

# MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



The newsletter of the Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood, Inc.

Volume 23, issue 4

## The Heroics of TLCB Member Alan Johnston Recognized by a U.S. Senator and an Army Four-Star General

TLCB member Alan “Hooker” Johnston attended the 2022 reunion, accompanied by his highly-trained companion dog, thanks to the help of fellow Maine veteran, Randy Jenness. We learned that Alan had quite a spectacular service career as a contract civilian working in Baghdad and other parts of Iraq. As the result of an incident in 2004 that nearly killed him and left him essentially disabled, Alan has been awarded two federal medals: The Defense of Freedom and the Secretary of Defense Medal for Valor. The following account was entered into the U.S. Senate record on November 14, 2006, by then-Senator Olympia Snowe of Augusta, Maine. It is followed by the citation that accompanied the OSD Medal for Valor, awarded personally by General David Petraeus in 2010. Alan was the third recipient of this medal, and fewer than twenty have ever been awarded. It has been equated with the Medal of Honor. We will let these two documents stand for themselves in explaining why Alan has been so significantly recognized.



Alan “Hooker” Johnston with his good buddy, also from Maine, Randy Jenness. Alan is also a member and officer of the American Legion’s “China Post 1, in Exile.”

Photo by Bill Tilton

**Ms. SNOWE.** Mr. President, I rise today to honor and recognize with the highest esteem Mr. Alan Johnston of Windsor, ME, for the tremendous courage and enormous valor he demonstrated in Iraq in 2004 that helped save many lives.

CPT Aaron P. Hill of the U.S. Marine Corps recounted in a witness statement that Alan Johnston’s heroic actions on August 7, 2004, had he been in military uniform, would have earned

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# Student Assistance Fund Update

According to Les Thompson, Assistance Chairman, the current Student Assistance Program should “sunset” in 2024. As agreed after the death of John Middlewood in Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, no new students have been added to this program and it will end when the last enrolled student graduates.

Currently there are two university students still in the program. They are: Matchima Khanda, 4th Year Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University (Mathematics Teaching); and, Sawini Manaonok 3rd Year UBU. Matchima should graduate in the spring of 2023 and Sawini in the spring of 2024. The committee is still looking at options for continuing to assist students; however, our school rehab projects in Laos benefit a lot more students overall.

Below are two photos that include Mr. Sattawat Sri-in, who has monitored the program since the death of John Middlewood and makes the regular tuition payments on behalf of the other members of the TLC Brotherhood.



## Donations to the Assistance Fund

To be sure your donation is posted in time, please ensure that the treasurer receives it by **December 28th**. In the March issue of the *Mekong Express Mail* we will present the list of donors to the TLC Brotherhood Assistance Fund each year.

The March 2023 issue will include all those who donated between January 1st and the end of December 2022.

## DUES Reminder and Info

This issue of the *MEM* includes a card which shows when you are paid through. If your card shows “2022” you need to pay \$30 to the TLC Brotherhood by the end of January.

Mail your payment in the enclosed envelope, or pay online at [www.tlc-brotherhood.com](http://www.tlc-brotherhood.com). You do not need a PayPal account and PayPal will not collect your information other than to process the payment. TLCB pays a modest fee for that service.

### Help our Brotherhood Team

- **Provide any contact information changes, such as phone, email, or address (on back of card).**
- **Always put your member number on all communications and checks! (It's on the dues card and address label).**

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### The Mekong Express Mail

David MacDonald (1939-2019), Founding Editor

Editor: John Harrington (jharrington@nscopy.com)  
Asst. Editor: Thelma Tilton (thelmatilton@gmail.com)  
Distribution: John Duffin (jduffin29@gmail.com)  
Composition: Bill Tilton (billtilton@gmail.com)

### TLCB Facebook Page

Ray Boas, Monitor  
(raymar711@gmail.com)

### TLC Brotherhood Website

Jerry Karnes, Webmaster  
(JKarnes@tlc-brotherhood.com)

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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.**  
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**Reunion 2023: St. Paul, Minnesota**



# The Crash of BATCAT Two-One

A Mekong Express Mail *interview with Ron Bogota*

By *Bill Tilton, MEM staff*

It was late April in Korat, where Songkran celebrations of the rainy season had already taken place and the rainy monsoon had started with its daily thunderstorms in the area. TLC Brotherhood long-time member, Ron Bogota, (pronounced “Buh-GO-tuh”) was a motor pool driver and had delivered the crew of an EC-121R to the flightline. He knew everyone on this crew. Their mission was to monitor the sensors placed along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, at that time part of a highly classified project, called “College Eye.” It was April 25 of 1969. At 1530 hours, “BATCAT Two-One” pulled out of the chocks, and other than the mechanic who pulled those wheel chocks, Ron was the last person to see the crew alive. As it turned out, he spent the night in muddy rice paddies searching through scattered wreckage for their bodies.

At the recent TLC Brotherhood Annual Meeting and Reunion, held in Springfield, Virginia, the group travelled by bus to the National Mall, in Washington, D.C., for another of our visits to the Vietnam War Memorial, often called “The Wall.” Ron Bogota had passed the word that he had brought a plaque to place at the panel where the 18 crewmembers’ names of BATCAT 21 are chiseled into the black granite of that evocative monument. My wife, Thelma, and I were on the second bus and when we arrived at the top of the gentle slope down to the apex of the Wall, I saw Ron and some others gathered at one of the far panels. When we got there, we found that two workmen had roped off about twenty feet of the monument and were replacing some loose cobblestones. They had already invited Ron inside the roped-off area and moved aside as we gathered for a silent prayer followed by a brief description by Ron about the crash and why we were honoring the victims. I was impressed that the workmen did not hesitate to drop their work, lower the tapes, and leave, probably per the policy of the monument caretakers.

As Ron explained, BATCAT 21 was the callsign for a Lockheed EC-121R “Warning Star” that was laden with special electronic gear and carried a back-end crew called “CIM,” which stands for “Combat Information Monitor.” The sensors were listening devices that were placed along the hidden jungle roads and paths of the famous Ho Chi Minh Trail supply route, which was used to send supplies to North Vietnamese fighters in South Vietnam. This was the famous “McNamara Line.”

The EC-121 was a military aircraft adapted from the graceful Lockheed “Super Constellation” airliner, and powered by four R-3350 piston engines, the same engine that also powered the Boeing B-29 bombers during World War II and the A-1 Navy/Air Force fighters that saw service in the Korean and Vietnam wars. Between 1966 and 1969, 30 retired Navy EC-121s were transferred to the Air Force and converted into “R” models, as sensor-monitoring aircraft. BATCAT 21 had the tail number 67-21493.

**BATCAT** continues on page 4



Above, “College Eye” facilities at Korat RTAFB. In the mid-1960s this was one of the most sensitive installations of the Vietnam War. Photo public domain.

Quoted from Wikipedia (Korat RTAFB history): “The mission of the 20 EC-121Rs was to detect and interdict the flow of supplies from North Vietnam down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the People’s Army of Vietnam and Viet Cong forces in South Vietnam. Their primary objective was to create an anti-vehicle barrier. If the vehicles could be stopped, then we would be able to halt a major source of enemy supplies.”



EC-121R on the parking ramp at Korat RTAFB. Departing aircraft is the EC-121D, predecessor to the AWACS airborne early warning aircraft. Photo Wikimedia.



Morning-after overhead view of the crash site of BATCAT 21. The initial point of impact, is at upper left, next to the "X" on the photo. The black arrow points to the Connie's triple-tail that made Lockheed's gracefully-shaped Constellation so readily recognizable. Personnel can be seen in the rice paddies searching for crew remains and items that may be useful in the investigation. Air Force photo. Markings added by the MEM staff.

### **BATCAT continued from page 3**

The relationship between ground support and crew personnel at Korat was pretty close, so Ron knew many of the 18 crewmembers who perished on that day. This event has troubled him ever since, particularly since he was detailed to assist at the crash site, getting a call at the motor pool at about eight PM and working through the entire night.

When Ron arrived at the scene, in muddy rice paddies less than four miles from the runway at Korat, he immediately realized how violent the crash had been. The only recognizable parts of the crashed Connie were the damaged but intact triple-tail and the engines with their twisted propellers. The violence of the impact was reflected in the many tiny pieces that were strewn around, and by the deep gouges in the ground.

### **What Happened**

According to the accident report, BATCAT 21 departed on Korat runway "24" (heading to the Southwest) at two minutes before four PM and reported "airborne" to Departure Control. The pilots immediately requested a radar update on the thunderstorm cell ahead of them. Their mission briefing

had included a review of the 553d Recon Wing policy of *no takeoffs or landings when thunderstorms are in the near vicinity of the airbase*. Their brief conversation with Departure Control suggests that the pilots were clearly aware of the presence of a nearby thunderstorm. Both pilots on this crew were highly experienced with thousands of flying hours.

### **As copied from the actual accident report:**

Immediately upon contacting Departure Control, BATCAT 21 queried the radar operator about the position of "that thunderstorm cell" and the radar operator reported the storm as stationary over the field extending 20 miles to the Southwest. The pilot of BATCAT 21 discussed the departure route with the controller and requested a right turn after takeoff instead of the usual left turn. The pilot also requested radar vectors after takeoff and the departure controller immediately began giving turn instructions to the

**BATCAT continues next page**



crew. While obtaining takeoff clearance on the ground, BATCAT 21 was initially directed to “maintain runway heading for radar identification.” This was changed to a heading of 280 degrees prior to departure.

After the crew reported turning to 280 degrees approximately one minute after initial radio contact, “BATCAT 21 then requested an immediate right turn to attempt to get out of severe turbulence. The request was approved. Neither primary nor secondary (IFF) radar contact was established.”

The report goes on:

At approximately two-and one-half miles after lift-off and about 500 feet altitude, the aircraft entered a down draft which also was an area of strong wind shear. The aircraft experienced turbulence, but more significantly, the relative wind swiftly changed from a 20-knot head wind to at least a 20-knot tail wind. As

the aircraft descended it entered the region closest to the ground where the tail wind was the strongest. Witness reports and wind damage estimates indicate that there was a most likely 60 knot tail wind at the surface when the aircraft crashed.

*Notes: 60 knots is about 69 mph.*

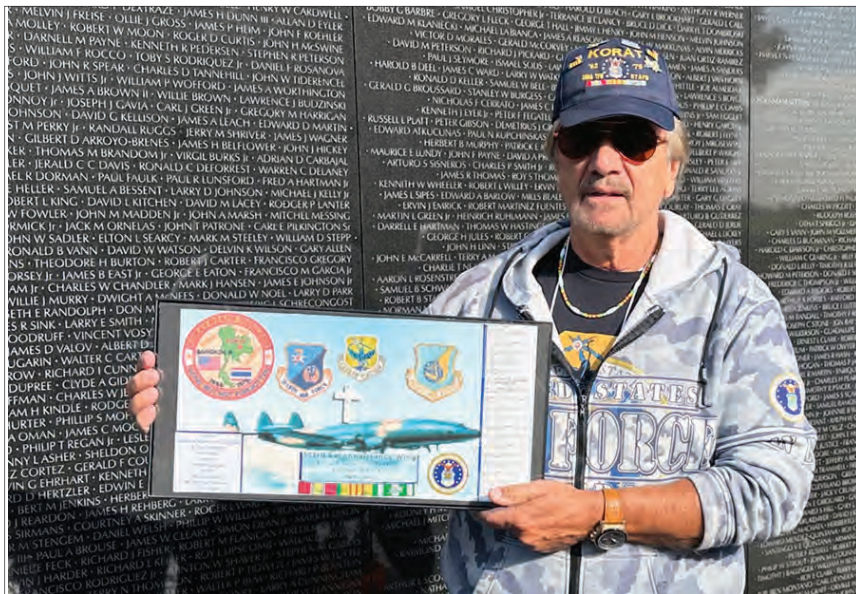
*Wind shear occurs when two airmasses pass each other going in very different directions, and can cause very abrupt changes in the air that is passing over the wings and control surfaces.*

*Relative wind is the speed and direction of the air passing over the aircraft, which is caused by the movement of the aircraft and is independent of the “wind” felt when stationary on the ground.*

We asked Ron about his involvement in the crash aftermath. He explained, “When we got to the crash site around 1800 hours on 25 April 69, I was operating an M-246 10-ton wrecker crane from the motor pool. The ground was very muddy. The only light, as I recall, was from the operating vehicles already on

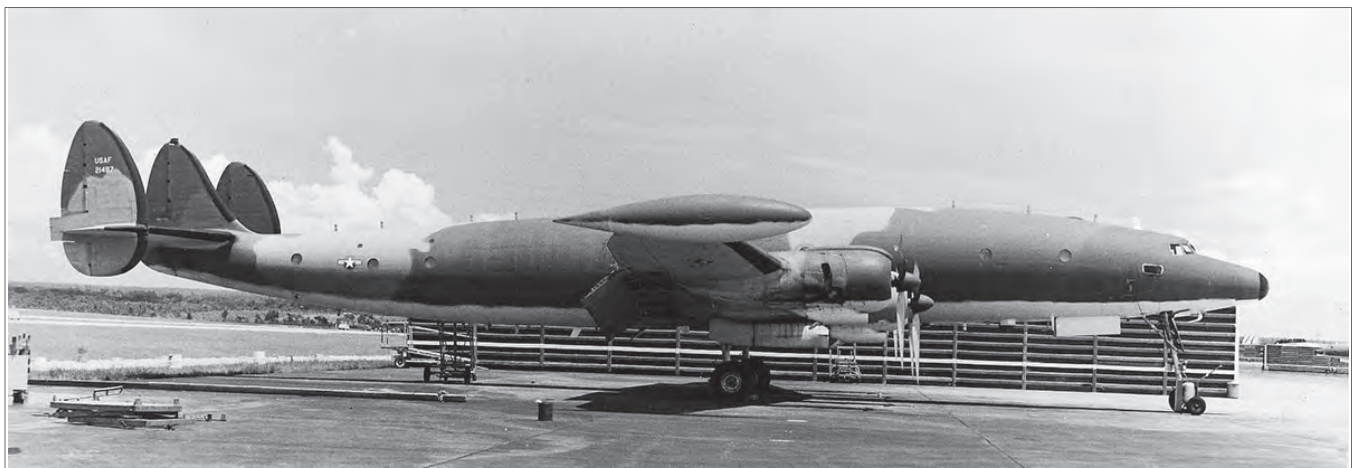
site and then later NF-2 lights that are used on the flightline. As I positioned the crane as per orders from the area commander, I got out of the cab and walked over to a huge rut caused by the aircraft. An MP [military police] said to me, ‘I wouldn’t go there if I was you.’ I told him that I did transport for that crew a few hours prior.

“The site was unlike anything I’ve ever seen in my life. It haunts me to this very day. I did find body parts and burned crew members with chutes in the trees. Their lunch box lunches were thrown about, and the stainless water and coffee jugs were stuck deep in the ground. That night we found 17 of the crew, but one was missing whom we found at day break inside part of the fuselage.” Then Ron trailed off, as he said in a lower voice, “God almighty, it was terrible. The smell was horrible, with the aviation fuel and burned bodies.” Those are memories that seem to stay with one forever.



Ron Bogota with his BATCAT 21 plaque at the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C. on October 14th, 2022. Photo by Bill Tilton

Below, Lockheed EC-121R in a revetment at Korat. Photo public domain.



“Hooker” continued from page 1

[Senator Snow continues:]

him a medal. Mr. Johnston, a civilian contractor who was overseeing construction of two medical clinics in Iraq, acted swiftly and selflessly to rescue others during a suicide attack on the headquarters facility at the Al Kasik Military Base located approximately 35 miles northwest of Mosul, Iraq.

Captain Hill was part of a unit advising Iraqi soldiers in Northern Iraq. He credits Mr. Johnston with saving a number of lives after insurgents drove two water trucks, packed with as many as 8,000 pounds of explosives, to the headquarters building. The blasts from this insurgent attack lasted over 90 minutes and destroyed the 2-level headquarters building, resulting in 14 deaths and an estimated 40 severely to critically injured people.



The DoD Defense of Freedom medal.

Acting without hesitation, Mr. Johnston sounded the alarm, throwing those around him to the floor, saving many lives. In the devastation that followed, acting with total disregard to his own safety, Mr. Johnston emerged from the wreckage and began to assist in evacuating and treating the survivors. Despite the continuing barrage of mortars and rockets, Mr. Johnston continued to offer help with his medical expertise, calm demeanor, and steadfast devotion to helping his fellow man.

Mr. Johnston not only reduced casualties and treated the wounded but restored critical support systems, including power and water. He also helped to find ways to feed the thousands of Iraqi soldiers dependent on the American military for support.

Alan Johnston, a 6-year veteran of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and an emergency medical technician for nearly 18 years, suffered injuries to his head and leg but treated himself and remained at the base in Iraq for 3 months after the attack. He left Iraq in December of 2004 and underwent another series of leg surgeries once he returned to the United States.

As a result of Captain Hill’s eyewitness account of Alan Johnston’s actions, last month I had the solemn privilege of pinning the Defense of Freedom Medal on Mr. Johnston’s lapel at a medal ceremony held at my Augusta, ME office with Mr. Johnston’s family present, officially acknowledging these courageous actions. This award is a rare and unique commendation issued only to civilians and is equivalent to the Purple Heart awarded to military service men and women.

But what is most remarkable is that this occasion marked the first time a civilian, private contractor was awarded this particular medal. Mr. Johnston’s lifesaving response to serve and sacrifice on behalf of others was something he chose to do. It was not his duty. It was not his responsibility; it was his goodwill and American patriotism that drove him to put his life at risk in order to assist and save others. There is only one word that sufficiently describes this exemplary Mainer, and that word is hero. I was extremely proud to present him with the Defense of Freedom Medal.

Mr. Johnston’s awe-inspiring willingness to think of others ahead of himself will forever be remembered by those

whose lives he touched and saved that day. The courageous commitment and valiant care demonstrated by Alan Johnston of Windsor, ME, exemplifies the very best of what it means to be a Mainer and an American.”

**From the American Legion China Post 1 web page:**

“At CENTCOM HQ on May 7, 2010 General David Petraeus personally presented Alan “Hooker” Johnson [sic] with only the third award of the Secretary of Defense Medal of Valor for performing an act of Heroism with voluntary risk of personal safety. He was also awarded the Defense of Freedom Medal by the US Department of Defense 4 years ago for saving the lives of US Servicemen around him that day.

“The narration reads, ‘The Secretary of Defense takes great pleasure in awarding the Medal of Valor to Mr. Alan Johnston for performing an act of heroism with voluntary risk of personal safety in the face of danger on 7 August 2004. On that afternoon, insurgents launched a coordinated, complex attack on Al Kasik Military Training Base, Northwest of Mosul, Iraq. During the most intense period of incoming fire, which



The SecDef Medal of Valor.

lasted over ninety minutes, insurgent forces employed rockets, mortars and two Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices in an unsuccessful effort to destroy the Iraqi Army Forces training there. During the attack, Mr. Johnson acted without hesitation to sound the alarm and direct others to take cover. Within seconds of this action, an explosion resulted in significant damage to the headquarters

building. With total disregard for his own safety, and despite suffering from his own injuries, Mr. Johnston began to triage victims and administer treatment to others who were injured during the attack. He then proceeded through the rubble, again exposing himself to enemy fire, to assess victims in the Base Command Center. Utilizing material on hand, Mr. Johnston assisted in quickly fabricating several stretchers from broken doors, desks, and chairs. Mr. Johnston provided necessary care and remained with the injured troops until they were securely loaded into medevac helicopters. Mr. Johnston’s courageous actions under fire, selfless dedication to duty, and willingness to answer the call of duty reflect great credit upon himself, his family, the United States Department of Defense and the United States of America.’



“Signed, Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense, United States of America.”

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**TLC Brotherhood**

**PO Box 60**

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**INCLUDE MEMBER NR!**



# This Year's Reunion

By Bill Tilton

In mid-October about seventy TLC Brotherhood members, spouses, and guests met at Springfield, Virginia for our 24th reunion and the TLC Brotherhood Corporation annual meeting 24. Vice President Gerry Frazier, who is designated as National Reunion Chairman in our bylaws, virtually single-handedly put this one together and did all the local groundwork.

The choice of Springfield, Virginia was excellent from one

would be heading that way, several of us were at a bank branch taking care of some official matters for the Brotherhood. But when we finally did go in mid-afternoon, we saw no other TLC Brotherhood members. Furthermore, the only Army TLCB member who attended the reunion was reunion-regular Randy Jenness. Now, Randy is one of the strongest supporters of our Assistance program, and always one of the most helpful and

spirited members to attend reunions. But Randy did not serve in a T-L-C country; he just likes what we do and what we stand for. In other words, he probably would have been at this reunion regardless of where it was held. Where was the Army? Well; I can't say, but from that aspect we failed totally!



At the Korean War Memorial, across the National Mall from the Vietnam War Memorial, TLC Brotherhood President John Sweet chats with Vice President and 2022 Reunion Chairman and "committee of one" Gerry Frazier. Reunion photos by Bill Tilton.

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standpoint and a near total failure from another. While we preferred to move west to accommodate the many members who do not live in the East, we also felt it was high time to bring us back to "The Wall," that is, the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. Springfield was logical for this because it's near the city yet hotels and services tend to be somewhat less expensive in this suburban location. Furthermore, it is near Fort Belvoir, where the long-awaited Museum of the U.S. Army had recently opened. Not only would this be an interesting and new tour opportunity, but we felt it would likely draw in some of our Army members and might even help recruit new members of the Army persuasion. This idea, unfortunately, was the "complete failure."

As always, those who attended had a great time visiting with each other, and the trip into Washington was very meaningful and enjoyable. Nearly everyone went, and the weather was perfect. Our bus schedule allowed plenty of time to spend in contemplation at The Wall, and for strolling around the Reflecting Pool to the Lincoln Memorial, the Korean War Memorial, and the World War II Memorial. While we did not lay a wreath this year, Ron Bogota did have a special event in memory of the crew of Batcat 21 out of Korat; see the nearby story.

Saturday afternoon after the annual meeting, the schedule was for tours by private car to the Army Museum. I don't know how many actually went there because when most members



Though Reunion Chairman Gerry Frazier had to do all the planning and preparation for the Springfield reunion single-handed, he got some great help at the event. Above all, Randy Jenness worked the hardest! Randy has been a great booster of Assistance and reunions ever since he joined the TLC Brotherhood. Among others who helped, Monty Dubs gets our thanks for purchasing the snacks from factory outlets in his home town of Hanover, "Snack capital of the USA!"





One of the excellent diaramas at the U.S. Army Museum. There was a very professional short intro film (15 minutes) and U.S. Army engagements are depicted since its founding in 1775 as our first national institution to engagements in South Asia.

disability: he has about 15% normal vision and is attended by a companion dog. Alan was almost fatally injured by a truck bomb explosion, but was able to save lives of other victims by treating them while under fire and seriously wounded. For this he received two federal medals. Please read the article on Page 1, containing a Congressional Record insertion by Senator Olympia Snowe for the DoD Defense of Freedom medal, and the citation for the SecDef Medal of Valor awarded to him by

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We did, however, have one Marine veteran, brought once again as a guest of Sally MacDonald, widow of our MEM's founding editor. Sally brought Jon Dansecker, who works for the Department of Veterans Affairs near her home in Havre de Grace, Maryland. Jon came for the second time, and after the meeting he joined as one of our newest members. He, too, admires the work of the Brotherhood and wants to support our continuing efforts.

One of the members who attended for the first time, and somewhat of a celebrity in his own right, is Alan Johnston, who was brought to the reunion by his friend and fellow Maine-iac, Randy Jenness. Alan shows outward signs of partial

General David Petraeus.

As the photos show, the auction was as much fun as it's ever been and sales raised thousands of dollars for Assistance. Also a great boost for Assistance, once again, was the "Rosie's Raffle" for a beautiful quilt that was donated by member Mark Schlieder



Ron Bogota explains the story behind his BATCAT 21 plaque and where the 18 lost crewmembers are engraved on the Vietnam War Memorial. "Besides the guy who pulled their wheelchairs," says Ron, "I was the last person to see them alive." After spending that night searching for their remains at the crash site he has struggled with PTSD. See the story, beginning on Page 3.



Assistance Committee Chairman turned co-auctioneer, Les Thompson displays a donated auction item to encourage bidding "for the kids!" As in the past, Carolyn Thompson and Nancy Sweet kept the tally and toted up the final bills for auction buyers. For this work they were titled Reunion Funds Collection Team.

and his wife Rebecca. We all are very grateful to them!

As usual, one of the first priorities on registration day was to locate a local Thai restaurant for dinner "on your own." In recent years Springfield seems to have become populated by numerous international dining places. In fact, there was a large

**Springfield continues next page**



Vietnamese restaurant directly across the street from our hotel, and a Vietnamese “pho” restaurant right around the corner. There were plenty of others, representing the Orient and the Middle East, particularly, and of course several establishments that serve Thai food. I don’t remember a reunion where we had as many choices of cuisine within easy walking distance of the hotel!

On Saturday morning, the board election was our first order of business, as required, and Randy Jenness agreed to act as “trusted agent” to tally the votes so that, finally, John Duffin could attend the annual meeting from the start. In 2022 all nominees were unopposed and all were elected, with John



Out of uniform? Barry Rowland not only wearing a non-regulation “Foreign Legion” hat of some sort, but also wearing the shirt of a different reunion! Looks like he was satisfied that he got his money’s worth.



Members Ed Stein and Debora Stein, who was the longest-serving chaplain of the TLC Brotherhood. They appear to be delighted with these auction keepsakes, though bidding and counter-bidding was fierce and ruthless! Remember, “It’s for the kids!” We did not see them wearing this headgear on the streets of Springfield next day, but the local citizens of this very-international community would not have given them a second look.

Sweet as president, me (Bill Tilton) as treasurer, and board members Ray Boas and Roger Durant to new terms as board members. New nominee Harry Bright was elected to replace John Sweet as a board member.

For those of us who did actually go see the Army’s new museum on Fort Belvoir, it was a real treat, though somewhat less daunting in size than the Air Force’s giant display at Dayton. Instead of displaying rows of guns, tanks and trucks, the museum designers chose to depict the U.S. Army’s engagement in our nation’s wars and battles since it was created by the Continental Congress, which first convened on May 10th, 1775.



Says the Army Museum: On June 14, 1775, the Continental Congress passed the following resolution:

Resolved, That six companies of expert riflemen [sic], be immediately raised in Pennsylvania, two in Maryland, and two in Virginia; ... [and] that each company, as soon as completed [sic], shall march and join the army near Boston, to be there employed as light infantry, under the command of the chief Officer in that army.

With this resolution, the Continental Congress adopted the New England Army of Observation, making it a “continental” army — a united colonial fighting force — that could represent all 13 colonies with the addition of the troops from the three middle colonies. The Continental Army thus became America’s *first national institution*.

From that point there are several rooms depicting major eras of our nation’s history and the participation of the Army in its wars. Major exhibits are World Wars I and II, the Cold War, including Vietnam, and the more current wars in the Middle East and South Asia. There are ample displays of uniforms, weaponry, and equipment, and if one read all the material presented it would take several days to cover it all. There is a short film in a full-sensory theater where a very professional and effective depiction of the Army’s role in our nation is summarized.

While we didn’t see any familiar faces in the museum, we did have some interesting conversations with docents and other viewers, and we came upon an especially notable group. There, reading the displays intently, was a group of five or six very fit-looking young Ukrainians (see photo). In excellent English they told us that they were in the U.S. for “training,” and we didn’t pry. They were very friendly but did not seem too eager to divulge much detail about their presence here, no doubt as it should be.

That evening the reunion attendants assembled for the President’s Banquet, hosted by our new President John Sweet. Activities during the evening included presentation of a certificate of appreciation to outgoing President Gary Beatty, along with a book containing the U.S. Constitution and a number of other important documents.

Readers may recall that our scheduled guest speaker was forced to cancel his appearance due to his son’s health

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emergency. For a time, it appeared that we simply would have no speaker. But on very short notice, Gerry Frazier was able to obtain the good services of James “Jim” Quinlan, a retired Marine and long-time employee of the Transportation Security Administration. For much of his adult life Jim Quinlan has been a student of military history with primary focus on the Civil War. Over a span of years, he accumulated the personal letters and diary of a Union Army Chaplain, William Lyman Hyde, of the 112th New York Infantry Regiment. The letters,

Reunion Chairman and TLCB Vice President Gerry Frazier, left, presented this certificate of appreciation on behalf of the Board of Directors to Gary Beatty, who had just completed his final term as President of the Brotherhood (which has a three-term limit). Since Gary is a retired attorney and prosecutor in Florida, the board presented him with a book containing the U.S. Constitution and many other important documents.



At right, Bill Tilton and John Sweet ran into some real-life heroes while browsing in the Army Museum. These three young people at left, along with several more who understandably chose not to be photographed, are in the Ukrainian military and were in the U.S. for special training. We expressed our support for their struggle against Russia.

principally to Chaplain Hyde’s wife, encompassed his service in this unit from 1862 to 1865. Jim compiled this correspondence and diary into the book “Armed Only with Faith,” which was published by McFarland and Company in 2015.

As a frequent visitor to Arlington National Cemetery, Jim became interested in cataloging the Civil War veterans interred there. A task he initially thought might take a few months to

**Springfield continues on page 10**



Carolyn Thompson holds the bag of raffle tickets while Rebecca Schlieder, co-donor of this year’s quilt, holds her eyes tightly shut and reaches in for a random winner’s ticket. All proceeds for raffle tickets go toward the Assistance Fund. In the TLC Brotherhood, all administrative expenses are paid from annual dues, not donations.



a year has now been under way for nearly five years, with an estimated two years more to complete. His banquet talk to the TLC Brotherhood dealt with the surprising magnitude of the task, which includes checking the existing military records of each name collected from an Arlington headstone, at the National Archives. Jim has discovered photographs of many of these soldiers and sailors which will be included in his growing catalog. He has found that some Confederate as well as Union soldiers are buried at Arlington, and many of their records contain surprising stories of their service.

The Rosie's Raffle quilt drawing winning ticket was drawn by quilt co-donor Rebecca Schlieder, with her eyes closed tightly! And out came a ticket with Dan Pierce's name on it, who as it happens is one of our newest members, attending his first TLCB reunion.



AND THE WINNER IS.....Dan Pierce, shown here with his wife Cindy. Dan celebrated his first year as a TLCB member on October 18th, so this was their first TLCB reunion. That is *some luck!* The *MEM* staff congratulates you, Dan...and Cindy.



Retired Marine and long-time TSA employee Jim Quinlan agreed to speak at the President's Banquet on very short notice, yet fascinated us with an account of discoveries and difficulties of his current hobby, tracking down and researching National Cemetery burials of Civil War veterans. Our scheduled speaker was called away by a developing family tragedy, and we are very grateful to Jim for stepping up..

Sadly, some members and guests had registered and planned to come, but were unable to attend. Mike Potaski had some medical issues to deal with and had to cancel. Eileen Harrington, *MEM* editor John Harrington's wife, is dealing with several broken bones and long-term physical therapy, so they were very disappointed to miss seeing friends and experiencing the camaraderie and fun. George Shenberger's children were also registered but missing because their mother, George's first wife, was gravely ill and has passed away.

For the rest of us, once again it was time to say those goodbyes. Always sad, but for most of us there is next year to look forward to. Where will our reunion be? When will it be? Those answers are in this issue, so please go find them and make your plans....we do want to see you there!



## Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The five members listed below joined between the September, 2022 issue of the *MEM* and December 1st. 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
2014	USA	Michael	Lopez	Boerne	TX
2015	USAF	William	Van der Ven	Atoka	TN
2016	N/A	Potjane	Dubs	Hanover	PA
2017	USAF	Charles	Trout	Dale	TX
2018	USMC	Jon	Dansicker	Havre de Grace	MD

# C-130 Pilot and a Very Special Mission

by John Weber

I graduated from high school in June 1966. The war was still going on and I knew that there was a high probability of getting drafted. I thought if I had to go to Vietnam, I would rather do what I chose instead of being drafted, so I decided that college with an AFROTC program was my best option. My high school band instructor was a pilot in the Ohio Guard and he was a big influence on my desire to be an AF pilot.

I chose Kent State and was in ROTC for four years, 1966-1970, though at times I and fellow cadets were not the most popular students on campus. The shootings at Kent State happened in May 1970. I was scheduled to graduate that May, but the school closed; however, the school and the Air Force were very accommodating and I graduated in December 1970 with a commission as a 2nd Lt.

A year of pilot training was next, at Laredo AFB, Texas. From February 1972 through August 1972, I completed C-130 initial training at Little Rock AFB, Arkansas, water survival at Homestead AFB, Florida, and jungle survival at Clark AFB, Philippines. I then went to Korat AB, Thailand as a member of the 7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron. Our C-130s had a capsule in the cargo area with consoles for 12 controllers. We flew orbits over the Cambodia border to facilitate command and control of the air war. Each mission was 12 hours and our squadron provided 24/7 coverage.

In 1974 after my year at Korat, I volunteered for a consecutive overseas tour and flew C-130s with the 21st Tactical Airlift Squadron at Clark AFB, Philippines. During 1½ years with the 21st, I flew a variety of missions including airdrops in Cambodia, a mission to Australia and Pakistan, two diplomatic support missions from Saigon to Hanoi, and three evacuation flights from Saigon to Clark AB in the spring of 1975, just prior to the fall of South Vietnam in April, 1975.

On one airdrop mission over Cambodia, I saw tracer bullets fly past the wings but fortunately we were never hit. On another mission our plane was heavily packed with ammunition for an airdrop in Cambodia. We had an engine problem requiring us to



Loading the C-130 prior to a "diplomatic support" mission to Hanoi, North Vietnam.

shut it down. I could not maintain the required airdrop altitude on three engines and a return to base was not an option; our crew recalculated the airdrop parameters and after a 360-degree orbit, we successfully completed the mission.

The missions from Saigon to Hanoi were in the summer of 1974 and they were unique in many ways. I flew on two missions, once as a co-pilot and the other as the aircraft commander. The frequency was once a week, usually on Friday. There was no specific State Department briefing. Any needed intel came through our squadron intelligence office.

There were parameters that we had to follow to make the trip. I had to take off within 20 minutes of scheduled departure; there was a specific airspeed, specific altitude, and of course, a specific route to fly to Hanoi. Prior to getting off of the plane in Hanoi we had to change into civilian clothes, and were driven to a government building with a nice meeting room where our individual pictures were taken. On most missions, pictures were prohibited, but on this one trip pictures were allowed.

The passengers were part of the UN Peace Commission. It seemed to me that this was a last-ditch attempt to end the war

*Hanoi continues next page*



The flightline at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airfield prior to the Hanoi mission. Photos provided by the author.



John Weber (tallest) with North Vietnamese at Tan Son Nhut prior to Hanoi trip.



and possibly save face for everyone involved. The four parties were the United States, South Vietnam, and neutral countries like Canada or Poland. There were guidelines of eight people per country, but no one was ever denied a seat. Passenger IDs were checked against the manifest we were given. Our loadmasters were not allowed to ask what was in the crates that the North Vietnamese were transporting to or from Hanoi. The only information given was the weight of the crates for the weight and balance of the aircraft.

The North Vietnamese we met on the flight line in Saigon were there to monitor the cargo loading and then to guard



Along a street in downtown Hanoi.

the crates to prevent any tampering. They arrived with the cargo, stayed on the flight line and then flew with us to Hanoi.

My notification for these Hanoi missions was nothing special. The C-130 crews were flexible. Whoever was next in the flight rotation could be assigned to this mission. I felt honored to be part of this peace keeping initiative, but as 1974 continued on and nothing had changed and only got worse as far as the war was going, I felt that the

Hanoi missions had accomplished nothing.

Flying over North Vietnam did not bother me because I knew that it was a very important, high visibility mission and there was a lot of effort on the ground to make this effort work. The countryside was tropical, with nothing to distinguish it from South Vietnam. We did not see any military operations or bombed-out areas. The airfield at Hanoi seemed pretty ordinary, and it looked similar to flying into Clark AFB, Philippines. After we landed and parked at Hanoi, the ground personnel boarded the aircraft. They were very eager to get on board and get their boxes offloaded and on their way. They were all very polite and no one was armed. After a three-hour courtesy visit downtown, we returned to the airfield and loaded the crates destined for Saigon. The return flight was uneventful.

I honestly didn't see the benefit of these flights. In my opinion they were just goodwill gestures by the United States. We could have been transporting anything for the North. My opinion only—the North was using us. Any positive accomplishments benefited only the North.

As far as Korat goes my experiences were not great or memorable. A few days after I arrived, I was downtown Korat and had my camera stolen. Two weeks later I was downtown again and was close to being mugged. From then on, I spent most of my free time on the base using the Morale-Welfare-Recreation facilities (MWR). One highlight of the year was a Thai

restaurant outside of the back gate. It was primarily for Thai officers, and was a great place that I often frequented for their delicious food.

After South Vietnam fell in April 1975, there was an abundance of pilots with fewer flying missions. "Rated supplement"

assignments were offered at the bases where the flying squadrons were based. I maintained my pilot rating, but worked in a ground job for a specific number of years after which I could select the plane I wanted to fly. I accepted an assignment as a security police shift supervisor with the 3rd Security Police Squadron at Clark AFB and was there for three years until May 1978.

In June 1978 I was assigned to the 9th Military Airlift Squadron, Dover AFB, flying the C-5 Galaxy. I was there until my retirement in February 1991, except for 1986 when I was sent to Kunsan AB, Korea for a one-year assignment. At Kunsan, I was Chief of the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing Command Post where I supervised 16 NCOs and 9 Officers.

During my C-5 career I flew missions into such nations as the Central African Republic, Chad, Senegal, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Costa Rica, Panama, Honduras, Columbia, Japan, Korea, Egypt, and various bases throughout Europe. My final missions before retirement were in support of Desert Storm.



Aircraft commander John Weber in civilian clothes at Hanoi, prior to leaving the aircraft.



John Weber socializing with North Vietnamese personnel after landing at Hanoi. In retrospect, he believes any positive outcomes from these missions benefitted only the North Vietnamese, who took the opportunity to use us..



# Relocation, a friend, an unwanted bus ride, but no haircut

by Mike Lopez

It's mid-October 1975 and I've arrived at Travis AFB waiting for my flight to rejoin the 7th Radio Research Field Station (aka Ramasun Army Station). After realizing that un-bloused boots and an untucked fatigue shirt were practices not permissible stateside, I decided six weeks at good "ol" Fort Hood was enough and requested reassignment. Despite all the endorsements by the company commander, battalion commander, personnel officer, etc. recommending disapproval, HQ Army Security Agency (ASA) decided that my talents as a Morse Intercept Operator were better utilized at Ramasun.

At Travis, who do I run into but Tom Fleming. He was ASA Military Police who was at the 7th with me during my first stint. We got to be good friends and I could always count on him for a ride in the MP jeep from the front gate to the barracks whenever I wasn't steady enough on my feet to walk it. He, too, was headed back to Ramasun. On the flight over we had a great time reminiscing, and after the usual stops in Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines, we land in Bangkok. Since it was a Friday, Tom and I knew we were going to spend at least 24 hours at the Windsor (the military hotel). We decided to skip the military bus and take a taxi there. We start haggling with the taxi driver who was parked in front of the terminal, directly behind the military bus. Now my Thai was fair, but Tom was fluent. He'd been working on a linguist MOS career field, but didn't complete the course so they made him an ASA MP; however, he had a real knack for language and learned Thai fluently from his Teelok (girlfriend). But I digress.

As we are haggling over the fare to get to the Windsor, we hear a booming voice from behind – "Get on the bus!" Wow, it's a grizzled old E-9 directing us to get on the military bus. Tom and I try to explain that we're okay on the economy as this is our second go round in Thailand. This Command Sergeant Major would hear none of it, assured us that the taxi driver would just rip us off, and again directed us to get on the bus. Since we had no choice Tom and I got on, and when the bus is ready to leave, the E-9 climbs aboard, looks at me and Tom, and says, "I know you boys have been on leave, but you both need haircuts. I will be at the bar in the Windsor at 1900 hours. Report to me then with haircuts." With that, the CSM departs



Mike Lopez (05H), was in the 7th RRFS in 1974-75 and 1975-76.

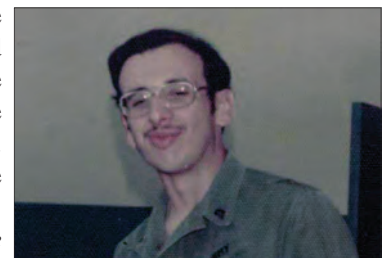
and climbs into his staff car. That should have been the end of the story, but as Paul Harvey used to say, "And now the rest of the story."

As we're rolling down a Bangkok freeway, the bus develops some kind of mechanical issue and rolls to the breakdown lane. After the bus stops, the Thai bus driver announces that he will get to the nearest phone and call for another bus. So here we are, stuck on the side of a major highway, comparable to an interstate back in the world. I'm sitting next to an open window when I see a duffel bag hit the ground below my window. Next, I hear Tom's voice call out. "Hey Pez, you coming with me?" To which I responded, "Hell yes." My duffel bag drops from the top of the bus and I hop off. Tom flags down a taxi and tells the driver to take us to the bus station. It was a hoot — Tom and I changing from our Class B uniforms

to civilian clothes in the back seat of a tiny Datsun taxi, but hey, I was a lot more flexible then. At the bus station we end up on the "Orange Blossom Special" headed to Vientiane. Anyone stationed in Thailand will remember those orange and white, un-air-conditioned buses that all the Thais would take between villages and cities. About 9 Hours later (2300 hrs.), and after stops at every town and village along the 300 miles between Bangkok and Non-Soong, the red lights on top of the FLR-9 antenna start to come into view. We were home at last. I wonder if the CSM ever got tired of waiting for us to report to him at the bar.

Postscript: Unbeknownst to us, the new Personnel NCOIC for Ramasun was on the military bus with us. Tom and I met him on Monday morning during in-processing. He remarked that he and everyone else on the bus was shocked when we bolted. Everyone was convinced that we would never be seen again. He was sure we would be robbed or kidnapped.

Mike lives in Boerne ("bernie") Texas and is working on an account of his little-known unit south of Korat. The MEM hopes to bring that to readers in a future issue.



## NOTICE

### NKP Reunion 2023

The next Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai AFB reunion will be held in Charleston, South Carolina on April 12-16, 2023

For details and registration, go to this website:

<https://www.events.afr-reg.com/e/NKP2023>





# *Nong Mai Village Assistance Project*

*(Possible because of easing COVID restrictions in Laos)*

*from the Assistance Committee*

Some months ago, the school and the villagers of Nong Mai, a village in Central Laos, submitted a request to the Lao Xiangkhouang Provincial and Kham District authorities, to address some local school needs. The request was for roofing sheets to replace existing rusty and worn-out sheets and to buy cement to lay floors, which would help the students reduce mud and dirt in the Nong Mai Village Primary School classrooms. Since no funds or materials for these improvements have been forthcoming from the local government agencies, the villagers have asked the TLC Brotherhood for about \$2400 to purchase the tin, nails, cement, gravel, and sand to upgrade the school.

This school is located in an impoverished upland community of villagers of ethnic Khmu background, and is found some 53 miles from Phonsavan City off Route 6 between Xiangkhouang and Houaphan Provinces. It was built about 20 years ago. There are 2 buildings, one of permanent construction and one of semi-permanent construction, which was built by the villagers. This semi-permanent building measures 25x140 feet including the corridor, and has five classrooms.



Rusty corrugated steel roofing is no longer doing its job and needs replacing. The request includes 460 of the heavy sheets, which villagers will install. Photos provided by local officials.



The "corridor" is dirt, which turns to mud in the rainy season. This project will provide concrete for the corridor and classrooms.

Requested materials include 460 sheets of metal roofing and 100 packs of roofing nails, as well as cement, sand, and gravel for the floors. The estimated cost for all of this is just under forty million Lao kip, which currently comes to approximately \$2400. The project has been approved for funding by our Assistance Committee. While inflation in Laos has kept up with the increasing value of the U.S. dollar, this amount still seems like quite a bargain! As usual, all the work will be done by the local villagers.

The Nong Mai Village Primary School has 193 students this year, of whom 76 are girls. There are 11 teachers of whom 6 are women. The village has 368 families living in 4 areas. Of the school total, 70% are of the "Khmu" ethnic/language group.

According to an article in "Wikipedia," the Khmu were the indigenous inhabitants of northern Laos. It is generally believed that the Khmu once inhabited a much larger area. After the influx of Thai/Lao peoples into the lowlands of Southeast Asia, the Khmu were forced to higher ground (Lao Theung), above the rice-growing lowland Lao and below the Hmong/Mien groups (Lao Sung) that inhabit the highest regions. Of the estimated half million total population of Khmu, by far the largest proportion live in Laos. They are also found in large numbers in China, Thailand, Vietnam, and the USA.

Most Lao Khmu villages are isolated, and are only slowly receiving electricity. In many areas, the Khmu live alongside the Hmong and other regional minority ethnic groups. The Khmu in the United States originated as refugees from the Vietnam War. Most of these refugees settled in California, which is home to both the Khmu National Federation, Inc., and the Khmu Catholic National Center.



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

# Reunion 2023: *St. Paul, Minnesota!*

## September 28-30

*Get ready for something different, yet SO appropriate!*

**W**e are excited to announce that the TLCB Board of Directors has chosen St. Paul, Minnesota for the 2023 Reunion and Annual Meeting. Reunion dates will be September 28 through 30, a time when Minnesota temperatures are typically *perfect!*

There are many reasons for this choice, but aside from the availability of affordable facilities, the two chief reasons are: 1) The largest U.S. concentration of Hmong people live in the Twin Cities, Minneapolis and St. Paul, and their leaders hope to conduct some reunion activities with us. 2) It is, for a change, a location west of the East Coast. The Twin Cities have excellent transportation connections and offer many attractions for our members and spouses as well. Not least among these is the renowned “Mall of America,” largest in the Western Hemisphere.

St. Paul is the state capital of Minnesota, and we have tentatively chosen a hotel, the Radisson, just off the Capitol grounds, in the heart of the city. Nearby are several special attractions, including the Vietnam War Memorial and The Minnesota Transportation Museum, as well as many other



Hmong and Alliance Special Forces in Laos memorial monument in St. Paul, Minnesota Capitol Grounds. This symbolic monument was dedicated in 2016. It portrays a bamboo shoot with Hmong saga portrayals on the bronze leaves.



James Hill House in St. Paul

attractions, such as the James Hill House, which resembles the Vanderbilt Mansion in Asheville, NC. Explore this beautiful vignette of history. Mr. Hill was the builder of the Great Northern Railway.

### ***Hmong Monument***

Hundreds gathered on a very warm June day of 2016 on the Minnesota Capitol grounds for the dedication of a memorial to U.S. and Alliance Special Forces in Laos. The 10-foot-tall bronze monument was inspired by survivors of the “Secret War” from 1961 to 1975. It resembles a sprouting bamboo shoot, and the leaves bear images of Hmong daily life, war, and relocation.

Laos was officially neutral during the Vietnam war, but North Vietnam used the Panhandle for a supply route (the Ho Chi Minh Trail) and supported Lao Communist forces (Pathet Lao) in an ongoing civil war. In response, the CIA recruited Hmong soldiers to carry on a covert campaign in the civil war. The

Hmong fighters became known as the Special Guerilla Unit. After the U.S. left Laos in 1975, when the armies of Communist North Vietnam invaded and overwhelmed South Vietnam, tens of thousands of Lao people fled and lived in refugee camps in Thailand, eventually re-settling in the U.S. While many live in California and other states, the Twin Cities population of Hmong is the largest concentration, by far in the USA, estimated at 81,000 in 2019.

Watch our website, [WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.com](http://WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.com), and the March issue of the *Mekong Express Mail* for more details. At the time this issue went to press the Reunion Committee was still in negotiation with the hotel.



Minnesota is also home to a large population of Scandinavian Americans and is known as the “Norwegian Capital of America.” In 2020 about 1/3 of all Minnesotans claimed Scandinavian heritage.

The statue seen at left, with the state capitol in the background, portrays Leif Erikson, who “discovered” America in the year 1000. It was dedicated on “Leif Erikson Day,” October 9th, 1949.