

# MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



*The newsletter of the Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood, Inc. Volume 22, issue 1*

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

## Together on Hallowed Ground

*The 2021 REUNION is **ON**: October 14—16, Gettysburg, PA!*

With the Covid scourge fast receding into history, the Brotherhood is ready to come back together face-to-face at last, for all who wish to and are able. The board had wanted to keep Newport, RI as the site, but found that the hotels there had priced themselves out of reach in the meantime. After considering some other options, the board of directors chose to hold this year's annual meeting and reunion in Gettysburg, PA. We have contracted with a fine hotel, the Wyndham, which is at the eastern end of town and right off US Route 15 on the Lincoln Highway, US route 30. We plan to provide interesting tours outside the hotel as well as some really good presentations on site. And of course, we will have the ever-popular Friday night Assistance Auction and dinner, the Saturday night banquet and memorial service, and the Saturday annual meeting.

### **Gettysburg: Not Just a Battlefield**

Those who are familiar with Gettysburg, know that it is definitely a "tourist" town, inevitable because of its famous battlefield. National parkland practically surrounds the commercial and residential areas, which local merchants both love and hate! But within that area, and a few places outside it, are many other things to see and do, starting with great shopping right off the square downtown. Also, there is the Eisenhower Farm, where Ike and Mamie lived out their retirement from public life, which is now open for interesting tours. It's a comfortable home, frozen in the 1950s.

### **Why This Town is Important**

For those *not* too familiar with Civil War history, here in a nutshell is why this particular battlefield is so famous. At the beginning of July 1863, the Confederacy met the Union here in a three-day battle, that was the turning point of the whole war. It was the only major battle on Union soil, the furthest north that Confederate forces fought, and resulted in the third most deaths

of any battle our nation has ever fought. After-battle burials and cleanup placed a gruesome burden on the community. Governor Curtin saw the post-battle horror and invited the other Union states to re-bury the dead in a "national" cemetery here. They scheduled a November dedication, at which the famous orator Edwin Everett spoke for two hours. Out of courtesy, the governor also invited President Lincoln to attend and give "a few appropriate remarks," which took three minutes and are now known as "Lincoln's Gettysburg Address." After the war, veterans, states, cities, and many others have wanted to place monuments to commemorate their units and special events in the war. An agreement was reached that Gettysburg would be the **primary site for commemorative Civil War monuments**, which explains why there are over 1300 of them here, rather than spread out to other battlefields like Antietam and Shiloh.

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## Editor's Notebook

In addition to the welcome news that TLCB will hold a Reunion later this year in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, there are two other items on which I would like to comment.

Beginning on page 7 is the wrap-up of the story of the radar site in Phitsanulok, Thailand. It is a collaborative tale, told by three members who were there at different stages of its short history: Paul Hauser, Darl Stephenson, and I. Two of us, Darl and I, have been back there fairly recently, he in 2019 and I in 2012. So, besides being a history of the site, it qualifies as a "Then and Now" feature. Hopefully, a few of you will recall that the *MEM* introduced this idea in the March 2020 issue with an outstanding piece by John Lorenzen, "Korat RTAFB: Then and Now." The hope was that others who have returned to Thailand would offer to do the same about their experiences.

Has not happened, so far. Warning, I know that many of you have found your way back, and I know who you are, and I am coming after you.

The second notable item is "Listening to the Red Chinese Pilots at Ramasun Station" by Bob Wheatley, which is a *From the Archives* article, originally having appeared in the September 2003 *MEM*. I would estimate that more than half of the current TLCB membership has joined since 2003, and there is a wealth of material in those older issues that would be of great interest to them. Additionally, Bob Wheatley did some editing to his Ramasun story. I would like to hear from members about some articles they might remember from our earlier years that they think are worth revisiting. The message here is *let me hear from you*.

John Harrington

Editor, MEM

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### Days of Yore!

At left, *MEM* "stuffer" and mailer John Duffin reading names of MIA in the TLC region, at the 2002 TLC Brotherhood reunion, which was in Manassas, Virginia.

Jim Roth, left, and Bob Norway are holding up the banner. This was on the National Mall, very close to the Vietnam Memorial, known as "The Wall." Photo taken by Bill Tilton, at the request of John Duffin, who furnished this copy.

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Brotherhood page*

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**Tax ID #54-1932649**

### **Board of Directors and Committee Chairmen 2021-2022, showing year of term end**

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### **The Mekong Express Mail**

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Via website—uses PayPal, which accepts credit card payments.  
By check—make checks payable to "TLC Brotherhood, Inc."  
Write payment purpose and member number on check.

#### **Mail to:**

**TLC Brotherhood  
P.O. Box 60  
Aspers, PA 17304**

**Reunion 2021: Gettysburg, PA**



Downtown Gettysburg has many unusual stores and sights.

### **REUNION** *continued from page 1.*

In another war, the Second World War, there were some **POW camps** in and around this area. (We expect to have a special authority tell us all about these during the Reunion).

Gettysburg is also the seat of **Adams County**, which has a rich history apart from the Civil War and is today the largest apple producer in the state, as well as the home of a number of familiar brands of fruit products. The county is part dairy and field crop land and part rolling hill country with a type of shale loam soil that is ideal for apple growing.

### **Getting to Gettysburg**

By highway, Gettysburg has several major Interstates within a half hour (I-81, I-76, and I-83) and near-Interstate quality US-15 running North and South. The old Lincoln Highway, US-30, goes through the middle of town and has few stretches where the speed limit exceeds 45mph. There is no rail or bus service. The good news is that the D.C. and Baltimore airports are within reasonable driving distance, and the airport that serves the state capital of Harrisburg has a surprising number of direct connections, and is a much shorter drive. Furthermore, the fares to Harrisburg are not exceptionally higher than they are to the major hubs.



A very small part of the vast battlefield that surrounds the town on all sides.

### **Transportation While Here**

For those who drive, the hotel has ample free parking. Gettysburg has a shuttle bus system of several routes (Rabbit Transit). One of these has a stop at the Marriott, right next to the Wyndham (the hotels have the same owner). The various routes all connect at the Railroad Station on Carlisle Street, about a half block north of the square, where interesting stores line the main streets. The shuttle also makes a stop at the upscale discount shops. The 2021 Reunion Committee will provide transportation to outside special tours and events as our schedule is worked out. See the September *MEM* for further information.

### **The Weather**

Usually, October weather is very pleasant in this region, where winter doesn't begin until December, and there is a chance that fall foliage may be spectacular still, up on South Mountain to the west. Bring sweaters and light jackets, just in case.

### **Your Gettysburg Address**

The **Hotel Wyndham Gettysburg** is located in the *Gateway Gettysburg* campus, at:

**95 Presidential Cir, Gettysburg, PA 17325.**

Hotel phone number: **(717) 339-0020**

**Identify your group as the TLC Brotherhood** to get our group room rate of \$129 plus sales tax. "Central Reservations" and other reservation services may not recognize this group.

Our contract includes three "**shoulder dates**" before and after the reunion period, at the group rate.

Cutoff date: **You MUST reserve by September 14 in order to qualify for the group rate.**



The hotel Wyndham Gettysburg

**NOTE:** The committee strongly recommends reserving as soon as possible. The hotel is experiencing strong interest in post-Covid travel and we have a limited block of guaranteed rooms. (You may cancel up to 24 hours before your stay, if necessary).

### **Area Attractions:**

If you have time to expand your reunion trip to enjoy some of the attractions of South-Central Pennsylvania and beyond, here are some ideas.

**Army War College:** Only 30 miles north of Gettysburg is the Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, which has important

**REUNION** *continues on page 4*

**REUNION** *continued*  
from page 3

Revolutionary War history. There is a military museum park on the post, which you may see from I-81 by Exit 49 as you pass Carlisle.

**Harrisburg, state capital sites:** Fifteen miles further north, is a beautiful state capital with several attractions, including the Pennsylvania History Museum, the Civil War Museum, and the lavish State Capitol

**Rockville Bridge:** The beautiful, longest stone-arch bridge *in the World*, that crosses the Susquehanna to Marysville, is still in heavy use today. It was once the four-track crossing of the



Enjoy a pleasant meal and perhaps some local wine at one of the restaurants on and just off the square, in Gettysburg.



The famous Rockville Bridge, upriver from the I-81 crossing at Harrisburg.

Besides the 80 events each year, it is the site of the largest indoor agricultural show *in the World* in January.

**Hershey:** Located just east of Harrisburg, you can tour the famous chocolate factory, and enjoy Hershey Park amusement center, etc. East of Hershey is Lebanon, home of delicious Lebanon bologna!

**Hanover:** Southeast of Gettysburg is the **snack food capital of the U.S.** Both Snyder's and Utz have tours of their pretzel and potato chip factories, and the city has some great antique stores.

**York:** Our fourth US capital (of nine) is not only an

The Pennsylvania Capitol Building in Harrisburg.

Pennsylvania Railroad's Main Line to Pittsburgh and West.

**The Enola railroad classification yard:** It is on the south side of the river from Harrisburg and was the largest *in the World* from the 1920s up through 1956 and is today operated by Norfolk Southern. In 1953 the yard handled over 11,000 rail cars per day and now has 79 tracks and capacity to hold over 5000 cars.

**Farm Show Complex:** Check for events at the Harrisburg landmark, which has 24 acres under one roof!





Evening on the square in Gettysburg. There are many interesting restaurants and shops here, such as the artifact shop shown at right..

important industrial city, but also has a quaint historic downtown area.

**Harley Davidson motorcycle factory:** In York, you can take an interesting tour (reservations recommended). It is amazing how they have implemented the use of robots!

**Lancaster:** Further east, it is in the center of **Pennsylvania Dutch country**, surrounded by some of the most beautiful and prosperous farmland in the country, where topsoil can run ten and fifteen feet deep, and Amish horse carriages are a familiar site on the country roads.

**Strasburg:** Located beyond Lancaster, this is a small quaint town, with its railroad rides and the unmatched Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania.

**Shanksville, Flight 93 Monument:** If you are traveling to or from the west, the 9/11 monument to the heroic passengers

Below, some Amish farmers in Lancaster County still use the old implements and horses on their prosperous farms every day..



and crew of United Flight 93 is about 100 miles west.

**Maryland:** Only 45 miles to the south (an hour's drive) is **Antietam battlefield**, where America had the most single-day casualties in our history, anywhere. It is said to be the best-preserved Civil War battlefield. The battle outcome, while not considered decisive, gave Lincoln the political capital he needed to publish the Emancipation Proclamation.

*NEWS: Watch for the June issue for specific details on schedule, registration, and events. We will also publish reunion details on [www.tlc-brotherhood.com](http://www.tlc-brotherhood.com), and on the Official TLC Brotherhood FaceBook page.*



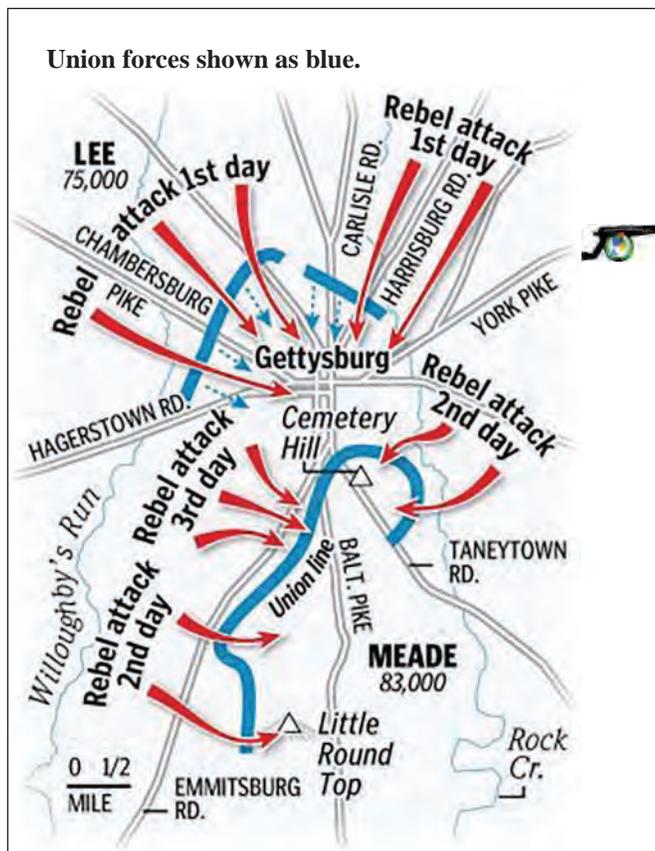
# Short Story of the Battle of Gettysburg

by Bill Tilton

In the first part of 1863 the Confederate armies, under General Robert E. Lee, were enjoying one success after another, despite having fewer troops and far less supplies. But all the important action was on Confederate soil. Full of exuberance and overconfidence, Lee decided to make a strike deep into the North, perhaps to New York or Philadelphia, in hopes that the Union would react by agreeing to allow them to be a separate country. They forged across the Pennsylvania border up what is now the I-81 corridor to Chambersburg. While advance units went as far as Carlisle and Harrisburg (and then came back south to Gettysburg), Lee moved the main army east toward Gettysburg because there was a shoe factory there. The Army of the Potomac, recently placed under the command of General George Gordon Meade, was moving north from mid-Maryland at Emmitsburg, trying to locate the invading Confederate army. On July 1st advanced scouts of the two armies made contact west of Gettysburg and the fight was on.



Artist's depiction of Pickett's Charge meeting Union Troops at "The Angle," on Emmitsburg Road, where Lee's determined forces were repelled with heavy losses. Later, General Pickett said to Lee: "General, I have no division." They say he was bitter the rest of his life.



Map shows how close the 3-day battle raged to the town, which has grown very little since then. Our reunion hotel is located approximately where the cannon is shown.

The battle raged on all day and into the evening on the 1st of July and again on the 2nd, and as the 3rd dawned, the Union occupied a low ridge south and east of the town and the Rebels faced them in a long line to the west. Lee's instinct to attack the center was well known by this time, and his own generals cautioned him not to do it. Meade was not nearly so forceful nor so clever, but his subordinates helped him forge a plan to strengthen the center of his defenses. Sure enough, it was a total disaster for Lee, in a frontal attack known forever since as "Pickett's Charge." This failed uphill storming of a well-defended stone wall position that followed one of the longest and loudest cannonading in history, overwhelmed all the lesser successes the Army of Northern Virginia had enjoyed, and on a dreary, rainy 4th of July, Lee retreated his tattered army back to Maryland and then Virginia, carrying the wounded and their remaining supplies in a train of wagons that was 25 miles long.

This made Gettysburg the only major battle fought in the North, and it became known as the High Watermark of the Confederacy, even though the war did not end until April of 1865, nearly two years later. If Meade's army was not so battered at Gettysburg, or if Grant had been there, and they had been able to attack Lee again on the 4th of July, the Civil War probably would have ended in 1863. Six months after Gettysburg, President Lincoln put the entire Union Army under General Grant, who chose to attach his command to General Meade's Army of the Potomac, with which he hounded Lee from battle to battle down to Richmond, then Petersburg, and finally to Appomattox Courthouse for the surrender and virtual ending of the war.

# The Radar Site at Phitsanulok, Part Two

## Update – 2019 and 2012

*Editor's Note; In the December MEM, we published a three-part article by TLCB members who had served at Phitsanulok, Thailand, (Det 8 of the 621st Tactical Air Control Squadron) between 1966 and 1970, during the site's beginning and its closing. Two of us have returned there in the past decade and the MEM is finishing up the Phitsanulok saga here. Darl Stephenson returned to Thailand in 2019. As the editor, I had asked him to write about that journey; however, it was also about the time that we, Darl Stephenson, Paul Hauser, and I, began working on the larger article. So, what follows is Darl's original article about his return to Thailand. And I have inserted some comments of my own, mainly relating to my return in 2012. FYI, I wrote a longer article, "Welcome (Back) to Phitsanulok," in the September 2012 MEM.*

## Return to Phitsanulok

By Darl Stephenson

In 2019, I returned to Thailand for the first time in 48 years. The impetus for the trip was really almost an accident. I had started to clean out my basement and came across all of my color slides that I had taken over the years from places where I had been stationed in the Air Force and where I had worked and traveled. I had slides from my boyhood, my assignment in Germany, my work as a contractor in Saudi Arabia, and numerous other travel trips. But when I got to the slides from Thailand, they just jumped out at me. I realized what a photogenic place it was and all the memories started to flood back. I had had some fleeting ideas of returning over the years. I had my favorite Thai restaurants because I loved the food, but other pursuits always got into the way. This time I made the decision. I had to return to the "Land of Smiles."

I immediately started to plan the trip back, coming up with an itinerary in my mind. The very first place that I thought of was Phitsanulok where I was stationed when I first got to Thailand. I had always had a special connection to this town and my assignment at Det. 8, 621st Tactical Control Squadron, known as "Dora Control." There had been the camaraderie of a small site and being in a Thai town that was not a "GI town" associated with the large U.S. bases. I also planned to go to a couple of places that I had not gotten to visit when I was stationed there, especially the Bridge on the River Kwai and Chiang Mai. Of course, there would be the stops in Bangkok going into and out of the country.

During this time, I had also joined a few veterans' Face Book pages and made friends with several who lived in Thailand or had visited frequently. They were a great help in answering questions and making recommendations. I also got ideas on travel from the site, "Thai Railways Past and Present," since I



Darl Stephenson and Dwight Menard in Phitsanulok 2019.  
Photos from Darl unless noted.

wanted to do as much travel as I could by train, one of my favorite ways to wander. Members of that site were especially helpful.

My best source of information was my friend Dwight Menard. He and I had been stationed at Ubon together and I had maintained contact with him over the years. Dwight had been on the original 5th TAC team that had opened Det. 8 and sometimes wintered at Phitsanulok with his wife. He had also taught English at Naresuan University and still knew people in the area. Most importantly, Dwight knew Mr. Singh who had been the site translator when the site was open. He also had a friend who went by the name of "Ringo," who I believe was Mr. Singh's assistant. I had hoped that I might be able to find some of our house girls who took such good care of us, but could not. Dwight gave me suggestions for hotels for both Bangkok and

Phitsanulok, train schedules, and other information.

I arrived in Bangkok and stayed a couple of days to acclimate myself and take a one-day trip to Kanchanaburi to the Bridge on the River Kwai. I saw the usual sights there including the bridge, the very well-kept allied war cemetery, one private museum, and then the museum right across from the cemetery, which is managed by the allied POW association. As I passed the library, I noticed someone working, so I entered and introduced myself. He was an Australian researcher and we struck up a conversation. When I was stationed at Phitsanulok, I heard a story about a POW who had escaped from the Japanese and had been befriended and hidden by Thais in Phitsanulok. The story went on that after the war he had returned and had reunited with the people who had helped him. It was a nice

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## RETURN *continued from page 7.*

story, but I was not curious enough at the time to further pursue it or get a reference for it. The story was that he had written an article or book. So, I used the opportunity to ask the researcher about the story. He told me that he had not heard of such a specific story but informed me that the Japanese had transported prisoners all along the railroad, and toward the end of the war had taken prisoners north to escape the allied advance. He said that such a story was very probable, but really had no more useful information.

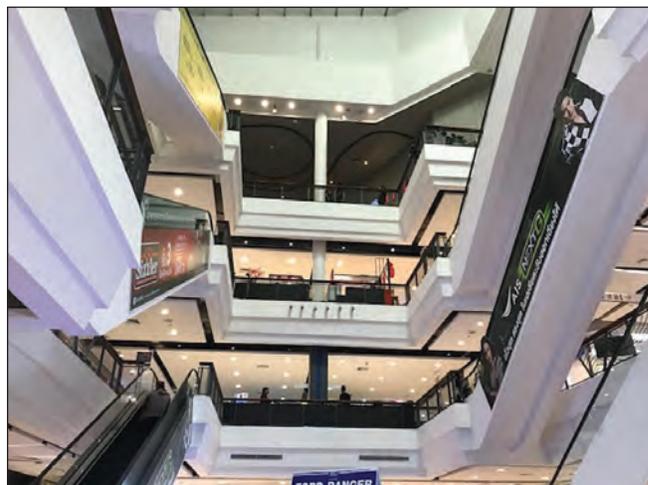
John Harrington: *The site of the RTAFB and our radar operations had been a Japanese POW camp during World War II. We had a master sergeant, at least in his late 40s and perhaps in his early 50s, who was our site medic (unfortunately I can't recall his name). I was told that he had been a U.S. Army ranger and had been parachuted into the area during the war to hook up with Thai resistance units. He was captured but escaped, and was hidden by friendly Thais. I was somewhat skeptical, but his story was confirmed by an article in Air Force Magazine. (I have tried to find the issue in the magazine's online archives, but for some reason, the years 1965 to 1968 are not available on the site). The medic was a rather prickly guy, generally considering most of the rest of as a bunch of wimps. He rotated out of Thailand sometime in late 1967. Ironically, while there he lived with the girl who sold wood carvings on the site. He claimed that she was the daughter of some Thais who helped him hide back in the WWII.)*

Also at the museum, I met a French couple and their private guide who had taken a day trip up to the area from Bangkok. As we talked, I mentioned that I had been stationed in Thailand during the Vietnam War and they seemed totally amazed, and at this point started to thank me for what the U.S. had done as well as my service during the war. All of a sudden, I was being treated almost as a celebrity, a totally unexpected development. After all these decades the Vietnam War may be looked at in an entirely different light by many people. Eventually, we parted ways and I bought a book on the railroad and left to return to Bangkok. It was quite a day.

The next day I left for Phitsanulok by train, from the classic old railroad station of Hua Lamphong. I ended up taking a 3rd class train because all the faster, second class trains were already booked. But it was the cool season and the open windows of 3rd class provide a much better venue for taking pictures, plus you still get the ambiance of vendors hawking their wares up

and down the aisles as the train goes along. One change from the "old days" is that I did not see many trackside vendors. Passing through Takhli, I noticed a radar site on a small karst mountain. I knew the radar site at Takhli was gone so I surmise that this site was a replacement by the Thai Air Force. It would be a better location for an air defense site than Dora was.

I arrived at Phitsanulok and Dwight met me at the station and arranged a Tuk-Tuk, open three-wheel taxi, to take me to the Topland Hotel, centrally located in downtown. One of the great things about modern travel to Thailand is that you can make all your own bookings online, which you could not do in earlier days, even if the city had the number of modern hotels it has now. After checking in, I explored the very nice department



Atrium in the Topland Hotel Phitsanulok, 2019

store and mini mall which is attached and adjacent to the hotel. Once again, I was just amazed that such conveniences exist now. I was prepared for the McDonalds, 7-11s, KFCs and other multinational businesses, but I was just floored by the modern shopping malls that are present in any decent size city today. Dwight made arrangements to meet me in the morning to meet with Mr. Singh and begin our tour of the area.

JH: *When I returned to Phitsanulok in 2012, with my wife Eileen, we also stayed in the Topland Hotel, which was indistinguishable from most U.S. luxury hotels. Incredible, since back in '68, the only hotel that westerners stayed in was the Hoa Far, which did not have air conditioning, just over head fans.*

*In my time in Phitsanulok, the site interpreter was Praphat "Pat" Kraisornsilp. The manager of the Thai American lounge was a Mr. Singh. I seem to recall that near the end of my tour,*

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

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

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

### ***Changed your address? ...eMail?***

If so, please let us know so that we can update the official database and ensure that *MEM* issues and official mail get addressed properly. You can send an email to [BillTilton@gmail.com](mailto:BillTilton@gmail.com), or a note in the mail to TLC Brotherhood, PO Box 60, Aspers, PA 17304.

*Pat may have been leaving, and there were discussions about Singh, who spoke excellent English, taking over that job.*

Dwight met me at the hotel and we made the short walk to Mr. Singh's store. The old downtown area of Phitsanulok has not changed much and the shops are much as they were before with some upgrades and newer signs. We walked into Mr. Singh's store and were graciously greeted by a family member who took us back to an area where we could sit and talk. I did not remember Mr. Singh but this is understandable since I was an operations guy and we did not have anything to do with the local business the base had to manage. We got coffee and started talking. Some of it was about Phitsanulok, but as with so many conversations among old guys, things kind of drifted off into talking about our aches and pains. In fact, Mr. Singh could not accompany us on our tour of the town because he had a bad knee and was having surgery on it shortly. Eventually, "Ringo" came in and we were introduced to our "guide" for the rest of the day. If I got the story correct, Ringo was actually an assistant to Mr. Singh during our time there.

Ringo had a car and his wife accompanied us on our trip. We first went to the Clock Tower on a roundabout downtown. This is a pretty famous landmark of the town and would be remembered by Phitsanulok veterans. After a couple of pictures, we got back into the car and headed south through town, eventually getting on Sanambin Road which

*site where it had been, but the building was gone and the land was empty. I would guess that some new version of Salubys has since been built.*

We stopped at the gate and were met by the very polite and military-looking gate guards. After some conversation between Ringo and the guards, we were allowed on the base with the guards giving us a salute. I felt really honored and returned the salute. Dwight later told me the proper protocol when in civvies would have been to "wai." We drove down the road to the former Dora site, which is now just part of the parking area for the transport wing which is based there. I did not attempt to



Site radar tower 2012. Photo by John Harrington.



Darl Stephenson in town center 2019

leads to the present Thai Air Force base. The road is much more developed than when I was there. In 1969 there were few structures along the way out of town. The old JUSMAG compound is still there but is now used by the Thai Army. The old bar/hotel called "Salubys" is now a regular restaurant we were told.

*JH: Salubys opened sometime in 1968. We partied there frequently. In 2012, when I asked our driver, he took me to the*

*take photos knowing that any kind of photography on a foreign military base can get you in trouble.*

*JH: On our first try, my wife and I were not able to get onto the site of our radar base. We did not have any local people helping. Two days later, accompanied by a local businessman, who turned out to be the son-in-law of my old landlord, we did get on. At that time, it still was an active radar site, and I recognized many of the buildings and much of the layout. I had brought pictures from 1968 with me and the young Thai captain who escorted us was fascinated. Of course, he hadn't even been born in 1968. As for taking pictures, I never even thought about any impropriety and shot away. I have since learned from Darl's friend, Dwight Menard, that the old radar operation is no longer active.*

Eventually we returned to the gate and continued back into town and over to the Nan River and Wat Phra Sri Ratanamahatath with its much revered Phra Phutta Chinnarat Buddha image. Even on non holidays and weekends this temple is exceptionally busy with pilgrims from all over Thailand and elsewhere because the Chinnarat Buddha is the second most famous in the country. Ringo and his wife remained in the car and Dwight and I went into the grounds, but Dwight also begged off going into the temple. I removed my shoes, paid the asked-for fee and went in respectfully. The temple was crowded with people and I found a friendly Australian who obliged me by taking my photo.

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After leaving the temple we walked along the Nan River for a while. Sadly, at least to me, the houseboats that used to line the river are gone. A previous mayor had decreed them a source of pollution and they were banned. They were part of the charm of Phitsanulok and the river used to also have street-side vendors.



The Nan River in 2019.

Now, it is much more park like and most people would deem it more beautiful, but it seems empty without the houses.

From the wat, we proceeded north of town to the suburbs for lunch at the very large, three-story Central Mall. I was just dumbfounded as we entered. It rivals any mall in the U.S. that is still doing well. I could not even imagine the town would have such a place back in 1969 because the only thing that could be called a mall was the local open-air market. Central Plaza has 154 stores or services and six major anchor stores. We ate lunch at a Black Canyon restaurant in the mall. Black Canyon is a chain that is Thai owned and has restaurants and coffee shops. Although kind of a Thai fast food, it was very good. Dwight suggested that I try Gang Hung Lay which is a pork curry dish. It is a northern Thai recipe and the curry is mild. I really like it, and unfortunately have not found it at any stateside Thai restaurants.

After this, Ringo dropped us off at the Red Cross Fair across the Nan River. This is somewhat like a county fair without the major rides. Dwight gave me a little security warning before we went in because with the very large crowds, pick pockets might be a problem. We wandered around through the shops and food vendors and once again I passed on getting any bugs to eat at one stall, so we went by.

When I was stationed there I may have attended this fair with a girl I knew and another lieutenant and his puying. It was one of the more memorable nights of my tour. This lieutenant was known as being quite a character, and before the night was over I had a great story that I could tell judiciously to the right audiences the rest of my life.

*JH: Darl, you really ought to tell it.*

After the fair we walked back to the Topland, passing through the ruins of Wat Wihan Thong dating to the 15th century. After returning to the Topland, we got some refreshing soft drinks in the casual bar and just caught up on events over years and traded stories of our time “in country.”

The next day we went out to Naresuan University a few

miles west of the city. This is a completely new facility with an impressive series of academic buildings, a hospital, and of course, dormitories for the students. We visited several of the buildings and Dwight occasionally met someone from his teaching days there. This took up most of the day and we returned and I rested up for the rest of my trip.



Samlor for tourists 2019

The next day it was time to board the train again and head north. The railroad station has changed little from back in 1969 and the preserved North British steam locomotive still sits on the circle in front of the station. Once again, I would be

**RETURN** *continues next page.*

boarding a 3rd class set of railcars for the beautiful trip north, initially through Chiang Mai, continuing through rice fields, and eventually climbing up through mountains, passing through Khun Tun National Park and going through the 1000-meter-long Khun Thun tunnel.

I stayed three days in Chiang Mai taking in the sights and enjoying the walking market on Sunday evening in the old town. Finally, I flew back to Bangkok for a final couple of days before returning home.

I was of course amazed at the new Thailand and in particular how prosperous Phitsanulok had become. It is harder to find the things that we knew when stationed there but it is still possible. There is still street food and very cheap restaurants you can visit. The major constant for me was how friendly the Thai people are, even in Bangkok. One morning in the hotel I greeted the maid with a Sah Wah Dee, Kopf and a wai. She returned the Sah Wah Dee but with "Sir" attached to the end. It was a very nice touch.

I told quite a few people that I had been stationed in Thailand all those many years ago during the war and they all seemed really appreciative of our being there. Perhaps this is just the

usual politeness, but I sensed the sentiments were real. Since the American presence, the Thais have seen the influx of the Europeans, and more recently, tourists from China and other Asian countries. We lived there long enough to be more than tourists and for the most curious of us, to absorb the culture and get to know Thai friends.

*JH: Besides my old landlord's son, Pramote, and his wife, Toy, in Phitsanulok, I met no one during the six days we were there who knew there had been an American radar site there from 1966 to 1971. In fact, if you look up much about the Thai military online, you'll find very little about the Thai role in the Vietnam War, particularly about the large U.S. presence, over 50,000 in 1968. It seems that after the fall of South Vietnam, then Cambodia, and then Laos in 1975 and 1976, the Thais were frightened about North Vietnam's plans for Thailand and basically scrubbed our presence and their role out of their history.*

Sadly, my time there came to an end but I am now hoping to return after some other travel plans. It was, in so many ways a return to "home." Yes, you can do it again.



## Buy from the Exchange and help the kids.



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### TLC Brotherhood, Inc., Official Notice: Nominations for 2021 Board of Directors Election

Nominations for Election of Officers and Board Members at Large will be open **April 1 thru May 15, 2021.**

Positions up for election are:

Vice-President, Secretary, Chaplain, and two Members-at-Large.

Submit nominations to the Nominating Committee:

Ken Schmidt: [Kschmidt\\_97@yahoo.com](mailto:Kschmidt_97@yahoo.com) or,  
Mike Vale: [mevale762@gmail.com](mailto:mevale762@gmail.com)

### Dues were DUE

In this issue, we have enclosed a thank-you card for those whose dues are paid at least through 2021. Your "paid-through" date is noted on the card. Please advise the treasurer if you think your dues "paid through" date is incorrect.

Email: [Treasurer@TLC-Brotherhood.com](mailto:Treasurer@TLC-Brotherhood.com). (Unpaid membership is dropped after March 31st, per TLCB Bylaws.)

# Listening to the Red Chinese pilots at Ramasun Station

by Bob Wheatley

**Editor's note:** This article originally appeared in the September 2003 issue of the MEM. The author, Robert "Bob" Wheatley, gave permission to republish, but requested that he be allowed to make a few revisions. Permission granted!

When I arrived at Ramasun Station [Thailand] in December, 1967, based on the images in the news footage I'd seen coming out of Nam, I was expecting to see tin roof hooches and dirt streets and outdoor latrines. Instead, Ramasun Station was way beyond anything I might have envisioned in my wildest dreams. It looked almost like some apartment complex back in



In front of Ramasun's HQ building, just inside the front gate, the only gate as far as I know. It was a secure TS site, after all.

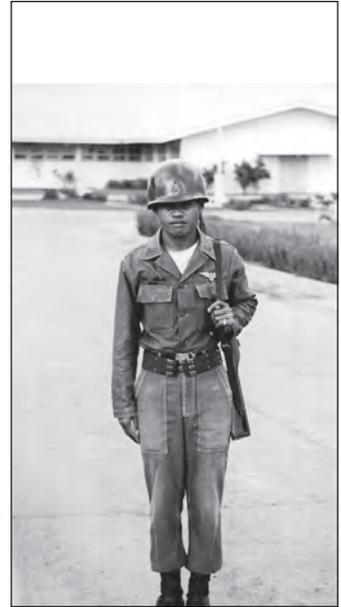
the States, and it really seemed out of place here in this remote site. Stepping off the shuttle bus from Udorn in the blazing late morning sun, I just stared in amazement for moment. "So, this would be my home for the next twelve months—Not bad! Not bad at all!" I thought. "How had I managed to get so damned lucky?!"

The site, located at the fringes of the small town Nong Soong, was situated a dozen clicks or so south of the city of Udorn Thani, just off the Friendship Highway. The 7th Radio Research Field Station, as it was otherwise known, was an Army post, run by the Army Security Agency. I and the other airmen who were stationed there were part of an Air Force detachment of the 6922nd Security Wing. We were given separate living quarters from the Army troops. I was pleasantly surprised to find that all of the barracks were really quite nice concrete block air-conditioned buildings, a far cry from the hooches I'd seen when I landed at the Udorn Air Base! In fact, all of the buildings on post were air-

Right, the house girls during Songkran, 1968. As you can see they were soaked to the skin, but so was I. I took this after they had chased me down and gave me a good drenching. I felt honored they included me in their tradition.

conditioned. "What luxury!" I thought. Air conditioning was something we would have killed for on my previous tour on Okinawa! I'm almost ashamed to mention the tennis courts, swimming pool, bowling alley, and indoor theater. I understand that a few months before my arrival, Ramasun Station had been just a tent city. As they say, "Timing is everything!"

The barracks, like the native homes I'd seen on the bus trip from Udorn, were built on pylons several feet off the ground. And aside from keeping the bottom floor dry during Monsoon, I'm sure it helped to keep out the snakes as well. All the streets on post were paved in concrete and had streetlights for safe walking at night. It was important to be able to see where you were stepping, as it was not uncommon for the Cobras and "Two Steppers" to crawl out onto the pavement to warm themselves in the cool of the night.



Thai soldier who guarded the gate and checked passes. He was happy to pose for a mug shot.

**Ramasun continues next page.**





A view of the secure compound where we monitored enemy radio transmission. This was taken from my second floor barracks window.



A view of the same secure compound taken with a 50mm short telephoto lens. Note the antenna field surrounding the building. There was but one way in past the check point where our faces were matched to our badges before being allowed entry. Beyond the compound was a railroad track, and beyond that nothing but rice paddies and forest. The sentry towers were manned at night to guard against sapper attack.

In fact, I understand that Ramasun's call sign, "Cobra 7," was derived from the hundreds of cobras which the construction crews had uncovered when clearing the construction site for the new facilities. In keeping with the Cobra 7 image, in the headquarters building stood a huge seven or eight foot tall, carved wooden King Cobra, hood flared, reared up and ready to strike. It presented quite an imposing figure, and it certainly commanded one's attention upon entering the HQ building.

Most of the post area was occupied by huge antenna arrays. Their presence, I thought, surely must have given away the purpose of the post, even though our mission was supposed to be top secret. The outside perimeter was bounded by a tall chain-link fence, topped with barbed wire to keep out whatever and whomever lurked beyond. We were issued M-16s (on paper), but I was somewhat disappointed to find that they were to be kept in the armory and distributed only in

listening for transmissions from the IL-18 Coots, daily making their way from Beijing down to Hanoi, carrying diplomats, advisors, troops, and arms to aid the North. We continually searched the HF band for enemy traffic. Upon recognizing a target, a reel-to-reel tape was started to record the intercept, and a hand written translation was generated "on the fly." A more complete typewritten transcript was generated from the tapes, after the fact, which the intel analysts used to compile a "big picture" view of enemy capability and intent.

The mission was carried out 24 hours a day, seven days a week. To provide constant coverage, each flight worked rotating shifts: three day shifts on, then one day off, then three swings and a day off, then three midnight shifts, followed by four whole days off. Then the cycle would repeat. The four

the event of an attack. Of course, the MPs on post were constantly armed, as were the Thai Army perimeter guards. But I couldn't help but wonder if, in case of a concerted attack, "Would it be too late by the time we were able to get to our weapons?" Things would happen later in my tour there to reinforce those concerns, but that is a whole "nother" story.

Security was very tight though. The Thai guards at the gate closely eyed everyone who entered the post and checked IDs. The radio compound where we worked was inside a chain link fence enclosure, nested inside a second chain link fence, both topped by barbed wire. Guard towers were positioned all around the place, and it looked like a maximum-security prison. There was only one way in or out. To get inside and to leave, we had to pass through a chain link "tunnel" to the guard station. There we would stop and show both our badges and our faces to the guard on duty. Then and only then, would we be allowed in or out of the gates. The rooms inside the operations building were somewhat small and were crammed to the gills with state-of-the-art radio gear and encryption equipment. For obvious security reasons, there were no windows at all in the building, and I wondered if the post were attacked, would we inside even know it in time to react to save ourselves? Fortunately, we never had to find that out, although we were put on full "alert" at least once during my stay, when the Udorn Air Base up the road was attacked by NVA sappers [fortification breachers].

Inside ops, there were facilities for monitoring radio transmissions, both voice and Morse, of all the direct or indirect participants in the war. In the Mandarin Voice Intercept Section our primary target was Chi-Com civilian and military air transport. I spent most of my time at the console of my R-390A Collins receiver,

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### **Ramasun** *continued from page 13.*

consecutive days off gave us the opportunity to play tourist and see more of Thailand than we otherwise would have. We took full advantage of it, visiting many attractions in the region. The down side was, the ever-changing shifts kept our bodies off balance, and we never really had a chance to get used to any one schedule. But rotating the shifts was a way of spreading the misery around evenly. Day shifts were the most active, followed by swings, but mid shifts seemed excruciatingly long.



The Air Force barracks. In the distance beyond the trees lies the Friendship Highway, and Udorn is about 11 clicks to the right as I recall. This is looking back toward HQ and the front gate off to the right. These barracks were brand new when I got there. Just months before they had been living in tents. All buildings on post were air conditioned, and as you can see the streets were paved in concrete and lined with street lights. It reminded me of an apartment complex back Stateside. These accommodations were a far cry from the hooches I had seen when I arrived at the Udorn Air Base. I couldn't believe my luck!

After about 8:00 or 9:00 PM, the Chinese went off the air. The day's flights had all landed well before that time, as the Chinese were loath to fly at night. Communications after that were extremely rare. Mid shift ran from 2300 to 0700 hours. On mids, we were left to endlessly scan the HF band listening to mostly static, guzzling cup after cup of the bitter black brew that we kept cooking on the hotplate. We passed time by making entries in the shift logbook, with frequent references to our "bleeding" eyeballs. The intended purpose of the shift log was to pass along any important happenings to the next shift, but on mids, it was treated more as a "dear diary," a place to "publish" our poetry and prose. Finally, about 0600 the Chi-coms would come back on air and begin establishing contact with one another again. Then we'd be pretty busy the remainder of the shift.

In their position reports, the Chi-Com aircraft we monitored referred to their navigational beacons and ground stations by encoded "trinomes" presumably so we wouldn't know their positions when they made their navigational reports to their ground controllers. On a monthly basis, all of the trinomes were changed in an attempt to throw us off track. It was all quite a futile effort for them. After listening to their transmissions for

a time, we became familiar with the operator's voices, and we could easily identify each one when we heard them. Combining the voice ID with our knowledge of their navigational routes, which never changed, we were able to break out all of the new trinomes within a couple of hours of the changeover. Similarly, I'm told that the "diddy boppers" in the Morse intercept section could ID the enemy Morse operators by the unique quirks in the way each one sent code.

As a shift supervisor, I was responsible for about fifteen men on my shift in the voice intercept section. Most things we listened in on were pretty routine—aircraft position reports, high altitude weather conditions, ETAs, and so on. But occasionally something more significant was intercepted, and it fell to me to determine what was routine and what merited reporting immediately to the intelligence analyst. If important enough, a "FLASH PRIORITY" message could be generated that would be in the hands of the President within three minutes from anywhere in the world.

I recall the day when the intelligence ship Pueblo was captured by the North Koreans in the Sea of Japan in January of 1968. I and my crew had just begun the day shift when I was contacted by the shift intelligence analyst. He explained the rapidly evolving situation to me and asked that I have my men be especially alert for any communications that might refer in any way, even indirectly, to an incident that was going down off the coast of North Korea. It had all begun days earlier when North Korean gun boats had begun shadowing the ship. Approaching ever closer, eventually the gun boats were joined by MiGs overhead, further escalating an already tense situation.

Such was the situation when I and my men were first made aware. We were updated periodically by the analyst as things further deteriorated over the course of that shift. Glued to our Collins R-390A HF receivers, I and my men proceeded to scour the voice communications bands for any tiny scrap of information that might be of use to our analysts. To our disappointment, we never heard any reference at all to the Pueblo from any of our targets that day. I remember all too well the knot in the pit of my stomach that grew heavier over the course of that duty shift as the situation remorselessly deteriorated and it seemed ever more likely Pueblo would be taken by force.

The men of Pueblo were doomed to death or capture. Virtual sitting ducks, alone on the high seas and practically defenseless, they were doing a job very similar to what I and my men were doing. The difference was that they were doing so in a much more dangerous environment than we were, here at Ramasun Station. They were our brothers in Communications Intelligence, though we had never met. I recall I was feeling downright sick to my stomach by the time swing shift arrived to relieve us that day.

Although we were unable to contribute to a solution, we

**Ramasun** *continues next page.*

had continued to cling to the hope we'd receive a last-minute message the North Koreans had somehow been repelled and the Pueblo saved. It was not to be, of course. In the immediate aftermath of the incident, all our "ears" at Ramasun remained tuned to pick up any scrap of information that might help our analysts gauge the magnitude of damage done to national security as a result of the capture of Pueblo. The damage was in fact far greater than we even guessed at the time.

Today it is recorded in the history books that support had been promised Pueblo if such a situation ever arose. That promise was broken and support was never sent. Pueblo was fired upon by North Korean three-inch guns before finally being boarded as the crew desperately, but unsuccessfully, attempted to dispose of all classified documents on board. One of the crew was killed during the shelling and the rest were taken and held captive in North Korea where they endured many brutal interrogations, beatings and torture sessions before finally being repatriated nearly a year later. I can only thank God or Fate that I and my crew were never required to make such a sacrifice for our country.

But not everything was so serious at Ramasun. Off duty time was pretty laid back. Even if it was rear echelon, to the best of my recollection, we never had to fall out for reveille and roll call, nor did we have the parade drills and inspections we'd had in other places I'd been stationed prior to my arrival in SEA. Aside from monthly "Commander's Calls," as long as we showed up for our scheduled duty shift on time, our time was pretty much our own. At Commander's Call, we were given updates on the status of the war, the latest developments in air weaponry (to remind us we were, after all, still in the Air Force), and any items of interest regarding day-to-day operations of the detachment. And of course, there were the obligatory scare films they showed us to educate and hopefully make us aware and wary of the dangers of VD.

To sum it up, quite in contrast to my early misgivings, my tour at Ramasun Station turned out to be a "piece of cake" compared to that of many others—especially with regard to the living conditions. It all seemed so incongruous with wartime! Not that I wanted to trade places, but I actually felt somewhat guilty, knowing there were others who were eating out of cans and sleeping in snake and leech infested swamps, while so



Among the amenities afforded us at Ramasun was an air conditioned six lane bowling alley where we could bowl all day for 25 cents a game. I snapped this photo while bowling with a couple of my buddies whose names I can no longer place, sadly enough. Other amenities included an indoor movie theater, in-ground swimming pool, tennis and basketball courts, softball diamond, photo lab, NCO and Airmen's clubs PX, etc., and all buildings were air conditioned. The chow hall offered actual fresh eggs and fresh milk!! No powdered eggs and milk for us! What a life!

many of us were living the "easy life."

Indeed, my feelings regarding my service at Ramasun had always been somewhat ambivalent. For many years after returning stateside, I felt almost as if I had no right to grieve the war—at least not as much right as my brothers in arms, who had returned with missing or paralyzed limbs or blinded eyes, or those who had tasted that singular moment of pure, undistilled, mutual terror, when you look into the eyes of the enemy and take his life before he can take yours..... "Why not me?" I asked myself. Why was I so fortunate, when so many others were not?" I've learned that these are questions almost universally asked among survivors of war, especially by those who escaped physically unscathed. But like all wars, that war touched every one of its participants in the most profound ways, whether front line or rear echelon. The wounds that I and many others like me brought home are simply the ones unseen, the ones for which no Purple Heart is ever awarded.

My association with the TLCB has helped to change those ambivalent feelings. I've come to appreciate, regardless of where we were stationed or what our AFSC or MOS, all of our efforts were of vital importance to the war effort.

Were it not so, we would never have been there. I am proud of my service and thankful for the opportunity



## Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The 5 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 sincere "Welcome Home."

No.	Branch	Last Name	First Name	City	State
1955	USAF	Salerno	Eugene	Oneida	NY
1956	USAF	Hawkins	Jeffrey	Cabot	AR
1957	USAF	Barton	Thomas	Ashboro	NC
1958	USAF	Tart	Ramon	Pikeville	TN
1959	USAF	Campbell	Charles	Orangevale	CA

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We give special thanks to the following generous donors who supported our charitable activities last year.  
“Honorable Donors” gave up to \$100, “Silver” up to \$500, “Gold” up to \$1000, and “Platinum” gave over \$1000

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