

# MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



The newsletter of the Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood, Inc. Volume 20, issue 4

WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.com

## TLCB Assistance Visits to Xiangkhouang Province Schools

17 to 20 September 2019

By Glenn Black

On Tuesday 17 September, Vaughan Smith, accompanied by Paul Carter, Tom Sawers, Larry Crider and his wife Tam, and I made the second Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood (TLCB) Educational Assistance trip to Laos in 2019. We went to the Plain of Jars, Xiangkhouang Province, to visit four recently completed school renovation sites for inspections and handover ceremonies.



### Some background:

These four projects were identified during the 2018 – 2019 timeframe and, as before, proposals for each site were submitted to

At left, Lao schoolkids welcome the TLCB team to their school. Photos by the author.

the TLCB Education Assistance Committee by the TLCB's counterpart at the Provincial Office of Education and Sports in Phonsavan, Xiangkhouang Province, Ajarn Soundeuane. His requests were translated by TLCB member, Art Crisfield, who then sent them to the Assistance Committee for review

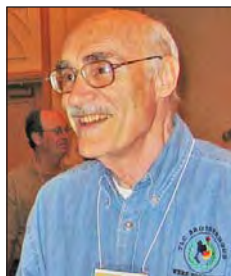
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### David MacDonald 1939-2019

As we went to press, David MacDonald, founding Editor of the TLCB MEM, passed away on November 28, 2019 after a long illness. He was 80 years old.



## Editor's Notebook: The 2020 Reunion in Newport, Rhode Island

You might think that at a certain age, one would realize that if you open your mouth haphazardly, you are likely to end up with a responsibility in your lap that you're not entirely sure you're capable of accomplishing. Yes, that's what you might think.

So one day sometime back, while I'm talking with Bill Tilton, a charter TLCB member, who along with his wife, Thelma, do most of the work in putting together the *MEM*, I happened to mention that Newport, Rhode Island, about 30 minutes from my home, would be a nice venue for a future Reunion. He wholeheartedly agreed and, with some degree of acquiescence on my part, presented the idea to the board of the Brotherhood. And that's how, at the October Las Vegas reunion, which I could not attend due to the date's proximity to that of my nephew/godson's long-awaited wedding in Hawaii, I was appointed 2020 TLCB Reunion local chairman by the newly elected Vice President and National Reunion Chairman, Gerry Frazier. The reunion will be at The Mainstay Hotel and Conference Center<sup>1</sup> in Newport on October 15th to the 17th, 2020. The hotel is about to undergo a significant renovation and by next Spring, it will be known as The Wayfinder Hotel

Frankly, I was fully supportive of the idea, but I must also admit to a level of concern as I get into the details of being a reunion chair. But let me tell you about why I think Newport is an excellent destination.

- *The town is located on the Atlantic Ocean, at the mouth of Narragansett Bay. It was once, primarily in the 1920s, a playground of the rich, and is still home to, in my estimate, as many multi-million-dollar homes per square mile as any place in the country.*



Newport was the famous playground of the super-super rich, who maintained "cottages" for vacationing. Names like Rockefeller and Vanderbilt were listed here. Now many of their mansions are open for us tourists to see how they once lived.

- *You can tour many of the 1920s mansions, or see them, at no cost, along the famous Cliff Walk, which also takes you along a breathtaking coastline.*
- *For a veteran's group such as the TLCB, our hotel is only a short drive from the Naval War College, which is open for tours, and the facility can also provide speakers to conferences. The hotel's nearness to the college means that it is well accustomed to hosting veterans' groups. Also close by is Fort Adams Park, which still includes Fort Adams itself, the country's largest coastal fortress, with an underground network of tunnels. Fort Adams is, in summer, home to several well-known music events, such as the Newport Jazz Festival and*

**Editor's Notebook continues on page 5.**

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#### **Board of Directors and Committee Chairmen 2019-2021, showing year of term end**

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Secretary: Paul Lee, 2021 (2nd term)  
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Chaplain: Jim Kidd (Memorial Committee) 2021 (unlimited)  
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Ray Boas, 2020 (1st term)  
George Shenberger, 2021 (3rd term)  
John Sweet, 2021 (2nd term)

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Assistance Committee: Les Thompson  
Communications Committee: John Harrington  
Exchange Shopkeeper: Thelma Tilton  
History Committee: John Lorenzen  
Membership Committee: John Duffin  
Public Relations Committee: "Willi Pete" Peterson

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#### **Payments to the TLCB**

Via website—uses PayPal, which accepts credit card payments.  
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Write payment purpose and member number on check.

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**Aspers, PA 17304**

**Reunion 2020: Newport, Rhode Island**



# 2019 Las Vegas Reunion Report

By Gary Beatty, TLCB President

Our Las Vegas reunion was a success, with thanks to local reunion chair George Shenberger and his wife, Ruth Ann, and National Reunion Chair/VP Les Thompson and his wife, Carolyn, for making it possible.

In addition to seeing old friends and meeting new ones, we also accomplished quite a bit of business. The auction took in over \$4000. Add to that over \$2000 from Rosie's Quilt raffle for a total of over \$6000 for the assistance fund. That goes a long way in Thailand and Laos.

This was the first year we didn't have a "new" quilt from Rosie Wheatley. As you know, Rosie tragically passed away this year. We missed her, Bob, and their son Jeff at the gathering. We've been advised we may have a source for future quilts, so we hope we can carry on the now officially known "Rosie's Raffle."

In tribute to Rosie, an owner of one of Rosie's quilts donated his for this year's raffle. Our banquet guest speaker, Christina Olds, daughter of legendary fighter pilot General Robin Olds, drew Ginny Beatty's name as the quilt winner. My wife was thrilled because she has been hoping to win one of Rosie's quilts for years!

**Presentations and Entertainment:** Christina's presentation of her father's life was fascinating and very well done. He had an interesting life to say the least; and having served in Thailand, he is one of us. She has written a book about him, "Fighter Pilot: The Memoirs of Legendary Ace Robin Olds," which is available on Amazon (of course).

We were also entertained by the music of ex-fighter pilot Dick Jonas, composer of a number of songs about experiences in our war. I've had a CD, on which he performs, for several years, "In Country: Folk Songs of America in the Vietnam War" — available, guess where!

**TLCB Business:** In addition to brotherhood, fundraising, and fun, we also got some other official business done. The results of the election are:

**Vice-president/National Reunion Chair,** Gerry Frazier. Gerry succeeded Les Thompson, who held the position for the past six years and was prevented by term limits from running again. I can't think of anyone more qualified to continue Les' excellent work. Les and Gerry formulated an SOP for guidance of future local reunion chairs.

**Secretary:** Paul Lee was re-elected. Having held that position, I know the work it entails. Paul takes and logs minutes of the Board and membership meetings, as required under the laws

of Virginia where we are incorporated.

**Chaplain:** Jim Kidd. Deb Stein, who served as Chaplain for the past several years has become so busy as Pastor of her two congregations that she had to step down from any official TLCB duties. Thanks for your years of service, Deb. There was no candidate for the Chaplain position before the reunion

so, under the by-laws, I would have to appoint a member to fill the position; however, I was saved that tough choice when long-time member Jim Kidd stepped up. Prior to casting of election ballots at the membership meeting, I announced that Jim had volunteered, and that if he was acceptable, they could write in his name on their ballots. Jim was overwhelmingly elected by write-ins. Welcome to the Board Jim.

**Members-at-Large:** George Shenberger and John Sweet were both re-elected.

**Membership:** With Gerry Frazier's election as VP, his Membership Chair position was vacant for the remaining year of that term. Again, under the by-laws, I was tasked with finding a member to fill that vacancy, and have appointed long-time member Roger Durant to fill the position. Roger has accepted. Glad to have you on the Board, Roger.

**Other Business:** In addition to the annual election, the membership also voted on two important matters, both related to our charitable activities.

1. Laos Projects: Following the death of MacAlan "Mac" Thompson, in-country direction of our Laos assistance projects was assumed by members of the team who had assisted Mac (Vaughan Smith, Paul Carter, Jeff Hudgens, and others). At the meeting, I apprised the members of the circumstances of continuing the Laos projects without Mac, and the members voted to continue for now with some changes in expense documentation from the Laotians.



President Gary Beatty presenting quilt winner with the 2019 Rosie's Raffle quilt. The winner: Ginny Beatty! Photo by Thelma Tilton.

**Las Vegas continues on page 4.**



## Las Vegas continued from page 3.

2. The second Assistance Committee issue voted on by the members involved simultaneous membership on both that committee and the Board of Directors.

Following recommendation of experts that assisted our financial audit committee, I proposed to the membership, and they unanimously voted to approve, an official policy that no one member can serve on both the Assistance Committee and the Board of Directors simultaneously, thus creating an internal “checks and balances” between our corporate management and the committee responsible for our largest expenditures.

**Committee Chairs:** Except for the local reunion chair appointed by the VP/National Reunion Chair, our by-laws provide that the President appoints the various committee chairs for the following year — who then appoint the members of their respective committees. Committee chairs for the next year are:

**Assistance Committee** - Les Thompson

**Membership** - John Duffin

**Communications** - John Harrington

**Public Relations** - William “Willi Pete” Peterson

**History** - John Lorenzen

**BX Shopkeeper** - Thelma Tilton

Anyone interested in serving on a committee should contact the chair of that committee. If you haven’t been part of running the TLCB, committee service can be a good intro.

**Change in the Communications Committee function:** Administration of our website had been part of the Comm committee; however, that became unwieldy, so former Comm committee chair/website administrator Jerry Karnes was relieved as committee chair, at his request. He remains responsible for administration of the website. The *MEM* editor John Harrington, who had been a member of the Comm committee, accepted appointment as chair.

Website administration is now a stand-alone position. At the request of the administrator, any questions about website

And then there was Las Vegas! Below, fantastic scene at the Bellagio resort hotel, all made from natural materials. Photos this page by Bill Tilton.



Cutups at the auction! Bob Pruiksma and John Sweet matching hats during the fast and furious bidding.




Outgoing Vice President Les Thompson presenting Christine Olds her legendary father’s high school diploma that Les had once bought at auction. Singer Dick Jonas, center, looks on.

content or posting of announcements should be addressed through the President.

**Website major Change:** “The Forum” was shut down as of November 1, and it will not be re-opened. This was a decision the Board of Directors made simultaneously with their decision to expand our Facebook page to allow members to post there. Ray Boas is our Facebook administrator. Please direct any questions to Ray.

The website administrator, Jerry Karnes, also advises that he will be making some cosmetic changes to the website. Jerry says periodic changes of appearance are necessary to keep people coming back and to prevent a site “from getting stale.” Since that’s related to what he does professionally, I defer to his expertise.

**2020 Reunion:** And finally, on the topic of reunions, the Board selected Newport, Rhode Island as the location of the 2020 reunion. I’ve never been there, and look forward to seeing a new part of the country. Gerry Frazier has appointed John Harrington as the local reunion chair. Details will be posted on the website and future issues of the *MEM*. 



**Editor's Notebook** continued from page 2.

the Newport Folk Festival. Alas, we will not be there in Summer.

- A little further away is the Nautilus Submarine Museum in Groton, Connecticut. Nearby the Museum, in New London, is the United States Coast Guard Academy.
- The center of Newport, a little more than a mile from our hotel, is busy with shops, restaurants, and harbor cruise opportunities. It's a lovely place to just stroll through. The town is steeped in history, from the Revolutionary War through the Civil War and its long association with the U.S. Navy. During the Civil War, the Naval Academy was temporarily moved to Newport. Another feature is the International Tennis Hall of Fame.

- You can reach Newport primarily from the Providence, Rhode Island airport; and the drive, whether by bus, taxi, or car, will take you over two spectacular bridges, the Jamestown Verrazano and the Pell bridges, each with stunning views of Narragansett Bay.
- Keep in mind that mid-October is the heart of New England's leaf season, and Rhode Island, despite its diminutive geography, is rich in scenic drives.

We'll be providing more detail about the 2020 TLCB Reunion, here in the MEM, on the TLCB Website, as well as the new and improved TLCB Facebook page (see page 14).

In the meantime, I would like to hear from the members about their thoughts on which of the above choices should be worked into the Reunion agenda.

John Harrington  
[jharrington@nscopy.com](mailto:jharrington@nscopy.com)



Above, the U.S. Naval War College, foreground, is located on Narragansett Bay in Newport, and will be a great resource for our reunion support and activities. Below, the Naval War College Museum contains interesting and important exhibits from naval history.





## Schools continues from page 1

and they were approved.

Work on these schools was completed since our last trip in February 2019. In August, Ajarn Soundeuan again communicated to Vaughan Smith, the TLCB Laos Education Assistance Coordinator in Thailand, that each of the projects was nearing completion and asked Vaughan to arrange visits to inspect the schools and attend handover ceremonies at the four sites.



Our SEA team having dinner with a tea merchant in the "Bamboozled" restaurant. From left, Larry Crider, Vaughan Smith, Paul Carter, Tim Sawers and Glenn Black of TLCB. Next, Mike Caroll, a friend of the late Mac Thompson and the group, who was a refugee worker with Mac. He was a reconstruction guy in Phnom Penh, where Glenn met him in the 1990s, and is now a tea buyer/merchant and long-term Lao hand. He buys tea from the Hill Tribes in Laos.

### The Trip:

On Sunday 15 September, each of the team members got themselves to the Nong Khai rendezvous point and spent the night there prior to departure. The next day, on 16 September at 7:00, the team met at the Friendship Bridge border crossing. Formalities for the Thai exit and Laos arrivals went smoothly and we were met by our usual driver, Somphou, on the Lao side of the Mekong. Again, we immediately began the seven/eight-hour drive to Phonsavan. We arrived around 15:30 and Vaughan contacted Ajarn Soundeuan, Provincial Chief of Education Outreach and TLCB's counterpart in Xiangkhouang.

The team members stayed at their preferred hotels—Phonsavan has many inexpensive but comfortable offerings. I put up at the Dokkhoun Hotel once again with its extensive display of inert, unexploded ordnance (UXO) spilling over in the lobby corner, everything from grenades, bombies, snake-

*"I should mention that since our last trip, Ajarn Soundeuan has kept Vaughan and the TLCB apprised of construction of all the four schools visited, by sending reports with many photos of community work parties at each site during various stages of construction/renovation efforts."*

eye tail fins, all types of mortar bombs from 60mm to 4.2 both Soviet/Chicom and American. There was a rusted, damaged Chicom burp-gun and of course, the ubiquitous collections of MK series bombs, and old WWII-era iron bombs. These are features of almost every guest house and restaurant in Xiangkhouang. It's like you are a nobody if you don't have a

bomb collection displayed in front of your business.

The restaurant picture is nearly the same, but a U.S. educated Lao girl runs a nice western establishment across the street from the "Craters" restaurant. Her place is called "Cranky's" and a lot of the Westerner NGO types gather for dinner or a nightcap. She's got sushi, Aussie/New Zealand steaks, burgers and an inexhaustible supply of grog, but I think everyone's favorite is good old Beer Lao. Otherwise, there are many Lao/Vietnamese restaurants featuring quite good offerings.

For breakfast, the team often goes to Craters because they are open a bit before 07:00 and they serve bacon and eggs or omelets. Vaughan prefers vegetarian, and has no problem finding ample Lao vegetable dishes. He and others visit the market for good breakfast fodder including Lao "quaytiow," Vietnamese pho, noodles and such. Food is not a scarcity there.

Phonsavan lies on a crossroads of highways 7 and 6, that connect the PDJ to Hwy 13 North to Luang Prabang and eventually to Thai and Chinese border crossings and to a couple of Vietnamese border crossings. It's become not quite a boom town but certainly a vibrant and busy city. I first visited Phonsavan in 2006 by motorcycle from Chiang Mai. At that time Phonsavan was a much more subdued, quieter place compared to today.

**17 September:** On Tuesday morning, we joined up with Ajarn Soundeuan and followed his pickup truck to **Khang Khai Lower Secondary School** in Muang



This is a "handover ceremony" at the Khang Khai school. It illustrates the importance of our team's presence. At this point we are handing out cash, and we follow-up to ensure it is spent as promised, which is critical to our success!

Pek district. This was pretty close to Phonsavan town itself, but the TLCB assistance appeared to have been put to good use. Two classrooms got new galvanized roof sheets, one 8 x 44 meters (think yards and you're in the ball park) and one classroom of 8 x 32 meters.

The larger building was of relatively new construction, while the smaller one was dilapidated. Each got cement floors and new paint as well. The school serves 356 students of whom 150 are girls. The ethnic makeup of the students is 129 Hmong, 45 Lao Theung, and most of the rest are Lao Loum, or other

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Above, photo lineup of the kids at Khang Khai Pre-School, in Laos.  
 At right, kids line up to greet the TLCB team at the same school.

ethnicities of varying economic backgrounds. The school serves 5 villages and 513 families. Some students live in close proximity to the school and others' homes are quite remote.

The handover ceremony went amicably with photo opportunities galore. Many of the children remained to be part of the post-Baci ceremony traditional dancing. Once again, TLCB's offering of sports equipment was appreciated and more than a half dozen kids demonstrated their enthusiasm for Frisbee throwing during the rest of our time at the school.

This trip, we spent a lot more energy photographing the kids with their sports equipment. At the most remote school location visited on the last day (Tham Houa Lao), we saw that from the moment each item of equipment was presented, be it soccer, volleyball or takraw balls or Frisbees, the girls and boys did nothing but play with them for the next couple of hours, with



some parents also participating. We recorded these events and their appreciation was obvious.

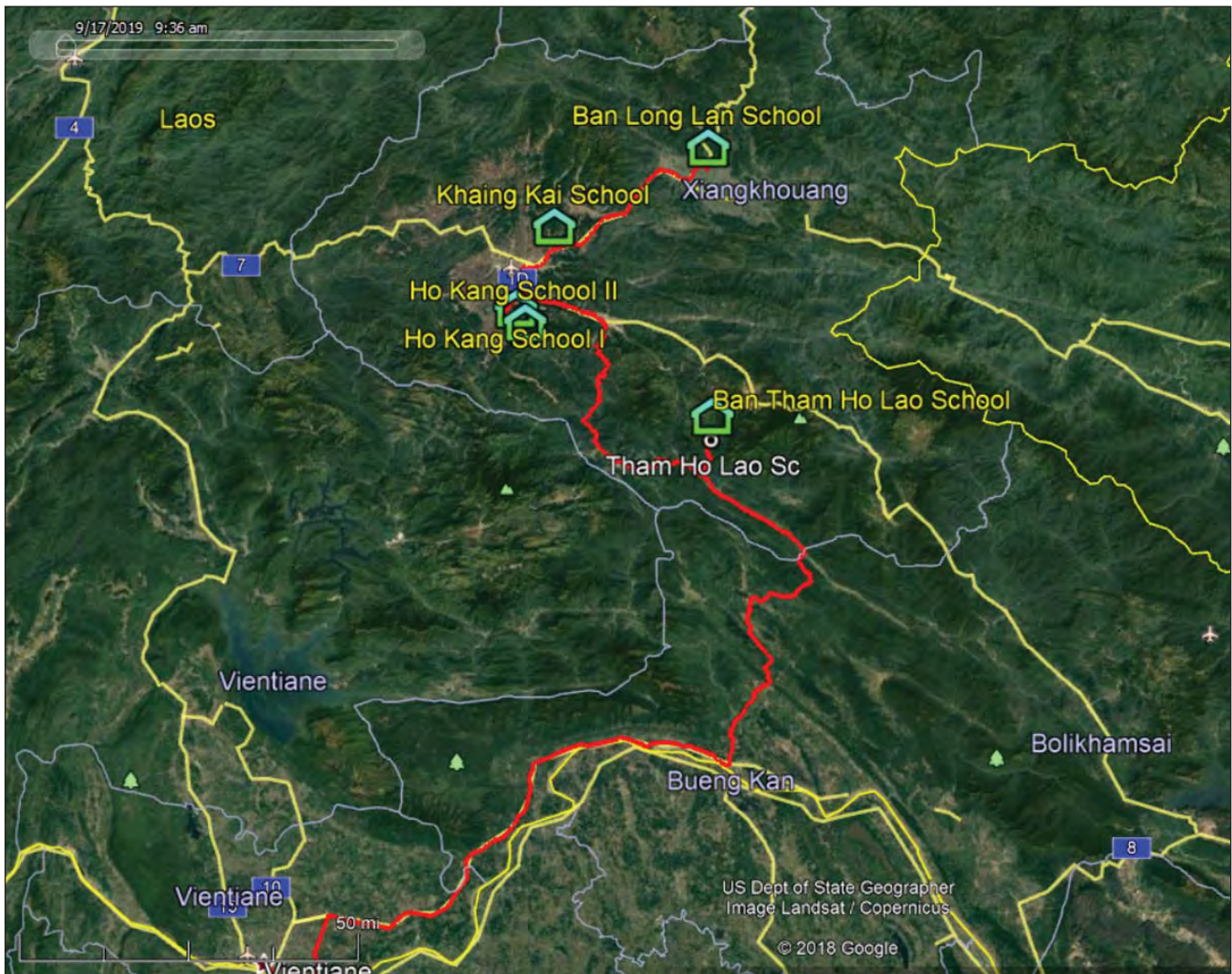


**18 September:** We visited **Ban Long Lan School**, located on Route 6, Xiangkhouang – Houaphan, road some 78 kms NNE from Phonsavan. The school was started two years ago through community efforts and is a pre-school of 8 x 26 meters. The community required funds for tin and nails for the roof, cement for floors, brick and cement for walls, stone and sand for floors, and sand for walls. The community carried out the labor. Since 2017, the community had raised the funds for the building, but construction was not complete for lack of additional funding. Thus, the community has asked the Provincial Education Office to request assistance from the TLCB to buy the needed materials in order to finish this school year.

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At left, mirthful and just a little bit shy, girls of Khang Khai school in their traditional dress.





Above, map of central Laos shows the team's travel routes. Vientiane, the capital, is at lower left. Town of Phonsavan is just above Ho Kang School II. Map and photos for this article furnished by the TLCB Laos team.

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The school has 8 teachers, of whom 3 are women; 168 students, of whom 88 are girls. Included are 63 pre-school children, of whom 41 are girls. The greater community of 3 villages has 201 families, numbering 1,125 people, who live in houses throughout the area. The main livelihood is rice and garden farming. Some families have moved in from elsewhere and are poor without permanent sources of income.

I should mention that since our last trip, Ajarn Soudeuane has kept Vaughan and the TLCB apprised of construction of all the four schools visited, by sending reports with many photos of community work parties at each site during various stages of construction/renovation efforts. The Xiangkhouang Provincial Office for Education and Sports appear to highly value access to the TLCB's relatively simple process of proposal submission, approval, and provision of assistance for these small projects. The TLCB funding mechanism may be the least onerous method, available within their bureaucracy, for meeting the needs of the

small, remote schools that might otherwise remain in neglect, and the TLCB's assistance is greatly appreciated.

Back to Ban Long Lan school: After a long drive, we arrived

**Schools continues next page**



The team enjoys one of the customary Baci ceremonies. During the proceedings hosts tie pieces of string to the guest's wrists to ensure that they will return. This one was at Ban Ho Kang school.





Above, getting ready for the party. Schools always do their best to entertain our visiting teams. Notice the re-purposed truck wheel.

at the school site to find the teachers and all students in attendance. Our handover ceremonies went well. The pre-school (kindergarten) inspection revealed quality work, though at that hour of the morning, around 11:30, the children were down on their mats for a nap.

A Baci ceremony followed and the TLCB team was lauded and fed some fare not usually encountered. Spicy frog and duck blood laab were among the offerings; however, some timely Beer Lao allowed the team to wash down these culinary delights with great shows of appreciation.

**19 September:** The team accompanied Ajarn Soundeuan to **Ban Ho Kang Primary School**, some 33 kms SSE of

Below, Tom Sawers' Frisbee lessons were very popular with Lao kids. TLCB deliveries of sports equipment are always accepted with great excitement.



Phonsavan. The Xiangkhouang Provincial Office of Education and Sports requested a TLCB grant of \$2,310 to buy tin and cement for rehabilitation of two buildings at the Ban Ho Kang Primary School, Phaxay District, Xiangkhouang Province.

The schools, built in 1994, are located at two locations. The first is on the west side on the road to the Plain of Jars Site #3 and serves three villages. The school is composed of three buildings, only one of permanent construction. The school serves two primary (first through third year) schools in nearby communities. Ban Vieng Thong village shares responsibility for maintaining the school.

Ban Vieng Thong is a community established to serve Khamu ethnic people who follow a non-sedentary way of life. They have difficult livelihoods and do not have resources to provide maintenance, leaving the two smaller school buildings without needed improvements for the past two to three years. The buildings were in deteriorated conditions, with rusting and leaking tin roofs and the dirt floors turn to mud in the rainy season. The community tried to request help for repairs from many places without success. Thus, the Ho Kang and Vieng Thong communities turned to the TLCB to request assistance to buy tin, cement, and brick to rehabilitate the two school buildings. Bldg#1 needed roof tin, floor cement, and brick for walls. Bldg. #2: needed roof tin.

The school has eight teachers, of whom five are women, with 126 students and 64 are girls. The community has 316 families with 1,024 people, 507 who are women. One-third of the inhabitants are of Khamu ethnicity.

The two schools were located some distance from the others. The more easily reached Ho Kang School I is located on the plain, 5.2 kilometers



Above, schoolgirls prepare to entertain guests in their finest traditional clothes.

away from Ho Kang School II, which is located over the lip of the Plain of Jars. The trip down into the valley was too steep for our vehicles to travel, so we left them and proceeded on foot down the scenic valley into the village below, and were met by the Ho Kang School authorities and teachers from both schools. I should mention that during our inspection of the Ho Kang School I building, we caught the departing students and teachers in time to distribute their ration of soccer, volley, and takraw balls and Frisbees to the kids. Another instant hit. The kids went wild but had to catch their truck transport back to the other school in the valley.

After a quick inspection, we drove on to the **Ho Kang School II** and Ban Vieng Thong village for the handover ceremonies. The team had about a 700-meter walk down the rocky trail to

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the riverbed and we crossed by hopping from boulder to boulder, then walked uphill and into the village. Despite being only 33 kilometers from Phonsavan, the sudden plunge of terrain makes this school and village quite remote. Clearly, the river is at times impassible during heavy rains. The ceremonies went well and the villagers showed much enthusiasm for our assistance and visit.

**20 September:** We departed Phonsavan following Ajarn Soundeuane through old Xiangkhouang Ville and down from the plain, down the mountains 123 kilometers to **Tham Houa**



With other Lao officials, Ajarn Soundeuane, at right, visiting Ban Long Lan Pre-School construction.

**Lao School.** Our intention was to reach this school on our way to the Thanaleng border crossing to Thailand.

Paul Carter had flown back on the 19th owing to commitments in Bangkok, so the team was down to the four of us, including driver Somphou. This required us to depart reasonably early and we met up with Ajarn Soundeuane shortly after 07:00 and arrived after 10:30. Upon arrival, we received the usual warm greetings from the children, locals, and school teachers. This location was very remote and it was apparent that our arrival was a special occasion for the village and officials. Ajarn Soundeuane assisted in getting the handover ceremony completed quickly and sports equipment was provided to the children. As I earlier mentioned, it was obvious that this village was really in need of sports recreation supplies. The

Baci ceremony followed, but during the entire time, most of the children as well as their parents, constantly played with the sports equipment, while we were treated to a great lunch of Lao pork, chicken, and vegetable dishes.

We departed Tham Houa Lao School at 13:30 and arrived at the Thanaleng Lao/Thai border crossing (Friendship Bridge #1) at 18:30, where we dropped off Vaughan and Tim. The rest of us, Larry Crider, Tam, and I got a ride with Somphou into Vientiane. Larry and Tam stayed for a few days to explore Vientiane and I visited some old Lao hand friends who reside in Vientiane. I also met the host of the LaoGPSMap site that generates all the great videos of his HCM Trail motor touring expeditions that TLCB members may have run across on YouTube. I love Vientiane for its French restaurants, pleasant cafes, and laid-back atmosphere, and I always enjoy a day or two of transition and relaxation after the Plain of Jars visits before heading back into Thailand. On 22 September, I departed Laos at the Thanaleng/Friendship bridge border crossing and returned to Chiangmai via direct flight from Udon Thani.



In the lush green mountains of Laos, girls of Tham Houa Lao School perform in the team's departure ceremony. Another very successful trip completed.

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## Newest Exchange Product: TLCB Playing Cards



This fine new product was suggested by a long-time member and proved to be very popular when introduced at our recent reunion in Las Vegas—how appropriate! Priced at just \$13 per deck, which includes shipping.

You can order these, and TLC Brotherhood hats, “base” hats, both golf and denim shirts, and other “logo” items, at:

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





# Information, Memories, and Laurels for Chaplain Deb Stein

by *Thelma Tilton, Assistant Editor*

Deb is from California and joined the Marine Corps at age 18. For those of you who know her, can you picture her as an automobile mechanic in the Marine Corps? She *was*. She then joined the Air Force Reserves and went from fixing vehicles to teaching others to drive them.

Deb also worked for Pitney Bowes as a service manager, with her next adventure working with husband, Ed, jointly managing a retirement facility in New England. The next giant leap occurred when she and Ed quit their jobs and moved to Pennsylvania so she could attend seminary school at The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. Once graduated, she took on shepherding the congregation at St. Stephen in Syracuse, N.Y.

Deb and Ed have two grown daughters and a flock of grandchildren. She describes herself as a high-tech grandma since she keeps in touch with them via texts, Facebook, and Skype. Debbie is the pastor at St. Stephen Lutheran Church in Syracuse, and it is my understanding that she has added another church to her ministry. Obviously enough to keep her really busy!

She has done a wonderful job as TLCB Chaplain, accepting the call in 2010, replacing the late Ted Ulrich.



TLCB outgoing Chaplain Deb Stein at the 2018 Annual Meeting and Reunion, in Biloxi, Mississippi. Photo by Ed Stein, reprinted from December, 2018 issue.

Since then, she has spoken at most reunion dinners and memorial services, and it was obvious to me that she put a good bit of time into her talks, which were always encouraging, knowledgeable, positive, and threaded with spirituality. Since we didn't get a lot of time to talk at busy reunions, I didn't get to know her well, so I went to the St. Stephen Lutheran Church Website and found some wonderful quotes, which follow, about Deb from her congregation.

"When you meet and talk to Pastor Deb, there is an instant connection and warmth you feel," said a church council member who chaired the committee that interviewed her. "Aside from her seminary qualifications and her life experiences that she brings to us, she is enthusiastic, energized, very personable, and down to earth." I think those TLCB members who know Deb and have had the benefit of her ministrations would agree. You can tell that she cares deeply about the TLCB mission and members, as she was also on hand to help with members' problems and bereavements.

But what I remember most about Deb and her mission as chaplain is, as an English major; I loved and appreciated the way she was obviously, carefully prepared and would find quotes to illustrate the main thrusts of

## ***Long-Serving Chaplain Passes the Prayer Book to Jim Kidd***

Our long-time member Debbie Stein, has recently stepped down from her position as TLCB Chaplain. It is our understanding that she has added another church to her ministry, giving her little time to carry on the chaplain's duties. Even so, her decision was contingent upon someone willing to carry on the spiritual side of the brotherhood in her stead. Of course, we regret her decision to step down, and we thank her wholeheartedly for her dedicated tenure. As it happened, Jim Kidd, in attendance at the yearly meeting, offered to serve and was elected by write-in vote.

her talks at various memorial services. I particularly recall her "Thinking About Freedom" talk during the Boston Reunion in Woburn, MA in 2015. She quoted from the "Declaration of Independence" and used messages from Ben Franklin, Voltaire, Bob Marley, Thomas Jefferson, Rosa Parks, John McCain, and Mahatma Ghandi, quite a diverse group from which to draw wisdom. Her talk at the Air Force Museum Memorial Garden in Dayton in 2017, amidst all of the memorial plaques, was also memorable. Bob Wheatley added to the reverence of the by-gone era by reading his poem, "No Hero's Welcome." It was a solemn memorial, and we were blessed to have her there to lead us in giving thanks, while remembering our lost brothers and sisters. Thanks, Debbie, for your warm and dedicated service and friendship as TLCB Chaplain.





## **New Member Profile: Gerald “Jerry” Nordberg**

I joined Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood (TLCB) with the intent of communicating with Veterans who served at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB) around 1973. I was there from January to December 1973, and am having Agent Orange-related health issues. I was diagnosed by the Minneapolis Veterans Administration (VA) Neurology Department to have Agent Orange Parkinson’s Disease.

My initial claim for disability compensation was denied, and I have filed the required Notice of Disagreement form and provided additional medical-related information. I am currently waiting for the VA Decision Review Officer to get back to me, which may take up to 26 months.

During my Parkinson’s research, I discovered that 20% of Parkinson’s patients were found to have chronic exposure to hydrocarbons. Jet fuels are primarily made up of hydrocarbons. I served at Beale AFB in Northern California my first three years working in fuels, six months at a tank farm, six months in fuel distribution refueling aircraft, and 2 years working in a JP-7 fuels lab gathering samples and testing fuel for the SR-71. JP-7 is an exotic fuel and there were only a few bases in the world that serviced the SR-71, so the sample size of exposure to this fuel is small. In Thailand, I worked in Fuel Distribution primarily refueling F-4s.

I recently contacted a law firm in North Carolina, called VetLaw, to help with my VA disability claim. I’m hoping I can help other Veterans in their dealings with the Veterans Administration.

**My Timeline:** I was born in Duluth, Minnesota, and lived there until I entered the U. S. Air Force in January 1970. I was very athletic, playing many sports growing up, and lettered in

basketball and golf in high school. In basic training, I signed up to be an Air Traffic Controller, but could not pass the color blindness test and subsequently went directly from basic training to Beale AFB in Northern California, assigned to Fuels Distribution. At Beale AFB I worked for six months at the Tank Farm and six months in Fuels Distribution before being assigned to the JP-7 Fuels Lab, where I worked for two years.

I worked part time at the Beale Golf Course Pro Shop and played squadron and base team golf for three years. I spent my last year in the Air Force at Udorn RTAFB in northern Thailand. I returned to Minnesota in December 1973 and attended the University of Minnesota-Duluth, majoring in accounting/business.

I was a cost accountant for three years at American Hoist & Derrick in Duluth, before moving to St Paul in 1980. I worked a couple of accounting jobs before being hired by First Bank System (now U. S. Bank) in 1984. I worked in corporate accounting as an accountant and accounting manager in the Controllers Group for 30 years, retiring as a Vice President in 2014.

**Personal life:** Twice divorced with no children. I am currently engaged, with an early 2020 wedding date.

Some of the golf I was fortunate to play in the Air Force were the SAC golf tournament in Ft. Worth, Texas; golf events at Spy Glass in Monterey, California; Vandenberg AFB; The Presidio in San Francisco; Travis AFB; and in Bangkok, Thailand.

I have only been able to play a handful of times each of the last two years due to physical complications of the Agent Orange-Parkinson’s. I hope to participate in a Parkinson’s specific physical therapy program this winter.



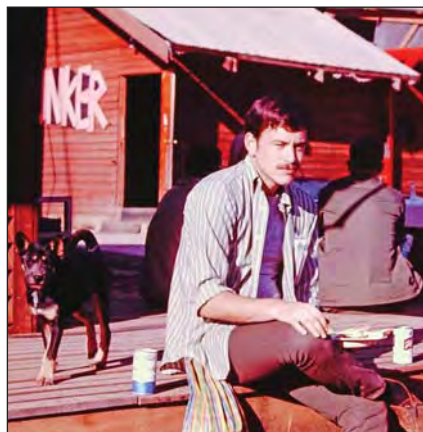
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## **New Member Profile: Alan Flowers**

I arrived at Nakhon Phanom (NKP) on March 17th 1970 and began what I consider to be the best tour of my short Air Force career. My AFSC was autopilot and I had been to Eglin AFB prior on deployment to learn the QU-22 system, which was an integral part of the drone capabilities of the aircraft. The plane was plagued with problems and never did fly as a drone; it did however get me to Thailand in a manner of speaking.

I was clueless about what was going on at NKP before arriving and was amazed at all of the different missions that the base was fulfilling. Since I was assigned to the 56th AMS Auto Pilot shop, I was exposed to many of the aircraft and their unique missions. Even the A-1s had a basic autopilot. We worked 12-on/12-off shifts when I first arrived, but we were able to go to eight-hour shifts when manpower picked up later on. I asked for and got nights, 11 to 7, a shift I worked pretty much for the rest of my tour.



Alan Flowers in 1970 at NKP.

I recall that one night a QU-22 was coming in after an in-flight emergency and I was called out to meet the plane. Seems the plane’s engine failed during a monsoon rainstorm and the pilot made several unsuccessful attempts to restart it. The pilot ejected his door preparing to bail but one last try got him a successful restart. He returned to base safely, but wet, sans the door. He got an unwanted taste of open cockpit flying.

My favorite work-related experience was when I was able to get one of our flying slots. I hitched rides with the HH-3s and 53s as often as I could. These were pretty much all training missions since I was not cleared for combat related flights. We would fly west, usually, and practice auto rotations or go to the firing range. I was able to see much of the countryside around the base. These aircrews were great to fly with and I developed a huge respect for them.

**Flowers continues next page**



I was scheduled to take a flight check on an A-1E model, but was disappointed to have it canceled at the last minute. I already had my parachute checked out. Bummer.

I traveled around the area some when I could. I shared a house in town with two other men from my shop for the last several months of my tour. The house was in a quiet neighborhood on the south side of town near the river. It was away from the bars and street noise so sleep was better and I enjoyed seeing the neighborhood kids and eating the local food. Interacting with the town's people was at times challenging but worth the effort. My Thai/Lao language skills were basic at best, but connections were usually successful and pleasant.

I was due to rotate in mid-March when my year at NKP was up. I would be 3 months shy of the end of my four-year enlistment so I assumed I would likely be discharged early. Since I wanted to seriously consider re-enlistment, I requested an extension.

The minimum extension was 120 days and I agreed, making my time at NKP 16 months. I left NKP on July 15th 1971 and headed to Travis for discharge.

I started working, shortly after coming home, in my family's business back in Maryland, which was a small chain of flower shops and greenhouse operation. I met my future wife, Sandy, there and we were married a year later. I worked mostly in the greenhouse operation, which had been my experience since I was 10 years old. Around the end of 1981 my wife and I bought

a Flower Shop in Elkton, Maryland, joining the ranks of the self-employed. We ran the shop together until the end of 2001 when Sandy passed after a several-year bout with melanoma.



Alan and Candy Flowers today. Photos provided by the author.

I closed the business at the end of 2002 and began work at Terumo Medical Corporation as a quality control inspector a few months later. I got a crash course in injection molding, and I inspected parts and devices used in open heart surgeries as well as other smaller items.

I met my wife, Candy, soon after closing my shop. She is a registered nurse and was working in a hospital near Annapolis at the time. We married in 2004 and I left Terumo and joined her in Annapolis. I have two daughters from my marriage to Sandy and suddenly had two more and two sons as well, all grown up. Soon after my marriage to Candy, I started work as a bookkeeper and database manager for a non-profit organization near Baltimore, where I worked until retiring at the end of 2015. Candy had retired a few years earlier

after a 40-year nursing career. I didn't want to keep her from the travel she was so looking forward to experiencing. We now live in Frederick, Maryland, which puts us closer to our girls.

We recently traveled to Ohio to attend the "NKP Gone, But Not Forgotten Reunion," which is where I was introduced to the TLC Brotherhood, and was honored to join and am awed by the achievements of the membership, both individually and as a group. I'm looking forward to a long and happy association with the group. Best to all!



## *Thoughts on Being Asked to be the Chaplain for the TLCB*

*By Jim Kidd*

At the 2018 Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood Reunion in Biloxi, Mississippi, Debbie Stein indicated that she would be unavailable for reelection as Chaplain in 2019. I volunteered to fill in for Debbie at the 2019 reunion.

In a telephone call with John Sweet prior to the 2019 event, John mentioned that there was a vacancy for Chaplain. On Saturday, 5 October 2019, before the business meeting at Alexis Park Hotel in Las Vegas, President Gary Beatty asked if I would accept the position. I noted to Gary that unlike Debbie, I am not a minister. Gary indicated that was fine and I accepted. I was subsequently elected.

Since I am not a priest, minister, or rabbi, I feel rather humbled in accepting the position of Chaplain. The TLCB is an excellent organization with great members and an all-volunteer leadership that is exceptionally talented and dedicated.

I appreciate your accepting me as an officer in the position of Chaplain.

At right, Jim Kidd at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C.





# TLCB Facebook Pages Bring in New Members

By Ray Boas, TLCB Facebook Administrator

**Editor's Note:** As the MEM reported last month, there has been a noticeable uptick in new TLCB membership. A driving force of that surge has been the reorganized TLCB Facebook page. If you haven't looked at it, give it a visit. It's part of my morning routine.

JH

There are different types of Facebook. There is your personal Facebook, there are Facebook Groups, and there are Facebook Pages. The TLCB is a Facebook Page. It was originally set up as a page and I decided to keep it as such. FB Groups are closed groups and membership must be approved. For example, the Nakhon Phanom RTAFB Group is open only to those who served at NKP. I didn't want restrictions, so I opted for the FB Page which is open to everyone. I felt this would help grow interest in the TLCB, help grow membership, and help grow assistance donations. Originally, our FB Page was set up so only the administrator could post new subject matter. I changed that so anyone could initiate a new post. And anyone can comment on any post.

Our FB page is for news and informational purposes and has been enabled for visitors to initiate new posts and interactive chat. We request posts fit the following guidelines:

- Be pertinent to our time in South East Asia (SEA)
- Be stories and pictures of SEA culture, current military related topics and stories, and any TLCB information and news.
- Absolutely no politics nor offensive language.

All new posts will experience a delay being posted to the timeline because the administrator must approve the material. I am encouraging members to post items, within the above guidelines, as frequently as they can. We do have a considerable

amount of interactive chat on subjects and pictures that I am posting, but not enough original member messages. The only other member posting on a regular basis is John Lorenzen, the TLCB historian, who posts *This Date in Vietnam* daily.

I spend an hour to an hour and half each day searching for appropriate subjects in an effort to increase viewership. I've posted several requests for TLCB Assistance donations along with pictures Vaughn Smith sent us from our projects in Laos, and tied that to a link on our website donation page.

A lot of our members don't do Facebook, fearful of misuse of personal information; however, the fact is that you can have a personal Facebook page and not post any personal data on it.

## How to view and post on the TLCB Facebook pages, as well as post pictures:

First, find the Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood page. Do not get confused as there are other similar groups and pages, but we are Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood. Look for the TLCB symbol. You must click on the "Like" link. That does two things. It allows you to post messages, and you will receive all new posts that other people make on the TLCB page. If you want to post a message, go to the top of the TLCB timeline and follow the instructions. It's that simple.

Remember, our FB Page is not only for members. It's open to everyone, in an effort to drive membership; however, we do need TLCB members to take the lead and start posting stories and pictures of your time in SEA, or from other FB groups of which you may be a member.

If you have any questions, email me, Ray Boas at, [raymar711@gmail.com](mailto:raymar711@gmail.com)

**See you on Facebook!**



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## The Qualified Charity Donation (QCD)

*A way to both donate to TLCB and pay less tax!*

*Reprinted from the September 2018 issue.*

IRS has a way for us to make our donations to the TLC Brotherhood with tax-exempt money using the Qualified Charity Donation (QCD). Thanks to some savvy members, we have learned that people with Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs) can direct their fund custodian to make part of their annual Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) directly to a charity (TLCB is a qualified recipient because of our IRS status as a 501(c)3 tax exempt charity). The part that goes to the charity is never taxed, which reduces your overall tax liability.

For more information you should discuss this with your IRA custodian or tax advisor, *if you have one*. This article is not advice and neither *The Mekong Express Mail* nor the TLC

Brotherhood is making any official representation of the QCD rules.

You may want to discuss this with a tax expert, too. In many circumstances the new income deduction laws make performing a QCD a very attractive way to reduce how much you wind up paying in taxes.

### **Tax Return Considerations for QCDs**

Be careful, though. We have also read that IRA custodians are not required to note on the IRS 1099-R form that you have performed a QCD. If you have a tax preparer and do not tell them about this, most likely they will list this transaction as a taxable one unless they know about the QCD.





# Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood



The 24 members listed below joined between the last issue of the MEM and the end of November. You can find more information on our website database. The Mekong Express Mail wishes you all a hearty "Welcome Home."

No.	Branch	Last Name	First Name	City	State
1892	USA	Perry III	Robert	Roanoke	VA
1893	USAF	Nordberg	Gerald	Oakdale	MN
1894	USAF	Davey	Donald	Las Vegas	NV
1895	USA	Simpson	John	Lacy	WA
1896	USAF	Brown	Richard	Anacortes	WA
1897	USAF	Zefran	Nicholas	Springfield	VA
1898	USAF	Mulder	Frank	Lexington	KY
1899	USAF	Davidson	James	San Antonio	TX
1900	USAF	Gonzales	Peter	San Antonio	TX
1901	USAF	Kopacz	Jan	Henderson	NV
1902	USAF	Guzy	Bill	Mesquite	TX
1903	USAF	Graziano	Bruno	Sun City Center	FL
1904	USAF	Kilcoyne	Patrick	Lavale	MD
1905	USAF	Kelly	Stanley	Scotia	NY
1906	USAF	Tischer	Philip	Spring Hill	FL
1907	USAF	McCarthy	James	Ocala	FL
1908	USAF	Cazobon	Dennis	Granbury	TX
1909	USAF	San Roman	Gilbert	Raton	NM
1910	USA	Sanborn	John	Shelburne Falls	MA
1911	USMC	Sleep	Gordon	Athol	ID
1912	USAF	Barnett	Terry	Middleburg	FL
1913	USAF	Douglas	Mason	Port Matilda	PA
1914	USAF	Stevenson	Darl	Pleasantville	OH
1915	USAF	Smith	Hilry	Las Vegas	NV

## Mekong Express Mail Index

For an on-line index to all MEM articles ever published, starting with our first issue in June of 2000, go to our wonderful TLCB Website: [www.TLC-Brotherhood.com](http://www.TLC-Brotherhood.com). All articles are listed by issue year and month, by title, with the authors' names and short descriptions of the subject matter. Go take a look sometime!

<http://tlc-brotherhood.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/MEM-Master-Index-031317.pdf>

**LIKE us on FACEBOOK—**

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

## 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 [Treasurer@TLC-Brotherhood.com](mailto:Treasurer@TLC-Brotherhood.com), or a note in the mail to TLC Brotherhood, PO Box 60, Aspers, PA 17304.

# The Sam Johnson Vietnam Archives at Texas Tech University

By John Lorenzen, TLCB Historian

Do you have items you brought home with you after your service in Southeast Asia? Are there items in old boxes in your closets, attic, basement, garage, or even foot-lockers? Do you worry that someday they will be lost or damaged — or thrown away when the time comes, as it will, for each of us? Did you know that donating your collection to add to the permanent Sam Johnson Vietnam Archives at Texas Tech University is a very easy way to preserve them for yourself, your family, and historians?

The Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University is the nation's largest archive for the Vietnam War besides the U.S. Government. It is one of the first places researchers go when they want to research information about the Vietnam War.

Years ago, the Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood established a relationship with Texas Tech University and designated their Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive as our official archive. The archival staff wants to work with every TLCB member so that our history is preserved, and researchers can learn about what happened in the greater war theatre, including Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia — not just within the boundaries of North Vietnam and South Vietnam.

Texas Tech University will preserve personal material you wish to donate to a collection in your name. If you donate documents, photographs, slides, audio recordings, films, and just about anything else, the Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive will digitize the materials and return copies to you on CD-ROM or DVD.

What happens to your donations? The Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive creates a collection with your name. As a member of the TLCB, your donation will also be linked to the TLCB Collection. When your donation is received, it will be processed for inclusion in the Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive and will



This street scene in Vietnam—probably Saigon—is an example of artifacts submitted by Vietnam War veterans. TLCB members are in a position to submit important materials about the vast number of military members who supported this war from outside the borders of Vietnam and Laos. Photo from the Vietnam Center Website.



be organized, finding aids created, stored in acid-free folders and boxes, and your materials digitized, with copies placed on line on the Virtual Archive. The donated items will be stored in Texas Tech's state-of-the-art archival facility which is temperature, humidity, and light controlled to ensure your collection will last as long as is physically possible. Since they can digitize analog audio (reel-to-reel as well as cassette) and most film formats (regular 8mm, super 8mm, and 16mm), you will receive copies that are much more functional and accessible. This will be important for future generations of your family and researchers, since the archive will be in a position to migrate to new digital formats, ensuring continued access.

If you wish to send donations to the archive, first send an email message or give the archive staff a call to discuss the items you are sending. The staff stands ready to assist you in any way necessary, so just call or write to let them know that you have materials you want to donate. Their e-mail address is [vnca@ttu.edu](mailto:vnca@ttu.edu) and their phone number is 806-742-9010.

The archive also has an Oral History Project, should you wish to participate. At a convenient time, a professional archivist will call and conduct a recorded interview, so that many years from now researchers, as well as your great, great grandchildren can listen to you tell your history in your own words and voice. The Oral History Project is open to all TLCB members and includes spouses and family members of veterans. Its goal is to preserve a complete history — including combat operations, base life, and the impact of the war at home. To learn more about participating in the Oral History Project, call 806-742-9010 or send an email to [vnca@ttu.edu](mailto:vnca@ttu.edu).

Full contact information:

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Texas Tech University Special Collections Library,  
Room 108, Lubbock, TX 79409-1041

Fax: 806-742-0496

Email: [vnca@ttu.edu](mailto:vnca@ttu.edu)

Website: <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu>

