

# MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



The newsletter of the Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood, Inc. Volume 22, issue 4

WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.com

## Brotherhood is Alive & Well!

by Bill Tilton, 2021 Gettysburg Reunion Committee Chairman

Having served as this year's local reunion chairman, I was asked by our editor to write a short article to go along with photos of the event. As they say, this is my "full disclosure." I thank Vice President Gerry Frazier, national Reunion Committee Chairman, for his guidance and support, and thanks to the great members of our local committee: Monty Dubs, Alan Flowers, Jim and Pat Hebert, and Ray and Marie Boas. They all gave their opinions, advice, ideas, and physical support throughout as needed! And of course I must give special thanks to my wife, Thelma, who always pitches in and spends



Does this look interesting? See page 14 to find out why it is appearing in this issue of the *Mekong Express Mail!*

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long hours posting checks, making sheets of raffle tickets, preparing registration packets, and so much more.

We expected many members would be eager to get together this year after the board of directors was forced to cancel last year's annual meeting and reunion because of the ongoing Covid pandemic. We were surprised by the high number who

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## Editor's Notebook:

### **Thanks For the Help**

Due to serious complications following spinal surgery in November 2020, my wife, Eileen, has been incapacitated for all of this past year. As a result, we did not attend the Gettysburg Reunion, a major disappointment for her, a retired American history teacher. Consequently, I have found it difficult to focus on many responsibilities, particularly editing the *Mekong Express Mail*. Fortunately, the assistant editor, Thelma Tilton, and the composition/production manager, Bill Tilton, have stepped up heroically, and this issue is practically entirely the result of their efforts. Thanks Thelma and Bill.

### **Coming Home**

Near the end of his excellent article about his work as a medic in 1973 in the Medical Civic Action Project (MedCAP) in Nakhon Phanom and Sakhon Phanom provinces, Gary Beatty, president of the TLCB, refers to instances of hostility toward him upon his return to the States. More than a few TLCB members and other returning veterans experienced various levels of attack from anti-Vietnam War protestors; however, it was not a universal experience. Previously, I have mentioned my return in late August 1968, the time of the Democratic Convention, which was marked by decidedly anti-war demonstrations. I went from Travis AFB to San Francisco to New York in my 1505s without any incidents. For the next two years plus, I was at Davis-Monthan AFB in Tucson. While there, I was taking several graduate courses at the University of Arizona and was never the target of any hostility. I certainly was not hailed a hero, but never was I assailed as a villain. I would be interested in the experiences of other TLCB members.

John Harrington  
jharrington@nscopy.com

## **Election Results**

As prescribed in the bylaws, the first order of business at the annual meeting of the TLC Brotherhood, Inc. was the board of directors election. In addition to two member-at-large positions, the offices of vice president, secretary, and chaplain were up for election. Vice President Gerry Frazier was elected to his second term, but the incumbent secretary and chaplain did not seek reelection because of health concerns. Al Dozal was elected to the board for the first time, as was Tom Ungleich, as secretary. Former member-at-large George Shenberger had been appointed to the vacant chaplain position by President Gary Beatty, and was elected to that position at the meeting. Elected to his final term as member-at-large was John Sweet, who has also served as first Assistance Committee chairman, treasurer, vice president, and president of the Brotherhood in the past. The *MEM* welcomes the new board members!



Newly elected TLC Brotherhood Chaplain, George Shenberger, speaking at the annual meeting of the corporation in Gettysburg on October 16, 2021.

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### **TLC Brotherhood, Inc.**

**Tax ID #54-1932649**

#### **Board of Directors and Committee Chairmen 2021-2022, showing year of term end**

President: Gary Beatty, 2022 (final term)  
Vice President: Gerry Frazier, (Reunion Committee) 2023 (2nd term)  
Secretary: Tom Ungleich, 2023 (1st term)  
Treasurer: Thelma Tilton, 2022 (1st term)  
Chaplain: George Shenberger (Memorial Committee) (unlimited)  
Board members-at-large

Ray Boas, 2022 (2nd term)  
Al Dozal 2023 (1st term)  
Roger Durant, 2022 (2nd term)  
John Sweet, 2023 (final term)

#### **Non-board committee chairmen (appointed by president)**

Assistance Committee: Les Thompson  
Communications Committee: John Harrington  
Exchange Shopkeeper: Bill Tilton  
History Committee: John Lorenzen  
Membership Committee: John Duffin  
Public Relations Committee: (vacant)

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

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Via website—uses PayPal system to accept credit card payments.  
By check—make checks payable to "TLC Brotherhood, Inc."  
Write payment purpose and member number on check.

#### **Mail to:**

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**P.O. Box 60**  
**Aspers, PA 17304**

**Reunion 2022: Springfield, Virginia**

## Reunion continued from page 1.

registered to come to this relatively remote location, since Gettysburg is more than an hour from the nearest major airports. In fact, the turnout nearly set a record and did put this year's reunion in the top three of all time, even though a few who registered did not show up. This response forced us to make some adjustments for the bus tours, which we solved with a "Group A, Group B" schedule that looked confusing but worked out just fine.

On registration day we suggested a Thai restaurant in Dillsburg, "Pakha," about 21 miles away, and nearly thirty folks did take that opportunity. In gratitude, the restaurant owner made a generous donation to our Assistance Fund, and enjoyed chatting with our group of Thailand-savvy vets.

The surprise turnout well exceeded our contract guarantee with the Wyndham Hotel, with the important benefit of having a huge space for the "Nipa Hut" hospitality room for the entire period, and an additional meeting room space for Friday's "Historic Gettysburg" presentation and Saturday's annual meeting of the TLC Brotherhood corporation. Ray and Marie Boas came in from Dayton to set up and supply the snacks and drinks for the Nipa Hut, having eleven round tables set up clear through the Saturday banquet. This arrangement seemed to please everyone, and I heard no complaints that the contract permitted us to bring in only beer and wine in addition to non-alcoholic beverages. Monty Dubs lives in nearby Hanover, which calls itself the "Snack capital of the United States." He donated a huge amount of bagged Utz potato chips, and various snacks, in addition to the individually bagged snacks that Ray and Marie bought. Near the end of the reunion, Chris Tilton donated a resupply of beer.

John Sweet clowning around on the battlefield. The barrels of these cannon are original, but the carriages are concrete reproductions. About 1/3 of the cannon present during the 1863 battle are still in the park, near original positions. Alan Flowers photo.



While the main point of the reunion aspect of this gathering was just to visit with one another, I think the two tours went quite well. Tara Wenzel, a neighbor of Monty Dubs, did not charge for her fascinating tours. (She and her husband, Ray, who both had NSA careers, are very fond of veterans). Starting at 8:30, she gave us a slide presentation, and then took two groups on bus tours to see sites of surprising interest, mostly to do with President Eisenhower's long association with the area. Tara overflows with fascinating facts. For example, she showed us a church where three presidents (Lincoln, Ike, and Nixon) had worshipped. Right across the street is the library, once Gettysburg's main Post Office, a part of which actually served as the White House for 38 days while Ike was recovering from a heart attack. Inside the church are several of Ike's famous oil paintings, and the very first U.S. flag with 50 stars, presented to



Jim and Pat Hebert, who live in Gettysburg, staffed the registration desk to welcome reunion members. Photo Alan Flowers.

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Half of the tour (Group B) at the Peacelight Memorial Monument, which was dedicated by Union and Confederate veterans on July 3rd, 1938, during the final Civil War Reunion. Ed Miller photo.

Ike when he signed the law admitting Hawaii to statehood. Tara's tour did not include the Battle of Gettysburg, but the battlefield is so large that much of her presentation was on or near the Military Park. For the bus portion we split into two groups, with one group enjoying the amazing Visitor Center while the alternate group was on the bus with Tara.

The first of two stops was at the Eternal Light Peace Memorial, dedicated on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1938, at the very last national reunion of Civil War veterans. By then only 8000 Civil War veterans remained, and nearly 1900 of them, both Union and Confederate, made it to the reunion. Their *average* age was 94! They were housed in tents on the battlefield and each was attended by a pair of Boy Scouts. Those Scouts had been given two rules, said Tara. Rule One: *do not let your veteran die*. Rule two: *whatever your veteran wants to do, make it happen....but don't forget Rule #1!* Miraculously,

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Guide Tara Wenzel, standing on the 1863 Confederate line, describes the location of Camp Colt, Armored training camp in 1917 and Captain Eisenhower's first command. "Pickett's Charge" foundered after a costly 3/4 mile-long dash from the extreme right side of the picture. It was stopped by Union forces at the "High Watermark of the Confederacy" under the letter "H" at the left top, on July 3rd, 1863. Little Round Top (just under "LRT") was the focal point of some of the most famous fighting on July 2nd. Ed Miller photo.



none died, despite trudging around wearing the wool uniforms of the 1860s in the steamy Mid-Atlantic in July. This is just a typical example of the amazing and often emotional items we learned about on that tour.

How times have changed! For lunch before the Saturday afternoon battlefield tour we bought a variety of deli sandwiches from a local restaurant (Dunlap's). When we picked them up the owner said, "I see that you're a veteran's group, so I'm going to discount my price by ten percent." Wouldn't have happened in the 1970s!

The worst thing about the Civil War Battlefield tours on Saturday afternoon was the light rain that moved through the area most of the day. When the bus windows steamed up as we drove up Little Round Top, I was pretty disappointed, but the seasoned, licensed guides easily saved the day and gave a really good capsule history of the whole three-day battle and its context within the war. There were plenty of anecdotes, particularly, for Group A, about the notorious General Sickles. In Washington before the war, Sickles literally got away with murder, and as a general, his best-known misadventure was nearly losing the Gettysburg battle for the Union. This blunder was his infamous, self-ordered advance into "The Peach Orchard" on the second day, leaving Little Round Top undefended and forcing other units to come to his rescue. For the rest of his life, he perversely claimed to be the hero of the battle.

The ever-popular Assistance Auction got started on Friday evening after an in-house pizza dinner, and an informal mention by John Sweet regarding the disastrous effects of Covid on the financial situation for Mac Thompson's loyal and resourceful driver on his trips to Laos. There were some real gems among the many "white elephants," and we felt there was a special spirit of giving and participation among those who cheerfully ran the bidding up for items they didn't even want. In fact, Randy Jenness routinely bid on many items and won the bidding on many of them. But every time, he promptly gave the item to the last bidder. At the end, he had nothing but satisfaction to take back to Maine! All through the auction our stalwart duo, Nancy Sweet and Carolyn Thompson, kept up with the winners'

names and bids and collected their payments afterward. Then came the feverish counting of dollars and checks, and making the whole thing balance. Nancy's fingers flew over the calculator keys and finally, the two agreed on a total—and it was a record! This year's auction-goers were very generous indeed.

Urging—and doing—the auction bidding was not Randy Jenness' only contribution. We asked him to run his "50/50" again this year, and he immediately agreed. The TLCB's half of that effort was about \$350, which seemed pretty good. The winning ticket was drawn by our guest speaker at the banquet, and the winner was Chris Tilton (yes, my son). I was pretty embarrassed by what looked like an inside job! However,

**REUNION** *continues next page.*

### ***To the TLCB Members:***

Please, may I express my thanks to everyone after attending my first TLCB reunion in years; this without David after his death.

From immediate welcome greetings by old friends, introductions to new ones, and favorite old stories while collecting so many new ones; it was a wonderful, well-organized whirlwind, giving us all the opportunities to visit! Gerry Frazier's remarks at the banquet about David became the memorial not previously possible because of Covid. It was fitting and warm to be with David's beloved TLCB "family."~~May we all meet next year in Springfield!

Bless and thank you all!  
Sally MacDonald



Enthusiastic and curious auctioneers John Sweet, Les Thompson, and Roger Durant cleverly extolling the alleged rarity of a "tourist rifle." Ed Miller photo.

The guest speaker, retired Army lieutenant colonel Tom Dombrowski, also agreed to pull the winning ticket for the Rosie's Raffle memorial quilt drawing. And the winner this year—how appropriate, in light of all they do: John and Nancy Sweet! Everybody cheered! Then the banquet was over, and we realized it was time to start saying our good-byes, since many had early departures on Sunday.



Bob and Virginia Vettel try on their new purchases at the auction. Alan Flowers photo.

How wonderful it had been to finally get together with so many long-time friends and to have met some enthusiastic newer Brotherhood members. The whole experience is so well expressed in poet Rachel Firth's "The Reunion," which was printed in our programs and is included on page 6.



Above, guest speaker Tom Dombrowski reading the quilt winner: John Sweet! He and wife Nancy are shown below with the 2021 "Rosie's Raffle" quilt. Chris Tilton won Randi's 50/50 and promptly donated his share back to Assistance. Alan Flowers photos.

Chris immediately did as Les Thompson had done at a previous reunion, and donated his half back to Assistance, much to my relief and pride!

As many know, President Gary Beatty recently experienced two severe health emergencies. I'm glad to report that Gary is recovering well; however, to his great disappointment he was unable to attend and officiate at the Annual Meeting of the TLC Brotherhood on October 16<sup>th</sup>. In his place, Vice President Gerry Frazier conducted an excellent meeting and hosted the President's Banquet that Saturday evening. By use of the telephone, Gary did actually preside over the board of directors meeting that was held prior to the members' meeting.

Below, Nancy Sweet and Carolyn Thompson once again tallying the auction proceeds. Somehow they keep up with the fast and furious bidding. Bill Tilton photo.



# *The Reunion...*

*by Rachel Firth*

*Written for the 306th Bomb Wing, Strategic Air Command*

Autumn leaves rustling, together to the appointed place, the old warriors come. Like Pilgrims drifting across the land they fought to preserve. Where they meet is not important any more. Greetings echo across a lobby. Hands reach out and arms draw buddies close.

Embraces, that as young men they were too uncomfortable to give, too shy to accept so lovingly. But deep within these Indian Summer days, they have reached a greater understanding of life and love. The shells holding their souls are weaker now, but hearts and minds grow vigorous, remembering. On the table someone spreads out photographs, a test of recollection. And friendly laughter echoes at shocks of hair gone gray or white, or merely gone.

The rugged slender bodies lost forever. Yet they no longer need to prove their strength. Some are now sustained by one of "Medicine's miracles," and even in this fact, they manage to find humor. The women, all those that waited, all those who loved them, have watched the changes take place. Now, they observe and listen, and smile at each other, as glad to be together as the men.

Talk turns to war, and planes, and foreign lands. Stories are told and told again, re-weaving the threadbare fabric of the past.

Mending one more time the banner of their youth. They hear the vibrations, feel the shutter of metal as engines whine and whirl, and planes come to life. These birds with fractured wings can be seen beyond the mist of clouds, and they are in the air again.

Chasing the wind, feeling the exhilaration of flight close to the heavens. Dead comrades, hearing their names spoken, wanting to share in this time, if only in spirit, move silently among them. Their presence is felt and smiles appear beneath misty eyes. Each, in his own way may wonder who will be absent in another year.

The room grows quiet for a time. Suddenly an ember flames to life. Another memory burns. The talk may turn to other wars, and other men, and of futility. So, this is how it goes. The past is so much the present. In their ceremonies, the allegiances, the speeches and the prayers, one cannot help but hear the deep eternal love of country and comrades they will forever share.

Finally, it is time to leave. Much too soon to set aside this little piece of yesterday, but the past cannot be held too long, for it is fragile. They say, "Farewell" ..."See you another year, God willing." Each keeps a little of the others with him forever.



# The Medical Civic Action Project in Nakhon Phanom, 1973

by Gary Beatty

It was nearing the end of the rainy season in 1973 and the road was washed out, so, to reach our destination that day, we had to walk along a quarter mile of rice paddy dykes while humping our equipment and supplies. Our objective was a large cluster of trees in the middle of several paddies in the Thare (AKA “Tha Rae”) district of Sakon Phanom Province of northeast Thailand.

Nestled in among those trees was a Catholic church and orphanage run by a Thai priest and staffed by Thai nuns. I was naively unaware of it until we arrived, and was surprised to see nuns in their habits in the middle of a Buddhist country. Our mission was to provide primary medical care to the orphanage children.

My tour of duty in southeast Asia during the Vietnam War was at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base, known to those of us who served there as “Naked Fanny.” The base was 14 miles west of the town of Nakhon Phanom, which was located in northeast Thailand on the Mekong River. Officially, it was a Thai military facility. Unofficially, it was a secret U.S. military special operations base.

I was an Air Force medic. Like many based there I had a primary duty of working in the hospital ER and flying air-evac. My secondary duty was the Medical Civic Action Project (MedCAP) in Nakhon Phanom and neighboring Sakon Nakhon Provinces.

At least once a week we traveled to remote villages in the provinces to provide villagers with primary medical care they wouldn’t otherwise receive.

The late Father Khai in front of the orphanage at Thare, in Northeast Thailand. The TLC Brotherhood Assistance Program began with support for this remote institution, which Assistance Committee founder John Sweet visited and supported while he was stationed at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB.



Replica of Ho Chi Minh's house at the memorial and museum in a Vietnamese refugee village along the road between Nakhon Phanom city and the air base.

Many of the Thare district population are Catholics who emigrated from Vietnam in the early 20th century to escape French colonialism. One of those emigres after WWI was a young man born Nguyen Sinh Cung, who changed his name to Ho Chi Minh. Ho lived in Nakhon Phanom (NKP) for a couple of years, and in his former house there is now a museum.

Nakhon Phanom and Sakon Nakhon provinces are 90% rural and one of the poorest regions in Thailand. It is part of an indigenous sub-region of southeast Asia known as Isaan, which is divided by the Mekong and encompasses most of northeast Thailand and part of western Laos. The village economies relied on rice production, cottage industries, and subsistence farming. Very few had running water or electricity. They spoke a distinct dialect that was a mixture of Thai and Lao.

At that time, the only hospital and doctors in the region were in NKP City, which may as well have been on another continent because most of the rural villagers had few, if any, motor vehicles. Transportation was accomplished primarily by wooden-wheeled carts pulled by water buffalo, as it had been for millennia. Or you walked.

Most of the time we drove to the villages, but sometimes, for security due to communist insurgents in the area, we’d go by armed helicopter

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## **MEDICAL** *continued from page 7*

or Thai navy gunboat on the Mekong River. Fortunately, we never encountered any hostile elements—probably because the bad guys knew we were non-combatants on medical missions.

The Thai government medical services in the region's villages were minimal. I don't know if that was because they were a cultural minority far removed from the capitol in Bangkok, but I do know that they were incredibly grateful for the health care provided by the U.S. Air Force. MedCAP was a factor in keeping the communist insurgents from winning the hearts and minds of the rural population.

The villagers expressed their gratitude to us by their hospitality during our visits. It was usually a community event that often included us having a mid-day feast with the village notables, catered by the moms of the kids. I ate true Thai food long before it became popular in the U.S.

Usually, as was the local custom, the meal was lubricated with “Lao cao” (akin to American moonshine), which meant we had to get our mission completed in the morning. On a couple of occasions, we were invited to partake in the local “homegrown,” which would have been rude to refuse. That we made it back to the base after some of those luncheons, I attribute to our Thai drivers.

But at least the Lao cao probably killed whatever pathogens we may have picked up from the food. If that didn't do it, I'm sure the Thai peppers did! (“The Scoville scale measures the common sweet or bell pepper at zero Scoville units, since it contains no capsaicin. The commonly found Thai pepper, known locally as prik kee noo, logs in at 80,000 to 100,000 Scoville units”).

Because the Thai king was dedicated to literacy, the one thing the government did was to provide for primary schools in the region. Most villages had a school, or had one within walking distance, shared by multiple small villages. Because our mission was providing health care to kids, most of our visits were to schools.

Our focus was twofold: First to provide primary care to the children, the second to give care to pregnant women. Treatment for other adults was usually limited to dental care. If any adult was actively ill, or had recently suffered an injury, we'd do what we could with the limited resources we brought. On rare occasions, we transported a critical case to the hospital in NKP.

Seeing the kids exposed us to childhood maladies largely eradicated in advanced countries. Until you've experienced it, you don't realize that even with the deficiencies in our health care system, it was far and away superior to what existed in rural third-world populations at that time. A common condition in the kids was conjunctivitis, which we treated with ointment and

then gave the mothers a tube and showed them how to apply it. Other kids had parasites, as did many adults. We'd give them a dose of an anti-parasitic and a box full for the moms to give the kids once a day. The children lined up for us to see them. They were very well-behaved, but we quickly realized that some would try to hustle us. The healthy ones who didn't get anything from us felt slighted. So, when they'd see a child ahead in line get treated, the next couple kids would fabricate the same symptoms. We handled that scam by giving a box



Typical country house in Northeast Thailand during the Vietnam War.. Animals could shelter under the house. Today the cart may be there, but it would probably have a single hitch for a two-wheel tractor (iron buffalo) instead of the water buffalo hitch on front. Photo from Gary Beatty.

of “special medicine” (multi-vitamins) to those who didn't actually need any treatment, with instructions to mom to be sure her child took one “every day.” The kid would walk away clutching that box of vitamins – no doubt certain of having put one over on us.

In one village, several of the kids had six toes on each foot. I assumed they were birth defects from something in that local environment until one of the Thai air force medics, who translated for us, was from that region and told me that it was a genetic trait in some of the indigenous Isaan population. Those with extra toes were considered to be blessed by the spirits.

But some of what we saw was serious. A common problem was water-borne infections. Cholera was, and still is, a problem there. An outbreak in a village got Thai civilian medical folks seriously involved. We Americans were vaccinated against cholera, but we also scrupulously avoided drinking the water by bringing our own. When we ate with the villagers, we

**MEDICAL** *continues next page*





Airman Beatty treating a sick child. Photo from the author.

only consumed what we saw being cooked. Even with those precautions I got a nasty case of dysentery that put me out of action for nearly two weeks.

We'd also see old injuries that didn't heal properly. Broken limbs were usually treated by the villagers themselves because of severely limited transportation to the hospital. Though some had clear disfigurement from past fractures, we were impressed by how well others had healed.

Rural folk medicine has been in use successfully, long before what we call modern medicine came about. Most villages had someone, usually a woman who was the "healer," for lack of a better term, who learned the arts from a predecessor. We always made a point of "consulting" with whomever that person was in each village. Some of them were impressive in their knowledge of anatomy and physiology without any formal education. They also taught us about using local plants for treatments.

The pregnant women we saw were all given a physical and at the very least, and a supply of prenatal vitamins to last them thru delivery. A couple of times our visit to a village coincided with a woman being in labor. Each village had at least one lay midwife with a lot of experience birthing babies, so the only time we'd get involved was if there was a complication that put the mother at risk. I assisted village midwives in two birthings. During my training I'd worked for six months in a hospital labor and delivery unit, but didn't pretend that I was more qualified than an experienced midwife.

Regarding the experience of childbirth, I observed in my training that most American women at their first delivery had only seen birthings in expectant mother class movies, but had never seen a live one. That was a relatively new phenomena

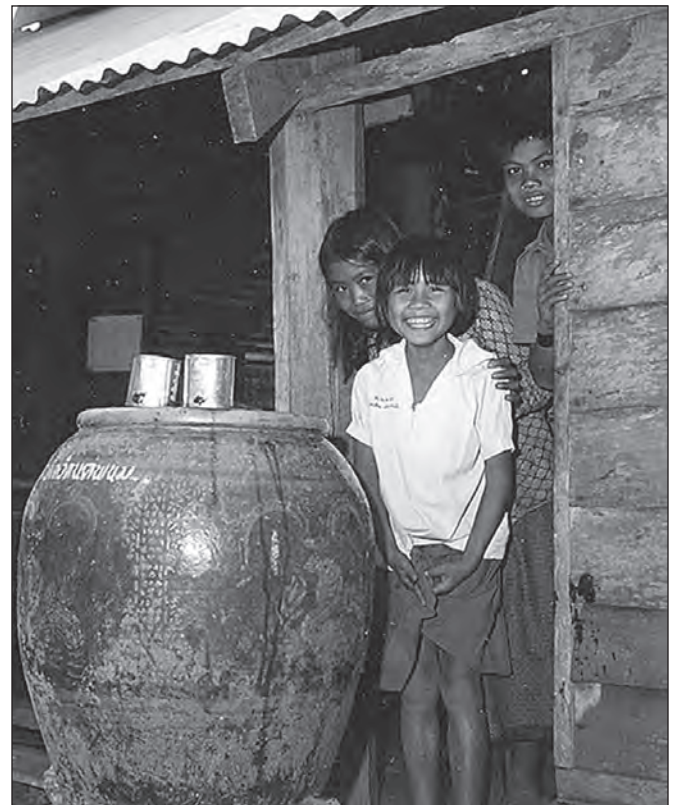
to their generation. Many of their mothers, and certainly their grandmothers, had seen birthings before their own first labor, because until post-WWII many babies were born at home.

By the time the girls in the villages were old enough to have kids, they'd seen many birthings by their mothers, aunts, and other village women. It appeared to me that they handled labor more stoically than American women. Maybe that was because maternal death from childbirth, most often from postpartum infection, was then still too often a fact-of-life in those villages. So, if we were present at a birth, we'd give antibiotics to the mother to reduce the infection risk.

At that time most girls in rural villages were married and started having children in their mid-teens. By their late twenties they'd had multiple pregnancies because the families needed as many kids as possible to help with the work. Repeated pregnancy, combined with working in the rice paddies, aged the women rapidly. It wasn't unusual for a woman to birth a child, and the next day be working in the rice paddy with the baby on her back, as village women had been doing since time immemorial. I was impressed. They'd have laughed at the concept of "maternity leave."

Most of the older women chewed betel nut as a stimulant, which also darkens the teeth and causes a variety of dental problems. I was sympathetic to our dentists having to work in some of those mouths. Few women from the rural villages avoided that fate, except for some of the most attractive ones. It was common for bar owners from Bangkok, Pattaya, and other cities, to travel into the rural villages to recruit "hostesses."

The local folks, here behind their water jug, were excited to see the medics arrive, and of course the children were always thrilled to get their pictures taken! Photo from the author.



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***The Official Thailand-Laos-Cambodia  
Brotherhood page***

## MEDICAL *continued from page 9*

Some of the girls went voluntarily to escape the villages, but not all. Female children are a commodity for a subsistence farm family. The girls were not “sold” to the bar owners because



Concerned mom and apprehensive child wait to see the “doc.” Photo from the author.

slavery is illegal in Thailand, but the bar owner would “loan” money to the family, and the girl had to work for the owner until the loan was repaid from her earnings. This could take years.

This practice is still going on. Many of the girls working in

A weaver at her loom, in an “Isaan” village. The girls giggled about having their pictures taken by a “farang,” or foreigner. Photo from the author.



Gary walks by the truck as villagers crowd in the distance, waiting to see the medic. Photo from the author.

the Bangkok, Pattaya, and Phuket tourist area bars were brought there from rural villages. We’d encounter the unintended consequences of some of those working relationships in the village kids whose parentage was obviously mixed race. Often if a bar girl got pregnant, she’d take the baby back to her village to be raised by her family, then return to the city to continue repaying the family debt. The first time I examined a young Thai child with blue eyes, I thought I’d come across another genetic anomaly (like the six toes) until I was told about the likely paternity.

I learned about the world and life in those villages, more than from all my formal education. That was my “Vietnam war” service. When I wasn’t providing medical care to children in rural villages, I was treating American military personnel in the base hospital ER. I never carried a weapon.

Within six months of my return home from Thailand, I was a college student. It was only then that I discovered what a bad person I was for having taken care of those Southeast Asian village kids and pregnant women during the war. I heard it from a professor who, upon learning that I was a Vietnam veteran, but not what my job was, asked me how many babies I’d killed. If you want to know why politics has become so acrimonious today, just look at how the Vietnam anti-war movement treated the veterans. That’s where it started. Civility went downhill from there.

Vietnam vets were not thanked for our service in those days. We were spat upon and falsely called baby killers by our self-appointed moral superiors who cared nothing for the truth. The anti-war movement justified it by adopting the radical, feminist “All politics is personal!” mantra.

I’m now the president of an international veterans’ organization that is also a charity working in northeast Thailand and Laos. We are not affiliated with any government and have no paid staff. All the work is done by volunteer, unpaid veterans and their spouses, and we are funded entirely by private donations.

We’re the same guys who served there during the war—and we still don’t kill babies.



# Student Assistance Fund Final Students

As the program “sunsets,” students express their plans for the future. The Board of Directors no longer seeks donations for the generously supported Student Assistance Fund, legacy of the late John Middlewood, a Nakhon Phanom teacher.

**Dararat Promarrak:** “For my future planning, I dream to be a teacher in a government school, so I have to take a qualifying examination. I want to help my students like I was helped by the TLCB. I got good grades at college and I’m satisfied with the results. I’m going to finish my degree.”



**Sawini Manaonok:** “After my graduation, I plan to develop my English for communication and some languages because I want to be a designer and artist. I got good grades in college and I want to work abroad and dream for my better future.”



**Thamonwan Thungnathad:**

“I am a fifth year student of the Faculty of Education with a major in early childhood education at Nakhon Phanom University. After my graduation, I plan to take the government’s qualifying examination to become a teacher in a government school. I got good grades, and I am very satisfied with them. I am doing a teaching internship in a government school and it is my last semester.”

**Machima Kanda:** “I am currently studying Mathematics at the Faculty of Education, Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University. It is a five-year course. I dream of being a math teacher in a government school and I have to take a qualifying examination. I want to be a teacher because I believe that teachers are opportunity providers. I will give my students educational opportunities as I have been given opportunities by the TLCB. I got good grades but I’m trying to improve my grades.”

## TLC Brotherhood Member Honored

In September the American Legion Post in Ocean City New Jersey dedicated their building to three deceased members. One of these is Bill Cruice, who was a TLCB member for several years. He attended the Philadelphia reunion, and always wanted to attend more reunions; however, his health issues ended his travel plans .

(From John Duffin, Membership Committee chairman, in September).



### 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 [BillTilton@gmail.com](mailto:BillTilton@gmail.com), or a note in the mail to

**TLC Brotherhood**  
**PO Box 60**  
**Aspers, PA 17304.**



## Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The 16 members listed below joined between the September issue of the *MEM* and Thanksgiving. You can find more information on our website database. The *Mekong Express Mail* wishes you all a sincere "Welcome Home."

No.	Branch	Last Name	First Name	City	State
1984	USA	Munoz	John	Fillmore	CA
1985	USAF	Sisti	Michael	Theektowaga	NY
1986	USA	Epstein	Richard	Silver Spring	MD
1987	USAF	Payne	Robert	Cape Coral	FL
1988	USAF	Pierce	Daniel	Mount Joy	PA
1989	USAF	Stetson	Craig	Dahlonega	GA
1990	Other	Hanna	Bonnie	Delaware City	DE
1991	Other	Stelling	Jennifer	Daphne	AL
1992	USAF	Somers	Noah	Dover	DE
1993	USAF	Lawrence	Alfred	Lewes	DE
1994	USAF	Nagy	Randolph	Federal Way	WA
1995	USAF	Harrison	John	Youngstown	OH
1996	USAF	Anderson	Keith	Apple Valley	MN
1997	USAF	Mohr	Dennis	Richland	WA
1998	USAF	Mullikin	Tim	Southlake	TX
1999	USAF	Weeks	Gary	Leander	TX

## Praise for “The Sorrows of Spring”

“The Sorrows of Spring,” appeared in the *Mekong Express Mail*, June, 2021 edition.

To the Editor:

I read Gary Larsen’s, “The Sorrows of Spring” article and saw history repeating itself as we left many of our loyal friends in Afghanistan. So glad he wrote this sad but poignant article. More of our citizens need to understand what took place in Thailand-Laos-Cambodia at the close of the Vietnam war. May I quote sections of his article in some of the media I work with? I would be happy to give credit to the author.

Would our reunion committee ever consider holding our reunion in Alameda, home to the USS Hornet? I have toured the aircraft carrier several times and noted that they allow meetings and presentations to be held and meals served on board in the hangar area. There is a Naval Air Museum just blocks away, several hotels nearby, with the Oakland airport just 20 minutes away. Food for thought.

Hope your wife is feeling better.

My best,  
Paul Hauser

To the Editor:

Wow! Hard to read, given current events. But I was riveted. So well written. Just change some names and the names of the countries, and here we are again, deserting our friends.

Years ago, I read a book, “Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret War,” by Jane Hamilton-Merritt. Harrowing and frightening. We owed so much to those people, and left them with “find your own way out.”

I’ve also read “The Spirit Catches You, and you Fall Down,” by Anne Fadiman, which is about Hmong refugees in my home town of Merced, CA, and the clash of cultures. In central California, the Hmongs had an annual New Year celebration at the Fresno County Fairgrounds. The one time I went, I listened to Vang Pow for a while.

Thank you for a wonderful, timely article.

Bill Jirsa  
Georgetown, TX

To the Editor:

Having read the Sept 2021 issue straight through, I thought that it was the most moving I have ever gotten, and there have been some wonderful ones. I must admit that more than a tear or two fell onto the pages, but due to the very nice paper it is printed on, they wiped away quickly. Anyway, both Gary and Terry’s accounts were impressive and filled with good thoughts from long ago.

Keep up the fine work,

Steve Kokkins  
Marion MA  
#1215

To the Editor:

As you noted in your Editor’s Notebook, Gary Larsen’s article is exceptional: so well-written, and so timely, with the fall of Afghanistan. What a story.

Those of us working in Thailand and Laos during that time look back with a monumental sense of sorrow indeed, as the disasters unfolded and our allies and friends were abandoned. All repeated this spring. The U.S. never seems to take any lessons from history and consistently ignores advice from those with insight and experience.

It was my great privilege to work for a U.S. Army contractor in Thailand from 1970 to July 1975, following discharge from Army active duty in 1969 after two tours in VN. I lived in Udorn and Korat during those years, so it was great to read Terry Brown’s article as he revisits Udorn. It has certainly changed from the small, dusty (or muddy) provincial capital full of Air Force, ASA, Air America, and spooks.

Like Terry, I too was blessed to be married to a wonderful Thai lady for 45 years, who accompanied me all over the world. Our daughter and I miss her terribly.

Yes, our numbers may dwindle with the years, but those of us with strong connections to SE Asia have it in our blood. Thank you, John, and all of your colleagues for keeping The Brotherhood together. I look forward to every issue.

Warm regards,  
David Hagen

## Bring Back Fellowship

**Announcement:** At the Gettysburg annual meeting, the members voted to form the proposed “Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood Fellowship Message Group,” using Google Groups. The TLCB Fellowship Message Group is a private group established to allow only current members of the Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood to communicate with one another, using email. This email platform allows you to send attachments such as photos, videos, and documents, etc.

**Particulars:** Individuals receiving the emails are responsible to download and store them if they want to do so. There is no storage of attachments by the TLCB. Members need to send ONE email only to the group, and it will be redistributed to all members on the list. You can change your settings to receive all emails, digest form, or no email. The motion adopted at the meeting approved this program for a 6-month trial and it is now active.

**To Join:** Send an email to Ed Miller at thinkp69@gmail.com. Include your first name, last name, TLCB membership#, and the email address you want to use. If you have a Google account and gmail address, we recommend that you use it, but it is not required.

**Let’s bring back some fellowship and camaraderie to our brotherhood!**

Ed Miller, Administrator

# *Return To D.C. Reunion—Visit the National Museum of the US Army!*

*by Vice President Gerry Frazier*

The 2022 TLC Brotherhood reunion will again return to the Washington DC area; the last reunion there was in 2016. When in the DC area, we who attend the reunion always pay an emotional and moving visit to the Vietnam Memorial Wall.

In 2022, we will also celebrate a new attraction that will serve as a focal point for your visit. After 40 years of planning, design, hard work, and reviews, the National Museum of the U.S. Army, located at historic Fort Belvoir, Virginia, welcomes visitors. The museum first opened to the public in 2020, but promptly choked due to the COVID pandemic. Doors were flung open again during 2021 with positive and exciting reviews of the museum and its modern exhibits. It's a long-awaited experience and an exciting place to see the depiction of the U.S. Army's growth and successes since the founding of our country.

We are still working out the details of hotel accommodations, etc. The Reunion Committee will offer more information and will announce specifics in the near future. Keep your October calendar open.



The long-anticipated official US Army museum was scheduled to open in April of 2020, but the Covid pandemic put a lid on that. However, the huge museum did finally open its doors and is drawing great interest. The TLC Brotherhood will hold our 2022 annual meeting and reunion nearby in Springfield, Virginia.

Museum diorama depicts soldiers climbing down a landing net into "Higgins" landing boats for the invasion of Normandy, France on D-Day, June 6, 1944. Higgins Boats were developed and manufactured in New Orleans, home of the largest World War II museum in the World.



# Helping Somphou

By Les Thompson, Assistance Chair

If you were at the Gettysburg Reunion, you heard about Mac Thompson's favorite driver in Laos, Somphou. In fact, he was the only driver Mac trusted. Many of us have travelled with Somphou in his van and share Mac's feelings about this knowledgeable, capable, and kind man. The pandemic put him and his family in very dire straits since travel there had been shut down, so our in-country team put out a call to help Somphou, and we followed with a request for same at the reunion.

Somphou was forced to borrow from his friends so he could pay two 600 U.S. dollar (USD) installments on his van, hoping problems caused by the pandemic would improve, but they didn't. The finance company repossessed his van, the source of his livelihood, and there is no way to get it back now. Somphou and his family seem to be managing to feed themselves and they are not paying rent as they have a house about 12 km from downtown Vientiane – their debt is to their friends, which as you can imagine pains them.



Somphou with Sunee and MacAlan Thompson at an overnight stop in up-country Laos in 2007. Photo from John Sweet.

## Somphou anecdote from Glenn Black

I appreciate your recent remarks about Somphou being our most reliable contact over there. His observations and resourcefulness have been invaluable during the many trips to Laos. I still think about the 2015 visit when one of Mac's charges, Paul Hilmer of Concordia University, was too camera happy on the Long Chieng runway in front of the army base on the other side. On previous trips, Mac had warned visitors not to be flashy with their cameras. A local army newbie saw Paul with his camera and big zoom lens, and didn't like it. As a result, we wound up being interrogated in the former SKY office, and Hilmer had to delete some of the photos on his camera. We were ordered out of town. Getting in the car again to drive all the way back to Xaysomboun would have really sucked since it was already 6:00 PM. We returned to the hotel to pack up and noticed that Somphou was on the phone, talking to the governor or vice governor of Long Chieng who owned the hotel. Rather, I think the manager of the hotel called the



Somphou with village kids in Hmong country up in Northern Laos. Photo from collection of Mac Thompson.

governor when he saw us packing up to leave, so the governor called Somphou and asked him to explain. Somphou related the event, and he replied to Somphou that nobody had to leave since the governor owned the hotel, and said that he would talk to the irate army guy. The moral of the yarn is that if we had used another driver, that experience might not have turned out that well.

## Update from Vaughan Smith

As of November 2nd, they are now under a 24-day lockdown in Laos, not sure when it started, as the Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic (LPDR) wishes to rid Laos of the current Covid-19 outbreak. Nobody, including Somphou's family, can sell anything on the streets, and adding to their problems, Somphou's two daughters are presently sick and on medicine.

## Summing Up

Along with the ~180 USD collected by our TLCB Thai team as a gift, which we sent to Somphou on 1 October, we have collected another 1,460 USD from the TLCB annual reunion and some of Somphou's friends in the U.S., and 564 USD from the Thai team for a total of 2,024 USD. This will cover Somphou's debt of 1,100 USD, maybe some interest, and perhaps some assistance to his family.

Special thanks to all that have contributed.



# The Vietnam War You Haven't Been Taught

The following announcement was received from Varanya Publishing <varanyapub@outlook.com> of Arlington, Texas. Dr. Paul Carter is a member of the TLC Brotherhood team in Thailand, and has made a number of trips to up-country Laos, both with Mac Thompson and with Mac's successors in our Assistance Committee work.

Early in the Vietnam conflict, Pentagon and State Department debate occurred on how to prosecute the war. On one side, principals advocated placing the main military effort in Laos to block the Ho Chi Minh trail, arguing that as the trail was the North Vietnamese invasion route into South Vietnam, the U.S. would never be able to secure the south with an unimpeded invasion flow. Placing U.S. soldiers in South Vietnamese jungles was a misapplication of U.S. combat power, they argued, as the North Vietnamese regulars, in South Vietnam disguised as irregulars, were on favorable fighting terrain. These advocates included General Maxwell Taylor, Walt Rostow, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, Marine General Charles C. Krulak, and General Westmoreland.

Opponents of this strategy stated that the U.S. should adhere to the 1962 Geneva Accord, and that placing 300,000 + troops to man blocking positions in Laos was too large a manpower commitment. These opponents' voices prevailed.

Dr. Paul T. Carter, advancing earlier arguments of Col Harry Summers, Jr. and Norman Hannah, examines this debate, how the fight in Laos would have worked, and why the U.S. would have had more favorable rules of engagement, less casualties, a better-defined mission for both military execution and domestic consumption, and more effective application of its military capabilities by blocking the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos. Carter argues that since the North Vietnamese required five conventional force invasions to topple Saigon: three in 1968, one in 1972, and the final invasion in 1975, and calculated that Saigon could only be defeated through overwhelming conventional force. Saigon did not implode or collapse through insurrection, and the evidence for the existence of a viable insurgency is weak. North Vietnamese statements that Carter incorporates from after the war support this argument. You can view his free introductory video at "The Vietnam War You Haven't Been Taught" | Dr. Paul T. Carter—Academia.edu

Dr. Carter (Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok) is a retired U.S. Army intelligence officer, and served as the 82nd Airborne Division's Chief of Intelligence Operations in Afghanistan in 2002-2003. He subsequently spent seven years at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), focusing on Iran and Iraq.

From 2007-11 at DIA, he deployed to Iraq for four tours, two of them with U.S. Special Operations Command Task-Force 17, as the Deputy J2 Planner and as Special Assistant to the J2. In 2013, the Office of Director National Intelligence awarded Carter the U.S. President's Daily Brief Professional Recognition Award for co-authoring U.S. Presidential Daily Briefs

Carter lives in Bangkok where he

lectures and writes on Second Indochina War lessons-learned and has traveled to Laos sixteen times and to South Vietnam six, exploring lost battlefields and interviewing former warriors of various nationalities. You can also view his introductory video "What was the U.S. Secret War in Laos?" at his Academia page.



## At the Exchange!



### Callsign Mug is Back—in METAL

The Exchange's newest item was introduced at the 2021 Gettysburg Reunion and was a big hit! Now available online in our virtual store, singly or as a money-saving set. This tough, durable 8 fluid ounce metal mug will be a great companion, displaying most of the familiar callsigns, nicknames, place names, etc. Sales have been greater than anticipated, so get yours before we sell out!

You'll reminisce as you pick out familiar words between sips from what is sure to be your favorite cup! Here is the entire wrap-around, shown below:

