

# MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



The newsletter of the thailand-laos-cambodia brotherhood, inc. Volume 18, issue 2

WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.com

## The Wall Talked to Me

by Patrick Minoughan

In 1997, I was working for EG&G Inc. when I was promoted to a Project Director for a nationwide government contract for the U.S. Treasury Department, IRS Division. I really didn't want the job and I almost didn't take it until my boss said, "If you don't take this promotion your ass will rot in that chair you are sitting in, in New Jersey." The major drawback on the job was that it was in Washington, D.C., a city not even on my bucket list. I said to my boss, "You don't have enough money for me to move to D.C." He asked me, "What's your price?" I gave him a figure and he said, "You got it, now pack your s\*\*t and get



Vietnam Memorial photo by Angela Pan. www.abpan.com, by permission.

down there." So, that's why I took the job. If I had known it was going to be that easy, I would have added about 50,000 bucks.

Ok, so I'm in Washington, D.C. and everyone at our headquarters is constantly pushing me to go see the Vietnam Wall. I had mixed emotions about going to experience the Wall. For me, there are too many names on that Wall, of good folks that

*The Wall continues on page 8*

### Table of Contents

The Wall Talked to Me .....	1
Editor's Notebook .....	2
New Member Profile, David Hagen.....	3
Newest Members List .....	4
Trip to Long Cheng, LS20A, Laos.....	5
New Member Profile, Brink .....	9
2017 Annual Meeting & Reunion Information .....	10

Reunion to Feature Military History Expert.....	11
Candidate Biographies, TLCB Election.....	12
TLCB Reunion Schedule.....	13
New Book on Secret War by TLCB Member .....	14
The Quilt—A TLCB Reunion Tradition .....	14
USAF: Air Commando Club commemorative event .	15
Mac and Friends of Assistance in Laos .....	16
At the Exchange: Dayton Reunion Shirt .....	16

## Editor's Notebook:

A few comments about the June 2017 issue of *The Mekong Express Mail*.

**Member-Generated Articles:** I love when the members tell us stories about themselves, which of course are usually about much more than themselves. In this issue, we have two profiles of new members:

David Hagen started out as an U.S. Army medical entomologist in Vietnam and then returned to Southeast Asia, particularly Thailand, doing similar work in a civilian role. Later, he worked around the world, and now retired, lives part of the year in Ban Umong, Thailand. David also has contributed an article, along with great pictures, of an exciting trip he made earlier this year to Long Cheng, Laos.

John Brink reflects on his experiences as a combat photographer out of Udorn, back in the late 1960s. Near the end of his story, he makes a statement that might express the feelings of many TLCB members: "Fifty years on I have become curious about the history of that era, and through the age of information, I became interested in organizations that promote what went on, and to verify some of my past experiences *so it was natural to become a member of the TLCB* (italics added)."

Our cover story, an emotional recounting of one veteran's trip to "The Wall," is from a relatively new member, and our only one now living in The Czech Republic, Patrick Minoughan, who is rapidly becoming a frequent contributor.

My point in calling attention to these three articles is that they

were all submitted by some of the TLCB's newest members, which in fact is true of many of the contributions to recent issues of the *MEM*. At the same time, I am confident that there are many long-time members who have not written something for us, although they have stories to tell. As I've said many times, there are no uninteresting stories, only untold ones. If you don't think you can write well, you're probably wrong. The *MEM* staff will be glad to help you along, so don't be shy. It's what we like to do.

**The Future of the TLCB:** As I mentioned in the last issue of the *MEM*, President Gary Beatty asked me to put together, and chair, an Ad Hoc Future of the TLCB Committee. A group of seven members has been exchanging ideas for several months now, and working with Gary, I plan to put together a summary of these ideas for the next issue and to provide the starting point for discussion at the 2017 TLCB Reunion in Dayton, Ohio, September 21 to 23. And let me remind you, that while I invited a small group to kick off this subject, all members are welcome, and encouraged, to send their comments to me.

And, naturally, since I just mentioned it, Ray Boas, **The 2017 Dayton TLCB Reunion** Chairman, is putting together a tremendous program, and we hope a great crowd will be there in September. On page 11, read about the exciting speaker that Ray has lined up. See everyone, well many of you, there!

John Harrington  
Editor, *MEM*  
jharrington@nscopy.com



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

Editor Emeritus: David MacDonald

Editor: John Harrington (jharrington@nscopy.com)

Asst. Editor: Thelma Tilton (thelmatilton@gmail.com)

Distribution: John Duffin (jduffin29@verizon.net)

Composition: Bill Tilton (billtilton@gmail.com)

#### ***TLC Brotherhood Website Contact***

Jerry Karnes, Communications Chairman

(JKarnes@tlc-brotherhood.com)

#### **Payments to TLCB**

Via website—uses PayPal, which accepts credit cards.

By check—make checks payable to "TLC Brotherhood, Inc."

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**TLC Brotherhood**

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## New Member Profile

### **David L. Hagen**

My love affair with Southeast Asia began in 1967 as a U.S. Army Medical Entomologist (one who studies insects, including their relationships with other animals, their environments, and human beings) in Vietnam.

I had studied Environmental Health at San Jose State College, California. Facing the draft, I found that the Army had a program offering Direct Commissions for those who qualified. I fit the bill, spent four months at Ft. Sam Houston, and then to Vietnam. I did two tours, commanding Preventive Medicine Detachments in the Mekong Delta and in the Central Highlands, where we supported U.S. military and Vietnamese provincial health officials in the control of malaria, plague, and infectious disease outbreaks. The Army and Vietnam changed my life; the work was meaningful, interesting, saved lives, and put me on a path I never would have enjoyed otherwise. I developed a great affinity for the *Montagnards* with whom I worked, and I continue to spend time with the ethnic minority groups in Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam.

After my positive experiences in Vietnam, I had been bitten by the “Asian Bug,” and I wanted to return to SEA. I was fortunate to find employment as an Entomologist, and later as a Site Supervisor with Pacific Architects and Engineers, dba AMPAC Maintenance Co., the Facility Engineering contractor for the U.S. Army in Thailand. I worked in Udorn and Korat for five years, from 1970-75, and during this time married the love of my life, Somwang; she had been working at the hotel I picked by chance while on R&R in Bangkok in 1968.

AMPAC’s Northern Area Office was located at Ramasun, just south of Udorn Thani, and home of the 7th Radio Relay Field Station (RRFS)—a top secret military communication and listening post and one of eight such facilities around the world operated by the Army Security Agency. Interesting place, with its football field-sized circular antenna array, known as “The Elephant cage.” The intelligence information gathered and processed at the 7th was passed on to combat units in the field all over SE Asia. Those Army and Air Force communication specialists, cryptographers, linguists, and translators who passed through the 7th can be proud of their work; they kept many more names from appearing on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall. Our next-door neighbor was an Air America pilot, so the ‘Secret War’ in Laos was never far away.

AMPAC’s Northern Area Office operated the power plants and maintained the ICS sites and ammunition supply points throughout northeast Thailand, and I made monthly visits to all the sites during my year in Udorn. In 1972, I became Site Supervisor for Camp Friendship and Jones Park ICS Site in Korat, adjacent to Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base. We renovated several hooches on Camp Friendship for the F-111 pilots when they transferred from Takhli.

When the Thai Government asked the U.S. military and its contractors to leave Thailand in 1975, Som and I returned to California. My parents lived in Santa Cruz, and I got a job as a health inspector with Monterey County Health Department.



His environmental health degree led David Hagen to a commission in the Army and to Vietnam in 1967. He is shown here in South Vietnam with a UH-1 “Huey” helicopter. Montagnard experience led him to a lifetime affinity for SEA ethnic groups.

After eighteen months, we moved to Hawaii where I got my Masters in Public Health, and where our daughter, Melinda, was born.

In 1978, we went to Indonesia where I worked on a University of Hawaii/Indonesian Ministry of Health manpower development project for two years; back to Hawaii for a year and then to Reno as a health inspector for a year. In 1983, I was offered a job in Saudi Arabia, where I set up the Public Health Program for the new airport under construction in Riyadh. Two years later I became a Public Health Consultant with the Saudi Arabian National Guard, which enabled me to hang on in Saudi until 1987 when I was able to join ARAMCO, the Saudi Arabian Oil Company, as a Preventive Medicine Advisor. I conducted Environment of Care assessments of company-owned/operated medical and dental facilities, and of 25 contracted private hospitals, providing medical care to a patient population of 912,000.

I retired from Saudi Aramco in 2004 and Som and I moved to Grass Valley, California. In 2008, we returned to the Middle East where I worked in health and safety on a \$15B Qatargas construction project of the largest LNG processing train in the world, with a contractor workforce of 22,000. We came home in 2010 when I retired permanently.

I guess one could say that I have ‘been around the block’ a few times. I followed my dream of working and living overseas, feeling that life in the U.S., though comfortable, was quite predictable. I preferred the challenges of employment abroad and

**Hagen continues on page 4**

### Hagen continued from page 3

immersion in other cultures. It gives one a wider perspective on the world and on one's own country, from other points of view. And Som, God bless her, followed me, uncomplaining, through it all.

It has been a good life, with many adventures, exotic vacations, frequent visits back to Thailand, but not without sacrifices and hardships. Even today, daughter Melinda's best friends are those she grew up with in Saudi, sharing that unique experience others find hard to relate to.

Sad to say we lost our dear Som three years ago to a series of hemorrhagic strokes. We were as close as two people can be; it will always be hard for me and Melinda without our 'Mumzi'.

Her ashes are in a temple in Lamphun Province, just south of Chiang Mai. We have family there, and I spend five months of every year staying in the small community of Ban Umong - a quiet agricultural area full of *lamyai* orchards and vegetable plots. I make this my base from October to March, when the heat and smoke from burning rice fields make outdoor activity and travel very unpleasant and unhealthy.

Earlier this year I spent two weeks in Cambodia, two weeks in Vietnam, and a week in Laos, where I was able to make an officially approved visit to Long Chengg, the former CIA/Hmong Army base and air strip in Xaysomboun Province—a place I have wanted to visit for years, but where access is restricted. My guide and I call it 'The AK Trip' because of all the security, mostly related to the Phou Bia gold mine nearby.

I particularly enjoy visiting remote hill tribe villages in Laos



Recent photo of David Hagen. Photos furnished by the author.

and Vietnam. We distribute reading glasses to the older women, many with poor eyesight, who spend much of their time in bad light embroidering and sewing their traditional clothes—one of the few ways to contribute materially to the family by making embroidery for sale.

Happy to share experiences with any and all of the TLC Brothers out there!

## Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The 13 members listed below joined between the last issue of the MEM and the 1st of June. 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
01786	USAF	Johnson	Dexter	Orland	ME
01787	USAF	Davis	Tarleton	Bluffton	OH
01788	USAF	Craig	Thomas	Milpitas	CA
01789	USAF	Mahoney	Danny	Holiday	FL
01790	USAF	Rivera	Michael	Malden	MA
01791	USA	Hilbert	Myron	Martinez	GA
01792	USA	Decker	Lewis	Vientiane	Laos
01793	USAF	Pertner	Gerald	Albuquerque	NM
01794	USAF	Oakes	Steven	Burns	WY
01795	USAF	Greer	David	Marstons Mill	MA
01796	USN	Arntzen	Roger	Jacksonville	FL
01797	USA	Fuerst	Gregory	Homosassa	FL
01798	USAF	Herder	Robert	Warren	RI

# Trip to Long Cheng, LS 20A, Laos (aka 'The AK Trip')

by Dave Hagen

Questions arise from time to time about access to Long Cheng, the former secret CIA/Hmong Army base and airstrip in Xaysomboun Province, known as LS (Lima Site) 20A during the 'Secret War' in Laos.

I can confirm that it is now possible to go there, officially. I booked a trip with Green Discovery Tours out of Vientiane and went there 7-10 February 2017. I went solo, with a GD guide, Thongkhon, and a 4WD pickup. Thongkhon is a biker and has been to Long Cheng many times; he leads motorcycle tours all over Laos.

Long Cheng continues to be a sensitive area, and access has been restricted, or stopped completely, for long periods of time due to local conflicts and incidents, often associated with the large open-pit gold mine located nearby at Phou Bia. Individual and group motorcycle riders, local and foreign, have been to Long Cheng even recently; however, they normally are barred from entering Long Cheng District, or have been asked to be on their way by the Lao PDR military who are still much in evidence in the area.

In many ways, this trip was a first. It required Green Discov-



"Welcome to Xaysomboun Province." Road marker up-country in Laos. Photos furnished by Dave Hagen.

ery to coordinate with, and write official letters to, the central Vientiane Office of Tourism and to the Province and District Offices where we would visit. Without this I could not have made the trip. I believe I may be the first foreigner to obtain official permission to visit Long Cheng in some time. Now that the precedence has been established, I don't know if official permission is still needed. I would not go without checking first. It just depends how bad you want to get there. I have wanted to go for many years. I worked for an Army contractor in Udorn in 1971; my neighbor was an Air America pilot, so the war in Laos was never far away. I have traveled in Laos extensively in recent years.

Xaysomboun has just recently been created as a separate province. As part of the formalities for this trip we met with the Director of the Provincial Department of Information, Culture, and Tourism at Xaysomboun town. He welcomes visitors and in fact has plans to develop tourism further in his province. My suggestion is to go now before it gets too developed.

Xaysomboun is a lovely place in its own



Xaysomboun Province Director of Information, Culture, and Tourism, left, and guide, Thongkhon, who often guides bikers on Lao trails.

*Long Cheng continues on page 6*



Above, Xaysomboun (town) is situated near dramatic "karst" mountains. Below, guest house where Dave stayed in Xaysomboun.

**Long Cheng** *continued from page 5*

right, a small town, quiet, not a lot going on, but in a gorgeous setting, surrounded by rugged mountains. The people are friendly, the market is small but interesting, with an excellent little coffee shop. A new market and City Pillar is under construction and will be completed this year. We stayed two nights at a new guest house run by a delightful H'mong lady, going and coming from Long Cheng. It was immaculate, comfortable, nice bathrooms, hot water, and even wi-fi! There are caves to explore, and the whole place is relaxing and a delight. Could have hung out here a week easy.

We encountered many trucks on the road to Long Cheng, hauling gold ore from the mine, with armed Army escort vehicles. Long Cheng itself is quiet and peaceful, and we took beaucoup photos on the old airstrip, notorious for the two karst hills at the north end of the runway, referred to as



'air brakes' for obvious reasons. Cows and kids on motorbikes use it now. My guide, Thongkhon, arranged a visit with a local fellow who is a former Royal Lao Army veteran. He led Thai Army troops fighting the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese in the hills around Long Cheng, and he related stories in front of his house over beer and snacks.

It seemed prudent to check in with the local police station and let them know we had official permission to visit. The officer-in-charge was officious and a bit



View from the mouth of a cave complex near Xaysomboun.

**Long Cheng** *continues next page*

arrogant—typical—and he took a copy of my passport. He sent along an armed policeman to accompany us when we took pictures in the hills above Long Cheng, which was the scene of intense fighting during the war, and the area is littered with old weapons and UXO. The valley has been cleared, but it is wise not to wander off well-worn trails. This young policeman guided us around the area. He was very relaxed, just doing his job, and was more interested in taking selfies while we were up in the hills.

We took him to lunch in the village after our excursion, and while we were eating, a pickup pulled up in front. Several Westerners got out, again with a Lao Army escort armed with an AK. They walked over to the airstrip, perhaps just taking photos like us. Then again, maybe not. They looked to be the same American and Australian mining engineers who had checked into my hotel in Vientiane; I had not met them. We observed them from our open-air restaurant, but thought it best to stick with our lunch. Who knows, maybe there are plans for the old airstrip.

There is a guest house at Long Cheng, and several good restaurants with friendly owners who welcome visitors. There is

a small Buddhist temple on a hill overlooking the airstrip, and a friendly monk who is happy to chat. He showed me videos on his phone of caves in the area. There is also a camp at Long Cheng housing Chinese engineers building a dam nearby. The Chinese are building lots of dams in Laos.

You can get permission to visit General Vang Pao's former house—a large concrete building now occupied by a Vietnamese noodle company. In some ways, this trip was like a scene from the Old West, what with its history, the gold mine, and the security. We drove all around the area, and no one bothered us or stopped us. It was a fun and exciting adventure, and I encourage anyone so inclined to go. Just check on the permission issue.

Oh, a final word of caution: Take care when you come upon road construction areas. The Chinese excavator operators are very focused on their job. You can sit for hours unless you let them know you are there and want to get through. Pay particular attention to the guy in the excavator working the level above the road. He may not know you are below him as he dumps his bucket of dirt onto the road below. We had some anxious moments until he realized we were below him. At any rate, when they know you are there, they will clear a way for you.



The Xaysomboun meat market, as it was when Dave visited. Province officials told him that the province is building a new market.

### **The Wall** *continued from page 1*

I knew and all of them were stationed in Thailand. My boss in D.C., a retired Navy brown-shoe [aviation billet, ed.] Captain kept pushing me to go to the Wall. He said that he had already been there. He had a way of pushing me and that was by always saying, "I'll bet you can't do it." Well for me that was a challenge, so the next week I was off to the Wall.

It was a Monday afternoon; three of us from our office went. Approaching the monument, no one said a word; we just all split up and went our separate ways to pay our respects. I was terrified; the Wall scared me. It was like it was talking to me. I began to picture in my mind what really happened to the nine airmen, my brothers from our brotherhood, who were killed in Udorn when a damaged F-4, returning from battle, became uncontrollable and flew through the front door of the AFTN Radio and TV station. I began to see flames everywhere, and thoughts were running through my head of what it must have been like to be trapped in a building and burn to death. I found the nine names together on the panel, and as I touched each name, tears began to run down my face. A U.S. Park Service attendant asked if I wanted some paper and a pencil to trace the names. I said no; there was just too much running through my head at that moment.

Next I went to Jim White's panel, an Air Force Captain. I didn't even touch his name yet and tears started again; there was just so much emotion coming out of that Wall. It was both magical and scary. Jim was an F-105 pilot and was shot down over the Plain of Jars in Laos. I know we were not doing anything in Laos officially. That's why today, since declassification, it

is commonly referred to as the "secret war." Jim went MIA. His plane was found and stripped down to the metal frame, but he was never found. Jim was a special guy, just a neat person, real down-to-earth type. He came from an Air Force family. His father was Air Force Major General Edwin White. I met him and his wife at their home in St Petersburg, Florida; they were convinced he was a POW and would be coming home someday. He had one brother who was also in the Air Force. You may have heard of his brother, Astronaut Ed White, who was killed in the space capsule fire at Cape Canaveral.

Finally, I went to the panel with the name Gerry Coyle on it and again just looking at his name tears began running down my face. The emotion was so overwhelming, it was just unreal. Gerry was a kid I worked with at Edwards AFB. He was another really neat kid, a little wiry guy, but tough as nails. Gerry was a SSgt in the Air Force, and he was killed in a helicopter crash along with 25 others who were part of the rescue operation of the ship Mayaguez. His helicopter crashed about 50 miles south of Nakhon Phanom (NKP) as part of Operation Rescue Mayaguez.

Now I can say I have been to the Vietnam Wall. And I also found out that my boss had never been there. Said that he just couldn't do it. He knew if he told me that I couldn't do it, I'd get it done and I did. I went, I paid my respects, and said a prayer for all the names on the Wall.

And because the Wall talked to me, caused me so much emotion, I'll never go back. It's a great tribute to all the names carved there, but I'll never go back. That Wall talked to me and reminded me how lucky I am. Once was enough.

*I've been to the Wall.*



Vietnam Memorial photo by Angela Pan. [www.abpan.com](http://www.abpan.com), by permission.





## New Member Profile

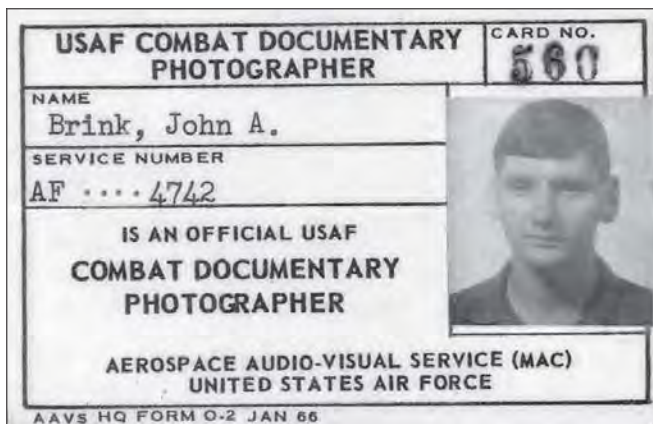
### New Member Profile:

#### **John Brink**

I was stationed at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force from July 1967 through July 1968 as Combat Documentation Photographer. Our unit came under what was at the time the Military Airlift Command, 600th Photo Squadron, 601st Photo Flight, Detachment-9 at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB).

From what I understand, the group of us who had orders for Southeast Asia, arriving during this time period, were the first designated “combat photographers” in the Air Force since WWII. An article in “US Camera” noted that there was a ten percent casualty rate for photographers. Not all of that was due to being wounded in action as much as it was to lack of training for circumstances other than photography. Being a flight crew member, most of the injuries and deaths were due to lack of training and experience. When I received my orders for Southeast Asia there was a “laundry list” of training: combat arms, combat photojournalism, altitude chamber rapid decompression physiological training, survival school at Fairchild AFB, and jungle survival school at Clark AFB.

I arrived with two other photographers at Udorn RTAFB in late August 1967. Our plane, a C-130, was met by someone from our detachment and transported us to the Photo Lab. We were told that we would have to wait a bit as our NCOIC was just returning from a mission. After a short while our new



NCOIC, MSgt Joseph Doyle, came into his office where we were waiting. That was a reality check for us as he was soaked with sweat and had a serious bout of helmet hair. He had just spent several hours over Laos documenting air strikes in an A1-E Skyraider with the 602nd Air Commando Squadron. For him, it must have been a dramatic adjustment to go from a combat situation to sitting down with us for a briefing; and for us, we got to see what we might be in for in the coming year.

Later in the afternoon we were shown to our new home, a hooch on the perimeter road facing the runway. My first impression was that I would never get any sleep because there was constant noise of aircraft landing and taking off twenty-four hours a day, but I did. The Det-9 hooch had about twenty-five guys in it that included the photographers, the gun camera



John Brink today. eArtist Point by Tony

crew, and even five army truck drivers who made hauls in the northeast sector of Thailand. There was one latrine that was shared by two hooches, but if ours was down, we had to roam around to surrounding facilities and search for water and toilets that were in working order. We always checked for snakes upon entering; they liked latrines.

The overall mission of the photographers was generally to document the whole Air Force operation in Southeast Asia, but particularly, the highest priority was the rescue operations of the Jolly Greens. Our local tribe was the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron (AARS). More on that later.

As with all photography units, there was always someone designated as the alert photographer, someone who was on duty twenty-four hours a day for one day. One of my first assignments was in in this capacity, and I was called out at night by the civil engineers to investigate a water pressure drop base wide. A bad leak was located in a rice paddy off base, and a hole had been dug down ten feet to where water had been rushing out of a hole in the line. With a flashlight and a camera, I went into the hole expecting to run into snakes. There were no snakes. It was determined that a farmer thought he would get ahead of the monsoon and rupture the pipe with an iron rod and flood his fields.

Our routine work included the “office” job of processing film and making prints, and we were called out for assignments to support the local newspaper with studio portraits, battle damage, accidents, and award ceremonies. We photographed all crew members: pilots, navigators, para-rescue men (PJs), and combat photographers. We made small prints and those, along with the negatives, were turned over to the Survival Specialist for filing. If the negatives were ever returned to us for making 8 X 10s, it meant that the crew member had been downed somewhere and ID photos were needed for distribution.

The first time I flew with the Jolly Greens was an eye opener. I’m in the Air Force but that does not preclude me from my history of motion sickness. Just normal flying was okay but I had no idea that a helicopter could dive and come up repeatedly turning on its side as it did so. So, I embarrassed myself

**Brink continues page 10**

**Brink** *continued from page 9*

upchucking on my helmet mic and the front of my survival vest. I guess I became acclimated so to speak and could ride all day without a problem. Diving and photographing a mini gun in action on the rear ramp was still a challenge. The gun sounds like a band saw and the vibrations go right through you.

Throughout the balance of the year my assignments could be termed the good, the bad, and the ugly. You choose. For me, New Year's Eve 1967 was noted for its weirdness. I was on the alert twenty-four-hour duty. My partner and I began at the Airmen's club to catch the entertainment there, but that was over by 2100 hours, so since my partner had gone from an Airman first class to a Buck Sargent (still an E-4), he could go to the NCO club. They were just setting up for a big bash so we stuck around to help and I, in my official capacity as photographer documenting the historical activity, got to stick around and



Combat Photographer John Brink in 1968. Photo furnished by the author.

drink. Shortly, I got a call from the air police saying they would pick me up to photograph an accident. When I got to the scene it was a mess. A sewage truck had turned over with two Thais riding on the top when the truck rolled over them. The driver was thrown from the cab. I was called out twice more for another accident on Friendship Highway and then a suicide after that. What a way to start the new year!

Fifty years on I have become curious about the history of that era and through the age of information I became interested in organizations that promote what went on and to verify some of my past experiences, so it was natural to become a member of the TLCB. I now live in Edmonds, Washington. I retired from the Department of Defense as a scientific and technical photographer and I now pursue landscape photography which I accomplish through hiking in the Cascade Mountains and kayaking in Puget Sound and area lakes.



## ***2017 Annual Meeting and Reunion, Dayton, Ohio***

***September 21-23 ~ 20 Years of Brotherhood***

### **Important Information that You Need**

#### ***ATTENTION All TLCB MEMBERS***

I need to compile a list of all members **who have not yet received their Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pin** and are attending the 2017 reunion/annual meeting.

Eligibility: Living United States Veterans who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces at any time during the period of November 1, 1955 to May 15, 1975, regardless of location. These veterans are eligible to receive one lapel pin, which will be presented during a formal ceremony at our 2017 Banquet Saturday, September 23.

Via email, forward to me your name, base name, and the years stationed there. raymar1970@embarqmail.com

***Thank You, Ray Boas***



***Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pin***



## ***IMPORTANT***

### ***Reunion Hotel Reservations***

Please call the Hotel Direct @ 937-426-7800. Do not set up your reservation through The IHG reservation desk.

**Identify yourself** as being with The Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood Reunion

Reunion Dates September 21st, 22nd, 23rd.

The Reunion rate of \$107/ night is good three days Pre and Post Reunion. Any problems please Call Ray Boas Reunion Chairman @ 937-307-0455 Or Email raymar711@gmail.com

**THAILAND, LAOS, CAMBODIA  
BROTHERHOOD**



**20 YEARS OF BROTHERHOOD  
DAYTON, OHIO 2017**

# *Reunion to Feature Military History Expert*

## *Ever Into Peril: Celebrating The Heroes Of The Doolittle Raid*

### *Banquet presentation by Ray Robb*

Ray's presentation will provide a historical overview of the daring 1942 American bombing raid on Japan led by Lt Col Jimmy Doolittle in retaliation for the devastating attack on Pearl Harbor. Ray will also provide a firsthand account of the Doolittle Raiders' final reunion and toast held in 2013 at the

### **Raymond L. Robb**

Ray grew up in Savannah, Georgia, where he developed a passion for aviation at an early age. Living in the shadow of Hunter Army Airfield, he was accustomed to frequent overflights of military aircraft of all types, a contributing factor in his decision to join the U.S. Air Force. While on active duty, he served for six years in England, followed by three years in the Netherlands on a Special Duty assignment. Upon completion of nearly a decade of service, he left the Air Force with an Honorable Discharge for a position at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) in Arlington, Virginia. From there, he later relocated to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, where he supported numerous aeronautical acquisition programs as a contractor prior to becoming an Air Force Civil Servant. In this capacity, he currently works as a Security Specialist in the Air Force Research Laboratory.

Outside of work, he continues to be a devoted aviation enthusiast, photographer, and historian. He has been a freelance writer since 2002 and frequently lectures throughout the Miami Valley on a variety of aviation history topics. He and his wife, Robin, live in Sugarcreek Township with their 13-year-old daughter, Staci.



National Museum of the U.S. Air Force.

An Air Force Veteran of 10 years, Ray currently works as a government civilian in the Air Force Research Laboratory. He has been a freelance writer since 2002 and frequently lectures throughout the Miami Valley on a variety of aviation history topics.



# *Candidate Biographies, TLCB Board of Directors Election*

*Saturday, September 23rd*

NOTE: Inserted in this issue of the Mekong Express Mail is an official absentee ballot/proxy for the board of directors election that will be held as the first order of business at the Annual Meeting of the TLC Brotherhood, Inc. Candidates selected by the nominating committee and approved by the board of directors were invited to furnish biographies for publication prior to the election. The following biographies were submitted to the editor and are presented in alphabetical order. **For members attending the annual meeting, a ballot will be furnished for voting at that time—do NOT submit an absentee ballot or proxy.**

## *Jim Green, Member at Large*

I am a retired USAF Chief Master Sergeant and served three years plus in Thailand, one year in '66 with several months TDY in '65 at Korat. I was a Weapons Load Team Chief for the F-105. My second tour was at Ubon loading the F-4 in '67-'68, and my final tour was at Korat in '74-'75, serving as a gunner on the AC-130. During those tours, I spent as much time as possible in the surrounding areas. At Ubon, my off time was with EOD, and during one sojourn, we used class six munitions to make a well for a leper village.

I have been a member of the TLCB for many years and believe in our mission. With very little provocation, I share what the organization is and does. Your consideration would be greatly appreciated.

## *George Shenberger, Member at Large (incumbent)*

I am running for Member at Large and would like to tell you a little about myself.

I was in the United States Air Force from November 1965 to February 1969, and went to Chanute AFB and Aerospace Ground Power Equipment Repair School there after basic at Lackland AFB. After graduating from the ground power course, my next assignments were Mather AFB in Sacramento for a year and McConnell AFB for more schooling on gas turbine engines. My next stop was Korat, Thailand for a year where I was a member of the 388th T.F.S. providing support for the F-105 missions over North Vietnam. After that, it was off to Nellis AFB in Las Vegas, then TDY to Naha, Okinawa. During my time there, the U.S. Pueblo was captured, and I volunteered to go to South Korea, Suwon Rock AFB when the Air Force sent a squadron of F-101s to Sowan from Naha.

After my military service, I worked for Johnson Controls as a maintenance machine repairman for 34 years, and retired in York, PA in 2004. My wife, Ruth Ann, and I raised four children; three graduated from college and the youngest girl manages our preschool in York, Jkandjlnurseryschool.com. I am a full-time landlord in York, PA and Wildwood Crest, NJ, where Ruth and I are property managers.

I have visited Thailand and Laos three times and have traveled the roads with Mac Thompson and visited John Middlewood, who was a blessing to everyone and will be missed by all. We visited the schools, orphanages, and some of the projects you read about in the "Mekong Express Mail." These trips gave me an opportunity to see our TLCB Assistance Program at work! The appreciation the students and teachers show is unbelievable. Travelling at our own expense, and experiencing these locations and what little the children and teachers work with, I realized that I would like to help with the TLCB objectives! Next year, I plan to see Mac and go on a mission trip to Laos.

With my past military experiences and my present, successful business ventures, I know I can continue to be an asset to the TLCB and the kids, and I am asking you to vote for me for Member at Large.

A&P graduate of Northrop Institute of Technology, Inglewood, CA

## *John Sweet, Member at Large*

Strong supporter of all TLCB objectives and membership  
Born 1947 in Marblehead, MA (suburb of Boston).

Graduated from Salem High School in 1966 and joined the USAF.

Attended Technical Training School, Lowery Air Force Base as a 23450 Precision Photographic Processing Specialist for Satellite Reconnaissance. Cross trained to 70250 and assigned to Headquarters Western Ground Engineering Electronics Installation Agency at McClellan Air Force Base, CA.

Ordered to Vietnam at Bien Tuey and assigned to 56th Special Operations Wing, 1987th Communications Squadron, Message Distribution Center, TUOC, Nakhon Phanom August 1969 - September 1970. Established "Operation Thare" to assist the children at St. Joseph's School under Father Lawrence Khai, located at Sakhon Nakhon, Thailand.

Assigned to 2014th Communications Squadron, Hanscom Field, Bedford, MA from September 1970 until July 1972. Assigned to Commander's Staff 2069th Communications Squadron, Nellis Air Force Base until July 1973.

August 1997, arranged return visit to Nakhon Phanom and Thare Orphanage (St. Joseph's School) and met with Father (now Archbishop) Lawrence Khai and commenced assistance program.

If elected to the position of Member At Large, I will strive to strongly advance, before the board, all objectives of the TLC Brotherhood and all concerns of fellow members. I would appreciate your support to achieve those goals.

—TLC Brotherhood Treasurer 1998—2000

—TLCB Vice President 4 terms: 2000—2004 & 2009—2013

—TLCB Immediate Past President 2 terms 2013—2016

—Founded TLC Brotherhood Assistance Program 1998

—Assistance Committee Chairman 1998—2006

—Established TLC Brotherhood List Servers 1999

## *Les Thompson, Vice President (incumbent)*

I have been a proud member of the TLCB since February 1999, and am currently the Chairman of the TLCB Assistance Committee and TLCB Vice-President.

My SEA duty was with Det. 5, 621<sup>st</sup> TAC Air Control Squadron, better known as Invert, at NKP from 1970 to 1971.

If re-elected, I pledge to fulfill my duties of office with honor and integrity.

**LIKE us on FACEBOOK—  
The Official Thailand, Laos, Cambodia  
Brotherhood**

# Tlc Brotherhood 2017 Reunion Schedule

Thursday 21 September 2017

Noon—7:00pm Hotel Check in, Holiday Inn, 2800 Presidential Dr., Fairborn, Ohio  
Check in at the Nipa Hut (Challenger Room).

Afternoon, Evening Social Time in the Nipa Hut, dinner and local sightseeing on your own.

Friday 22 September 2017

6:00am—10:00am **FREE BUFFET BREAKFAST**

8:45am Load buses for the Air Force Museum and Memorial Park; depart hotel by 9:10am.

After a brief *Memorial Service* at the TLCB Plaque outside the museum, you will be on your own to tour the museum, IMAX theater, and interactive exhibits. There is a restaurant available for a light snack or drink.

4:00pm Load bus for return trip to hotel; bus departs museum by 4:15pm.

4:45pm Assorted Subway sandwiches and snacks in the Challenger Room.

7:00pm—? Annual TLCB Assistance Auction in the Challenger Room

Saturday 23 September 2017

7:00am—10:00am **FREE BUFFET BREAKFAST**

8:00am—9:00am Closed Board Meeting in the Columbia room.

9:15am—10:30am All membership TLCB Annual Meeting in the Challenger Room.

10:30 Meeting of new BOD members. See President Beatty.

Optional Presentations (Challenger Room)

1:00pm—2:00pm Bill Peterson LS-85 update presentation.

2:30pm—3:30pm (Tentative) “The Black Mariah Story” Presentation by Jack Mecham.

6:00pm—7:00pm Banquet Cocktail Hour (CASH BAR ONLY) Challenger Room.

7:00pm—? 2017 TLCB Banquet. (Speaker will be military historian Ray Robb, who will talk about the Dolittle Raiders) Quilt drawing, etc.

Sunday 24 September 2017

7:00am—10:00am **FREE BUFFET BREAKFAST**

*No events scheduled. Reunion officially ends.*



# New Book on Secret War by TLCB Member

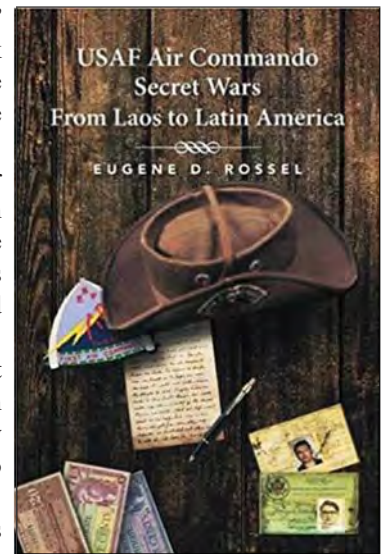
In his new book titled, "USAF Air Commando Secret Wars from Laos to Latin America" (published by Xlibris), Lt Col Eugene D. Rossel USAF, retired, gives a rare, insider's look into special operations of the military, particularly the so-called secret wars involving the United States Air Force. This book illustrates the courage and honor of the military and the sacrifices that are sometimes inevitably made in the name of duty.

The Air Commando secret wars, Rossel shares, happened mostly during the Vietnam War time frame and was a global effort involving USAF volunteer personnel who were given official military orders that did not necessarily specify the country they served in. These operations were used to normally strengthen a poor country with little military resources and training with secret warriors frequently being there doing some of their legwork behind the scenes.

"My book covers the secret wars we participated in numerous countries which we couldn't talk about until leaving the service, and it covered activities in Vietnam, Laos, Africa, Latin America, and a little of Spain," the author says. "The main purpose of the book was for my family, answering the question of "What did you do in the war dad?" and for the guys who served with me and those who didn't return to their families."

A timely resource on military history and operations, "USAF Air Commando Secret Wars from Laos to Latin America" is for history buffs, military and aviation enthusiasts, people who served in the USAF, and their families and friends.

Available hard cover or softcover, and as an "ebook," at Amazon and Barnes & Noble.



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## The Quilt – A TLCB Reunion Tradition

By Bob Wheatley

The words of the Willie Nelson hit song asks the question, "Ain't it funny how time slips away?" It seems not so very long ago I attended the first reunion of the the corporate TLC Brotherhood, held in Colorado Springs. That was an absolutely unforgettable experience for me. It's hard to imagine more than sixteen years have passed since then, and soon we will once again convene for our seventeenth annual reunion, this time in Dayton, Ohio. There we hope to see some new faces, renew old acquaintances, and look forward to participating in that unique kind of camaraderie and bonding that only brothers-in-arms and their families can share. Beyond the camaraderie, the thing that most attracted and has kept me a continuous member of the TLC Brotherhood, since before our incorporation, is the charitable work TLCB does to aid the needy people of Southeast Asia—the people whom we all came to know and love during our time over there. We can tout that as something unique among veterans' organizations, I believe.

Beginning with that first corporation reunion in the year 2000, and for every year since, Rosie Wheatley has assembled a one-of-a-kind, hand-made quilt to be raffled off at the annual banquet. One hundred percent of proceeds of all raffle ticket sales go to the TLCB Assistance Fund. To date, the annual quilt raffles have raised well over \$30,000 for the cause. Rosie is now hard at work assembling the blocks for the 2017 Quilt Raffle. As usual, this year's quilt will be done in shades of patriotic red, white, and blue and sized to fit a queen-size



Rosie Wheatley working her labor of love, making a quilt for the annual TLCB drawing at the reunion banquet. Photo from Bob Wheatley.

bed. As always, you can be certain it will be a quality work assembled and quilted with Tender Loving Care—something you can be proud to display in your home, should you be the lucky holder of the winning ticket!

You will find a sheet of ten raffle tickets enclosed in this issue of the *MEM*. Tickets are \$2.00 each, so a full sheet is \$20. You may purchase as many as you wish by photocopying the enclosed sheet. Only one ticket will win, but the more you buy, the better your chances! **YOU NEED NOT BE PRESENT AT THE DRAWING TO WIN.** Just fill in the ticket(s) with your contact information and mail with your check made out to TLCB, Inc. To help our Treasurer out, please include the words "Raffle Quilt" in the memo line of your check. Should you wish to purchase a large number of tickets, we will make it very easy to do. Simply mail your name, member number, and contact information with a check in the amount to cover the number of tickets you wish to have entered in the drawing. Your tickets will be filled out and entered in the drawing for you. It doesn't get much easier than that!

### Mail to:

TLC Brotherhood, Inc.  
Box 343  
Locust Grove, GA 30248

# *USAF Announces Commando Club Commemoration Event*

*William R. Peterson*

*Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood*

*Vietnam War Commemoration Chair*

I am pleased to announce that there will be an official commemoration event honoring the men of the U. S. Air Force covert operation Commando Club to be held in March 2018 at Maxwell – Gunter, Montgomery, AL.

Here is the notice I received from the event hostess Emily E. Shade, CMSgt, USAF, Director, Air Force Enlisted Heritage Research Institute Barnes Center for Enlisted Education, Air University:

All are welcome as we honor and remember those lost at LIMA SITE 85.

Please “Save the Date” 10-13 March 2018.

The Air Force Enlisted Heritage Hall will be hosting a 50th anniversary of the events at Lima Site 85 at Maxwell-Gunter, AL.

We are tentatively planning several days of events to include: a memorial service, a Lima Site 85 Monument and reflective bench unveiling for all the Airmen involved with the event, book signings opportunities, and the 19th annual Heritage Hall annual 5K, which will be dedicated to CMSgt Etchberger.

*For readers not familiar with this topic, here are some bits of information:*

**Commando Club** was a USAF covert radar operation atop a mile-high mountain in northeast Laos named Phou Pha Thi, which is 15 miles from the border of North Vietnam, 185 miles northeast of Vientiane and the Mekong River, and 220 miles north of Udorn. Udorn was home to their forward administrative and support unit. The men flew aboard the Pony Express helicopters to get to work, generally on a two-week rotation of 12 men crews.

The purpose of Commando Club was to provide precise radar-guided bombing commands to USAF pilots flying F-105 fighter-bombers attacking strategic targets in North Vietnam Route Pack Six. This was done successfully in South Vietnam (Skyspot Sites) using the TSQ-77 system to direct B-52 strikes (Arc Light) and other tactical aircraft as well. That system was modified for use on a mountain in northern Laos and was designated Commando Club MSQ 81 site. This ground site, using a TSQ-81 radar, computer, and plotting board, enabled the crew to plot the incoming F-105 flight along a flight path toward a three-dimensional point in space. Reading the track data, the controller would direct the pilot with voice commands for speed, altitude, and heading towards a pre-initial point, initial point, and bomb release point. The pilot, hearing the

controller counting down from 5 to “Mark!” would then release his bombs. The accuracy with the Skyspot systems was amazing. Ironically, it was also a major factor in reducing collateral damage to North Vietnamese people and property.

The terminology has been confusing to some. The designation **Lima Site 85** refers to the STOL airstrip on the SE corner of the lower part of the mountain used by Gen Vang Pao’s troops in the guerrilla war against North Vietnamese Regulars and Pathet Lao. This was the Military Region 2 HQ for indigenous intelligence collection, road watching, and small unit combat. There were over 200 Lima Sites in Laos, as well as a number of Pakse Sites in the lower panhandle of Laos. This force of approximately 1,000 Hmong, Thai, and Lao troops accomplished the CIA advisers’ mission in coordination and under the direction of Vang Pao and the Royal Lao Government (RLG), in conjunction with the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane. In the end, after operating for five months, the Commando Club site was overrun by North Vietnamese Dac Cong Special Forces. The friendly defending troops fought an enemy force of approximately 3,000 North Vietnamese Regular Army infantry supported by artillery units.

The Air Force crew were sheep-dipped members of Strategic Air Command’s 1st Combat Evaluation Group (1st CEVG). They performed their duties unarmed, well behind the lines in a hostile physical and enemy-infested environment solely at the mercy of those senior Air Force evacuation planners and U.S. Ambassador William Sullivan, who commanded everything in Laos without exception. Despite excellent daily intelligence provided by CIA on the ground in sight of the approaching enemy, the order was not given in time to evacuate the site successfully.

Of the 16 USAF men who worked the Commando Club mission on 11 March 1968, only four survived as the result of heroic helicopter rescues performed by an Air America crew, followed by a USAF Jolly Green crew. CMSgt Richard Etchberger was eventually awarded the Medal of Honor, MSgt James Calfee was awarded the Silver Star, and other men received the Bronze Star. All were awarded the Purple Heart medal.

It was my honor to serve this mission and these men daily from TACC-North Sector on Monkey Mountain in Vietnam. As I write this there is now one survivor.

The official commemoration event sponsored and hosted by the Air Force Enlisted Heritage Hall will celebrate the memory of these brave men. All are welcome to attend. Contact CMSgt Shade at Emily Shade ([emily.shade@us.af.mil](mailto:emily.shade@us.af.mil))



# Mac and Friends of Assistance in Laos

Mac Thompson, our principal representative for Assistance in Southeast Asia, recently returned from one of his runs into Laos to check on progress and find new projects. He sent the photo shown, and gave us a brief report.



In front, Vaughan Smith, Mac Thompson, from the left upper row, Larry Crider, Paul Carter, Glenn Black, and Auke Koopmans. Photo furnished by MacAlan Thompson.

Mid-May, time for another run up to NE Laos for checking on TLCB funded projects; three schools this trip, new tin roofs and cement floors. It's necessary to schedule the trip a month or two ahead of time to coordinate with the folks up in Phonsavan and with the travelers going with me. Decent weather planned, so off we go on 15 May. Oops, it rained, and rained, and rained.

We passed through Vang Vieng, L-16, old home of the Neutralist faction, current home to world travelers looking for tubing, kayaking, zip-lining, Beer Lao, etc. On to Phou Khoun, turn right through Moung Soui, and arrive at Phonsavan, in the rain.

Two days of school visits, in the rain, with associated ceremonies, baci, Lao and Beer Lao, then time to head back south. And the rains stopped. Breakfast and photo op at the Craters Restaurant, then on the road, eight hours back to Nong Khai on the Thai side, RON at Udorn, then another seven hours to home.



## At the Exchange: Dayton Reunion Shirt



Above, pocketed reunion shirt (men's style).

At right is the same Port Authority shirt in burgundy, with the TLCB logo, looking for a new owner. You can order these shirts in a variety of colors and sizes for men or ladies, with "crest" or "TLCB" logo. You may have to wait a few weeks until they are made up for delivery.

Below are the new "camo" hats with "Thailand Vet" or "Laos Vet," available now.



Your TLC Brotherhood Exchange always has news. This time we are proudly displaying the 2017 Reunion shirt. It has the logo tastefully embroidered on a lavender shirt that is available in lady's sizes and men's regular and tall. See the enclosed order blank for more details--and to ORDER!

As shown below, we also have a new hat thanks to a member suggestion—"Thailand Vet" and "Laos Vet." And don't forget the option for custom lettering on some hat styles. Visit the Exchange at [www.tlc-brotherhood.com](http://www.tlc-brotherhood.com) and see these and other fine products you can order on line.

