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Duck Blood Salad in Laos

TLCB trip to Xiangkhouang, Laos 8-14 December, 2024

By Vaughan Smith

We had four of us going: Glenn Black, me, my wife Sunantha, aka Pa Tor, and a newbie, Ian Salisbury, a friend of mine who picked me up when I was hitchhiking in New Zealand to visit my son about 20 years ago. He was a truck driver then, and he later became an English teacher in Thailand. But earlier, in the 1980s, he was an explosive expert from the mines of Western Australia and was contracted to walk around Isaan using explosives in a minerals search. Since the early 2000s we have been good friends. Ian lives most of the time in Sakhon Nakorn, just west of Nakhon Phanom. He speaks fair Thai, and we are hoping that he will like what we do and help us out in the future.

This was Sunantha's first TLCB inspection trip, but she has come on three TLCB reconnaissance trips with me in the past—two in Khammouane Province and one to Siem Reap, in Cambodia. She was my chaperone since we were travelling with young female university students who are our tenants.

Just before the trip, we learned that Ajan Soundeuan's eldest son, now age 40, was in an ICU and had just returned home. It was a shock to me as I knew little about Ajan Soundeuan's family, except that his wife came to some dinners we had. I first thought it was an accident, but Ajan Soundeuan told me this morning that his eldest son has had bad health since birth and has gout, liver disease etc., and is on the brink of death, and could die at any time. Remarkably, Ajan Soundeuan, our



Happy student at Lat Huong High School during a handover ceremony. Photos from the author.

long-time principal contact in Laos, was not concerned. He said, "it was just life..." and wouldn't affect our trip.

Monday, 9 Dec 24 Nam Say Primary

This was a very remote village in the mountains near the border of Xiangkhouang and Houaphan provinces. The village

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Editor's Notebook: Resignation

It is with deep regret that I am resigning as the editor of *The Mekong Express Mail*. As many of you know, my wife is restricted to a walker and a wheelchair. And while she is making real progress, the therapy sessions are increasing, and I am seriously involved in their support. Additionally, I am dealing with some physical issues of my own which will require a good deal of my attention. Combined, it has been harder and harder for me to devote the time and concentration that the *MEM* requires. Frankly, the most recent issues have been successful largely due to the increased efforts of Bill and Thelma Tilton.



I hurry to add that I will remain a member of Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood and will continue to contribute to the Assistance Program, the function of TLCB that convinced me to join in the first place. I also plan to attend future Reunions as our health and schedule permit. In fact, we have both airline and hotel reservations for Nashville.

Serving as editor for the past 12 twelve years has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my careers and I will always be proud to be a member of the Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood.

John Harrington
MEM Editor
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is almost 100% ethnic Khmu, *not* Hmong as mentioned in the request. The dirt road, branching off Route 7 near Kham, aka Ban Ban, was potholed, rocky, winding, narrow, and parts were under repair/construction; plus there were streams to ford. Somphou scraped the bottom of the van several times. Crunch, crunch, and we were thrown out of our seats many times. I was worried that I would bite my tongue off when my mouth snapped shut—had to control my tongue... The trip to the school took over 2.5 hours; return took over 4 hours.

On the way back, we had to take a different route. We made three U-turns to find a way out. The first was a stream we had to ford, which had a broken-down truck blocking the way and was waiting for parts from Phonsavan, plus, we were blocked and had to find another way out. The second delay happened because we took the wrong turn and took the high road, which was too steep for our two-wheel drive Hyundai van, so we had to go back and use a low road. The third problem was caused because a bridge had been washed out. There were no warning signs, and we had to double back to find another way out.



Preparing duck blood salad for the lunch after the handover ceremony at remote Nam Say.

Duck Blood continues next page.

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What it's all about! The kids of Nam Say watch as the TLCB team hands over another project to improve their school. We are fortunate to get the chance to meet these rare ethnic groups while they still live in their largely traditional ways. In Nam Say Vaughan found that the population is nearly 100% ethnic "Khmou," and not Hmong as incorrectly mentioned in the request for Assistance Program help.

Per the Google timeline, we drove 100 miles (160 km) leaving Phonsavan at 09:36 and returning by 18:07.

All felt that the visit went smoothly and was a successful day. Ajan Soudeuane said it was good to use an interpreter. We had brought one up from Vientiane, a friend/colleague of TLCB member Tony Zola, who has been translating the requests



Nam Say kids telling Vaughan not to swim in their polluted river.

since Art Crisfield "retired." Many of these elementary kids, however, could speak good surprisingly Thai. All had fun on the field, especially with the frisbees they slowly learned how to throw. The school and village officials and the kids enjoyed the day. The village headman prepared *Larp Leuat* made from fresh duck blood. It tasted good and my stomach is still intact. One thing these kids told me when I said that I would like to have a swim in their river if I could. "NO WAY," they said. "It is polluted from a gold refining factory upstream. The authorities have not been able to clean it up, and the villagers have given up trying to get anyone to do anything about it. The water can't be used for drinking, fishing—all fish dead, irrigation, or farming, and the kids get rashes if they go into the water." They said that the pollution goes deep into the riverbed and still seems to be entering the river upstream.

Overall, it was a good day, but

driving was tedious and seemed never to end.

Tue 10 Dec 24 am, Motion 24-08, Yun Xay Upper Secondary School:

The TLCB team had visited this school on 17 March 2023 (Motion 20-10) when we changed the roof of a different building. At that time the new two-story building was under construction. Van driver Somphou said that during Mac's time, the TLCB helped move the old buildings to a new location to



Nearly complete new Yun Xay classroom building above at right. Shed to the left is full of electric motorcycles. They also found such bike sheds in the more wealthy, well-established schools near Phonsavan. The city folks, and those living along the main routes, seem to be doing much better than in remote villages.

make way for a new two-story building, which is now almost complete.

The huge, new two-story building was built by a company over the past three or so years. The TLCB changed the roof of one of the old wooden buildings a few years ago at the same school, and we saw it being built. There is, however, no electricity yet. The company must install the wires to the building, but there is a hold-up. It looks like the company has not been paid by the government. They have not handed over the keys to the school yet, so the new building can't be used. It has

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no furniture or toilets yet. Those needs may be put in a future request to the TLCB. They were not part of the construction contract. The school officials say they will buy the wood, and a local carpenter will build wooden furniture, which is cheaper than ready-made or metal-framed ones. If this new building can be furnished, the school will have enough rooms to have all the classes in the mornings, and there will be no need for separating the morning and afternoon classes for two sets of students. They have enough teachers to teach all the students in the morning. Ajan Soundeune has been asked to prepare a request to the TLCB for the furniture.

Our project gave new roofs for one large building and half a roof, the front side, for a smaller building.

The materials, sand, stones, and cement have been purchased for the toilet, they say, but they have decided to build it in a different area as the present location, with the blocked toilet, floods during the rainy season. The location is at the other end of the grounds.



The old toilet at Yun Xay. The new one will be at a different location because this one floods during rainy season.

There is a school hall with a rounded roof and no doors or floor yet. Some said it was built with contributions from parents, but not allowed now by the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR), and others say that it was built with Korean funding. It had no roof on our previous visit, so it is making slow progress.

Tue 10 Dec 24 pm, Motion 24-11, Lat Huang High School

This is a huge school with over 1,100 students from kindy to 12th grade. The school is quite close to Phonsavan. The headmaster said that some buildings had been donated by the U.S. Government. There is a high population of Hmong in this area, and someone said that they were refugees from Vientiane, having moved to this area of Xiangkhouang in the mid-70s.

During the typical handovers, Ajan Soundeune explains about the TLCB, the headmaster gives a history of the school, and the village headman usually says a few words. At Lat Huang Sunantha gave short talks in Thai about the importance of education. Usually, I give a short talk in my broken Thai,

but this time I gave my talk in English and Sensouk translated it into Lao. This seems to be working well, and we have received good feedback from Somphou and Ajan Soundeune. Sensouk had urgent family business and left us early Wednesday morning to return to Vientiane.



Sunantha and Vaughan listen as Ajan Soundeune explains the TLC Brotherhood and our Assistance Program at the Lat Huang High School handover ceremony. Sunantha spoke in Thai about the importance of education. Parents and most of the students listen attentively.



At Lat Huang High School, there is a new roof for which the TLC Brotherhood provided the materials. It appears they could use a concrete porch as well.

Duck Blood *continues next page.*



Dancing performance for the team, at Lat Huong High School. The higher building left of center is the village market place.

Wed 11 Dec 24 pm, Motion 24-15, Ban Ta Primary School

This is a small primary school of 3 grades presently in one room. Materials have been purchased for replacing one roof, cementing the floor of two rooms under the new roof, adding fiber-cement ceilings to keep out cold and heat, and materials to



Above, floor and roof funded by the TLCB at Ban Ta Primary School. Below, unusual handover meal because of the late hour. It was hosted by the village headman in his own house.



build a small reading room/library for the villagers. We arrived late in the afternoon and most of the children had gone home. The village is 100% Hmong. The headmaster/teacher invited us back to his home for dinner.

Wed 11 Dec 24 am, Motion 24-06, Phon Thanh Primary School

This Motion, 24-6, was approved by the Assistance Committee, but after looking carefully at the photos of the roof, the tiles looked in fair condition. As we didn't want to change all the tiles, the school came up with a second proposal to change the whole roof to tin; we, however, decided to make a visit to look at it ourselves, even though theirs is not a huge request: \$1,900 USD. Something seemed fishy, and what we requested, e.g., better photos, were not sent to us. There were no close-up photos of the roof, nor any photos inside the classrooms.

We had to walk over a bridge, built by the Japanese government in 2010 for \$30,000 USD. We passed the Community Health sign, which has been translated to "Phon Tan village to stop defecating!" Just past the bridge, the river had a ford for large trucks, but our van would not have been able to make it.

Our investigation showed that only some of the tiles around the perimeter of the three-classroom building were broken and had caused the plywood under the eaves to rot. There seemed to be minimal-to-no leaking in the three classrooms. Most of the damage to ceilings was due to moist air, fog, and mist in the winter months. The headmaster claimed that the roofs were leaking and that the children couldn't study during the wet season. He and others mentioned it many times... they seemed to be gaslighting us.

Sunantha and I went into one classroom with young children, no adults except us. When asked, the children said, "the roof never leaks."

The headmaster, Ajan Soundeuane, and the Village Headman, all tried to say that it was not true, that the tiles were thin, made in Laos, could not be walked on, and were all cracked, and that the children couldn't study during the rainy season. They said that maybe fifty percent of the tiles needed changing. I estimated five percent, and I felt again that they were gaslighting me. Somphou agreed with me and tried to point out where the leaks were...they would not listen.

It was obvious that the roof had not been maintained at all, and there was a tree next to the school with its branches touching the tiles, which could easily damage the tiles in a storm. They said



Ceiling damage found at Phon Thanh. There was very minor exterior damage.

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Eaves damage found at Ban Tha.

that the village had no ladder to climb up to take a closer look. Somphou climbed a tree to have a look. I don't believe that the village had no ladder as one of those joining us helped build the school. They never provided good photos of the roof to us. They only showed damage around the balcony eave ceilings. They never provided any photos of inside the classrooms. I told them we should tear down the

damaged plywood ceiling around the outside perimeter and check the tiles from below. They didn't want to listen.

A second school room needed walls completed and a cement floor (see photos during our visit). They had requested sand and cement for it but provided no photos or even mention of this building in the requests. A third building with only poles and a frame, to be used as a teachers' room, was also needed but was not included in either request.

They said that it was a heavily bombed area and there was a landing strip in the hills above the school. Glenn did some research and believes that it could be Lima Site LS 115 at Phou Kheo—See his emails at the bottom of the photo album of our visit. We were about 50 km away from the VN border.

I was not too happy with the situation, their exaggerations and lies, and lost my trust in them. Only Somphou, our driver, seemed to genuinely check things out and he agreed with my evaluation. I, however, feel that our main concern is for the children and the environment for the children to study. They should not be penalized for the behavior of their elders.

After receiving input from Les Thompson and Ed Miller, I now feel that the whole roof should be replaced with tin for the following reasons:



The tiles, although keeping out the rainwater for most of the building seem to be thin and brittle, are reaching the end of their lifetime, and now would be a good time to replace them with tin before they deteriorate further.

The TLCB may not be around in 5 or 10 years to do the job, and who will help such a school? The tin roof should last thirty plus years, and it is not a huge expense for the TLCB. As the crow flies, the school is 30 km from the Vietnamese border and is in a very remote mountainous area.

They provided us with lunch and a Baci ceremony, even though they hadn't received anything from us. We were served Laap Leu-at again, Laap made with fresh duck's blood. That's OK for me, but Sunantha would only take some cooked meat and veggies.

As they seem to have difficulty in writing up a comprehensive request, I will draft one for them using photos I took and ask them to fill in the gaps.

On 1 January 2025, I finished drafting a new request in English and sent it to Ajan Soundeuane, to ask him to translate it into Lao. The information included was from their first two requests: The first one had the history of the school, and the second had materials or tin instead of tiles. The request included needs for the three-room building and the one-room building. Better photos were added showing the whole story. Ajan Soundeuane was happy to receive this request, and to know that we are still interested in helping the school, and says that he hopes that the school will provide a list of the materials needed for this new request in a few weeks... Let's see.

[18 Jan 25 update: new request written and is being voted on by Assistance Committee.]

Thu 12 Dec 24 am, Motion 24-07, Ngod Lieng Primary School

This school is very remote and took almost 3 hours of rough, pot-holed, winding roads to reach. On the way back, two semi-trucks had an accident and blocked the road going up a hill between Kham and Phonsavan on highway 7. Cars were able to squeeze around them on the left in the gutter. Unfortunately, I didn't take any photos as it would have made a great story for the *MEM*. About 500 meters on the right from both ends, trucks were lined up and parked because they couldn't get through the narrow gap between the two damaged trucks. They must have been there for several hours. We only had to wait about

At left, the TLC Brotherhood funded a new roof and the fresh-concrete porch for this aging class building at Ngod Lieng Primary School.



At right, this Ngo Lieng toilet has no water connection at all. There is a similar toilet that has a primitive water connection but needs upgrading.

Duck Blood *continues next page.*

thirty minutes while the cars coming from the other end had passed all the trucks. Luckily, someone was controlling the flow of cars to and from Phonsavan, since it was only one lane for about a kilometer.

The teachers requested two more projects: Renovate the kindergarten playground and install a water tank and pipes so there would be water available for both sets of toilets. Ajan Soundeuane was asked to help the school prepare the requests.

Fri 13 Dec 24 am, Motion 24-17, Lath Ngone Schools

Another interesting day, and thankfully just a short drive from Phonsavan. This is a BIG school with over 1,000 students—an unbelievable HUGE welcome and an ENORMOUS request!

This area, I understand, was designated as an area to accept refugees from other parts of Xiangkhouang, e.g., Kham District (aka Ban Ban) during the war years. About 80% of the population are ethnic Hmong. There is one large bomb crater near the bike shed, close to the entrance gate. This is a fast-growing population and the kindergarten is overflowing. The TLCB’s assistance to re-roof two of the buildings has helped



Above at Lath Ngone school, the impressive long line of students in tribal costume greets the TLCB party. Lower picture above shows the packed kindergarten, for which a replacement is under construction.

the high school have more rooms and to move out of the more dilapidated rooms. The location is about 12 kilometers from Crater’s Restaurant, in Phonsavan.

This was our final school. We were going to return to Thailand late that afternoon, but Somphou and Ajan Soundeuane convinced us that we would be finished quite late, and we wouldn’t reach the border before it closed. This allowed Sunantha and me to visit Site 1 Jars and the small museum, and as a Kiwi, I’m very happy that the New Zealand Government

built this small museum near Site 1. At the top of the hill, we found a half dozen young Hmong ladies pluming their feathers for Hmong New Year, and who told us they would be putting their photos and videos up on Tik Tok!

Next day was Saturday, 14 December, and we looked forward to the last bumpy, bouncy, harrowing, boring, sometimes hair-raising, up and down, left and right, swerving 9 or 10-hour ride back to the border. For some time now, the new airport is meant to be finished next October, and if road conditions don’t improve, we will need to fly in the future. Somphou said they are lengthening the runway so large planes from Russia can land here safely... but I wonder about that.



Above, at Lath Ngone Sunantha gets the little strings tied to her wrists to ensure that she will return, one of the pleasant rituals of the traditional “Baci.”

Visits complete, there was time for a little sight-seeing. The ladies at right were preparing to make videos for Hmong New Year. Near Phonsavan, this was on the famous and mysterious Plain of Jars, where so much of the land fighting took place in Laos, and which is now a world-famous tourist attraction. It was Sunantha’s first time to see it.



Glenn Black, July 14, 1952—February 16, 2025

We are saddened to report the untimely death of one of our most active Assistance Program field operators, Glenn Black, who was born in Kansas and died of a heart attack in his hotel room in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, a few days after the team's most recent trip in that country. Read his account of that trip on page nine, next, as completed by Vaughan Smith.

Glenn was a good friend of Mac Thompson, who recruited him into supporting our Assistance Program. Glenn enthusiastically joined Mac and others on a number of the team's trips into remote areas of Laos and was largely responsible for finally opening Cambodia up for reliable charity work and inspection in that country. In the next issue we will present the last part of a trilogy Glenn wrote, ostensibly about the Khmer Air Force but necessarily presenting an excellent account of the political and military course of the Vietnam War as experienced in Cambodia. Thus our loss is double. Both his contribution to the Assistance Program and his excellent writing skill and subject matter knowledge represent a great loss with his death.

A man of many talents, Glenn started his education with a fine arts bachelor's degree, majoring in painting, at Kansas State University, and soon joined the Peace Corps with an assignment to build rural schools and roads in Ecuador in 1977 and Fiji in 1979. He furthered his education in 1984 with a master's degree in Community Development and International Development from the University of Missouri. He also attended an intensive French program in Canada in 1990 and '91.

Meanwhile, from the Peace Corps Glenn joined World



Glenn Black funeral, in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Relief in Bangkok, starting a long career as a logistics expert employed on a series of humanitarian projects throughout the undeveloped world. The locations we know of where Glenn served include, in chronological order: Thailand, Rome, Equatorial Guinea, Camaroon, El Salvador, Sudan, Ecuador again, Cambodia, Senegal, Cambodia again, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Afghanistan again, Sudan again, Mongolia, and Cambodia. At the time of his death Glenn's home was in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Many of Glenn's employers were NGOs and government agencies working on projects funded by agencies of the United Nations and by USAID, which is where he became acquainted with our MacAlan Thompson, who started the Lao Schools program for the TLC Brotherhood. Glenn wrote three publications for USAID and a mine safety manual for the United Nations. He was conversant, including technical vocabulary, in French, Spanish, Thai and Khmer, the language of Cambodia.



Glenn Black at left, with Doug Vincent, Larry Crider, Tim Sawers, and Vaughan Smith, on a Laos visit.

The Chaplain's Corner

It has been a privilege to serve the TLBCB in the capacity of Chaplain since assuming this position at our 2024 reunion. I have had the honor of sending condolence letters on behalf of our organization to the families of a number of our brothers, of whom I am aware, who have taken their final flight.

Alan Flowers—Frederick, MD (5-16-24)
John Edward Mullins—Oxford, MI (5-21-2024)
Ronald W. Wayda—Niles, IL (11-26-2024)
David Geryak—Fort Worth, TX (12-23-2024)
James Hoover—Lynchburg, VA (2-16-2025)
Mark Welch—Albuquerque, NM (3-13-25)

Please notify me if you are aware of a TLBCB member's passing.

Dan Pierce
Chaplain; dan.nkp.pierce@gmail.com

Assistance Program's First Inspection Trip to Cambodia 8-14 February 2025

By the late Glenn Black, with Vaughan Smith

Saturday, 8 February 25:

Sunantha and Vaughan travelled by land from their home in Nakorn Nayok, Thailand to Siem Reap, Cambodia via the Aranyaprathet-Poipet border crossing. Assistance Chairman Paul Carter and Paul's wife, Supa, and I [Glenn] flew from Chiangmai to Siem Reap in Cambodia, via Bangkok; however, Paul and Supa were on a private trip and were not part of the TLCB inspection team.

In the evening, Glenn had dinner with Staffan Hildebrand, a free-lance reporter, photographer, and filmmaker for the Swedish News Agency during the war years. Enjoy reading "An Interesting Friend" on page 14. The Smiths dined with a van owner/driver, Mercy, and they were able to hire him to transport us to all locations in Siem Reap to Kampong Chhnang and back to the Thai border.

Sunday, 9 February 2025:

On this day, Vaughan arrived with his wife from his Dusit Hotel and picked me up at my Homewood Hotel. Both hotels were at desirable locations near Siem Reap's river. Vaughan had a new van and an English-speaking driver for hire. I should mention that a lot more English is spoken in Cambodia than in Thailand or Laos. English is a required language, which is very desirable for Khmer later seeking jobs. Kids all over the country speak English quite well, as do those who have attended secondary education.

We then picked up Paul and Supa, and being a Sunday, we took the liberty to visit the Jayavarman VII Library, which is run by Mey Kosal and Loun Theany, a husband-and-wife team. Mey Kosal goes by "Kosal," his given name, the family name being the first name in Cambodia.

Note: Kosal and Theany, with Paul's assistance, have since requested the TLCB's assistance to transport students from 10 schools in the Siem Reap area to learn more about Cambodian history at the Jayavaram VII library, museum, and cultural



Kids enjoying the bus ride to Jayavaram VII Library. Trip was paid for by the TLCB Assistance Fund. Photos from late Glenn Black's phone camera.

center. Motion 25-07 was approved. The first visit took place on 27 March 2025. See an update on these visits at the end of this article. page 13.

Kosal is also an employee of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and he and his wife Theany are experts on the Khmer culture and the



At left are Mey Kosal and Loun Theany, who run the Jayavaram VII Library, and are Khmer culture experts. Kosal also works for UNESCO. The library is located near Angkor Wat, which was built by King Jayavaram VII in approximately 1100 AD. Fourth from left is Sunantha Smith with Supa Carter, and Paul Carter is at far right. It appears that Vaughan or Glenn took the picture, as both are missing from this version.

history and evolution of the different phases of the Khmer Empire. Their library is on the outskirts of Siem Reap and is a worthwhile visit for those seeking to visit Angkor Wat.

Jayavarman VII was the king who built Angkor Wat temple as well as the leader during Angkor's most powerful period of prosperity and peace in 1,100 AD. At the time, the Kingdom of Angkor encompassed most of Thailand and Laos, as well as southern Vietnam from the fertile lands of the delta northward to Saigon, then known as Prey Nokor.

The Khmer people still refer to Saigon as Prey Nokor. Many Khmer ethnic farmers still inhabit the delta in Vietnam and are known as the Kampuchea Krom. Regrettably, in the 16th century Cambodia lost this important land to the Vietnamese and the Kampuchea Krom have been on the losing end ever since. The Vietnamese continue to marginalize them, and those who try to live in Cambodia are considered tainted by virtue of having been born in Vietnam. Until the 1970s an estimated

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Cambodia Assistance *continued from page 9.*

600,000 inhabitants of Cambodia were Vietnamese, though how many may have been ethnic Khmer born in Vietnam is unknown.

U.S. Army Special Forces trained Kampuchea Krom battle units in the Vietnam War. These units were effective in the Delta but never gained the trust of Saigon. Early in Cambodia's war with the NVA and VC, the well-trained Kampuchea Krom battalions were relocated to Cambodia but were squandered on hopeless situations or sent into battles unsupported and outnumbered. Their numbers quickly dwindled primarily due to weak Cambodian Army leadership. As said, many of the Khmer of Cambodia did not trust the Kampuchea Krom, so some of that attitude may have influenced a tendency to commit these units to the more hazardous duty. Even after the demise of the Khmer Republic in 1975, a stated objective of the Khmer Rouge was to recapture the Delta and even Saigon/Prey Nokor in Vietnam. It was mainly the border attacks on Vietnamese villages in the Delta of Vietnam that provoked PAVN to invade Cambodia in late 1978, completely routing the Khmer Rouge units to jungle sanctuaries along the Thai border.



Full to overflowing motorcycle sheds have become a common sight in Southeast Asian schools, except in the remote villages of Laos. Schools near population centers are noticeably more modern and better equipped.

provided a small workshop and shelter for motorcycles and bicycles. Both were satisfactorily completed, though bicycles and motorcycles exceed the space provided and they could use an extension to the shelter that was just built, which may possibly be the topic of a future proposal. Also noted were broken floor tiles as well as a room of the school in which floor tiles and furnishings were destroyed by vandals—disgruntled students perhaps?

We then moved to the nearby That Pong Kindergarten (motion 23-21) where the main sala was increased with a metal structure with tin roofing provided, and the floor was re-tiled, increasing the area of the kindergarten. Provided also were new chairs, tables, and stationery supplies. The kindergarten also acts as something of a day care center, kind of like all kindergartens, so that parents can work and attend to other matters and their younger children. All appreciated this work.

After these three visits, all brief as is the Cambodian



Vaughan and some of the students at Bantey Primary School, located near Angkor Wat Temple complex.

One note: The Kampuchea Krom were not mentioned during the presentations.

Monday, 10 February 2025

We visited Bantey Samre Primary School (Motion 23-24), which is near the entrance to the Bantey Samre temple of Angkor and some 16.5 kms as the crow flies. The TLCB re-roofed one classroom and resurfaced the floor of the canteen. Handover documents were provided and Glenn and Vaughan distributed sports equipment—volley and soccer balls and, of course, frisbees, always a big hit. The handover ceremony was a brief affair, typical of Cambodian ceremonies, and it adjourned after 20 minutes or so. We visited classrooms to inspect their conditions. The schools, built by Swiss Government funding 20 years ago, are all cement and block and relatively new compared to schools in Laos.

After this, we visited Run Ta Ek High School (Motion 24-01) which serves nearly 1,000 secondary school students in several modern buildings built by NGOs relatively recently. The TLCB

Lunch, Cambodia style, showing Sunantha and Vaughan Smith.



Cambodia Assistance continues next page.



Frisbees are popular everywhere, and kids get the idea very quickly. We also donate soccer balls and sometimes other sports equipment. Here are Vaughan Smith and one of the schoolgirls in Cambodia.



Tuesday, 11 February 2025:

This was a day of rest since all five school visits in the Siem Reap area were finished in one day, instead of the planned two days.

Wednesday, 12 February

Travel from Siem Reap to Kampong Chhnang

Departure at 08:40 via Hwy 6 along the North side of the lake, southeast to a road south, to a ferry crossing directly to Kampong Chhnang. On the way, we stopped for a break at a 900-year-old bridge. Read about the Kampong Kdei Bridge, from the time of Angkor

way, though very brief by the standards of Laos, the Commune Constable, Streng Soley, provided lunch for us at the nearby police post. Besides being head of the police, he is apparently important as a community organizer. After the meal, we were taken to several prospective school projects in the same area of Run Ta Ek town.

I should mention that Run Ta Ek is a new village and community composed of families forcibly relocated from the Angkor Thom complex, which was increasingly overrun by people living within the complex setting up shops and making livelihoods there. This is a controversial move by the Cambodian government with many outsiders taking the sides of those displaced from the complex. Some had lived in the complex for many years and should have had a genuine right to remain, but newer people increasingly moved there for employment opportunities. Cambodia created a government organization called Authority for the Protection and Safeguarding of Angkor and the Region of Angkor, APSARA, which controls the access to the Angkor complex and is responsible for the forced removal from the premises to Run Ta Ek. Many of those moved were not adequately compensated for the houses and land they lost and have reluctantly moved to reduced opportunities and circumstances. The deed has been done however, and some help for the schools is probably for the good. Children will benefit.

We inspected additional community-felt needs at nearby Wat Run Primary School where a motorcycle and bicycle shelter are needed. Also, at the Tany Primary School, the roofing material has deteriorated. There are considerable leaks, which need attention. The material appears to be fiber or asbestos and apparently hail stones have cracked and damaged the roofing panels. The school needs aluminum roof sheets or galvanized tin sheets to replace the damaged material. All other aspects of the school appeared to be in order.

We returned to Siem Reap and arrived about 5:00 PM.

Wat, on page 12. We crossed the southern-western end of Thale Sap Lake by ferry to reach Kampong Chhnang city. We arrived at our hotel, checked in, and went to a Khmer Lunch of Lok Lak about 15:00.

Thursday, 13 February 2025: Morning:

[This section was started by Glenn Black and was completed by Vaughan Smith. Ed.]

We visited Chak Primary School Baribour, Kampong Chhnang (Motion 24-02). TLCB funding was to build one classroom, but without informing us, they decided to build two rooms instead of one. By the time we arrived, eight months after the TLCB funds had run out, they had managed to get money from the community and other sources to complete most of the building.

In the afternoon we visited Kbal Thnal Community Kindergarten/Pre-School, a possible TLCB project in a more remote and poorer area. The roof was leaking, and beams and poles were rotting. The grounds and school room flood as they are lower than the road and adjacent properties. The



Students at Run Ta Ek High School performing a Khmer dance. The schools try to preserve the cultural heritage of Cambodia.

Cambodia Assistance continues next page.

village headwoman said that the current structure is not worth fixing and a new one should be built. The grounds need to be raised. We suggested that they write up two requests for TLCB assistance.

Then we visited Phsar Cluster School. They had presented a request on 23 April 2024 for 4,000 USD to renovate one classroom, but we decided to visit the school before forwarding it to the Committee for discussion. During our visit we discovered that they had been able to collect funds from other sources to renovate the classroom. They told us that there is a need for reading rooms outside the classrooms, so we asked them to make a new request.



Cambodian student.

Friday, 14 February 2025: Morning

First, we visited Andong Rovieng Primary School (Motion 24-03) where the TLCB had provided 4,000 USD to build a dining hall, which is also being used as a meeting room.

Our last school visit was to Sre Kach primary school (Motion 24-05). The original requests were for a perimeter fence (4,000 USD) and a new canteen (6,200 USD). This motion was tabled by Les Thompson in May 2024 until there is a visit to assess the needs.

During the visit we discovered that the school had been able to obtain funds to start the perimeter fence. The school, however, will prepare a new request for a new canteen with a lower budget.

Friday, 14 February 2025: Afternoon

About 2 pm, we went our different ways. We arranged for a taxi from Kampong Chhnang to take Glenn to his hotel in Phnom Penh, a two hour/100 km journey. Glenn was not to be seen alive by us again. He was MIA for a month until we learned that he had died from a heart attack in his Phnom Penh hotel room on Sunday 16 February—two days after we last saw him, and one day before he was expected to fly back to Chiangmai. He had been cremated a month later in Chiangmai, before we learned that he had died.

Glenn was the key player in this first ever TLCB monitoring/inspection trip to Cambodia; he shared his extensive knowledge of Cambodia along the way and was enthusiastic in seeing how schools had progressed since he was involved in supervising the building of schools in the Battambang area in the 90s. Glenn

could speak some Khmer and enjoyed speaking a few words of Khmer to those we met, and they appreciated Glenn. He enjoyed the food, the restaurants, and the Khmer people. As usual, Glenn was very observant, took good notes, and drafted an interesting report of our visits in Siem Reap province, as written above, but he did not complete his reporting of the schools in Kampong Chhnang



Glenn Black
province.



Kampong Kdei Bridge

The **Spean Praptos**, also known as the Kampong Kdei Bridge, is a 900-year-old Angkorian-era bridge located south of Siem Reap, Cambodia. It was built during the reign of King Jayavarman VII in the late 12th to early 13th century as part of the ancient road system connecting Angkor to other parts of the Khmer Empire.

Key Features:

- **Made of laterite blocks**, a common material in Angkorian construction.
- **Over 20 arches**, making it one of the longest corbeled stone arch bridges from the Angkor period.
- **Originally part of the Royal Road** connecting Angkor to the eastern provinces.
- **Nagā balustrades**, snake-like sculptures, at both ends, symbolizing protection and spirituality in Khmer culture.
- **Still in use today**, though a modern bridge now carries most of the traffic.

Despite centuries of weathering and flooding, Spean Praptos remains a remarkable example of Khmer engineering and is a lesser-known but fascinating historical site near Siem Reap.



Above, the twenty corbeled stone arches of Spean Praptos date from the time that nearby Angkor Wat was built, nearly one thousand years ago.

Below, the roadway of this ancient bridge is still in use, though heavy traffic is now restricted to preserve this treasure.



Update on Local School Visits to Jayavarman VII Library and Museum.

Earlier this year the Assistance Committee funded a program to provide school children in the Siem Reap, Cambodia area the opportunity to take an education field trip to the Jayavarman VII Library and Museum. We funded ten school educational field trips. As of May 24th, five schools have participated. These visits are not just joy rides; you can see that studying is required while at the library and museum, which helps build critical thinking skills.

Penn State University students recently visited as well. This appears to be a group doing cross-cultural studies in Cambodia and the school felt that the library and museum were useful in their curriculum. This is the second year of their visit.

I am particularly happy that Kosal, the museum director, designed a banner that includes the United States' flag. Also, on the Facebook pages of some of the schools' posting pics of their visit, they wrote "American Charity."

Cambodia Assistance continues page 14.



A Cambodian student bravely asks a question during a lecture session.



Here the students from one of the schools are hard at work completing their study assignments. Cambodia is striving to restore preservation and general knowledge of its particularly rich cultural history. Students learn of the importance of their country's place in Southeast Asian history.

Schools visited so far, are:

- Kong Mouch School— 47 Students and 4 teachers, 26 April.
- Wat Reach Bo School— 61 Students and 3 teachers, 3 May.
- Arain Rainsey School— 62 students and 2 teachers, 6 May.
- Bayon Primary School— 44 Students and 3 teachers, 23 May.

It appears that this venture is a real success and worth every bit of the modest cost to the TLC Brotherhood Assistance Program.



Above, Penn State University student gets hands-on learning about Cambodian culture at the museum. She appears to be carving some sort of symbology into wood. Below, one of our school groups study museum displays.



Below, students from Wat Reach Bo school going home with a greatly enhanced appreciation for their inherited history and culture. The TLC Brotherhood is fortunate to have the opportunity to enable these visits.



An Interesting Friend

Staffan Hildebrand, was a free-lance reporter, photographer, and filmmaker for the Swedish News Agency during the war years. Staffan, also a good friend of Paul Carter, wrote the following to Vaughan on 3 April 2025:

As a summary. I was in the Pathet Lao headquarter caves during the end of the war with ongoing U.S. bombings in April 1973 and interviewed the Red Prince Souphanovong there, among other things. He was really bright, with a sense of a soft, sarcastic, French-influenced humor. He had a Vietnamese wife and founded the Pathet Lao in 1950 in close collaboration with Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh to defeat the French, which they did 1954.

The Pathet Lao invited me a second time in 1974 to document the repatriation of the Hmong refugees who escaped the B-52 destructive bombings at the end of 1960s and early 1970s. Laos is the most-bombed country in the world, and all by the U.S. Air Force, supported by Air America in covert operations.

I interviewed the socialist rebel who joined the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) insurgency in the Sakon Nakhon secure area outside of Thai government control. It was very difficult to organize the interview in July 1971.

The fact that I, at that time, spoke very good Isaan dialect, helped create a lot of confidence with the rebel group, prior to them accepting me. I was of course not allowed to film their secret jungle base in Phu Phan, but in 2016, the same rebel leader as in 1971, invited me to film their headquarters which had been deserted for 30 years. I can promise you that that it was not a regular tourist tour! No other foreigner had been allowed to visit the headquarters except me and my team in 2016 as part of my upcoming documentary.



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If so, please let us know so that we can update the official database and ensure that MEM issues and official mail get addressed properly. You can send an email to:

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TLC Brotherhood

PO Box 60

Aspers, PA 17304.

INCLUDE MEMBER #!

Mark Randolph Welch, 1939-2025

Retired U.S. Army Lt. Col. Mark Randolph Welch of Albuquerque, NM, passed away on March 10, 2025.

The following is excerpted from his obituary, published in the Albuquerque Journal on Mar. 23, 2025

Mark's adventurous life of living on six continents began when he was born on March 23, 1939 in Chuquicamata, Chile, South America, where his father was a mining engineer.

After a few years in Chile, the family moved around the U.S., and in 1945 landed in East Wenatchee, WA, where they started an apple orchard called Longview Orchards, fondly referred to as "the ranch." This home served as a U.S. base for the family as they moved and lived around the world. Mark learned to hunt on the ranch, a skill and passion that he carried throughout his life.

In 1950, his family moved to Tanganika in East Africa and stayed until 1952. The family moved to Israel from 1953 to 1955, where Mark attended a Scottish Presbyterian prep school. In 1955 the family moved to Nepal, and Mark went to Woodstock boarding high school in India where he made lifelong friends. Returning to the U.S. in 1957, Mark went to college at Washington State University majoring in Mining Engineering and ROTC. Mark then entered the Army as a 2nd Lieutenant, and he was the Hanau, Germany Post Engineer when President Kennedy came to inspect the troops and gave his famous speech "Ich bin ein Berliner."

In 1966, his tour in Germany ended when he got orders to Thailand, with a short stop at Ft. Lewis in Washington State. After one year in Thailand Mark left active duty, transitioning to the Army Reserves. In 1968, the family moved to Marquette, Michigan for Mark's work as a Project Engineer for Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company. After a couple of freezing winters, the family moved to Sutter Creek, California, where Mark worked as the Mine Manager at Interpace Mining Corporation.

Mark then moved his family to Albuquerque, NM in 1974, where he worked as the Chief Mining Engineer for Rancher's Exploration, overseeing mining projects throughout the West. After the work at Rancher's concluded, Mark and colleagues formed their own mining company, Western Resources in 1984.

Mark and wife Sharon made their home in Albuquerque for several years, and in 1991 they moved to the Sydney, Australia area, where Mark eventually became the President of Nord Pacific Mining Company, which included work in the remote regions of Papua New Guinea. They lived in Australia until

1999, when they finally settled down in Albuquerque, NM.

Mark was very proud of his service to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, retiring in the Reserves as a Lt Colonel in 1999. Mark joined the TLC Brotherhood in July of 2011 as member #01392. He indicated that his service in the Army in Thailand was at Korat and U'Tapao air bases, and at Camp Vayama at the deepwater port of Sattahip.



The Quilt—2025!



Once again Mark and Becky Schlieder, members who live in Catawissa, PA, have generously donated a quilt for "Rosie's Raffle" to raise Assistance Program funds. Drawing will be at the President's Banquet in Nashville on Thursday, September 18th, at the end of this year's reunion. Tickets are enclosed and you can also buy them on the TLCB Website, www.tlc-brotherhood.com. **Donation of \$2 per chance goes 100% to Assistance.**



Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The three members listed below joined between the March 2025 issue of the *Mekong Express Mail* and this printing. You can find more information on our website database.

The MEM wishes you all a sincere "Welcome Home." We are delighted that you have joined us.

No.	Branch	First Name	Last Name	City	State
02099	USAF	Harry	Dillon	Bradenton	FL
02100	USAF	Denise	Fricke	Lincolnwood	IL
02101	USAF	Richard	Comer	Niceville	FL

Reunion 2025: Nashville Tennessee!

Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood
Annual Meeting and Reunion
September 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th

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

Reunion Itinerary

Monday September 15th

Registration is in the Volunteer Ballroom, starting at noon. The Nipa Hut hospitality area opens at noon and is also in the Volunteer Ballroom.

Monday is the “on your own” day.

Tuesday

The **Downtown Trolley Tour** shuttle departs from the hotel at 8:15am. It has a 25-passenger capacity and will **shuttle back and forth all day**. The shuttle will terminate at 5:00pm. We suggest you be onboard by 4:00pm.

The Evening meal is on your own.

Wednesday

Departure from the hotel for the **General Jackson Riverboat Cruise is at 10:15am**. The Cumberland River cruise is approximately 2½ hours long and includes a lunch Buffet and live entertainment. The boat will return to the dock at 2:30pm and buses will take us back to the hotel.

The evening meal will be a **Southern Style Deli Buffet** in the Nipa Hut, starting at 5:00pm, followed by our **TLCB Assistance Auction at 6:30pm**.

Thursday

The Board Officer’s meeting is at 9:00am, followed by the **Annual Meeting of TLCB, Inc., at 10:00am**, which includes the members’-only board election voting.

The afternoon is on your own.

The **President’s Banquet** starts at 5:00pm with a cash bar and Dinner Buffet served at 6:30pm.



Above, the riverboat cruise is an option this year. It features live Nashville music and a Southern style meal, plus a pleasant authentic riverboat cruise on Tennessee’s Cumberland River.



A stop on the optional Trolley Ride, the Nashville Parthenon, is the only full-scale replica of the original one. *You can’t see this in Greece*, folks, because Nashville’s the only place in the World where you can see it as the ancient Greeks originally built it. In 1990 they even added a replica of the 42 foot statue of Athena inside. It was gilded in 2002.

Banquet Speaker

CW4 (Ret) William Inman

CW4 William Inman retired from the Army as a master army aviator, then started a Junior ROTC Program in Monticello, Kentucky, where he was a senior Army instructor for 21 years, and retired having honorably worn the uniform for 44 years!

William started his Army career in 1966 as a military policeman and a basic training DI, then got out and did police work in Missouri for four years. In 1973 he went back into the Army as an Army Aviation warrant officer, flying the UH-1 helicopter and both C-12 and U-21 fixed wing, multi-engine aircraft as an instructor pilot. He served three tours in Korea, two in Berlin, Germany, and finished his numerous U.S. assignments at the West Point Flight Detachment in 1993. Among his many decorations, he holds the Meritorious Service Medal with four oak leaf clusters.