

# MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



The newsletter of the Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood, Inc. Volume 19, issue 1

WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.com

## Book Excerpt: *Inherently Dangerous*

Chapter Twelve: *Invert; Nakhon Phanom, Thailand*

by Paul Hauser

### Introduction

The roots of this narrative reach back to the early 1960s when I graduated from college and was going to be drafted into military service. *Inherently Dangerous* is my personal narrative of four years/four months as a Weapons Controller Officer in the U.S. Air Force, including sixteen months in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. It also includes stories of three other officers and material that came from declassified Air Force documents. Some of the names of individuals have been changed to protect those who were unaware they would end up as characters in a book one day.

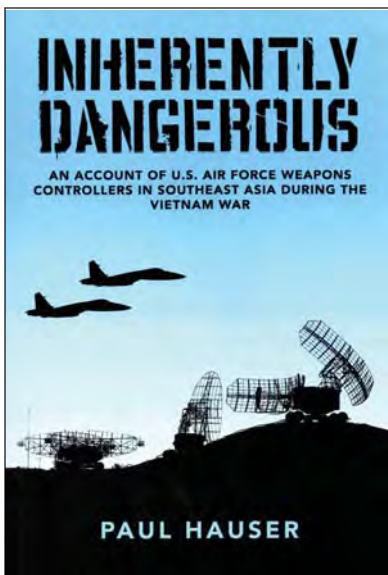
A message came into our DORA CRP from the 505th indicating a need for additional weapons controllers with “skilled” ratings. So, I volunteered to fly up to INVERT at Nakhon Phanom in northeast Thailand for additional training and testing. Nakhon Phanom, the City of Hills, was also well known by all airmen as “Naked Fanny.”

Whoever came up with that name had a damned good sense of humor. INVERT was said to be one of the busiest radar sites in Southeast Asia, and it and BRIGHAM, farther to the north, were closest to the North Vietnamese capital of Hanoi.

The operations room at INVERT was huge with four tiered levels. The weapons controller positions were arranged

three radar scopes to a level, descending from senior director and crew chief positions of the battle staff section, moving down past the weapons controller positions to the surveillance positions at the building’s floor level. The third and fourth levels had height-finder scope positions on the ends of the

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## Editor's Notebook:

### *The Books of the TLCB*

In this issue, *The Mekong Express Mail* (MEM) is featuring a chapter from *Inherently Dangerous*, a book about weapons controller operations in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. It was written by Paul Hauser, a new member of the Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood. In the past few years, we have included excerpts from other books, both fiction and non-fiction, written by TLCB members. Among the most recent were:

- *Going Over: Ramusan, 1969*, by James E. Stanton (pen name, M.H. Burton), March 2013 issue
- *The Champa Flowers*, by Alan Melton, September 2014 issue
- *The Tales of the Six Tigers*, by Cato McDaniel, March 2016 issue

Sounds impressive, doesn't it? However, the fact is that many more TLCB members, some no longer with us, have written and published books, and the MEM would like to make sure the Brotherhood knows about them. (Full disclosure: In summer of 2016, I published a novel, *The Year of the Lieutenant*, which I had actually written many years before).

My own self-serving intentions aside, I would like to establish a new and on-going feature in the MEM, "The Books of the TLCB." To make this a reality, I need the assistance of our membership. To ensure that this reaches the widest possible TLCB audience, I am also posting a copy of this edition of my Editor's Message on the TLCB Forum, and I will be asking Ed Miller to also post it on the TLCB Facebook page he is managing.

Book information does not necessarily need to be supplied by the author. If a member knows of a member's work and thinks the author may be modest (admittedly not a quality generally found in authors), the member should feel free to

submit the information. The most important step is for members to provide me, by any means they can, with information about members' books.

#### That information should include:

1. **The full title of the book**
2. **The author's name as it appears on the book, or the author's pen name, if relevant**
3. **The publisher (if available)**
4. **Is it available on sites such as Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Apple's iBooks, or any other?**

And here's a very important element. Since I am a relatively new TLCB inductee (2011), I'm confident that there are a number of titles out there written by members who are deceased, and I ask that all should feel free to let me know about those books.

Frankly, I'd like to add one additional request. There may be many books out there, written by non-TLCB members, that would be of interest and we should list them as well. Send me that information also. Who knows, it may provide us with some new members. You can reach me at [jharrington@nscopy.com](mailto:jharrington@nscopy.com), or by mailing me the old-fashioned way to P.O. Box 1332, Charlestown, RI, 02813.

### *Color! Color! Color!*

I guess I hardly need to point this out, but the print edition of *The Mekong Express Mail* is now published in full color, made possible by the first increase in the TLCB annual dues since the organization's founding, from \$25 to \$30. The raise was approved by the Board after the September 2017 TLCB Annual Meeting. We welcome suggestions about how to make the best use of our new capabilities.

John Harrington  
MEM Editor  
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# *My Return From Ubon RTAFB, May 1969*

*By Mike Kelly*

*Staff Sergeant, USAF, May 1966 till December 1969*

*I saw an article in the TCLB Mekong Express Mail (MEM) suggesting that members submit their recollections of their time in Thailand, so I wrote about my last days there, the excitement during the homewardbound trip, and public reactions upon my arrival in the States. [Italics added by MEM staff]*

*My time in country was routine. I arrived at Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB) with other 25 Tactical Fighter Squadron (TFS) guys from Eglin AFB aboard a C-141 in late May of 1968. As part of the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW), I spent my time maintaining F-4s and AC-130As. Working 12-hour shifts six days a week pretty much kept me out of trouble; I never took an R&R. I made E-5 while still at Ubon, so I guess I did something right; however, my return trip would be way more eventful than I would have preferred.*

*Here are my recollections from almost 50 years ago. Dates and times are approximate, as I did not keep a diary. (My Dad's brother, Bob Kelly, had been in the Army Air Force in WWII and he suggested that I keep a diary. He said that he didn't and it was one of his greatest regrets. I thought that was silly, as I thought a diary was for teen age girls! I now share my late uncle's regrets).*

## ***An Adventure in Bangkok***

I am pretty certain I left Ubon RTAFB on the afternoon of May 24, 1969 aboard a C-130. After several stops at other bases, I arrived in Bangkok in early evening. I checked in with the Military Airlift Command (MAC) terminal and was told that space back to the States was very limited, as all the guys that came over with the 25 TFS were leaving at the same time. I was told to come back in the morning.

I was then sent to a hotel in downtown Bangkok where transient personnel could stay free of charge. I don't recall its name. The next morning, I was told that I was a "standby" on a flight back to the States, and would be boarding soon. Since I was in a group of standby passengers, we would board last. Just as we were about to board, four of us were told that we had been bumped off the flight for guys on emergency leaves. Come back tomorrow!

On the way back to the hotel, I sat beside another guy who had gotten bumped. He was an E-4 from Nakhon Phanom (NKP). I don't recall his name, so I will just refer to him as "NKP guy." We talked about our luck and cursed MAC. Since I am an optimist by nature and didn't have a wife or girl back home, I said that I didn't mind too much. This would give me a chance to see Bangkok, as I had never been here before. So NKP guy offered to show me the town, as he said he had been there several times.

Back at the hotel, NKP guy told me to change into civilian clothes and meet him back in the lobby in about a half hour. He said to be sure to bring my travel orders. We got into a cab and went to the Navy BX where he instructed me to buy a large bottle of Old Crow whiskey and a carton of Kool cigarettes. When I told him I didn't smoke, he said, "Just trust me and do it."

When we got back to the hotel, I picked up the whiskey and cigarettes, ready to get out of the cab. He said to leave them in the back seat like I had forgotten them. Slowly, I was starting

to catch on!

We sat in the lobby for about another half hour and then in came an older Thai guy in a chauffeur's uniform with a hat. He looked like a doorman at an upscale New York hotel. He introduced himself in passable English as "Pete," and he took us outside and put us in the back of a Mercedes Benz sedan and off we went.

He took us to several statues of Buddha, a huge temple, the floating market, a reptile zoo and many other sights. After dinner and a few drinks at a nightclub, we started back to the hotel.

**Kelly continues on page 7**



Above, Mike at Warren: This was the only photo I can find of me in Thailand. Since I took most photos, I had very few of me. This was taken in early 1969 at Warren, a village near Ubon. I looked for one I recalled of me standing on the Mun River Bridge, but could not locate it. It would have been more scenic!

## Dangerous continued from page 1

rows. All the personnel had a clear view of the information posted on the self-illuminated, transparent Lexan wall presentation of Southeast Asia. Enlisted personnel were continuously plotting real-time mission information. Sitting at a scope on the third level, I could easily read the weather information, tactical, and offensive mission data. Hanoi, out of radar range, was displayed close to the top right-hand corner, and Bangkok, near the bottom left corner. The aircraft refueling sites were identified as anchors (aircraft holding patterns, like racetracks), and they rarely changed during the course of the war. From roughly overhead at INVERT, and on a north-south track extending forty miles apart, they consisted of aerial tankers at altitudes from 14,000 to 28,000 feet. The altitude could be adjusted depending on weather, winds aloft, or type of aircraft in question. The tracks were Stations Red, Blue, White, and over in Laos, Green and Orange. In addition, there were many additional non-refueling anchors, such as an HC-130 Airborne Command, Control and Communications aircraft, or the EC-121R Batcat Super Constellation aircraft that was relaying information to INVERT to counter a detected threat. This was far and away the busiest radar site I had ever seen.

Since INVERT was one of the radar sites closest to North Vietnam, its main mission involved air support for the Ho Chi Minh Trail interdiction campaign. The goal was to stop or dramatically slow down, by aerial bombardment, the North Vietnamese supplies coming down the trail to supply the Vietcong. Assigned aircraft taking off from their home base would report in to INVERT, and the weapons controllers would exercise control of the strike force to the limit of its radar coverage. At that point, a twenty-four-hour-stationed C-130 ABCCC would take over control.

Sitting at a scope with a headset on I was listening to CRICKET, the daytime ABCCC, when they received the following radio message.



Scott Harrington, friend of Paul Hauser, at the NKP gate

**T**he responsibility for the identification and control of airborne aircraft throughout the world is known as airspace management.

In the US Air Force, reconnaissance, strategic and tactical aircraft are considered weapons. Personnel trained in maneuvering aircraft from the ground or in the air for combat purposes are known as weapons controllers.

Most civilians know that an air traffic controller keeps aircraft apart; a weapons controller drives aircraft together, which in and of itself is *inherently dangerous*.

This book stands as a tribute to all the US Air Force Weapons Controllers who strived to bring our airborne crews home safely.



Paul Hauser's first memoir, *I'm Always Going Somewhere* is available on amazon.com. The book is a contribution to the amazing history of mapping and intelligence gathering in Latin America. Book reviewers have said: "It is written in such an entertaining way that I felt like I was there

in the jungle with his team of surveyors" and "A wonderful book that discusses a piece of American history that very little is known about."

The back cover of *Inherently Dangerous*, by Paul Hauser. Photos provided by the author.

"CRICKET this is BONE CRUSHER on guard. Spike at 20.982993 November – 105.917064 Echo."

This was the latitude and longitude of a previously unknown missile location identified by BONE CRUSHER'S missile warning receiver.

CRICKET replied, "BONE CRUSHER we have DEVIL 02 on station and fragged," which meant there was another nearby aircraft, call sign DEVIL 02, with a full load of weapons to expend on the new target.

I witnessed several special mission tasks and B-52 campaigns known as Arc Light. Arc Light was a flight of three B-52s delivering 750 bombs to any requesting force under heavy attack. Releasing their bombs from very high altitudes, the B-52s could neither be seen nor heard on the ground. As if this was not enough to keep everyone at their radar consoles busy, they also gave navigation, rescue coordination, and in-flight refueling services for SAR (search and rescue aircraft), flight following military sensor recon missions, and a whole host of special missions, such as U-2 spy plane photo missions and

**Dangerous continued next page**

## **Dangerous** *continued from previous page*

the SR-71 recon flights.

When my day shift was done, I would usually stop in at the Officer's Club for a beer or perhaps a light meal. As the club was crowded, it was not uncommon to have an officer walk up to the table and ask if he could join you. On one such occasion, I had a Captain Morse from an ABCCC squadron out of Udorn join me for dinner. As we were both Weapons Controllers, I asked him about his airborne duties. He said he flew 12-hour daylight missions orbiting above northern Laos in a modified C-130 (call sign Cricket) that had a prefabricated module about the size of a small mobile home on board. The unit was connected to the aircraft's electrical system, and apart from the pilot, copilot, navigator, and flight engineer, there were 25 command and control personnel, or "back enders," in the module. At times all 25 were communicating with the fighters, recon, and rescue from all the services. There were no radar consoles but plenty of communication equipment. The fighter aircraft would check in en route to their assigned targets, and the ABCCC crews would give them any changes of assignment, communication changes, or informational updates. Then the same aircraft returning from their missions would report their bomb damage over their target, damage to their aircraft, and ask the latest weather conditions en route to base. "How long is your assignment?" I asked, and he replied, "one year." During the course of our conversation, I failed to ask him what had brought him to INVERT.

One very memorable day, while I was off duty, I noticed a group of airmen running towards the airfield. A downed pilot had been rescued and was being brought back to the base. It turned out that the pilot had been flying a F-105, commonly known as Thud by its aircrew. It could fly supersonic at low levels and could carry a greater bomb load than WWII bombers. Unfortunately, it was much less agile than the smaller MiG fighters. It could make a single pass coming off target at Mach one and then return to base (RTB). Its limited maneuverability in comparison to the MiG-19 or 21 made it a very poor plane in a dogfight. It had the unusual reputation of being the only U.S. combat aircraft to have been removed from the war due to high aircraft/pilot losses. Pilots shot down over North Vietnam, especially around Hanoi and Haiphong, had a very small chance of rescue. Only one in six known to be alive was rescued. The Jolly Green helicopter bringing the F-105 pilot back to base landed on the tarmac in front of me. Every airman in Southeast Asia, wherever based, loved those Jolly Green rescue crews. On hundreds of occasions they went into North Vietnam to pick up a downed pilot at the risk of their own lives. A Jeep pulled up and the downed pilot was put in the front seat and driven over to the officer's club. Once there, some of his fellow pilots placed him on the top of the bar for all to see. It was a sight to behold. Here were full-grown men cheering, crying, and shouting with joy that this pilot had been saved from certain death. The comradeship and esprit de corps shown that afternoon will always remain as one of the highlights of my military career.

***Here were full-grown men cheering, crying, and shouting with joy that this pilot had been saved from certain death.***

My final test was controlling three sets of fighter aircraft. It was intense and stressful, and went on for well over an hour. I was flight following outbound and inbound aircraft while driving a flight of four birds to their rendezvous with their tanker. My instructor sat at the console next to me, evaluating my every move. When it was all done, I had simultaneously managed all the assigned aircraft and was upgraded to the classification of "skilled weapons controller."

The evening following my evaluation, a few of us went out to dinner at a Thai restaurant in downtown Nakhon Phanom. The town itself sat on the banks of the Mekong River across from Laos. Just before we entered the restaurant, we heard distant explosions from across the river. A few days before we had been told that Thai mercenaries were in Laos and we guessed they were attacking the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) hidden in the jungle.

I ordered steamed rice, vegetables, and chicken. Ben Wilcox, one of my fellow controllers liked spicy foods, so he ordered som tum, a cool yet fiery slaw of green papaya mixed with fish sauce, lime juice, peanuts, and plenty of garlic and hot chilies. It was a favored dish by locals in the fields of northeast Thailand. Sitting across the table from him, I could see him break out in a sweat and turn beet red as he tried to eat his dinner. I asked him if he was all right and he could not answer. He reached for several glasses of water that were on our table, and ate some pieces of flat bread, then finally said in a small voice, "That's the hottest damned thing I've ever tasted." So much for spicy foods containing the extra hot Thai chilies.



## **New Member Profile**

### ***Paul Hauser***

Paul Hauser was commissioned a 2nd Lt in the U.S. Air Force in 1963 at Lackland AFB, San Antonio, Texas and then sent to Tactical Air Command's 1744-A Weapons Controller School at Tyndall AFB, Florida. Upon graduating, he was assigned to the 729th Tactical Control Squadron based at Eglin AFB, Field #3, Panama City, Florida the home of Jimmy Doolittle's B-24 practice field.

In April 1965, civil war broke out in the Dominican Republic. Paul's squadron, along with a United Nations peacekeeping force, were called into service to provide air traffic control over the country, to evacuate U.S. citizens and open up a safe travel corridor to the international embassies in the capital city of Santo Domingo. Since Paul was fluent in Spanish, he was, within several weeks, reassigned to the Headquarters General Staff as an interpreter. For his service during this crisis, Paul was awarded his first Air Force Commendation Medal.

In October 1965, Paul was given an eighteen-month TDY assignment to the 505th Tactical Control Group at Clark AFB, Philippines. From there, he was assigned to build and operate a Forward Air Control Post (FACP), call sign PORTCALL in

**Hauser** *continued on page 6*

**Hauser** *continued from page 5*



Paul, "back in the day." Photo taken in a Cambodian temple ruins. Photos provided by the author.

Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam.

In June 1966, he was given a new assignment to help build and operate a Command Reporting Post (CRP) in Phitsanulok, Thailand, call sign DORA. In

addition to his weapons controller duties, Paul was also designated as the DORA site Security Officer.

While in Thailand, he passed a test to become a "skilled level controller" at the (INVERT) radar site in Nakhon Phanom, Thailand. This led to his last Air Force assignment in 1967, as a 1744-A Weapons Controller Instructor at Tyndall AFB, Panama City, Florida. For his service in SEA, Paul received an Oak Leaf Cluster to his Air Force Commendation Medal.

After determining that virtually nothing had been written about this military career field, Paul wrote his highly rated book, "Inherently Dangerous – An Account of U.S. Air Force Weapons Controllers in Southeast Asia During the Vietnam War." He states that most civilians know that an air traffic controller keeps aircraft apart; however, a weapons controller drives aircraft together, which in and of itself is inherently dangerous.

Paul and his wife, Susan, reside in Alameda, California and have eight grandchildren.



Above, house in Nakhon Phanom where Paul and other weapons controllers lived.

## ***Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood***

*The 8 members listed below joined between the last issue of the MEM and the 25th of February. 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
USAF	1823	Mecham	John	Springfield	OH
USAF	1824	Hauser	William	Alameda	CA
Other	1825	Mueller	Gilbert	Bangkok	Thailand
USMC	1826	Mullins	Edward	Chesapeake	WV
USAF	1827	Harmon	Arnie	Lewis Center	OH
USAF	1828	Polifka	Karl	Williamsburg	VA
USA	1829	Bailey	William	Centerville	MA
USAF	1830	Jeffers	James	Denison	TX

*Kelly continued from page 3*

I mentioned that I had failed to get my Dad anything from Thailand, and Pete said he could get us into a jewelry store even at that late hour. We pulled up in front of a dark store and within minutes, the lights were coming on and the owner opened the door for us! After spending all the baht I had and another \$40 to boot on a set of star sapphire gold cuff links and a jade and gold tie tack, I was just about broke. I did have a great time, however.

The next morning NKP guy and I went back to the MAC terminal. Still no flights back to the U.S., but they said that they could get us on a flight to Saigon, where we stood a better chance of getting a flight to the States. NKP guy decided to stay another night in Bangkok. Since I had less than \$50.00 to my name, I thought I better get on my way home.

### *The Long Flight(s) Home*

I got to Tan Son Nhat about midday. I saw an Army MP and talked to him for a while. He said that the terminal building was heavily damaged in Tet and it had very few amenities. I asked him about food and he suggested I try the airport restaurant, as going off base was not advisable. The food was good, kind of



Above, Bangkok Jewelry Store. Taken in late May 1969. This is the store "Pete" had opened for me very late at night; I would guess after midnight. This is where I bought gifts for my Dad.



Above, limo ride in Bangkok. Taken in late May 1969. In the photo you can see "Pete," the limo driver with his chauffeur's cap on the dashboard. Also street scene of Bangkok.



Above, Chi's Band, that played in the Airman's club on base at Ubon. We called them the "Wurlitzers" (juke box company), as everything they played sounded like the original artist. They were fantastic, and I venture to say most guys at Ubon would agree.



Above, Red River Rats parade at Ubon, Date taken unknown. The RRR's were fighter pilots that had gone north to Hanoi.

a mix between Chinese and French as I recall.

After about 6 hours, I was able to catch a Seaboard World Airways Super DC-8 to Yokota AFB in Japan. We loaded hot (starboard engines running) which didn't allow us to take on any fuel. This probably seemed like a wise choice to the flight crew at the time, as it was getting dark outside; however, it was to have almost disastrous consequences later.

The plane started taxiing while a lot of guys were still standing in the isle. I had a window seat on the left side just behind the wing. As we taxied out it was completely dark and I will never forget the sight. It looked like the entire base was infested with fireflies. All the guys were flashing their flashlights at us, saying goodbye.

I slept most of the way to Japan as there was a solid overcast below, so not much to see. I woke up when they started serving a breakfast. A little later, the pilot announced that we were diverting to Tokyo International, as Yokota was below

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## Kelly continued from page 7

minimums. A few minutes later he announced that Tokyo was now also below minimums, and we were going to have to hold for a while.

Finally, we began to descend, but I still couldn't see anything but overcast. The plane had flaps and gear down—but no ground in sight? Finally, we broke out of the overcast, and were just a few hundred feet above water.

The pilot yawed the plane wildly to the right and almost immediately back to the left. Just then, I saw the runway threshold flash under the plane. We hit hard and almost off the left side of the runway. How he kept it on the runway was beyond me. As we slowed down, I could hear a loud thumping noise from below like a flat tire in a car. We finally slowed enough to turn off on a taxiway. We sat there for a while until a firetruck came out and gave us a once-over look. Apparently, the plane couldn't taxi, so they shut down the engines and we had to get off on portable stairs. With over 200 passengers, this took a while. To his credit, the Captain stood at the cockpit door and personally apologized to everyone for the hard landing as we got off. He said that he had to stick it on the runway, as we didn't have enough fuel to even go around once. Yikes!

When I could, I checked out the landing gear. Several tires had been ripped off the wheels on the left main landing gear. I also thought I saw damage to the brakes. It was clear to me that this bird wouldn't be flying on to California any time soon. We were taken by bus to the International Terminal. We had to wait till Seaboard could send another plane. They estimated a layover of from 6 to 12 hours. It was closer to 24! I was

Below, sunrise off the coast of California. Taken from the replacement Seaboard World Airways DC-8 sent to pick us up in Tokyo. We landed at Travis about 1/2 hour later. I can't put into words the emotion of seeing this sight. Suffice it to say it was special.



running low on money and everything seemed very expensive. I slept on benches in the terminal as best I could. I got by on hamburgers, fries, and cokes for the next day, and I was able to find a men's room to clean up and change to another uniform.

A replacement plane finally arrived and we took off for San Francisco. We crossed the California coast just after daybreak and landed at Travis AFB. Right before we landed, the plane got very quiet. When the wheels touched the runway, someone behind me said "God Damn" in a very reverent tone of voice. It was more like a prayer than a curse. Then everyone was cheering and shouting.

Below, Mike, taken last summer at the French Lick Casino and Resort in French Lick Indiana. Photos provided by the author.



## U.S. Public Reactions

I took a bus to San Francisco International Airport, and I spent what little money I had left on breakfast. *No one had told me to expect any rude treatment from civilians and I wore my uniform. Actually no one seemed to care and generally acted like they didn't see me. No one spoke except other GIs. When I got to the United Airline gate to catch a flight to Chicago, the gate was very crowded and no one seemed very friendly. No one spoke to me directly, but a young guy said to the girl with him "poor bastard, they are sending him to Nam" as he walked by. I was perplexed as to why he said that till I noticed the baggage tags on my carryon bag. They*

were gold and green and had SGN on them, leftover from my flight from Bangkok to Saigon.

I didn't want anyone's sympathy, no matter how misplaced, so I just went to an empty gate, sat down looking out at the runway and thought about what a trip home it had been so far. When they called my flight to Chicago, I boarded and sat as far away from anyone as I could. *However, on my next flight, from O'Hare to Louisville, Kentucky, a very kind stewardess sat down beside me and carried on a most pleasant conversation with me. I really needed that. By the time my parents met me at the airport, I had put away most of the unpleasant aspects of my trip home. It had been about four to five days without much sleep or food since I left Ubon and I was really glad to be home.*

After a month at home, I went to Luke AFB. I got an early out in December 1969 to go to college. *Everyone on campus was very down on the military and I never mentioned my service. In fact, I had a female history professor who verbally abused any ROTC guys in her class.*

I got a BS and MS in Physics and worked in Medical Physics both in academia and private practice for 40 years. Working in academia, I found no one wanted to hear about anything to do with the military, so I just forgot about my military service till I came across the TCLB website. I now enjoy reading about the experiences of others in the *Mekong Express Mail*, as many were way more exciting than mine.





# Shining a Light on the Gulf Coast

**NOTICE: The Annual Meeting and Reunion of the TLC Brotherhood, Inc. will be held in Biloxi, Mississippi from October 11th thru 13th, 2018.**

Your stay at The Margaritaville Resort, at right, with a room rate of just \$93.00 per night (plus taxes \$119.00), free valet parking, plus other perks still being assembled by our Tourist Commission, will be a wonderful, relaxing time. This reunion is shaping up to be one of the best reunions of all time.

## Reunion Hotel Reservations

To reserve your room now, call the Margaritaville Resort Biloxi direct at (800) 794 1582 or call the local number (228) 271 6377. **Be sure to tell them that you are with the Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood to get our rate.**

## Shoulder Dates

The hotel has set aside *a few* rooms, at the same rate, for those who wish to make a vacation out of their trip since there is lots to see and experience in the area. They are available on the Tuesday and Wednesday prior to the reunion and the Sunday and Monday after. First come, first served—while they last.

## Hotel and area Amenities

You are cordially invited to visit our state for your reunion. You can “waste away in Margaritaville,” because that is exactly where we will be staying. Margaritaville is a family-friendly resort located in the Point Cadet entertainment area of Biloxi. A non-gambling property, it offers three restaurants, a lounge area, a 24-hour coffee shop, and a Nipa Hut like never before. Instead of a conference room, we will have a large, two-room King Corner Suite that opens onto a “huge” deck, a perfect place to enjoy a margarita and watch the sun setting on the Mississippi Sound. Want more? Within a 10-minute walk of our hotel, there are 3 casinos and 15 restaurants, not to mention 2 Starbucks. You want a steak, some Mexican, or Asian, we got that.

## Seafood?

Oh, *we got seafood!* In fact, in 5 minutes you can walk to our **Maritime & Seafood Museum**. You can't get a more convenient, central location!

## Stennis Space and Infinity Science Centers

You don't want to just hang around the hotel all day. On Friday, we'll hop on a bus and head west to someplace you would not expect in Mississippi. We'll drive along scenic Beach Boulevard, where you will probably see other sites you would like to visit, such as our new Aquarium, currently under construction. But our destination is the Stennis Space Center. For you CAMS



guys, you will see the largest engine test stands probably in the world. This is where all of the rocket engines launched from Kennedy are tested. We are currently testing the engines for Apollo, and SpaceX is doing a feasibility study to build a launch complex here. While there, you will want to tour the Infinity Science Center and walk through a section of the International Space Station.

## Shopping

- **Gulfport Outlet Mall**—Not far from the airport.
- **Downtown area**—Has mall shops and some open-air sidewalk restaurants.
- **Ocean Springs**—Just on the other side of the bridge by the hotel, small craft shops and places to eat.
- **Cruise Options**—There is a paddle wheeler, a working shrimp boat tour, and a tour boat to the barrier islands.

## The new Mississippi

Some of you were just here in the 1960s for training at Keesler, AFB. I know because I have heard your stories—but you know, that was over 50 years ago! The Mississippi Gulf Coast has been destroyed twice in 35 years. What Camille didn't wipe out in 1969, Katrina erased in 2005. While we were still clearing debris away from the storm, the BP oil spill ravaged what was left of our beaches, seafood industry, and our economy. The only thing standing was our lighthouse and the people of the Gulf Coast. We began to rebuild again: Our homes, beaches, economy, and our industry. We aren't finished, but we are ready to show off a little.

So, leave any preconceived notions of Mississippi at home along with your diet, and visit the *New Mississippi*.

“Ya'll come down now, heah?”

**John Schillo**  
Local Reunion Chairman



# 2017 Donor Honor Roll

*Of the Four Objectives of the TLC Brotherhood, our charitable work gets the most publicity and the most funding. Members support this work in various ways, but financially is what pays for the projects.*

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## Official Notice:

### TLCB Election 2018

The TLC Brotherhood, Inc. Board of Directors election will be held on Saturday, October 13, 2018, at the Margaritaville Resort, Biloxi, Mississippi. The TLC Brotherhood Board of Directors has designated the period April 15 through May 15, 2018 as the nominating period for the official slate of candidates.

During this period, active members are invited to submit nominations for the offices of president and treasurer, and for two board member-at-large positions that will be up for election at this time. Present board members and their term dates are listed in the information box on page 2. Nominees must be active members and willing to serve. Send nominations to any of the nominating committee members.

They are:

Ken Schmidt (Chair)	<a href="mailto:schmidt-kenneth@att.net">schmidt-kenneth@att.net</a>
Mike Vale	<a href="mailto:mevale762@gmail.com">mevale762@gmail.com</a>
Bob Vettel	<a href="mailto:rvettel@cox.net">rvettel@cox.net</a>

#### Mailed nominations:

Must arrive at the TLCB PO box by the 15th of May, 2018.

Mail To:

TLCB Nom, PO Box 343, Locust Grove GA 30248.

# VOLUNTEER NEEDED !

Communication Committee Chairman and Webmaster, Jerry Karnes, needs your help. Anyone interested in working with him archiving TLCB related matters for posterity should contact him at [jkarnes@tlc-brotherhood.com](mailto:jkarnes@tlc-brotherhood.com) for details. The job requires minimal computer skills and time commitment and is an important job necessary to preserve our legacy.

Gary Beatty  
President

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

## Mekong Express Mail Index

Do you ever recall a *MEM* article or photo from long ago and wish you could find it again? Did you know there is an on-line index to all *MEM* articles ever published, starting with our first issue in June of 2000? Yes, there is, and it is on our wonderful TLCB website: [www.TLC-Brotherhood.com](http://www.TLC-Brotherhood.com). All articles are listed by issue year and month, by title, with the authors' names and short descriptions of the subject matter. Go take a look sometime!

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

## At the Exchange

Featured this issue (at right): the famous “elephant hide” map wallets—brought right in from Bangkok. They probably never were real elephant hide, but most of us carried them. Has yours worn out? We can bring you a replacement, for just \$15, postpaid! We have them in both black and brown, as shown at right. →

Don't forget those terrific travel mugs, and check your hat--is it time to order a new one? Just click on the BX building at: <http://tlc-brotherhood.com/wp/the-exchange/>



Try to find these wallets anywhere else in the USA—we couldn't! In fact most of our orders come from non-members who have looked everywhere else but Thailand, where ours come from.

## *From the Archives*

The following article was submitted by former TLC Brotherhood member Russ O'Neal and published in the Mekong Express Mail September, 2003 Edition. The two black and white photos appeared in the original article. The others were added for this reprinting, to provide further interest. Minor edits have been made for clarity. Ed

# *An unforgettable return to base from a SAR mission in Laos*

*By Russ O'Neal*

Prior to September 1967, the HH-3E Jolly Greens were based at Udorn RTAFB. Our normal procedure was two aircraft on alert at Lima 20 Alternate (Long Tieng) for North Vietnam search and rescues (SARs), two on alert at NKP for the Ho Chi Minh Trail and western South Vietnam, a single back-up bird and crew on alert at Udorn and the remaining two Jollys in maintenance. Although I believe we were authorized 10 aircraft, the most I can remember us having at any one time was seven.

The birds at 20 Alt departed 20 Alt at sunrise and flew to Lima 36 to pull strip alert. They would return to 20 Alt at dusk. Lima 36 was not secure at night. We rotated crews every three to four days. Air America flew the fresh crews up from Udorn unless one of the 20 Alt birds needed maintenance at Udorn. Then we would fly a fresh bird (or birds) and crews up to 20 Alt for the rotation. We basically did the same for the NKP birds, except the NKP birds would stay on alert at NKP.

In late August 1967, the first HH-53B Super Jolly Greens arrived at Udorn. It took about a month to show new crews



A "Jolly Green" at NKP. This is CH-3E serial number 67-14703, which was assigned to the 21st Special Operations Squadron from 1962 to 1972 and is now in the Museum of Aviation on Warner Robins Air Force Base, Georgia.

the ropes, and get them up to speed and on their own. So, in September 1967, the HH-3E Jolly Greens packed up and everyone moved to NKP.

In the late spring of 1967, I was pulling alert at NKP when we got a call that a Road Watch team over on the Ho Chi Minh Trail had run into a problem. Seems one of the little guys had stepped on a land mine while the team was moving the night before and needed to be evacuated for medical attention. They were east of a very heavily protected section of the Trail. We planned a safe route in and out flying through a narrow gap between

***SAR continues on page 14***



Lima Site 36 at Na Khang, Laos, LS-36, during the Indochina War. In this photo, there are two USAF Jolly Green H-3 Search and Rescue (SAR) helicopters left of center. There are also two fixed wing aircraft at center, and it looks like a helicopter off to the right. Na Khang was located in northeast Laos, not far from the North Vietnamese (NVN) border. It was just a bit north of the Plaines des Jars (PDJ), a highly embattled region, and southwest of Sam Neua, a Pathet Lao communist headquarters. Just to the east, running southwest to northeast to the NVN border is Route 6, a crucial route for the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) to move men and supplies. This was the most hotly contested area in Laos. Photo and narrative by permission from Ed Marek and his website, [www.talkingproud.com](http://www.talkingproud.com).

*SAR continued from page 13*

known gun positions to the North and South. The Intel shop kept an updated master flak map for the crews to review. Each crewmember then updated his personal flak map, based on the master in the Intel shop. Intel briefed and debriefed each crew before and after each mission. The master flak map was updated, based on crew input during mission debrief.

Our flight in was uneventful, just another leisurely flight into Laos enjoying the beautiful Lao countryside. The weather was clear with a million miles visibility. We easily located the team with the help of a friendly Nail Forward Air Controller working the area. The team was located at a high elevation so we pickled (dropped) our drop tanks to get the HH-3E light enough to hover.

A routine hoist recovery of the injured little guy was made from about 150 feet above the ground due to the thick jungle canopy in the area. When I pulled the little guy into the chopper he was holding the nastiest looking M1 carbine I had ever seen. All the varnish was worn off the stock, the rifle bluing was gone, the clip was inserted and a round was in the chamber. My PJ immediately grabbed the M1 from him and cleared the weapon. The mine had blown the little guy's heel off his right foot. He was in considerable pain.


As we turned west to head back to NKP we got a big surprise. A storm cell had moved in and was setting dab smack over our intended route back to NKP. We called NKP weather and asked them to give us an estimate of how high the cell was. Their response was about 12,000 to 13,000 feet ASL (above sea level). This was not what we wanted to hear. The HH-3E did not like flying much over 10,000 to 11,000 thousand feet ASL. If my memory serves me right, I believe the H-3's service ceiling is 12,000 feet.

Helicopters and thin air do not mix well (nose bleed altitude is anything over 50 feet above ground level (AGL) in a helicopter). We did not have enough fuel to fly north or south around the bad guys' gun positions. Remember we had just pickled our drop tanks with 400 gallons of now much-needed JP4. This was prior to the HH-3E's having in-flight refueling capability, so we could not call a tanker. We had three choices. We could fly over the bad guys and their guns (not a good choice since we already had our guy); climb to safe altitude above the highest mountain peak and punch through the cell (not good, we could see a spectacular lightning show going on inside the cell), or go over the top of the storm. Not a good choice either, but better than the alternatives, since we were now flying a very light HH-3E. Remember we had just dropped 400 gallons (2,600 lbs) of fuel.

It should be noted that Air Force regulations require that crews be on oxygen any time they fly above 10,000 feet in an un-pressurized aircraft. But hey, you gotta do what you gotta do to complete



Charter member Jim "Dusty" Henthorn dedicating CH-3E number 67-14703 after restoration at the Museum of Aviation on Warner Robins AFB, near Macon, Georgia, in 2003. Dusty was a flight mechanic/gunner in the 21st SOS at NKP in 1967 through 1969. He was a fire captain in Baltimore for many years and is now retired in Florida. He was the treasurer of the TLC Brotherhood for three terms of office. Black & white photos for the original article were furnished by Dusty Henthorn.

the mission. So up we went, and up some more and some more. At 12,000 feet we were still below the top of the cell. So we climbed some more, our little HH-3 was really struggling. At 13,000 we were still below the top, so up some more. Now the ole gal was really complaining, shaking, and vibrating. At just under 14,000 feet we reached the top of the cell and turned toward NKP. It took us about 45 minutes to reach the other side of the cell, clear weather, and start down out of nose bleed altitude. So went another day in the life of a Jolly Green Rescue Crew during the secret war. 

Below, A1-E "Sandies" escort CH-3 Jolly Green on a search and rescue mission in Laos. Photo from Pinterest.



# Commando Club & LS 85 50th Anniversary Memorial Event March 2018

*By William Petersen (Willie Pete)*

*TLCB Board*

*TLCB Public Relations*

*TLCB Vietnam War Commemoration Chairman*

On 11 March 1968, there was a sudden attack by North Vietnamese commandos on the Commando Club covert USAF radar site in northeast Laos. The site had been providing precision bomb guidance to USAF F-105 strike aircraft hitting strategic targets in North Vietnam since early November 1967. Of the 16 Commando Club technicians, 12 were designated KIA, killed by a secret North Vietnamese Dac Cong 20-man commando force. The Dac Cong were supported by approximately 3,000 infantry, one company of artillery, and one battalion of Pathet Lao artillery. Protecting the LS 85 mountain and STOL air strip were approximately 1,000 Hmong, a small Royal Lao unit, and a Thai PARU force. These allies were under the direction of two CIA advisers and a USAF Combat Controller. This American loss was the biggest loss of Air Force ground combatants in the entire Vietnam War.

Their combat success, valor, and loss of life will be honored at the Barnes Center for Enlisted Education at Air University, Maxwell AFB-Gunter Annex. The Barnes Center is using the Commando Club experience as an example of leadership for current USAF NCOs.

In mid-March, the Barnes Center will host a commemoration event which will honor the men of Commando Club and Lima Site 85. This notes the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of Lima

Site 85. On Saturday 10 March, there will be the 19th Annual 5K Run named, this year, after CMSgt Richard Etchberger Commando Club, whose heroic lifesaving actions earned him the Medal of Honor. On Sunday there will be a church service, and on Monday there will be a reception at 0830, followed by the unveiling of the monument commemorating the Commando Club team, with a family luncheon afterwards, hosted by Col. Jason L. Hanover, Commander of the Barnes Center for Enlisted Education and CMSgt Emily Shade, Director, Air Force Enlisted Heritage Research Institute.

The Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood will have three members participating in the memorial event.

**President Gary Beatty** will be working with Barnes Center leadership building bridges toward future relationships.

**Membership Chair, Gerry Frazier**, who spent four years in Thailand and Laos during the Vietnam War, will be looking for ways to increase our membership, which is so appropriate given that Commando Club personnel were secretly based at Udorn RTAFB, and operated from their mountaintop site on Phou Pha Thi, Houaphan Province, Laos.

**Vietnam War Commemoration Chair, William Peterson**, will work with the school leadership on archival discussions and with the Commando Club families, some of whom are

personal friends and colleagues. Peterson worked with Commando Club during its five months, and in April and May of 1968, flew Rivet Joint (SIGINT and Radar) missions over Houaphan Province.

To memorialize our TLCB presence at this event, I created a wall plaque which Gary will present to our hosts. We have several goals: Honor the men of Commando Club and honor their families as well, establish a relationship with Air University and the Barnes Center, open a gateway for new members, and document our presence.

During the last portion of the five-hour firefight, an Air America Helicopter



Phou Pha Thi, a Northern Laos karst mountain, which was the site of LS-85 and the Commando Club TACAN and Skyspot operation. Photo from Wikipedia.

**EVENT continues on page 16**



Commando Club installation on top of the mountain. The Battle of LS-85 and other details were declassified in 1998, according to Wikipedia. Photo from Wikipedia.

## Maxwell Background

Air University, Montgomery, Alabama has numerous centers for advanced military education. For officers, it has Squadron Officers School (Captains), Air Command & Staff College (Majors) and the Air War College (Senior Field Grade Officers). There is a center for the advancement of Enlisted Personnel including the Enlisted Heritage Research Institute, the Barnes Center for Enlisted Education, and the Senior NCO Academy. These colleges and centers are located at Maxwell AFB and the Gunter Annex. There are also a variety of technical courses offered for Air Force Specialty Codes—"How to \_\_\_\_\_." This is a place where the past, present, and future coalesce. I was privileged to graduate from two courses offered for the BOMARC computer guided nuclear surface-to-air missile, and I graduated from Squadron Officers School.

Our TLCB President, Gary



Beatty, was assigned there PCS during his career.

### EVENT *continued from page 15*

suddenly came to the western ridge and made a daring rescue of four Commando Club technicians: Capt Stan Sliz, SSgt Bill Husband, SSgt John Daniel, and CMSgt Dick Etchberger. As they pulled away from the mountain, the enemy fired nine rounds, one of which hit the Chief who died en route to Lima Site 36 where a fixed wing aircraft was prepared to take them to the hospital at Udorn. An hour later, Jolly Green 67 was able to pick up the remaining technician, SSgt Jack Starling.

The last item to note: After 50 years we still do not have full accountability on four Commando Club men: MSgt James H. Calfee (Lt Col Blanton's Crew Chief that night), TSgt Willis R. Hall (Crypto Tech), SSgt Don F. Worley (Radar Tech), A1C David S. Price (Radar Tech).

John Daniel and I worked on several details of Commando Club activity on the mountain in February. Unfortunately, John has some medical problems which prevent him from attending the March event. It's really a shame because he is the last survivor, and we all would have benefited greatly from his presence.

In honor of those who have been confirmed killed in battle, we list their names here:

Lt Col Bill Blanton, Commander  
 CMSgt Richard Etchberger, Crew Chief  
 TSgt Melvin Holland, Radio Tech  
 TSgt Patrick Shannon, Plotting Board Operator  
 TSgt Donald Springsteadah, Radar Tech  
 TSGT Herbert Kirk, Teletype Repair  
 SSgt Henry Gish, Radar Tech  
 SSgt James Davis, Data Computer Operator

To memorialize our TLCB presence at this event I created a wall plaque which Gary will present to our hosts. We have several goals: Honor the men of Commando Club and honor their families as well, establish a relationship with Air University and the Barnes Center, open a gateway for new members, and document our presence. The image of the plaque is below

