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Board Cancels TLCB Annual Meeting and Reunion

by Gary Beatty, president

Due to concerns about the Wuhan virus, the Board of Directors unanimously voted to cancel this year's TLC Brotherhood, Inc. annual meeting and reunion. It was not a decision made lightly. This will be the first year without a reunion since the founding of the TLCB. It is an event many members look forward to as a chance to get together with old friends and meet new members. The reasons for the Board's decision, though probably obvious, are explained below, as well as the legal considerations and potential impact on Assistance fundraising.

The 2020 reunion was planned for Newport, Rhode Island; October 15 to 18; however, the status of public gatherings in

that State are uncertain at this time. We cannot predict what the status will be in October. An option to move the reunion to November or December was discussed, but there is no more certainty about those months.

Travel is also a concern. Our members are all in a



vulnerable age group, so it would be impossible to predict how many would be willing to travel to attend, or what airline schedules would be like at that time. Uncertainty about attendance is an insurmountable problem for contracting with the hotel for rooms and facilities. Given the multiplicity of uncertainties in planning and the ability to congregate, the Board determined that there was no alternative to cancellation. Efforts will be re-directed to the 2021 reunion.

Legal Components to the Decision – Meetings and Elections:

As we are an incorporated non-profit in the State of Virginia, we are subject to that state's corporate statutes. Virginia law mandates that we must hold a meeting for members at least once per year. In the past we complied with that mandate by holding the business meeting in conjunction with the annual reunion.

Prior to the Board meeting, I, in my capacity as ex officio legal advisor to the Board, reviewed the relevant Virginia law, and consulted with our Virginia-registered agent, a licensed Virginia attorney, as to our options. The law affords an

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Editor's Notebook

What Do You Know About the War in Thailand? And Sawadee to Newport.

"Communist Defeat in the Second Indochina War," a remarkable article by Paul Carter, a TLCB member and historian, begins on page 3. It is actually the opening of a feature article that Paul wrote for the scholarly publication, *Asian Review*, and it documents the long history of communist activities in Thailand and the country's eventual victory over the terrorists.

Most of us who served in Thailand in the 1960s and 1970s were at least vaguely aware that there were insurgencies taking place, mostly in the northeast and some in the southern peninsula; however, for the great majority of us, our focus was on Vietnam and Laos. I know that at the radar site where I was stationed in Phitsanulok, halfway between Bangkok and Chiang Mai, we were never really threatened. In fact, the senior NCOs and officers lived off base, and many of us wandered near and far on our motorcycles, rarely concerned about security. Oh, I do remember that several times we went on alerts, usually lasting four to five hours, but they were protective responses to incidents that took place at larger and distant bases, particularly Udorn, where our squadron headquarters was located.

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, or a note in the mail to TLC Brotherhood, PO Box 60, Aspers, PA 17304.

I was surprised when my colleague, Bill Tilton, came across a fairly recent article in a Japanese journal, *Kyodo News*, "In Thailand, tourists are drawn to Communist relics in deep forest" about a Thai Communist Party encampment in the hills of Phitsanulok Province. Maybe I should not have been so cavalier about frolicking about in those regions. Two photos are reprinted pages 3 and 5, supporting the camp's existence.

Somehow or another, I doubt if my experience was unique. I am confident that many of our TLCB membership were aware of communist activities in Thailand during their tours, and some of you may have even had some more hands-on encounters. So, I would like to ask any and all of you to share your knowledge with the *MEM*. Please send them to me and we might put together a special section, or turn them into an on-going series.

Newport and the 2020 Reunion. As President Gary Beatty announced on page one, the 2020 TLCB Reunion, scheduled for this October in Newport, Rhode Island, has been cancelled due to the uncertainties related to the Covid-19 pandemic. I was the chairman of the event and was looking forward to welcoming the membership to my adopted home state, having migrated all the way here from far-away Connecticut. Needless to say, I am sorely disappointed. Rhode Island is an historic and beautiful piece of our country. It is the "Ocean State," with an incredible shoreline and a notable military history, mostly naval, being the home of the United States Naval War College. I don't know if we will have the opportunity in the future to give Newport and Rhode Island another "go" at hosting the TLCB, but let me offer any of you, who ever ventures this way, an invitation to visit with me and my wife Eileen. A mini-tour of the smallest state's grandeur will be your reward.

John Harrington
MEM Editor
jharrington@nscopy.com

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The Mekong Express Mail

David MacDonald (1939-2019), Founding Editor

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

TLCB Facebook Page

Ray Boas, Monitor
(raymar711@gmail.com)

TLC Brotherhood Website

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

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Reunion 2020: Cancelled

Communist Defeat in the Second Indochina War

By Paul Carter

“Once I talked with them [his North Vietnamese captors] about captured soldiers at the front line. They asked me which front line? I was thinking of Plain De Jars and Sky Line Ridge, so I told them. They laughed and told me, ‘that’s not the front line.’ They said their front line was Thailand.” Quote from Thai Forward Air Guide CROWBAR, captured by the North Vietnamese in Laos in 1972 and kept captive for over four years.

The nearly three-decade armed struggle on peninsular Southeast Asia between communist forces and so-called “Free World” forces was settled in 1975, when Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV, communist North Vietnam) forces seized the southern Vietnamese capital of Saigon. The DRV and communist Pathet Lao forces — supported by the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) — asserted their hegemony over Laos that same year. Meanwhile, the communist Khmer Rouge conquered Cambodia, the North Vietnamese driving them from Phnom Penh in late 1978.

The communist victories were total and the forces of democracy beaten, so said press accounts and the popular notion. The primary narrative of these wars — really one war composed of several campaigns — has portrayed the communist victories in Southeast Asia as absolute. The storyline has been fairly consistent: The United States, its Western and Southeast Asian allies lost the Second Indochina War and the communist forces prevailed.

There is another story that has not been popularly told, a successful one few talk about. The truth is that on the peninsula, one country, Thailand, which the PRC and DRV intentionally targeted for communist expansion, failed to follow the

Phetchabun province (1979); Communist insurgents, both ethnic (grey shirts) and Thai students from Bangkok (white shirts) posing for picture with their weapons.



domino path of its three neighbors. Given the feeble record of governments in defeating insurgencies since World War Two, this was a notable achievement, particularly since two of the defeated countries bordered Thailand. A recent empirically based counterinsurgency study conducted for the U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense found that of 59 core insurgencies world-wide since World War Two, host-nations lost in 31 of those conflicts.

History has largely overlooked the Thai victory over its insurgency and success in resisting external communist forces. In this article, I argue that Thailand triumphed over communism because of certain decisions, some risky, its leaders took and the determination of its king and population to fight communism both at home and abroad. Thai leaders in the 1980s and 1990s certainly portrayed the Second Indochina War as a victory for Thailand, as demonstrated through the war memorials they commissioned during this period. As Dr. Richard Ruth observes:

These monuments illustrate a period of economic development and growing prosperity during the war years that appear intended to demonstrate to its people that Thailand, unlike the United States, can record its participation in the conflict as a national boon. They reflect a profitable and proud phase of modernization that not only transformed the kingdom from a largely agricultural developing nation into the most technologically advanced and wealthy mainland South-East Asian state.

DEFEAT continues on page 4.

Add Your Memories of the War

Paul Carter is a TLCB member and an Asian scholar. His article, “Communist Defeat in the Second Indochina War” appeared in the *Asian Review*, I, Vol. 33 (1), 2019. With his permission, beginning on this page, the *MEM* is publishing the introduction to it, in a slightly edited format with footnotes removed. Although communist insurgency and terrorism in Thailand did not reach the levels of Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia, it occurred throughout the country on a regular basis throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, particularly in Isan, but not limited to the Northeast. Many of our TLCB members were present in those areas and felt the impact or were aware of such events. The *MEM* would like members to share some of their experiences so we can print them in a future issue. Once again, do not be shy. We will provide editorial assistance at your request.

Paul Carter has also provided the TLCB MEM with a PDF of the entire article with footnotes, endnotes, and bibliography included, and has given us permission to make it available to any member who would like a copy. Send an email requesting a copy to jharrington@nscopy.com, which is also where you should send your memories of your experiences.

DEFEAT *continued from page 3.*

Evaluating the Communist Insurgency

It might confound the international visitor touring charming Thailand today to learn that communist violence racked the kingdom 50 years ago. By mid-March 1967, communist assassinations of Thai government and community officials in the northeast Isan region had increased from a long-standing average of about ten per month, to thirty. Armed clashes between government forces and insurgents were averaging one per day. This alarming violence rarely made headlines outside Thailand because the Western press focused on the war in Vietnam. Assassinations ranged from provincial governors to village headmen (puuyaibaan). Aid workers were not immune, insurgents killing a three-man Thai team in Nan Province in 1970. Even rural school teachers were targeted. As teachers fled, schools closed. By 1984 when the Thai State had defeated the insurgency, almost 22,000 Thai government officials had been killed or wounded and intellectuals assassinated.

A casual review of the *Bangkok Post* in the early 1970s vividly demonstrates commonly occurring communist violence. To give one example, in just a two-week period ending in January 1972, the newspaper reported the following violence in five articles over four days:

- *Between December 29, 1971 and January 4, 1972, government clashes with insurgents resulted in 32 “communist terrorists” (Bangkok Post term for the insurgents) captured, six killed, 10 wounded while six government authorities and one villager were wounded, with 122 insurgents surrendering to authorities.*
- *A communist group of unknown size attacked a work camp guarded by 20 soldiers, policemen, and volunteers in Ban Wang Pa, Hat Yai, using small arms and a M-79 grenade launcher. One assailant was killed.*
- *A Vietnamese “suicide squad” penetrated U-Tapao Royal Thai Air Force base, damaging aircraft. One raider was killed, another captured.*
- *After three days of fighting, Thai forces seized an insurgent training camp in the Phu Phan mountains, capturing three while others fled. The camp’s training capacity was 150-200 personnel, complete with agricultural lands, basketball and badminton courts.*
- *Insurgents attacked a Thai Border Patrol Police (BPP) unit in Udorn Thani Province, injuring three soldiers and fatally injuring a policeman. Three assailants were killed.*

That very month the governor of Nong Khai, a province on the Mekong River bordering Laos, implored Lao officials to help stop the insurgent gun running to Thailand. Thai government forces the previous week had seized large amounts of M-16 rifles, ammunition, anti-tank rounds, and other weapons. The request did little good. One year later, the paper reported that 150 heavily armed insurgents overran the Loei Post Office, murdering eight policemen.

The communist insurgency was centered in Thailand’s impoverished northeast and parts of the north. The violence was

real, the insurgents committed. Nan Province was a particularly remote northern area requiring aggressive government action over the years to root out insurgents. In May 1972, during an attack on a communist camp in Ban Huey Lak Lai, 25 kilometers southwest of the district capital, 14 Thai cavalrymen were killed and 30 wounded in military operations lasting several days. The DRV was providing a pipeline of weapons to Thai insurgents through Laos, which shares a 1,700-kilometer border with Thailand. That same month, Thai forces captured smugglers in Kalasin transporting assault weapons from Nakhon Phanom province. The haul included M-79 grenade launchers, 257 grenades, assault weapons, and almost 40,000 rounds of assault rifle ammunition.

In 2016, Thai former communists offered vivid recollections of their fight against the Thai State. “The theories of Marx, Lenin, and Mao Zedong helped me to see Thailand from a different angle. The Communist Party of Thailand’s (CPT) goal was to build a party, a military, and mobilize the people to change Thailand’s political system.” Another remembered, “In the scorching heat of March 1966, plagued by ‘leeches that sucked all the blood out of our legs,’ (she) trekked from Nabua, Thailand to a communist base in northern Vietnam, close to the Chinese border.” She remained there for almost two years, receiving Vietnamese language and medical training to become a nurse before returning to Thailand in 1968. One captured communist during the war said he trained for eight months in Vietnam with 100 young Thai men and 43 Thai women, with North Vietnamese and Thai instructors.

Communist recruiters were often subtle in their techniques, migrating into new villages and, after sometimes a year of gaining villagers trust, beginning recruitment. Other times, armed gangs of up to 100 would enter a village late at night, gathering villagers at a wat while searching for village leaders and teachers. The communist leaders would alternately proselytize and threaten for hours, then present a tendentious form of mohlam (northeastern folk song story-telling) denigrating the Thai political, social and economic order, as one village abbot witnessed and outlined in a private letter to his superiors.

Some scholars have argued that the communist threat to Thailand was insignificant, Thai military leaders using the theme of “communist threat” as means to prod the United States into providing Thailand increasing economic and military aid. Phimmasone Michael Rattanasengchanh argues that Premier, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat used anti-communism as a ploy incorporated into the idea of Thai nationalism to increase his and royalist power and that, “communism was too small to pose any danger to the country.” Phimmasone cites a 1963 U.S. Army assessment stating the communist movement in Thailand “was relatively small and its activities were manifested mainly in clandestine propaganda.” Daniel Fineman argues the traditional Thai “cold war model” seeking to explain that Thai leaders’ actions were flawed. This model attributes Thai military leader motives for internal activities and foreign policy to combatting a communist threat, when they actually used the communist threat to attack their opponents and consolidate political power.

DEFEAT *continues next page.*

I do not disagree that Thai military leaders embellished the communist threat, used it to consolidate their domestic power and, on one occasion, even surreptitiously printed communist literature. Sarit in particular used the threat to brutally attack opponents, sometimes by unlawful execution. Where I part company with their analysis is when they conclude that because Thai leaders used the threat for power consolidation, communism therefore was not a formidable threat. That communism was a significant threat to Thailand and that leaders conveniently used the threat to consolidate their power are not conditions in contravention. The assassination rates and daily armed clashes clearly establish that communist violence was a threat to Thailand's governance



Now a tourist attraction in Phitsanoulouk Province, this camp was a CPT Hq and training camp, where China-trained insurgents planned attacks and provided medical treatment to curry favor with Thai people.

and way of life, regardless of the domestic politics.

Perhaps there was an additional motive for Thai military leaders to embellish the threat? We will never know, but, as I address later, their zealous desire for military action in Laos and dismay at the American catatonic response in the early 1960s poses the possibility. After all, it was not until 1966 that U.S. intelligence recognized the significance of the threat previously emanating from Laos. We now know that

communist activities inside Thailand were more robust in the 1950s and early 1960s than the U.S. estimate of activities previously cited.



Official Notice: TLCB Election 2020

Due to cancellation of the annual meeting and reunion, there will be no live, physical member meeting for The TLC Brotherhood corporation. In order to comply with our by-laws and Virginia law, the following procedure is adopted by the board of directors:

1) Voting will be entirely by mail-in ballot, which are included with this June issue of the Mekong Express Mail (MEM). Ballots must be received by the addressee shown on the ballot form by November 15, 2020, so that election results can be posted in the December issue of the MEM.

2) If there are any issues a member wishes to bring before the board of directors, please include that request in a separate writing that can be mailed with the ballot. Any such requests will be forwarded by the trusted agent (who counts the ballots) to the secretary of the board for consideration at the next board meeting.

The TLC Brotherhood Board of Directors has adopted the official slate, which was recommended by the Nominating Committee as announced in the March issue of this newsletter.

The absentee ballot includes a provision for write-in votes, which are permitted. These forms are for use only by active members.

The official slate of nominees for 2020 is:

For President: Gary Beatty (eligible incumbent)

For Treasurer: Thelma Tilton

Members at large:

Roger Durant (eligible incumbent)

Ray Boas (eligible incumbent)

Note that the TLCB Bylaws permit write-in votes; however,

voters should make sure their write-in candidate is an active member and is willing to serve if elected.

Remember, ballots must be received by November 15, 2020 to be valid.

Nominating Committee Appreciation

As can be seen elsewhere in this issue of the MEM, running this organization responsibly takes effort and coordination by many members to make it work. Our Bylaws spell out the procedures for election of officers, and one of the key steps in the process is appointment of a Nominating Committee. This year, the Nominating Committee was chaired, for the second consecutive year, by Mike Vale. Mike's committee consisted of Tom Ungleich and Bob Pruiksmas. All three of these gentlemen have earned the thanks of the membership for taking on this task, helping the organization to function within our Bylaws.

The job of the Nominating Committee was complicated this year by the fact that there was only one nomination from within the membership for any of the four positions up for election. Fortunately, all three incumbents agreed to run for a new term, so we have a full slate of well qualified candidates; however, all of our elected positions have term limits. Nobody can hold a position for more than three consecutive, two-year terms, so, in the future, some of you within the organization will need to step up and take responsibility for the management of this Brotherhood. If you are not sure you want to jump into this responsibility all at once, consider volunteering to help on a committee. There are several who can use your help, and you can gain experience with how the business side of this organization works. The future of the TLC Brotherhood is really up to you.

Gerry Frazier
Vice President

The More Remote the Better

Trip Report – TLCB Assistance Program:

Visits to Xiangkhouang Province Schools. 1 to 6 March 2020

By Glenn Black

On Monday 2 March 2020, the first TLCB Educational Assistance trip to Laos in 2020 was made by Vaughan Smith, Doug Vincent, Tim Sawers, Larry Crider, and me to the Plain of Jars, Xiangkhouang Province to visit two recently completed school renovation sites for inspections and handover ceremonies.

These two projects were identified during 2019 and submitted to the TLCB Education Assistance Committee by the TLCB's counterpart at the Provincial Office of Education and Sports in Phonsavan, Xiangkhouang Province, Ajan Soundeuan. His requests were translated by TLCB member Art Crisfield, sent to the Assistance Committee for review, and approved for funding. Early this year Ajan Soundeuan communicated to Vaughan Smith, the TLCB Lao Education Assistance Coordinator in Thailand, that two projects were nearing completion and asked Vaughan to arrange visits to inspect the schools and attend handover ceremonies at each site. The suggested dates for the handover visits were during the week of 2 thru 5 March.

1 March:

The team members traveled to Nong Khai and most of us spent the night at the Mut Mee guesthouse, which has an excellent river view; however, Mut Mee had suffered a fire which burned down the reception and kitchen area and one of the pavilions/salas, which are under repair.

2 March:

The next day we rendezvoused at the Pantawee Guesthouse, an old Mac Thompson standby. The team then met at Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge #1 border crossing at 07:00. Formalities for the Thai exit and Lao arrival went smoothly. No individual temperature checks were in progress except while departing Thailand. Entering

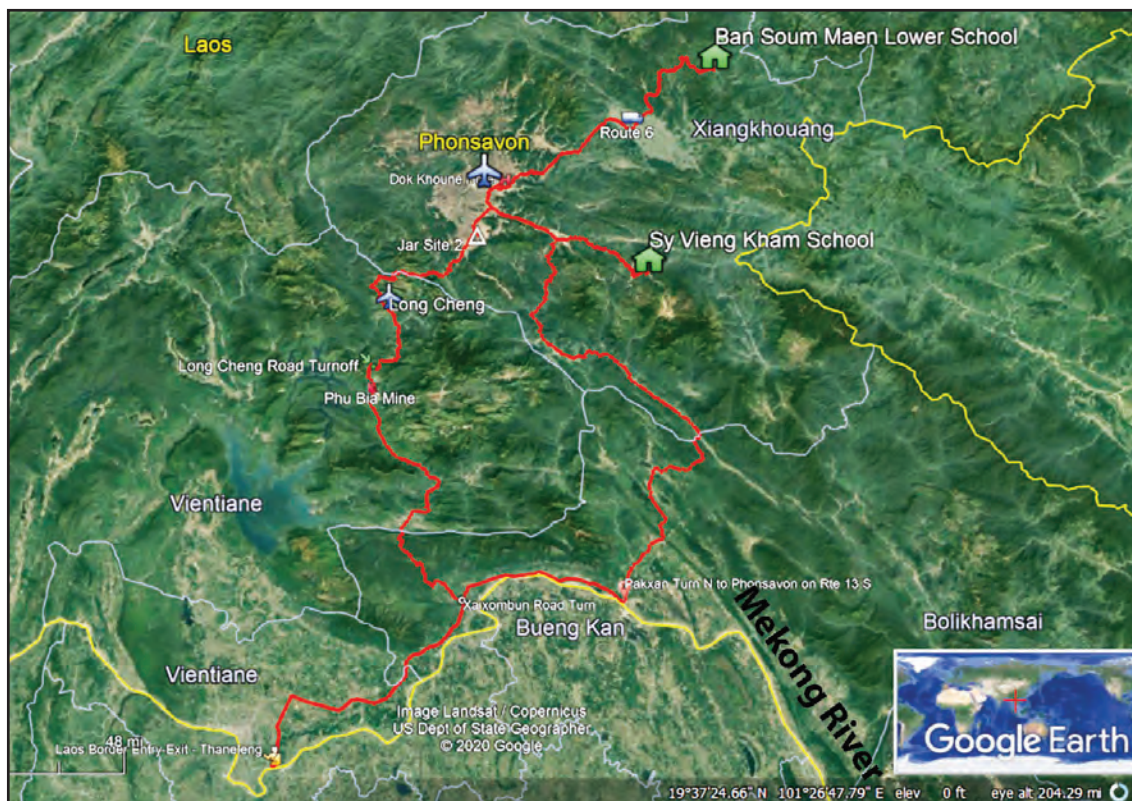
Starting at lower left, the red line shows our team's route from Vientiane, past Phu Bia mine, through Phongsavan, and then back down through Long Chieng to the Mekong and back to Vientiane. Photos provided by the team.

Laos, a man monitored an odd machine, perhaps infrared, that apparently would detect any feverish arrivals, though nobody was hauled out of line. We were met by our usual driver Somphou and departed Lao immigration and customs at Thanaleng on the Lao side of the Mekong and proceeded along Rte 13 South, making some route changes along the way.

From Phu Bia we continued on to former Lima Site 98, aka 20 Alternate, to Long Tieng. The runway still looks usable for light aircraft but apparently doesn't see any use. Maybe the authorities reckon there are too many bad "Phi" (spirits) for their people to be landing/taking off to/from LS-20A, with possible respect for the dead, as many Hmong, Lao, and other soldiers died on Skyline Ridge on all sides.

Also noticeable were more restaurants and stores. There's a camp set up for some Chinese working on various projects, and I noted sturdy new pylons that carry power up to Phonsavan probably from Nam Ngum III or V project — a hydropower project that extends from the western border of Phou Kout district of Xiangkhouang province to Louangphabang Province. The pylons were considerably larger than any I'd seen and

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continued up the valley from Long Tieng and Skyline Ridge, and down into Sam Thong (LS-20) generally following the road up to the Plain of Jars. According to the project proposal found online, if the power carried on these lines is from Nam Ngum V, the entire power output is intended to be used internally in Laos.

Our intention had been to remain overnight (RON in Mac-speak) at a Long Tieng guesthouse, though nobody thought to make reservations until the ride up to Long Tieng.

Somphou could not get through to the guesthouse on the phone and upon arrival in Long Tieng, usually a very sleepy town and valley, we learned of a government meeting taking place in town and all rooms were booked. There were no satisfactory alternatives. Somphou had already had a bad day having had a small shake down at an earlier checkpoint in the trip for some minor document infraction (the team compensated him upon departure).



Our trip "bombed" in Long Tieng.

The checkpoint otherwise appeared to have serious duties and required us to produce our passports, took our names and visa info, and returned them to us. We had not been asked for our passports for over three years. An officer asked for Somphou's vehicle documents and fined him on some technicality. As said, the 'fine' was minor by our standards but in a place like Laos with Covid-19 taking hold and business slow, the amount was significant for him. When he let me down in Vientiane, he told me he had no work lined up and wasn't sure when he would have new clients.

The lack of rooms took us by surprise and it was already

Below, the Assistance Team having dinner with Mr and Mrs Soudeuane. From left to right, Doug Vincent, Ajan Soudeuane, Mrs. Soudeuane, Larry Crider, Vaughan Smith, Glenn Black and Tim Sawers.



16:20. The weather was good, the roads were dry but extremely dusty, so we continued on our way to Phonsavan. The road from Long Tieng north to the plain is never in what you could call "great" shape though it seems to be getting some serious improvements this dry season. Near the top of Skyline Ridge there appeared to be a new road driving onto the ridge, but I could not see the road enough to know how extensive or how far it went along the ridge. The road through Sam Thong on to the Plain of Jars was undergoing a lot of improvements, and near the top of the plain I noted a Chinese batching or asphalt plant, but I won't get my hopes up yet.

We arrived in Phonsavan at sunset around 18:30 and the team members stayed at their preferred hotels. I should add that during the last leg of the trip from Long Tieng up to Phonsavan I



Above, Site 3 in the Plain of Jars.

noticed that fires have laid bare the mountains on a long section of road up to the Plain. In Phonsavan it was hot and the air quality quite bad and not unlike Northern Thailand presently. The smoky air was causing me a fit and then a miracle; it started raining pretty heavily about midnight bringing fresh air. This was to last the next few days and only stopped on the day of our departure, much to the relief of my lungs. We were lucky not to have spent the night in Long Tieng as the steep narrow dusty roads have become a slippery quagmire with that rain.

3 March:

Vaughan contacted Ajan Soudeuane to arrange our time of departure for the first school visit. As the team had arrived a day earlier than expected, we had a full day to rest and were able to visit PDJ Jar Site 3. That evening we were hosted by Ajan Soudeuane and his wife at a good Lao restaurant in Phonsavon, which was a nice pre-trip gesture and relationship builder.

4 March:

We were joined by Ajan and traveled to Ban Soum Maen Lower Secondary School, Kham District, Xiengkhouang province. When I titled this report

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TRIP continued from page 7.



Above, Headed north in Laos, on an excellent unpaved road. At left, the driver checking more typical road conditions. Below, the road down near Ban Soum Maen



“The more remote the better,” this is what I had in mind, the relatively far distances from Phonsavan compared to other school renovations the TLCB has done in the province. My GPS recorded 107 km from Phonsavan to this school. Fortunately, only a relatively small portion of the trip (14 km) was on unpaved road; however, over that distance the road descended 600 meters and the grade was -2.4%. It was a good enough road but a look at the wet, steep, slippery, slick-looking road from our 2-wheel drive Hyundai van took my earlier thrill about the rain away. Somphou stopped to look at road conditions then commented that we might be spending the night there.

Oh well, we tried it anyway and took the plunge and finally made it to Ban Soum Maen Lower Secondary School. It was sort of at the end of the line in the mountains descending from the PDJ.

The TLCB grant for this school (approximately \$4,974) budgeted for tin and nails, cement, gravel, sand, rebar wire, and transport for the repair of old and dilapidated buildings of Ban Soum Maen School. The school, built in 2001 of semi-permanent construction by the villagers themselves, measures 8 x 38 m. The community cut forest trees for the lumber needed for school

construction. Replacement roofing sheets and cement floors were needed for two buildings, the classroom building which measures 8 x 36 m and the student dormitory which measures 7 x 32 m.



Vaughan Smith inspects work with the students.

All labor was provided by the villagers, who came from four villages inhabited by 95% ethnic Hmong and one village by ethnic Phong. Agriculture consists of upland, rain-fed farming with very little income from their meager harvests. This was evident as we noted very steep slopes with only small areas of flat land that would be suitable to farm. Homes were built on hillsides

or in creek valleys, making a livelihood in this area is difficult. Most families were not able to contribute to funds for helping repair and maintain the school and dorm.

The school has 10 teachers of whom 3 are women, with 135 students, of whom 37 are girls. Both teachers and students live at the dorm with a total of 62 people, 17 are women. The school serves 5 villages, and there is therefore

a need for the dormitory/kitchen since children whose homes are far away stay at the school during the week under the care of the school and village officials.

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Student dancers at ceremony lunch.



Above, girl students at the ceremony. Below, Students dance after ceremonies..



It was clear by the community's reactions and enthusiasm during ceremonies that the TLCB's assistance in this rough and remote region was appreciated. Vaughan opened the "ceremony in the clouds" shortly after our introduction to local authorities. All went well with the handover and baci as usual.

After the ceremonies we were treated to traditional dances by the students wearing very colorful traditional dress. This school was different in that during the meal a table was set for the kids who danced, so we "shared and shared alike" (the students just didn't share the Lao-Lao or Beer Lao). I'd never seen this consideration taken for the children performing at other schools and their presence added to the atmosphere of our post ceremonies lunch.

The remoteness of the village was underscored in the intense curiosity with which the students reacted to the TLCB team's visit. Some bedraggled children were extremely shy, stayed clear of us, and looked at us from a distance, but we were finally able to draw them in when we managed to get some of the braver ones to play frisbee with us. When we inspected the work on the school, a number of the older students wanted their photos taken beside us. Not a lot of "falangs" (foreigners) have come down the road to these hills (more like none).

The students and community were delighted as the sports equipment was presented. And again, "freez-bee" became an instant hit with all. TLCB just might make frisbee a national sport in Laos.

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About the Baci Ceremony:

The baci ceremony is a blessing of thanks that is given after the handover at every school. I've noticed that the baci is slightly different at each school, and the one at Ban Sy Vieng Kham Primary School began with a long string run through all the hands of those immediately present, which was a change. Then the ceremony took a more familiar turn as the village headman (naiban) and school principal lit candles and led a chant of thanks. Local rice in a dish, and a glass half filled with lao-lao, the local rice alcohol, are set before him. During the chant, handfuls of rice are tossed at the visitors and drops of alcohol are flicked over on each of the team members. After the headman's initial chant, another follows in which teachers and village authorities visit each visitor to tie baci strings on the wrist of each, often followed by a drink of lao-lao or a villager offering a piece of chicken, pork, or other delicacy, depending on the village. They visit each of us and express their thanks and wish us good health and wealth in a chant, while tying pieces of string around our wrists. The strings signify the good will and appreciation of the individual and wishes for good health to the wearer and good will. After this ceremony, a jovial feast is provided.

Glenn Black



Above, Sy Vieng Kham Primary School, with new replacement roof sheets. Below, Kitchen roof sheets replaced also.



TRIP continued from page 9

We departed by 14:30 as it was looking like rain, but we made it back up the mountain — the roads had dried up a bit since our descent three hours earlier — and onto the good road to Kham district and back to Phonsavan, arriving about 18:00.

5 March:

We were on the road to Sy Vieng Kham Primary School, Khoune District, Xiangkhouang province, located about 72 km mainly SSE from Phonsavan, generally over good roads, with about 30 km of less improved and partially paved roads. The TLCB grant of \$2,029 was for buying new corrugated tin roofing sheets, nails, and transport costs to the site to replace those on the school building and kitchen of Sy Vieng Kham Primary School, Khoune District, Xiangkhouang Province, Laos.

Background:

In a letter dated 2 October 2019, and signed by the principal of the school, the village headman, and the chief of the Khoune District Education office, the Xiangkhouang Provincial Office of Education and Sports provided the following information:

The Ban Sy Vieng Kham Primary School is a remote school located on the Phonsavan-New Muang Mok road some 72 km from Phonsavan. The school, measuring 8 x 42 m, was built in 1987 using semi-permanent construction of concrete and rebar. The roof was severely damaged by a big storm that tore the tin sheets off. The villagers saved some and nailed them back on the roof. They collected part of the money from the community to buy more tin sheets, but had a shortfall of funding and more funding was requested to re-roof the school, dorm, and kitchen. The villagers provided all the required labor. It was difficult for the villagers to raise more money, and even labor was stretched due to the village/community's involvement in cutting and sawing trees for lumber and obtaining aggregate and other materials to help build another smaller village school nearby.

At this time, the school has 7 teachers, of whom 4 are women, and 107 students, of whom 44 are girls. The school serves 3 villages with 178 families of whom 26 are Hmong. All in all, the population is 905 people.

Above, handover document signed.
Then, below, the post-handover Baci ceremony.



Tim Sawers caught this photo, above, of Village Elder/ Master of Ceremonies (Mor Phon) enjoying a good laugh, at Sy Vieng Kham School



The TLCB team arrived about 11:00 and inspected the roofing jobs and went through the examination of the work and then began the traditional handover ceremony. Speeches were given by school principal and village headman and then Vaughan and Soundeane. Larry Crider and Tim Sawers both gave their words of thanks and appreciation to extend TLCB's friendship to the school and people of the community. Doug Vincent gave a similar speech in Hmong and Lao, much appreciated by those present. I must mention that Doug's fluency in Hmong

TRIP continues next page.

and Lao was also a very big hit at the Ban Soam Muang school where 95% of those present were Hmong and the minority being Phong.

6 March:

On Friday 6 March, the team made its way back down the Plain of Jars via the normal route south to Paksan on the Mekong and took a right turn on Highway 13, which follows the Mekong River up to Vientiane. Just short of Vientiane, Somphou diverted to the Friendship Bridge border crossing to let off the team which continued to Nong Khai, Thailand for the night and later back to their destinations.

A Note on Covid-19:

I should mention that the TLCB team made this trip right as the Covid-19 virus was becoming a concern; however, by the 1st of March departure date, Laos had reported no cases of virus. This held true until recently, but I write this 10 April, and the Thai-Lao border has effectively closed. There is a 14-day mandatory quarantine. Still, their rate of reported cases is still quite low and we were lucky to get the trip in prior to the many restrictions that exist today.

Going Home:

I continued to Vientiane to spend the 6th and 7th of March there, enjoying the town. On the 8th I took an Air Lao flight to Luang Prabang, figuring it was a good bet that tourism would be on the ebb, and I wasn't disappointed. I usually stay in the area near the ex-Royal Palace near the great Morning Market and near to Phousi hill, where you can find plenty of great food, and there are peaceful spots on the Mekong. On 10 March I took the Lao Air 55-minute flight back home to Chiang Mai.



Above, students in traditional dress, expressing gratitude for sports equipment from the TLC Brotherhood. Notice the pink Frisbee labeled "TLCB Gift."

Below, Doug Vincent's "stump speech" given in both Lao and Hmong languages, which was very much appreciated.



Left, new schoolroom floor.

Below, the TLCB team leaving Laos on March 6, 2020. Left to right, Tim Sawers, Doug Vincent, Larry Crider, Glenn Black, and Vaughan Smith.



Why The Roads Are Improving in Laos

By Glenn Black

Editor's Note: This material was initially included in Glenn's summary of the March Assistance Report, but it is noteworthy and is presented as a stand-alone story.

Phu Bia mine is a massive operation started originally by an Australian PanAust, Ltd. with a 90/10 percent joint venture with Lao PDR (People's Democratic Republic). The mine commenced operations about 20 years ago as a gold mine, though now is called a "copper" mine. In reality, mines called "gold" or "copper" also capture all metals, so ore taken from a copper mine can include some amount of gold, silver, molybdenum, platinum or others, which are separated at the smelter. We have often met ore truck convoys from Phu Bia as we travel up to the Plain of Jars (PDJ) on every trip since my first trip with

Tieng and Phu Bia mine. Although the mine's intention was to provide foreign currency, the locals have likewise benefitted from better area access roads.

The Australian Chamber of Commerce has stated, "PanAust has received a number of awards for its initiatives in carbon reduction, community development, and microfinance initiatives. Phu Bia Mining has contributed more than \$4 million (U.S.) in community development funding to its local communities at Ban Nam Mo, Ban Nam Gnone, and Ban Nasaysavang, including schools, health clinics, business development, and market development."

From the mine area to Long Tieng, past efforts to repair/improve the road were a perennial effort, but on this recent trip



Above, Phu Bia mining operation at turnoff to Long Tieng. At left, Passing Phu Bia tailings dump and pond.

Mac Thompson in 2012. The ore was transported in sealed containers carried by 18

wheelers from Phu Bia to Paksan and down the Lao panhandle formerly to Paxay and Chong Mek border point for crossing into Korat/Nakhon Ratchasima and then on to Sattahip port for shipment to the company's smelter in Indonesia. Nowadays I understand a lot of Lao freight goes to Thakek (across the border from Nakhon Phanom) and takes a left turn East over Route 12 to Vietnam, and probably is shipped out of Da Nang. Once Phu Bia was in operation, the roads around the mine were paved and improved to carry the considerable weight of the ore trucks and machinery operating around the area including Xaisomboun to near Long Tieng, previously a very rough journey. I mention these details because prior to the mine's road improvement, almost any road not on Highway 13 North or South changed every rainy season making road conditions abysmal. Once Phu Bia mine started, the roads near Long Tieng were improved and even new roads were completed in the area between Long



Above, Ore truck descends to Paksan. At right, Phu Bia tailings and pond en route to Long Tieng.



the repairs appeared to be expansive and a more serious engineering effort.

It looks like the intent is to turn the Long Tieng to Phonsavan dirt/gravel road into an all-weather road via Chinese loans and also Asia Development Bank (ADB) loans.

"The Lao Tribune" announced in February 2018 that PanAust's Phu Bia and Sepon sites would close operations in 2020. I did notice that we encountered convoys of ore carriers coming down, double-stacked from the mine, an indication that empty ore carriers were being transported for use elsewhere; however, at the mine I noted that the shaft was still dumping crushed rock onto the conveyer and the giant trucks are still hauling ore down to an immense tailings dump site. From the road there is no sign of a flotation tank reagent pond. If that was hauled out for safe disposal, I would commend the mine. As the photos indicate, mines have a disturbing impact on the environment.



Scholarship Beneficiaries Express Gratitude

Our Assistance representative in Nakhon Phanom Province, Mr. Satawat Sri-in, has been faithfully receiving and paying out the scholarship support that the TLC Brotherhood committed to when the late John Middlewood set up the Student Assistance Fund in Nakhon Phanom, to which many members continue to contribute every year. This program is “sunsetting,” but still very much alive. We have been assisting a number of students through secondary school and even into college, and now in twos and threes they are graduating. Below are photos and heartfelt gratitude expressed by our three recent college graduates. We thank Khun Satawat for devoting time and energy to this project and for sending these reminders of the success of our works.

Dear T.L.C.B. Foundation

My name is Miss Nutchanat Niwongsa who have gotten the scholarship from the foundation. Now, I have graduated from Nakhon Phanom University, Faculty of Engineering, Civil Engineering major. I would like to thank T.L.C.B. Foundation very much for supporting and helping me. Thank you again for your kindness.

Sincerely,

Nutchanat Niwongsa



Khun Satawat Sri-in.
Photos furnished by Satawat..

Hello TLCB group. My name is Wipdada Phetsuwan. I am a student of English majors at Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat Sakhon Nakhon Province Campus. And I am one of the students receiving a scholarship from TLCB group. Today I wrote this letter to TLCB group because I want to show my gratitude for receiving scholarship. And now I am graduation at the bachelor degree from Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat Sakhon Nakhon Province Campus.

Therefore, I want to say thank you so much for this scholarship. Thank you very much.

From

Wipada Phetsuwan



Dear T.L.C.B.

My name is Natsupha Pholman. I am a student from Burapha University, one of the student that received the scholarship from T.L.C.B. Now, I am delight and grateful to tell every T.L.C.B. members that I got a Beachelor’s Degree of Political Science and Law-Major in General Administration at Burapha University.

Hereby, I would like to say thank you T.L.C.B. for the kindness and I am very appreciated for your helping and supporting. I wish every T.L.C.B. members will be happy and be healthy.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

Natsupha Pholman



The Old Stone Wall

By John Sweet*

Sometime far long ago, I do not know just when,
This old stone wall, was of great importance then.
Men labored long and hard, to make this land their own,
Though now I cannot tell, on which side from the stone.

Twisting through these shallow glens, of forest littered floor,
A monument to forgotten places and times long gone before.
Each stone is now a grander thing, with a meaning all it’s own,
Of the builders hopes and dreams, still standing here alone.

As the autumn breeze scatters the leaves, of the rainbow hued fall
I follow beside in easy stride, seeking answers from the wall,
While chipmunks run off chattering, in the underbrush and hide,
I notice one rock has fallen, and tumbled down beside.

Seeking with care I find, the true place for the stone,
And with great satisfaction, the wall becomes my own.
Walking along replacing others, as I journey on my way,
Knowing I’ll return again, to replace others some day.

The ancient secret hidden, so deeply within this wall,
Keeps it ever standing, safeguarding from its fall,
Those who pass along this way, raise back the fallen stone,
Thus no span of age or person raised up this wall alone.

*There are now two significant poets from New Hampshire.
I’m sure you all remember Robert Frost

Rosie's Raffle!

By Bob Wheatley

What a crazy year 2020 has been! As most of you probably already are aware, this year's TLCB Reunion in Rhode Island has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many or most of us are perhaps in the "high risk" category, and as disappointing as this news is, caution is wise. My thanks go to our Board of Directors who had to make this very difficult decision on our behalf with the membership's best interests in mind. Our annual reunion, with the auction and my wife Rosie's quilt raffle, have perennially been major sources of funding for our efforts to provide humanitarian aid to the needy people of Southeast Asia in memory of our brothers who did not return with us.

Over the years since TLCB's incorporation, Rosie's raffle quilts have raised many tens of thousands of dollars for our Assistance Fund. Sewing and quilting brought Rosie immeasurable joy and satisfaction in her lifetime, and I can attest with no reservation that she was happiest when she was working on her raffle quilts to benefit the children of Southeast Asia. I was privileged to watch and share in her joy. After completing each year's quilt and even before it was raffled off, she was thinking about next year's quilt. Leafing through her many quilt books and magazines, she would stop periodically and excitedly ask, "What do you think of this idea? Is this something the Brothers would like?" I recall someone once asked of her, "What's in it for you?" Incredulous, she responded, "I get to help the kids!"

Tragically, the love of my life, my wife of 47 years passed away last year after a short six-week fight with pancreatic cancer. The final quilt she made was for raffle at the 2018 Biloxi Reunion, and as always, she was busily selling and entering tickets for the drawing right up to the last minutes before the winning ticket was pulled. Today I am both proud and humbled by her hard work and contributions to humanity and veteran's causes in general, and to the TLCB in particular. Rosie's quilts are a part of her, a legacy that will live on into the future. I was extremely gratified to hear the annual raffle will continue as "Rosie's Raffle" in her honor and in remembrance of her tireless efforts in contribution to our cause.

The COVID-19 pandemic, having already turned so many things upside down for so many, also threatens our sources of funding. With the reunion cancelled, the live auction of course will not be possible this year, but Rosie's Raffle definitely is a go! This year one of our members has stepped forward to donate a beautiful quilt named, "Land of the Free; Home of the Brave." It is a quilt anyone would be proud to own and display in their home, and I am certain Rosie would approve. It measures 73 by 81 inches. Add to that, they also donated a four-foot-square coverlet as 2nd prize. It takes only one ticket to win, if it is the right one. I for one will be purchasing a boatload of tickets in hopes of multiplying my chances of winning this one! Raffle tickets are included in this issue of the *MEM*, priced at \$2.00 each.



Above title panel and first prize quilt.
Below coverlet title panel and design.



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. 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>

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The Official Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood page

In Honor of MacAlan “Mac” Thompson

By Les Thompson, TLCB Assistance Program Chair

At the 2018 annual meeting in Biloxi, the Board voted to memorialize Mac Thompson. The biggest hurdle was that we have no permanent brick and mortar location, so a memorial

plaque seemed problematic.

We knew about “Big Brother Mouse” books, because Mac would buy them for distribution to the schools he visited in Laos. This organization publishes books for children, in Lao, to encourage literacy. Most TLCB members who have traveled to Luang Prabang have visited their store.

On their website, they list books they want to publish but which are in need of sponsors. They put a dedication inside that edition of the sponsored book, devoting it to whomever the sponsor names. They also have a page on their website with that sponsor, posting the dedication. The committee felt that this would be a great way to honor Mac. John Sweet proposed that we back “Tigers & Rice” as it talks about Laos and its current relationships with its neighbors. The committee proposed this idea to the Board and it was accepted with the funding coming from the general fund. It did not involve any assistance funds. “Tigers and Rice” was published at the beginning of 2020.



Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The 6 members listed below joined between the last issue of the MEM and the 31st of May. 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
1929	USAF	Cole	Gerald	Fairview Heights	IL
1930	Other	Sibounheuang	Khambang	Nashville	TN
1931	USAF	Schwartz	Joseph	Cuyahoga Falls	OH
1932	USA	Harnly	Richard	Ft Wayne	IN
1933	USAF	McKibben	Robert	Hillsville	PA
1934	USAF	Lockhart	Walter	San Antonio	TX

Now: **BASE SHIRTS** in the Exchange!

The famous Base Hats designed by charter member Bob Pruiksma and now carried in three hat styles, have proven to be our most popular and enduring product ever. The TLCB Exchange is now offering embroidered Base *Shirts* for special order.

CUSTOMIZE YOUR OWN BASE SHIRT!

Wear these black base shirts proudly! Out among other veterans? These specialty golf shirts will tell them where you were based and even the unit you served with if you want to incorporate that into your design. If you choose, you can also add a call sign or other significant information option, at very little additional cost.

ORDER PROCESS:

The TLCB Exchange will take orders for three weeks to a month, have the shirts custom embroidered, and mail them to you, postage included. The whole process will take four to six weeks, depending on the ordered quantity. If we get a large order, we will have them embroidered and ship them to you sooner. Order with the enclosed form or go to www.tlc-brotherhood.com, and click on "SHOP." If "Base Shirts" prove to be popular with customers we will continue to offer them, but it will not be practical to stock all the sizes for all the Thai bases.



The shirts are inspired by our ever-popular Base Hats, shown at right in baseball style, as designed by Bob Pruiksma. Also available in military and camo.



REUNION *continued from page 1.*

alternative so long as we comply with our own bylaws, and provide the members an opportunity to present matters to the Board for consideration.

Under our bylaws the only requirement for the annual meeting is election of officers and Board members. The bylaws also provide for absentee voting by mail-in ballot. Historically, we have usually had as many mail-in ballots as live votes cast by members at the business meeting, so mail-in voting is not an anomaly for our members. Therefore, due to cancellation of the reunion, there will be no live business meeting. The following procedures to comply with our bylaws and Virginia law, is adopted by the Board:

1) Voting will be entirely by mail-in ballot. Those ballots will be included with the June issue of the Mekong Express Mail (*MEM*). Ballots must be received by November 14, 2020, so that election results can be posted in the December issue of the *MEM*.

2) If there are any issues a member wishes to bring before the Board, please include that request in a separate writing that members can mail with the ballot. Any such requests will be forwarded by the trusted agent, who counts the ballots, to the Secretary of the Board for consideration at the next Board meeting.

Assistance Program Fundraising:

Separate from the legal considerations is the matter of Assistance Program fundraising. The annual reunion, which includes the auction and Rosie's Raffle, have always been the primary source of our Assistance funds. The Board believes we can mitigate the impact on our fund raising created by this cancellation.

Since Rosie Wheatley's death, we no longer have her sought after, prized, and unique quilts; however, Assistance Committee Chair Les Thompson has secured a new source of attractive quilts. Though nothing can replace Rosie's personal touch, this new source will fill the gap. Raffle details are in this issue of the *MEM*, along with photos of this year's quilt,

Auction Alternative:

While we can't hold the auction, a highlight event at every reunion, the Board suggested an alternative to make up for the fund-raising shortfall. If each member who planned to attend, donates a portion of what they would have spent on travel and the hotel room to the Assistance Fund, this should more than make up for what we lose by not holding the auction. And remember — we are an IRS approved tax-deductible charitable organization. We hope this alternative plan will result in the least impact on our organization goals. It can't make up for the loss of human contact and sense of brotherhood that a reunion gives us all, but it's the best we can do under the circumstances!