

# MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



The newsletter of the Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood, Inc. Volume 25, issue 1

WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.com

## A New Era for TLCB Assistance?

*Lessons learned and an opening to Cambodia at last*

*By Vaughan Smith*

Visiting schools in Xiangkhouang province, Laos has become a little tedious for our team, with almost the same routine each time — long, windy, bumpy drive to Phonsavan from Vientiane and back; nearly 10 hours for our December 2023 trip instead of the usual 7 hours, and the long daily drive from Phonsavan to the remote villages and back. A few of our Northeast Lao team have no desire to go now or are being prevented from coming because of this and that. I wanted to try something new. Furthermore, the Assistance Program has never before found a way to conduct projects to our standards of performance and confidence in the land of the Khmer.

### **First attempt to find a new field for TLCB projects:**

In early 2023, I decided to look for new areas in southern Laos. My retirement income mainly comes from renting out 20 plus rooms. Over the past four years, students from Laos have



Cambodian schoolkids at Bantey Samre Elementary School, under a new TLCB-funded roof. Photos courtesy of the author.

been renting my rooms, and over the past 2 years, there have been some students from Cambodia too. They all have partial scholarships from the Panyapiwat Institute of Management (PIM), owned by the CP corporation, which has the 7-Eleven franchise for Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. Besides many other faculties, PIM is training managers for their 7-Eleven and CP factory expansion in Laos and Cambodia. It is a work-based learning with a system. For the four years of study to be 7-Eleven managers, students study 3 months, work/intern in a 7-Eleven in Greater Bangkok for 3 months, then back to study for 3 months, and so on for four years. Some are

**At Last!** *continues on page 3*

### **What's Inside:**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Correction, and Official Election Notice .....    | 2  |
| TLC Brotherhood Information .....                 | 2  |
| My Story [Pruitt], Part II.....                   | 7  |
| Donors to TLCB Assistance in 2023 .....           | 8  |
| Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood .....       | 10 |
| Newest Products in the Exchange.....              | 13 |
| Bombing in Cambodia and its Lasting Effects ..... | 14 |
| 2024 Reunion .....                                | 16 |

## CORRECTION

In the December 2023 issue we mislabeled the photo on page 3, showing Prof Lee Pao Xiong introducing Maj Gia Tou Lee.

The person we labelled as Major Gia Tou Lee *is not him*. It is actually a picture of Mr. Chao Lee from Congresswoman Betty McCollum's office, who greeted us on behalf of the congresswoman. Major Gia Tou Lee, who in 1975 narrowly escaped Laos with his family, is the speaker shown on the left, below. Photo courtesy of Lee Pao Xiong.



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## TLC Brotherhood, Inc. Official Notice

### Nominations for 2024 Board of Directors Election

The nominations period for election of officers and board members-at-large, will be open from **April 1 through May 15, 2024.**

#### Positions up for election are:

President  
Treasurer  
Two Members-at-Large.

*Submit nominations to anyone on the  
Nominating Committee:*

**Dave Weeks**    [weeksdj4@knology.net](mailto:weeksdj4@knology.net) (Chair)  
**Jim Mayo**     [karjam500@aol.com](mailto:karjam500@aol.com)  
**Bob Vettel**    [rvettel@cox.net](mailto:rvettel@cox.net)

**NOTE: Nominees must agree to serve in the position.**

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

If so, please let us know so that we can update the official database and ensure that *MEM* issues and official mail get addressed properly. You can send an email to:

Treasurer@TLC-Brotherhood.com, or write to:  
**TLC Brotherhood**  
**PO Box 60**  
**Aspers, PA 17304.    INCLUDE MEMBER #!**

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## **TLC Brotherhood, Inc.**

**Tax ID #54-1932649**

### *Board of Directors and Committee Chairmen 2024-2025, showing year of term end*

President: John Sweet, 2024 (first term)  
Vice President: Ray Boas, (Reunion Committee) 2025 (first term)  
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Chaplain: George Shenberger (Memorial Committee) (unlimited)  
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Al Dozal, 2024 (first term)  
Roger Durant, 2024 (3rd term)  
Harry Bright, 2025 (first term)

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Communications Committee: John Harrington  
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Membership Committee: John Duffin  
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### *The Mekong Express Mail*

David MacDonald (1939-2019), Founding Editor

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### *TLCB Facebook Page*

Ray Boas, Monitor  
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### *TLC Brotherhood Website*

Jerry Karnes, Webmaster  
([JKarnes@tlc-brotherhood.com](mailto:JKarnes@tlc-brotherhood.com))

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Via website—uses PayPal system to accept 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 2024: Pensacola, Florida**



## ***At Last!*** continued from page 1

entering Master's programs, which are in English language, and they receive full scholarships from CP. The first batch of Lao students graduated in 2023 and were going home, some to work in 7-Elevens in Laos, and others to get work visas to return to work in Thailand, as salaries in Laos are insufficient.

### ***First try—a non-starter***

In May 2023, Sunantha and I drove up to the Northeast Thailand Provincial capital city, Nakhon Phanom (NKP), with two of our Lao students who had recently graduated, parked at the bridge, crossed over to Thakhek in Laos and took a songthaew (baht bus) up to the Nakai plateau — quite a steep climb to get up there to where one of the students lived. Her mother said that there used to be bomb craters outside their house, but they had been filled in. We spent two nights there and learned about a remote school which needed assistance. The only way to it was by boat, which was not possible as the rains had not arrived, and the dam water was too low for boats.

We found that the schools and villages in the area we stayed in had received development funds from the dam contractors and did not need assistance. One of the relatives of our student was working in the local office of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES), and this MOES official came to the house, and we shared printouts of proposals drafted by Ajan Soundeuane in Xiangkhouang. As we were meeting, Ajan Soundeuane called me out of the blue, so we could include him in the discussion, which seemed to be confirmation that we were on the right track. We were given some photos of the school needing assistance. We requested that the MOES official in Nakai write a similar proposal to Ajan Soundeuane's plan, in coordination with the headmaster and village head of the remote school. We headed back to Thailand. On our way back to Bangkok we spent a couple of hours with TLCB members Ed and Pet Miller in NKP, and Doug Vincent in Amnat Charoen.

Unfortunately, we have not heard back from the contacts in Nakai, and I need to follow up. I've asked the ex-student for up-to-date photos of the school and a request to take us with her on her next trip home.



Partly poured floor of unfinished school repair in Nakai area. Access to this school in Laos includes a 1 1/2 hour boat trip, which was not possible on this trip because of low water. Other schools in this area receive good support from the power dam contractors. Photos courtesy of Vaughan Smith..

## ***Second attempt to find a new field for TLCB projects***

In June 2023, I drove to Ubon with two more just-graduated Lao students who live in Champassak province in the south of Laos. One lived in Khong close to the Mekong River waterfalls near the Cambodian border, the other was from Pakse. We visited a park near the falls, dropped her off, and headed back to Pakse.

The student and her friends suggested that we head east to Attapeu, a much poorer province next to Vietnam, to look for a needy school. We had the use of a pickup owned by the ex-student, and I paid for the gas. On the way to Attapeu we



Nong Yoy school in Champassak Province near Attapeu, Laos. The Smiths viewed needed repairs and added it to their list of candidates for future TLCB projects.

noticed a school, Nong Yoy. I added this school, which seemed to need assistance. and selected photos. It is in Houay Kong township in the Paksong District of Champassak Province. We managed to meet some teachers in the school as well as the village headman; the headmaster lived elsewhere. They showed us around the school and what needed fixing. It looked like a suitable project for TLCB's assistance. We have received no news, so this needs follow up. The student who accompanied me there is presently working in a newly opened 7-Eleven in Pakse or Savannakhet and I hope to see her at her graduation near my apartment.

## ***Third attempt to find a new field for TLCB projects***

In early November 2023, TLCB members John and Nancy Sweet, Monty and Potjane Dubs, and George and Ruth Ann Shenberger all arrived in Northern Thailand and planned to visit the TLCB's project in Mae Hong Son province. I flew up to Chiangmai and Paul Carter, Glenn Black, Tim Sawers, and I, all members of our Northeast Laos team, were able to meet with TLCB President John Sweet. I was able to join the trip to Mae Hong Son for a couple of days. It was a great opportunity for me to meet and get to know more of the stateside TLCB members and see the useful project that Monty and Potjane have initiated in Mae Hong Son, Thailand.

***At Last!*** continues on page 4

*At Last! continued from page 3*

## **Presidential Influence**

One thing President Sweet yearned for was for the TLCB to have a project in Cambodia. Within a couple of weeks, by chance, or another fortuitous coincidence, I learned that two of our Cambodian tenants wanted to return home for a university break, but their parents, for financial reasons, had persuaded them not to go for a short two-week visit. I stepped in and told them that I was happy to drive them up to Aranyaprathet, Sakeo on the Cambodian border, and pay for the taxi from Poi Pet to Siem Reap, if they would help us look for some schools that may need assistance. They spoke to their parents, explained the situation, and said they would join me, and that one of their fathers, a policeman, had some schools in mind under his jurisdiction. It seemed a little dubious to me, but it could be an answer to John Sweet's prayers.

On 16 November 2023, just two weeks after Sweet had shared his desire for a Cambodian project, I asked my wife, Sunantha, to join me on the trip as I didn't want to be an old farang accompanying two young, female first-year college students without a chaperone. Two of their university tenants from Cambodia and I drove from Nonthaburi in the Greater Bangkok Area, leaving at 2am to Aranyaprathet, Sakeo province in Eastern Thailand, a 3.5-hour drive, and parked near the border. We walked over the border, which opened at 6am, to Poipet, Cambodia and took a taxi (2.5 hours) to Siem Reap, Angkor Wat, where the students are from.

Soon after our arrival in Siem Reap, after lunch and my power nap (driving since 2am), Soley, the policeman, took us to the needy Thmat Pong Kindergarten and the Banteay Samre Primary School, which are under his jurisdiction, some 20 km out of Siem Reap city. The kindergarten only operated for a couple of hours in the morning, so there were no students during the afternoon visit, but we were able to take some photos and videos, and consult with a few teachers, Soley our policeman, and the village headman. It turned out that the building was actually a community center for the village and used for many different village activities, the kindy just part of it. A local villager had donated the land for it many years ago.

At the primary school there were students, and we took photos

and videos of the leaking roofs and the cafeteria floor which needed re-flooring. We conversed with the headmaster with the help of an English teacher and Soley's daughter as translators.

Sunantha and I spent one night at the home of Soley and his family. The next morning, we visited the kindergarten again, were presented with a list of materials needed by the teachers and students, and materials to expand the classroom — quite a surprise to receive a wish list just 18 hours since our first



The original concrete floor at Banteay Samre Primary School was failing. Construction money came from outside, but there were no funds for upkeep. The villagers showed willingness to do the work.

encounter! They seemed extremely well organized. In the afternoon we got a taxi back to the border and drove home to Nonthaburi. The two students stayed with their families for another week. A short but very sweet trip! And thanks to John Sweet's encouragement for hastening TLCB's entry into Cambodia, which was very fruitful, amazingly efficient, and well organized.

## **Thmat Pong Kindergarten**

The kindergarten project proceeded very quickly. On returning to our home in Thailand, based on the photos, data, and information I had received, I was able to draft an immediate request, in English, for the kindergarten since they had provided a lists of items with prices in USD, to expand the pavilion and buy materials and furniture. The request was sent back to Soley to gather info to fill in the gaps and make corrections. By November 25th it was ready to send to the Assistance Committee for consideration. The project was approved by the Assistance Committee on 2 December, funds arrived in Cambodia on 5 December, materials were purchased about 11 December, delivery began on 12 December, and construction started on 13 December. The project was completed on 17 December, just a month since our exploratory visit to the site when they had a party to celebrate its completion and opening for use.

Glenn Black [see his Cambodia article on page 14], a TLCB member living in Chiangmai, has worked in Cambodia, knows the country well, follows



Vaughan, at left, with kindergartners at Siem Reap, Cambodia. School is in Thmat Pong multi-purpose community center.

*At Last! continues next page*





At left, the well that is protected by law as part of the World Heritage Angkor Wat site. Note the Chinese characters on the sign.

the news of Cambodia, has brought up a good point: Was this land and kindergarten, being only 15 km from Angkor Wat, in the protected area where people are being evicted to protect the area of Angkor Wat, a World Heritage Site since 1992? We were subsequently informed that it was private land donated by a villager, and that the only protected item on the land was the old well! (I'm not sure if

Soley was joking with me or not).

### ***Banteay Samre Primary School***

On 16 November 2023, we visited this school with Soley and his two daughters. It was about 3 miles away from the kindergarten. We met with an English teacher, who was teaching in a room with a holey roof, and with the headmaster who showed us the disintegrating fiber-cement roofs, the canteen which needed a gutter fixing, and the broken but slippery-when-wet polished cement floor which needed attention. The school, of solid construction, was built in stages with Swiss government funds at the turn of this century. Since then, funding has not been available for repair. Many of the schools in Laos which we renovate have similar problems.



The first priority at Banteay Samre was the failing "holey" roof.

The cafeteria was built with funds from the South Korean government. During the tour of the school, I mentioned that for all TLCB projects, the labor must come from the villagers themselves. We are only paying for the materials, I told them, and initially, the headmaster balked at this — maybe he was used to big grants from embassies and NGOs. Soley came down on him like a ton of bricks! The headmaster agreed to proceed and use village labor.

As with the kindergarten, I prepared a draft request as soon as I returned to Thailand and sent it to the English teacher and the headmaster to fill in the gaps. At that time, unlike kindergarten,

This was the tear-off of the old roof. The bottom photo shows the workers lifting new roofing onto the school building.



I had no data on the materials needed and costs involved. Initially the school came up with a budget of \$21,380 USD to fix the roofs, add ceilings, and put in a new floor for the cafeteria. I informed them that we only had a budget of about \$3,000 USD, so they removed some of the roofs and the ceilings and came up with a new budget of \$3,550 USD. After the request had been signed, it was sent to the Assistance Committee for consideration on 10 December 2023. It was subsequently approved on 21 December, and funds were transferred to Soley on 17 January, delayed because I was visiting family in New Zealand and Australia and had lost touch with the project.

Soley said that he was free to manage this second project, which was good since I did not know the English teacher. He actually suggested that I send the money to him and not to Soley — I didn't want to take the risk and didn't know the headmaster well enough. Materials for the project were delivered on 19 January and the work began immediately and was completed by 23 January:

### ***Learnings:***

After the two incomplete attempts, in May and June 2023, to start projects in new areas of central and southern Laos, and after two successful projects in the new frontier of Cambodia, I've been reflecting on the reasons why. The needs in Laos seem to be greater than those in western Cambodia. The schools are

**At Last! continues on page 6**



**At Last!** *continued from page 5*



Above, Soley selfie. He cooked up some fish for the workers' lunch. Below, delivery of TLCB-funded floor tiles. We have entrusted Soley with these purchases.



The tile floor laying is nearly complete, here. The success of this \$3550 project is likely to lead to much more work in this area.

near the tourist area of Angkor Wat, but the schools I went to in Khammouane and Champassak provinces didn't jump at the opportunity like the Cambodians did. The Cambodians took the bull by the horns and didn't stop until it was all completed — in record time!

***Things that were done differently:***

The two requests were in English and USD which saved the delay in translations. In our December trip to Laos, I suggested to Ajan Soundeuane that he do the same; he agreed.

In both Laos and Cambodia, it was good to go with my tenants who knew me, and I knew them. We try to treat them as our own children, provide for all their needs, and try to visit their parents when I visit Laos or Cambodia. They and their families know the area and who to contact.

In Cambodia, I obtained the basic information from those concerned, prepared a draft proposal for them to fill in the gaps, and they quickly caught on to this. In Laos, I gave them printed copies of the requests that Ajan Soundeuane puts together for the local and provincial authorities to sign, assuming they would follow Ajan Soundeuane's example. It looks like I should give added help to the two Lao sites to write up the initial requests to TLCB, and make sure someone is in control. It may have been too high a hurdle for them to get over.

Having a respected, local official, like Soley and Ajan Soundeuane, who are doers and men of action in command, may have been a key element.

Maybe it is to do with the nature of the Lao and Cambodian people, their political systems, or possibly the greater suffering of the Cambodians through the Pol Pot years. Things definitely seem to be moving materially in Cambodia.

The banking system in Cambodia seems to be superior to that in Laos, as is their use of banking apps and their agility in using mobile phones.

***Regarding Xiangkhouang province***

Paul Carter and his wife, Supa, joined our monitoring trip to Laos in early December 2023. Supa was a great asset to our team since she speaks northeastern Thai (Isan, a Lao language), and being a female, she could interact easily with the female students and teachers, easier than Paul and I can. She was also happy to stand up to introduce the TLCB during the handover ceremonies. Paul and Supa are happy to take over the Xiangkhouang operation from me now that he has finished his PhD and has more time, so I can concentrate on southern Laos and Cambodia. At least those are our current plans, but, of course, they are subject to change.

***Possible future plans for Cambodia***

I was not in the fray like most of our TLCB members were. I was involved in the aftermath. When travelling through these countries, I often wonder what it was like back in the day, and if my TLCB colleagues and friends were flying over these areas, and I wonder where the action may have been, and where a lot of damage was done... I'm slowly learning more about those days.

For Cambodia, I was hoping to go further east towards Vietnam to find projects in areas more affected during the 60s and 70s, but the logistics will be more difficult, and I need to find trustworthy people to work with, which may take time. We are hoping some doors may open. We will see. In the meantime, with these two projects done successfully with little effort, I plan to ask Soley to find a couple of other projects in needy schools in western Cambodia or elsewhere. If we have completed four or five projects in Cambodia, I will arrange a trip to check out the work done.



# My Story, Part II

by Gary Pruitt

Editor's note: the first part of "My Story" appeared in the September, 2022 issue of Mekong Express Mail. Here is the final paragraph of that article:

*A month or so after returning, my wife and I found that we were going to be parents in October 1966. A month later, I was notified that I had a one-year assignment to SEA, reporting in August. I requested that the reporting date be extended until after my wife gave birth. The assignment was cancelled and I was deferred until 90 days after the birth, January 1967. Our daughter was born October 19, 1966. I notified the Personnel Assignment Section, and a couple weeks later I was notified of an assignment to Bien Hoa AB, South Vietnam. Wow, that didn't take long!*

## Gary continues—

1966 was a challenging year. I knew I would be going back to SEA in 1967 after our baby was born. During that summer I had learned that three of the HH-43 crew, Capt Tom Curtis, A1C Bill Robinson, and A3C Neil Black were shot down September 20, 1965; three CH-3C crewmembers, Lt Lilly, Lt Singleton, and SSgt Art Cormier and the two A1E Pilots, Captains Bolstad and McKnight, shot down November 6, 1965, were listed as POWs being held in North Vietnam. The HH-43 co-pilot, Lt Duane Martin, who had been held in Laos, escaped with Navy Lt Dieter Dengler in June 1966. Lt Martin was killed by a Laotian Villager. Lt Dengler was eventually picked up by a Jolly Green. He wrote a book, *ESCAPE FROM LAOS*. I was happy to hear all were reported as being alive, prayed for them and Lt Martin's family.

## A Welcome to Bien Hoa

January 1967, I flew to San Francisco International Airport, caught the bus to Travis AFB, and got on a contract airline to South Vietnam. 19 hours later I arrived at Tan Son Nhut AB South Vietnam. After a bus ride to Bien Hoa AB and getting settled into a 3rd CES hootch, I got a note saying that the base fire chief wanted to see me. I found my way to the fire station

and met the chief. I was to report to Detachment 6, 38 ARRS for attached duty. My first night on Bien Hoa, the Viet Cong blew up part of the napalm storage area. All off-duty firefighters were called out to assist in combating the resulting fire. *My welcome to Bien Hoa AB.*

Next morning, I showered and went to the rescue detachment and met the commander where I was assigned to a crew for duty. A pararescueman, Roger Porter, and I had arrived at Bien Hoa on the same flight. He was a cousin of Bill "Pits" Pitsenberger, a pararescueman in Det 6 who had been killed while on a rescue mission in April 1966. Roger and I became good friends and still are. Years later in 2000, Pits became the recipient of the Medal of Honor, presented posthumously to his father. The movie, *Last Full Measure*, tells the story of how a group of men fought to get Pits awarded the Medal of Honor.

Det 6 had two missions: Local Base Rescue (LBR) and Aircrew Recovery (ACR). Firefighter/rescue specialists flew LBR missions, pararescuers flew on ACR missions. Depending on the mission, we sometimes would be assigned to either type.

Bien Hoa was an exciting base. I think every type of aircraft in the U.S. military and Vietnamese military was at Bien Hoa or landed there. It was a busy place with one runway. A second runway was under construction. I was taken over to the 173rd Airborne Brigade firing range to get familiar with the M-16 and 38 revolver. I left the 173rd with an AK-47, short barrel 12-gauge pump, and a 45 semi-auto handgun, all of which I gave away when my tour was up.

I flew lots of LBR emergency scrambles for inflight emergencies, mostly battle damage; and ACR missions to downed aircraft, medical evacuations, and special missions. On one shift, the Army requested us to bring the fire suppression kit to a crash site to knock down flames so they could start remains recovery from two Huey Helicopters that had collided. We both had our fire protective gear on, so we



The Bien Hoa hootch area in 1967.

Photos furnished by the author. Additional photos in the September 2022 issue..

**Pruitt II continues on page 10**



# *Donors to TLC Brotherhood Assistance in 2023*

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| Harmon, Arnie     | McCord, Thomas     | Rogers, Richard    | Thompson, Kenneth    |
| Harpley, James    | McDaniels, Chris   | Rollins, Randall   | Tilton, Christopher  |
| Harris, Bobby     | Mead, Harold       | Ruland, Timothy    | Tober, Richard       |
| Harrison, John    | Meyer, Raymond     | Rutherford, Lowell | Towers, Gary         |
| Hebert, James     | Mignon, Gerald     | Ryman, Randolph    | Trinchero, Paul      |
| Helfers, Eric     | Millaway, Raymond  | Salisbury, Daniel  | Twigg, John          |
| Helwig, Dene'     | Minoughan, Patrick | Samples, Kristie   | VanSickler, Court    |
| Herder, Robert    | Mitchell, John     | Sand, Raymond      | Vincent, Douglas     |
| Hill, Jim         | Mogilewicz, Jeff   | SanRoman, Gilbert  | Wagner, Vernon       |
| Hodge, Stanley    | Mohr, Dennis       | Saunders, Richard  | Waller, Reuben       |
| Hoover, James     | Molloy, Kevin      | Saxton, Ronald     | Watson, Charles      |
| Hotujec, Leigh    | Monteith, Roy      | Schmidt, Rodney    | Weathers, John       |
| Howe, Donald      | Moody, Dennis      | Schreader, George  | Weaver, David        |
| Hunt, William     | Mulder, Donald     | Schwartz, Joseph   | Webber, Ronald       |
| Innes, James      | Mullikin, Tim      | Seehafer, Eugene   | Weeks, David         |
| Jennings, Charles | Munoz, John        | Shane, Ronald      | Wethington, Ronald   |
| Jirsa, William    | Nicolosi, Roy      | Silva, Raymond     | Wheatley, Robert     |
| Kennedy, Francis  | Nigl, Joseph       | Sleep, Gordon      | Williams, Donald     |
| Kenning, George   | Norway, Robert     | Smith, Larry       | Williams, Luther     |
| Korandis, Stephen | O'Conner, Brian    | Smith, Vaughan     | Wolf, Richard        |
| Kosh, Ronald      | Odom, James        | Squires, Everett   | Wood, Thornton       |
| Kulig, Ronald     | Oubre, Carroll     | Stein, Debora      | Wright, David        |
| LaBella, Vincent  | Palumbo, Frank     | Stein, Edward      | Yoakum, Michael      |
| Lamica, Stephen   | Parker, Kenneth    | Stephenson, Darl   | Yova, Tim            |
| Landucci, Robert  | Paski, Thomas      |                    |                      |
| Lapolla, Bernard  | Paul, Robert       |                    |                      |
| Larsen, Gary      | Payne, Doug        |                    |                      |
| Lawrence, Alfred  | Perry, Richard     |                    |                      |
| Lee, Paul         | Perry, Stephen     |                    |                      |
| Lee, Thomas       | Petersen, Dennis   |                    |                      |
| Lehtonen, Thomas  | Peterson, Lawrence |                    |                      |
| Lewin, Howard     | Pirrello, Richard  |                    |                      |
| Lin, Long         | Pocchiari, Joseph  |                    |                      |
| Linsley, Edward   | Pruitt, Gary       |                    |                      |

The Board of Directors and the Assistance Committee are deeply grateful to all who donate to our Brotherhood's charitable activities, no matter the amount of your donation. Each year over \$50,000 is received by the TLC Brotherhood for these activities.



# Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The fourteen members listed below joined between the December 2023 issue of the *Mekong Express Mail* and this printing. You can find more information on our website database.

The MEM wishes you all a sincere “Welcome Home.” We are delighted that you have joined us.

| No.   | Branch | First Name | Last Name  | City            | State    |
|-------|--------|------------|------------|-----------------|----------|
| 02053 | USAF   | Rodney     | Schmidt    | Wichita Falls   | TX       |
| 02054 | USA    | Supa       | Carter     | San Kamphaeng   | Thailand |
| 02055 | Other  | Lydia      | Roth       | Sebring         | FL       |
| 02056 | Other  | Terry      | Bolger     | Vientiane       | Laos     |
| 02057 | USAF   | Arnold     | Dubcak     | San Antonio     | TX       |
| 02058 | Other  | Tim        | Adams      | Chiang Rai      | Thailand |
| 02059 | USAF   | Jon        | Goldenbaum | Riverside       | CA       |
| 02060 | USAF   | Michael    | Ferranto   | Douglas         | AZ       |
| 02061 | USAF   | Dennis     | Maurin     | Metairie        | LA       |
| 02062 | USAF   | Craig      | Duehring   | Fairfax Station | VA       |
| 02063 | USAF   | Chad       | Swedberg   | Woodcreek       | TX       |
| 02064 | USA    | Dennis     | Newell     | Moline          | IL       |
| 02065 | USA    | Tom        | Enos       | Englewood       | FL       |
| 02066 | USAF   | Richard    | Smith      | Worden          | MT       |

## **Pruitt II** *continued from page 7*

assisted with the recovery of remains. Not a pleasant task, but an important one.

One afternoon a U-10 lost power on takeoff and crashed trying to land on the parallel taxiway across from our alert pad. A crash truck responded and extinguished the fire. The pararescueman and I ran to check the pilot out; he didn't survive.

An F-100 with an emergency fuel problem landed hot, bounced a few times, blew a tire, went off the runway, hit a big ditch, flipped upside down, and burst into flames. Our pilot set the FSK down, letting us off to assist the fire trucks. We grabbed a handline from a crash truck to help fight the fire. 20 MM ammo started cooking off. Our pilot hovered the HH-43 over the flames to knock the flames down and blew the flames away from the F-100. The result: we got the F-100 turned back over. Surprising, the pilot was okay, but the young combat photographer in the back seat was dead. Later we heard that he had probably died of fright.

## **Screen Door Attack**

Following a rocket/mortar attack early one morning we evacuated about 30 wounded to the hospital near Saigon. We were loading wounded on both HH-43s, two or maybe three each trip. Was a busy night. Several people running from their hooches to the bunker got hurt falling down or running into each other. One guy was running towards the bunker, at the same time he was about to pass one of the hootches and the screen door came open. The guy ran through the screen door, which scratched him up pretty bad. Someone had a flashlight

in the bunker. We were checking him out and he told us what had happened. Pretty soon he and everyone else was laughing, including a couple of guys who were taking a shower when the attack started. Yes, they were naked.

Once a month we would fly a base chaplain and doctor or medic to a leper colony. A Catholic Priest, Father Beset, and the lepers with their families had built a beautiful place. They were shunned by the Vietnamese people, including the Viet Cong.

My tour at Bien Hoa was shortened by three months, due to my TDY time at Udorn. I was surprised when I got my next assignment. I was going back to Williams AFB. The morning I was scheduled to leave Bien Hoa, I got up, and took my last cold shower. As I was walking back to my hootch a guy said good morning, then asked me what I thought about finally having hot water? I said “What?” He said “Yes, the hot water lines were connected yesterday.” I thought “Oh well.”

## **Williams AFB, No Sleep, On to Yokota**

So early October I boarded my flight to Travis AFB, CA, from Travis to San Francisco International Airport. Protestors were everywhere. People working at the airport were not much better. The only smiles I remember were from the flight crew on the plane. I was glad to be home to my wife and little girl and I was happy to be back at Williams AFB, again attached to Detachment 16, WARRC. Everything was about the same at Williams except that it was so quiet I had trouble sleeping. I had gotten so accustomed to the constant noise of aircraft operations and the big guns over in the 173 Airborne Brigade

**Pruitt II** *continues next page*



area firing 24 hours a day. On the few times at Bien Hoa when it was quiet many of us did not sleep well. It would be a couple of years before I could sleep well.

September 1968 I was notified of an assignment to Yokota AB, Japan, for February 1969. October 1968 I was promoted to Staff Sergeant and was upgraded to HH-43 Enlisted Instructor/Flight Examiner duties. January 1979, we left Williams AFB. I had to catch a flight to Yokota AB in February. Protestors and the attitude of many when they saw a uniform was negative at San Francisco International Airport, and during the bus ride to Travis AFB.

I arrived at Yokota at 3 am and got settled in the unit. The fire chief told me there were no flying slots available. That was okay, I was ready to be working at the fire department. I got on the list for housing and made arrangements to bring my family over. They arrived in April, and on January 30, 1970, our son was born at Tachikawa AB.

Yokota was a great assignment. Our tour was extended by the Air Force, and I extended it again to February 1974. Due to the drawdown of U.S. Forces in Japan after the end of our involvement in South Vietnam and the return of our family housing area to Japanese control, our assignment was curtailed back to June 1973. I tried for a second tour. Not happening. We were going to Holloman AFB, New Mexico.

### ***NKP, More Protesters, and Problems***

At Holloman we got into base housing and got settled. The HH-43 Detachment had been deactivated in 1972, so no flying position. January 1974, I was selected for promotion to TSgt. Shortly afterward I was notified of an assignment to Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, better known as NKP, or to us old timers, Naked Fanny. Our time at Holloman had been short. Good, and not so good. My drinking had caused some problems, and I was not looking forward to leaving my family again.

Late August 1974 I left Alamogordo, NM for Travis AFB.



Nakhon Phanom RTAFB Fire Department, circa 1967.

At San Francisco International nothing much had changed, maybe even worse as far as antiwar protestors. The bus ride to Travis AFB was miserable. Got on a flight to Clark AB, Philippines. Had to spend the night at Clark so I visited the Base Fire Department where I knew some folks. Next morning got on a C-141 to Thailand. We made stops at Bangkok's Don Muang AB, then Udorn, and finally NKP. Getting off the C-141, I was amazed at the changes from when I was last there in January 1966. There was a paved runway, parking ramp at the terminal, and lots of buildings scattered around. The fire chief and a guy I had known at Yokota, met me at the terminal and got me settled in the fire station NCO quarters. Three meals a day were available in the fire station and TV in the day room. Fire chief briefed me the next morning. I would be

the Assistant Fire Chief of Training. The fire chief handed me the latest "13 AF Staff Assistant Visit Report" that was full of negative items and lots of recommendations. I was up for the challenge.

A few days later, a MSgt arrived who would be the deputy fire chief. After looking over the complete "Staff Assistance Visit Report" he said to me, "We can fix this, Gary." We got to work. The 13 AF Staff Assistance Team came back in December and was amazed how well all the write ups had been corrected.

### ***Wildfires, Snakes, and Pinochle***

I need to mention that a day or two after I arrived at NKP, I saw an HH-43 Helicopter flying around. Was told it



Gary Pruitt at the Holloman AFB Fire Department, 1973.

**Pruitt II** continues on page 12

**Pruitt II** continued from page 11



Nakhon Phanom RTAFB hooch area.

was the last local flight around NKP that it would make before being flown over to Udorn. Later, I was told that it was the last HH-43 to leave SEA. Rumors of when NKP would close spread like wildfire and changed daily. Speaking of wildfire, we had a large wildfire on NKP in the Thai Air Force area, which burned a large area of jungle/forest. No structures were lost and no loss of life. Most importantly, we kept the fire away from the Thai Restaurant and the other little Thai food stands located under the Thai Restaurant, one of my favorite places to order food from. Weekly, we had small wildfires around the base perimeter caused by a trip flare being activated by an animal, a human, or even a large Cobra. Snakes! I need to mention I think I saw at least one snake every day I was at NKP, under hootches, around the base perimeter, edges of the taxiways,



SMGT Gary Pruitt rounding out an eventful career.

and behind the Fire Station, etc.

I had found a pinochle partner in the 40th ARRS Hootch next door to mine. He and I played pinochle almost every night at units all over NKP. We never lost a game. We were good at counting cards and remembering what each player had put down for points. I never again had a pinochle partner like him.

The number of authorized hootch bars was decreased. Things were changing. News coming out of South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia was not good for the people of those countries. Daily flying activity at NKP continued. OV-10s, CH-53 and HH-53 were the main aircraft assigned to NKP. Also, had a couple of T-39s that made daily flights to and from Saigon. United States Support Activities Group and 7th Air Force had been at NKP since early 1973. 1975 started off with losing a CH-53 and crew during a functional flight check.

### ***Sad Times, Final Days at NKP***

Things continued to deteriorate in South Vietnam and Cambodia. In April 1975, our helicopters of the 21 SOS and 40 ARRS assisted in the evacuations of the U.S. embassies, first in Phnom Phen, Cambodia; then Saigon, South Vietnam.

In May 1975 a ship, Mayaguez, was seized by Cambodian Forces. May 13, CH-53s and HH-53s departed NKP for U-Tapao RTAFB. On May 13, 1975, CH-53 call sign Knife 13 with 18 NKP Security Policemen and a crew of five crashed 35 miles from NKP, no survivors. The rest of the helicopters continued on to U-Tapao to pick up US Marines who became part of what became known as Mayaguez Rescue on Koh Tang Island.

April and May were sad times for NKP. Losing 4 NKP members in January and 23 in May was tough. I personally knew the four lost in January. Recovery of remains at both crash locations was difficult. At NKP I ran into several helicopter folks I had known at Udorn and Bien Hoa; had good visits with them.

The withdrawals from South Vietnam, Cambodia, and soon Laos were considered by many to be abandoning those nations we had promised to support, at least with equipment. Many of us were disappointed and I still am. Three trips I had made to SEA. It was over, for some folks.

### ***Emergency Leave and More Protesters***

The first of June, I was notified by the Red Cross that my wife needed surgery ASAP. I talked to my wife by phone, and I would be needed to care for our two children; convalescence time would be around 60 days. Since I already had my orders to report to Davis Monthan AFB, Tucson Arizona in August 1975, the Red Cross informed me that I would not have to return from emergency leave to NKP. My squadron confirmed it. When the Red Cross notification arrived, my First Sergeant processed my emergency leave order. At Travis AFB, I was advised to change into civilian clothes before going to the International Airport. I decided not to. The protesting was even worse. I weathered the name calling, slurs, and shaking of fists. I got on my flight to Alamogordo, New Mexico. Two days later my wife had successful surgery. Her convalescence time would be 60 days. In August, we arrived at Davis Monthan, got settled into

**Pruitt II** continues next page



base housing, and I was back to work. So far, I had spent 11 years and 6 months of my 15 years in the Air Force overseas. I was wondering what was next.

### ***Retraining, Retirement, and More Training***

January 1978, I volunteered to retrain from the Fire Service to the Social Actions Office. Our focus was on drug and alcohol abuse, human relations training, and equal opportunity investigation. September 1978 we were on our way to Langley AFB, Virginia. I spent three years with the Social Actions Office in the 1st Tactical Fighter Wing. In June 1981 I was selected for a position at HQ, Tactical Air Command, Personnel Directorate, Social Actions Division. I was promoted to SMSgt (E8), and June 1984 we moved back west to Nellis AFB, Nevada where I was assigned as the Superintendent, Social Actions. May 1975, I was selected for a Special Duty Assignment as the Deputy Director, Nellis Family Support Center, a fairly new function. After completion of a special project, I retired from the Air Force as a SMSgt (E8) with 28 years 6 months active duty. I had a great career, good assignments, good people to work for and with, and a wonderful wife who held the home front together while I was traveling to far off and distant lands.

I went to work for an auto parts company in Las Vegas, Nevada and joined a racing team at the Las Vegas Drag Strip. In December 1991 I was hired back on Nellis AFB to a civilian position in the Family Support Center. In 2005 at age 62, I took early Social Security and retired completely to a rural area on the Arizona Strip Lands, 10 miles north of Mesquite, Nevada or 32 miles south of St George, Utah.

At the Pedro Rescue Helicopter Association Reunion, June 2022, the guest speaker was TLC Brotherhood member, Scott Harrington, who co-authored with the late Joe Ballinger the book, *They Called it Naked Fanny*. I enjoyed reading his book

and particularly meeting him.

Some people I want to mention who have been important to my success and life.

To all the great people who challenged me and gave me opportunities to succeed.

My Father and Mother who gave me life.

My friend, partner, and wife Maxine (Lamar) Pruitt, who has been by my side since November 29, 1964.



And many family and friends over the years.



## ***New Products in the Exchange!***

<https://tlc-brotherhood.com/shop>

By request, we now stock this KHAKI version of our ever-popular baseball style LOGO and BASE hats. **Look at that sharp two-tone bill!**



Short-sleeve golf shirts are now stocked in this very rich MAROON!

# Bombing in Cambodia and its Lasting Effects

By Glenn Black

According to the map, the eastern Cambodian areas and notably Ratanakiri, Mondulkiri, and Prey Veng and Svay Rieng provinces certainly got pestered during the Lon Nol war. I worked for the CMAC in 1996 and 1997 and coordinated contract demining with MAG, HALO, and CMAC seminars and EOD teams for resettlement projects from 1998 to 2000.

## Where the UXO is

During the 1990s CMAC, HALO, and MAG, coordinated by CMAC, aimed their efforts on the more populated agrarian areas of Cambodia. The eastern regions were targeted least because they were less populated, and much of the former trail areas had returned to jungle. The areas you see along the eastern border are blood red due to USAF/USN air strikes on the various branches of the HCM Trails as they entered Cambodia from Laos. Also notice the trails of air strikes that roughly follow Hwy 4 from Phnom Penh to Sihanoukville, Hwy 5 to Battambang/Sisophon, Hwy 6 through Kompong Cham, and along the Mekong to Laos. Keep in mind that from August 1973, further US bombing (USAF & Navy and Marines) was prohibited by the Cooper-Church Amendment of the US Congress, which also applied to Laos; however, the Khmer Air Force/KAF T-28s continued to drop US-supplied bombs up to the last days of the war. These carried MK-81 250-pound bombs and napalm. The latter were not a big UXO problem, but the former were.

The “dud” 250-pound bombs, that the CMAC contract deminers found in S Battambang province, often had only a single fuse in them rather than one in the tail and one in the nose, and if dropped too low to the ground, the fuses didn't arm.

I doubt that the Lon Nol Khmer Republic air strikes that took place post-August 1973 are incorporated in the map; however, the Lon Nol army continued to keep Hwy 5 open by bombing choke points along the road or by bribing Khmer Rouge for passage in efforts to get the rice crop out of Battambang and down to Phnom Penh. Bombing also continued down Hwy 4 in attempts to keep access to the Sihanoukville port open, though by 1974 it's unlikely that much freight or cargo got through either of these routes to Phnom Penh, and Lon Nol's control of Cambodia was reduced to areas under siege in Battambang, Phnom Penh, and along the coastal areas. Still, Lon Nol's Khmer Air Force flew a lot of T-28 missions to these beleaguered outposts.

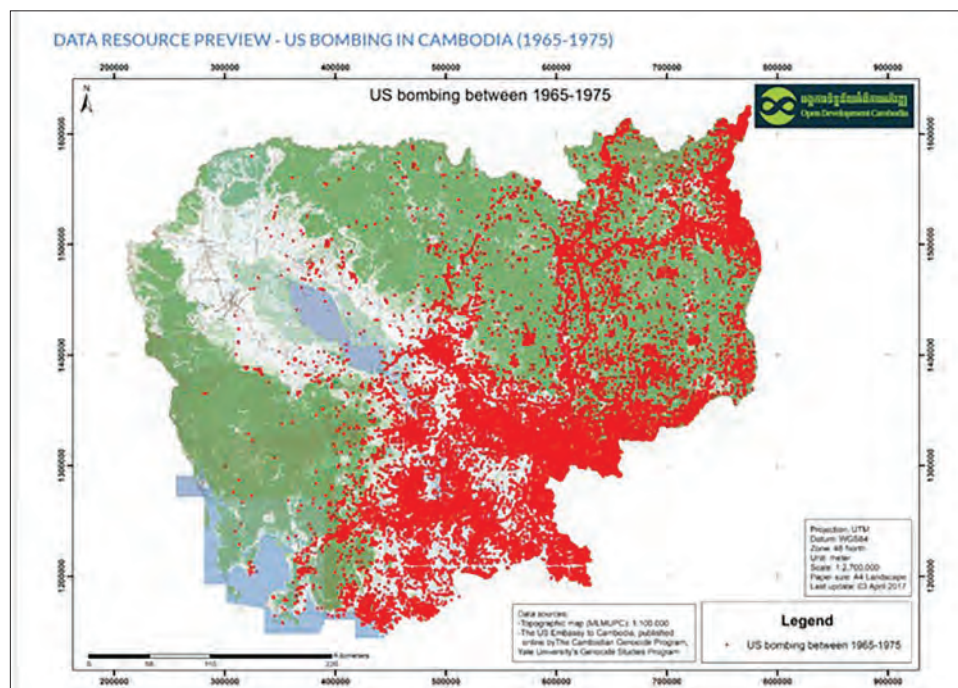
## Post-Vietnam War Cambodia

The map shows a lot of eastern areas bombed, but there is/was significant contamination from mines and UXO along the extent of the Thai/Cambodian border, the area where post Lon Nol, the occupational army of Vietnam and their proxy PRK (Khmer) army under Hun Sen, attempted to retake turf from the Khmer Rouge. After the withdrawal of the PAVN Vietnamese troops in 1989, the PRK renamed itself the State of Cambodia (SOC) and continued fighting the Khmer Rouge and their non-communist allies, FUNCINPEC (Royalist), and the KPNLF (ex- Lon Nol Khmer Republic Combatants) in wet/dry season fights over the turf adjoining the Thai border.

These fights lasted from 1979 thru 1988 and 1989 when the Vietnamese withdrew from Cambodia and their proxy PRK/SOC continued their fight until 1992. From 1993, Hun Sen's CPP leaning faction fought under the name of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) until 1998 when the KR finally defected or were defeated.

Also, during the US involvement with the Khmer Republic under Lon Nol, significant aerial bombing took place in western Cambodia up to 1975, primarily MK-81 250-pound bombs dropped by Lon Nol's Khmer Air Force T-28s. Also, during trips to the resettlement areas in 1998 and 1999, we noted that several Russian cluster-bomb containers wound up in the war trash piles collected by the mines/UXO clearance teams. The cluster bombs were said to have been dropped by RCAF MI-8 helicopters during the 1997-1998 dry season.

Considerable anti-personnel and heavy bombs were dropped in the east as well, but few Khmer, other than hill tribes, lived in the border



Continues next page



areas of Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri. Prey Veng and Svay Rieng have less forests and more farmland, so they were not only bombed a lot but are also infested with mines and UXO accumulations, mainly unexploded artillery and mortar rounds and RPG and M-79 rounds. These accumulations are mostly from the short-lived defence by Khmer Rouge against Vietnamese invaders during their late 1978 and early 1979 blitz and occupation of Cambodia. Thereafter, all resistance efforts against the Vietnamese Army and People Republic of Kampuchea (PRK - Hanoi friendly Hun Sen) were located along the Thai border and concerned very heavy mine contamination and dud artillery, mortar, rockets, and RPG and M-79 rounds.

From 1980 forward, the KR began their seasonal fights with the Vietnamese and PRK communist armies and were supplied by the PRC/China via Sattahip port and transported to border areas for delivery to the KR by the Thai Army. Other Khmer non-communist resistance groups began to coalesce with the primary armies being FUNCINPEC, a royalist army headed by Prince Ranaridh and Kampuchea People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) army, primarily composed of former Lon Nol (Khmer Republic) fighters. All three of these groups recruited younger cadres from refugee camps along the Thai border. In the 1980s, Ronald Reagan began supporting the "non-



Bombing was much heavier than many of us knew.

communist" liberation armies that were fighting in Cambodia, and US war materials and supplies began to flow from Sattahip to border areas, via the Thai army — who got richer.

The only person from my time with CMAC, whom I know, is Heng Rattana, a young demining unit leader when I was there, and who is now Director of CMAC. At the time, the Norwegian People's Aid provided many technical advisors to support all agencies involved with mines and UXO clearance. CMAC used to have a Public Awareness Officer and probably still does. That person can be contacted. I may know of one American who has continued to be an intermittent consultant or was when I last worked in Cambodia in 2013 to early 2015. I'll try to ask those friends of mine in Cambodia who might know who to contact at CMAC or MAG.

### ***Future of UXO in Cambodia***

Since the UN Peacekeeping Mission (UNTAC) in the early 1990s, Cambodia has had a lot of money thrown at it for demining and other efforts. Undoubtedly, progress has been made, both in mine and UXO clearance. By the kind of jobs undertaken by CMAC, which I have read about, there appears to be increasing efforts to clean up previously low-priority contaminations. I recently read an article about CMAC clearing UXO from sunken supply barges found along the Mekong and Bassac rivers, which suggests that they are using their mines/UXO clearance resources to attend to these less accessible threats. Like Laos, the entire country was contaminated at one point or another.

While I worked for CMAC in 1997, on two occasions unexploded 2,000-pound bombs, dropped on rice barges bound for the Japanese Army, were found and destroyed. Given the intensity of the bombings of the HCM trail and former battle areas, air-dropped bombs, mines, and UXO flung from fighting ground troops will continue to be found well into the future.

### ***Finding Where to Help***

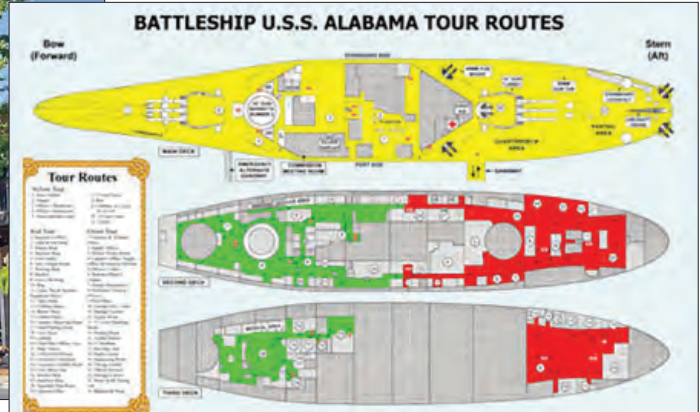
I'm not sure this map itself is a good guide to identifying villages in need of TLCB assistance. Many other considerations must be taken into account. As said, after 1998, eastern Cambodia received relatively lower priority, and Mondulkiri and Ratanakiri provinces are quite interesting areas. Ratanakiri abuts Vietnam to the East and Laos to the north, and Mondulkiri has a long border with Vietnam. I will make some inquiries about needy areas from those sources I know that remain and pass on any information I learn about areas of interest.



### ***Acronyms in this Article***

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| CMAC:      | Cambodia Mine Action Center  |
| EOD        | Explosive Ordnance Disposal  |
| FUNCINPEC  | is a French acronym for " <i>Front uni national pour un Cambodge indépendant, neutre, pacifique, et coopératif</i> ", which translates as "National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia," Prince Sihanouk's royalist political party. |
| HALO:      | Hazardous Area Life -support Organization  |
| HCM Trails | Ho Chi Minh Trails   |
| KAF        | Khmer Air Force  |
| Khmer      | The language and the people of Cambodia  |
| KPNLF      | The Khmer People's National Liberation Front was a non-communist political front organized in 1979 in opposition to the Vietnamese-installed People's Republic of Kampuchea.   |
| MAG:       | Mines Advisory Group   |
| PAVN       | People's Army of Vietnam (communist forces)  |
| PRK        | People's Republic of Kampuchea, a client of Vietnam installed in reaction to Pol Pot's repressive rule.  |
| RCAF       | Royal Cambodian Armed Forces   |
| RPG        | Rocket Propelled Grenade   |
| SOC        | State of Cambodia, which was a new name for the PRK  |
| UNHCR:     | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which calls itself the "UN Agency for Refugees"   |
| UNTAC      | United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia  |
| UXO        | Unexploded Ordnance  |

*Pensacola, home of the Blue Angels*



Tour the renowned Battleship USS Alabama (BB 60), in Mobile Bay, an hour west. You may want to visit quaint Fairhope on the way, for walking and shopping. Stop at Foley and get some "thrown rolls" at famous Lambert's Cafe.

# 2024 Reunion

☀️ *Pensacola, Florida* ☀️

September 15-18 (Sun-Wed) at the Holiday Inn Pensacola, located at 7813 N. Davis Hwy.

**RESERVATIONS:** (850) 472-1400 (Be sure to tell them you are with the TLCB)

**ROOM RATE:** \$125.00/night + tax of 12.5%. Good for 3 days prior to reunion and 3 days after. Includes free Wi-Fi, parking, buffet breakfast. **RATE CUTOFF DATE:** 08-28-2024

***RESERVE SOON!*** *This helps you protect the dates you want and helps us plan. It also helps us to obtain the most benefits from the hotel.*



At left, the National Naval Air Museum. During our visit there on Tuesday, the 17th, the Blue Angels are scheduled to practice. The museum has a free viewing area where we can watch them!

There is lots more in Pensacola, including a really cool downtown. The World War II Battleship "Alabama" is a MUST, and of course "The Wall, South," a duplicate of Washington's Vietnam Veteran's Memorial wall.

Below, mockup for the 2024 Rosie's Memorial Quilt raffle. Raffle tickets will be included in the June issue, along with reunion registration forms.



**Banquet Speaker MG (Ret) Richard Comer:**



**General Comer** was commissioned from the Air Force Academy in 1973. He flew various versions of H-53 helicopters for his entire flying career, ending with his final flight as the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) Vice-Commander, in September of 2002. Between 1974 and 2002, he flew Air Rescue first in SEA and then in Europe. He joined AFSOC in 1987 at Hurlburt AFB. He commanded the 20th SOS from 1990-92, during both DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. He commanded the Hurlburt Ops Group and Wing in the 1990s. He taught English at the Air Force Academy, he has been Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for SO/LIC, Director of Policy and Planning at US NORTHCOM, and Director of the Coalition Coordination Center at US CENTCOM. He serves on boards of several non-profit organizations.