

MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



The newsletter of the thailand-laos-cambodia brotherhood, inc. Volume 18, issue 1

WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.com

It's Dayton Time Again!

The 2017 TLCB "Dayton" Reunion/Annual Meeting

September 21, 22, & 23

At the Holiday Inn, 2800 Presidential Drive, Fairborn Ohio



It's time to start making those travel plans for this year. As so many TLCB members know, the annual reunion can be a wonderful experience. This year promises to be very special, if only because it includes a visit (or visits?) to the Air Force Museum, which has expanded enormously since our last visit to that facility, which must be unique in the World. You don't need to be an Air Force type to appreciate the amount of history and interesting displays found in this place!

Here are the facts you will need right now:

Hotel:

The hotel rate is \$107.00 plus tax per night and includes a full, complimentary breakfast for up to 4 guests per room. The reunion rate is good 3 days prior to the Reunion and 3 days after and includes free parking and Wi-Fi. The TLCB registration costs will be provided in the June *Mekong Express Mail*.

Agenda:

Registration for the TLCB Reunion will begin at noon Thursday, the 21st, and the hospitality suite will be open for getting acquainted and catching up. The complete schedule will be published in June.

The TLC Brotherhood, Inc. Annual Meeting will be on Saturday morning, September 23rd, 2017 at the Holiday Inn, Fairborn, Ohio, at 9:00 AM Eastern time.

Food:

There are 15-20 eateries within 3-4 minutes of the hotel and the famous Thai 9 Restaurant, located in the Oregon District in Downtown Dayton, is 15 minutes away.

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Editor's Notebook:

The Vitality of the TLCB

As the members of the Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood (TLCB) realize, the future of our remarkable organization is an issue for our leadership. At last September's Annual Reunion, in response to the aging of our membership, newly elected President Gary Beatty asked me to chair an ad hoc committee on the future of the TLCB. (*Admission: Because of the Christmas season and some pressing professional and personal matters, I have been lax in addressing my task; but I promise that will change, and soon*). Along that broad theme, I think this issue of the *Mekong Express Mail (MEM)* is a demonstration of the ongoing vitality of the TLCB and strengthens the argument that we should be developing a plan for ensuring the TLCB's long-term future.

First off, on pages 12 and 13, there is a lengthy list of our members' contributions to the Assistance Program, arguably the most significant of the TLCB's accomplishments. In our previous edition of the *MEM*, there was a powerful photo essay of the program's work in Laos and Thailand.

On page 5, there is the most recent update to our new member list. Frankly, it is remarkable that forty and fifty years after most of us were introduced to Southeast Asia, our membership list grows, even without having yet adopted a strategy for preserving our future. As the editor of the *MEM*, I can testify that these new members are enthusiastic, not passive, about joining the TLCB. Each new member is invited by me to provide us with a personal profile or to contribute something to the *MEM*. The response of the most recent batch of recruits was frankly overwhelming. Not only does this issue include submissions from three of them (two as "New Member Profiles" and one as a "Why I Joined TLCB" essay), but a half-dozen others have

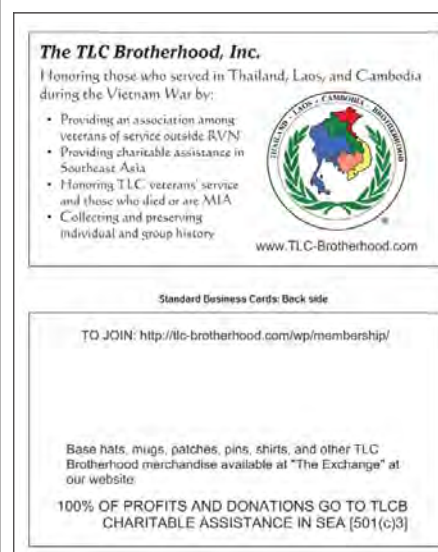
promised future contributions. Another notable fact about many of our recent recruits is that more than a few of them first went to Southeast Asia in civilian roles – Peace Corps, State Department, volunteer organizations, etc. The TLCB has always had a number of such members, but that interest appears to be growing. A likely reason is the increasing awareness of the work of the Assistance Program.

All of the above is a dynamic demonstration of the on-going vitality of the TLCB. And that's a further reason that I should get off my butt and get working the Future of TLCB Ad Hoc Committee.

JH

Find these in your MEM envelope.

Thanks to the generosity of member George Oubre, we have printed a large supply of the cards shown here. We hope you



will find other veterans who share our interests and just need to know who we are and how to find us. There are a few in each copy of this issue of the *MEM*. Please contact the Exchange for more cards if you find that you can use them.

Front and back of the new TLC Brotherhood calling cards.

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Reunion 2017: Dayton, Ohio

Why I Joined the TLC Brotherhood

By new member, Jim Ake

As a youth, I had caddied for an individual who told me about his international travels. This planted the seed for my desire to see and experience foreign lands and people. Ten years later, although I had never been in an aircraft, I joined the USAF after college and became a KC-135 copilot with the 28th Air Refueling Squadron at Ellsworth AFB in Rapid City, SD.

My first taste of combat was on a six-month Arc Light deploying to U-Tapao RAFB, Thailand. During our time at U-Tapao we flew refueling missions over Cambodia, South Vietnam, and Laos. These missions included interdiction over the Ho Chi Minh trail, SAR missions of downed airmen, and supporting USAF fighter-bombers over the Plain of Jars in Laos.

During this deployment, I took personal trips to Pattaya Beach, at which time there was only one hotel, the two-story Nipa Lodge (I understand that the hotel scene in Pattaya has changed significantly); and I went on a five-day trip to northern Thailand staying in Chiang Mai, visiting hill tribes and other Buddhist and cultural attractions.

Upon returning stateside I volunteered to return to combat in South East Asia (SEA). I had the required flying time and experience to upgrade to Aircraft Commander, and selected the C-130 Hercules. Basic C-130 training commenced immediately at Little Rock AFB, and tactical training followed at Pope AFB in North Carolina. Then I was off to my new PCS station at CCK airbase in Taichung, Taiwan for a fifteen-month tour.

Enroute to CCK I had a three-week jungle survival course at Clark Airfield in the Philippines. This training supplemented the basic survival training that I had at Fairchild AFB in Washington. At Fairchild I lost 15 pounds, whereas in jungle training, I gained some weight due to the abundance of food and water in the tropics.

Tactical combat checkout began immediately in Vietnam. After completion, I was assigned my crew in the 50 Tactical Air Squadron (TAS). The Air Force assigned new aircraft commanders to experienced crews, and as the commanders' experience and capabilities improved, less proficient crews were

Lockheed C-130 keeping one engine running, in Southeast Asia. After flying KC-135 tankers, Jim went back to SEA in these remarkable tactical transports.



Jim and his wife. Photos from the author.

assigned. This system enhanced safety and crew development.

CCK C-130 crews staged twenty-day TDYs at Tan Son Nhut (TSN) Air Base in Saigon, Vietnam. We flew sixteen hours per day with multiple sorties per shift. Each succeeding day, our report time was four hours later, which accommodated USAF twelve-hour crew rest requirements, and we flew six days, then had one day off. During that time our schedule rotated through a twenty-four-hour cycle. We returned to CCK after our twenty-day TDY. During our time at CCK, the aircraft received maintenance and repairs; and the crews had training, additional duties, and rest. In seven days, we returned again to TSN.

Our missions in SEA ranged from Korea (we brought howitzers to support Lam Song 719 invasion of Laos), to Indonesia where we landed in a remote jungle dirt strip to pick up AK-47 rifles to supply Laotian allies. Most missions were in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand, with a rare mission to Laos to work with Air America. Landing runways ranged from a dirt 1150 foot strip called Luscombe airfield, near Vung Tau, Vietnam, to 11,500 feet at U'Tapao, Thailand. At remote airfields and/or when there were active battles nearby, we would keep at least one engine running to facilitate a rapid evacuation.

The C-130 is a unique airplane that can perform spectacular flying feats. It can take off and land on unimproved airfields as short as Luscombe field mentioned above; it can land on an aircraft carrier with no arresting wires and then take off without a catapult. Once airborne, it can fly on two engines. I once lost two engines climbing out of NKP and returned to U'Tapao on the remaining engines. It is adaptable to numerous missions from gunship to snow landings to forest fire fighting, and is still being manufactured after over fifty years of production.

After my tour in Vietnam, I resigned from active duty, returned to school to get my MBA degree in International Business, and joined

Ake continues on page 6

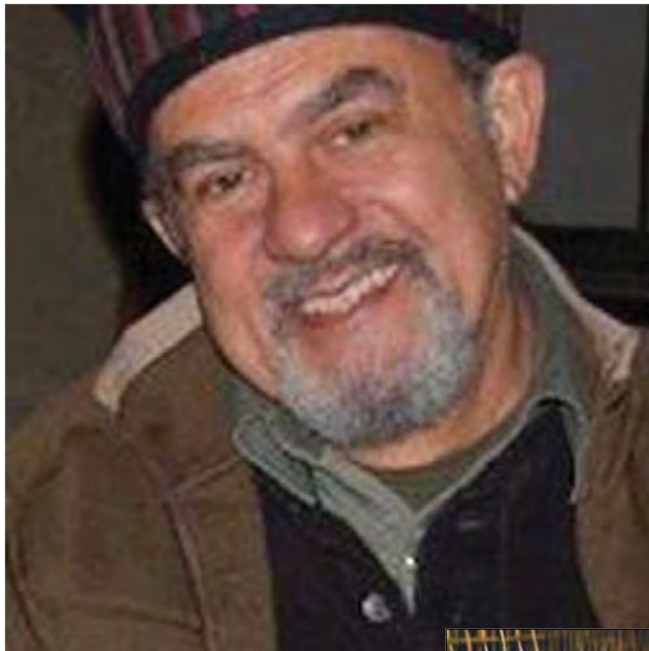
New Member Profile

Larry F. Crider

Hello TLCBers!

My first volunteer service was as a draft avoider, 1W status, conscientious objector, building a hospital in the Zambian bush country.

I joined the Peace Corps in 1971 and happily went to Thailand for two tours, first in the malaria eradication program in Nakhorn Sri Thammarat, then to the wilds of Uthai Thani with the wildlife conservation division of the forestry department. Not yet ready to leave Thailand, I worked as an English teacher for three years, one at Chulachomkiao Military Academy, two with Mahidon University.



Larry Crider today. Photos from the author.

In 1978 I was hired by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Joint Volunteer Agency (JVA), Refugee Section, American Embassy, Bangkok, where I first spent time pre-screening refugee applicants in all four ethnic camps – Lao, Khmer, Hmong etc, and Vietnamese – eventually assigned to the Vietnamese Boat Section. After three years with JVA, I made a failed attempt at resettlement in the USA, bailed out, and returned to work in Bangkok with International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) at the U.S. Embassy Orderly Departure Program (ODP). I remained with ODP for nearly ten years, including three years of conducting interviews in Thu Duc, Ho Chi Minh City,



Larry celebrating life.

during the dark and difficult mid-1980s.

In 1991, I joined a fair number of other JVA and ODP folks in accepting jobs as asylum officers with the newly established Asylum Corps of the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS). Luckily assigned to San Francisco, I remained for seven years, eventually becoming the director.

In 1998, I left the Asylum Corps for the position of Officer in Charge, AKA Immigration Attaché, at the U.S. Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City. After three years, I returned to INS, which became U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services under Homeland Security, in San Francisco, eventually assuming the position of Acting District Director. I was left in an “acting”

Crider continues next page

Below: Larry, right, and new TLCB member Tim Sawers wearing “Yao hats.” Tim was in the Peace Corps and in the U.S. Embassy to Thailand, Refugee Section, and is another “FOM” (Friend of Mac—meaning MacAlan Thompson, our Assistance rep in Bangkok).



Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The 19 members listed below joined between the last issue of the MEM and the 5th of March. 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
1767	USAF	Smith	Vaughan	Pakkred, Nonthaburi	Thailand
1768	Other	Crider	Larry	Nevada City	CA
1769	USAF	Thiel	David	Garrett	IN
1770	Other	Sawers	Tim	Hamburg	NY
1771	USMC	Allen	Mike	Long Beach	WA
1772	USA	Toscano	Peter	Whittier	CA
1773	USN	Stoddard	Mike	Bakersfield	CA
1774	USAF	Riffe	James	Philadelphia	PA
1775	USAF	Wilson	Stephen	San Antonio	TX
1776	USAF	Watson	Charles	Baton Rouge	LA
1777	USA	Wimert	Michael	Houston	TX
1778	USA	Brown	Robert	Plymouth	NC
1779	USA	Loveland	Ben	Parrish	FL
1780	USAF	Hudson	Eddie	Fairmont	WV
1781	USAF	Potter	T. Mike	Middleton	MI
1782	USN	Wadsworth	William	Traverse City	MI
1783	USA	King	Charles	Victoria	TX
1784	USA	Flatt	Phillip	Chesterfield	VT
1785	USAF	Appleby	Clyde	Ottowa Hills	OH

Crider continues

position for 2 ½ years, so I decided to retire!

Upon retirement in 2004, I have been spending much wonderful time traveling and living throughout South and South-

east Asia: Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, India, Nepal, and Burma; and I am now happy to have connected with Mac Thompson and some of his fine collection of old hands in the TLCB. My home base is Nevada City, California, and I am

married to a Vietnamese woman and have a 24-year-old daughter.

I learned of the TLCB from another member, Vaughan Smith, who let me know of a pending trip to Laos with Mac Thompson and other members. Having worked with both Mac and Vaughan at the Refugee Section in Bangkok, I asked to join both the TLCB and the trip.



TLCB representatives in the Plain of Jars, in Central Laos. Left to right, Mac Thompson, Vaughan Smith, Tim Sawers, and Larry Crider. Photos provided by the author.



Ake continued from page 3

USAF Reserves in New Orleans, Louisiana. Our unit also flew C-130s, and I became an instructor pilot. Ironically, the only other pilot with combat experience was once my copilot in Vietnam.

Continuing my desire to explore foreign cultures and experiences, my professional career for the next forty years revolved around international business ventures and travel. Since that

time, I have been to over seventy countries, both as a tourist and for business. Our family was fortunate to live in Australia, and I had business operations and joint ventures in Hong Kong, Mexico, Ireland, Japan, and Beijing. I also had the opportunity to travel back to Vietnam in the 1990s where over 90% of the Vietnamese people were born after the USA Vietnam war. I was met in Saigon with open arms, warm hospitality, and generosity from the Vietnamese people.

On one trip to Bangkok in 2005, I asked the hotel concierge about a visit to the floating market in Bangkok. He asked when

I was last in Thailand and I answered in 1971. He laughed and said that he wasn't born yet, and that there is no longer a floating market in Bangkok.

Southeast Asia still holds an allure for me, and my membership in the TLC Brotherhood and future trips to this fascinating area and its people help fulfill that dream that started on the golf course in my childhood. Through the Brotherhood I hope to give back to the people of the region, and to meet other military individuals with similar interests and experiences.



Above, Capt Jim Ake looking comfortable if a little sweaty in the familiar cockpit of a C-130 Hercules in Southeast Asia. Photos provided by the author.

New Member Profile

Mac "Pete" Jeffrey

During the time I spent there, I went from a carefree teenager to a man...overnight. During my assignment, I earned two letters of commendation. I was only one person within my team, but I and the other brothers in my Security Police Flight worked as one cohesive unit. We were given a job to do and we did it to our fullest.

There were good times and bad times. I was just serving my country.

You can use my name, but please if you do, also share any glory with my brothers in the 388th SPS, "A" flight, Korat RTAFB, Sept 71-Sept 72. We were the Fighting Cobras.

At right, Pete Jeffrey celebrates Luckenbach, Texas, and sends out a special salute to the "Fighting Cobras" in the 388th Security Police Squadron, "A" Flight, Korat AFB. A native of Waco, Texas, Pete joined TLCB this past November. Welcome home, Brother.



RIP: Ronald W. Jenkins, TLCB Member

by Bill Tilton

We have learned that TLCB member Ron Jenkins died on July 7, 2016, at the age of 65. We never heard much from Ron, but after he joined in 2007 he was proud to be a loyal and steadfast member (and generous contributor to TLCB Assistance) which is clear from the following paragraph from the obituary that appeared in the Johnson City Press (Tenn.) in July:

Jenkins was a Member of The Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood. He held a strong commitment to the goals and projects of The TLC Brotherhood in assisting Thailand and Laos in constructing schools in rural areas of Southeast Asia and in providing scholarships. Jenkins also adhered to their creed of "Secret Warriors, Secret Peacemakers."

From that obituary, we have prepared this brief biography, and it is clear that we now wish we had come to know him better.

Born and raised in Eastern Tennessee, Ron earned his first engineering degree in four years instead of five, and was in the Army ROTC at the University of Tennessee for a couple of years. In the mid-1960s he interrupted his graduate engineering degree studies specifically to go to the Vietnam War in the Air Force. To get to SEA he was sent to two missile test ranges out West and then was assigned to Dover AFB to join a special team. He then deployed with the team to Ubon AFB, in Thailand, where they set up and deployed a new air-to-ground weapon system. Ron said, in his TLCB application, that he was in "deployment, operations, and maintenance of guided weapons systems" in the 8th TFW "Wolf Pack" in 1972 and 1973. The unit once commanded by the late General Robin Olds, the 8th TFW flew F-4s at Ubon at that time and included a highly specialized strike force employing the new laser-guided bombs.

We assume the "air-to-ground" system Ron worked on was Paveway laser-guided bombs. These revolutionary weapons were used extensively in Operation Linebacker II, while Ron was at Ubon. According to Wikipedia, 48% of Paveways dropped during 1972-73 around Hanoi and Haiphong achieved direct hits, compared with only 5.5% of unguided bombs dropped on the same area a few years earlier. The average Paveway landed within 23 feet of its target, as opposed to 447 feet for gravity bombs. The leap in accuracy primarily brought about by laser guidance made it possible to take out heavily defended, point objectives that had eluded earlier air raids.

The most dramatic example was the Thanh Hoa Bridge, 70 miles south of Hanoi, a critical crossing point over the Red River. Starting in 1965, U.S. pilots had flown 871 sorties against it, losing 11 planes without managing to put it out of commission. In 1972, using Paveway, 14 sorties managed to do what the previous 871 had not: drop the "Dragon's Jaw" bridge span, and cut a critical North Vietnamese supply artery.

After the SEA experience in this system, Jenkins was sent to a test squadron at Eglin. When he had been there for 18 months, he was personally selected by the CINCUSAFE (who had known Ron when the general was CINCPACAF) for a special assignment to set up Paveway at a special site in Europe.

After this initial NATO deployment of Paveway, Ron was the only engineer of his team assigned to remain with the system when it became operational, and later was called upon to brief the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Chairman of



Newspaper photo of Ron found on the Internet. No information given.

the Senate Armed Services Committee, and various cabinet members and other individuals. Jenkins also was the first American to brief a squadron of pilots of the British Royal Air Force regarding the operation of the Paveway air-to-ground system.

As a USAF engineer, Jenkins travelled to dozens of countries and many of the practices and procedures he developed became important parts of the operating and maintenance documents for laser guided bombs throughout the World. But

in the mid-1970s for various family reasons, he decided to return to Tennessee and try his hand at practicing law. His decision was supported when he scored in the top 9 percent in the LSAT, nationwide, which he attributed to the frigid conditions in an old Army Kaserne classroom in Germany, which caused his hand to shake and accidentally mark the correct question choices! Even after going into law practice, Jenkins was called back as a civilian GS-13 from 1983 through 1985 to apply his considerable laser-guided bomb knowledge.

In his private life back in Limestone, Tennessee, Ron Jenkins was a man of many accomplishments. As a lawyer, he was admitted to practice in all Tennessee State Courts, Courts of Appeal, and the Tennessee Supreme Court as well as in the United States District Courts, in the United States Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, and in the United States Supreme Court. Interested in martial arts, he attained the rank of 3rd degree black belt in the International Tae Kwon Do Alliance, later re-named Tiger Rock Martial Arts. He also obtained a pilot's license and was an airplane owner. He was a member of the Aircraft Owners & Pilots Association, the American Judges Association, the Tennessee Municipal Judges Association, the Barbershop Harmony Society, and the Appalachian Express Chorus.

Ron had two daughters and two sons (his youngest son, Capt Robert Jenkins, predeceased him), and seven grandchildren.



Some Ideas for Travelling to Thailand and Laos

By John Sweet, Frequent Flyer to Southeast Asia

Since 1997, I have made 20 trips to Thailand, and on many of them, have visited Laos as well. I was asked to write a short article to give other members insight about travelling to SEA in the easiest fashion. This of course is only one opinion and methodology and I'm certain others organize and plan differently. Nonetheless this will be a good starting point for those who have contemplated a return journey and would pursue it if they had some idea of how to go about it all.

First priority is the weather and what time of year to go. I've always planned between late August and September, or February for trips to Isan (the Northeast) or Chiang Mai. By the end of August, the heat and the rainy season are coming to an end, the airfares are lower, and without as many travellers, the hotel prices are cheaper. In February, although the airfares and hotels are higher and there are a greater number of tourists, it's the dry season which is the best time of year for a trip into Laos.



John Sweet, founder of TLCB Assistance, first treasurer, immediate past president, and, with wife Nancy, SEA frequent flyer. Photos by the author except where noted.

For weather planning, I use Accuweather.com, which even shows Nakhon Phanom for example. Just do a little research on monthly and yearly weather for the locations you wish to visit.



Early morning at the old Floating Market, 1966. McBangkok breakfast boat with *pho* cooker aboard. Photo by Bill Tilton.



As Jim Ake found out, there is no "Floating Market" in Bangkok any more, but you can still find colorful scenes back in those canals, and you can easily rent a boat to take you there. Photos by John Sweet except where noted.

Next priority, of course, is securing the lowest possible cost for airfare. Price ranges swing wildly, as do the durations. Some airlines have extensive layovers halfway to Asia, especially when traveling from east of the Mississippi. Those traveling from the west coast generally, but not always, have the lowest fares. For example, I recently traveled from Boston on Qatar Airways, with a three-hour layover to change planes in Doha for \$678.00 round trip, and journeyed only 22 hours start to finish. Both Qatar and Emirates have new fleets of planes, both are highly rated, have short flight times, and usually have low fares. These two airlines are working hard, competing to be the major airline hub for flights to Asia.

Everyone has his or her preference for on-line search engines for flights. Personally, I use Skyscanner.com and SeatGuru.com. Skyscanner finds the

Travel continues next page

most options and prices, from my experience, and provides the most detailed information about the flights, without actually selling the ticket themselves. SeatGuru provides information on every airline individually, by their fleet of planes for selection of the best seats. As soon as you procure your tickets, immediately follow up on the airline's website and select your seats.

Generally, I plan and purchase plane tickets and hotels three or four months in advance, which gives the advantage of greater flexibility and selection. Agoda.com and Booking.com have been the two websites I have found to be very trustworthy over the years for securing hotel reservations. However, before finalizing choices, always check independent reviews of the hotel on Tripadvisor.com.

ATM machines at the airport work great for obtaining Thai Baht, and the very small difference in price is well worth it for the convenience. You can obtain taxis easily at the airport for

Nakhon Phanom now has regular air service that is reasonable and modern. Below, the Mekong at very low water, from a hotel at the South end of town, in 2008.



You can hire a car to drive you up into the incredibly beautiful karst mountains of Laos, shown below.



It's not the same now, but colorful scenes are still found in the Thonburi canals.

very reasonable costs to downtown Bangkok, about ten to twelve dollars for the hour ride. There are other methods of transportation, but direct curbside service and luggage handling work best in my opinion.

The Internet has everything you will need for very detailed information with the use of Google. Put in a few hours and plan your own junket back to the "Land of Smiles," and perhaps for the more adventurous, onward to Laos. AirAsia and Nok Air are the two airlines I routinely use for traveling within Thailand, and securing their advance fares through their websites results in astoundingly low fares.

Happy Travels!



Above, Mac Thompson strolling up into the legendary and once extremely dangerous Muea Pass, now a paved and increasingly important commercial road between the coast of Vietnam and Thailand via the Nakhon Phanom bridge over the Mekong. This IS the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Forward Air Guides in the Secret War

The Mekong Express Mail received the following submission from member Paul Carter

Much has been written about the secret war in Laos, from published books to diaries, to short stories and web blogs. So much so that one wonders if there is anything left to write...and then one remembers that 150 years later, authors still find material concerning the U.S. Civil War to write about.

It was a warm October day in Bangkok, 2015, that I met Mac Thompson for the first time. I am a retired Army Officer (8 years enlisted) pursuing a master's degree in Bangkok, and I met up with the man that many contacts had directed me to. I had an interest in the Laos war, and all I had talked with through email told me that I must meet up with Mac Thompson.

Over coffee and more than an hour of conversation, I told him that I had a dilemma. I was interested in the Laos war, needed a thesis subject, but wasn't sure what to write about. My master's degree was to be in Thai studies, so the subject had to be Thai. Mac, who has a professional relationship or friendship with many of the writers who have authored books on the Laos war, told me that for years he had been suggesting to authors that they write on a unique group of Thai who fought in the war, had gotten little to no recognition, and who were virtually unknown, even in Thailand. They were a small group of Thai who spoke English, were not military, but fought in the war in Laos as contract employees of the CIA and coordinated U.S. airstrikes! It was probably the first – and only time – in U.S. military history that foreign civilians coordinated U.S. airstrikes, so it was surely a story unique in the annals of warfare. It sounded like a great idea, so Mac took me to the Unknown Warriors Association, 333 Alumni office at Don Muang Royal Thai Air Force base to introduce me to the forward air guides (FAGs) who worked there, and pitched the idea to them. They responded eagerly, stating that for years they had wanted someone to tell their story. Thus, the research on the Thai Forward Air Guides began.

Fifteen months later, I have spent hours in their homes, offices, malls, and even late night Karaoke. (These Thai guys love Karaoke. I kept telling them—repeatedly—that I was horrible at singing, but as more and more empty beer bottles filled the table, their prodding grew, so finally I grabbed the mic, and with liquid courage, belted out “God Gave Us This Land.” I think it's a Pat Boone song. I'm glad I got to sing, because never since have they ever suggested I take the mic.)

My research has led me to the U.S. National Archives, the Army War College library, interviews with retired Special Forces and Combat controllers, and soon-to-be three trips to Laos with Mac, one that included LS-20A, Long Tieng. I have uncovered information that I don't think previous researchers on the Laos war have found. Mac has been my mentor throughout this project and this May I will publish my thesis. Although it may not be ground breaking, nor very thought provoking, it will add one more chapter to the story of the U.S. secret war in Laos and give some long due recognition to a group of freedom loving Thai who served their country—and the cause of freedom—admirably.

The Mekong Express Mail (MEM) asked Paul if he would describe a little more about his work.

My thesis is an academic piece and will not be for sale, but it will be available. Here is a synopsis below, followed by the first paragraph in my acknowledgment.

Synopsis

This research is centered on Thai civilians who volunteered to fight in Laos as Forward Air Guides (FAGs) in support of Thai, Lao, and U.S. forces in the Laotian Civil War (1953-75), a key battleground of the Second Indochina War. A FAG was a U.S. military-trained, U.S. CIA- employed military operations coordinator working in support of Thai and all allied forces in Laos. A FAG's primary duty was to direct U.S. reconnaissance and strike aircraft in attacking targets, and serve as a liaison between the Thai military and the CIA. Thai FAGs played a significant role in tactical support for the Thai, Lao, and American forces, and the FAGs greatly enhanced Thai force's ability to fight. It's quite surprising that the story of Thai FAGs in the Laos war has not been told in English language publications. Their role in modern warfare is quite unique, in fact an anomaly. I'm not sure that such an arrangement will ever be duplicated, where a foreign civilian is given less than two weeks of training and placed on the battlefield coordinating air strikes for a foreign power. The story line of the loss of Laos and Vietnam to communism could just as easily be written as the salvation of Thailand from communism. It's not by accident that Thailand did not succumb to communism, but for a myriad of individual and collective actions, both on the part of individuals and the government, that the Thai and the U.S. took to protect their way of life. The Thai government, and no doubt the monarchy, viewed Laos as the frontline in the fight against communism, and took actions to confront the threat.

The fight in Laos was another front to the larger Second Indochina War concurrently taking place in Vietnam. Thailand's secret military expeditionary effort in Laos rivaled its public troop commitment to the Republic of Vietnam. The FAGs played an extraordinary role in that fight. FAGs bridged the warfighting gap between Lao, U.S., and Thai forces. With no military experience and almost no training, they went into battle and facilitated the streamlining of operations between allied forces. Without FAG participation, allied forces would have been severely hampered in their ability to conduct combined operations. While the aggregate Thai troop commitment over the years that Thailand deployed troops to Vietnam was probably around 36,000 troops – likely surpassing the aggregate Thai troop deployment numbers to Laos – at one point in 1972

FAGS continues next page

Remembering Colonel “Bo” Bottomly

By Patrick Minoughan

Editor’s Note: One of our newest members, in fact our only member in The Czech Republic (see December 2016 MEM), sent me an obituary of Colonel Heath “Bo” Bottomly. I didn’t have any record of the Colonel being a TLCB member and mentioned that to Pat Minoughan, who wrote the following personal memory of a clearly memorable leader. With that, I thought it made a MEM-worthy memorial. An edited version of Colonel Bottomly’s obituary is also included.

I was at Takhli RTAFB in 1969 and 1970. Colonel Bottomly and I arrived within days of each other and we got along great. I don’t remember the base commander, but Colonel Bo was known by everyone as the “Bald Eagle.” He had a painting of a bald eagle on his F-105. He had over 100 planes that went out every day to Laos and Vietnam, and each day he flew, he flew lead. People on the ground knew when he was there. He hated to fly higher than 100 feet above the ground, and he was vain enough to make sure everyone saw his Bald Eagle.

He was an interesting guy who supported everyone, including the SR-71 (CIA) operation that used his base for turn-arounds to Kadena. He lost more pilots in the Plain of Jars than any other wing commander because they were there every day. As a matter of fact, one of his target assignment officers is a TLCB member. I know because he wrote to me, but I guess I’m too old, and I cannot remember his name.


The Colonel and I had a lot of conversations together. At Takhli in ‘69-’70, if you needed something done, he was the guy everyone called, and he was to the rescue every time without fail. I had to ask him for help once—well more than once. When an F-4 returning to Udorn crashed into the radio and TV station and knocked it off the air, killing nine of our own personnel, I, at Takhli, had the only two spare transmitters that were on Udorn’s frequency. My commander in Korat asked if I could get them to Udorn. I said yes, not knowing how the hell I was going to do it. I called Colonel Bo for help, and he said he would have base ops call me right back. Five minutes later base ops called and said they had a crew and C-47 waiting for us to bring down the spare transmitters and take them to Udorn. Within 30 hours of the crash, Udorn was back on the air with radio and the surviving station members were on the air again, only now they were broadcasting from Korat by land line to the Udorn transmitters.

That’s the way he worked. No matter what it was, if you called him, he took care of it—a truly super wing commander. If you ever have time, Google him and his military career will

blow your socks off. He wrote a couple of books about his life and other people’s lives who had affected his life. He was different.

At one point, he became the inspector general (IG) at March AFB, California. Rumor had it that they made him IG because he knew each-and-every rule in the book, and he broke each and every one of them. He used to brag on TV about the big hole he was developing in his chest from the two Generals (7th AF and 13th AF) poking him in the chest because they didn’t like something he did.

One time, Colonel Bo decided that he was going to have a festival (fund raiser) for a local orphanage, and he called it the Montana Stampede. It so happened that the Commander of the 7/13th Air Force arrived the same day. Colonel Bo brought the General to the fair grounds to show what the base was doing to help the local community. While touring the grounds, four junior pilots thought it would be a great idea to steal the tires off the Colonel’s car and bring them to the radio station so we could auction them off. The Colonel thought it was funny, but the General didn’t like walking in the heat. The General would have evacuated himself if he had seen the guys towing the Bald Eagle F-105 down the street from the flight line to the radio station to be auctioned off. To say the least, Colonel Bottomly was a “colorful” guy.

COLONEL HEATH “BO” BOTTOMLY: Col Heath “Bo” Bottomly was born in Chinook, Montana on September 30, 1919. He was a graduate of the University of Montana and the West Point class of 1944, and was a decorated fighter pilot who served in the Pacific in World War II, and later in Vietnam and Thailand. Upon retirement from the Air Force, he was a Christian speaker, storyteller, writer, and coach. He died peacefully at home in Winchester, California on October 24, 2016. 


FAGS continued from page 10

Thailand had 20,913 troops deployed inside Laos. This arguably represents the single largest Thai expeditionary effort in modern times, as at no single point did Thailand have that many troops on the ground in Vietnam.

Acknowledgment for Carter’s paper

I am deeply indebted to my mentor MacAlan Thompson, my gateway to this project. “Mac,” in Laos with the U.S. government (USAID) from 1966-1975, was an incalculable source of information, took me to Laos several times and introduced me

to the FAGs, who trust him unreservedly. I am always in awe when opening a book on the Laos war and the author lists Mac in the credits. Legendary American doctor in Laos during the conflict, Charles Weldon M.D., author of *Tragedy in Paradise: A Country Doctor at War in Laos*, wrote that Mac was “The keeper of the Lao archives. If he doesn’t know it, it didn’t happen.” Without Mac, my work would not have been possible.

The MEM certainly looks forward to Paul Carter’s completed thesis and we hope to be able to run selections from it. 

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Your Dues

In this issue each member received a dues card. If your dues are paid at least through 2017 you got a thank-you salute. If, as we went to press, you still had not paid for 2017, you got a reminder card. Please consider renewing now. Annual dues for TLCB are still just \$25. You can pay on-line at www.tlc-brotherhood.com, or mail your payment, with the card, to:

TCL Brotherhood
PO Box 343
Locust Grove GA 30248

Please take the time to mark your card and **let us know of any changes in your contact information.** And of course, donations to TLCB Assistance are always welcome and needed.

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Questions?

If you have any questions, please reference “2017 Reunion” in the subject line and email Ray Boas at:

raymar1970@embarqmail.com

Things to Do Within a 15 Minute Drive

National Museum of the U.S. Air Force – The National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, located at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, is the world’s largest military aviation museum. With free admission and parking, the museum features more than 360 aerospace vehicles and missiles and thousands of artifacts amid more than 17 acres of indoor exhibit space. Each year about one million visitors from around the world come to the museum. For more information, go to www.nationalmuseum.af.mil (937) 255-3286.

Wright Brothers Memorial – This historic memorial overlooks Huffman Prairie where Orville and Wilbur Wright flew their experimental airplanes and the Wright Company conducted a flying school. Free Admission. (937) 425-0008

Huffman Prairie Flying Field & Interpretive Center – It was here that the Wright Brothers learned how to fly. See where the brothers successfully mastered the mechanics of controlled, powered, heavier-than-air flight. Visit the new Interpretive Center. A National Park Ranger will bring history to life! Free Admission. www.nps.gov/archive/daav/pla_fac_huffmanprairie.htm (937) 425-0008.



In Dayton, the original Wright Cycle Shop, where the Wright Brothers built and sold bicycles and where they built their gliders and, finally, the gasoline powered Wright Flyer that proved a heavier than air flying machine was practical.

Wright Cycle Company – (See above) Tour the restored Wright Cycle Shop in the historic Wright-Dunbar Neighborhood where the Wright Brothers developed many of their aviation concepts. www.nps.gov/daav/planyourvisit/facilitysites.htm (937) 225-7705.

Carillon Historical Park – Carillon Historical Park encourages you to sample Dayton’s rich heritage of creativity and invention! Founded by Colonel Edward and Edith Deeds, the

A modern replica of the original Wright Flyer.



If the AF Museum looked like this the last time you saw it, you're in for a big surprise! As shown here, since opening in 1971 it has grown a bit. And if you've never ever seen it, hold on to your hat!

Above, the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, at Wright/Patterson AFB, near Dayton, Ohio, in 1971.



At right, as it is in 2017.

park is situated on a beautiful, 65-acre campus between the Great Miami River and a glacial moraine. The park immerses you in the region’s history—from Dayton’s founding in 1796 through two centuries of expansion, industrialism, and innovation. Learn about these revolutionary achievements while strolling through the park’s 25 historical buildings and interacting with the hundreds of artifacts in the exhibits.

See the restored 1905 Wright Flyer III, the world’s first practical airplane. This airplane made history over Huffman field in Greene County. www.daytonhistory.org/destinations/carillon-historical-park (937) 293-2841. Carillon Park Brewing Co. (937) 910-0722 www.daytonhistory.org/destinations/carillon-brewing-company

Historic Clifton Mill – Built in 1802, this is one of the largest water-powered grist mills still in existence. With breathtaking views of the Clifton Gorge, you can enjoy a home cooked meal for breakfast or lunch overlooking a covered bridge. Browse the gift shop decorated with antiques from a bygone era. Tour the working mill on each hour from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. from

March 1st to October 1st. www.cliftonmill.com/index.html (937) 767-5501.

The Mall at Fairfield Commons — Visit the shops, boutiques and an incredible array of department stores. A full range of services are available to compliment your shopping experience. A Dining Court on the second level offers an assortment of foods for your palette. www.mallatfairfieldcommons.com (937) 427-4300.

The Greene — Unlike anything the Miami Valley has experienced before, The Greene is a fun and unique shopping and entertainment destination with upscale shops and restaurants. The region's new village-like open mall concept with cobblestone streets and a green space focuses on a family experience filled with possibilities for all. www.thegreene.com (937) 490-4990.

Dayton Aviation Heritage National Park — This multi-site park tells the stories of flight inventors Wilbur Wright and Orville Wright and African-American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. Visit the historically refurbished Wright brothers' printing office, walk through an original Wright brothers' bicycle shop, see the Wright brothers' third airplane, follow Wilbur and Orville's footsteps at the Huffman Prairie Flying Field, and experience Paul Laurence Dunbar's last home. www.nps.gov/daav (937) 225-7705.

Oregon Arts District — Dayton's original arts and entertainment district has something for everyone, from art galleries to vintage stores, trendy restaurants to laid-back watering holes, along with an independent movie house, comedy club, and even a climbing center and yoga studio. In the 2008 People's Choice Awards, the District won more honors than any other Dayton destination. www.oregonartsdistrict.com (937) 224-1518.

America's Packard Museum aka The Citizens Motorcar Company — The museum features over 50 automobiles on display in the restored Art Deco showroom, service department and pavilion. In addition, significant artifacts from the Packard Motorcar Company are on display. The January 1998 edition of *Car Collector* magazine named the museum one of the "Top Ten Automotive" museums in the United States. www.americaspackardmuseum.com (937) 226-1710.

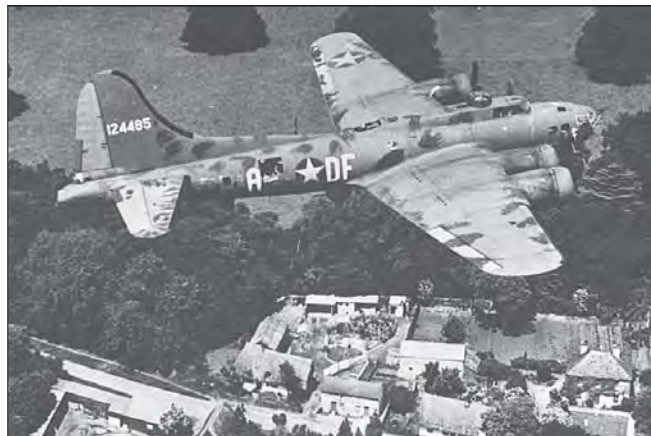
Boonshoft Museum of Discovery — Extraordinary traveling exhibits and interactive experiences will spark your imagination as you explore the Boonshoft Museum of Discovery's 94,000 square feet and two stories of unlimited learning potential. See a real Egyptian mummy, witness explosive science shows, and dance to the rhythms of the color wall. The Museum houses the region's only Planetarium, a live animal zoo, a three-story climbing tower, and much more. www.boonshoftmuseum.org/ (937) 275-7431.

Carriage Hill MetroPark — Farm life in the 1880s comes alive at Carriage Hill Farm. Visitor Center exhibits start the journey back in time while demonstrations, reconstructed and historical buildings, and even period farm animals paint the picture. There are also acres of natural beauty to enjoy. www.metroparks.org/Parks/CarriageHill/Home.aspx (937) 278-2609

The Dayton Art Institute — One of the nation's finest mid-sized art museums, The Dayton Art Institute features world-class special exhibitions: a family-oriented, interactive Expe-

Reunion continues page 16

As if That Weren't Enough! "Memphis Belle" at last—



The long-awaited restoration of the fabled "Memphis Belle" is finally completed and she is expected to go on display in May of this year. Shown above during WWII. "The B-17F Memphis Belle is an icon that represents the thousands of bomber crews, maintainers, and others supporting the bomber mission, whose service and sacrifice helped win WWII," said a museum spokesman. "Work is underway to showcase the aircraft in the WWII Gallery, and the surrounding exhibit will include interactive displays, rare archival film footage, and many personal artifacts which have never been seen before by our visitors."

In the restoration shop at an early stage, below. Memphis Belle was the first B-17 to complete 25 combat missions and was then flown on warbond drives during the war.



On display for many years in Memphis, Tennessee, before being acquired by the Air Force Museum, she has been in restoration since October, 2005.



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riencecenter; and a diverse permanent collection of African, American, Asian and European Art. www.daytonartinstitute.org (937) 223-5277.

Hollywood Gaming and Dayton Racino — Features 1,000 Video Lottery Terminals, a variety of food and beverage options, a sports bar and entertainment venue. The 5/8th mile harness racing track has more than 1,000 enclosed, track-view grandstand seats and a state-of-the-art simulcast theater where patrons can wager on races at racetracks throughout the U.S. www.hollywooddaytonraceway.com (937)235-7800.



New at The Exchange

We have another fundraising idea and are offering you the opportunity for special orders on our Secret War camo hats. How about your call sign, base, or other special projects, such as 7th RRFs or USARTHAI, or areas such as Long Binh or Phu Mu? We recently received a suggestion for a “Thailand Veteran” option, and we filled an order for “Dressy Lady.” Got any more ideas? We will charge \$21 for each special-order camo hat, shipping included. Come on all you Army, Coast Guard, Navy, Marine and Air Force folks; we want to include and honor your service, and we are so grateful so many of you have joined in 2016! (Air America and others welcome too).

Have you taken a glance at the new shirts we are offering in several colors, lots of sizes, and a choice of TLCB crest or TLCB logo? We have had quite a bit of interest, for which we are grateful since all profits go to the TLCB Assistance fund and the kids. These special-order shirts take about 6 weeks to fill since our embroidery specialist needs several orders to keep her shipping costs down and our profits up.

Go to <http://tlc-brotherhood.com/wp/the-exchange/> and click on the Exchange building to order. You can pay by credit card (via PayPal) or print out the order and send it with a check to: TLCB, PO Box 343, Locust Grove, GA 30248.



TLCB Bangkok

Says Mac Thompson, in Bangkok: “This is the hardcore of our SKYLARK group at Future Park Mall a few km north of Don Muang Airport. The group is named after the eatery we used to meet at, changed to a new place in the mall about six months back. We get together now and then on an unscheduled basis for lunch and a BS session. Les and I started these meetings at the Country Place when the mall opened about 1997, and have continued with the catch-up sessions, now at the *New Country Place*.”

From left to right: Jack Williams—former USN pilot, soon to join the TLCB, Mac Thompson—charter TLCB member, Bill Putman—TLCB member, Tuk Putman, Sunee Thompson, Mayuree Strouse, Tony Tambini—TLCB member (hiding behind Les Strouse), Les Strouse— charter TLCB member, Tom Ross—TLCB member, Mark Daniels,—TLCB member. Photo provided by Mark Daniels.