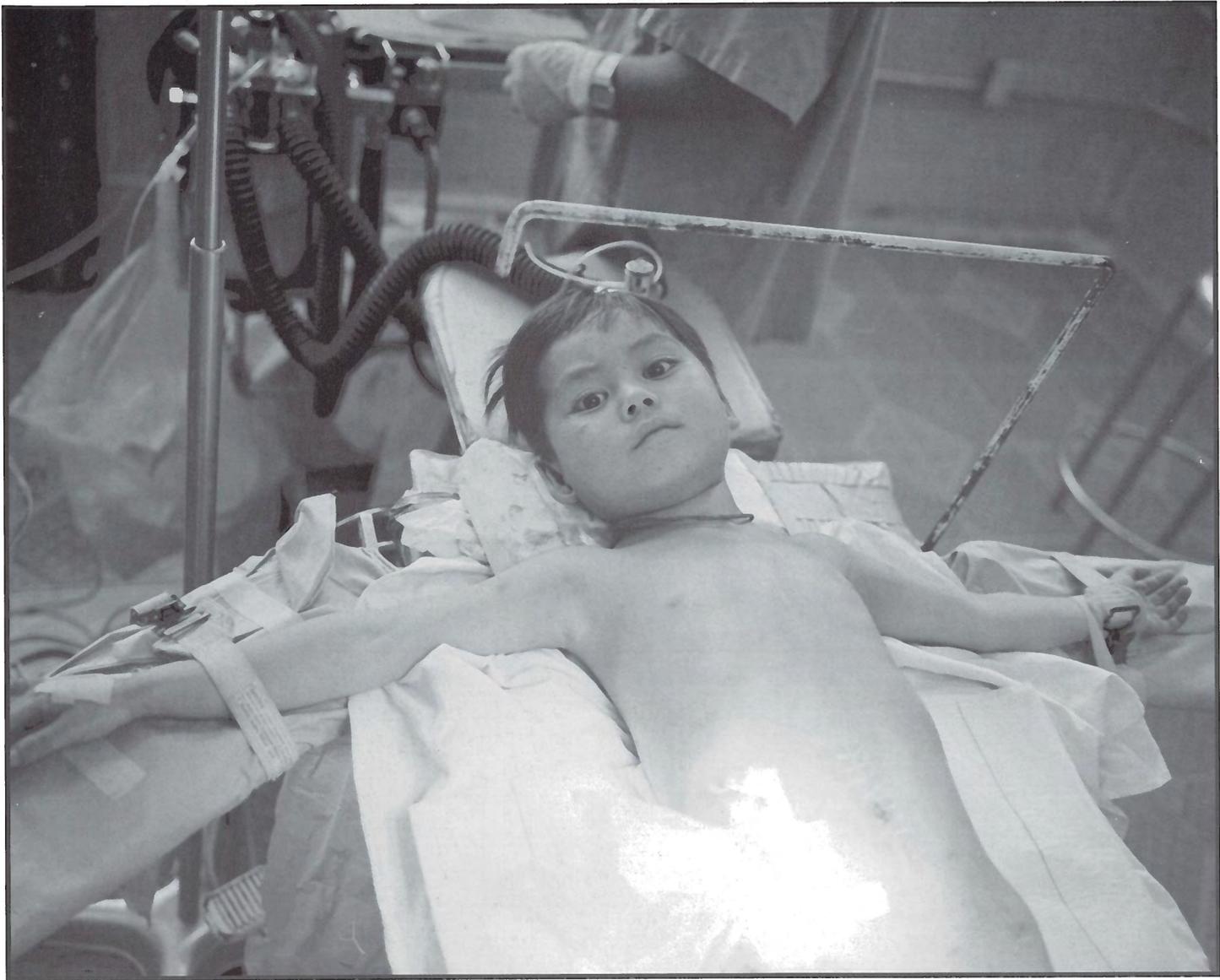
“My house was built on the ground. It had only a dirt floor, and I wanted to make it cleaner so decided to raise it off the ground. I was digging holes for the posts, for the foundation, and I don't know what happened next. One strike and I was bleeding and in pain. When I opened my eyes, all I could see was fire.

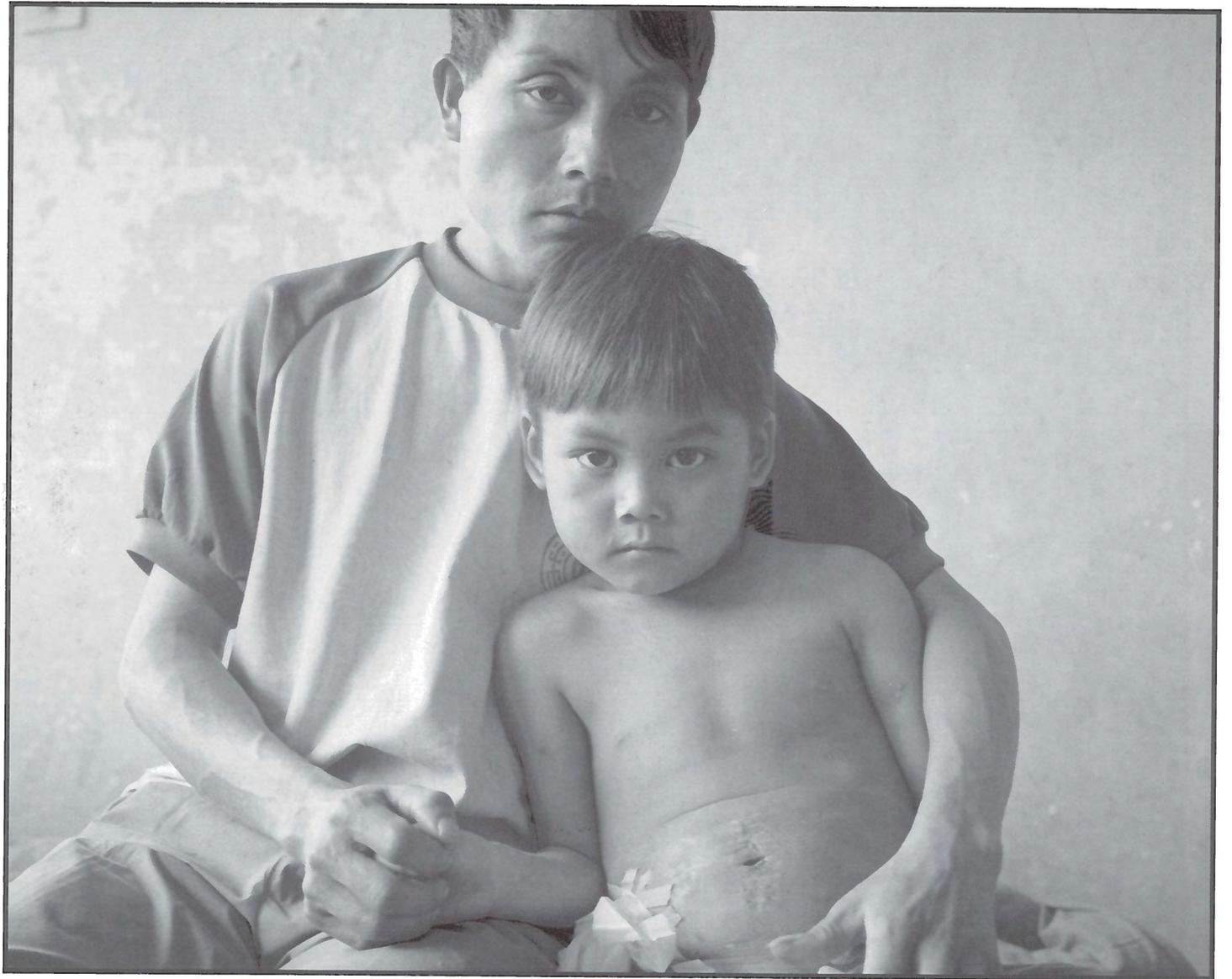
The explosion ignited some petrol, and the house caught fire and burned down. Our entire saving of two million Kip (\$800) was in the house. We couldn't get the money out in time. It had taken us five years to save that money. Some of it was a gift from our relatives, but, mostly, it was money we saved from raising livestock for the military. We were going to buy farmland.

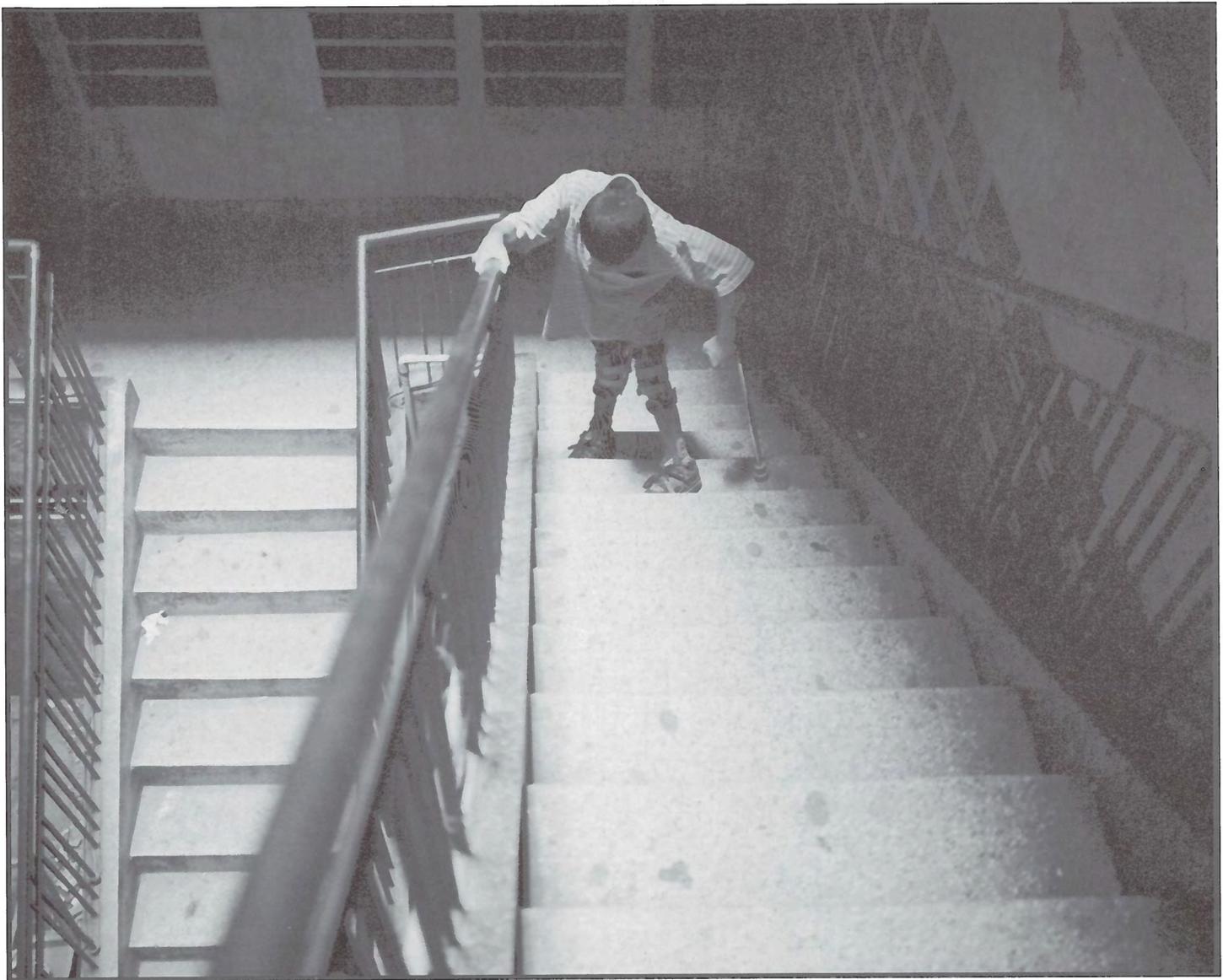
We have three children, but we no longer have a home or any household items.

I always feared this would happen. So many people are injured by bombs. I don't know if we will return to our village or go somewhere else.”











Chet Tin and her 9 year-old son, Mony Pom, live on the third floor of an apartment building in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Mony Pom has polio and was recently provided with braces for his legs through a USAID-funded rehabilitation center.

“Mony was not vaccinated for polio when he was born. I did not know any children who had the disease. He was two-and-a-half when he became sick.

I took him to the hospital, and the doctors told me he couldn't be cured, but I refused to believe them. I took him to have acupuncture, which was expensive. We sold our house to pay his medical bills. The acupuncture helped him move a little bit, but he still wasn't cured.

Without braces for his legs, he couldn't go down stairs by himself. It was too difficult for me to carry him. He had to stay inside and was unable to go to school. He was angry all the time and would throw things.

Now he has braces that help him walk so he no longer has to remain upstairs. He can go outside when he wants and is able to attend school. Moving on his own has changed his behavior. He is much happier.”



Eam Juth is 68 years old and learning how to walk again. She has just received her first prosthetic leg from a USAID-funded rehabilitation center in Prey Veng, Cambodia.

“There was metal from a mine that had already exploded. I was wearing shoes, but the sharp metal went through the shoe and into my foot. The wound

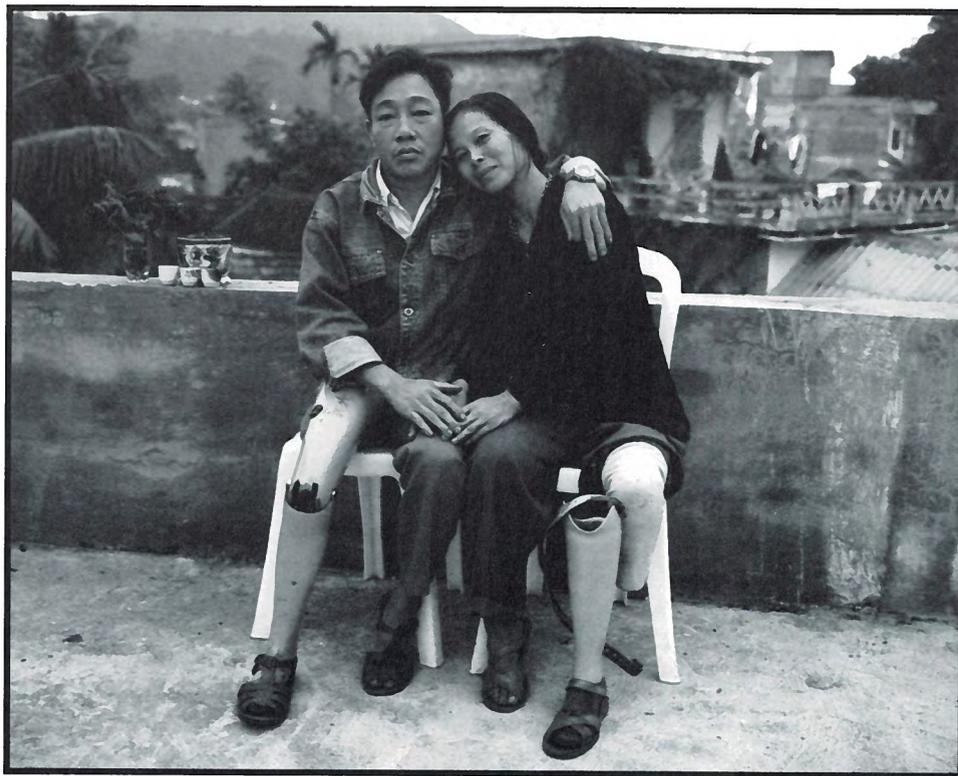
was small so I took traditional medicine at home. It didn’t heal, and after about a month it was so painful that I could no longer walk. I went to the hospital, and the doctors said they couldn’t cure me. If they did not amputate my leg, I would die.

When I left the hospital I was given crutches. It was difficult for me to use

them because they weren’t as good as my leg. For three years, I used crutches. I always had trouble moving outside of my home and caring for my grandchildren.

Two months ago, I heard on the radio that there was a center in Prey Veng that could give me a new leg. I was excited that the center would provide everything for free, even food and a place to sleep. If it cost any money, I could not have afforded to go.

A month and a half after hearing the announcement on the radio, my family saved enough money, 8,000 Riel (\$2.00), to send me from our home province to the center. I have now been here for one month and been measured and fitted for a leg. After they finish making adjustments to the leg, I can go home. When I return home, I will be able to carry things like a small bucket of water and to bathe myself. In the past my children had to do these things for me.”



Nguyễn Thê Dâu and Lê Thi Minh have been married for twenty-three years and have raised five children together. A USAID-funded rehabilitation center in Than Hoa, Vietnam, assists them in maintaining their prosthetic legs.

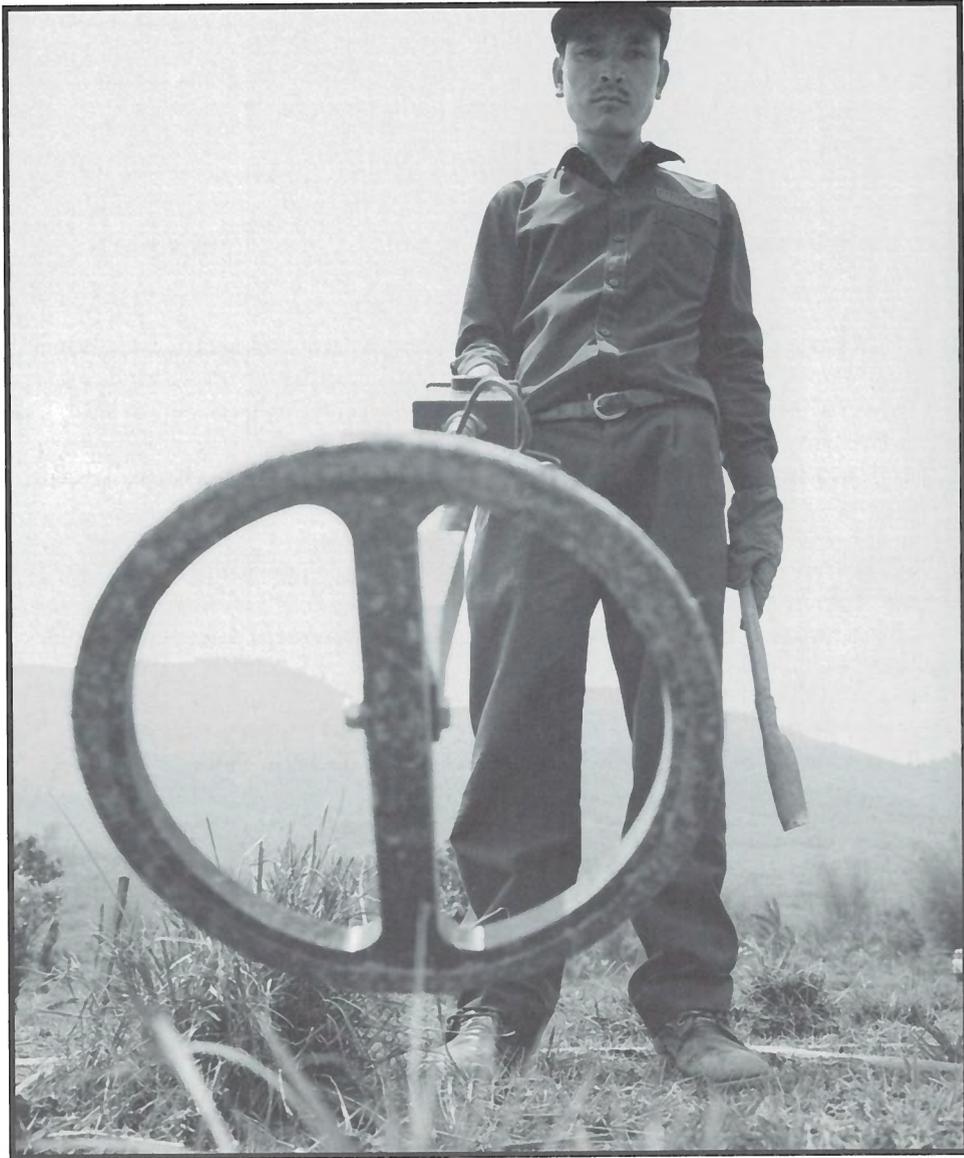
“Since we are both disabled, it was a difficult decision for us to get married. I knew it would be easier to marry a ‘normal’ girl. After we got married, everyone looked at us. I was very shy. I have two loves, one for my homeland and another for my wife who lost a leg, just like me.”



Kopkham Luangkehot works in the province of Xieng Khuang as a regional coordinator for the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Program. He acts as a liaison between the Lao government and the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), a British non-governmental organization that finds and removes unexploded ordnance as well as conducts community awareness programs. USAID contributes to the Lao UXO Trust Fund, which helps to support this partnership between the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Program and MAG.

“There are 200,000 hectares of land in Xieng Khuang. In the past four years, 115 hectares have been cleared of landmines and UXO. MAG has 81 men working six hours a day, five days a weeks in the region. Every time a technician’s metal detector sounds, he must dig.

For every UXO we eliminate, there will be less accidents and less people living in fear. In the past three months alone, there have been eight people killed and eight injured by UXO. This does not include two children killed and one injured earlier today.”









Pochua Yang caught his sons, Lou and Sou, rolling an unexploded bomb with their feet. The boys, ages 6 and 7, were bringing the bomb to a scrap metal dealer. Pochua and his sons live in Phonsavan, Laos, a city scheduled for unexploded ordnance (UXO) education and awareness programming.

This programming will inform children about the dangers of UXO and will be funded through USAID.

“I have told them many times that they should never touch bombs, but they are too young to understand the danger. They were taking the bomb they found to a scrap metal dealer so they could sell it to get money to buy candy.

I am scared for my children. I tell them constantly how dangerous bombs are, but they don't understand. Almost every day after school they search for scrap metal with their friends.

It's wrong for a dealer to buy scrap metal from children. If the dealer did not buy bombs from my children, then they would not be looking for them. They don't know that what they are doing could kill them. A dealer would probably give them only 500 Kip for that bomb they found this morning. That's not enough to buy a bowl of soup, but it is enough to buy candy.”



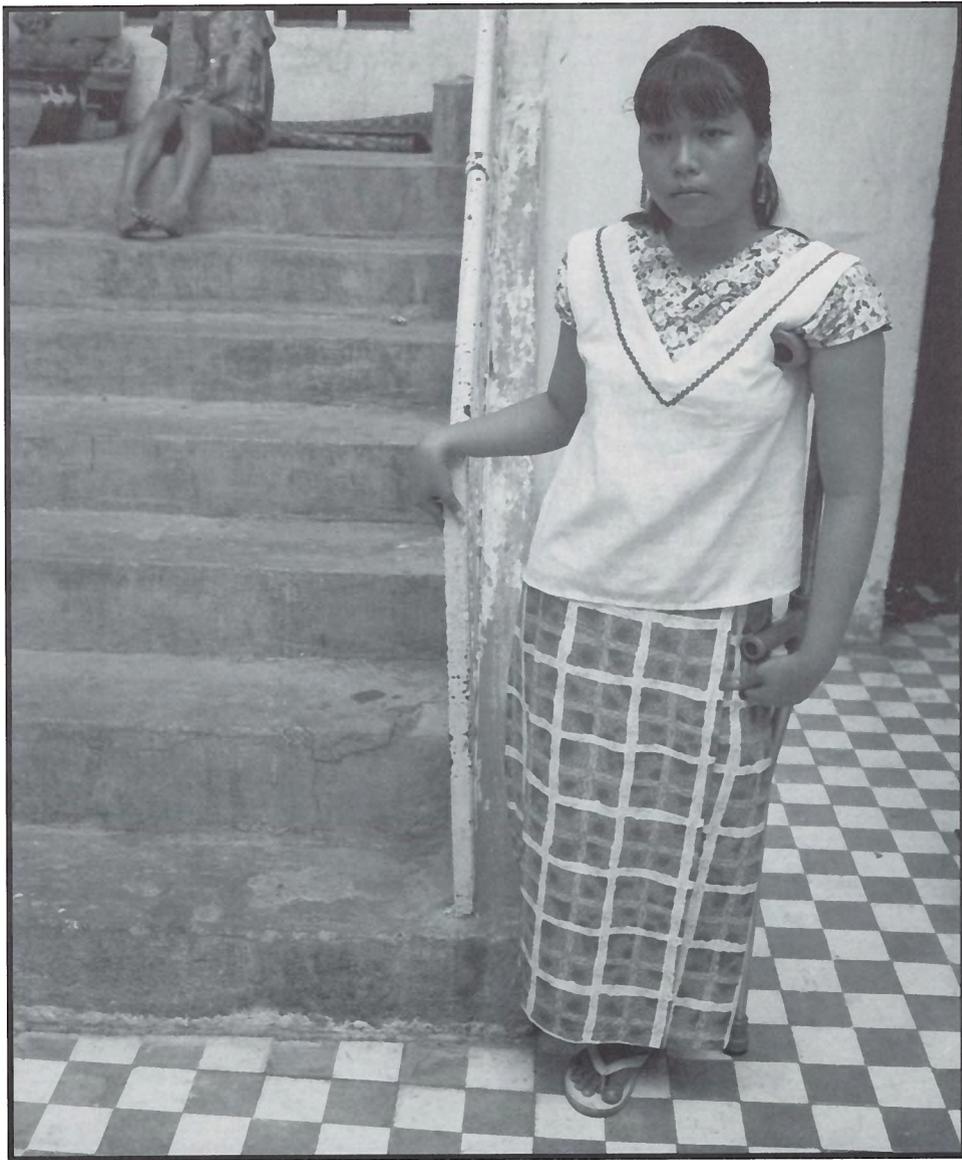
Sounthaly Sibounheuang is the mother of 8 year old Thong. In 1996, Thong suffered a severe head injury when a buried mortar shell exploded in his schoolyard in Xieng Khuang, Laos. Thong's medical bills were paid with funds contributed by USAID.

“A teacher was burning wood in one of the old bomb craters to keep the students warm. There was a mortar shell buried in the crater, and the fire caused it to explode. The explosion injured only Thong.

He was running all over the schoolyard in a panic, bleeding and screaming. I am a teacher at the school so I was there to catch him.

He is not the same as he was before the accident. He used to talk a lot; now he is angry and forgets. If I tell him to go and get some water for me, he goes halfway and then returns to ask me what I wanted. He never used to forget anything or feel angry. Before the accident we used to sit quietly together and talk.

I do not let him go to school anymore. I am afraid it will happen again.”



Poa Thida, 16 years old, became an amputee when she was 8. A USAID-funded rehabilitation center in Kien Khlang, Cambodia has provided her with a prosthetic leg.

“My family and I were on our way to a refugee camp in Thailand. It was a dark night. Some men tried to rob us. They held us at gunpoint and tried to take all of our possessions. My brother and I were very afraid of these men. We held hands and ran as fast as we could into the forest. This is when I stepped on the mine and was thrown from my brother’s hand. He kept running. He was too scared to stop.”

Poa’s mother, Thac Thgi Trang, interjects:

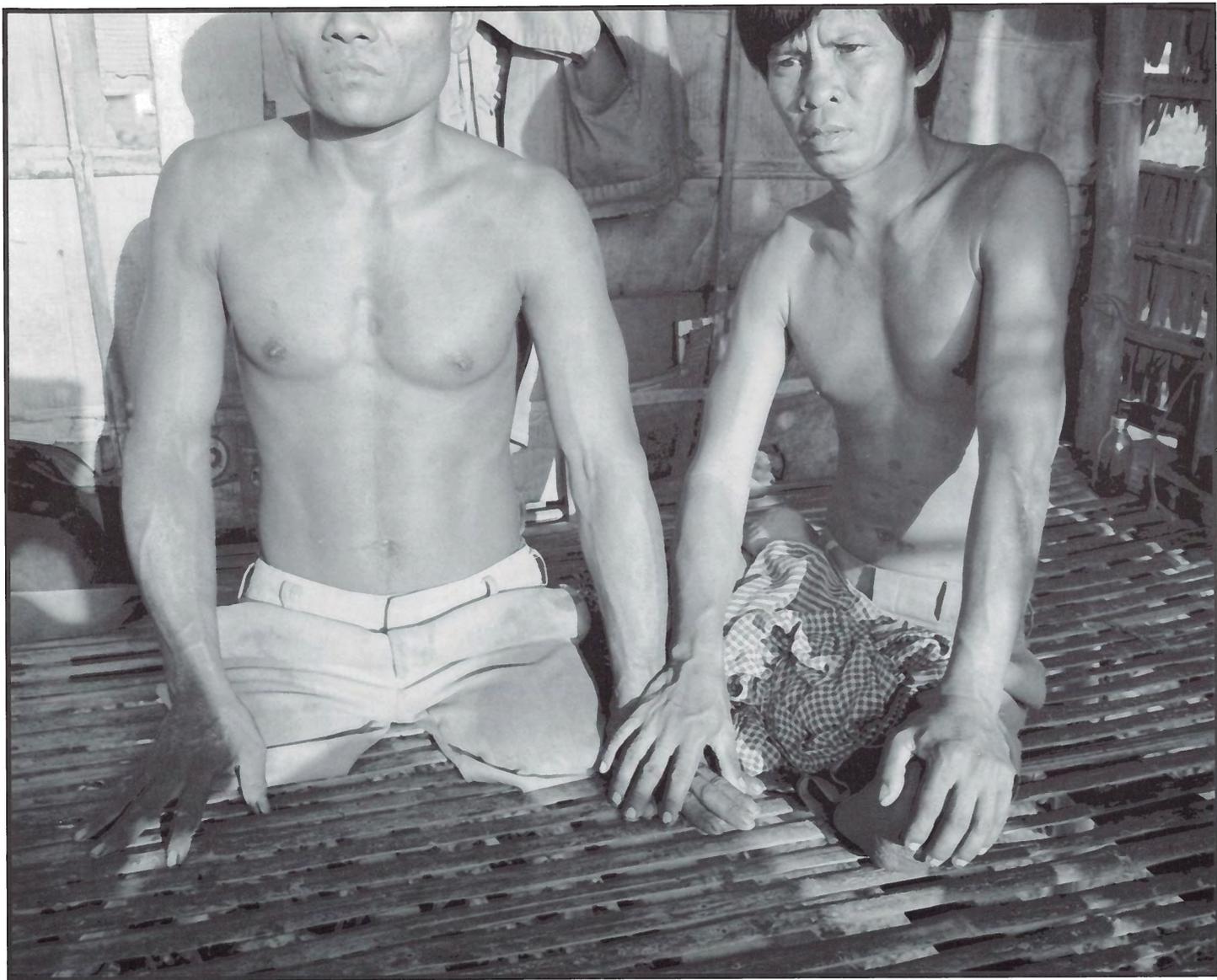
“Her body was thrown on top of a dead tree, which was good because otherwise she would have landed on sharp pieces of the mine. It was dark, and I was very confused. The explosion came from behind me, so I thought it was from fighting. This was 1990. There was a lot of fighting then. A soldier came toward me and told me to count my children. I counted only six—Poa was missing. I told the soldier that my daughter was missing, and he said that maybe she had stepped on a landmine. I begged him to help me find Poa. I told him that even if she is dead, I want her body.

Without torches the soldiers couldn’t find her that night. The first time they went to look for her, they only found some of her blood. When they did finally find Poa, it was only because they heard her moaning. This was five o’clock in the morning, three hours after the explosion.”

Poa continues:

“I woke up, being carried to the hospital; I was in pain but didn’t know my leg was missing. In the hospital I was very emotional and cried. I had no hope, but the nurses kept telling me to live. One nurse even took me on walks and told me jokes. I remember laughing for the first time since my accident.

When my family returned to Phnom Penh, I felt ashamed because there weren’t as many disabled people here as there had been in the refugee camp. My first time at school was difficult—everyone looked down on me. They thought that all disabled people were like beggars—yelling and screaming and wearing torn clothes. But, when I explained that I stepped on a landmine, they took pity on me. Now my friends know that I am a normal person. Whatever they can do, I can do too. I realized this on my own.”



Samrith Nara is 34-years-old and was injured during a Khmer Rouge attack on his village in 1996. He receives assistance from a USAID-funded rehabilitation center in Prey Veng, Cambodia.

“My old friends call me ‘Monoh Pikah,’ which means ‘person without legs’. Before my accident no one called me this. I can’t stop people from saying it, but I don’t like it.

My accident has changed the way I think. I no longer feel comfortable talking with people who have legs; I don’t like to mix with them. I used to be invited to eat with my friends, but they no longer invite me. When I had legs my friends could rely on me to help them with their work; now they disregard me.”

Khloth Sareth is the site manager for the Prey Veng rehabilitation center in Cambodia, which opened in 1995. The USAID-funded center provides daily meals, accommodations and treatment for its patients.

“A lot of patients are frightened when they first come to the center. They are used to being isolated and feel less significant than people who are not disabled.

I notice changes in patients when they leave the center. Many feel more confident and comfortable around others. This is because they have been exposed to people like themselves and realize that they are not alone.

One woman, born with one short leg, was unable to walk for over thirty years. When she left the center she could walk. The people in her home district couldn't believe it.”





Buth Meang stepped on a mine in 1987. In 1995, he received his first prosthetic leg from a USAID-funded rehabilitation center in Prey Veng, Cambodia.

“I was able to walk again by the time I left the center. After returning home my neighbors and friends commented on how well I walked and encouraged me. Some people did not believe that I was able to walk. They would make me walk in front of them so they could admire me. It is still difficult for me to believe.

I lost my leg, how can I walk?”

CO-OPERATING AGENCIES

*The following organizations are
implementing the Leahy War Victims Fund
worldwide:*

The Consortium
Ms. Connie Woodbury
R. R. Number 2, Box 758
Putney, VT 05346

Friend-in-Need Society
Ms. Kalyani Ranasinghe
171, Sir James Peiris Mawatha
Columbo 2, Sri Lanka

Health Volunteers Overseas
Ms. Nancy Kelly
c/o Washington Station
PO Box 65157
Washington, DC 20035-5157

International Committee of the Red Cross
Mr. Theo Verhoeff
19 Avenue de la Paix
CH 1202, Geneva Switzerland

Prosthetic and Orthotic Worldwide
Education and Relief (POWER)
Mr. Michael Boddington
14 Western Road
Henley on Thames
Oxfordshire RG9 1JL
United Kingdom

Prosthetic Outreach Foundation
Ms. Shirley M. Forsgren
720 Broadway
Seattle, WA 98122

UNDP
United Nations Development Program
Mr. Jeffrey Avina
Resident Representative
Phone Kheng Road
PO Box 345
Vientiane, Lao PDR

UNICEF
United Nations Children's Fund
3 UN Plaza
New York, NY 10017

Viet-nam Assistance to the Handicapped
Mr. Ca Van Tran
1307 Dolley Madison Blvd, Suite 4c
McLean, VA 22101

Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation
Mr. Bobby Muller
2001 S Street, NW
Suite 740
Washington, DC 20009

World Rehabilitation Fund
Mr. Jack Victor
386 Park Avenue South
New York City 10016

World Vision Relief and Development Inc.
Ms. Lynn Belland Sauls
220 Eye Street, NW
Suite 270
Washington, DC 20002

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

After having the opportunity to spend time with people whom the War Victims Fund directly assists, I am certain it has a tremendous impact on individual lives. I hope this document helps to illustrate the need and potential for humanitarian assistance.

To produce this work I have depended on the generous support and interest of many individuals: staff members of three organizations- World Vision (Vietnam), Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (Vietnam, Cambodia) and the Consortium (Laos), interpreters, a talented printer and designer, family and friends. Please know how grateful I am.

Noah Hendler

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS © 1998 NOAH HENDLER
NOAH HENDLER CAN BE CONTACTED VIA EMAIL AT: NOAHEMAIL@AOL.COM
IAN RICHER / 1998 / HARVEST GRAPHIC DESIGN - XHARVESTX@AOL.COM

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Lloyd Feinberg
Manager, War Victims Fund
Agency for International Development
G/PHN/HN/EH
3.07-07M, 3rd Floor, RRB
Washington, DC 20523-3700
Email: Lfeinberg@usaid.gov

Catherine Savino
War Victims Fund
Technical Support Contract
1601 North Kent Street; Suite 1104
Arlington, VA 22209
Email: Catsavino@msn.com



US AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
BUREAU FOR GLOBAL PROGRAMS, FIELD SUPPORT, AND RESEARCH
OFFICE OF HEALTH AND NUTRITION
WASHINGTON D.C. 20523