

MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



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The Khmer Republic and Khmer Air Force And the Other Secret War, Part III

by the late Glenn Black

Editor’s Note: After the March issue of *The Mekong Express Mail* was published, we were saddened to learn that Glenn Black had died on February 16th, in Phnom Penh. See page 7 for a story about Glenn. In this issue we conclude his excellent three-part series on the war as it was experienced in Cambodia.

Part II of this article was an add-on to the material Glenn originally submitted. Said Glenn in Part II, “From my sources, this is the background situation of Cambodia’s progression from the onset of the Khmer Republic’s entry to the war on March 17, 1970 to April 17, 1975 in which FANK [Lon Nol’s National Khmer Armed Forces] and the KAF [Khmer Air Force] operated, but my article wishes to honor the Khmer Air Force Veterans and their website—not to insult them with inconvenient truths. A lot of the early events took place simultaneously—the coup, the bombings, the deaths of the Vietnamese and Cambodians, and the increasing presence of North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong units in Cambodia.” We begin Part III with the last two paragraphs of Part I to provide continuity.

Part III

When President Nixon took office, he expressed his desire for U.S. troop withdrawals in South Vietnam. Consequently, General Creighton Abrams, Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), initiated a bombing request to General Earle Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint

Chiefs of Staff. Abrams was concerned about the NVA/VC taking advantage of a troop drawdown, and reminded General Wheeler that intel expected a large-scale NVA/VC offensive soon. Abrams said that a concentrated B-52 attack on the Communist’s Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) would have “an immediate effect on the offensive and will also have its effect on future military offensives which COSVN may desire to undertake.” Thus, these areas were the targets of the first border bombings that came to be known as the “Menu” bombings.

Secrets

Wheeler met with the Joint Chiefs to authorize the bombings and sent the request to Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird, who passed it to the White House. The request was to be considered “by the highest authority,” meaning the President. This response also insisted that “this matter be held as closely as possible by all channels and in all agencies which have access to it.” Further discussion culminated in approval by President Nixon, who told General Wheeler and the Joint Chiefs, on a half dozen occasions, that nothing whatsoever about the proposal

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Editor's Notebook

Greetings, readers. In our March issue, Editor John Harrington announced his resignation, made necessary by health challenges. I am pleased to accept appointment to succeed John as editor of the *Mekong Express Mail (MEM)* from TLCB President John Sweet, who subsequently agreed to serve as our content “wheedler.” I’m sure many readers will hear from John as he teases out the worthy but untold stories of our members. I have also asked my wife, Thelma, to continue as Assistant Editor and John Duffin as Circulation Manager, who totes each edition from the printer, stuffs envelopes including inserts, and mails them to us.



As our founding president, I wanted us to have a printed periodical that would come to members physically and would convey our special story with topics of historic significance. The first board of directors readily authorized this publication, and the first issue came out in June of 2000. ***This issue is the 101st edition.***

At an event in Virginia, I met a Scottish-born reporter and one-time Montreal newspaper editor, David MacDonald, who worked in Washington and had White House and Pentagon press credentials. What’s more, he had been a soldier in the British Army and served in Malaya during the “Emergency” that preceded U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. Furthermore, Dave’s wife Sally, a current member, was the daughter of the famous White House reporter, military veteran, and persistent press irritant to many presidents, Sarah McClendon.

Dave readily agreed to join the TLCB and be our first *MEM* editor. He set our publication standards, and nearly all his

editorial policies remain in effect. Unfortunately, Dave’s health forced him to relinquish this job in June of 2012, and in 2019 he died and went from being our “editor emeritus” to “founding editor.”

I knew John Harrington was a published writer and was in the publishing business in some way, so I approached him about filling Dave’s editorial shoes. While John’s connection to the industry was in circulation, not content or design, he took to the job with skill and confidence, and readers have often expressed appreciation for the quality of the *MEM* while he was editor. We already miss his steady help and guidance very much!

In this issue we are publishing an obituary for Hank Maifeld, of Rumford, Maine. In 1999, I knew Hank was eager to help with our new TLCB in some way, so when we launched the *MEM*, I contacted him about getting the newsletter printed and mailed. Hank found a good printer and did the stuffing and mailing for the first three years, sometimes with the help of his grandchildren, before he asked for relief. Another helpful member, Ray Hayes of Milford, New Hampshire, accepted the job and put in over six years very efficiently and promptly. When Ray finally asked to be relieved from this tedious work, Philadelphia-based John Duffin, our current circulation manager and long-time Membership Committee Chairman, accepted the job, starting with the March 2011 issue.

I have been closely involved with the *MEM* since the beginning, having composed every issue and written many articles along the way. Also, I have solicited articles and chosen the graphics for many of them. I love this work and am happy to continue, so it was only natural for President Sweet to ask me formally to step in as the editor. I like John Harrington’s style and policies and currently have no plans to change things. I look forward to receiving and publishing many more articles about our members and their military experiences.

Bill Tilton, Editor

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must ever be disclosed. Nixon was correct in his assumption that Congress would not allow him to bomb a neutral country.

To accomplish total secrecy, some sleight of hand was required. This included the diversion of B-52 planes that were airborne from Guam and targeting legitimate missions in South Vietnam near the border. Pilots of those planes were notified in advance that they would be diverted to “other targets” while enroute to the legitimate targets on the Vietnamese side of the border. As the planes neared the Vietnam war zone, the USAF bomb radar controller in Vietnam radioed the coordinates of the new target to the navigators and guided the planes on the final bomb run inside the Cambodian border. After the airstrike, the bomb radar controller burned evidence of the top-secret diversion instructions and coordinates of the strike. Information about these strikes remained as the USAF had recorded bombing assessment reports.

Breakfast at Tay Ninh

The first of the “Menu” Bombings was “Breakfast,” and its mission’s target was a 25 square kilometer block located NW of Tay Ninh, Vietnam. It was attacked by 59 B-52 bombers mostly flying in cells of 3 planes. The bombing destroyed bunkers and some war materials and some NVA and VC troops, but did not destroy COSVN, which turned out to be more elusive than



Forward air controller (FAC) in an OV-10 preparing to direct a pair of F-100 fighters on airstrikes in Cambodia.

Photos provided by Glenn Black, with this note: All photos are the property of Cambodia Veterans, Inc, www.khmerairforce.com or Rustic.org (photos of OV-10 & O-2 Skymaster)..



Air Force O-2, a modified Cessna Skymaster two engine successor to the O-1 Birdog.

thought. The area targeted in the Parrot’s Beak of Cambodia was considered one of the more important NVA/VC sanctuaries.

The “Breakfast” mission was followed by eleven more Menu Bombings in Cambodia with similar damage. These bombings continued into 1970 with “Lunch,” “Snack,” “Dinner,” “Supper,” “Desert,” and finally “Patio.” Some of the later missions bombed areas larger than one hundred square kilometers. The bombings did not destroy COSVN, which moved between the areas or pulled back deeper into Cambodian territory. War materials and bunkers were destroyed, and NVA/VC were killed along with Cambodian civilians. The result of the bombings and incursion was that COSVN and the NVA/VC units moved deeper into Cambodia, bringing them into more frequent conflict with Cambodian authorities.

Rustic FACS and Back Seaters

From June 20, 1970 to 15 August 1973, the USAF Forward Air Controllers (FACs) with the call sign “Rustic,” flew their OV-10s and O-2s from Bien Hoa base in Vietnam and carried out ground support missions in Cambodia. There was both a day shift of OV-10s and a night shift of O-2 Skymaster FACs operating. At the end of each shift, the FACs flew back to Bien Hoa, near Saigon. Early in 1973, the Rustic FACs were based at Ubon RTAFB and other bases in Thailand. At night the push-pull O-2 Skymaster aircraft, the military version of the Cessna 337, was the better plane because the O-2 had less cockpit illumination that gunners could see from the ground.

USAF aircraft could land in Cambodia if damaged or for fuel uptake or emergencies, though their pilots and back seaters might be flown out to Vietnam or Thailand so that they were only considered ‘transiting’ Cambodia.

English speaking KAF staff often flew as back seaters in the Rustic OV-10s and/or the O-2 Skymasters and translated communications from FANK unit commanders on the ground who spoke only Khmer. Otherwise, French speaking USAF staff served as back seaters because most of the FANK army officers also spoke French. Back seaters often were any French-speaking staff, such as cooks, admin, or logistics staff.

Rustics provided 24-hour coverage over Cambodia from

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early in 1970 until all U.S. air support to Cambodia was ended when the Cooper-Church Amendment was passed by Congress in 1973. The ban became effective on 15 August 1973 and stipulated that no U.S. air support be allowed to support FANK forces in Cambodia. From that point forward, the KAF, flying in O-1 Birddogs, took over the ground support role of the Rustic FACs, spotting and marking targets for the KAF's T-28D fighter bombers, AC-47 gunships, and AU-24 Helio "Stallion" mini-gunships.

The bombings, deceptions, and attendant secrecy imposed by the White House were successfully kept out of the news until 1973 when a lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force divulged the secret to the press. Until then, Nixon had kept the Secretary of the Air Force and USAF Chief of Staff completely out of the loop. Though he initiated the request, General Creighton Abrams's Cambodia desk officers, responsible for Cambodia intelligence, were not notified of the bombings, nor was Lon Nol. Such was the secrecy that the Nixon administration was able to impose on the bombings as well as other information about support to Lon Nol's Khmer Republic.



KAF crew by their AU-24 Helio Stallion Short Takeoff and Landing (STOL) aircraft. The USAF provided fifteen of these gunship versions to the KAF in 1972.

Freedom Deal

Operation "Freedom Deal" followed the Menu Bombings in 1970, and continuous bombings, primarily by USAF fighter-bombers and B-52s, lasted until August 15, 1973. Since the start of Operation Menu in 1969, the U.S. Air Force had dropped a total of 539,129 tons of ordnance on Cambodia/Khmer Republic by 15 August 1973. By comparison, the U.S. bombers dropped about four times that amount of tonnage on Laos from 1964 to August 1973, so USAF bombing in Cambodia was proceeding at a good clip during nearly four years from the start of the "Menu Bombings" as opposed to "Barrel Roll" in Laos, which lasted nearly ten years.

Button Pushed; Power Gone

The U.S. bombers were the only button President Richard Nixon had available when FANK forces were attacked by

Frequently used acronyms

COSVN: Central Office for South Vietnam

FANK: Forces Armee Nationale Khmer

KAF: Khmer Air Force

NVA/VC: North Vietnam Army/Viet Cong

MACV: Military Assistance Command, Vietnam

superior numbers, and after 15 August 1973 that actuator was gone. By 1973, Nixon's power had been weakened by Watergate and impeachment proceedings, and neither he nor Sec. of State Kissinger were able to induce Congress to prolong his bombing campaign. The only help he could offer was the assistance and supply that Congress had already approved.

Lon Nol, FANK attempt to retake territory

The FANK army intervention was ineffective from the beginning, and by June of 1970, the two provinces bordering Vietnam in the NE part of the country, Rattanakiri and Mondulakiri, fell to the Communists. Most of Svay Rieng and Prey Veng provinces were soon to follow. Within a short time, the NVA/VC controlled nearly all the Cambodian territory east of the Mekong River and continued to claim land in central Cambodia, including the province and city of Kampong Thom. The forest area along the western border with Thailand had long been a sanctuary of Khmer Communists since the 1960s. Otherwise, the NVA/VC gained control over the Cardamom Mountains sanctuary north of Kampot and along Cambodia's border area that extended from Vietnam's Delta—a lot of territory to lose in nine months.

FANK launched the "Chenla I" offensive to reclaim Kampong Thom, but its gains were minimal. In 1971 the "Chenla II" offensive was launched with the same objective and retook Kampong Thom city, holding it briefly. Then the NVA counterattacked, and FANK suffered yet another defeat.

Growth of Khmer Rouge

By the end of 1972 the NVA, borrowing a page from President Nixon's playbook, began "Khmerization" of the war that allowed the NVA/VC to concentrate their efforts on South Vietnam. NVA-trained Khmer Rouge took over on the battlefields and continued to grow stronger. The NVA still provided Russian supplies to the Khmer Rouge; however, the Chinese increasingly assumed the role of supplying them.

Civil War

From that point forward, Khmer were fighting Khmer and the battle for Cambodia itself became a civil war with the Khmer Rouge in ascendance over the Khmer Republic. By 1972, the territory of the Khmer Republic consisted of enclaves around Phnom Penh, Battambang, Northwest Cambodia, Kampot, and Sihanoukville. Occasionally Highway 5 to Battambang or Highway 4 to Sihanoukville could be opened by FANK forces with air strikes, U.S. and KAF, and helicopter assault

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troops opening the Khmer Rouge choke points. This allowed Battambang's rice harvest to be transported to Phnom Penh and shipments from Sihanoukville to be transported by truck to Phnom Penh.

Near the end of 1974, this was no longer the case. Supply convoys up the Mekong River to Phnom Penh found the going a lot more dangerous, as the Khmer Rouge controlled much of the territory along both sides of the Mekong. By early 1975, there were no more river convoys due to the fall of the Neak Luang garrison to the Khmer Rouge on the narrowest point of the Mekong River, thus preventing any future resupply via the Mekong. The U.S. began an airlift to Phnom Penh from Thailand and Saigon in February of 1975, flying 600 tons of rice, ammunition, medicines, and fuel, per day, to FANK forces.



Pilots of the KAF and American advisors in a happy moment. No identification is available.

Long gone was the U.S. air power that might have made a difference as Khmer Rouge massed for the final assault. On the 14th of April, President Ford dropped his request to the reluctant U.S. Congress to approve additional aid to the Khmer Republic. On 15 April in Cambodia, by radio, the Khmer heard of the decision of the U.S. Congress; and though still willing to fight on, they knew the end had come.

The end of the Khmer Republic

On 16 April, the defensive perimeter of Pochentong airport was breached by Khmer Rouge forces who outnumbered the FANK soldiers by two to one. The UH-1H helicopters of the KAF, no longer able to operate from Pochentong Airport, continued to land and depart from the national stadium, their final LZ. The exhausted troops of FANK fought on but could not stop the Khmer Rouge who entered Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975. The Khmer Republic and FANK surrendered at 10:00 AM and were no more. The Khmer Rouge entered the city.

Foreign and local entreaties to the Khmer Rouge leadership for humane treatment of their adversaries fell on deaf ears. FANK's efforts, courage, and valor were for nothing. Worse

yet, when the war ended, it was not "the end." A whole new period of darkness was to descend on Cambodia and the Khmer People immediately after the surrender of FANK and the Khmer Republic. Many books detail the bloody aftermath.

Khmerairforce.com

The khmerairforce.com Website is the gateway source, with sections on the evolution of the Cambodian Air Force from its start in 1954. Be vigilant for links throughout the site that seem superfluous but, if clicked on, relate to other facets and interesting details about the KAF, as well as some anecdotes. Some are quite humorous. Others describe the brutal fates of those pilots or crews so unlucky to have crash landed in the territory of the Khmer Rouge. There is a lot of information about the KAF efforts to get ahead of the curve against the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong (NVA/VC) and their ultimate enemy, the Khmer Rouge. In the first two years of Cambodia's entry into the Vietnam War, 1970 and 1971, the Cambodian Army was outnumbered and was fighting well equipped, seasoned NVA/VC units. During this period, Khmer communists were being trained by NVA/VC units, but they were not the significant force they became in 1972. In the same period, the U.S. military trained and equipped Cambodia's Khmer Armed forces including the Khmer Air Force (FANK).

Keep in mind that there are multiple authors of the Khmer Air Force links, and their first language is not English and the translation from the Khmer language to French, then to English yields occasional French words and some inexact grammar. Please bear with it; the details and stories

within are well worth the effort.

The site provides interesting details of how things were if you happened to fly for the Khmer Air Force during the Khmer Republic. Also of interest are the aircraft that composed the KAF before and after 1970, and the many locations where the KAF pilot cadets trained, at bases in the USA, as well as U.S. training at Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) bases in Thailand.

Dac Cong attack on Pochentong Airbase and The KAF Aircraft Inventory

Aviation Royale Khmer's (Khmer Air Force, or KAF) varied inventory was largely destroyed in an NVA attack in January 1971. After FANK's modest gains made during the Chenla I offensive, which Lon Nol touted as a victory, Vietnamese Dac Cong sappers attacked Pochentong Airport, destroying nearly all the Khmer Air Force, except a squadron of six T-28Ds that had been timely relocated to Battambang Air Base only weeks before. See www.khmerairforce.com.

Prior to the 1971 attack, the air force consisted of French, Russian, Chinese, and American aircraft. The Soviet and

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Chinese aircraft were acquired during Sihanouk's efforts to be friendly with USSR and China in the mid-1960s. The lost fleet was mostly replaced by U.S. aircraft that the KAF were already familiar with, such as O-1s, T-28s, and C-47s. Crews were also trained to fly the new AC-47s, AU-24s, C-123s, and UH-1 H "Huey" Helicopters.

This menagerie of aircraft was a nightmare for USAF technical advisors and KAF staff to configure into effective ground support wings due to lack of spare parts, ammunition, and training. Much of the training took place at Thai Air Force Bases and many KAF pilots received training in the USA. See <http://khmerairforce.com/AAK-KAF/AVNK-AAK-KAF/P-AAK-EN.html> for details about all training classes.

The KAF was to have successes; notably, a T-28 attack on an NVA truck park in NW Cambodia touched off a conflagration that destroyed over one hundred trucks loaded with war materials. The KAF support often allowed FANK ground forces to rally and save their positions continuously throughout the war; however, when left to provide air support on their own, they could not be everywhere at once and the departure of the Rustic FACs and U.S. strike aircraft on Aug 15th 1973,

considerably reduced the air support footprint in Cambodia.

From August 15, 1973 forward, until Phnom Penh fell, the Cambodian Army and Navy were to depend upon the Khmer Air Force to provide air support to ground and riverine forces with T-28D fighter-bombers to deliver napalm and MK-81 250 lb bombs on Khmer Rouge positions. AC-47 and AU-24 (Helio Stallion) gunships also provided support and even the C-123 transports dropped pallets of bombs. The KAF referred to these as "B-123s." The KAF did its best, but due to shortages of planes, spare parts, maintenance, and trained pilots, there were never enough of them to provide the cover or emergency strikes in the way the USAF and the USN bombers had.

The Khmer Air Force flew missions until the last days of the Khmer Republic, at times landing on Highway 4 to park their T-28s outside Pochentong airport, avoiding the continual 107 mm and 122 mm rocket attacks and artillery fire during its final months in 1975. On 16 April, the KAF pilots flew their last missions and dropped bombs on their disabled planes and equipment at the airport before flying to Thailand. The last flyable UH-1 Hueys transported officials and families from FANK's provisional LZ inside the Olympic Stadium to RTAF bases in Thailand.

Sources

Continue the Lesson: Sources for Further Reading

This is my "history fast" background about the Khmer Republic and the Khmer Air Force. The events mentioned in this article can be better studied in the sources provided below. From the Khmer Air Force website links, you will learn more details about the development of KAF and ground support efforts and the perspective of the Khmer Air Force veterans and their stories. I think you will find their history compelling. See other books or sites listed in my sources below for more information about the Khmer Republic. All details, quotes, and dates of events are from sources at the bottom.


Note: I especially draw the reader's attention to the report by Lieutenant General Sak Sutsakhan, FANK, the last Minister of Defense and the last Prime Minister of the Khmer Republic. General Sak Sutsakhan submitted his report, "The Khmer Republic at War and the Final Collapse," to the U.S. Army History Department in 1978. His honest account of the intense pressure put upon all units of FANK, the problems encountered, and the cross purposes of the divisive leadership of the Khmer Republic all combined negatively to weigh the odds against the efforts of FANK to outmaneuver and defeat the NVA/VC and ultimately, the Khmer Rouge.

"*Sideshow*" by William Shawcross remains the go-to book of all events in Cambodia and within the USA, which precipitated the beginning of the war in 1970, the many details throughout the Khmer Republic's five years of existence, and its eventual end.

"*Call Sign Rustic*," Richard Wood's interesting firsthand account details the history, life, the pilots, the back seaters, and realities of the RUSTIC FACs from the start of their intervention in 1970 to August 1973.

"*The Khmer Air Force*," primarily written by Kenneth

Conboy and Ron Bowra, is available via Wikipedia. Conboy and Bowra also wrote "FANK" which details equipment transfers from the Military Equipment Delivery Team Cambodia (MEDTC), the organization of the Khmer Republic's Forces under FANK, insignia of FANK, and descriptions of FANK engagements.

"*The Cambodian Wars Clashing Armies and CIA Covert Operations*," also by Kenneth Conboy, details the Khmer Republic period as well as U.S. support during President Reagan's presidency to the non-Communist resistance factions FUNCINPEC and KPNLF during Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia, 1979 to 1989, and continued fighting with the Communist Peoples Republic of Kampuchea, which was renamed State of Cambodia, SOC, in 1989. The SOC were adversaries of the Khmer Rouge and non-Communist factions, and fighting continued until the Paris Peace Agreements were agreed to by all factions and their supporting nations in 1991. This book ends at this juncture; however, the restored Royal Kingdom of Cambodia Army, RCAF, was to continue fighting the Khmer Rouge until their collapse in late 1998. 

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INCLUDE MEMBER #!

MEMORIES OF GLENN BLACK

by Tom Michael Petrocz

I was truly saddened to learn of the passing of my dear friend Glenn Black in February of 2025. A message from Glenn's close friend, Vaughan Smith, a member of the Thailand – Laos – Cambodia Brotherhood (TLCB) was forwarded to me. I got in touch with Vaughan, and he asked if I might write a word or two about Glenn for the TLCB quarterly newsletter. That was the impetus for this narrative.

Cambodiana

Where do I start? How about the night I first met Glenn in November of 1991 in Phnom Penh! I need to provide the reader with some background information about the “scene” in Phnom Penh at that time. There was only one place to go and gather for entertainment on Friday night — the Cambodiana, the swankiest hotel in the city. It was also the only place one could buy a cold beer at that time!

Everyone in the expat community went there, even the Christian groups with their kids! The evening opened with a song by the house band “The Phnom Penh Blues.” It was not that they played the blues — it was what they gave you. *They sucked!*

Glenn arrived at work with an agency called PACT. The country director was a cantankerous, lazy Yale grad named Fred Haight. They were to act as a surrogate for non-government agencies (NGOs) receiving USAID grants in Cambodia, as they did not have a presence there in the fall of 1991. For



Glenn in 2007, at Tom's wedding. Photos from the author.

those unfamiliar, USAID stands for the U.S. Agency for International Development. It was the mechanism by which the U.S. provided assistance overseas.

Glenn arrived on a Friday. Fred brought him to the Cambodiana, and then just abandoned him. Thanks Fred! Glenn and I walked all the way back to his hotel, the Monorom, which was one of the original five hotels open for business in Phnom Penh in 1991. We were accompanied by Tom Rogers who was the country director for Holt International. For those familiar with Phnom Penh, the Monorom was adjacent to the railway station. It took us 45 minutes to get there, and we stopped to get a mackerel sandwich on French bread — a Khmer specialty! Yum!

Glenn's position required him to help the rest of the USAID grantees fulfill their obligations under USAID regulations since he was quite experienced in this area. Most of the rest of us were novices. Glenn did tutorials for us and was pretty much my mentor in doing procurements per USAID regulations. I have to stress that at that point in my career I had no experience in doing procurement per USAID regulations. Fred's successor chastised him for this even though this was his job description. As a result, he switched jobs and worked for UNTAC, the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia.

Major Coup

While still with PACT, Glenn pulled a major coup that would affect both of our lives in ways we could not imagine. USAID wanted us to buy items from U.S. producers if possible. Until that time, we were able to buy Toyota Land Cruisers since there were no U.S. vehicles available. Glenn was able to locate a supplier in the U.S. called AMEG, The American Export Manufacturing Group. The CEO/owner, Wess Tribble was a long-term ex-Lao hand from the Vietnam Era. He was able to supply U.S.-made Jeep Cherokees with maintenance possibilities. In fact, Glenn, Tami Ito, and I went to Sihanoukville in late 1991 or early 1992 to bring the vehicles back to Phnom Penh. Very different from today!

I would now like to turn to our leisure activities in the fall of 1991 and early days of 1992. There was a restaurant at the end of the road from the Victory Monument on the river called the Kirirom. As one looked at the river, one could see the “Broken Bridge.” It is not clear if the Khmer Rouge or the government forces blew the central span, but the result was the same: impassable!

Dangerous Chat with Jackie Daniels!

Boat trips up and down the Bassac and Mekong Rivers were available. I went on many of these cruises; however, I only have multiple reports on one I did *not* go on. At that time, Glenn was speaking regularly to his buddy Jackie Daniels. I think some of you know him. Well, the railing on the boat was not very high and Glenn leaned back and fell off the boat and

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floated downstream! Talk about waist deep in the big muddy! The boat had to circle back until they could locate him and fish him out of the water. Glenn did not do any more boat trips for the next few months!

I want to add a tale about a typical lunch with Glenn while he worked with UNTAC. Mark Quinn, “The Mighty One,” as he was a massive ex-SEAL, Annie Moran, and I all worked for ICMC at one time, and for lunch we would walk to the California Restaurant, an eatery owned by a Cambodian lady from Los Angeles. Glenn had to drive from UNTAC HQ and was usually a little bit late, so we had already ordered.

Glenn’s lunch orders were something to behold — or not! As he entered, the waitresses would push each other towards our table because it was difficult to wait on Glenn. He would peruse the menu aloud and say, “Hmm...fish and chips, but corn would be better than a salad.” The waitress would scribble on the order form. “But then, a cheeseburger with fries—but a side of salad instead of veggies.” Scribbling again. “Oh yeah...tacos! OK!”

Now, quite honestly, neither the waitress nor Mark, Anne, nor I had any idea what Glenn had ordered. The owner came over and said like a Jewish deli manager in New York, “Glenn, whatta ya want?” Glenn, somewhat bemused, would say, “You need to train these girls up a bit.” And as we left, Glenn would always leave a generous tip!

Claymore Mine

Vaughan had sent out the report of Glenn’s last field trip for the TLCB. There was a photo taken on an Angkor-period bridge, recognizable by the carved side entrance and railing carved surfaces. These spans dot the landscape in northwestern Cambodia. We were on a field trip one afternoon and paused at such a span to take some photos. Glenn located a Claymore right on the side of the road facing traffic! [Note: a *Claymore* is a lethal antipersonnel weapon that sprays a cloud of ball bearings from ground level. Ed.] We notified two British demining agencies, Halo Trust and the Mine Advisory Group (MAG) to take action as we were unsure which one operated in that location. The Claymore was safely removed.

Glenn and I both left Cambodia for a year or two. When I returned, I was engaged by UNHCR as a field officer with the responsibility of monitoring the status of repatriated refugees. Glenn initially went to work with the Cambodian government mine action agency, known as the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC).

I was based in Sisophon in Banteay Meanchey Province on the Thai border opposite the Thai municipality of Aranyaprathet; however, the Singaporean UNHCR head of office, Nellie Chan, asked me to assist in opening up a new field office in Battambang, the second largest city in Cambodia. The incoming head of sub-office was Johann Siffointe, who worked with Glenn and me on the original USAID contracts back in 1991. This was now 1998. I knew

Glenn was quite dissatisfied at CMAC and told Johann that he was available. Johann told me to contact him and, voila, Glenn joined me as a UNHCR field officer.

Better to Enjoy the Free Time!

Now, Glenn and I were known to “enjoy” our off hours. Nellie Chan was a strait-laced conservative Chinese Singaporean lady. She was not an aficionado of those who “enjoyed” their free time. She hated me and merely disliked Glenn; however, she appreciated our work ethic and our expertise.

Nellie was responsible for writing the UNHCR Annual Report. Instead of doing it herself, she sequestered Johann, Glenn, and me in a hotel in Battambang and gave us three days to complete the report with only the barest of parameters. She joined us after the third day, and we presented her with a printed-out 87-page report. Her response: “This is ridiculous. It’s 87 pages; it’s much too long.” We told her to edit out the parts she didn’t want, and we would dress it up and smooth it out. Reluctantly, she had to admit that we did a good job. In appreciation, she didn’t even buy us a beer. God forbid we should enjoy our free time!

I have one more UNHCR anecdote to offer. UNHCR brought all the field teams into Phnom Penh for a program retreat. The venue was a hotel at the foot of Wat Phnom, a familiar landmark in Phnom Penh. The schedule had the sessions begin at 8:30 AM. The field teams were accustomed to coming to the office at 7:00 AM and hitting the road by 7:30.

Now, understand that Khmer have the eating habits of Hobbits — breakfast, brunch, “elevensies”! As our session reached 1:30 PM, the loudest sound one could hear was the continuous hum of growling Cambodian tummies! There were also no restaurants near the hotel. By the time people returned from the “lunch” break, it was well after 2:30 PM! The sessions did not end until about 7:30 PM that evening.

Nellie asked, “Does anyone have a suggestion about the schedule for tomorrow?” Glenn said, “How about we start at 7:30 and go to noon and then call it a day.” Nellie retorted:

Memories of Glenn *continues next page*



Glenn Black on the left, at Tom and Pimmy's wedding in July of 2007.

“Glenn, that’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard!” Glenn answered, “Then why did you ask me?” to the amused laughter of the Khmer and chagrin of Nellie. We kept the same tedious schedule!

By the way, I found out some years later that this was regarded as one of the most successful UNHCR operations. The typical percentage of the repatriating caseload monitored was 10 – 15%. We did 65%! I attribute that to the fact that we “enjoyed” our free time!

No-Fee Parking!

I would like to offer one final Cambodia anecdote. Glenn and I were headed to the Foreign Correspondence Club of Cambodia restaurant, which is on the riverfront in Phnom Penh. Glenn had purchased a used car that was barely functional. We parked, and a kid came over and asked for a dollar to watch the car. At that time, if you left your vehicle unattended, street kids would rip off the aerials or perform other acts of vandalism. Glenn looked at his car and the keys in his hand and tossed them to the kid saying, “Take it!”

The kid looked at the car, looked at the keys and threw them back to Glenn saying, “I don’t want it!” The kid ran away in a panic, and we did not pay a “parking fee!” Good one Glenn!

I was engaged to be married in February of 2006 and I promised my fiancé, Pimmy, that we would get married on July 7th the following year — 7/7/7! I was working in Iraq at the time and six of my colleagues were able to attend the festivities. Friends from Cambodia days were also in attendance including Glenn and our friend Annie who came all the way from Dublin!

As previously mentioned, Glenn became acquainted with a company called AMEG while procuring vehicles in Cambodia back in 1992. A year later found Glenn doing procurement for them in Afghanistan. There was a new contract coming up in Iraq and Glenn recommended me for the procurement position with AMEG. Based on his recommendation, I was hired by the owner, Wess Tribble. I was working for them at the time of my marriage. I wish to recount an episode that happened prior to our wedding.

Episode in Cambodia—to Remember!

In December of 2006 I had an R&R and went to Bangkok to see my fiancé, Pimmy the Eskimo, my nickname for her. By chance, Glenn Black had an R&R scheduled from Afghanistan at the same time and was also in Bangkok. Glenn got in touch and informed me that Wess Tribble was also going to be in town to attend a reunion of the Assembly of Expatriates — South East Asia (AESEA). Glenn invited me to attend the reunion with him.

This reunion was a FREAKING TRIP! Most of the attendees were folks who were a part of the “secret war in Laos.” These were guys right out of the pages of the two books written by Christopher Robbins about CIA operations there — “Air America” and “The Ravens,” the former also made into a film starring Mel Gibson and Robert Downey Jr. Wess himself was originally with the military there and then remained with USAID, much like John Paul Vann in Vietnam whose work was chronicled in “A Bright and Shining Lie” by Neil Sheehan. In fact, Wess was the individual principally involved in bringing

in mules from Tennessee to transport goods through rugged mountain terrain along trails from Laos through Cambodia and into Vietnam. It was an enjoyable time with presentations, great conversations with amazing tales of the “secret war,” and of course, a LOT of alcohol!

Glenn and I had not worked in Laos, but spent over five years in Cambodia, and we ran into an old acquaintance from our Cambodia days, Al Rockoff. I’m sure that most readers have seen the film “The Killing Fields.” Al was the photographer portrayed in the film by John Malkovich who could not get the passport photo needed by Dith Pran. Al was always attired in black jeans and a black tee shirt, usually holding a drink or a joint in his hand. Glenn and I used to hang out with Al and other journalists, such as Nate Thayer, who was the last Western journalist to interview Pol Pot. Al, by the way, said that there never was a photo to try and put on a passport for Dith, and if there had been, he would have been able to expedite it. Al was offered a job as a consultant on the film but turned down the opportunity.

There were also memorabilia available to purchase and I bought a mug which is pictured below. It was a great event to attend!



The Nisour Square Massacre

Now I’ll turn to my work in Iraq, and Glenn’s invaluable role. The contracts officer indicated that he was leaving to take a job on an airport project in Dubai. I thought it would be difficult to continue without his help and support, and I asked Wess from AMEG if he could send someone else out to help me. He got approval for another position and until that person was able to come, Glenn agreed to come for two months to help. This was great. Glenn was the one who had gotten me this position and was much more proficient at procurement than I was. Glenn arrived in August of 2007.

As fate would have it, due to some bureaucratic snafu, USAID suspended procurement activities until further notice! Glenn had come out to a security risk area in good faith and now had nothing to do except listen to mortars exploding in the distance. He tried to keep himself occupied by creating spreadsheets for me to track procurements and a supplier list as well. I would

Memories of Glenn continues on page 10

Memories of Glenn *continued from page 9*

make good use of these in the future.

This brings me to an event that many have probably heard of and has become known as “The Nisour Square Massacre.” First, here is the account from Wikipedia about this incident and then I’ll offer my input, since Glenn and I were there!

The Nisour Square massacre occurred on September 16, 2007, when employees of Blackwater Security Consulting, (now Constellis), a private military company contracted by the United States government to provide security services in Iraq, shot at Iraqi civilians, killing 17 and injuring 20 in Nisour Square, Baghdad, while escorting a U.S. embassy convoy. The killings outraged Iraqis and strained relations between Iraq and the United States. In 2014, four Blackwater employees were tried and convicted in U.S. federal court; one of murder, and the other three of manslaughter and firearms charges. In 2020, all four convicted were pardoned by President Donald Trump.

Now let’s look at what preceded this and a few words about Blackwater, which was founded and led by a right-wing fanatic named Erik Prince. He was presently involved in arranging the deportation of Venezuelans from the U.S. to a notorious maximum-security prison in El Salvador. His sister, Betsy DeVos, was the Secretary of Education during the first Trump administration. He employed mostly former U.S. Special Forces personnel. These guys have been likened to Rambo wannabes. Personally, I felt, and feel now, that they were more like the pompous malicious characters that Martin Kove played in “Rambo,” the aide to the colonel in Thailand, and in “The Karate Kid,” John Kreese, the owner and coach of the Cobra Kai dojo. They were arrogant as hell and thought they were the “cat’s pajamas” to use a dated phrase. Somehow, they got the contract to provide USAID and diplomatic security in Iraq. They could frequently be observed in helicopters with legs hanging out the side, rifles in hand as they flew lower than needed over our compound. On the day of September 16th, they were escorting a USAID delegation that was paying a visit to the Tijara project at the Business Center building which was towards the southern part of the Mansour compound.

Cluck, cluck, cluck!

Just before noon, I was sitting in the office with Glenn on my left and Mark Wease, the Contracts Officer, on my right. Glenn and I had desks adjacent to a window. We heard a LOUD boom and felt a shock wave. Glenn was in an awkward position when the blast occurred and ended up on the floor. All hell broke loose as the Blackwater guys scrambled to get the USAID delegation off the compound. They set off smoke bombs to cover their exit and called for backup from other Blackwater teams at Nisour Square. It was this backup team that instigated the massacre. I do not wish to delve into the details of the event; you can read further about it if you Google “Nisour Square Massacre.” I will comment on what we learned afterwards.

I learned from Sallyport [“Sallyport Global,” a security and

logistics company. Ed] that the explosion had nothing to do with our compound. There had been an insurgent attack on a police position outside the rarely used north gate of the compound. A vehicle packed with C4 plastic explosives lost control and crashed into a checkpoint causing the explosion. Sallyport had CCTV cameras all around the perimeter of the compound and they indicated that there was no danger to personnel on the compound. Security told me that the Blackwater team made no effort at all to check with Sallyport about the nature of the danger and security level. They set off the smoke bombs unnecessarily and scurried off the compound to meet with their backup team, which had been summoned. There was no reason



Glenn Black, at far right, with the procurement team and contracts officer.
Author Tom Petocz is in front, with the hat.

for them to depart in such a haphazard manner. Basically, the Blackwater macho-men both on the escort and backup teams panicked. The tough guys were frightened and turned chicken. All I can say is “Cluck, cluck, cluck!”

Glenn finished his two-month stint without further incidents. Above is a photo of Glenn with the Procurement Team.

This has been a brief glimpse into activities I have been involved in with Glenn Black, a dear friend, since 1991. I hope this trip down Memory Lane has brought a few smiles to your faces. Glenn would have appreciated that.



TOM MICHAEL PETOCZ

Tom Petocz lives in the Lat Krabang District of Bangkok, near Suvarnabhumi Airport. He has worked in humanitarian and technical assistance roles in Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, South Asia, the Southern Caucasus, the Mideast, Southwest Africa and the Navajo Reservation in the United States, serving as a volunteer with the United States Peace Corps, the United Nations Volunteer Program, and an impressive number of other agencies and roles of a related nature. He was a good friend of the late Glenn Black.

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Brotherhood page

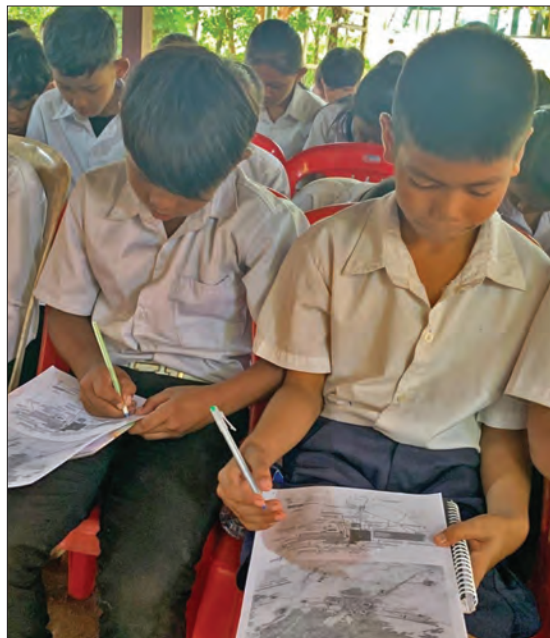
Jayavarman VII Library and Museum Project Completed

First discussed in the June issue, this year our TLCB Assistance Committee funded a program to provide school children in the Siem Reap, Cambodia area the opportunity to go on education field trips to the Jayavarman VII Library and Museum, which has displays and gives classes on Cambodian history and culture. We funded ten school educational field trips. *These visits are not viewed as entertainment.* Studying is required while at the library and museum to help build critical thinking skills and further the students' appreciation for the long and complex history and

culture of their own people. A very reasonable sum provides for bus transportation, water and snacks, and a teacher's assistant.

As noted in the previous issue, the museum director designed a banner that includes the United States' flag. Also gratifying to us, on the Facebook pages of some of the schools' posting pics of their visit, they wrote "American Charity."

At the time of publication of our June issue, five schools had participated. Now all ten schools have completed their visits. Assistance Committee Chairman Paul Carter provided these additional program photos.



At left, students from Chreav Primary School working hard to understand the Khmer history and complex culture. Above, Sra Srong school students on a task involving a map of Cambodia. Below, Sra Srong teacher holding the banner they made for these trips. Photos from Paul Carter.

Lower left, wording of a certificate received by our Assistance team from the director of the Khmer Temple Foundation, who requested the ten-school cultural project that was recently completed.



Kingdom Of Cambodia
Nation Religion King 3
Khmer Temple Foundation Organization
Letter Of Appreciation

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to: Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood (TLCB) for supporting the ten schools to study Khmer history and Heritage at the Jayavarman VII Library in Siem Reap, Cambodia, from March to July 2025.

We appreciate the support of the American charity for our students.

Siem Reap 5th August 2025
Director
Loun Theany

Hank Maifeld, 1940—2024

We are saddened to hear of the death of Hank Maifeld, a charter member who joined the TLCB in April of 1999, and attended the first TLCB Reunion in Tyson's Corner, VA. He was the first volunteer to offer to take on the job of finding a printer, stuffing the envelopes, and mailing the *Mekong Express Mail* to our membership. Hank told us that his grandchildren often helped him with this tedious job.

From his obituary:

Lewiston, ME – Henry A. Maifeld, 83, of Rumford passed away Friday, August 2, 2024, at the Marshwood Center. He was the husband of the late Isobel E. (Donaldson) Maifeld who passed away in 2020.

He was born in Cincinnati, OH on October 10, 1940, a son of the late Edwin "Ep" and Hazel (Klare) Maifeld. He grew up in Cincinnati attending local catholic schools and graduated from Elder High School. Following graduation, Hank enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, where he spent the next 23 years serving his country, earning the rank of MSGT.

After being honorably discharged, Henry moved to Maine and began working for the Rumford Post Office until his retirement. Hank was an avid collector; he collected football cards and stamps among other things. He and his wife enjoyed traveling. A highlight was traveling with family to Hawaii. Henry was known for his HO scale Christmas village that he set up under his tree every year during the holiday.

He is survived by three children, five grandchildren, a great granddaughter, his four siblings, and several nieces and nephews.



children. Besides the TLC Brotherhood, he was a member of Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church, the American Legion, VFW, and VFW Honor Guard, the Smoky Hill Trail Association, Vietnam Veterans of America, and the Distinguished Flying Cross Society.

He was a supporter of the Hays Arts Council, the Hays Symphony, and organizations that promoted education in his community. He enjoyed listening to classical music, birdwatching, traveling, gardening, woodworking, stargazing, and photography. He loved being a full-time grandpa, was a classic movie and Star Wars buff, and passed so many of his passions on to his grandchildren. As an author, he wrote for various newsletters and published a historical fiction book series titled, "Tales of the Sergeant Major" by Bob Wilhelm.

Survivors include his wife Joan, of the home in Hays; four stepchildren, four siblings and seven grandchildren.



Nashville Reunion last minute info

Radisson Hotel Nashville Airport, 615-889-9090
1112 Airport Center Drive, Nashville, TN 37214

Monday September 15th

Registration and Nipa Hut are in the Volunteer Ballroom, starting at noon. Monday is the "on your own" day.

Tuesday

Our hotel shuttle departs from the hotel at 8:15am and is included in your registration fee. The shuttle has a 25-passenger capacity and will **shuttle back and forth all day**, ending at 5 pm. We suggest you **be on board by 4:00pm**.

The unlimited ON/OFF Trolley Tour of Downtown Nashville is on your own. You can purchase your tickets in advance at <https://www.trolleytours.com/nashville/tickets>. Click the "Old Town Trolley Tour."

There are many great places to eat within 1/2 mile.

Wednesday

Departure for the **Riverboat Cruise is at 10:15am**. Cruise is approximately 2½ hours long, with a lunch Buffet and live entertainment. Buses will take us back to the hotel at 2:30pm. Dinner is a **Southern Style Deli Buffet** in the Nipa Hut, starting at 5:00pm, and the **Assistance Auction is at 6:30pm**.

Thursday

The Board Officer's meeting is at 9:00am, followed by the **Annual Meeting of TLCB, Inc. at 10:00am**.

The afternoon is on your own.

The **President's Banquet** starts at 5:00pm, with a cash bar. The dinner buffet will be served at 6:30pm.

Bob Wilhelm, 1950—2025

Robert B. "Bob" Wilhelm, 75, Hays, KS died Thursday, February 20, 2025, at Wesley Medical Center, Wichita KS. Bob was a long-time member of the TLCB, joining in 2000. He was born January 26, 1950, in Kingman, Kansas, one of five children, to Dallas Eugene and Genavieve Evelyn (Blair) Wilhelm. He attended schools in Minneola, Cullison, and Belle Plaine before graduating from Sterling High School in 1968. Bob enlisted in the United States Air Force in 1970 and attained the rank of Sergeant during the Vietnam War. He later received his BS in Biology and his MS in Zoology from Fort Hays State University. He was curator at (KSHS) Historic Fort Hays for 29 years.

He was united in marriage to Joan L. (Becker) Tippy on August 5, 1995 in Hays, and joined her in raising her four

Newest Member in the TLC Brotherhood

The following member joined since the June issue of the *Mekong Express Mail*. You can find more information on our website database. *The MEM* wishes Stuart a sincere "Welcome Home." We are delighted that you have joined us.



No.	Branch	First Name	Last Name	City	State
02102	USAF	Stuart	Lawrence	Enterprise	AL

Fairbanks Flood Rescue, 1967

by Bill Tilton

In mid-August of 1967, the impending danger was known in Fairbanks and by the night when the town flooded, many military personnel and civilians had evacuated from the low areas. Late the evening before, we heard on Fairbanks radio that the runway at the Army's Fort Wainwright was under water—the Chena River rose until it spread out of its channel and came straight down the runway to rejoin itself a couple of miles closer to central Fairbanks. Around midnight, the local radio noted that the “ladies” of a popular club on the river in town were on the roof and waving for help. Fairbanks was flooding.

Basops and Preparations

I don't know if I was on the duty schedule for that night, but it didn't matter. I knew we would all be needed, so I got up and drove over to the base operations building (basops) sometime around three. I was one of the full-time aerodrome officers, responsible for monitoring the condition of the parking ramps, runway, and taxiways comprising the aerodrome, among other duties. In summer we could “work” on call from home when we “had the duty,” but in winter the duty aerodrome officer only slept when there was no snow falling.

In August there is plenty of pre-dawn light and so I took the basops station wagon and drove around the aerodrome to see if we were in danger. The Tanana, a wide glacial stream-type of river, runs parallel to Eielson's 15,000 foot, 300-foot-wide runway. The shallow main river is about three miles away, and about a mile wide there, but one stream of it is only about



Downtown Fairbanks, Alaska. The Chena River flows out of low hills and record rainfall sent it out of its banks. A popular entertainment club is out in the river, where its ladies were rescued by boat. Photos by the author unless otherwise marked.

“It began raining on August 8 and did not stop raining until August 15. In those eight days, 6.15 inches of rain fell at the Fairbanks airport compared to the annual average of 10.81 inches...”

[Historical marker on Cushman Street, Fairbanks, Alaska]

a thousand feet from the runway. In communication with the tower by an aviation band radio in the basops station wagon, I drove along the river side and saw that the rising water was still well down from the runway grade. I shoved a stick into the dirt at the edge of the rising water so that I could come back and check its progress. I never

did get to do that.

I had arrived at Eielson AFB, about 25 miles south of Fairbanks, in February, assigned to base operations, with additional duty flying T-33s mostly on target missions for Alaskan Air Command interceptors. We shared the basops



H-21 “Flying Banana” supporting Army operations in Alaska. Built by Boeing/Vertol, it was a famous Piasecki design and was heavily used by both Air Force and Army. This model had a folding hoist over the door just aft of the cockpit windows, used for lifting survivors during a hover pickup.

building with an air rescue detachment, equipped with Piasecki H-21 helicopters, nicknamed “flying bananas” because of their long, bent fuselage between fore and aft rotors. Piasecki is now the Vertol division of Boeing.

The rescue pilots flew all over the area on various errands and, of course, recurring training. That August, after it had rained and rained for many days, the rescue pilots told us that they thought something bad was coming. Up in the hills northeast of town, there was water everywhere and the little Chena River was the only way out. That river loops around the Army's Ft. Wainwright, with its long runway in one of the loops. Originally known as “Ladd Field,” this base had been a major node on the

Fairbanks Flood continues on page 14

Fairbanks Flood *continued from page 13*

ferry route used to supply aircraft, especially tank-killing P-39s, to the Soviet Union during WWII. In 1967 it was the home of the 171st Infantry Brigade and housed 15,000 of Fairbanks's claimed population of 25,000 at the time.

Rescue Volunteer Instructions: What to touch and what not to

As daylight increased, I drove back to basops to report the situation and find out what was going on. I was immediately approached by a frantic helicopter pilot who asked me if I would fly observer for him on a rescue mission. "Of course!" said I. After getting approval from my boss, the base operations officer, I joined the pilot—I'll call him "Jim," since I don't remember too many names after nearly 60 years! He put me in the left seat, the reverse of fixed-wing seating positions, showed me what to touch and what not to, and explained what he needed me to do, which was to watch out the left side. Shortly we were off at low-level to Fairbanks, and very soon found a party of survivors waving from their housetop for rescue.

Hoist, Sling, Weight, and Fuel

For ten hours we flew that rescue mission, along with all the other flyable helicopters of the rescue detachment. We would spot some folks, sometimes waving for help, usually on building roofs, and let down to a hover above them. The pararescue crewman (PJ) would let down a sling and bring them up one-by-one. The hoist pulley was above the door, and he would bring them all the way up to floor level, then pull them onto the floor. Once they were settled, if we still had power left, he would drop the sling for the next one. There was plenty of space in the cabin, designed to hold twenty troops, but weight was the big limitation.

Jim gauged the available power by knowing when he could not maintain rotor rpm at full throttle. As each survivor got on the hoist, Jim would have to increase power by a twist-grip throttle on the "collective," which is a control held by the left hand to control rotor lift. The "cyclic" control is the stick that the pilot operates with his right hand, and it controls direction of flight through rotor tilt. During hover, he kept his eyes on the rpm gauge, which had two needles—one for engine speed and



At the University of Alaska, high above the town, rescue operations were set up and a parking lot was used for the helicopter landing area. This is the view on final approach to a landing, with a ground director guiding us in.

one for rotor speed. He needed to keep them together. When Jim hit the throttle stop (wide open), to keep from losing rotor rpm (and crashing!) he stopped the rescue and lowered the nose of the H-21 to commence forward motion.

As soon as you pick up forward motion the rotors gain more lift, so that we could climb away from the flood waters. Once comfortably flying, Jim would turn in the direction of the University of Alaska home campus, which is on the north side of Fairbanks on a plateau above town. They had roped off the main parking lot for us there, and as soon as this makeshift runway was clear, we would set down and turn our survivors over to waiting local rescue personnel. The H-21 rotors are high, so there was no need to shut down during the quick unloading.

Refueling and Stop-drill Repairs

Leaving the university parking lot, we would either head back down to the town for more rescues or proceed directly back to Eielson, depending on our fuel state. I think we usually got about three loads of survivors before we had to refuel, and of course each load was more people because we had burned off fuel and lost its weight. When we landed on the ramp at Eielson, it seemed like we were meeting a NASCAR pit crew. A waiting fuel truck hooked up very quickly, while sheet-metal specialists climbed all over the fuselage to "stop-drill" the new cracks caused by so much hovering. By drilling a small hole at each end of a new crack they prevented it from propagating



Above and right, forced to their rooftops or huddled in pickup trucks and wherever they could find high ground, people waited for rescue.



Fairbanks Flood *continues next page*



Above, unattended fire consumes a house near downtown.

further. Later in the shop the sheet metal specialists would apply proper patches to these cracks.

Flying Bananas and Shawnees

The H-21 was a little under-powered. This was because it did not get the engine it was designed for, according to my friends in the rescue section. At the end of World War II, there was a huge surplus of B-17 bomber engines, which were nine-cylinder Curtiss-Wright “Cyclones,” the R-1820. But Piasecki had designed their helicopter to use the more powerful Pratt & Whitney R-1830 that powered the C-47 (the DC-3 airliner) among other famous planes. Rather than purchase new R-1830s, the government required Piasecki to use surplus R-1820s.

By the way, Piasecki originally designed the Flying Banana for an Arctic rescue mission, and it could operate very well in Alaska’s frigid winters. The Air Force made the initial buy for support of the many early warning radar sites in Alaska, Canada, and Greenland. The Army’s later CH-21C “Shawnee” version did see service in SEA, though it performed poorly in that climate. Some of the Army’s earliest combat losses occurred when a Shawnee was shot down on the border of Laos and Vietnam in July 1962. The jet-powered Huey (UH-1) did not replace it in that theater until 1964, according to “Wikipedia.”

The Flood Damage and a Near Mishap

In the very gradual Alaska dawn, we saw that Fairbanks was completely flooded, with the murky waters coming up about mid-wall of the first floors of the buildings. The official flood depth was five feet. At one point a house caught fire. We saw no people around it, so to us it was just a curiosity, and it gradually burned until the embers were quenched by the floodwater.

Our routine was pretty set. My job was to be the eyes on the left side and to help “Jim” stay out of trouble with obstructions. There was some slight danger of colliding with another helicopter, but that was pretty unlikely because there were very few of us out there. Mainly I was critically needed during hover, since his primary attention was on rotor rpm and maintaining hover. One rescue was particularly critical, and that was on our final pickup. It was into a school ground and there was a very tall public safety communication antenna right next

to the school. It had guywires that spread wide. By now the daylight was getting dim. The H-21 had a powerful floodlight under the nose of the cockpit, and Jim switched this on as we let down. Suddenly the light caught the flash of one of those guywires coming up on the left and I told him to shift to the right immediately. Fortunately, he turned before asking why, and the forward rotor missed that steel cable by a narrow distance. We landed there and some folks got aboard. Then as we headed back up to the university, Jim declared that it was our last pickup of the day. I was glad of that because it was too dark to be safe. Fortunately, we had finally reached the point where we had to search to find survivors to pick up, and we headed back to Eielson. We logged ten hours of flying time, though mine didn’t count because I was not checked out in the H-21. For the records, I was just another passenger.

I did get to fly one of those whirley-birds out at Nome the following fall, during a military exercise out there. The pilot let me fly straight and level for five or ten minutes, but as we approached the landing area, I had no idea what to do and said, “I think you had better take it.” He agreed.

The Instant Family

The next day we heard that many refugees had come to the base and that there were children at Family Services who were separated temporarily from their parents, so my wife Gay and I drove down there and volunteered to house one of them.... possibly a teenager. A pretty young girl came out to the car and asked if we could take more than one. Of course, we said, whereupon she excitedly signaled her *five* siblings! They were the children of a family whose house near Fairbanks Airport had been flooded out. The oldest was a girl who had just graduated from high school and the youngest was a little boy who was about to start first grade.

Housing this little family was one of our positive experiences during that flood. The two older girls took charge of the three young ones and immediately started doing chores in our house. They always cleaned up and we never had to worry about who was wearing what, when, or what they liked or didn’t like to eat, or any other of the many issues that kids spring on their parents every day.... those girls took care of it! The oldest girl had a date with a boy she met on base, and we helped her get dressed up, and of course there was much excitement. On the other end of the age spectrum, the little boy had an early accident on a neighbor’s tricycle, and I said that his face looked like he had walked into a propeller! He had some other mishaps, too, but somehow, they all survived the experience.

When the flood waters had receded, we took the little family to the motel where their parents had been living with a large group of displaced neighbors, not far from Fairbanks Airport. It was near their home, which was unlivable because of water damage and the mold that was starting to show up everywhere. We found them on the motel’s second floor, in a room where they all ate their meals. The table was made from a door supported by stacks of Army C-ration cases. That was one thing that was in abundance. C-rations were *everywhere*.

Fairbanks Flood *continues on page 16*



Our instant family at Eielson AFB base housing. Six kids whose parents shared a motel at the airport with many other refugee adults. The youngest has the white T-shirt and the teen with a date on base is at the top, in blue. At right is my late first wife, Gay.

They expressed deep gratitude to us for sheltering their kids but said that they had no idea when they would be able to take them back. That was fine with us! Eventually we suspected they were also enjoying a little vacation, as it seemed that they stretched that empty nest just a little bit more than necessary.

The Aftermath and Lessons Learned

Driving through the Fairbanks neighborhoods was distressing. Every house had appliances and carpeting out on the front lawn, and there were piles of crumbled drywall and other debris waiting to be picked up by someone. It was a long time before the Fairbanks stores and restaurants lost that faint odor of mold. One of our favorite restaurants in Fairbanks was the “Tiki Cove,” which was in the basement of a store in downtown. The ambience was Polynesian, and they had some of those high-back Philippine woven reed chairs and they put little umbrellas in the Mai Tais. The owner joked on the radio that the flood was the first time his restaurant had been full! We waited many months before he was able to reopen—but he did, mold smell and all.

There were community advisories about the recovery, but some folks didn’t get the message—or simply ignored it. The city warned about the saturated ground and cautioned residents to wait for it to drain; however, a homeowner decided to pump out his basement as soon as he could get to it, which ended in disaster. At some point in the pumping out process, the floor of his basement erupted upward, instantly refilling his basement, teaching him a lesson about the power of hydrostatic pressure.

There was an expensive furniture store in Fairbanks in those days, and of course all their stock got wet to some degree.

They announced an auction when they found that people were interested in pieces they thought they could restore. It was said that in the auction frenzy, some pieces of flood-soaked furniture sold for more than the price tags!

The Earthquake and Flood: JCPenney

The JCPenney company had bad luck in Alaska. As the first major U.S. chain to open a store in Alaska since statehood, Penney’s opened a five-story department store in Anchorage in 1962. Two years later Anchorage was nearly destroyed in the Good Friday Earthquake, at 5:30 PM, March 27th of 1964, which whipped and rocked the city for over *four* minutes! At over 9.0 on the Richter scale, it was the second strongest earthquake in the World since modern seismology began measurements in 1900. The outer wall of Penney’s building moved outward, and all the floors collapsed. Up in Fairbanks, which for years had relied on the local Northern Commercial Company general store for nearly everything except groceries, there was great excitement in 1967 when the brand-new JCPenney store opened about a month before the flood. I remember passing over it and wondering if they would bother re-opening. They



It seemed that every time JCPenney opened a new store in Alaska something very bad happened. But the earthquake in Anchorage was far worse, and people died.

did! In the parking lot there were cars with their headlights on, underwater! I never did figure that one out. At one of the downtown intersections, there was a large hole in the street where the swirling water had torn up pavement and soil underneath it, down ten or fifteen feet. There was a story about someone walking in the filthy water of the flooded street and unknowingly stepping into that hole and drowning.

The Bright Side

This and many other stories were told during the coming months, but there was one thing that all agreed on: it was so fortunate that this flood was in August! Fairbanks typically freezes up in late fall, and that would have been a much worse disaster and survival challenge for many people. At least they had time to dry out and prepare for winter. It turned out to be even better luck than usual, because January 1968 averaged minus 55 degrees for the month, most of which was at minus 60 degrees day and night! That set another local record, but the weather folks acknowledged that their records only went back ten years.

