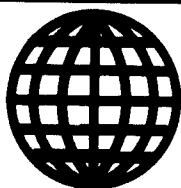


JPRS-SEA-90-015

18 MAY 1990



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JPRS Report

East Asia

Southeast Asia Autobiography of Chamlong

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19990507 087

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Chamlong Looks Back at Past

90A50012A Bangkok *CHIWIT CHAMLONG* in Thai
Jan 90

[Autobiography by Major General Chamlong Simuang]

[Excerpts] Heart to Heart

Even though much has been said and written about me, no one knows me better than I do.

I have lived for more than half a century now, and the time of my death is coming closer and closer. I feel that it is time to record some of the facts about my life. This is why I have written "Chiwit Chamlong" [Chamlong's Life], which you are now reading.

"Chiwit Chamlong" records the life of a very poor boy. My mother was a hawker, and my father was a fishmonger. When I was small, I worked as a servant for a very kind family. Now that I am an adult, I am serving all of Bangkok.

I want to thank you for spending the money and time to purchase and read this book written by an author named "Chamlong."

Thank you,

Major General Chamlong Simuang

7 January 1990

This Is My Life

I want to affirm that I will be honest and make sacrifices my entire life. I have conducted myself this way for a long time. I did not begin doing this just when I was elected governor of Bangkok.

Even though I have faced threats and pressures, I have never bowed down before or given in to what is wrong. If I did, it would be tantamount to betraying both myself and Thai society.

This is my life. I will be an honest person and make sacrifices without concern for what may happen to me. Because this is me, Chamlong Simuang.

Maj. Gen. Chamlong Simuang 5 August 1989 [passage omitted]

Hawkers of today probably don't know that the governor of Bangkok, who is very strict and who is frequently cursed by hawkers who don't understand, is himself the son of a hawker. Thus, I know all about working as a hawker. But as governor, I must work on behalf of everyone and not just those who happen to have the same occupation as my mother. Thus, I have upset some hawkers. I probably wouldn't be criticized so much by these people if I didn't care about things and ignored the fact that the hawkers and their baskets on the sidewalks make it difficult for people to walk down the street.

During the time that my mother was a hawker, she carried her goods from the temple in the center of Talat Phluto Pho Sam Ton and Ban Khamin. If she still had goods left, she took the same path back, trying to sell her goods. She sold betel. If she were still working today, it's doubtful if anyone would buy her goods, because the younger generation does not use betel. During the period that Field Marshal Phibunsongkram was prime minister, he prohibited the use of betel. Everyone cursed him for this. But if he had not prohibited that, we would still be like the Indians, spitting betel juice everywhere. The train stations would be filled with bowls for spitting betel juice, just as I observed in India. [passage omitted]

During the fruit season, my mother sold fruit. She was an expert in selecting durians. All she had to do to quote a price was to pick up a durian, turn it over in her hands, and open up one section. She could tell you immediately how many lobes it had. Even as a young boy, I was familiar with the various varieties—chani, kan yao, and kop. But I don't remember if we had the mon thong variety then or not.

I became involved with the mon tong variety of durian again when I was the secretary general of the prime minister. That was just after General Prem Tinsulanon became prime minister. The government invited Nguyen Co Thach, the Vietnamese minister of foreign affairs, to attend a lunch at the Government House. It happened to be the durian season. I ordered an official to go buy a mon thong durian for him.

I sat next to Nguyen Co Thach, not far from the prime minister. We chatted for awhile and then Nguyen Co Thach changed the subject. He said:

At home, I adhere to the Buddhist precepts, too."

"Excellent. You are like Secretary General Chamlong. He adheres to the eight precepts and eats only once a day," said the prime minister looking in my direction.

I listened to the conversation and looked at the plate of food in front of me. Finally, the plate was taken away without my having eaten anything. When dessert was served, durian was served to everyone, including me. Nguyen Co Thach ate his very quickly. I quickly offered him my plate of durian. He stood up, and using communist jargon, said, "I want to compliment the comrade who adheres to the eight precepts. He has also done me a great service by giving me his durian. I thank him." This was a jovial statement from a man who has been called the "iron man of the communist world." [passage omitted]

My mother's business began to decline. Her income was not stable. I was growing every day. How could she continue to support me? By chance, one of her customers told her that an amiable gentleman was looking for someone to do housework. She went and applied for the job and asked permission to bring me along.

She earned a fixed salary of 6 baht a month. I was still young and did not work. That gentleman saw to it that I was well fed, too.

My mother always taught me to be diligent and frugal. She set an excellent example. She was praised by the master [Khun Nai] and everyone else in the house for her diligence. Later on, after I was elected governor, she told me that she had spent only 2 baht a month. She had saved the other 4 baht for my education. [passage omitted]

My Father, the Fishmonger

8 February 1989

Dear brother:

Happy New Year! I wish you success in your work. I finally have a chance to write to you. My father, Lo Sieu Eng, is your father's younger brother. My name is Sieu Ling. Because we live so far away from each other, staying in touch with each other is not easy. During the Chinese New Year, my cousin visited your country. She has told us about our relatives and about activities and customs in Thailand. Her name is Choeng Su. She gave us your address. It was not complete, but fortunately, we have been able to get in touch.

I hope that you will think of your relatives and write to us. I have two brothers. Both are working. I hope that you come visit us sometime. I have enclosed a picture of my father when he was young.

All of us are well. I hope that you are well, too.

Sieu Ling (Your relative)

This letter was written in Chinese characters. It was sent to the Bangkok City Hall. My assistant secretary couldn't read it and so he gave it to someone to translate. I was astounded to learn that I had relatives in China.

Pe, or Chawiwian, the daughter of my aunt, told me that Sieu Ling's father really was my uncle. He was the younger brother of my father. He is deceased now. That was when I learned that I had an uncle in China. In Thailand, the Sae Lo family is a small family line. It is not a large family like the Sae Tang, Sae Lim, or Sae Chua. But I have so many relatives that I can't remember all of them or where they live. I don't know Choeng Su, to whom Sieu Ling refers in her letter. She is probably another of my relatives.

This letter reminded me that I should think about my lineage. Actually, I have never forgotten who I am or where I came from. But I have always considered myself to be a Thai. My father died when I was still a baby and so I don't remember anything about him. I have asked relatives about this, but it wasn't until I was 55 that I learned that my grandfather was named Hok Lo and that my grandmother was named Phek Lieng Sae Chua.

Although my mother was Chinese, she spoke Thai fluently. She dressed and lived like a Thai. She started chewing betel when she was still quite young. She liked to watch Thai dramas and could recite Thai poems very well. She sang the same songs to my two younger sisters that she had sung to me when I was young. She did not teach me to speak Chinese. It was as if we knew that I would not grow up to be a merchant like my parents. My father's name was Hasieu Sae Lo. His Thai name was Somnuk Chunrat. He was born in China but left there to seek his fortune in Thailand. He sold fish at Chroen Phat on the Thonburi side. My mother's name was Bunruan. Her father's name was Kukku Saechiu, and her mother's name was Kimthuan. I had one older brother. When he was young, my mother called him Hua To, but I don't know what his real name was. When he was four years old, my father took him to live in China. He died there during the war in China without ever having had a chance to return to Thailand.

When I was born, my mother was living with Yai Tho, my mother's aunt. She was a well-known midwife. Many pregnant women living in Sam Re, Buk Khalo, and Bang Nam Chon used her services. I called her husband Lao Tieu in Chinese, or Ta in Thai. I don't know his real name. And that was fine, because whenever I called him Lao Tieu, he knew that I was referring to him.

Lao Tieu rented land and grew betel in an area that is now the site of the Phra Pin Klao Hospital. The floor of his house was ordinary dirt. The roof was made of nipa leaves, and the walls were made of bamboo. It was very cool during the summer. There was no need for a fan like there is today. When I was older, I often went to visit my old home. Finally, it was torn down in order to build the Naval Hospital.

My father had several younger brothers and sisters. Most of them lived in Bangkok. Some lived in Khlong Toei. Others lived in Ban Khamin. I was close to only one, an aunt whom I called "A Ko." She had a shop in Manorom District, Chainat Province. She had a daughter named Pe, or Chawiwian, the one who told me about Sieu Ling.

My aunt tied her hair in a bun and wore pants like Chinese women in general. She couldn't speak Thai very well. But she was interested in what was going on in society. She knew many people and liked to help others. During elections, she occasionally served as a canvasser for candidates but didn't ask for anything in return. Those for whom she worked as a canvasser usually won, which made her very proud.

My aunt died in Manorom at the beginning of 1989. She used to come visit me twice a year. Every time she visited me, she would tell me about the past. She had a very good memory, remembering things as if they had just happened.

Sometimes, she became upset by the fact that I did not act Chinese in any way. I couldn't speak or understand the Chinese language. When speaking, she sometimes had to stop, because she couldn't remember the Thai

word. I just sat there and laughed. She was very amusing. She loved me like her own child. She loved and respected my father a lot, because they had left China together. Her husband had a good position as a janitor at a mill at Tid Nguan, which is in the Khlong San area along the Chao Phraya River.

Just after I was born, my father took me and my mother to live with my aunt and her family. Unfortunately, the mill went out of business when the owner, Phraya Choduk, died. After that, we each went our separate ways. My aunt moved to Manorom, and our family moved to Bangkok. We moved to Bangkok because that was where my mother's family lived. My father traveled back and forth between Bangkok and Chainat, because he loved his sister very much. He went to visit her quite frequently.

My father was a handsome man and knew many people. He liked to go to parties and loved to gamble. He was a man of many passions. He regularly sent money to A Ma [grandmother] in China and sometimes visited her. He intended to bring A Ma and Hua To to Thailand, but he died before he could do so.

I changed my surname from Chunrat to Simuang when my mother married Chot, who officially adopted me as his son. The names of my two sisters are Kanya and Phani Simuang. Today, there are only six of us who use the surname Simuang, that is, my father, mother, sisters, myself, and Sirilak "Simuang." Others with this surname are not related to us. But there are people in several central, northeastern, and southern provinces with this surname. Thus, people with the surname Simuang often come to see me, because they think that we are related. I tell them that because we have the same surname, it's the same as being related. We have to help each other for the honor of the name "Simuang." [passage omitted]

Father Chot came from Damnoen Saduak District in Ratburi Province. When he was in the monkhood, he passed the Naktham Ek examination. He applied for a job as a postman. He delivered the mail along various streets and lanes. He was a diligent and frugal person. Just after he married my mother, he was fortunate enough to be transferred to the express train mail. His allowance was increased, and he made a profit from buying and selling small articles as permitted by the State Railway during his travels aboard the train.

At that time, I was attending lower secondary school. My [step]father worked aboard the northern train. He used to buy brooms and baskets for me to sell. I took them from our house at Sam Re and sold them at the Phlu Market. These goods were of very good quality, and they were cheaper than similar items sold at the market. Thus, it was easy to sell them. During the logan season, I became a logan merchant. My father bought one or two crates of logans in Chiang Mai each trip. The logans sold well, too, because our markup was very small. I sold them just to earn some money for rice and sweets. [passage omitted]

My mother had retired from working as a hawker, because she had to take care of my younger siblings and take care of the house. Thus, I had to sell goods in her place. This was just the opposite of when she was a hawker. I carried the goods on my back and set up my stand wherever there were a lot of people. I spread out my goods on a plastic sheet. [passage omitted]

Just after I graduated from the military academy, my father was still working for the postal service aboard the express train. Once, when I went upcountry on government business, I went aboard the same train as my father. I saw that postmen aboard the express train work very hard day and night. They have to load and unload sacks of mail whenever the train stops at a station, and they have to sleep on top of the bags of mail. I couldn't sleep like that. I saw how hard my father worked to support my mother, me, and my two sisters. He worked hard like that for several years before our economic situation improved somewhat. We were not as close to starving as in the past.

My father was well liked by both his superiors and his fellow workers, because he was diligent and serious about his work. In his late 50s, my father couldn't work like that anymore and so he asked to be relieved of his duties aboard the train. I had graduated by that time, and my sisters were grown up. Thus, we didn't face any serious difficulties.

My father was a very frugal person who constantly thought about the future of his children. He learned that the Bangkok Metropolitan Life Insurance Company offered scholarships to the children of policyholders who had good grades. He tried to buy insurance for several years and then applied for a scholarship for me. But I never got one. Even worse, after he had almost finished paying for the policy, the company went bankrupt. The policyholders filed suit, and each one got a small percentage back. My sisters and I were very disappointed. We had managed to save some money, and they took it. When will Thailand be free of dishonest people? We don't cheat them, and so why do they cheat us?

The Sam Re Temple [Wat Sam Re]

"Sam Re became well known when buses started operating along the "Chula-Sam Re" route. This became a well-known name everywhere from Sam Re to Chulalongkorn. There were several buses that went back and forth several times a day.

Even though there were several temples in that area, my relatives all went to the same temple, that is, Wat Sam Re. They did occasionally go to temple fairs at other temples, but whenever they made offerings, they did so at Wat Sam Re. When I entered the monkhood, I did so at Wat Sam Re. I also attended school at Wat Sam Re. I am an alumnus of a Bangkok school. Now that I am the governor of Bangkok, that probably makes the alumni of Bangkok schools and students now attending school here very proud. [passage omitted]

Not long after my mother put me in the Sam Re School, she applied for a housekeeping position. I made another friend, Chao Wua, but he attended another school, Wat Kra Chap, and so we did not walk to school together. [passage omitted]

Toward the end of primary school, I became more diligent in my studies. The more diligent I became, the more fun school became. My mother didn't have to press me to do my homework or study for tests. After I helped her do the housework, I did my homework, thinking that if I studied hard, I might someday be able to earn some money to help my mother. My mother wouldn't have to face so many difficulties in her old age. [passage omitted]

Pa Lian, who also helped do housework for Khun Nai, liked to go to the temple. She regularly went to Wat Kra Chap, the temple where Chao Wua was studying. Besides asking me to help carry this and that, she also urged me to refrain from buying sweets and instead donate the money to the temple. When the monks praised me in front of my relatives, my face glowed, and that made me want to continue saving my money to make donations to the temple.

There was a period when I was crazy about keeping fish and crickets for fighting. One day a monk gave a sermon about fate and said: "As a person does, so shall he reap." I thought about the creatures that I was torturing, some of which I had caught and some of which I had purchased. If I was reborn as a fighting fish or cricket in the next life, I knew that I would be in trouble. Thus, I decided to release all of my animals.

Not long after I released my fish in the Si Luang Oi Canal, it was attacked by a very large fish. I became very concerned about committing sins. I realized that eating meat was bad, too, because this promoted the killing of living creatures. I thought about becoming a vegetarian but didn't do so.

Many of those who graduated from the Wat Sam Re School continued their education at the Wat Nuan Noradit School. But I took the entrance test to attend secondary school at the Ban Somdet Chao Phraya School. Others attended that other school, and I went to this one.

At one time, many of the senior people in the country were alumni of Suan Kulap School. But I am an alumnus of a "temple" school and "Ban" school. I did not have a chance to attend Suan Kulap like others. During the soccer season, my school competed against Suan Kulap School. That was a lot of fun.

After my mother left her housekeeping job, we went to live with my grandmother. That was when I took the test to enter secondary school, placing first on the examination. It was not until much later that I learned that I had placed first because of the school's policy of accepting a number of students recommended by the abbot of Wat Anongkharam, with their names listed first. The names of those who had passed the test on their own were listed

after that. That was because, during that period, the abbot of Wat Anongkharam was a great patron of the Ban Somdet School.

I was fortunate to attend that school, because the teachers there were excellent. And they were very strict about discipline. Now that I am the governor of Bangkok, I am very interested in the 427 primary schools under the jurisdiction of Bangkok. These schools have about 14,000 teachers and approximately 230,000 students.

Wherever I go, I always tell people that I am an alumnus of a Bangkok school. I want my alma mater to make progress. [passage omitted]

I would like to return to the time that I was a student in Bangkok. Being a student was definitely much easier than being the governor of Bangkok.

Ban Somdet

My mother was not unhappy about anything, but she probably wanted us to be more independent and so she decided to resign her housekeeping position and go live with my grandmother. She resigned before finding another job. But she was confident of her ability to support us, because she was diligent and she had her hawker's equipment.

I learned that everyone in Khun Nai's house was sorry to see her leave, because she was very diligent and did an excellent job. She was a very neat and orderly person until she grew old. Whenever someone did something for her, she was not satisfied. She would say that they had not done a neat job. She usually did things herself.

That was toward the end of the Second World War. Gunny bags were in short supply at the markets. During the champac season, relatives of my mother persuaded the Chinese owner of a jute mill to open a spinning mill beneath my grandmother's house. The machines were operated by pedal. This was a new occupation with which we were unfamiliar. Everything had to be learned anew.

We picked up the jute from the Chinese, soaked it in water, and then unraveled the strands. These were then laid flat and scraped with the end of a nail. After that, we put them on the spinning mill to make threads. They were then delivered to the factory, which used them to make gunny bags.

That was not an easy way to make a living. It took a lot of work to make just a little money. It took many days of practice to learn how to do this. During the first few days, we didn't earn much, because the jute that we spun was bristly. The threads were not neat. Some were too thick, and others were too thin. Thus, our wages were cut.

My mother and I had to practice about a month before we were able to earn a little money. The money that my

mother had saved from working as a housekeeper gradually dwindled. We were on the verge of having nothing to eat. We had to switch from eating rice and eggs to eating fried pork intestines.

My mother would buy 0.1 kg of pork intestines and fry it with fish sauce for seasoning. But it was very tough. Just 0.1 kg would last us for several days. As for sweets, we had flour or sweet basil seeds filled with sugar. These were the cheapest sweets you could buy. [passage omitted]

I worked so hard trying to earn some money that the flesh on my left index finger, which I used to press the jute onto the shuttle, was almost worn down to the bone. I had to stop for awhile, and whenever I put my finger in water, it hurt terribly. But I had to bear this. If I didn't work, we wouldn't have had any money to buy food. From this, I learned to be a very patient person. [passage omitted]

The Wat Sam Re municipal school did not offer classes in the English language. When I entered the Ban Somdet School, I took classes in English, because I thought that everyone had taken this subject. I took special lessons with my grandfather, who was a postman. I memorized words and rules of grammar. At the end of the first month, I placed fourth on the English examination. On the exams given in the following months, I placed third, second, and then first. I scored number one on the monthly as well as the year-end examinations until I graduated from secondary school. As for my total score for all classes combined, I placed first every year. [passage omitted]

In secondary school, we stopped using the blackboard and had to use notebooks. After the war ended, there was a shortage of paper, and paper was very expensive. I used postal paper that had been thrown away. I asked my grandfather to save it for me. I put heavy objects on the paper to flatten it out and then sewed the pages together to make a notebook, cutting the edges to the size stipulated by the school. My notebooks were different from those of the other students. Those of other students were white but mine were brown in color. The teachers didn't say anything.

But they did scold me for not wearing shoes. I didn't have enough money to buy even a pair of canvas shoes, which were cheaper than leather shoes. We hardly had enough money to buy food let alone shoes.

The teachers used to spank me for not wearing shoes. That was the rule. I had to put up with the spankings and couldn't get angry. The teachers were just punishing me in accord with the rules. They didn't spank me because they were angry with me. I wore pants made of thick canvas and so the spankings didn't hurt very much. Such pants were very popular at the end of the Second World War. They were thick and so stiff that when you took them off they could stand by themselves.

I was spanked by my teachers many times. After we began earning enough to buy me a pair of shoes, I escaped the spankings. I still remember my first pair of canvas shoes. There was a thick piece of rubber at the toe end. But it wasn't long before my little toe wore a hole through the canvas. I had just the one pair and even though I washed them frequently, they still smelled. The leather shoes worn by my classmates didn't smell and were very comfortable.

Father Chot was very kindhearted. He took me to buy my first pair of leather shoes at Wiang Nakhon Kasem. Even though these shoes had been worn before, they were still much better than a new pair of canvas shoes. Even though I wore them a lot, my toes did not wear a hole through them. I wore them for a long time.

Thinking about this, I sometimes feel proud, because the teacher who spanked me, Charun Wongsayan, who was the principal, later became the under secretary of education.

I did well in school, because I was diligent. I was always studying. Whenever things became too noisy inside the house, I would climb up the tall calabur tree in front of the house and read. My goal was to place first on the examinations. Some of my classmates sometimes cheated on examinations, but I didn't tell the teacher. I just studied harder and scored higher than them every time. [passage omitted]

Besides wanting to be a musician, I also wanted to play sports. I liked to play soccer. At that time, the balls were made of buffalo hide, and they were quite large. Or perhaps they just seemed large, because I was smaller then. I played as hard as I could, but no matter how hard I tried, I was never very good. I wasn't nearly as good as Prayong, a friend of my mine who had transferred from Assumption School. He was the soccer star of Ban Somdet School.

Because I wasn't any good at soccer, I switched to basketball. Besides being a very good math teacher, Mr. Maitri was also a very good basketball coach. I studied and trained along with my classmates, but I couldn't seem to get the hang of it. Niradom, who wasn't any taller than me, learned much faster and played better. Niradom, who is now a police major general, would probably lose to me now. While serving in Satun, he was shot in the hand by a terrorist and lost a finger.

I was never very good at any sport. Even though I liked sports and trained hard, I could never play very well. And so I gave up sports and became a spectator instead.

When I was still living in Khun Nai's house, Achan Suwan, who was then a student at Amnuaisin School, used to rave about a well-known sportsman with the same surname as mine. Thus, I dreamed about being a star athlete whom others would talk about.

My mother gave me 5 satang [1 satang equals 0.01 baht] a day for school. I spent 3 satang and saved the other 2

satang. I took rice from home and purchased a bowl of noodles with beef for 2 satang to eat with my rice. Actually, the soup contained just bits of leftover beef that was very tough. It was like the food we ate at home. I used the other 1 satang to buy a barbecued potato. This was a white potato cut into three thin, round pieces. I ate the same thing for lunch every day, but I never got tired of this. I was afraid of only one thing—not having anything to eat. [passage omitted]

Cadet Leader

Young men in that period liked to enter the army and navy academies. To get in, you first had to attend a preparatory school. I applied to both the army and navy preparatory schools. I really wanted to be accepted, because I had dreamed of serving in the military for a long time. [passage omitted]

As it turned out, I passed the entrance examinations to both schools and so I decided to attend the Army Preparatory School. [passage omitted] Before the results were announced, to be sure of getting into a school, I also took the test to attend Grade 11 at Suan Kulap School. For a poor boy such as me to continue on in school after completing Grade 10, I had to get in quickly. Unlike boys from wealthy families, who could afford to wait and take the test again the next year if they failed it this year, I couldn't afford to wait. Fortunately, I was accepted by the Army Preparatory School. [passage omitted]

All my expenses at the Army Preparatory School were paid for me. They gave us everything. The food was free. They gave us uniforms to wear. And we didn't have to buy any books. We could borrow them from the school. The important thing was that after graduating, I didn't have to look for a job. I started earning a salary immediately. That was quite suitable for a poor boy like me.

Furthermore, not long after entering the school, we had a test. I placed first in my section. Each class was divided into four "sections." I was in the fourth section of the freshman class. I was made section leader and was paid 105 baht a month. I was able to save some money. During my sophomore year, I was in Section 3. Again I scored highest on the tests. I was paid 105 baht a month. I received a monthly stipend throughout the time that I attended the preparatory school. In the entire school, only Somphong and I were section leaders both years. [passage omitted]

When I was old enough to enter primary school, my mother took me to live at Khun Nai's house. When I entered secondary school, she left her job there and went to live with Yai, who was then married. Ta and Yai were like real grandparents to me.

Not long after my mother married Chot, my sister, Ni, was born. And then Tim was born. Both of my sisters were the darlings of Ta and Yai. Yai's small house was becoming very crowded. Chot earned enough money for us to build a house along the Sam Re Canal. That was when I entered the Army Preparatory School. But just

before the house was completed, my father ran out of money. When laying down, you could see the tile roof. It was hot, because there was no ceiling. I saved the money that I earned as class leader, purchased some long pieces of lumber, and built the ceiling myself. I used rope to secure things and so I didn't need anyone to help me. It didn't take me too many days to finish the job.

Because I didn't have much money, I served both as carpenter and cement man. I didn't have to hire anyone. When first learning to pour cement, I had to learn how many parts of cement, rock, and sand to use. [passage omitted]

While attending the preparatory school, I did not return home very often. But when I did go home on a visit, I always took my books along, because I wanted to be an excellent student. I never wanted to lose more than three points on a test, and my score for conduct always had to be 100. Classmates sometimes left the school without permission, thinking that this was an exciting thing to do. But I never did that.

At that time, the Army Preparatory School had a detention building for students who had misbehaved. The school was very strict about discipline. If you committed an infraction, you had to go stay in the detention building.

Students at this school studied and trained hard using the Westpoint curriculum. We studied the same subjects as students at a university. I think that the only subject that we didn't study was medicine. We studied engineering, including civil, electrical, and mechanical engineering. Students were also required to study the Thai language. [passage omitted]

I was very diligent in my Thai studies, too, because I wanted to be first in every subject. But while studying this subject, I always wondered why we had to study the Thai language in view of the fact that we were training to fight and kill the enemy.

After graduating, I learned that all of the subjects that we had studied were beneficial. In making decisions, it wasn't possible to determine which subjects had enabled me to make the right decision. I have even made good use of my Thai studies. [passage omitted]

I wanted to write poetry to lift their spirits, but I didn't have any skill in this and so I called Sirilak and asked her to write a poem for me. When I went to the wedding, I recited this to the bride and groom and their parents. The bride was delighted and said that she especially liked the final line. She said that she would memorize it and recite it to her husband or attach it to the head of the bead. [passage omitted]

Around the middle of December 1989, the 9th Infantry Regiment held a party. The commander asked me to recite a poem in the Ratchamongkon Hall. This was being broadcast on television. I decided to read a section from the story Inao. I practiced reading the section over and over for a month out of fear of making a mistake. After

returning home tired from work, I practiced reciting the poem. And this refreshed me. [passage omitted]

There had been democracy in the military academy for many years. Every year, a 5th-year student was elected to the school's highest office, that is, cadet leader. The duty of this person was to supervise all cadets. He had the authority to deduct conduct points. He was the leader of the cadets. He dressed smartly and wore an insignia on his shoulders. When a lower-ranking cadet passed him, he had to stop and salute. The cadet leader was paid 250 baht a month, which was a lot of money in those days. The leader was chosen in an election in which the commander, faculty, and all the students had the right to vote.

I served as cadet leader in 1959. I wore a sword and marched at the head of the cadets. We marched from the academy past the Rachadamnoen boxing stadium and across the Makhawan Bridge on our way to study at the training grounds in front of the Ministry of Education. At that time, there wasn't so much traffic and so it was fairly easy to maintain formation. That was a very lovely sight.

As cadet leader, I had to devote myself to the school. When I saw senior officers doing something improper, I objected, particularly in cases involving corruption, such as profiting from bids and so on. This upset some officers, but they couldn't fault me, because I was a good student and conducted myself properly.

Then, an event took place for which I was punished. But I think that that was unavoidable in view of the fact that I wanted to act on behalf of everyone. This had happened to others before me. You have to accept the punishment.

To be on the safe side, I asked several classmates whose fathers were senior officers to join me. Two were Cadet Wirayut Inwasa and Cadet Uamsak Chullacharit. Their fathers were both generals. Another cadet was named Thammanun, whose father was then second only to Field Marshal Sarit.

We showed a special movie at the Chaloem Thai pavilion. The name of the movie was "Sleeping Beauty." But after showing this movie, things were not so beautiful. The academy issued a notice praising us for showing this movie and using the profits to purchase musical instruments, sports equipment, and a large radio for the cadet club. But then, an order was issued dismissing me and the others from our positions as cadet leaders.

The first charge was "violating the order of the supreme commander during a period of martial law." There were several other charges, too, that "were punishable by up to 20 years in prison." Just one of those charges was too much to think about.

I don't know what Cadet Thammanun was thinking, but he denied any involvement in showing the movie. I didn't want to beg. Fortunately, the father of Wirayut and the father of Uamsak told them that if you do something for society and are punished for it, you have no reason to blame yourself. Moreover, all of us were

good students and had conducted ourselves well. The administrative officers and faculty helped us and so seven people were reinstated after three months and three were reinstated after just one month. I, of course, was in the first group, and Thammanun was in the second group.

Actually, I was not a member of Class 7 but Class 7/2. Both Wirayut and Uamsak both became generals later on. Thammanun, Class 7/1, resigned his commission when he was a 1st lieutenant. I don't know where he is today. He just disappeared.

We had violated an order, because Field Marshal Sarit had forbidden cadets from showing special movies, because that necessitated troubling senior officers, who had to be invited. If we had shown the movie at the normal time, we wouldn't have made a profit. By showing the movie at 0600 hours, we were able to rent the theater at a cheap price.

When this happened, Field Marshal Sarit was sympathetic and sent each of us a bell to lift our spirits. He also gave each of us a special allowance. Actually, I couldn't accept the allowance, because I was commissioned after my classmates and had not worked a full year.

After having held the highest cadet position, I was now at the bottom. My classmates had already graduated. We had to serve as cadets an additional three months. My classmates were earning 1,050 baht a month, but I and the others were paid only 10 baht a day. That February had only 28 days and so I earned only 280 baht that month. [passage omitted]

I was a person without a future. Regardless of what I did, all I wanted was to be my own person and not be blown about by the wind. I wanted to work on behalf of society.

General Panya Singsakda told me that not long after he was appointed secretary general of the prime minister, a senior official of Bangkok Metropolitan Administration learned that I had been one of his subordinates during the war in Vietnam. He asked about my character.

"Don't get mad, Chamlong. But I told him that you had the qualities of a leader and could not be anyone's subordinate. I told him that you could only be the boss and that you would be good at that. I told him that he wouldn't have any problems if he acted like you."

I don't know if Gen Panya was praising or criticizing me. He was probably doing both. While serving in Vietnam, I opposed him strongly. Those staff officers working under him received two-step promotions. The only exceptions were San Siphon, Mongkhon Phumhiran, and me.

The three of us liked to oppose things. Regardless of whether it involved business, training, or fighting, we always managed to find fault. We did this even though we knew that Panya was our superior. And so how could we expect to get a two-step promotion? [passage omitted]

The West Point curriculum taught us to be gentlemen. All cadets had to go through the "renovation" system, which was the most trying thing in the life of a cadet. You couldn't eat or sleep as you wished. Upperclassmen issued strange orders that tired and embarrassed you. The purpose was to develop your patience, develop group cohesion, and get you to obey your superiors.

After graduating, as time passed, the good things that we had learned as cadets gradually faded away. When profits were involved, many people forgot their ties to their classmates. They were ready to kill each other in cold blood.

"It's only the demon that is evil. Suriyawongphongsak is not evil." I will definitely never be like that.

During those five years, every time that we passed the statute of King Rama 5, the man who founded the military academy, we had to stop, salute, and shout out: "I will preserve your legacy with my blood."

Those words are still present in the minds of those who have adhered to their ideals.

A New Officer

During my first four years as a cadet, I planned on becoming an infantryman. But after I became cadet leader in my 5th year, I was almost dismissed from the academy for the incident mentioned above. The man who filed the charges was an infantryman. That changed my mind about becoming an infantryman.

Another thing was that an officer earned 1,050 baht a month. When could I afford to buy land, a house, and a car? I might spend my military career in the provinces. When I retired, where could I go, because I wouldn't have a house after serving in the military my entire life?

I decided to become a signal officer. There were opportunities for advancement in this branch, too. After attending the Army Command and General Staff College, I could advance just like officers in other branches. The important thing was that at that time, the United States was providing support to the Thai military. There were many scholarships for going abroad. There was a program for infantrymen, but it was very short, just 5-6 months. The signal program was much longer.

By studying abroad for a longer time, you could learn more. And you would have an opportunity to travel, buy many things, and save a lot of money. Just after I decided to become a signal officer, I was chosen to go study abroad. The 1st year, I scored highest. This course lasted one year, which was what I wanted. I was sent first to New Jersey and then to Georgia, which is in the southern region of the United States.

When studying abroad, I saw many new things that excited me. That was because our country didn't yet have those things. I saw tall buildings, trade centers, and Western-style open-air markets. Even escalators were a novelty to me. Even though I was able to travel some and buy some items, I lived frugally and managed to save much money. The goods sold on base were cheaper than those sold off base. And medical treatment was free.

After returning to Thailand, I was assigned to a signal company at Lumpini Park (the unit has now been moved, and this has been turned into a military preparatory school). The company commander was Chiu, that is, General Chawalit Yongchaiyut. In the evenings, I earned some extra money by working for the Technical Department of Army Television Channel 5. I earned an extra 300 baht a month working there. I worked with Tum, Major General Charuphan Buranasongkhram.

Sometimes, I went with Colonel Karun Kengradomying to install television signal transmitters on Khao Wong Prachan or to erect antennas along the border in the northeast.

Not long after I was assigned to this signal company, Chiu left to attend the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. Chan, Lieutenant General Hanyut, was appointed company commander, and I was made deputy company commander.

Officers quarters were limited. Chiu was afraid that I would not be treated fairly and that I would not have a place to stay. Thus, we made arrangements to have me move into his quarters the day that he left.

I wanted to be wealthy and to have a house of my own and so I had to work even harder. Right after I graduated, I began teaching evening classes. I taught at the Wat Phichai Yat Tutoring School and at the Wat Thepthida School. On my days off, I taught children near my house.

As for religion, according to Thai custom, to become a man, every Buddhist male must spend some time in the monkhood. I had originally planned to be ordained at the temple of Achan Phuthathat at Chaiya. But several things prevented that. Ta suggested that I be ordained by Abbot Wichianmuni at Wat Tai near the Phlu market. That was an old and very well-known temple, and it was not far from my house on Sai Samphan Lane. It would be easy to go about in the mornings to receive offerings of food. I knew many people in that area. I later learned that King Taksin had been ordained at Wat Tai. The temple has preserved many things that belonged to him.

There were several other army, navy, and air force officers who were ordained with me. I placed first on the Buddhist doctrinal examination and was given an award by the abbot, Chao Khun Wichianmuni. After serving in the monkhood for three months as required by custom, I disrobed and resumed my military career. [passage omitted]

We first began seeing each other when I was a cadet and Sirilak was a student in the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Science at Chulalongkorn University. We were married in a simple ceremony in 1964. I didn't want to trouble a senior officer by asking him to preside at the ceremony and so we asked our parents to preside at the ceremony. The reception was held at the Officers' Club at the military academy. Fellow officers helped us make all the arrangements. [passage omitted]

Three months after we were married, I was selected to go for training in Hawaii for six months. This was an opportunity to learn and save money. After returning from Hawaii, we built a hut in the middle of a field in Lat Phrao. We used a lamp and well water. Later on, we borrowed money from the bank and from Sirilak's father and built a two-story house. That was when I was a captain.

The house was far from where I worked and so I needed a car. Sirilak is a very kind person. She sold her engagement ring, and I used the money to buy a used Nash from a foreign advisor with the company who was about to return home. Thus, although I was still young, I now had a home, some land, and a car.

I purchased that Nash for 16,000 baht, which included the tax. In April 1989, I sold the car for 170,000 baht and donated the money to the Red Cross. Sirilak, who was the real owner of the car, also decided to donate her ring to the Red Cross.

In this world, there is nothing that really belongs to us. Even our bodies, which we nurse so carefully, are borrowed. At some point in time, we have to return them. This is true for everything. The only question is how soon we will have to part from them.

Having a large house actually causes suffering. You have to spend money and time maintaining it. When I really began following the teachings of the Buddha, I discovered that I was moving in the wrong direction. We can't expect to copy the Buddha and reach his level. No matter how hard we try, we can't reach his level. But we can reduce suffering. Thus, we must try to follow his path by eating less, using less, working more, and, if we have anything left over, helping society.

We decided to sell our large house and live in a smaller house. We stopped spending so much time on improving our house and instead devoted our time to helping society. I am now much less selfish than I once was. On my days off, I spend my time teaching people the Buddhist teachings and distributing "spiritual" food. I can devote myself to this, because I don't have any children or obligations.

Fortunately, I have constantly trained to conquer my desires. Because of this, in dealing with huge sums of money when serving as the secretary general of the prime minister and now as governor of Bangkok, I have never stumbled. The front and back doors are closed tightly. I

cannot be bribed. I am proud of being able to speak frankly and of doing what I say.

"No matter how much money is involved, I will never cheat," because I am a person who adheres to the true religion. There is no religion in the world that praises corruption. I adhere to the truth.

Although I am a layman, I practice the Buddhist teachings strictly. Some have nicknamed me "half layman, half monk," and many call me "maha" [great].

I followed the Buddhist teachings strictly even when I was a politician, a senator, and the secretary general of the prime minister. And I continue to do so now while serving as the governor of Bangkok. Politicians must be honest. If they aren't, they will be pseudo-politicians. If Thailand does not grow and make an effort, it will disappear.

Not Time

When I was in secondary school, I met an old fortune-teller. He owned a banana plantation near Wat Sam Re. I didn't ask him to tell my fortune, but he went ahead and told me that I would die before the age of 25.

I didn't know how to respond. I didn't know anything about horoscopes or palm reading. I had seen my grandfather and his friends go to fortunetellers. Sometimes the predictions were accurate and sometimes they weren't. My grandfather had studied fortunetelling ever since he had lived at the temple. He had all the books. I did not have him tell my fortune. The old fortuneteller's prophesy might have been correct.

The people in that area considered that old fortuneteller to be very accurate in his predictions. And so what could I do after he told me that I would not live beyond the age of 25? I continued to study just like before. I didn't get upset. I just warned myself that I was fast approaching the age of 25. But when I turned 25, I felt very relieved. I was still alive. But we all have to die sometime. The only thing that we don't know is when.

When I was 31, while serving as the commander of Chiu's old signal company, I received orders to make preparations to go serve in Laos. Prior to that, I had had no inkling that I would have to go there. It wasn't until after I had returned from Laos that I learned that the order requesting an officer to carry out a special mission in Laos had been a mistake. The senior officers who had issued that order really wanted another officer who had the same name as me, that is, Major General Chamlong Phakcharoen. The mix-up occurred because we had the same first name.

Initially, I commanded paratrooper police, called "Pharu," at Combat Headquarters 333 in Udon. We maintained communications contact with various operations teams in Laos. After that, I was sent to Laos. You had to go wherever your commander sent you. I worked in Savannakhet, Pakse, and Meaung Soui.

One day, "Mr Thep," that is, Lieutenant General Withun Yasawat, asked me to come see him.

"I am putting you in charge of SAT Team 16 at Pha Thi. The fact that you are a signal officer is immaterial. I have seen your leadership abilities. Get ready to go."

The Pha Thi mountain range was an important site. It was the site of a modern radar station, which directed the various types of U.S. aircraft operating out of Thailand to targets in both Laos and Vietnam. Thus, the Lao and Vietnamese communists wanted to seize this position. [passage omitted]

The leader of the Pha Thi operations unit changed several times. Khwan, or Major General Worawit Phibunsin, returned to Thailand to attend the field-grade officers school. Colonel Pridi Bunsawat, whose code-name I can't remember, was nearing the end of his term. What's strange is that these two men and I belonged to the same class, and we were very close to each other.

Before leaving, I listened to a talk on the situation at Combat Unit 333. The speaker concluded with the comforting words that even if the enemy surrounded our position, they could not take Pha Thi hill, because this hill was very high. We and the right-wing Lao forces occupied the better position. The enemy would suffer heavy casualties.

I left early the next morning by myself. I landed at the Lao staff school at "Long Cheng." I slept overnight with Winai (Major General Winai Sinuan), who taught at the army command and general staff school. I was supposed to fly by helicopter from Long Cheng to Pha Thi. The helicopter flew over Pha Thi several times but couldn't land because of the heavy fog. They dropped me off at the foot of the mountain, and so I had to climb to the top. Pridi sent soldiers to lead the way. After climbing for just a short time, I was sure that the enemy would have no trouble reaching the top. I had chatted with Winai until late in the night and had slept just a few hours. And yet it was still an easy climb for me.

Halfway up, we reached the house of Captain Kiatsu, a Meo officer who commanded a reconnaissance team. Lao customs are the same as Thai customs, that is, we both respect our teachers. Fortunately, I had once taught communications at the Lao Command and General Staff College. Cpt. Kiatsu had attended my class. He remembered me and accepted and respected me. [passage omitted]

At first, I wondered why you had to take your rifle with you when you went to the latrine. Was the situation that bad? After being there awhile, I learned that besides the thick fog, security atop the hill was practically nonexistent. I tried to have barbed wire emplaced around our position but failed. The villagers in that area grew opium poppies, and the opium was ready to be harvested. The village headman and some of the villagers came and complained to me. One woman said that her husband had fought on our side and that he had died in battle. She

asked how we could be so cruel as to block their path and prevent them from earning a living. The team leader before me had tried to do the same thing as me, and he, too, had failed. Thus, we were at great risk. If fate was with us, we would live. If not, we would die. That is why it was necessary to take your rifle with you when you went to the latrine. You never knew when you might meet an enemy. [passage omitted]

I drilled the men hard. Our drills resembled actual combat. Everyone was told what they had to do and where. For example, some people were responsible for firing the mortars. They had to run from the bunker to the gun pit, bring the mortars that had been hidden beneath the ground, and set them up. We practiced to see how long it took to fire the first round after the initial order was given.

The American officer assigned to our Thai unit was quite satisfied with our training. He had confidence in the capabilities of Thai soldiers. And if necessary, U.S. aircraft could be there in five minutes to bomb the enemy. [passage omitted]

It was around the beginning of April 1968, a time that I remember very well. It was 1800 hours when the first enemy artillery shell landed about 100 meters from the bunker in which I had taken cover. The enemy fired a very large number of shells. I was in constant contact with all four operations teams stationed on Pha Thi hill. Besides the Thai soldiers, Lao soldiers were assigned to these teams, too.

"Morale is good. All the Lao soldiers are accounted for. I am making drinks for everyone," replied the leader of one of the operations team when I asked about the men's morale after the heavy enemy shelling. After that, the enemy fired its artillery sporadically and sent planes to bomb our position. The voice of Major Suaya could be heard quite clearly over the radio:

"Commander! Commander! They are concentrated here."

Suaya withdrew all of the Lao soldiers who were guarding various points and concentrated them at one point in preparation for leaving Pha Thi. After that, it would have been easy for the enemy to seize our position. At 0130 hours, the enemy shelled our position heavily in preparation for the attack. We had requested air support, but it took the aircraft 45 minutes to get there, not five minutes as had been agreed on. The aircraft flew in circles and dropped flares in order to reveal the enemy artillery positions. The enemy artillery continued firing, which showed that they had not been destroyed.

For political reasons, this was the way combat was in Laos. That is, if Lao infantrymen were used, the artillerymen had to be Thai. If Thai infantrymen were used, the artillerymen had to be Lao. Unfortunately, the latter was the case on Pha Thi hill. If it had been Thai artillery, it would have been a real battle.

"Yes, sir," answered the Lao artillerymen every time we pointed out a target and then asked if the target had been hit. They said yes, but in fact not one target had been hit.

After the enemy artillery had softened up our position, communist troops wearing black outfits rushed up the hill. They moved through the checkpoints for which the Lao soldiers had been responsible. I ordered the mortar crews assigned to the four operations teams to open fire as we had practiced. This was taking a great risk, because the enemy troops were quite close to me. If the mortar crews had made a mistake, they would have killed me and everyone else in the command post.

Our fire was very accurate, and the enemy gradually pulled back. I am not a fearless person, but I can control my fear. My only thought was, if my time has come, then I will die. I periodically telephoned the operations teams to help boost their morale and acted as if nothing had happened.

The next morning, there was not one enemy soldier left on the hill. We saw many traces of blood, which showed that the enemy had carried away their dead and wounded. They did this wherever they fought.

Even though we were exhausted from the night's fighting, not one of us had been killed or wounded. If we were provided with additional weapons, ammunition, and supplies, we could fight again. Senior Thai and American commanders decided to withdraw the forces to Udon. About 20 engineers had been lost, because the enemy had managed to climb to the top past checkpoints that were the responsibility of the Lao forces. That was near the radar site. They had thrown grenades.

Some of the technicians who survived said that the forces had held maneuvers. If fighting broke out, they were supposed to flee the radar room, tie long ropes to the trees, lower themselves, and flee over the overhanging rock. But after getting down, they forgot to release the rope. The enemy climbed down the rope and got the explosives.

The Meo lost about 200 men. That was because they did not hold their positions or stay in the bunkers. Instead, they ran here and there. Most of the Meo soldiers were children 14 or 15 years old. They did not have the courage of adults.

Although the enemy had withdrawn from Phathi, they were still hiding in the area. Thus, in withdrawing our forces, we had to be very careful. The Americans sent Skyraider aircraft to circle the area. Huge Jolly Green helicopters then came down and flew us out.

I had to sit with the pilot in order to point out the locations of the Thai units so that the helicopters could go pick them up. One time, when we were circling at a high altitude, we grew low on fuel. A fuel tanker approached us and refueled our aircraft in mid-air. I had heard about this but had never seen it personally.

The withdrawal was carried out in a disorderly manner. It took several days to complete this.

Senior Thai, American, and Meo commanders all wondered how a large number of enemy troops had managed to get up there. Because the area where they attacked was very difficult to get to. The slope there was very steep. Everyone had assumed that they would use the easier route, which was the zone of responsibility of the Thai forces. I, too, had made that assumption when holding maneuvers.

Cpt. Kiatsu had had many troops reconnoitering the area below Phathi. He had received much support, including weapons, ammunition, and food, from the Americans. He had made a reputation for himself during the time that the communists occupied Phathi. That was before there was a radar installation on the hill. He and his men had climbed the mountain, attacked the enemy, and regained control of the hill. And so why did he allow the enemy to scale the hill this time?

Two days later, General Vang Pao asked Cpt. Kiatsu to accompany him in a helicopter to survey the battlefield. By the time they returned, Cpt. Kiatsu was dead. Gen. Vang Pao said that enemy troops on the ground had fired at their helicopter, hitting Cpt. Kiatsu. None of the others aboard the helicopter had been hit. Kiatsu had survived on the ground but had been killed in the air. [passage omitted]

Several years after returning from Laos, some of my former subordinates were stationed in Bangkok while others were stationed in the provinces. Whenever I met one, I couldn't resist chatting about old times. [passage omitted]

Interest

The term "hua se" refers to the staff officer who formulates plans. "Se" comes from the abbreviation "Se.T," which stands for "senathikan" [staff officer]. Every officer, particularly an army officer, who wants to get promoted must attend the command and general staff college.

Those who have graduated from the Army Command and General Staff College can choose where they want to serve. The positions that they have dreamed of are open to them. And those with the best marks have the right to choose first. I chose to serve in Vietnam. I was the assistant planner to the chief of operations of the Thai Volunteer Division in Vietnam. I trained in Kanchanaburi for six months and then traveled to Camp Brackette in Bien Hoa Province in Vietnam. During that period, General Wanchai Ruangtrakun, General Panya Singsakda, Lieutenant General Chatchom Kanlong, and Lieutenant General Soem Chaibut served as the staff chiefs. All of them were members of classes senior to mine, and I knew all of them.

About a year after returning from Vietnam, I was selected by Supreme Command Headquarters to go to

the United States to study for a master's degree in administration. I had dreamed about that for a long time. Just after graduating from the military academy, I had asked to serve as a mathematics instructor in order to prepare myself to receive a scholarship so that I could earn a master's degree. But I was not given a scholarship and so I didn't go.

This time, I went with Somphan (Lieutenant General Somphan Ruangwaitaya), who had been one of my instructors when I was a cadet. I felt more comfortable going with one of my old instructors. I think that we were among the first to go study for a master's degree in administration at the institute in Monterey, California. That university is operated by the military, but the classes are taught by qualified civilian instructors who are well-known in the field of "operations research" and administration. Most of the students there are graduates of the U.S. army and navy military academies, who are the cream of the crop.

Somphan and I both took our wives along to help us with the housework and with our studies. They paid all of our expenses. We were quite comfortable. Medical treatment was free for both me and my wife.

Monterey is a small town. Besides being a college town, it is also a famous tourist area. The beach is very beautiful. Just after we arrived, I rented a house on a hill overlooking the ocean. I lived like a rich man, and I drove a Mustang.

But it wasn't convenient to drive the Mustang to the campus, because the car was always breaking down. I had bought it for \$300. I didn't have the money to buy a more expensive car. Thus, I decided to rent a house near the school. Other Thai students were living in that area, too. If the car broke down or a problem arose, I could rely on them for help.

I left the Mustang at home so that Sirilak could use it to go buy food. And we used it to travel here and there on my days off. For myself, I purchased another vehicle, a bicycle. I paid \$2 for it at secondhand store. The way to the school was all downhill and so all I had to do was sit on the bike and steer it. But on the way back, I had to pedal hard.

I have to confess that in all the years that I had attended school, I had never had to study so hard as I did then. Many foreign officers attending this school were sent home, because they couldn't keep up. And some American officers did not graduate either.

Just after I returned to Thailand, Supreme Command Headquarters started a program in administration for officers with the rank of colonel and major general. I taught some of the classes along with other officers who had recently graduated from Monterey. Most of the experts were senior instructors from the National Institute of Development Administration. One of these was Dr. Chirayu Isarangkun Na Ayuthaya. [passage omitted]

I also taught an economics class on "cost recovery analysis," which is very important for administrators. I have benefited a lot from this subject when making decisions. [passage omitted]

1. "The Great Chamlong is a communist."
2. "The Great Chamlong killed those involved in the 6 October events."
3. "What is the 6 October group?"
4. "They are communists."

6 October [passage omitted]

Those who are around my age can probably attest to the fact that our country has never experienced such turmoil as occurred in 1976. I don't know why, but there were demonstrations almost every day. And the demonstrations were not peaceful like they are today. They were always very noisy and bombs were set off.

I don't know where they learned to act like this. They seemed to produce bombs for the fun of it. The country was thrown into turmoil. The newspapers and radio reported alarming stories. The people were very concerned and wondered when the situation would return to normal. If things had continued like that, it would have affected the nation, religion, and monarchy.

Like many others, I was very worried. I couldn't just sit by idly. I went to listen to debates here and there. I listened to people discuss political matters at the radio stations and came to know several of the speakers. All of them were very serious people, and they were deeply concerned about the possibility of people killing each other.

The situation grew worse and worse. On the evening of 5 October, someone showed me an article in the newspaper. The picture showed an effigy of the Crown Prince hanging by the neck. I was shocked and couldn't understand why things had been allowed to reach this stage. People told each other, "things are terrible." The time had come to tell the government that it had to take action to end the turmoil.

On the morning of 6 October, I dressed just like I had when I had gone and listened to the debates, that is, I wore a hat and glasses. Because during that period, it was impossible to tell who was who. My hair was cut short, which identified me as a soldier, and that could have been dangerous. I joined others at the statue of King Chulalongkorn. I went without asking any of my subordinates to accompany me. Only Sirilak went along.

Later in the morning, I went to the Government House. I remember that it was raining hard, and all of us got soaked. We called on the government to take action to restore order. We did not ask the government to resign or to kill the students. [passage omitted]

I was out in the rain the entire day. I grew weary and felt in danger, because I didn't know if someone was planning to set off a bomb. Participating in that demonstration was not easy. People's arms and legs were broken. When I returned home at 1900 hours, I turned on the radio and heard that there had been a coup. There was also the terrible news that many students had been killed at Thammasat University. The next morning, detailed stories about this appeared in the newspapers.

Later on, from a memorandum, I learned that during the time that we had been at the statue of King Chulalongkorn and at the Government House, things had been happening at Thammasat University. For example, around 0600 hours, someone on the outside had fired into Thammasat University. And someone inside the university had fired back. Bombs were set off and war weapons were used. Many students were killed, and many others were arrested.

This was an issue in the general election held on 24 July 1988. People used this issue to attack their opponents. During a speech at Sanam Luang, I presented evidence showing that I had not done anything wrong as people had charged. I did not participate in nor did I support the killing of those students. [passage omitted]

Many people do not feel that those terrible events, which happened more than 10 years ago, should be brought up again. But when people began making false charges, the Moral Force Party to which I belong sent an inquiry to the government and asked the government to reveal the truth. But the government did not do anything.

Instructors at Thammasat University know who was involved in the events of 14 October 1973 and 6 October 1976, and they have cut their ties to those people, because they cannot erase their doubts or forget those terrible events. At the Ratchamangkhlaphisek ceremony held in Ayuthaya Province, one professor from Thammasat University who participated in the ceremony told me that he was well aware of the fact that the opposition had raised the terrible events of 6 October in an attempt to smear my name and destroy me politically. He said that if I had done what they claimed, Thammasat University would not have invited me to participate in so many events. And the university had been inviting me to participate in events even before I was elected governor of Bangkok.

The number of people attending the religious ceremony and commemorative lecture held at Thammasat University on 6 October every year has steadily declined. Some people used to wear black clothing, but they have changed. But that doesn't matter. It's good that the pain is fading. But such events must never be allowed to happen again.

Preparing To Be Governor [passage omitted]

In October 1978, I held a political position. I was assigned to the Office of the Secretary General of the Prime Minister. That was when General Kriangsak was

prime minister. At that time, I was a lieutenant colonel. I watched villagers, their clothes soaked, come to the prime minister's house to make appeals. There had been terrible floods, and no one had done anything to help them. I heard him telephone those concerned and order them to take immediate action to solve the problem.

The Thung Song Hong area along the Pra Pa Canal was flooded. Prachachun, Chaengwattana, and Ngamwongwan streets were flooded, and hundreds of rai of land in the area separating Bangkok, Nonthaburi, and Pathumthani were flooded. In some areas, the floodwaters were very high.

That day, the prime minister did not give me any orders, because my duties did not concern that. But because I am a person who likes to get involved in everything, I went to observe the situation in the area at the head of Chinnakhet Lane. If you don't go to see things for yourself, you can't tell how bad things are.

On one side, there wasn't any flooding at all. But just across Ngamwongwan Road, the entire area was flooded, because that was outside the protected zone. How could the people not be angry. They were so angry that they were talking about tearing down the dam and destroying the water pump. Thus, I rushed to call the prime minister to inform him about this and advised him that he should have the 1st Army Region commander, Lieutenant General Thep Kranloet, and the RTA CINC, General Prem Tinsulanon, send troops to help the people. I also called Lieutenant Colonel Manun Rubkhachon, the commander of the 4th Cavalry Battalion, so that he would be ready to take action immediately when he received word from his superiors.

Within 30 minutes, vehicles from the 4th Cavalry Battalion arrived on the scene followed by vehicles from the Army Transportation Department. The people began to smile. The soldiers spread out and began providing help. The people waved and forgot about destroying the dam and water pump. Besides that, in lanes where the water was particularly deep, military flat boats were used to help rescue people and their belongings and provide help in other ways.

In the afternoon, General Prem arrived in a truck belonging to the 2d Cavalry Battalion and surveyed the flooded area. That evening, Prime Minister Kriangsak arrived in a jeep to comfort the people. Beginning that day, I was put in charge of coordinating things to solve the flood problem. I was in charge of coordinating the efforts to reduce the floodwaters and help the people. I was busy there for 31 days. Many of the people there thought that I lived in the area. But actually, I lived on Soi Chanthima (Lat Phrao Road, Soi 80). [passage omitted]

The coordinating center that I set up along the road was staffed by officials concerned with providing vehicles and boats, doctors, nurses, and policemen. One afternoon, a senior doctor from the Phra Monkut Hospital stopped by and asked if we needed any more doctors. I immediately said that we needed a psychiatrist. He shook his head and

said that if a psychiatrist came and saw such a situation, he would go crazy, too. [passage omitted]

I relied on the battalion forces commanded by fellow officers. They provided much help. Thus, throughout the rainy season that year, miraculous things took place at the Prachaniwet 2 Housing Development.

Measuring the Value of Society

On 8 July 1985, Professor Kasem Sirisamphan sent a letter to me at the Ministry of Defense. After reading the letter, I immediately went to see him at his house.

I had worked with Professor Kasem during the period that Gen. Prem served as prime minister. Professor Kasem was a minister and I was the secretary general of the prime minister. Actually, I had known him even before that. I had often discussed politics with him.

Professor Kasem gave his analysis, saying that campaigning for office in Bangkok now cost a fortune. He said that before too long, poorer people will not be able to engage in politics. Large campaign posters alone cost a million baht. People were contending for positions that paid very low salaries. It didn't make sense.

He was sure that I would restore proper political values, and so he urged me to run for governor of Bangkok in the name of the Social Action Party. I was stunned. I had never thought about becoming the governor of Bangkok. I was happy serving in the military. I was happy working with my fellow officers. The work was not too heavy, and I could expect to be promoted. I had been cadet leader at the academy, and I had graduated from the Army Command and General Staff College and earned a master's degree in management. I had fought in both Laos and Vietnam and had the qualifications to continue on with my military career.

I sometimes liked to take a risk. My instructors at the military academy had stressed that if you are going to take a risk, it should be a risk that you have "thought about carefully." Thus, I told Professor Kasem that I needed time to think about this and that I would tell him my decision. He had "set the wheels turning" and all I could do was think, think, think. Every day, I thought about whether to say yes or no.

One month later, I called Professor Kasem, and he said that he had already submitted my name to the Social Action Party. But senior people in the party did not seem very interested in the election in Bangkok. I told him that I had thought about this a lot but had still not decided whether to run for office or whether to run in the name of the Social Action Party. Everything was still up in the air. But I told him that when I did decide, he would be the first to know.

Major General Suphon, an officer from a class junior to mine, once called Major General Sanan Khachonprasat from his desk, which was near mine, and half joking, asked:

"Is Chamlong really going to run for governor? I don't believe it."

Others didn't believe it either. It was like an antic in an Indian movie. Later on, I called Professor Kasem and told him that I had decided to run in the name of an independent group. He nodded, because the Social Action Party was still indifferent to this.

I switched from being a soldier and to being a politician because of the encouragement of Professor Kasem. I had a good job. I was still on active duty. But I decided to resign and take the risk. [passage omitted]

I Don't Have a Future [passage omitted]

For several years prior to the time that I decided to run for governor for the second time, I constantly asked myself: What do you want to be? Can you answer?

The answer was always the same. It never changed. Many people did not believe me. There was no way for them to believe me, particularly those who did not know who I was or where I had come from. Most thought that I was interested in a higher position. They thought that the purpose of everything I did was to gain a higher position. No one believed that if I could choose and had no commitments, what I really wanted was to be just plain "Chamlong," live in a small hut engrossed in nature, and follow the Buddha's teachings in order to reduce my desires.

I have no future.

1 July 1989

Subject: Offering flowers and presents on my birthday.

To: My fellow citizens.

My birthday on 5 July this year was like my birthday last year. That is, I am a year older and that much nearer death. I have to hurry to do more good works.

Some of you may wish to offer flowers or presents on my birthday. I want to thank you for your kindness. But I would like to make the same request that I have made before. That is, I would like to ask you not to offer flowers or presents. That would just be a waste of both your and my work and leisure time. Instead, I would like to ask you to support my work for the development of Bangkok and Thai society.

Sincerely,

Major General Chamlong Simuang