

3

CHAPTER

Rural children in the north and northeast were most affected by the outbreaks of Japanese encephalitis. (MFN#001327, AFRIMS photograph archives)





Neuropsychiatry Department staff carrying their supplies across the Ping River during the 1970 encephalitis sequelae study in Chiang Mai. (MFN#003328, AFRIMS photograph archives)



The 1970s

AS THE WAR IN VIETNAM CONTINUED into the 1970s, the SEATO MRL maintained support for the US Army Medical Research Team–Vietnam in Saigon. Diseases of military importance, including hepatitis, diarrheal diseases, Japanese encephalitis, and malaria, were priorities. The MRL was also involved in the drug screening program of troops in Vietnam.

An outbreak of Japanese B encephalitis in a US Marine air wing that had moved from Vietnam to Thailand (Nam Phong, Khon Kaen Province) prompted a rapid response from the MRL. The effort involved a number of the SEATO MRL departments: Epidemiology collected specimens from random volunteers to determine the ratio of asymptomatic to symptomatic infections, Entomology studied the potential insect vectors of transmission, and Veterinary Medicine explored the question of amplifying hosts.

The introductory statement in the Annual Progress Report for 1971–1972 by the US Army Medical Component (USAMC) director, Colonel Leslie Altstatt, described the immediate response:

In July 1972 we learned of the occurrence of a case of “aseptic meningitis” occurring in a U.S. serviceman stationed in Thailand. Within the hour we were able to determine that three other similar cases had occurred apparently originating in the same place. Within one day we had clinical confirmation of our suspicion that these were cases of Japanese encephalitis. The following day, drawing upon experience and information gained from our three years of work with Japanese encephalitis in Chiangmai Valley, we were able to launch a full-scale epidemiological investigation of what proved to be a major outbreak of this disease.¹



[Left] Rear Admiral
Samrit Jatinandana,
Director General,
1969–1975.
(Royal Thai Army
official photograph)



[Center] Major General
Thutchai Dhirathumrong,
Director General,
1975–1977.
(Royal Thai Army
official photograph)



[Right] Air Vice Marshal
Sithibun Purnaveja,
Director General
1977–1984.
(Royal Thai Army
official photograph)

Studies of patients with diarrhea led to the first isolation of *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* in Thailand. Malaria drug studies for both treatment and prophylaxis were major efforts of the laboratory. Building on the malaria drug screening program at WRAIR, candidate drugs were evaluated in field studies. Most of this testing was done in collaboration with the Royal Thai Army in border areas.

During the 1970s, major political changes in Southeast Asia had an impact on the laboratory. The United States and Vietnam signed the Paris Peace Accords in 1973, but fighting continued until 1975, when all remaining US forces were withdrawn from Vietnam. In Thailand, the civilian government of Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj secured a promise of rapid American troop withdrawal from the country. Fortunately for the SEATO MRL, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported the continuation of its medical research and the continued presence of US Army researchers at the MRL.

One consequence of the ending of the Vietnam War was the dissolution of SEATO in 1977. Letters of Agreement between the Thai and US governments preserved the MRL's operation on the same basis as previously, still under the Royal Thai Army Supreme Command, but its name was changed to the Armed Forces Research Institute of Medical Sciences (AFRIMS). The change took effect on 1 July 1977.



[Top] Professor Phon Sangsingkeo leads a 1970 meeting of a Neuropsychiatry Department team in Chiang Mai studying psychiatric sequelae of Japanese encephalitis viral infections. Professor Phon, a recipient of the Magsaysay Award, is known as the founder of modern psychiatry in Thailand. (MFN#003324, AFRIMS photograph archives)



[Bottom] Dr. Pricha Singharaj (a future director general of AFRIMS) from the Faculty of Public Health, Mahidol University, and Khun Vacharee Jan-Aiem, a member of the Neuropsychiatry Department staff, at the 1970 encephalitis sequelae study site in Chiang Mai. (Photograph courtesy of Khun Vacharee Tumrong-rachniti)

[Top Left]
Colonel Leslie
Altstatt, USAMC
Director, 1969–1972.
(US Army official
photograph)



[Top Right]
Colonel Phillip Winter,
USAMC
Director, 1972–1975.
(US Army official
photograph)



[Bottom Left] Colonel
Douglas Beach, USAMC
Director, 1975–1977.
(MSN#003665, AFRIMS
photograph archives)



[Bottom Right] Colonel
Herbert Segal, USAMC
Director, 1977–1980.
(US Army official
photograph)



Thailand and AFRIMS were also affected by events in Cambodia. After 4 years of disastrous rule by the Khmer Rouge, the Vietnamese army and Cambodian communists overthrew the regime in January 1979. Fighting continued, however, and hundreds of thousands of refugees flowed into Thai border areas as the decade ended. The laboratory's physician-scientists were in the refugee camps from the start, helping provide medical support for the large numbers of people arriving in very poor health, in a situation with no existing infrastructure. The USAMC director became advisor to the US ambassador on refugee medical matters.



During the decade, the laboratory's directors general were Rear Admiral Samrit Jatinandana, Major General Thutchai Dhirathumrong, and Air Vice Marshal Sithibun Purnaveja. The directors of the USAMC were colonels Leslie Altstatt, Phillip Winter, Douglas Beach, and Herbert Segal. There were also several changes to the departmental structure of the USAMC during this period: the departments of Neuropsychiatry, Pathology, Epidemiology, and Parasitology were either dissolved or merged with other departments.

Khun Vacharee Jan-Aiem interviews a family as part of the encephalitis sequelae study in Chiang Mai (1970). (MFN#003336, AFRIMS photograph archives)

REFERENCE

1. *Annual Progress Report, 1970–1971*. Bangkok, Thailand: SEATO Medical Research Laboratory; 1971.



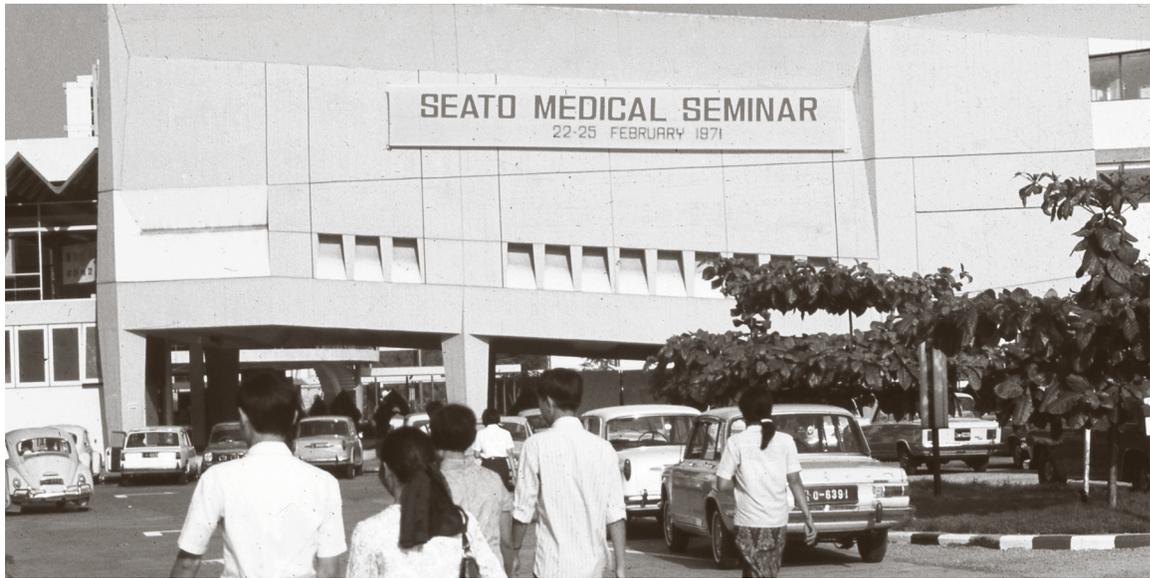
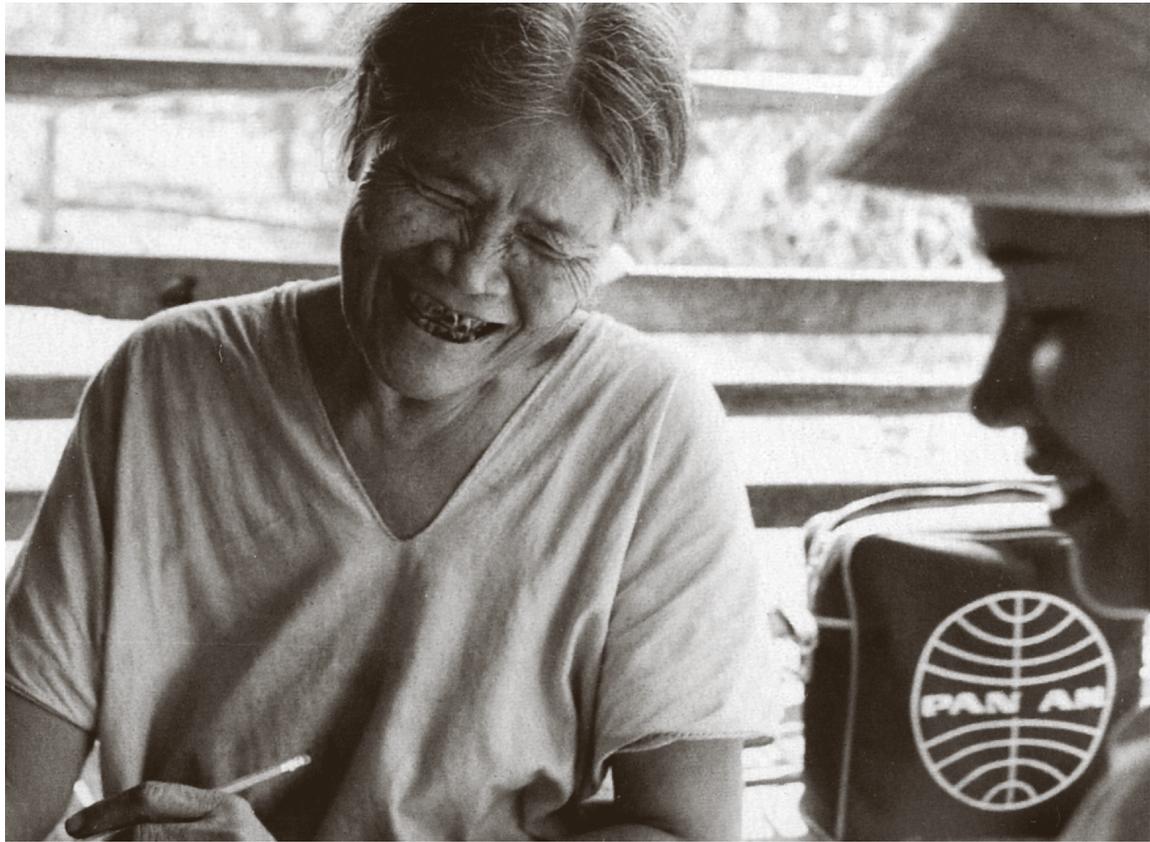
[Top Left] Khun Kam-Lah and Khun Vacharee Jan-Aiem of the Neuropsychiatry Department with three hill tribe women in a 1971 study of psychiatric illness among the Lua' community of Mae Sariang district, Mae Hong Son. (MFN#003321, AFRIMS photograph archives)

[Bottom Left] Staff of Department of Neuropsychiatry (1971), including Khun Khanitha Rojanasthien, Khun Vacharee Jan-Aiem, and Khun Ang-Kana Sivarangsimunt (front row), and Khun Boonarb Panpanya, Khun Vilaiwan Ounrat, and Captain William Biggers, the department chief. (Photograph courtesy of Khun Vacharee Tumrongrachniti)



[Right] Hill tribe woman being interviewed in 1971 by Khun Vacharee Jan-Aiem in study of transcultural influences on the psychiatric evaluation of minority groups in Mae Hong Son. (MFN#003335, AFRIMS photograph archives)







[Top Left] Mae Hong Son villager being interviewed as part of a 1971 study of how psychiatric evaluation of minorities is influenced by the background and training of the evaluator. (MFN#003337, AFRIMS photograph archives)

[Bottom Left] The SEATO Medical Research Laboratory's First International Seminar is held at Ramathibodi Hospital in 1971, commemorating the Laboratory's first 10 years. (MFN#003635, AFRIMS photograph archives)

[Right] Major Herbert Segal (future USAMC director) and a team from the Department of Epidemiology carry out a malaria survey as part of a drug prophylaxis study. (MFN#002757, AFRIMS photograph archives)



[Left] Khun Vichit Punkitchar and Khun Chaliew Deerapat from the Entomology Department collect larvae in an ecologic study of Japanese encephalitis in Chiang Mai (1972). (MFN#001243, AFRIMS photograph archives)

[Right] SEATO entomology team sets up a CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) light trap in a Chiang Mai village in 1972. (MFN#001277, AFRIMS photograph archives)









[Top Left] A 1972 “friendship party” between the two components. Included in the photograph are Vice Admiral Komet Kruatrachue, Professor Tranakchit Harinasuta (director of the Hospital for Tropical Medicine), Rear Admiral Samrit Jatinandana, and Major General Supoj Kwanmitr. (MFN#000601, AFRIMS photograph archives)

[Bottom Left] A 1973 photo of the Department of Virology. In front center is the department chief, Lieutenant Colonel Bill Bancroft, with Major Robert McNair Scott, deputy chief, on his right, and Dr. Rapin Snitbhan on his left; Dr. Joe Marshall is in the third row. (MFN#001605, AFRIMS photograph archives)

[Right] Captain Norm Wilkinson collecting mosquito larvae at the site of a Japanese encephalitis outbreak among US Marines in Nam Phong, Khon Kaen (1972). (Photograph courtesy of Dr. Michael Benenson)

[Inset] A productive catch of mosquitoes in the CDC light trap, carried out as part of an ecologic study of Japanese encephalitis in Chiang Mai Valley in 1972. (MFN#001290, AFRIMS photograph archives)

