

A History of Peace Corps Thailand's Regional Representatives

Jon Keeton, Former PCT Regional Representative in the North

Let me give some background. Many PC countries, if not most, had regional offices to serve volunteers far from capital cities when transportation was much more difficult. By the mid-60s, they were well established. I assume they were opened as PC began. In addition to the North, Northeast and South, the Central Region had a regional director stationed in Bangkok. Mine was Liz Raspolic when I was a PCV in Thai XI.

I was the last American regional rep in the north, and left in 1972. The paved highway to Bangkok was almost finished. Reducing costs was one reason for the change, but also an awareness it was time for host country nationals to have more responsibilities. Later, PC put more emphasis on technical support.

Even much smaller PC/Korea had regional offices when it opened in 1966. By the time I became Regional Director with PC Washington in 1984, they had been phased out, except in far flung Micronesia.

I viewed my job consisting primarily of volunteer support, site checks and host government relations. Wasn't it wonderful visiting me, Carolyn, even if you weren't *mine*?!

Jon Darrah, Former PCT Regional Representative in the North

Volunteer support was divided in my time. The technical support was handled from Bangkok and the more general support was handled from the four regional offices: Chiangmai, Songkhla, Central and Khon Kien. The central region was run out of Bangkok. It is hard to believe now, but in my time communications were difficult. For instance about half of the road from Chiangmai to Bangkok was dirt. There was a lot more rail travel. The Peace Corps even had an account with the railway. The telephone system was pretty basic not very widespread. There was an adequate telegraph system which was widely available but telegrams were not very effective in discussing a problem. It is also important to remember that during my time, at least, the Peace Corps was larger in terms of Volunteers and the program was more diverse - TEFL, Health, community development and agriculture. All the senior staff people were American which made for a long break in period for some.

The Chiangmai office was staffed by George Papagiannis, me, Jon Keeton. I also seemed to recall a Thai man by the name of Sangvan who was married to a former Thai Volunteer who served as Regional Rep. Bunleu na Chiangmai worked in the Chiangmai office for many years.

Bob Charles is the only name I remember from the Khon Kaen office

Tom Wallace and Dave Davenport are the only two farang names I can remember who worked the Songkhla office. As time went on, Thai were appointed to positions in Peace Corps Thailand. If I am not mistaken Khun Nikorn was the last Regional Rep in Songkhla. When the Songkhla office closed, he was transferred to Bangkok. Khun Nikorn could provide you with more information on the Songkhla office.

The regional offices were closed for a number of reasons. As the roads improved, it was often easier for a Volunteer to get to Bangkok than the Regional Office. The improvement in the sophistication and coverage of the telephone system enabled the Volunteers to reach Bangkok more efficiently. In addition, Peace Corps was having budget issues, so closing the Regional Offices was a way to save money. In-country training and the appointment of Thai staff made for greater efficiency and less need for the Regional Reps.