

# MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



*The newsletter of the Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood, Inc. Volume 25, issue 3*

**WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.com**

## *Journey To the Site of an Earthquake*

*The following is based on a U-Tube video by Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood member Dr. Paul Carter, an interview with Leigh Hotujec, and information from various public sources.*

### **Earthquake McGoon**

One of the most colorful and celebrated of the many unusual Air America crewmembers was James McGovern, otherwise known as Earthquake McGoon, who famously crashed his C-119 Flying Boxcar in a remote corner of Northeast Laos the day before the French Army surrendered Dienbienphu to the ragtag but determined Communist Vietnamese Army led by General Giap.

Paul Carter and motorcycle tour guide Chris Corbett of LaoAdventure Tours, may be the first Americans since the Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) search team to visit this isolated area of Laos. But first, a review of the remarkable life, colorful and storied personality, and demise of Earthquake McGoon.



James McGovern's CAT Flying Boxcar (C-119) in French Air Force paint shown delivering a howitzer cannon into DienBienPhu, Vietnam, after being hit twice by groundfire. The left propeller is feathered and there is serious damage to the horizontal stabilizer at the rear. McGovern somehow nursed this stricken plane 77 miles into Laos before it crashed along a riverbank. This painting, "Earthquake's Final Flight," was by artist Jeffrey W. Bass in 2006 and is part of the "Intelligence Art Gallery." It was donated by the Fairchild Corporation, C-119 manufacturer.

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### **End of the "French War" in Vietnam**

It was May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1954, and the post-World War II French presence in the colony of Vietnam was going down the tubes! Their desperate four-month effort to hold the area known as Dienbienphu was in its last day. The U.S., feeling a sense of responsibility to France, had been air dropping supplies to the besieged Dienbienphu forces as the Communist army encircled the French, tightened the noose, and finally overwhelmed the airfield. French crews had been dropping supplies from 8000

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## Sawadee Kop\* And Other Everyday Phrases

Like most of the other members of The Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood (TLCB) stationed in Thailand, time spent was just about one year to the day, and that was over nearly 56 years ago. Yet most likely because I spent well over a year writing a novel set in a fictional Thai city that resembled the one I was based in, Phitsanulok, and also as a result of my active participation in the TLCB, my memories of that time are remarkably clear (at least I think they are).



As my wife will attest to, I very frequently use Thai phrases or words in my conversation; and I'll bet that I am not alone in that among the TLCB membership. Some of them are:

*Kun sabai di loo?*

*Di mak kop.*

*Ching ching mai go hoke.*

*Chua lai kop?*

*Mai baba bobo.*

Perhaps spelled a little differently, many of you know what expressions I was trying to say, which were:

*How are you?*

*Very good.*

*It's true. I don't joke.*

*What's your name?*

*I'm crazy.*

It's not only my remembering of Thai phrases and words, but I have what seems to me nearly exact memories of many of the buildings and areas of our relatively small radar site of around 100 officers and airmen, Detachment 8 of the 621st Tactical Control Squadron, which was headquarter-based in Udorn. As the admin officer for the site, I ran the orderly room, which also supported the offices of the commander, Major Robert Lichvar, and top sergeant, Carl (I think) Johnson. At times, often when waking up in the middle of the night, I can recall exact conversations held in those offices.

Although Det 8 was not in a combat area, we were engaged in combat support activities. A good deal of bomber activity

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# Sheba Eight Zero, Part II, Rescue and Investigation

by Bill Tilton

In the June, 2024 issue of *The Mekong Express Mail* we published the first part of this account of the crash of a KB-50J aerial refueling tanker near the island of Bermuda in October of 1963. The author was co-pilot on that aircraft and agreed to recount the experience and details of the crash. Part II, presented here, completes the story. Ed.

Parachutes are not good to have at sea, once you're in the water. They will drag you down and you can get tangled up in the canopy and shroud lines. I pulled the single harness release on one side and used the hooked blade knife we carried in a leg-pouch, to slice through the side that had no release. To my relief, there was no sawing or struggle—the never-used hook sliced through that thick parachute riser strap like butter! I watched the orange and white canopy disappear into the deep. Then with sharks and barracuda in mind, I quickly climbed into the skittish little raft, which is not easy if you don't know how! That's when I failed to do one step that had been taught at Sea Survival—I did not push the riser release cover back on, risking having some sharp edges of the release cut the inflated raft. Fortunately nothing bad happened, but I later felt sheepish about that misstep.

Now I noticed that the surface was not exactly smooth as glass. Although it wasn't choppy, there were deep swells and

Below, author, left, and navigator Steve Sellers emerging from a Marine H-34 helicopter that carried them to the U.S. Naval station at the west end of Bermuda. Note the useless signal mirror carried by Lt Tilton. Official U.S. Navy photo.



occasionally a wave formed and then broke over and drenched me. This was not a problem, and when I was at the crest of a swell I could see the island in the distance. But I didn't see any other crewmen.

Next I pulled up the supply bag to see what I had and get some means to signal aircraft. First there was the two-part radio in its separate "water-tight" bag. When I pulled the zipper, seawater poured out. The radio and battery pack were dead, of course; and being useless to me, I tossed them over the side. Next I located the smoke, the flares, the little signal mirror, and the dye marker. Knowing search planes were sure to show up soon, I put a bag of bright dye in the water, which made a brilliant day-glow greenish contrasting patch on the water. I opened one smoke signaler and had it ready. I put the mirror lanyard over my head, but found that it used the older type aiming method, which was not the one we were taught to use in Sea Survival. Fortunately I didn't have to read the directions on the back, because I soon heard aircraft engines, and there came a four-engine "rescap" C-54. Immediately I popped the smoke dispenser, which made a huge cloud of bright orange smoke. Almost right away the

C-54 rocked his wings in recognition and I saw a marker buoy drop to the water. Then I pointed to the direction where I thought the rest of the crew would be, though I didn't really think the C-54 crew could see me that well. Nevertheless, they did head off in the direction I thought they should.

## Rescue

It wasn't long after the rescap left that a Marine CH-34 appeared and came down low over me, dropping his cable and "horse collar" into the water to discharge the static build-up that would be a real shocker for me, then sweeping the dangling pickup device

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over to me. Guided by my recent training, I crawled out of the raft and pushed it away, then got into the “horse collar” the correct way (with the cable in front of my face) and was quickly raised to the open side door, where a sailor grabbed my waist and pulled me in. There sat Steve Sellers, probably grinning to see me. It was too loud to talk much, as we quickly



The author snapped this photo from the Kindley AFB hospital bay where the surviving members of the crew were housed “for observation” during the accident investigation. This C-124 was part of “Operation Big Lift,” a test of the plan to keep NATO-dedicated Army units in the U.S. and deploy them to join their equipment when needed. These transports operated around the clock, getting fuel and fresh crew at Bermuda and the Azores.

dropped down and brought up Joe Samaripa, and then headed to the Navy Base Bermuda, at the west end of the island. The H-34 cockpit is higher than the cargo deck, and we could see the pilots’ legs. I noted that they were wearing civilian low-quarter shoes instead of flying boots, which seemed peculiar.

As we got off the helicopter, we were met by two sailors with a stretcher. They looked a little disappointed that they weren’t needed; a Navy photographer snapped our photo with one of those big old press cameras. To my surprise, there was actually a small crowd out there, but we were led directly into base

operations, where they were still coordinating the search. They told us that three more had been located and were being picked up by the Air Force. That would be the rear-end crew. We were given new orange flight suits to replace our drenched ones, and after a while a Naval officer took us in a British station wagon the twenty-some miles to Kindley AFB hospital, where we joined reel operator Bill Webster and mechanic Ed Strong. Corbin was in surgery.

The three back-enders were in the water up to

their chest, since they had no rafts, but surprisingly they were located pretty much as quickly as we up front had been. Ed Corbin told us later that when he was pulled into the helicopter the pararescueman took one look and shouted, “Where’s your leg?” He then reached under his thigh and pulled the rest of the leg out in front of him (I don’t know where the compound fracture was). The pararescueman turned white and leaned out the door to wretch!

### **Initial Reaction**

In the hospital at Kindley we immediately started telling each other our experiences, when someone stopped us short. We were not to discuss the incident with anyone until a flight surgeon had interviewed us, and after we were examined for injuries. They explained later that this is by regulation, in order to obtain the freshest accounts of what the survivors recalled. As far as injuries, of course we all wondered about Ed Corbin, and if they had yet found Curley Moore and Charles Crigler. None of us had injuries, except for mild bruising in the crotch from the parachute straps, and the flight surgeon commented that our training must have been good.

Divers were soon in the water to find whatever they could, including the classified comm codes in my helmet bag, and they sent word back that the cockpit area was in thirty feet of water and Curley’s body was sandwiched between his seat and the instrument panel. The aircraft commander is last in the briefed bailout order.

On the other hand, nobody knows what happened to SSgt Charles Crigler, our mechanic passenger up front. Flight engineer Joe Samaripa never saw him again after he disappeared into the nav compartment at the start of the bailout, the navigator had no recollection of seeing him, and I thought I counted his parachute. But after several days intensely searching the ocean for him, he was declared missing and presumed dead. If I did see his parachute ahead of me he must have drowned and sunk in the ocean.

As already mentioned, Crigler did not want to bail out. We found that he had told others that he would never jump into the ocean. Also, it turned out that he was never willing to comply with the annual swimming pool exercise when we demonstrated an ability to swim in flight suit and boots. For this reason it was a violation of TAC regs to put him on TDY orders to Bermuda or the Azores, where he had been for three weeks.

Once the flight surgeon was done with his initial

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KB-50J refueling an F-100 fighter. The red stripe around the tail cone of the left J-47 is where the white-hot turbine spins. Note that it is in line with the front of the wing flaps, where five fuel lines are. Just ahead of the star insignia is the “blister” where Webster saw the tailcone separate and the inner left wing instantly erupt in flames that went past the tail and melted the plastic of his blister. USAF photo.

assessment, we five went into a marathon jam session, relating the events to each other and speculating on what had happened to Curley and Crigler, and particularly what caused the plane to catch fire. Bill Webster's story about the initial explosion was the clue. It appeared that J-2, the left J-47 jet engine, had been the cause.

Late in the afternoon a young-looking surgeon came in. He wanted to apologize to us because he had worked on Corbin's broken leg for five hours and said he had done the best he could. Seawater and debris were in the wound, and there were many little pieces of bone to put together. He was the only surgeon available that Sunday at Kindley, but that wasn't saying much, because he was very new and this was the toughest surgery he had ever done on his own. He assumed the surgeons at Keesler AFB, in Biloxi, would have to go back in and do it right. "I just did the best I could," he said humbly. That evening they air-evacced Ed to Keesler and we didn't see him again until Christmas.

The doctors at Keesler let us know that there was no need to do further work on Ed's leg, noting that the Kindley surgeon had done a superb job. But they also said that Corbin would be in a wheelchair for six months and would walk with crutches for much longer than that. They told him he would never be on flying status again. Surprise! At Christmas he came to a party in Alexandria, and he was on crutches already! Furthermore, he eventually went to SAC as an instructor refueling boom operator and completed a full career. He was not one to be held down!

### **Investigations**

We lived in the hospital ward "for observation," for five days. The squadron commander flew out, as did the Group HQ ops officer from Langley AFB, and in the base library he convened an Investigation Board to determine the cause of the accident. They interviewed each of us, but of course as the surviving pilot my testimony was particularly important. We were assured that their findings would be locked up and not available to the

View of lead tanker in formation. Aft exit door is aft of the star insignia. View is from the co-pilot's seat on the right side of the cockpit. The top of the aircraft commander's instrument panel is in the foreground. In the original bomber configuration the bombardier's position would be at the right, in the cockpit nose window. Photo: author.



Receiver pilot's view of the "basket" and hose deployed by the KB-50J. The jet engine shown is the counterpart of the engine that blew apart and sprayed the flap "well" with very hot pieces of the failed turbine at the rear of the J-47 engine.

"Collateral Board," whose job was to find blame. We were protected and advised to tell everything we knew, even if it showed we were to blame for something.

### **The Cause?**

A technical representative from General Electric came to the board as an expert on the J-47 engine. He provided the information that told us what had happened. The cause goes back to an event shortly before we left Lajes, in the chilly, misty Azores, an island group about a thousand miles west of Portugal, which owns them. A Douglas C-133 transport disappeared after leaving Dover, Delaware on a trip to Europe. They had reported to Air Traffic Control while in UHF radio range, but as they left the coastal ADIZ and should have switched to long-range HF communications, they never made any further reports and eventually were overdue at their destination. Their entire planned route of flight had to be searched, and our crew had been assigned several stretches to search to the west of Terceira Island, where the base was.

On our second day we searched for four hours in a rectangle three hundred miles northwest of Terceira. During this time the atmospheric pressure increased and our "altitude hold" on the autopilot automatically held us lower and lower, so that by the time I noticed how our wingtips seemed too close to the water when we reversed our search course the navigator's optical height-finder showed us at two hundred feet. It was a very windy day, with lots of whitecaps, and apparently, we ingested lots of salt spray.

In a day or two, we left Lajes and flew the ten-hour trip to Bermuda, where we were scheduled for a refueling the next day. That plane had many unrelated maintenance problems, but it operated fine for the refueling mission. One reason I was happy to be assigned to Curley Moore was that he was an instructor and

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could start me on an upgrade program to aircraft commander. On that sortie he put me in the left seat, and I got to fly formation with another tanker, which I enjoyed. In formation we used the jets to maintain position on the other plane, since the propeller engine throttles belonged to the engineer until just before touchdown—we just called out power settings and he took care of the rest.

The J-47 was prone to compressor stalls, or disrupted airflow through the engine, particularly from rapid throttle movements. While I was moving those throttles to keep formation I noticed J-1 got hung up. I checked the exhaust gas temperature (EGT, measured aft of the turbine) but it did not rise. I knew I had a



Tilton next to the fuselage of a KB-50J on his first TDY to Bermuda, not yet checked out nor even on a crew, and still a 2nd lieutenant, in May of 1963. The 18-foot diameter propellers were optimized for high-altitude operation and did not allow full power (60" Hg, 2500rpm, 3500 HP from 4,360 cu) to be developed on the runway until the plane reached 100 knots airspeed.

stall, but it appeared to be what the manual called a “cold stall.” Curley turned on the anti-stall system, which also reduced the amount of thrust from the engine, and broke the stall. He told me later that he had had to shut the engine down and re-start it to break the stall.

During my preflight inspection, I had noticed that the jet compressors were very rusty, which I had never seen on a jet engine. They were almost completely covered with a thin red layer of rust. Curious, I mentioned this to an engine mechanic, who explained that they would throw a few buckets of walnut shells through the jets to clean them up when we got back to England AFB. This rust was not customary. It probably resulted more from our low-level search missions than it did from sitting in salt air at Lajes and Bermuda ramps. We learned later that *this corrosion changed the airflow characteristics of the compressor and made it much more prone to a stall.* The Navy always flushed their compressors with fresh water after the low-level subchasing missions.

We were very eager to get home, but not in a KB-50. In the

hospital both of the airmen told me they preferred a ship, but if they had to fly they wanted to be in anything but a KB-50. Joe Samaripa said he agreed. I felt that way too. We didn't know what they had in mind for us at first. On behalf of the crew I asked the CO if we could go home some other way. “Out of the question,” was the reply. “But-but!” But there was no room for discussion; he assured us that we would all get over our understandable reluctance and that the best thing was to figuratively climb back on the horse that had thrown us.

### ***The Cause Explained***

A day or two after they started the investigation a tech rep from General Electric showed up. He was very efficient and knowledgeable; he was probably a propulsion engineer. It was he who unravelled the most likely cause of the explosion and eventually laid the bulk of the blame on the unflushed engines after the search and the misleading information about “cold” stalls in the manual.

### ***Interlude***

While I waited to be called for the investigation I found a paperback by an Air Force pilot who had been the subject of Project Man High at that time holding the record for the highest ascent in a balloon and longest free fall descent. He had jumped from balloons at altitudes above 100,000 feet on several occasions during physiological studies being conducted by the Air Force Systems Command. On the back cover was his picture: three years later I was to meet him in person, at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base, in Thailand.

Joe Kittinger proved to be a very likeable red-head with a great sense of humor and impressive skill as a pilot. In 1966 he led the Air Commando “Big Eagle” squadron of A-26s to NKP, from which they flew interdiction missions against the central segment of the Ho Chi Minh Trail network. Later, shot down in an F-4, he was captured and interned in Vietnam's Hanoi Hilton. There is a display about him at the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio. Many TLCB members knew Joe Kittinger very well.

### ***Again?***

In one of those boring times on the ten-hour homebound trip the engineer had the bad judgement to let the plugs foul up a little by neglecting his hourly changing of operating conditions (fuel mixture or engine speed) for a minute. When the plugs self-cleared, the mild rumble and gentle yaw was precisely the sensation Joe Samaripa and I recalled when our plane had exploded, and even though we knew instantly what had happened we complained sharply to him. I'm sure if he had

**Sheba 80 continues next page**

realized what it was to us and how we would react he would have been much more attentive.

Back at England AFB the Collateral Board was convened by the base legal office, and this time there were lawyers there, who warned us that our answers could be held against us in a Flying Evaluation Board proceeding, which usually had ruinous career implications. No crewmember was charged with anything, however. The major fault was pinned on the "Dash One," the operator's manual, and those responsible for it, for the misleading description of a cold stall. The manual described a cold stall but did not explain what the GE techrep had told us, which was that this kind of stall is the most serious because instead of the hot gas temperatures reaching the tailpipe (and reflected on the control panel indicator), they are largely absorbed by the turbine itself. The finding was that the heat-damaged turbine had exploded at 98% thrust and sent hot "shrapnel" into the wing. On the B-50 there are five 2-inch fuel lines running out the wing that are very much in line with that turbine, and they probably erupted into pressure-fed flame immediately.

The final explosion was probably in that wing. Each of the two bomb bays held a tank of jet fuel used for refueling and for our jets. They held fifteen thousand pounds each, or about three thousand gallons, and were made of rubberized canvas. But those two tanks were found intact on the coral reef, still full of fuel. The rest of the wreckage is strewn widely and has become very corroded and encrusted with sea life. Dive companies take tourist divers out to the "Airplane Wreck" sometimes, and they can identify landing gear and "corn cob" engines there. So far as I know, the jets were never found, and divers only know where three of the R-4360s lie silently corroding in the brine.

### **Aftermath**


We were given thirty days leave, and my wife and I went to Virginia and Pennsylvania to visit family. On the day President Kennedy was shot, my squadron sent a twx to my parent's address, asking: "WHAT IS YOUR VOLUNTEER STATUS FOR ASSIGNMENT 421ST AREFS, BIGGS AFB, TEX.?" It was the one thing I definitely did not want. I wanted to fly, but I had little liking for the KB-50 at that point. As we headed back to Louisiana, I asked my father to give this reply: "I DO NOT, REPEAT, DO NOT, VOLUNTEER FOR ASSIGNMENT TO THE 421st AREFS."

So I reluctantly reported to Biggs AFB in January, where the 421st AREFS was a tenant unit, and got to fly that complicated machine for another year. I felt perhaps this assignment confirmed for me our self-deprecating slogan: "Once tanker trash, always tanker trash." The SAC KC-135 crews looked



1950s photo of John "Curley" Moore, hand raised, and his crewmembers with the "basket" used for the probe and drogue method of aerial refueling. USAF photo.

down on us there, and I really never did take to living in the desert, though we did enjoy El Paso and visits to Juarez.

Curley Moore was buried at Arlington National Cemetery and his widow, who was a school teacher in Houston, soon remarried. It was known by our crew that their childless marriage was not a happy one, and he had told a friend that he intended to retire when we got back to Louisiana. Curley was not only a very competent pilot, but a very nice person to know. In the few weeks that I knew him we had some good times in the air, but he had kept pretty much to himself during that time at Lajes. What I do know about him is that his quick decision saved six people's lives, including mine. Why did he stay in the plane? Speculation was that he was still trying to fly the plane in the short time before it exploded, or trying to avoid crashing on Bermuda. Maybe he was trying to find out if everyone had bailed out. Or maybe he just didn't care. 

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over North Vietnam and Laos took off from Thai bases. Since fighter bombers were loaded to the max with bombs, to be able to take off, the aircraft were not fully loaded with fuel. A major activity of our radar operation was to hook the fighters up, at altitude, with KC-135 tankers, to complete fueling. As a TLCB member, Paul Hauser, wrote in an earlier edition of the *MEM*, "It was an 'inherently dangerous' operation."

Not a combat site, but we still lost two airmen during my year there. One was a tech sergeant who died after developing a temperature of nearly 105 degrees. Symptoms were very similar to spinal meningitis, although the doctor, who came to Phitsanulok from our support base at Takhli, refused to ever directly say that was what it was. Still, they nearly shut the base down for almost a week. We also lost a staff sergeant in a motorcycle accident, which was complicated because his passenger, a Thai girl, was badly injured. And the sergeant had a family back home.

I was the summary courts officer for both deaths, which involved written contact with their families. Naturally, I did

not provide the full details of the staff sergeant's death. And for obvious reasons, I'm not including their names; however, I will note that Major Lichvar named a garden on the site after the tech sergeant, which the chow hall girls maintained, and our movie theater was named for the staff sergeant.

I'll add to these stories by noting that when I visited Phitsanulok more than 40 years later, the garden had faded away and the movie theater had been torn down. My larger point of recalling, in detail, events from more than 50 years ago is that I am quite certain that my ability is not unique. After all, spending a year at a small radar site adjacent to a good-sized Thai town, which was in fact a provincial capital, is certain to be an experience that would be memorable for most of the officers and airmen who were there, or in fact at other bases and sites in both Thailand and Laos. And it is those stories that the TLCB members should be writing about in the *MEM*.

\*I've seen "kop" spelled several different ways, often "kharb," but I'm comfortable with "kop." Keep in mind that the Thai language has its own unique 44-character alphabet and English conversions of Thai words are at best — approximate. So I'll stick with "kop".

John Harrington, Editor

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## Earthquake continued from page 1

feet and about 90% landed among the Communist forces. The CIA's Civil Air Transport (CAT) pilots, however, were willing to drag their C-119s in as low as 400 feet above the ground to ensure that the drops went to the beleaguered French forces.

### ***A Fatal Crash***

By May 6<sup>th</sup> there seemed little hope as CAT pilot James McGovern and the other CAT crews desperately braved intense



James "Earthquake" McGoon in the cockpit of a World War II fighter. He was credited with shooting down four Japanese "Zero" fighters and destroying even more on the ground.

groundfire down in that valley of death. On his first pass that afternoon, piloting a C-119 cargo aircraft to deliver a howitzer to the beleaguered French forces, McGovern was hit at very low altitude and nursed his fatally damaged plane some 77 miles into Laos, before crashing.

The very next day, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May, the garrison surrendered and on July 20<sup>th</sup>, at the subsequent Geneva Conference, France formally relinquished all claims to Vietnamese territory.

As described in the May 17, 1954 issue of *TIME*,

Over Dienbienphu, Earthquake had just dropped down to 3,000 feet for his run when his voice cracked over the radio: "I've got a direct hit." Steve Kusak swung his plane in behind Earthquake's. One of Bird Two's engines was spurting oil, and Earthquake feathered it. Just then, a second shell tore a hole in one of the tail booms. The stricken plane lurched. Earthquake caught sight of a riverbed ahead, flanked by 4,000-foot mountains. "Steve, tell me which way the mountains are lowest," Earthquake said to the plane above him. Steve took a hasty look, and called, "Turn right."

Steve Kusak tried to coach McGovern, whose aircraft was steadily losing altitude. He urged McGoon to bail out while he had enough altitude, but Earthquake replied that he couldn't risk getting captured and "...doing all that walking," on his painful feet, as he had once had to do when previously captured by Chinese troops.

### ***Looks like this is it...***

Though he skillfully flew the stricken C-119, it continued descending over the mountains of Laos, and finally the plane sank too low to avoid the terrain, even along a river. As Steve watched helplessly, Earthquake's voice came coolly over the radio, "Looks like this is it, son," he said. The left wing tipped the rocky hillside. The Flying Boxcar did a slow, ponderous cartwheel and burst into an orange-black blossom of flame and smoke. It was Earthquake's 45th such mission.

The crash killed McGovern and other crewmembers, except for a French officer, Jean Alaux, who was aboard as an observer. A Thai cargo "kicker" was also thrown clear but soon died of his injuries.

Tall, overweight, and famously casual, social, irreverent,

**Earthquake continues next page**



and popular, McGovern was known by all as “Earthquake McGoon,” a nickname given him by famous Hong Kong saloon owner, “Pop” Gingle, after a character in the “L’il Abner” comic strip. Earthquake had bad feet, and in the C-46s he flew for CAT he often sat in a large wicker chair in place of the aircraft’s regular pilot’s seats. He had been a WWII fighter pilot credited with shooting down four Japanese “Zeroes.” Later he went to fly for the CIA’s clandestine airline, which later became known as “Air America” in “our” war. So, readers might be wondering, “What has this history got to do with the TLCB?”

### ***TLCB and Earthquake***

The CIA suppressed information about U.S. involvement in the French defeat, but five years later, on August 4, 1959, author and one-time Flying Tiger pilot, Felix Smith, claimed that the CIA had learned of three graves there from a French visitor who was told about the crash while in the Lao village of Ban Sot, in the far Northeast. This report was suppressed by the CIA, however, until a private historian found it in French files years later. A group of former CAT pilots then persuaded the CIA to support a search effort.

The *Joint Task Force, Full Accounting* (JTF-FA, now called the DPAA), searches for the remains of missing military members in battle areas all over the World. In 1997 a JTF-FA team was searching for a Vietnam War F-4 fighter crash site at Ban Sot. During that search, the team found a propeller from a C-119 in a local village. The serial number on this propeller was not on the list of aircraft lost during “our” Vietnam War, so the team set that aside and showed little interest in it. Because their limited resources are always devoted to the searches most likely to yield results, this unusual find was not a priority at that time, but it caught the notice of TLCB Founding Secretary, Leigh Hotujec!

Air America “brat,” Leigh Coleman Hotujec, who grew



The approximate route McGovern and Kusak flew from the battle at Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam, to the bank of a lazy river in the mountains of Northeast Laos, as depicted by Paul Carter in the U-Tube video, “Journey to ‘Earthquake McGoon’s’ Crash Site.”

up in Vientiane, was serving on the board of the Air America Association as their media representative. Another early TLCB member, the late Bill Gardner, worked in Agency (CIA) Declassifications at the National Archives and helped Leigh and JTF-FA personnel on the “Laos Desk” in the identification of the propeller that villagers had displayed. Urged on by our members and veterans of Air America, the team confirmed that this prop was indeed from the C-119 that Earthquake was flying that day. Subsequently, Leigh was tasked by the AA Association with assisting JTF-FA in locating any/all of McGovern’s living relatives as well as dealing with any news coverage, regarding inquiries about CAT/AirAmerica, that would come as information became public.

It should be no surprise that Leigh took great interest in the search for Earthquake’s crash site and remains. She was very familiar with stories of Earthquake from her teen years



Lao villagers had this C-119 propeller, but because the serial numbers did not relate to any ongoing searches, the JTF-FA team was not interested when they first saw it. TLCB and Air America Association members pressed the searchers when they realized it could be from 1954 and the legendary “Earthquake.”

with her parents in Vientiane, where her father, Ben Coleman, flew for Air America. Ben and Earthquake had a mutual friend, Felix Smith, cited above, who had been Ben’s roommate in Kunming, China, and was his best friend. Felix Smith famously authored the book, “China Pilot, Flying for Chiang and Chennault.” He died in 2018 at the age of 100. Because of this connection, Ben followed the exploits of James McGovern very avidly, and as a teen, Leigh heard all the stories. (Ben Coleman was also a friend of General Claire Chennault, who founded the WWII Flying Tigers and, postwar, CAT, among his many ventures).

### ***Visit to the Crash Site***

Up until recently, no Americans except DPAA had located the actual crash site of Earthquake’s Flying Boxcar, and so

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## Earthquake *continued from page 9*

far as we know, the first Americans besides the DPAA team visit were Paul Carter with Mr. Chris Corbett of LaoAdventure Tours, who guides intrepid adventurers on motorcycle journeys in remote areas of Laos. After Paul and Chris made this trip, Paul prepared an excellent U-Tube video about the adventure: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIuhSuNce3U&t=971>. The following is a summary of that adventure.

The nearly 800-mile round trip started from Luang Prabang, the pre-1975 capital of Laos. The trip was planned on dirt-bike motorcycles that are well adapted to travel on the very bad roads of the remote provinces, but exceptionally bad weather



Below, the trip was both challenging and beautiful, as all who have toured in the mountains of Laos will attest.

and terrible roads forced a switch to a four-wheel vehicle. Their route went east to Pakxaeng, through Hiam (Hot Springs), then north to Xon and east to a visit to the mountain we call LS-85. From there they went to Sam Neua and then north and on to the crash site on Route 6A. The known crash site is between the settlements of Muang Van and Ban Loup, nearly on a riverbank.

## Earthquake *continues next page*



Chris Corbett, left, of LaoAdventure Tours, and Paul Carter prepare for the rugged 800 mile round-trip to locate the 1954 crash site of Earthquake McGoon, with a stop at LS-85, in Northeast Laos. Map at left shows their route from Luang Prabang.



Paul Carter film

It appears that this team stood on the very spot where the C-119 struggled to its final impact.

When he saw imagery from 1961, JTF-FA researcher Bill Forsythe saw what appeared to be three graves at the actual crash site. But there was a later burial site of crew remains somewhat apart from the crash. The reason for the reinterment is given in an opinion by Paul Carter, as a long-time student of Southeast Asian cultures. Paul notes that the people here are very superstitious. A woman they met in this area said that as a young girl she gave this site a wide berth because she believed it was haunted by the spirits of the men who died there. The site lay virtually untouched and avoided until the bodies of the crew were moved up away from the river onto private land, where they were located by DPAA. Paul also interviewed a fisherman

who actually witnessed the crash on that 6<sup>th</sup> day of May 1954.

### Videos, Simulations, and Views

Dr. Carter used video simulation to depict the flight of Earthquake McGoon from Dienbienphu to the crash site, over the rugged jungled mountains there. He also made two short videos showing the difference between airdrops at 8000 feet and at the low altitudes from which the CAT pilots were making those last desperate drops in the vain effort to enable the French defenders able to hold out against Giap's overwhelming army. These interesting views are included in the U-tube video cited earlier. We are grateful to Paul Carter for his U-Tube account of Earthquake's life and demise as well as his historic quest to the crash site.



Above, the red mark indicates where the C-119 finally crashed, up on the bank of the Nam Ma river, approaching from lower right over the ridges.

Above and right, the travel presented many challenges, particularly when crossing water ways and on rough and often muddy roads.



Above, crash site and ultimate burial site were well separated. Dr. Carter speculates this was owing to the superstitious nature of the inhabitants of this area, who feared the presence of spirits in the area of the busy road and river where Earthquake crashed. The bodies had been reinterred. At left Chris Corbett and Paul Carter, holding the magazine, on the exact spot where the CAT C-119 came to rest after clipping a wing and cartwheeling, as witnessed from the following C-119 flown by fellow pilot Steve Kusak. As crashing became unavoidable, James "Earthquake McGoon" McGovern uttered, "Looks like this is it, son."

## TLCB Rice Helped Flood-Battered Ban Yao

*Based on A Report From Jim Michener, in Laos*

*One of the most satisfying endeavors of the TLC Brotherhood has been to raise funds to help poor and disadvantaged children in the Thailand, Laos, Cambodia region in memory of those military and civilians engaged in the Secret War who did not come home. The project described below, the TLCB's response to disastrous floods in Laos that wiped out a village and destroyed the economic basis of two others, is an example of the TLCB's Assistance Fund at work in Southeast Asia.*

A single-engine prop plane flying in a straight line would have covered the distance between Vientiane and Vang Viang in less than 15 minutes. Overland, on August 24th [2001], it took two vehicles three hours. One carried Phetsavang Sounnalath, the Lao director of the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO). The other carried Jim Michener, TLCB's Assistance Committee representative for Laos. The former is the son of a deceased supreme commander of the Lao army. The latter flew generals in Vietnam during the war and has chalked up a decade living in Laos.

At the height of the rainy monsoon season, unusually heavy



What used to be Ban Yao, a few days after floodwaters eradicated the village, taking everything of value, including the precious food supply that was stored from the harvest. Photos furnished by Jim Michener.

rains brought disaster to several mountain villages in central Laos. Unlike anybody could remember, landslides took out a section of Route 13 North and buried others. Tumbling trees wiped out miles of wires. Flash floods obliterated the village at Ban Yao. Like useless bookends, the bridges at its entrance and exit are all that remain.

Because nothing was there, it seemed incongruous when police stopped the two vehicles at the first bridge. 500 meters later, at the second bridge, the tragedy was laid bare. Homeless villagers peered down at the foundations of houses that no longer existed. Eerily, masonry steps rose from the ground to nowhere. Phetsavang and Jim got out of their vehicles. They looked back at the first bridge. All was open ground. The full measure of the disaster then struck them.

This Lao-American cooperation was the brainstorm of US Charge d'Affaires a.i. Susan Sutton. Jim had approached

her about how TLCB might help the villages, after reading about their plight in local papers. Knowing them both, Susan suggested to Jim that Phetsavang might be the best contact for channeling TLCB assistance to villagers stricken by natural disasters. Their military backgrounds providing an automatic starting point, Jim and Phetsavang immediately hit it off. Phetsavang, before their first meeting was over, revealed that he has an American brother-in-law living in the States who served in Thailand during the Vietnam War.

Near the end of the second bridge, Jim and Vang Viang's district governor, sitting on small chairs, chatted away. Not only did the villagers lose their homes, but their rice paddies were overlaid by untold tons of mud that was up to two meters deep. Across the road, the 5,000-foot peaks of Pha Tongching scraped the sky. Looking like summertime ski slopes, brown swaths, kilometers long, the remnants of landslides, ran down mountainsides.

Pepsi and fried bananas were served. Chickens darted between feet (some bare) and the legs of benches and stools. One at a time, villagers came forward, hands pressed together before their faces, bowed slightly, and paid respect to the district governor. Most left with a fried banana. Watching from the shadows, older children stood with smaller children balanced on hips.

Half an hour later, surrounded by emerald mountains scarred by fresh brown landslides, Phetsavang and Jim stood on the other side of the road with representatives of the provincial government as TLCB's assistance (tons of rice, household goods and field implements) was acknowledged, then accepted. It was significant that Ban Yao was not even on the map before disaster struck. Leaving their slash-and-burn culture behind, these villagers—descendants of Yao, Meo and Khmu tribesmen—had descended the slopes not that long ago and taken up the wet-rice cultivation of the Lao people. The more isolated the people, the more they are cut off from customary channels of assistance, the quicker TLCB will help. For the villagers in Ban Yao, seeing was believing.

A similar ceremony conveying TLCB assistance was repeated at 5 PM in Kasi, the next district north. Luckily, houses there were not destroyed but rice paddies were buried under silt more extensively than at Ban Yao. A sort of truck stop for those hauling cargo to Luang Prabang, people tend to pass through Kasi rather than linger. But linger Phetsavang and Jim did, the district governor hosting a dinner in their honor at 7. Because of a power failure the table was lit by candles stuck in

**Flood!** *continues next page*

the tops of Nescafe ice coffee cans, As toasts were made, rice whiskey passed the lips of 14 guests. Outside, coming south from a mountainous passage, battered buses stopped. Boys ran from the restaurant with buckets of water, pitching them at overheated wheels and brakes, the steam rising higher than the nearby rooftops.

An American bearing gifts is still an American, and there was some tension around the table. The moment being so light in the dark, Jim asked the governor if he had any relatives in the US. Considering that pockets of dislike for Americans remain, it was a daring question. With a smile, the governor admitted to having next-of-kin in Colorado. His admission brought smiles of acceptance from everybody and all semblance of formality melted instantly away. Jim observed that the Secret War had become the Secret Peace. Everybody laughed, and somebody decreed, waving another bottle of rice whiskey, that all would drink a toast to the Secret Peace.

All in all, it was a very Lao day, one that proved that “brotherhood,” by any definition, is alive and well in Laos.



Jim observed that the Secret War had become the “Secret Peace” at the governor’s celebration dinner. Michener is second from left; others unidentified.

## James Michener, 1944-2024

*Note: Information for this article was drawn from a message Michener had prepared for someone, in response to questions related to his ultimately successful quest for DVA compensation for his diagnosis of PTSD. It was found on his personal computer after his death.*

**T**hailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood charter member, Jim Michener, died in March 2024, from complications following a fall in which he fractured his collarbone. His death was reported to us by Terry Bolger, a Vientiane resident and TLCB member.

Born in 1944, Jim Michener exchanged emails with the earliest group of veterans who eventually formed the core of the TLCB, probably sometime in 1998. He had been living in the People’s Democratic Republic of Laos for more years than he ever intended, having become very fond of Asian cultures and somewhat disenchanted with his own country and people.

Jim Michener’s father was a Quaker descendent of a family that had come to the New World around 1660. William Penn later founded the colony of Pennsylvania in 1682. Jim’s mother was Presbyterian, but their religion was Quaker and he grew up on a farm near Solebury, in Bucks County, which is north of Philadelphia.

### Army Helicopter Pilot and Crash Survivor

Jim Michener enlisted in the Army out of high school, in 1962, when he was about to be drafted. He was assigned to the Army Security Agency as a cryptographer/analyst, first

in the Philippines and then Okinawa. In 1965 he got orders for Phu Bai in Vietnam, but superseding orders then sent him to helicopter school and an appointment as warrant officer. From there he was assigned, in 1967, to the Central Highlands of Vietnam, where he flew troops in and out of combat areas in a Huey. Sadly, he carried many bodies, as well. Between sorties they would land on a river sand bar where kids earned some piasters flushing the blood off their cargo decks. During this time, he survived a landing crash caused by a mechanical malfunction, and on another occasion, he



Jim Michener and his UH-1 “Huey” in Vietnam. He was very proud of being assigned to carry Korean General Lew for his various trips in-country. Photos provided by Jim Michener.

listened to his best friend scream as he burned to death while pinned in the pilot seat of a crashed Huey. The fire was so intense nobody could get in to rescue him. Finally, Jim was selected to be the personal helicopter pilot for Major General Lew, Korean Army commander of the Tiger Division, flying him all over Vietnam.

### The Novelist

When Jim joined the TLC Brotherhood internet group, he referred to himself as an author, and mentioned a book that he was writing about his experiences in Vietnam. It was a novel and centered on a friend he had known in Pennsylvania who died in combat. In his story, the casket that was returned to the family was unsealed and found to contain only rocks.

The manuscript was archived at Swarthmore College in fragments that Jim was still submitting at the time of his death.

In 2022 he told his correspondents that it had reached more than two million words. When would it end? Here is a comment he made, again in 2022, “On again off again, I have been

*Michener continues on page 14*

**Michener continued**  
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semi-focused on a particular issue for many years. It has been talked about by many scholars who have discussed Vietnam, but they then change the subject to something else. The topic is even in the indexes of their nonfiction books. For one reason and one reason only, it is especially prevalent today. I won't reveal what it is until the last sentence on the last page of the last manuscript." It seems unlikely that he ever would have written the end of that manuscript, which he had declared finished on at least one occasion within the last ten years.



Jim Michener in recent years, over lunch in a Vientiane cafe. He was 80 years old when he died.

**Student, Entrepreneur, Counselor**

After his tour in Vietnam, Jim was assigned in 1968 to Fort Rucker, in Alabama, as a helicopter instrument flight instructor and promoted to 1st lieutenant. But within six months he was operated on for regional enteritis and then medically discharged from the Army a year short of his service obligation.

Out of the Army, Jim went back home to Bucks County, matriculated at the local community college, then transferred in 1971 to prestigious Swarthmore College for a BA degree. That led him to a job as a cost estimator for a large construction firm, followed by starting his own construction management company in New Jersey until the housing crisis of 1983 put him out of business. From 1983 to 1985 he studied at Princeton and Harvard, majoring in classical archeology and ancient history, respectively. While returning from an archeology "dig" in Lebanon, he suffered a freak back injury that landed him in a VA hospital for two years. During these post-Vietnam years, Michener also counseled Quaker conscientious objectors for Solebury Quaker Meeting, where, as a young boy, he had helped his grandfather prepare graves.

**Back to Asia—for Good**

Something happened to Jim Michener during that two-year recovery period. Some time while he was convalescing, he decided to go back to Asia. In his words, "Using personal funds, seeking something new in lands I knew from my overseas Army tours, I relocated to Asia." He got a job with Inlingua, a large language training company, teaching English in Tokyo, from 1987 until 1989, when he went to Bangkok with the same company. There, he said, he also did much private English tutoring in private homes, apparently making some very useful connections with influential people. Whatever happened, we know that Jim got a job with Lao Aviation, the national airline of Laos PDR, in public relations. There he created *Dok Champa*, the Lao Aviation inflight magazine. Dok champa, or frangipani, is the national flower of Laos. This publication so impressed the Singapore magazine, *Business Times*, that they hired him as a freelance business writer. He also wrote two Southeast Asia travel guides during this period.

Meanwhile a dark side of his Asia residence was in the background, as an un-named U.S. agency hired him to gather certain information, between 1994 and 1997. Jim could never reveal any specifics about this job but made comments that suggested it was in the intelligence field, and that it could have continued pretty much as long as he wished.


The airline, Lao Aviation, went bankrupt in the SEA financial crisis of 1997 and their Boeing aircraft were repossessed. *Dok Champa* was immediately discontinued, of course. From there, Michener went

off to Cambodia and started a company called Ophir, publishing a successful business publication called *Cambodia Emissary*. That venture ended abruptly with the Cambodian government coup in 1998.

Jim Michener's last two commercial ventures were not full time. A retired State Department acquaintance from Pennsylvania, who wished to encourage Michener's epic novel-in-development, began to support him financially. One venture was as a travel advisor/consultant, called Asian Trails, for which he was managing director. The other was as consultant to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Bangkok, advising American investors on doing business in Southeast Asia.

Jim considered himself a friend of the late "Mac" Thompson and of Air America pilot Les Strouse, both TLCB members and *MEM* contributors in Bangkok. For some years he lived and entertained in an old French mansion, Villa Dara, in Vientiane, until his mentor/supporter in Pennsylvania died. After that he lived in small apartments and the vacant Villa Dara sadly deteriorated; however, supported by Social Security and a VA disability pension, he had built at least one house for a Lao family, while he remained in his simple apartments.

Michener had many prominent friends in Vientiane, including the U.S. and other ambassadors. He also had a group of Lao friends. In particular, he sponsored one friend and his wife to complete an education at Boston University and then to launch a successful business career in Laos. This friend had worked on *Dok Champa*, the inflight magazine. Jim also funded a promising and industrious, but very poor, young man in Vietnam to attend a university in Dalat, and through his financial backing, to become a nuclear engineer in Danang.

Was Jim Michener related to the author James A. Michener? He thought not, but "The Atlantic" once carried an article that attempted to show that he was James A's illegitimate son. It was curious, indeed, that author James A. Michener once applied for membership in the Solebury Quaker Meeting, in Jim's home town. (Jim Michener claimed that James A. was turned down on the grounds that he wanted to be a Quaker for self-promotional purposes only.) Furthermore, Michener, who was born in 1944, said that his father, who returned from WWII in 1948, was "In Burma the whole time." 

## George Getchell, Col USAF Ret.

by MEM staff

The *Mekong Express Mail* learned that member George Getchell, met by many at our reunions, died at the end of November 2023 after a bout with cancer. George joined the TLC Brotherhood in September of 2000. He lived with his wife, Veronica, near Beavertown by Lake Anna in Central Virginia. A MEM staff member interviewed George about his career and about his experiences over the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and you can read the article on Page 1 of the March 2008 issue of *Mekong Express Mail*.

A fighter pilot, George started his Vietnam FAC tour down in IV Corps, at Ca Mau in early December of 1965. His Thailand experience began when he was among the first 20 forward air controllers in the 23rd TASS at Nakhon Phanom. In early April 1966, he was told to take his O-1F "...and everything you own and fly to Danang as soon as you can." At Danang they were very secretive, and it turned out there were 22 FACs that had been brought in from all over South Vietnam, all with four to six months' experience. Said George, "We all ended up in a room and none of us knew each other at that time. In walks this guy with a [non-standard] hat on. He was quite a character, but I cannot remember his name. He rolled this map out and said, 'OK, you guys, you're going to NKP, in Thailand.'

"When we all landed at NKP, we got out and started wondering out loud what we were to do next. But Lt Col Louis Johnston showed up and showed us where the officers' club was first, which was good, and then the hooches. Then before they released us, he got us all together and said, 'Now look, this is all very hush-hush. No cameras. Don't talk about what you see or do. Don't talk about that building on the hill there.' (Referring to Invert, the NKP radar transmitter.) We were all



George at home in 2008, admiring one of his favorites, a North American F-86 fighter. An F-51 hangs overhead. Photo by Bill Tilton

thinking, 'Wow, this is serious.' We looked around and there was a T-28 with no markings, a couple of helicopters parked there, and a bunch of civilians walking around. Johnston told us, 'You'll get a briefing as we go along.' He added, 'It's a very fluid situation here.'"

From Southeast Asia, George went to the F-5 squadron at Williams AFB, Nevada. He said, "It was one fine airplane! It had been sold to 17 or 18—now 30—countries. They had the T-38s at Willie then and it was similar so that is where they put the F-5, but we were in TAC. What we did was train the people from different countries that were buying the F-5s. Then we would go over and help them set up their programs."

He was there for nearly four years and then went to Air Command and Staff College at Maxwell AFB, Alabama. From there he was assigned to Morocco for two years, as the F-5 team chief for the Moroccan Air Force. Said George, "It was great, the best-kept secret in the Air Force." From there he was

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## Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The eleven members listed below joined between the June 2024 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
02071	USMC	Richard	Girardin	West Milford	NJ
02072	USN	Terry	Dye	Caliente	NV
02073	USAF	Charles	Rushforth	Kaneohe	HI
02074	USAF	William	Johnson	Port St. Joe	FL
02075	Other	Barbara	Branyan	Cammack Village	AR
02076	USAF	Frank	Thompson	Rickman	TN
02077	USAF	Terry	Reed	Blue Springs	MO
02078	USA	Ken	Green	Syracuse	UT
02079	USAF	Paul	Wells	Sumter	SC
02080	USAF	Barry	Ratcliffe	Ft Walton Beach	FL
02081	USAF	Lucky	Hughes	Ormond Beach	FL

## Getchell is continued from page 15

assigned to the 12th Air Force and JCS exercises, and then to Luke AFB in the F-5 and the F-15. They were using the F-5 as the aggressor against the F-15s and the F-16s to try and give them MiG experience in combat training.

From there George went to Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe (SHAPE) in Belgium and the American Embassy in Germany as the U.S. Air Forces in Europe (USAFE)

liaison officer. In between that he was base commander at Hahn Air Base, on full flying status. Hahn was where he flew the F-16 and later at Shaw AFB, South Carolina.

In June of 1992 Saddam Hussein's Iraq invaded Kuwait and the U.S. launched Operation Desert Storm. George Getchell was assigned to Air Force headquarters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, his last assignment before he retired as a full colonel. He had a remarkable career and enjoyed an ideal retirement on his small Virginia horse farm, a TLCB member to the end. 

## Professor Satawat Sri-in

by MEM staff

**O**n July 19th, President Sweet received a note from the widow of John Middlewood, in Nakhon Phanom Province, that Prof. Satawat Sri-in had died that day of upper respiratory congestion, at the age of 67.

Readers may recall that when Dr. Middlewood died we were covering the tuition expense for a number of worthy but also needy students in Nakhon Phanom by having John pay the tuition with donated Brotherhood funds. Rather than terminate this Student Assistance Program, the Assistance Committee desired to “sunset” the program by continuing with the students already enrolled. To do this we had to have a reliable agent who was also fluent in English, which Mrs. Middlewood (Maeo) is not. Fortunately, John Sweet had met Professor Satawat in the Middlewood's church and found him, as a long-time friend of John Middlewood, to be both reliable and fully fluent in English. He was a professor at Nakhon Phanom University, where he actually taught English. Once Satawat agreed to be our “trusted agent” there, Les Thompson, chairman of the Assistance Committee, agreed to continue the Student Assistance Program until the last student

Satawat provided this photo to the *MEM*. It was taken on the shore of the Mekong River at Nakhon Phanom City.



TLCB president John Sweet furnished this recent photo of himself, center, with Satawat, left, and Nakhon Phanom radio personality Phomphan Kulapa.

left or graduated.

Ever loyal to the Brotherhood and to the role he played in Thailand, Satawat faithfully used our debit card to pay the monthly tuition, with receipts for all expenditures without a single error. He also sent photos and notes from the grateful students, as well as notices of graduation or, in a few cases, students being dropped from the program for not meeting our high standards.

At the time of his death Prof Satawat was Deputy Director at Nakhon Phanom University, bringing experience from previous roles at Nakhon Phanom University Language Institute and Royal Thai Government. Satawat Sri-In earned the Master of Science in Environmental Science from Mahidol University in 1986. With a robust skill set that included Government, Public Policy, Economic Development, National Security and more, Satawat Sri-In contributed valuable insights to the industry. His untimely death is a loss to the TLC Brotherhood and to the Nation of Thailand. 