

# MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



*The newsletter of the Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood, Inc. Volume 26, issue 4*

[WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.com](http://WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.com)

## Assistance now in Thailand, Laos—and Cambodia

by Paul Carter

Young Nita was not looking forward to school that morning. Morning math problems would take second fiddle to her first fetching water for the school toilets, an arduous, muddy climb from the overflowing stream up a steep bank carrying the water, and then the long trudge to the school. Ngod Lieng Primary School, in Xiang Khouang Laos, had been built, for some odd reason, without much consideration for water, and the reasons as to “why” were long forgotten. “Don’t be so sullen,” the school master said. “In two months, the dry season will come, and the stream will be dry, and then you will wish you had water to carry.”

But these students’ fortunes changed because of *your* help. Your charitable donations resulted in having two water tanks, material, and lines purchased and installed to provide a continual year-round supply of water for the children, enabling them and their teachers to focus on learning. (We are still in the rainy season at this writing, making all construction slow). Such are the privations of many school children, particularly in



Girls at Ngod Lieng Primary School, in Laos, collecting water for the old toilet system. In the dry season, the creek dries up. Photos provided by the author.

Laos. But because of the generous hearts and cheerful giving of the TLCB members, lives changed for the better this year for many school children across three countries.

Vaughn Smith and I, your TLCB “Forward Element” in Thailand, and our TLCB Assistance Committee and Leadership hope that you fully grasp the enormous enhancements you have provided to children’s lives. As you celebrate the holidays with your families and friends, please have a toast and give a pat on the back to each other for the differences you have made.

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## From the Editor—Board of Directors Changes

As alert readers will know, we held the TLC Brotherhood, Inc., annual meeting at Nashville last month, on the last day of the 2025 reunion. The board election is always the first item of business. This election brought three new faces to our board, and reelected one member.

**Barry Rowland** follows Ray Boas as vice president. Barry is member #01821, having joined in October of 2017. He and wife, Donna, live on Lake Norman, just north of Charlotte, North Carolina. In 1970 to 1973 he served at Nakhon Phanom, Takhli, and Danang in weapons maintenance (46250). Barry is well known among SEA veterans as the organizer of the Nakhon Phanom RTAFB reunions, which makes him well suited as VP, since that position includes being national reunion chairman of the TLCB.



**Bob Vettel, Secretary**

**Bob Vettel** follows Tom Ungleich as secretary, first as an appointee and now elected. He and wife, Ginny, live in Warner Robins, Georgia, near the Air Force Base and depot by that name, near Macon. Bob, #01333, joined the TLCB in July of 2010. In Thailand in 1972 and 1973 Bob was a Ground Radio tech at Korat, Udorn, Nakhon Phanom, and Ubon. Like most of us, Bob and Ginny are now retired, but it has become well known that he will be back up in North Dakota for at least two weeks every October, driving a 20-ton truck and hauling sugar beets during the harvest of the family plantings of about a thousand acres of those sweet roots.

A new member of the board elected this year is **Les Thompson**, who served for many years as chairman of the Assistance Committee, where he was succeeded by **Paul Carter**, who lives in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Reelected to the board this year was Director **Ken Schmidt**, who now begins his second term on the board. **Welcome to all!**



**Barry Rowland,  
Vice President**

Bill Tilton, Editor

## **Changed your address? ...eMail?**

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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### **Board of Directors and Committee Chairmen 2025-2026, showing year of term end**

President: John Sweet, 2026 (currently second term)  
Vice President: Barry Rowland, (Reunion Committee) 2027 (first term)  
Secretary: Bob Vettel, 2027 (currently first term)  
Treasurer: Bill Tilton, 2026 (currently second term)  
Chaplain: Dan Pierce (Memorial Committee) (term unlimited)  
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Al Dozal, 2026 (currently second term)  
Ken Schmidt, 2027 (currently second term)  
Les Thompson, 2027 (currently first term)  
Dave Weeks, 2026 (currently first term)  
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Communications Committee: Ray Boas  
Exchange Shopkeeper: Thelma Tilton  
History Committee: John Lorenzen  
Membership Committee: John Duffin & John Bollwerk  
Public Relations Committee: Vacant

### ***The Mekong Express Mail***

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By check—make checks payable to “TLC Brotherhood, Inc.” **write member number and purpose on the check**, and mail to:

TLC Brotherhood  
P.O. Box 60  
Aspers, PA 17304

**DUES: \$30**

**Reunion 2026: San Antonio**

## Assistance *continued from page 1*



The Ngod Lieng girls carried the collected water to the toilet for the day's flushing. This was their daily routine. In the dry season? Well; don't ask!



For just \$2155 of your donated funds, a proper water system was bought and installed at last.

While continuing to fund rural school improvements in Laos, your generous contributions funded a new educational project in Cambodia this year, profiled in the last two MEMs, so that Cambodian children could learn about their history and heritage in a curriculum not taught at school. It also provided them with an exciting adventure, their first school trip! Over a thousand children have benefited from your charitable giving



Above, Cambodian students on their first field trip, funded by the TLCB. Below, schoolchildren pose for their portrait at Jayavarman, library, where they learn about their heritage--the proud history and unique culture of the Cambodian people.



One of the groups in a class using the library's diorama to help students visualize elements of their ancient country's culture. The horrible disruptions in Cambodia's recent past make such classes extra important in healing the damage to their society.



We are excited about a new project in Thailand, the Care Corner Orphanage Foundation near Chiang Mai. The children's home is populated by hill tribe orphans and was started by two western missionaries from Singapore in 1995. The premises houses 43 children. Twenty kids apply each year, but the facility can only accept 3-4. The facility has chickens, fishponds, and they grow vegetables and cultivate mushrooms, not enough to meet their needs however. The children attend an adjacent Thai public school. We found this orphanage through my wife Supa who volunteers there teaching Thai language to

## Assistance *continues on page 4*

### **Assistance continued from page 3**

the hill tribe children. Obviously, the children speak Thai, but several lag behind their Thai peers mainly due to a turbulent childhood before coming to the orphanage. Your contributions have provided shoes, food, and dormitory construction for these children.



The new dormitory, already under construction. This is not a TLCB project, but will be a great help to the growing orphanage.



Committee Chairman Paul Carter, and kids at the orphanage, above. Below, a teacher with a group of younger children holding class..



Above, Supa Carter gives out very popular donuts to the children of the Care Corner Orphanage, near Chiang Mai, Thailand.



The new freezer, above, and chilled food "pantry," below, have made a significant improvement in the safety and cost of providing proper nutrition to the orphanage children. These were provided to the orphanage before our Assistance Committee got involved with Care Corner Orphanage, and the TLCB has helped stock both.



**Assistance continues next page.**

**The Mekong Express Mail**



Paul and Supa are to the right of center in this photo with the children of Care Corner Orphanage.

Currently there are 43 children altogether, and about 20 apply each year, though they can only add 3 or 4.



Above, this Care Corner photo speaks for itself.



Above, the TLC Brotherhood provided the Care Corner kids this footwear. For some things in Thailand, even today, a dollar goes a long way.



### **Assistance Committee considerations.**

The school conditions in some of the most rural areas, such as Nong Nam Laos, above right, are in such a dilapidated condition that it is difficult for children to concentrate on learning when the heavy May rains come or the cold January winds blow. But thanks to your help, children and their teachers are being provided better conditions in which to learn.

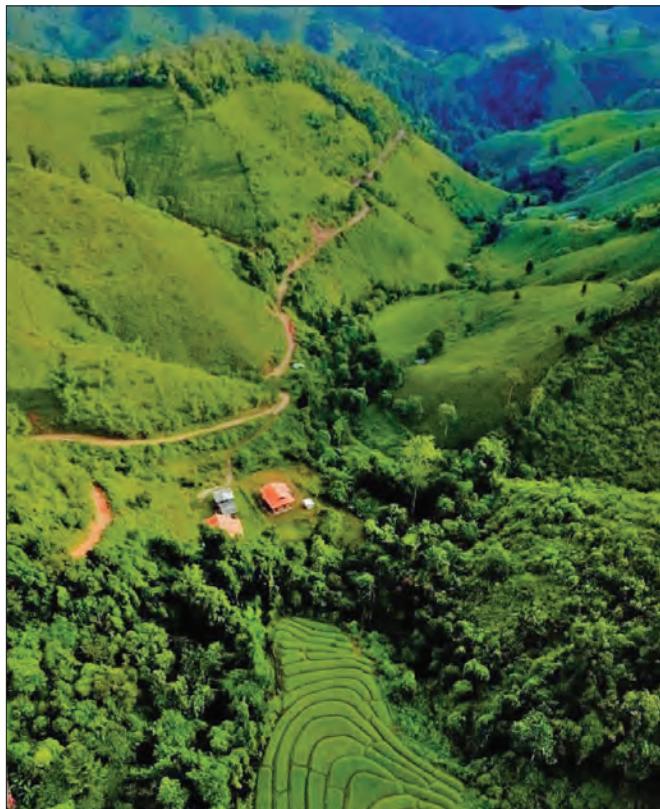
These and twelve other projects that the TLCB funded this year reflect the renewed and expanded efforts of the Assistance Committee now that COVID is well behind us. We on the

Assistance Committee are making a small pivot from our traditional Laos-heavy projects by trying to find additional worthy assistance projects “closer to home,” Thailand, for several reasons. First, if you look at the TLCB budget allocation versus what we have been spending, it’s clear that we need to be doing more. As our treasurer said in a report to key leaders recently, “our surplus far exceeds our operating needs.” Looking at what we spent last year and this year on assistance, compared to our bank account balance, we must improve in

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## Assistance *continued from page 5*

The natural beauty of remote Thai areas is stunning. Is it any wonder that the mountain people of Southeast Asia still dwell in their traditional regions?



finding worthy efforts to include projects that are beyond the \$2000-\$3000 range. Laos and Cambodia are very poor countries, so most individual projects can only accommodate a few thousand dollars.

Secondly, we must accept the fact that many of us, Vaughn and I for sure, are getting 'long in the tooth' and there are just the two of us here. We don't know how much longer we will be able to carry on the TLCB work, and it is no secret that volunteers are hard to find for any organization. Laos and Cambodia are still worthy of our funding. Vaughn and I have

Below, Long Neck Karen village school, and some of the schoolchildren we saw there. Their requests are modest, but their needs are significant.



several proposals from Laos in their final stages before we submit them to the committee. We will continue our support there; however, it's getting harder to travel there because Laos road conditions are getting worse, and at this writing all the border points between Thailand to Cambodia are closed or restricted. Air travel, which has albeit decreased, remains open. As Vaughn and I get older, traveling within Thailand is easier.

Thirdly, within Thailand there are projects worthy of our effort. Supa and I have recently traveled to some very distant, remote Thai locations near Myanmar, where more of the schools don't have adequate funding. One is a Hmong village on top of a mountain, and another is a Kayan village; you have heard of them as the Long Neck Karen. This village has no electricity and is in need of basic school supplies and clothing. Items in Thailand are often more expensive than in Laos and Cambodia, of course, which for our budget considerations, is probably a good thing.

You can rest assured that Vaughn and I and the other assistance committee members will ensure the money is spent wisely and judiciously. We have taken months in some cases going back and forth with sponsors of potential projects to make sure they meet our requirements for funding.



Above, entering the Long Neck village, which seems hacked into a hillside. Below, Supa with some of the children in the village. Note the water main along the road. What electricity there is, comes from some solar panels.



# Why T. F. A. and what's an Igloo White?

By John Schillo

**W**hen I first joined the TLCB in 2001, John Sweet asked me to write an article on TFA's computers. I told him it would be a very boring article and only put people to sleep. Over the years he has insisted, and each time I said, "I'll think about it." Then 3 weeks ago I had to have hip surgery and John called to see how I was doing, and before the anesthesia wore off, he got me to agree to write something.

I have read many articles about the electronic battlefield and the sensors; how they worked or didn't work. McNamara's fence cost too much! Blah, blah, blah, blah! This is none of that. These are the nuts and bolts of how you make it go.

To get to the "why," you have to go back to the Johnson administration and his Secretary of Defense, Robert Strange McNamara. (yes, that's his middle name, look it up). McNamara envisioned an Electronic Battlefield where the commanders would be able to make up-to-the-second decisions using state-of-the-art computers and sensors. Looking at where we are today with unmanned autonomous drones, sensors, and remotely piloted vehicles, you could say he was a visionary. (This would be the same visionary who, as V.P. of Ford, changed the design of the Thunderbird and installed the backseat in 1958.)

## Task Force Alpha

Electronic Battlefields have to start someplace. That someplace turned out to be Task Force Alpha, and IBM ended up as the prime contractor. Initial concept was simple, use old Navy sensors to monitor truck traffic on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. OK, so how do you do that? How do you get the data from the sensor and how do you interpret it? Easy! You get IBM to write an app for that. A really, really big app.

Your app is going to need a name. Something indicative of what it does. Got it! *Igloo White!* When somebody says Laos, the first thing that comes to mind is heavy snowstorms and igloos.

## The Sensors

Now we have the concept, we have the equipment, and we have the software. Let's see how it all works together.



Assortment of sensors on display at the U.S. Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio.

There are basically two types of sensors, seismic and acoustic. The seismic will activate from the vibrations of the truck going by. With the acoustic you can actually listen for the trucks or eavesdrop on their conversation. Circling overhead is an EC-121 Batcat or some other electronic warfare (EW) aircraft whose job it is to send the signals back to my computer at Task Force Alpha.

So how do you turn a big truck into a pile of scrap metal? It's all in how and where you place the sensors. The sensors are dropped or placed along side a road in what we called strings. Usually, 3 or 4 sensors are evenly placed forming the string.

For my example I will use American roads. I am sure the FACS and other pilots who flew the mission know the original names, but we were only interested in string numbers. Let's say you are driving a Zil 131 west out of Atlanta on Interstate 20. You are picked up by the first sensor in the string; we know you are there. When you activate the second one, we are computing how fast you are going, and by the time you pass all sensors, we know your exact speed and direction. What you don't know is that somewhere in front of you is a triangle on a map called a delta point. The map and the data that is displayed on the GM250 and 2260s used by the targeting analysts in the plot room at TFA. They will let "Crown" know that there will be a target passing that delta point in 15 minutes. If they have an aircraft in the area, you are going to have a bad day.

You, the enemy, suspect an ambush so you plan on heading south on 141 as soon as you enter Alabama. Sorry, but we have strings north and south of that interchange as well as on I-20 west of the interchange. We will know if you turned off I-20 and went north or south or stayed on I-20. Either way, we gotcha!

## Marine Support

I know most of the TLCB is composed of A.F. Wing Nuts but we do have a few Devil Dogs (Marines). I was told by IBM that during the Battle of Khe Sanh the Air Force dropped sensors around the battle area as sort of a beta test and to see if they could predict troop movements. I'd like to think it helped.

The two paragraphs below, from the Internet, describe Igloo White and TFA's ISC. They seem to be short on the specificity that I provided.

**Igloo White continues on page 8**



Mac Thompson chatted with this former Pathet Lao soldier one morning near Routes 8 and 12 in Laos, on an Assistance trip in 2008. This Igloo White sensor was on display where Mac had breakfast. Mac said to the soldier, "You might have shot at me," to which the soldier replied, "Maybe so!" Then they both had a great laugh. Photo by Bill Tilton.

## Igloo White continues from page 7

**IGLOO WHITE**—Using the cover of darkness, dense jungle, and bad weather, North Vietnamese trucks carried critical supplies down the Ho Chi Minh Trail nearly undetected. Since large numbers of American ground troops were not permitted into neutral Laos to stop the trucks, the U.S. Air Force deployed a system of electronic equipment to thwart the enemy's cover and alert U.S. commanders. This highly classified electronic system was known as Igloo White.

**ISC**—Infiltration Surveillance Center - Task Force Alpha, a 200,000-square-foot facility at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base, was part of the cutting-edge infiltration surveillance system. Its mission: to inhibit North Vietnam movement into South Vietnam via the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which ran through parts of Laos. A modern air-conditioned building, it was protected by large revetments of Armco corrugated steel filled with dirt.

### TFA and me

How a computer guy ended up in a war zone! I have looked over various articles about TFA and the computer system on the internet. It became rather obvious that none (yes NONE) of these people were ever actually inside of the computer room at TFA. If you were in the computer room, especially at night, Genaro Martinez and I would have noticed you because there were never more than 2 USAF 7 level S/Sgt or above in the computer room during night operations. The exception to this was a cadre of IBM software and hardware engineers to support the operation. The IBM hardware guys, called field engineers or FEs, had a maintenance office off the side of the computer room. One of the FEs was in there at night diligently waiting for a problem to occur and to ensure that none of the "magic smoke" leaked out of any of the equipment. The only time they were on the floor was for a real problem that we couldn't clear, but they were more likely to be heading on a potty break and then to the snack bar.

One of my favorite tales of TFA is that it was underground. They obviously got us confused with the French Underground in WW2. I live on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. We have one thing in common with Thailand. If you dig a hole more than 2 feet deep, you have a swimming pool. You won't find a house with a basement in Biloxi, and if TFA had one, I never saw the door or found the steps. I can't tell you exactly how it was built but based on what I saw and was told, this seems to be a logical guess.

I am sure you have all seen the advertisements on TV for General Steel Buildings. They pour a concrete slab and then assemble a gigantic lawn shed. Do that about four or five times with various size sheds, connect them together and surround the entire thing with aircraft revetments from the flight line. Now, fill these revetments with concrete, being sure to leave room for a bunch of antenna masts with all manner of directional antenna pointed toward Laos. Find a place to plant a big-ass generator in case the one on base fails — and you have an Infiltration

Surveillance Center (ISC).

## How do you get to NKP?

So now that you see what a choice assignment this was, how does one get selected? A guy at one of the Air Commando conferences asked me that and I told him that I had no idea. "Come on" he said, "you must have pissed somebody off. That's how we all got here." Well, there was this M/Sgt at Sewart AFB, outside of Nashville, that I could not get along with. One day I got notified to go to CBPO. I had orders to Seymour Johnson AFB, but they were canceled by HQ USAF. I was selected for a special assignment overseas, but I needed to extend or re-enlist to take it.



The Task Force Alpha compound. For those familiar with NKP at this time, this view will tell you where TFA was situated.

My questions, their answers: "Where is it?" — classified. "What will I be doing?" — classified. "Can you at least tell me when I will transfer?" — classified. So, I have to extend or re-enlist to find out what it is and then what happens if I turn it down? You will go back on the transfer list, but your first choice is gone. "Give me the damn papers." Ok, so now I know it's NKP, wherever that is, and they want an experienced IBM operator. "So that's it." No. You have to go to the security police and update your security clearance and undergo advanced weapons training on the M203 and M79 grenade launcher. What? I have never had to ask somebody in the computer room, "Where do we keep the grenade launcher?"

Ok, that sounds a bit over the top, I thought so, too, but that is the way it went down. Then I joined the TLCB and found out about Lima Site 85. I found a report that said one of the failures at Phou Pha Thi was that the technicians weren't supposed to be armed and that they had little or no combat training or experience. Enter this IBM-experienced 7 level S/Sgt who happened to be prior Army and qualified expert with the M-14 and Marksman with the M-16. (I dispute that to this day. They said I only hit 99 out of 100.) He also served in a maintenance unit next to 1st Cav on the DMZ in Korea where we alternated between practice and real alerts. One Saturday morning a month we would dress in our combat uniforms, draw

**Igloo White** continues on next page

our weapons, and walk up to the DMZ like a column of ducks on each side of the road and then turn around and march back. I guess they just wanted to show the North Koreans that we were still there. That doesn't make me Audie Murphy, but I think it moved me up in the line for an NKP assignment.

## Off I went to NKP

It was just me and a few guys with M-16s reading a manual on perimeter defense. It was a good flight as far as first-class reservations on a C-130 go. Then suddenly, what happened, did we crash? Nobody told me about PSP. The load master opened the ramp and told us to start unstrapping the pallets. Another thing they failed to mention during computer school. Also, why is there a man driving an M-151 jeep behind us with another guy holding a machine gun, with real bullets, on a stick?

## OK — I'm here?

Now I am on my own. No one traveling with me and nobody on the flight line holding a sign with "S/Sgt Schillo" on it. I get directions to CBPO, walk in and announce, "I'm here." Reply: Who are you and why are you here? "I have orders, here they are." Reply: I am sorry, but we don't have you listed. They call a M/Sgt over who looked at my orders and said, "You don't belong here. Your orders say Alpha Task Force but probably should say Task Force Alpha. They have their own CBPO. You need to go to them."

Another base map, and off I go. I walk into the TFA building and announce, "I'm here." S/Sgt Schillo we have been expecting you. Finally. Meanwhile, my brain is thinking to itself, "Don't you have a jeep? I had my own jeep in Korea, and I was only an SP4. I've been dragging this duffle bag around NKP for 3 hours in July!"

They sign me in to the unit, give me a hootch number, a line badge, a funny-looking hat, and a pair of white tennis shoes. Ok, I'll play. I said, "What's with the white shoes?" Reply: You have to wear them inside the ISC. "And the hat?" Reply: That's the Air Commando hat. You wear that when in uniform on base. "But I am not an Air Commando!" Reply: You are now! "When did that happen? I apparently wasn't paying attention." Reply: When you accepted the assignment. Tomorrow you will draw your uniforms and jungle boots. You need to have the lugs cut off one pair of boots; the other pair stays as issued. You wear the pair without lugs to the ISC and then change into the tennis shoes.

## Hi Ho Hi Ho, It's off to work we go!

The big day is here. First, I have to stop at a gate so the security police can check my ID and line badge. So far so good. I walk about 50 feet and I'm in the ISC. Not so fast, there is another Security Police checkpoint. Once you pass that, you go to a locker room and take off your hat and boots. This is where the white tennis shoes come in. Now here you are dressed in O.D. jungle fatigues with subdued stripes and name tags and wearing white tennis shoes. Proceed down a long hallway to the end. Turn left and open a pair of double doors and there it is! The magnificent machine everybody wants to know about. A supercomputer to beat all supercomputers. Wait a minute, that looks like an off-the-shelf IBM 360/65 that anybody with 250,000 1970 dollars could buy or rent for about

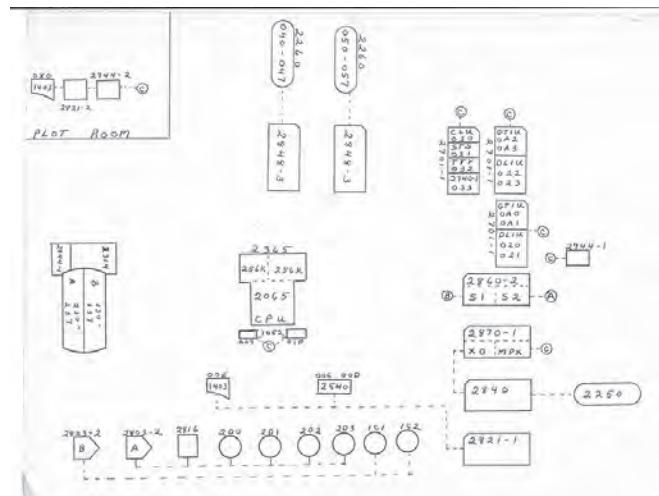
\$3,000 a month. There it is, complete with two large cabinets holding 256k each for a total of 512K of memory. (That is .5 megabytes; remember how exciting it was when the 3.5-inch floppy came out and held 1.4 megabytes?) Not very impressive by today's standards but remember, this is the computer NASA used to put men on the moon!

In fact, some of the software we ran came from NASA. Nobody today thinks about what happens when you hit print on your computer. It just prints. But they didn't just print in 1970. The computer stopped processing while the printer printed each individual letter. Enter the Houston Automatic Spooling Program, HASP, that we got from NASA. HASP grabbed the report, sent it to the disk drive and then sent it to the printer from the disk. The processor continued to work uninterrupted.

The computer we used was not classified. The software and its function, whether it came from NASA or the IBM software developers, is what was, and a lot of it probably is — classified. IBM also had an employee who did nothing but train us Air Force guys. And train us he did. The training Bob gave us could not be duplicated at any college in the world. I earned a nice living for 45 years thanks to Bob, IBM, and their training.

## The Layout

I made this chart during my training. In the center was the IBM 360. In front of that, a high-speed line printer on the left



## Igloo White continues from page 9

up the light pen, it's 2260.

In the corner of my layout, you see a box for the plot room. The fourth control unit on the right controlled the printer in the plot room and some other peripheral devices.

Now what you have all been waiting for — the three smaller



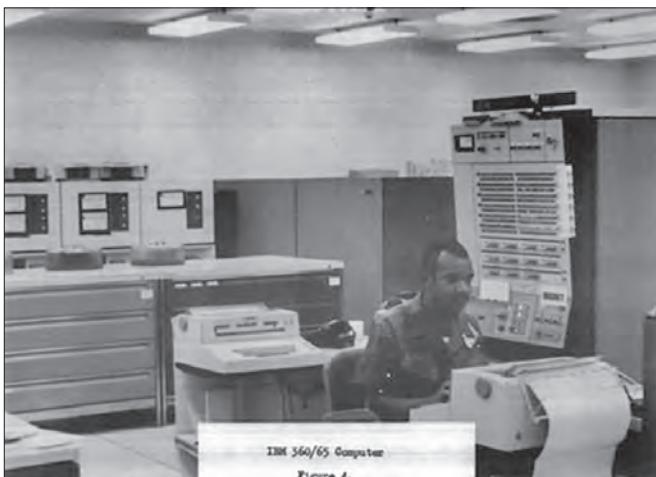
The plot room.

boxes in the back. They say things like DLIU and GTIU. Data Link Interface Units and Ground Terminal Interface Units. These put the Igloo in Igloo White. This is where the sensor data from the orbiting aircraft comes in. All the chirps, squeaks, clicks, hums, and bangs you hear on a radio come in here, are fed to the magic box in the center, and show up on a screen in the plot room. Sometimes the clicks and bangs turn out to be water buffalo and not trucks. Kobe steaks anyone?

### ***It's All Just a Pile of Junk!***

None of it works. It can't do a damn thing. There's no app for blowing up trucks in Laos. Enter the IBM Software Engineer, aka *da guy what programs da computer*.

Another thing we had before the civilian market did, was the operating system, like Windows 11, or my preference, Linux. TFA's 360s operating system was called OS/MVT, which stood



The computer we used was not classified. The software and its function, whether it came from NASA or the IBM software developers, is what was, and a lot of it probably is — classified. The operator's console is the tall unit at the right. The IBM 360 was a powerful machine in 1968, but of course today it would take a room full of them to approach the power of your iPhone.

for Multiple Variable Tasks. I could run 15 jobs at a time if I could manage the core memory allocation and not create a hole that limited throughput. (Yeah, it wasn't so simple to be a computer operator back then.) Remember, I said we had 512k? The OS took up about 200k. When we were running the sensor program, it used what was left. But, when we were running the reports in the morning, the operator controlled the memory to each job. You knew the size of each program, and you had to fit as many as was possible in the 300k. If a 40k program ended and you had a 50k program to run next, you screwed up. Not only were you 10k short and you had to wait for another program to end, BUT it had to be the program that was running next to the 40k program that ended. The memory the program used had to be contiguous. Totally confused yet? Don't worry about it because around 1974, along came an operating system called VS for Virtual Storage. It now controlled memory and disk allocations.

The IBM guys programmed in assembler language. You may have heard of programming languages back then such as COBOL or FORTRAN. Easier to write in but they are memory hogs. We didn't have a lot of memory to play with, and Assembler is a lot cleaner and more efficient — but hard as hell to write in.

We are not going into the wonderful world of assembler language, but it gave me the opportunity to double dip while I was there. The programmers would write the program out on what was called a coding sheet. They hired me, on my off time, to work in their office inside the ISC and keypunch the programs, then compile and test them during their maintenance time on the system. Eventually, they let me write some of the smaller subroutines, usually something like setting up a logic loop to verify the data didn't change before moving on to the important stuff. You could say that I programmed rings around IBM. Carroll Lazuire was an IBM manager at TFA and a late TLCB member. He told me once that he didn't believe I did all that work for what they paid me. I said, "Instead of what, drinking beer all day at the NCO Club or going downtown?" No, I left TFA with an unwritten master's degree in computer science.

### ***The Sun Comes Up; System Goes Down***

Around 0700 – 0800, the plot room would call and tell us it was OK to secure the system. We could now end the sensor operations. To do this, we had to go to the main console and type in a secret word "shutdown" and press enter. We would then change out some of the disk packs in the drives and reboot the system. Reboot is not an IBM term. To be accurate, we would initiate an Initial Program Load IPL. Now the IBM 360 was what it was supposed to be, a computer. For about four hours we ran various after-action reports based on data that was stored on a log tape during the previous operation. These reports were prepared, boxed, and sent up to god and the assistant gods wherever they lived. Didn't have a need to know and didn't really care. That was above my pay grade.

What I did care about was all the carbon paper, remember that? and the other documentation that had to be taken out to

***Igloo White continues on next page***

The Mekong Express Mail



Ground surveillance Monitor (GSM) and IBM 2250 Display/Keyboard Console.

the burn area for classified waste. We couldn't wear our white tennis shoes outside the building, so we had to change back to boots. While we were enjoying a nice, sunny, 100-degree afternoon burning classified waste, the IBM FEs were performing the daily PM check on the system. When they finished, we shut the system down, changed the disk drives back, put up a fresh log tape, and IPL the system. Time to make the donuts again.

Inside the double doors, on the wall on the right, slightly above your head, so it was hard to reach naturally, there was a square, red pull switch with a safety wire. Under the switch was a notice from IBM "Pulling this switch voids the IBM maintenance agreement. **BOOM!**

## Back In "The World"

I left TFA and came back to the states knowing that I was the best damn computer tech in the world. And apparently, I was not too far off because 3 months later I was hired by the Pennsylvania State Police as a shift manager on a brand-new state-of-the-art computer system they were building in Hershey, PA. To be hired as a manager, I had to pass six state exams starting at operator 1 all the way up to supervisor 3. I got to the testing center at 8AM and by 1PM I had passed all six exams, and ended up first on the employment list, and with my 5-point veterans' preference, I scored 105 out of a possible 100 points. (Thanks again, Bob)

A year and a half of that and the 193rd Electronic Warfare Squadron came knocking and I was off again. Not familiar with the 193rd? They were part of the Airborne Command and Control missions and some Batcat missions. I don't remember what base they flew from but when retrieving some classified documents from the safe one day, I saw some folders marked Commando Hunt and Commando Solo. I just retrieved my documents, signed the sheet, locked the safe, and left. So, for the next 10 years I still had one foot back in TFA. Now the 193rd Special Operations Wing, they fly the EC-130s and are still a part of the Air Commando community.

Thank you TFA, thank you IBM, and thank you United States Air Force. It was a great ride.



# Board Announces Reunion 2026

The 2026 Annual Meeting and Reunion of the TLC Brotherhood, Inc. will be held at the Holiday Inn Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas  
**On September 23rd through the 26th, 2026**

In case you didn't know (or forgot), here are some San Antonio attractions:

- The Alamo
- Fort Sam Houston
- Lackland Air Force Base
- The Riverwalk
- San Antonio Botanical Gardens
- The Japanese Tea Garden
- Amazing Mirror Maze
- Tower of the Americas
- Randolph Air Force Base
- Brooke Army Medical Center
- Villa Finale Museum & Gardens
- Arsenal district
- King William Historic District
- The San Antonio Missions
- Kelly Field Annex
- Six Flags Fiesta Texas



A scene on San Antonio's famous Riverwalk.

## ***Greetings from our Chaplain***

**A**nother memorable reunion came, was celebrated, and is gone, and what a wonderful time we all had in Nashville! Thank **EVERYONE** who had a hand in making this reunion happen!

It has been an honor to serve as the TLCB chaplain this past year. Thank you for providing this opportunity, a privilege and pleasure. To me, the term brotherhood involves caring, supporting, and encouraging one another. I try my best to fulfill that mission. Having served in full-time ministry, I believe in the benefit and power of prayer, and would like to help you in this function. Several have reached out this past year, and I appreciate your helping me fulfill my chaplain role.

Here are highlights from my *Chaplain's Reunion Report* for the benefit of those who did not attend. You were missed. As of this writing, I have had the honor of sending nine TLCB condolence letters to the families of those who have taken their "Final Flight." Those of whom I was made aware include the loved ones of:

Ronald W. Wayda, Niles, IL 11-26-2024

Alan Flowers, Frederick, MD 5-16-2024

Mark Welch, Albuquerque, NM 3-13-2025

James "Captain Jim" Hoover, Lynchburg, VA 2-2023

David Geryak, Fort Worth, TX 12-23-2024

John Edward Mullins, Oxford, MI 5-21-2024

Robert Wilhelm, Hays, KS 2-20-2025

Henry "Hank" Maifeld, ME 8-2-2024

Eugene Rossel, Chino, CA 5-3-2025

Condolence letters went to Bob Wheatley at the passing of Rosalie's sister, Becky Boyd 12-23-2024, and to Jennifer Stelling at the passing of her mother, Angela Melancon 10-20-2024.

Upon learning of a death, I try to locate and research their obituary, often gaining insight from Facebook to personalize the condolence letter. I pray each week for known health issues, and am thankful for any updates you provide, allowing me to pray more specifically. Your requests are confidential unless told otherwise. My prayers also include the "Brotherhood" in general each week because at our ages, we are at that season of life where many of us are facing challenges.

Let me know of the death of a member, spouse, or any prayer need which falls under the realm of caring, support, and encouragement—as a card for someone needing a "get well," a "lift," or an encouragement. Please tell me who they are by phone, text, or email:

Dan Pierce – TLCB Chaplain, (*Numbers 6:24-26*)

*Dan.NKP.Pierce@Gmail.com* Phone: 717-492-6297



## ***LtCol Eugene David Rossel***

**1937—2025**

*Known to many members of the TLCB, Gene died in the spring, this year. The following is from his obituary:*

**H**e was a beloved husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, brother, and proud veteran, passing away peacefully on May 3rd, 2025, surrounded by family in Loma Linda, CA at the age of 87. Born on July 14th, 1937, during the Great Depression, in Okawville, IL. Eugene was raised in a close-knit Catholic family in Mascoutah, IL. He graduated from Cathedral High School in 1955 and went on to earn a degree in Electrical Engineering from Saint Louis University.

Upon graduation in 1959, Eugene joined the United States Air Force as a second lieutenant, beginning a distinguished 28-year military career. As a radar officer and decorated veteran, he served his country with honor in Vietnam, Panama, Laos, and Spain, visiting over 80 countries during his service, living his dream of seeing the world and circling the globe three times. He was awarded 18 medals and decorations in recognition of his service.

In 1970, Eugene was stationed at Torrejon Air Force Base in Spain before being reassigned to the Los Angeles Air Force Station in California to support the space shuttle program. He later worked at the Ballistic Missile Office at Norton Air Force Base, retiring from the Air Force in 1987 as a lieutenant colonel.

Following his military retirement, Eugene continued his work as an engineer in the aviation and computer industries. A man of curiosity and intellect, he was an avid writer and published the

book "USAF Air Commando Secret Wars: From Laos to Latin America." He was working on a second book at the time of his passing.

Eugene maintained daily connections with his military and civilian friends, sharing camaraderie and stories.

He was a longtime resident of Chino, CA since 1979, and cherished his mornings at Flo's Airport Café with his fellow veterans, recounting memories and building new ones. Eugene was a proud member of numerous military organizations including the Air Commando Association, American Legion, VFW, FAC Association, and Air America and many others [including the TLC Brotherhood! Ed.].

Eugene was a man of integrity, passion, and deep patriotism, and enjoyed opera, theater, traveling, writing, and most of all, his family. His legacy lives on in the values he instilled, the stories he shared, and the love he gave so freely.

A military service honoring Eugene was held on May 28, in San Diego, and a second service was held in his hometown in Okawville, IL, where military graveside rites were accorded by American Legion Post 233. He will be truly missed and forever remembered.



# Your Legacy

by Thelma Tilton

## My Regret

My parents were from Norway, were not talkers, and I didn't ask enough questions. I know very little about what their life was like as youngsters, as immigrants learning a new language, and how my dad learned and mastered his building trade when he arrived in Brooklyn at 19. I should have asked about those things more, and I feel bad that they didn't tell me. Don't let your family feel an empty spot. Talk to your kids and grandkids so they learn about you and how it was in your generation. Let them share those memories.

## Legacy Meaning

Just what does the word legacy mean to us at our age? One meaning in the dictionary talks about a gift, by will, of money or personal property. Most of us have drafted that formal document to take care of those we leave behind because we hope to leave monetary comfort to family or friends, but we also hope to give personal items that have meaning to us.

What always bothers me when someone dies, especially famous people, is that they are remembered on TV—after they die. Nice, but how about doing something a little special before we leave? Why not gift something meaningful? This word legacy made me wonder what those of you who served in the Vietnam War could offer as just that, a remembrance of your service. WOW, how about our challenge coins to our loved ones?

## Even WOWER—Memories/Heirlooms

As an example, Bill donated two Ho Chi Minh Trail framed water color paintings by his artist sister to the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech. As shopkeepers, Bill and I have come up with a possible way of sharing each person's legacy, to be remembered forever for the service each provided through dedication and love for the USA. But even WOWER, how about a legacy coin pendant and the interest they can provide about the history of personal experiences, the work, and the memories of each TLCB member who served in the Vietnam war! Double-sided Challenge Coin Legacy Pendants. HEIRLOOMS! Give them as unusual gifts for Christmas, birthdays, graduations, or just a surprise. Use them to start a dialogue with your children and grandchildren. Tell them where you were stationed and what your job was. Show them your photos. Have you labeled them? How did you feel before, during, and after the war? Did you learn anything? What were the people like? Did the experience help you mature? Give them the gift of your experiences, happy, sad, or just plain funny!

## Cost

Because the coin depth measurements are such that the silver bezels had to be handcrafted, driving up the cost. As always, the TLCB board allows the Exchange a profit of 20% or less (10% in this case), which goes to our Assistance program.

I love my two pendants, the rare Space Coast/TLCB—only 7 available as we go to press, and the regular TLCB/POW one, and am very proud to wear them. You or someone you admire can love and cherish one also.



The prettiest challenge coin we have ever offered, the now rare "Space Coast" coin made exclusively for the 2009 reunion and then carried in The Exchange (BX). As of this printing there are only SEVEN LEFT! We have had these set in a sterling silver pendant bezel, hung on a stainless steel chain. As shown, they are priced at \$225 anywhere in the Lower 48 states, including postage. If you want one you had better order soon!



Reverse side of the rare Space Coast challenge coin in silver pendant with stainless steel chain. To purchase, go to [WWW.TLC-BROTHERHOOD.COM](http://WWW.TLC-BROTHERHOOD.COM) and choose "SHOP" to access the Exchange. You will need to scroll all the way down to find these, if any are left.

# Reunion 2025; Making Music in Nashville

**D**esign the reunion shirt and take orders; finish the “Mekong Express Mail layout;” process the reunion registrations, create and print individual Rosie’s Raffle tickets; create, assemble, and insert the name tags into the registration box; collect flags, banners, auction and BX items, and then it’s laundry, pack, and roll. On the road AGAIN! Are you asking me, “Are you bragging or complaining?” I think at 83, a little hag brag is permissible. WHEW!

What makes all the work and associated pressure worthwhile for us? I am never quite sure until my creaking, stiff old bones climb out of the car, after a two-day road trip, and hobble into the reunion hotel, piling suitcases and reunion tubs of materials on the rolling cart on the way. Here it comes!

**THE JOYS:** There are usually TLCB folks hanging around, and I see outstretched arms and giant smiles! We see and greet old friends we have known for years, and during the reunion process, we meet new and interesting members as the days fly by. Admittedly, face and story remembrances and renewal are a large part of the game since most of us only see each other once a year. I think we all understand since at times, our memories “Ain’t what they used to be.”

What brought me particular joys this year? It was the gracious help offered and gratefully accepted. The Registration Team, Karlette Mayo and Ginny Vettel, was exceptionally capable and cheerful as well as super organized. Besides greeting members and answering questions, they sold and documented raffle tickets, TLCB car blankets/throws, and Secret War T shirts so we didn’t have to worry about those items. Carolyn Thompson again kindly took over the raffle job after registration.

Next stop was the social area, once again run by the NCOIC of the Nipa Hut, Randy Jenness SSG, recent author of “The Short Stick, US Airborne Rangers (Ret),” a healing memoir of a combat veteran. His big smile and bear hug are contagious, and his friendly and efficient management is a welcome part of relaxation in the hut.

**THE AUCTION:** Carolyn Thompson and Nancy Sweet were, as usual, masters of the TLCB Auction paperwork. They

Extreme left to right, Karlette Mayo, Nancy Sweet, Carolyn Thompson, and Randy Jenness at the final accounting after the Assistance Auction, which is not only great fun but always gives a big boost to our Assistance Fund.



Everybody agreed--the Tennessee Legends were terrific. But then, Nashville is a magnet for real talent, so it was no surprise. Most said that fiddler was best of all. Wow!



maintained the numbered order of the bidders/winners, their purchases, and the final bids. The behind-the-scenes auction routine always moves at a furious pace for these two ladies working the financials. After it was all over, they were able to provide treasurer, husband Bill Tilton, with the cash, checks, and correct listing of total sales.

And a great addition to the TLCB Auction Team of Roger Durant, John Sweet, and Les Thompson was Debbie Stein who was able to move the bidding along with her ever so sweet way

of embarrassing bidders to go higher “*For the Kids!*” She brought order and her brand of humor to the game and gave the other guys a respite of having to shoulder the tedious process on their own. I bet they enjoyed the show more this year without so much pressure on them. We all saw sweat on Debbie’s back, and I think she will agree that the auction total proved the team effort worthwhile. They worked hard! Yay Deb! I think she totally enjoyed it! Will she be brave enough to join the guys again next year?

*Nashville continues on next page*

The Mekong Express Mail



Longtime TLCB chaplain, Rev. Deb Stein proved to be an exceptionally effective and witty auctioneer, keeping the bidding going and making the troops behave!

**THE CRUISE:** The riverboat was lovely, special, and enjoyable with a beautiful day and good food, but the on-stage presentation was one of the very best I have seen! The girls were beautiful, their costumes colorful, and radiant with flowing, shining metallics combined with talent extraordinaire. Exquisite, amazing. The gifted fiddler danced on pretty, long legs as she played; the male singers/guitarists were accomplished and brought tears to my eyes with one song in particular, "One More Day," meaningful for those of us who have lost a loved one.

**THE PLANNING:** Jim Mayo had suggested more than once that Nashville would be a great place for a reunion, and I think we all greatly appreciated his suggestion. Another kudo to Vice President Ray Boas for coordinating the event, and much gratitude to cheerful and capable Bob and Ginny Vettel for making everything happen so well in Ray's illness absence.

**THE MEETINGS:** The board of directors met and discussed and voted on the 2027 reunion site. More to come about it! The annual corporation committee members gave thorough and well-thought-out committee reports as to membership and the financial status of the brotherhood organization.

**THE BANQUET:** The closing night with the banquet was lovely as usual. President Sweet made presentations to absentees Vice President Ray Boas and *MEM* Editor John Harrington for their work for the TLCB over the years. John introduced our guest speaker, William Inman, CW4 US Army Ret, who told us about his unusual army experiences during his long service career, providing an interesting and entertaining program, which included a fine-looking, smooth-feeling polished piece of the Berlin Wall.

Jim Mayo, in Air Force uniform, again performed the formal and beautiful service of "The Missing Man Table" with the seriousness and respect it deserves.

**THE QUILT:** The winner of the Rosie's Quilt Raffle was Kay Jenness, her first time at a reunion. Kay generously offered the beautiful quilt up for a re-draw, and Ken Thompson was the second grateful winner. Mark and Becky Schlieder again had the quilt made as a donation to the TLCB Assistance.

**SEE YOU NEXT YEAR?** Most of us were on the road or in the air again after the few days of a much-needed and fun friendship renewal. Thanks for coming and we hope to have another good

crowd in San Antonio next year when we again celebrate the charm of the river city. Reunion details in the March issue!!



*Thelma Tilton, MEM Assistant Editor*



Chaplain Dan Pierce reading Missing Man Table description, at the lectern. With each item, Sergeant Jim Mayo places the object in its correct position on the round table, which was out of the photo to the left. This is the most elaborate and meaningful version of the ceremony we have ever seen. It was done for TLCB for the first time last year, in Pensacola.



## Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The three members listed below joined between the September 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
2103	USAF	Steven	Alvey	Dahlonega	GA
2104	USAF	Eddie	Jones	Newnan	GA
2105	Other	Kimberly	Bell	Northport	AL

## Nashville Reunion Ups and Downs

by Rev Deb Stein

We were so excited to go to Nashville this year! We booked flights and hotel as soon as possible. I organized our travel so that every moment was accounted for. Pack the clothes – check. Take cats to be boarded – check. Drive to Boston (cheaper flights) – check. Leave car at parking area and catch their bus to the airport – check. Everything was going pretty well. We finally got to our gate, only to find that the flight was delayed. Okay, no problem.

We arrived in Nashville, so excited. We took a picture in front of the “Welcome to Nashville” sign. Things, however, started to go downhill from there. No worries about luggage, ours was all carry on. First order of business—find out where the hotel bus stop is and notify the hotel.

### A Hint of Trouble

The first indication that something was going wrong, was the incredible long lines everywhere. You could hardly move, once outside the doors. I called the hotel and they assured me that the bus was currently there, but we might miss it, so we better hurry. There were no directions as to where we should go, but we finally found our way, only to see that all traffic, on foot and by bus or car, was at a complete standstill. There must be a traffic light or something. I’m sure things will be moving along.

Next, we actually found the bus, but we were told that it was full – no room for us. He said for us to try to catch one of the other buses for nearby hotels. We had no idea which would be best, and on close examination, every bus was full, with people standing in the aisles, and even sitting on the steps. We were getting very frustrated. Little did we know, this was just the beginning.

### Horns! Fumes! Heat!

Others were also getting frustrated as ever so often a car would blare it's horn and others joined. We were in a parking garage. Few vehicles were moving. It was also incredibly hot, with no place to sit. I wondered at all the exhaust fumes from the cars and buses; it was surely an unhealthy situation all around!

After about an hour and a half after our conversation with the driver, I called the hotel again, and was told about the traffic being so difficult and that there might have been an accident.



Excerpt from a Nashville Airport Authority statement:

“On September 15, Nashville International Airport® (BNA®) experienced an unprecedented traffic event that caused significant congestion and inconvenience for our passengers.” The official cause was excess passengers and timing..

The hotel employee assured me that as soon as the bus got back, they would send him to pick us up. An hour later I called again; this time the bus driver answered, and said that he tried to get back but was stopped. Once again, he suggested that we try hopping another bus. I assured him that this wasn’t an option. Finally, he said that he would see what he could do, but the traffic was very bad.

### More Heat and Fake Uber

I remembered the lines for taxis – hundreds of people waiting in line. I looked at my phone, which was running sadly low on power, and realized we could probably walk – but the GPS didn’t offer that option – no sidewalks. Another hour passed, and I made yet another call. This time the previous gentleman answered. He told me that the bus driver had punched out for the day and gone home. The temperature was rising in that parking garage, and it wasn’t just the heat. I was livid! After hours of waiting, there was no option left.

Suddenly, I noticed cars picking up people on the other side of the parking garage. They had stickers in their windows for “Uber” and “Lyft.” I immediately downloaded the Uber app on my phone and tried to figure out what to do. After around 40 minutes, I got the request entered into the app, and we walked over to where the drivers parked and saw one car just sitting there.

### \$67 per Mile?

We approached the driver and asked if we were in the right place. He said “yes,” and offered to drive us to the hotel. He said he’d do it off the books, so he helped me to delete my request. After we’d gone a little way, but weren’t quite out of the airport area, we started to talk about money. He wanted to charge us \$100, but I told him it was only 1.5 miles. So, we went back and forth, and he settled on \$85. At this point, we just wanted to get to the hotel. It was 10:30 PM, and we’d been in the airport parking garage area for around six hours.

Once we got to the hotel, the restaurant was closed, but they kindly fixed us something to eat, since we missed lunch and dinner. This was the first good thing to happen since the wheels touched down in Nashville. We never really did find out why the traffic was so bad. We heard that there was some road work, an accident, and all kinds of stories. We saw pictures of people leaving their rental cars on the highway and dragging their suitcases to try and catch their flight.

So, the question is... Will we fly again? Not to Nashville we won’t! As far as San Antonio goes, we’re looking at other options. You see, once things got settled, we had some fun in the city, but what we really came for was the fellowship of our old friends at TLCB. The time spent together has been so wonderful each year. We try not to miss it.

They say that when you’ve got everything completely planned out and under control – God laughs. We only *think* we can control things, but it’s only an allusion. We don’t live by ourselves on a small island, we live in community with others, impacted by their choices – good or bad, right or wrong... just as they are impacted by our own. The only way through such experiences is patience and perseverance... and a lot of prayer.

