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TLCB Member Publishes Story of Thai Volunteers in the Secret War

Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood (TLCB) member Paul Carter has recently published *CIA Secret Warriors: Thai Forward Air Guides in the US War in Laos*, the first time this story has been told in the English language.

Dr. Richard Ruth, History Department Chairman at the U.S. Naval Academy and author of the acclaimed *In Buddha's Company: Thai Soldiers in the Vietnam War*, wrote the book's Foreword, stating Carter "tells the ultimate 'untold story' of the Vietnam War."

Carter's book heavily focuses on the Thai Forward Air Guides, U.S. military-trained contract employees of the CIA

who coordinated U.S. air strikes in support of Thai and Allied forces in Laos during the Second Indochina War.

Paul Carter says, "Their role in modern warfare as English-speaking CIA-employed Thai civilians coordinating airstrikes for a foreign (U.S.) Air Force is unique, an anomaly never seen in warfare before or after." He summarizes several centuries of conflict between the Vietnamese, Siamese/Thai, Lao, and

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CIA Secret Warriors



Thai Forward Air Guides in the US War in Laos
The Untold Story

Paul T. Carter
กรุงเทพมหานคร, 2561
Bangkok, 2018

Cover photo: FAG "Spotlight" with HT-2 radio (circa 1972, Laos). Photos from the author's book, *CIA Secret Warriors*.

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Editor's Notebook:

The Future of the TLCB: Better than You May Think

At last year's Reunion, I led a discussion of the Future of the TLCB. The cover article of the September 2017 issue of the *Mekong Express Mail* (MEM) was dedicated to the same topic and summarized the submissions of members of an ad hoc committee that TLCB President Gary Beatty had asked me to chair. The article and the discussion yielded no concrete resolutions, but seemed to emphasize the challenges of developing structures that would allow the organization to survive past the lifespans of its natural membership. At the end of the article and the discussion, I asked members to contact me if they had any additional thoughts. The results to date: No responses. Now you might think that means the future of the TLCB is dim. However, the reality is considerably different, and this issue demonstrates that idea. To start with, our new member list is 10 joiners long, which is typical for each quarter. Also, we have three new member profiles and two of them are of women, which is not altogether unique. However, they are both from women who were not service members, but came to their interest in South East Asia through other venues, which is also not entirely unique. The third new member is a SEA veteran, a pilot, who only recently became aware of the TLCB and wanted to be a part of it. And that is similar to the profiles of the many who are part of the steady stream of new members. So, while we many not have figured out new structures of the TLCB's future, we clearly have a lot of new blood in our dynamic organization.

John Harrington
jharrington@nscopy.com

John McCain

In this issue, we memorialize the passing of three TLCB members. One of them, Steve Long, was a prisoner of war (POW) in Vietnam. It is also worth noting the passing in late August of arguably the most famous POW, John McCain, who subsequently went on to a distinguished career in politics. No person can deny the man's heroism and integrity. I would like to thank him for a life of duty to his country.



Photo from Quipster
Wordpress.

Mekong Express Mail Index

Did you know that there is an on-line index to all *MEM* articles ever published, starting with our first issue in June of 2000? Yes, there is, and it is on our wonderful TLCB Website: www.TLC-Brotherhood.com. All articles are listed by issue year and month, by title, with the authors' names and short descriptions of the subject matter. Go take a look sometime!

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

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Khmer that adds context to the U.S. involvements in Laos in the 20th century. He walks the reader through the U.S. and Thai decisions and motivations that brought the U.S. to fight in Laos, with historic and cultural details previous writers have not provided. He also furnishes extensive footnotes to support his narrative.

Carter drew upon recently declassified CIA documents from 2018 based on his 2016 declassification request, personal interviews with Thai and U.S. personnel, including the Thai

Forward Air Guides themselves, former CIA officers—oral histories, declassified State Department and Department of Defense records, personal travels to Laos, and other sources.

Carter has made his book available without charge to TLCB members. You can obtain an e-copy by sending an email to Varanyapub@gmail.com. In lieu of payment, Paul Carter suggests a contribution to the TLCB Assistance Fund, by going to this link: <http://tlc-brotherhood.com/wp/donate/>, although the book will remain free. The book format is Adobe PDF, 352 pages, with 58 color and b/w rare photos, most never before published.

Book Excerpt

CIA Secret Warriors: Thai Forward Air Guides

by Paul Carter

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

“Laos’ salvation is practically our own...” Thailand Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman, 1961

Years before the United States began its escalating military entanglement in Vietnam, U.S. military and civilian forces were engaged against communist forces in a much smaller, severely under-developed neighboring country of which few Americans had heard. Wedged between Vietnam and Thailand, the kingdom of Laos historically had been a pawn between

the two warring states. The remote, mountainous, backward landlocked nation, unlike its neighbors, did not have one meter of railway when the war began. No railway system exists today (albeit China is constructing one now).

In the late 1950s the estimated mixed-ethnic population was around 2 million (although no one was quite sure), the average Lao life span under 40 years, and over 90 percent of the people were functionally illiterate. There were no colleges or universities in the country and only one high school. Yet prior to the conflict in Vietnam, U.S. policymakers saw cloistered Laos, a nation slightly smaller than Oregon and quite removed from

Two Thai Border Patrol Police Aerial Reinforcement, known as “PARU,” center of front row, in a Laos Village, date unknown. Source: Underground Warriors Association (UWA 333).

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20th century development, as a primary location to confront communism.

What Americans refer to as the Vietnam War was essentially the larger Second Indochina War. Some scholars date the beginning of the Second Indochina War to 1954, others to 1959. As Bernard Fall characterized it, “The origins of the Second Indochina War are deeply rooted in the way the First Indochina War ended at Geneva in July 1954.” Or perhaps more tellingly, the way it did not end. A scant five years later, the events of 1959 fueled the conflict, as the North Vietnamese began initiating guerilla attacks in South Vietnam and the Laos Civil War began.

In retrospect, Laos seems one of the last places on earth the U.S. would want to take a major military or ideological stand against communism, committing almost unending resources. “Few areas in Southeast Asia are ridden with a more complex history or a more complicated tangle of political interests than this ‘accidental country,’ as one of my briefing papers described it,” according to former CIA Direct Richard Helms. A U.S. State Department officer in Laos from 1961 to 1963 observed that: “We always used to say Laos was not really a country, it was a figure of speech. It was not really the kind of thing that you’d say; well, here’s a clear territory, clear borders, people that are under the control of them,” none of that existed. It was very much just an area.” Of course, Laos was indeed a country and it had an elite with decidedly opposing views on which direction the country should take. Regardless, Laos was probably not a conflict that was Washington’s war to win or lose.

According to a U.S. survey at the time, 90% of Lao thought the world was flat and populated mainly by Lao. The country was woefully uncharted, with one responsible Lao official in 1959 telling a USAID official, “If you tell us where the villages are, we will put them on a map.” A CIA station chief in Vientiane observed about Laos, “Its economy was underdeveloped, its administrative capability primitive, its population divided both ethnically and regionally, and its elite disunited, corrupt, and unfit to lead.”

The CIA station chief notes that perhaps because of these systemic factors, Laos never developed any organizational capability for prosecuting the war. This failing in itself made the war almost impossible to win. It is questionable actually whether the U.S. even wanted to win a war in Laos. Much of

the American policy sentiment at the time seemed to be that the U.S. could win the war in Vietnam by seeking a stalemate in Laos.

Perhaps it was these conditions as well as the complexity of Southeast Asia that made the area ripe for war. As the noted Southeast Asian scholar Chris Baker wrote:

Mainland Southeast Asia is a jumble. The terrain and the climate are the same across the region and hence so is the traditional way of life. People grow rice, eat fish, keep buffalos, and worship the spirits in nature. But in other aspects, the region is



Rare, unpublished photo of CIA Directorate of Plans, Chief Far East Division William Colby (l) with Vientiane CIA Station Chief Douglas Blaufarb, meeting with Vang Pao at Long Tieng, probably October 1965 (see Colby’s trip report FRUS, 1964–1968, Volume XXVIII, LAOS, p. 484-485). Colby would become CIA director. Source: UWA 333

desperately divided. Its five main languages have separate scripts and structures. Every major faith in the world has its adherents. The political systems range from monarchy to the one-party state. And all this in an area that is roughly the same width as Texas.

Another fundamental problem existed, but this one emanated from the Potomac River and not the Mekong. Many scholars argue U.S. civilian and military decision-makers did not understand the Lao and made even less attempt to do so. It is an argument I probably would have readily accepted even absent evidence. I saw this repeatedly in my four civilian intelligence tours in Iraq. While I was liaising with leading Iraqi civilian and military leaders as well as incarcerated high-level insurgents, I witnessed U.S. State Department and senior military leaders fall victim to the all-too-common cognitive trap of “mirror imaging.” That is, the assumption that the foreigner thinks like and holds the same values as the American interlocutor. Their fault is not one of commission and condescension,

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rather of omission due to a lack of training. Confined inside a cultural bubble, some Americans talked more than they listened to their Lao allies. The lessons of World War Two taught Americans that the overwhelming application of power won wars. Ideology and will, however, were to be the instruments of power in the Second Indochina War.

A significant failure which I address later in the book is that some of the programs the United States wanted to implement in Laos and that had worked in a very similar environment in Thailand, could

never be achieved in Laos because the U.S. halted its efforts there. The U.S. halted efforts when it signed the 1962 Geneva Accord and pulled people from the country, while the North Vietnamese violated the treaty and maintained 7,000-9,000 military personnel in Laos. In Thailand, the U.S.—particularly the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD)—had decades to train the Thai military and police and create and sustain programs. In Laos, the efforts were interrupted and never regained adequate momentum. In fact, Royal Lao Army Brigadier General Soutchay Vongsavanh specifically addressed how the U.S. training and then program interruption failed the Lao Army.

Before Washington's leaders could ever have envisioned what a failure their efforts in Laos would become, they sounded the klaxon that Laos would be the Southeast Asian country where the United States would forcefully confront communism. The world geo-political realm at this time was a post-World War Two Cold War struggle where the U.S. and the Soviets were competing to build opposing orders, capitalist versus communist. Laos was considered a very important domino in the stack of countries that could fall to communism, which would change the geo-political balance in Southeast Asia.

A CIA officer stated that he was in a meeting in the CIA Director's office in 1959 when the director, Allen Dulles, pointed to Laos on a map of Southeast Asia and said "Gentlemen, there's a fire burning out there." That fire would consume more than anyone anticipated, and slowly seared the American military and diplomatic establishment. By 1971, Washington was spending U.S. \$3.75 billion per year to achieve a stalemate in Laos, which on a per capita basis probably made Laos the largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid in the world.



Rare, unpublished photo of CIA Directorate of Plans, Chief Far East Division William Colby shaking hands with Bill Lair (baseball cap), probably October 1965, Long Tieng, Laos. Vientiane CIA Station Chief Douglas Blaufarb, far right, Vang Pao, far left. (see Colby trip report FRUS, 1964-1968, VOLUME XXVIII, LAOS, p. 484-485). Colby would become CIA director. Source: UWA 333

It is unclear to what degree Royal Lao Government [RLG] attitudes towards democracy and against communism influenced Washington's decisions. Ryan Wolfson-Ford argues: "Lao anti-communism became central to the RLG's ideology at the height of the Cold War, yet it had already been on the political agenda of leading members of the RLG elite for over a decade, long before the Americans wielded much influence in the country. In this way, early interactions among the elite and American officials were more akin to a meeting of the minds, at least on the subject of communism; the real effect the Americans had in this period was to promote an already existing tendency among the elite and society at large."

President Kennedy and his foreign policy team focused on Laos as its major foreign policy issue during the days leading up to Kennedy's inauguration in January 1961. Both Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy viewed Laos as key terrain for containing communism's spread. A scarce three days after Kennedy was inaugurated, he approved in his "conference" with the Secretaries of Defense and State and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) among others, nine "State-Defense-CIA Task Force on Laos" military and paramilitary recommendations, the first two of the recommendations almost certainly being the arming and training of 2,000 Hmong guerillas. That such a task force even existed in Laos and that its recommendations required presidential approval, speaks volumes to Washington's urgent focus on Laos.

In late January the JCS recommended the President release a statement regarding the U.S. views and policy positions on Laos, which Kennedy did on March 19, 1961 when he held a

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FAG "Sunflower" (middle) with two Thai Volunteer Corps troops at a Thai military camp, Laos, circa 1972. Source: UWA 333.

news conference and said:

I want to make a brief statement about Laos. It is, I think, important for all Americans to understand this difficult and potentially dangerous problem. In my last conversation with General Eisenhower, the day before the Inauguration, on January 19, we spent more time on this hard matter than on any other thing; and since then it has been steadily before the Administration as the most immediate of the problems that we found upon taking office.

In April 1961, the White House viewed communist advances in Laos so alarming that it was prepared to consider air strikes inside China to stop Chinese intervention. The possible use of

FAGs "Counter" (l) and "Sky King," Veterans Day 2018, Bangkok. Source: Counter



nuclear weapons was discussed.

President Kennedy and his administration were short-sighted in that they forced Allied elements—Lao military and political leaders—to accept a coalition government in Laos in 1962 which included communists, and then pulled U.S. troops from the country. Eisenhower, according to written accounts of his conversations with Kennedy, had understood it was impossible to have a coalition government with communists, and the Thai – who vehemently opposed the arrangement – understood this too. This façade of an arrangement brought about a feeble government and was a half-step measure in the prosecution of war. This mistake cost a lot of Allied blood and treasure and civilian suffering. The war should have been either prosecuted fully, or not at all.

As William J. Rust states, “At the time of Kennedy’s death, U.S. policy in Laos was confused and contradictory. On the one hand the president had approved a gradually escalating program of military pressure to demonstrate U.S. resolve in Laos. On the other hand, his basic policy guidance was that the ‘U.S. should not take the initiative in military escalation.’ This inconsistency reflected the dilemma Kennedy faced after the collapse of the Soviet-backed Geneva Convention.”

In fact, Kennedy’s two most influential “counterinsurgency theorists,” Roger Hilsman and Walt W. Rostow, held strongly divergent views on the consequence of North Vietnamese infiltration through Laos for the Vietnam war. Their situation was similar to that of Marine Major General Victor Krulak and senior Foreign Service Officer Joseph Mendenhall who Kennedy sent on a fact-finding mission to Vietnam in September 1963. Upon return, their reports and assessments were so divergent that Kennedy asked his two advisers, “You two did visit the same country, didn’t you?”

Divergent views on how to fight the war and inter-agency rivalries contributed to often tepid war prosecution measures

in Laos. As author Thomas Harris observed through the character Hannibal Lecter, “We live in a primitive time, don’t we? Neither savage nor wise. Half measures are the curse of it. Any rational society would either kill me or give me my books.”

Active U.S. involvement in Laos began in March 1953 when the French-Viet Minh war spilled into Laos and the Viet Minh crossed into the country, pushing south to seize Laos’ royal capital, Luang Prabang. Washington acted with alarm, rushing supplies to

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continues next page



FAG "Night Fighter" (bottom left corner) with Thai Volunteer Corps troops, Plain of Jars, Laos, circa 1972. Source: Night Fighter.

Thailand and Laos in six C-119 CIA-sponsored aircraft with civilian crews. As Walt Haney wryly observed, for the United States, "This form of involvement displayed elements which were to become familiar to U.S. involvement in Laos in the next twenty years; expanded involvement as a response to crisis, the use of civilians in military and para-military operations, and the reliance on air power."

While U.S. involvement in Laos developed rather rapidly, the communist encroachment there was a slow burn. Although not the first communist-associated group he had formed, Ho Chi Minh established the League for the Independence of Vietnam, or Viet Minh, back in May 1941 as a broad front movement for communist-directed independence and reform in Vietnam.

Few today realize the purpose for the French establishing a base at Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam, less than 10 miles from the Lao border, was to cut the Viet Minh approaches to Laos and defeat Viet Minh forces there. A year later, the Viet Minh defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu, effectively ending French colonial rule in Southeast Asia.

The U.S. war in Vietnam was to become just one battlefield in the larger Second Indochina War, pitting the communist world against the so called "Free World" forces. The U.S. secret war in Laos raged just as prolifically and violently as its conflict in neighboring Vietnam. In fact, by 1971—two years

before the end of the U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia—the U.S. had dropped 1.6 million tons of bombs over Laos, more than double the 600,000 tons it had dropped over North Vietnam.

The election of Richard Nixon as U.S. President in late 1968 was the beginning of the end to the U.S. military entanglement in Southeast Asia. "Peace with Honor" was his mantra ending

FAGs "Spotlight" (left) and "Big Mo," at *FAG Flyrods* restaurant, Bangkok, Dec. 2017. Big Mo is the oldest FAG and served with US Special Forces White Star soldiers in 1961. Source: Author



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the war. By 1969 the United States' primary peninsular Southeast Asian ally in the Second Indochina War, Thailand, also publicly signaled its intent to begin a drawdown from the Vietnamese conflict. President Nixon announced in 1969 that 50,000 U.S. troops would withdraw from South Vietnam by April 1970, while Thailand announced it would withdraw its 12,000-man contingent from South Vietnam. The U.S. Congress also passed a bill prohibiting the introduction of combat elements into Thailand or Laos. Yet the communists had no such peaceful and honorable plans. In 1967, there were 40,000 North Vietnamese soldiers occupying Laos, according to the Lao Prime Minister.

Despite these public statements to demobilize, behind the scenes in 1970 the Thai and U.S. governments decided to secretly expand the fight against communists in Laos, leading to the largest Thai military expeditionary deployment in modern times. Laos took on increasing significance with the United States in no small part because the key U.S. ally, Thailand, considered Laos as the frontline to stop encroaching communism toward Thailand.

The CIA Director in 1970 estimated the CIA would be directing 36,000 irregular Thai and Lao troops in Laos in fiscal year 1971. This approach, shrouded in secrecy, would become the most puzzling way to run a war perhaps ever conceived.

The last three Thai battalions (GM 203) depart Long Tieng, May 22, 1974. Source: UWA 333 The C-130 in this fading picture appears to have no markings.

The U.S. ambassador to Laos would be a de facto field marshal commanding the war, the U.S. DoD would fund it, the CIA would run the operations on the ground and spend the DoD money, the U.S. and Allied Air Forces would conduct the air bombing campaign, and the Thai, Hmong, Royal Lao, and Laos' minorities would fight the ground war.

There were other strange anomalies regarding Laos. It was the only country in the world in which the U.S. funded 100 percent of its defense budget and almost all of its economy (albeit the French were still providing some military training, at least to the neutralists). It was also perhaps the only country ever where the warring factions were not participants signing the peace accord and where a nation attacked (Royal Lao Government) maintained diplomatic relations with the aggressor (North Vietnam) throughout the course of the war.

A key component of this expanded Allied fight in Laos was young English-speaking Thai men who the CIA recruited to coordinate U.S. and Allied air strikes in Laos. They were designated Forward Air Guides, commonly called FAGs, and were a unique element of warfare not seen before or since because they were foreign civilians absent military experience (for many), working for a foreign intelligence agency coordinating air strikes.



NOTE: This excerpt from a book by TLCB member Paul Carter, is reprinted with his permission, and who is solely responsible for the content. Neither the Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood, nor the Mekong Express Mail are responsible for, nor do they endorse, any opinion or other content therein.



New Member Profile:

Linda Howey

I first arrived in Thailand in 1973 as a Peace Corps Volunteer, serving as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher in Phrae, a nutritionist in Chiang Rai, and ending my service in 1975. After four years back in the U.S., I accepted a position in Thailand with the International Rescue Committee (IRC). IRC had a contract with the U.S. Embassy to assist in “processing” refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, a process that entailed conducting extensive interviews with the applicants in refugee camps all over Thailand, presenting each case to a U.S. immigration officer, obtaining medical clearances for refugees approved to resettle in the U.S., and finally, obtaining U.S. sponsorships for each person or family approved for resettlement.

I was very fortunate to have worked with the Embassy’s Refugee Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator at the time, Lionel Rosenblatt, and Mac Thompson, respectively, and a host of other extremely capable and committed expatriates and local staff.

Having been granted intermittent leaves of absence from my job as a Park Ranger in Yosemite National Park, I was able to “commute” between Yosemite and Thailand for a few years, but when the National Park Service (NPS) required a full-time return to Yosemite, I opted to stay in Thailand and resigned from my civil service position with the NPS. Though this was a difficult decision at the time, in retrospect it only confirmed that my abiding interest was in refugee and international work.

I returned to the U.S. in 1985 to attend graduate school, after which I accepted a job with Refugees International in Washington, DC. While in DC I got married and found myself accompanying my new husband to southern Africa (Malawi), where he had accepted a position with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), working on assistance to the Mozambican refugee population that had fled to Malawi. I eventually joined USAID as well, and my husband and I both served with USAID for more than 20 years, primarily in Africa.

I am now retired from USAID, but my last assignment was in Pakistan, just a five-hour flight from Bangkok. After a 23-year hiatus, I flew from Islamabad to Bangkok in October 2013, prepared for a vastly changed environment, but instead finding myself “at home” once again. I subsequently learned about the TLC Brotherhood from Lionel and Mac, and I am grateful that I can provide a small measure of support to this remarkable organization.

I currently live in Medford, MA, with my husband, Greg Gottlieb, who retired from USAID in 2017 and accepted a position at Tufts University, located in Medford.



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QCD: Donate and SAVE!

IRS now has a way for us to make donations to the TLC Brotherhood with tax-exempt money using the Qualified Charity Donation (QCD). Thanks to some savvy members, we have learned that people with Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs) can direct their fund custodian to make part of their annual Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) directly to a charity (TLCB is a qualified recipient because of our IRS status as a 501(c)3 tax exempt charity). *The part that goes to the charity is never taxed, which reduces your overall tax liability.*

For more information you should discuss this with your IRA custodian.

NOTE:

This article is not advice and neither The Mekong Express Mail nor the TLC Brotherhood is making any official representation of the QCD rules.

You may want to discuss this with a *tax* expert, too. In many circumstances the new income deduction laws make performing a QCD a very attractive way to reduce how much you wind up paying in taxes.

Tax Return Considerations for QCDs

Be careful, though. We have also read that IRA custodians are not required to note on the IRS 1099-R form that you have performed a QCD. If you have a tax preparer and do not tell them about this, most likely they will list this transaction as a taxable one unless they know about the QCD.



Official Notice:

TLCB Election 2018

The TLC Brotherhood, Inc. Board of Directors election will be held on Saturday, October 13, 2018, at the Margaritaville Resort, Biloxi, Mississippi. The TLC Brotherhood Board of Directors has adopted the official slate, which was recommended by the Nominating Committee as announced in the March issue of this newsletter. The official Ballot/Proxy form was enclosed.

As prescribed in the bylaws, write-in votes are permitted. The absentee ballot and a proxy designation form are for use only by members who do not attend the annual meeting. Use one or the other, but NOT both forms.

New Member Profile

Susan K. Crosby, and her Objective

This history summarizes my 25-year career in law enforcement.

From 2005-2008, I was a Lieutenant/Field office supervisor for the State of Florida in Orlando. My primary responsibility was



Officer Susan Crosby, "then."

supervising squad(s) of detectives conducting overt and covert criminal felony investigations in seven counties in central Florida, as well as the support of non-sworn staff. During that time, I also participated in the I.C.E. Task force, was acting captain for the central Florida region as needed, and supervised one of

the first teams of law enforcement agencies to arrive in Jackson County Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina.

From 1989 to 2005, I was a Law Enforcement Detective in Florida (From 1989-1998, Miami). During 1998-2005, I was in criminal investigations, audio and visual surveillance. I prepared search warrant affidavits and executed search warrants, prepared press releases and coordinated with media, and participated in the FBI Task Force.

From 1984-1989, I was a police officer for the South Miami Police Department and was on uniformed patrol and was a background investigator and training coordinator, reporting directly to the Chief of Police.

PS: Of particular interest to TLCB members may be my interest in what I have entitled "Objective Laos." Please see the accompanying article.

Hot Springs, North Carolina

Objective Laos

It began with a POW/MIA bracelet given to me by my mother in the early 1970s. She was a registered nurse at the V.A. Medical Center in Miami FL and bought the bracelet in the hospital canteen. The silver bracelet is engraved: "Lt. Col. Carter P. Luna, 3-10-69"

In 2006, I became a volunteer and later a Board member with the Museum of Military History in Kissimmee Florida. I was also an associate member of Orlando Chapter 400 of the Military Order of the Purple Heart. When I joined, I "apparently volunteered" to plan and coordinate a motorcycle benefit ride

Susan Crosby's inspiration grew from this POW bracelet, given by her mother, a VA nurse, in the early 1970s. It reads, "Col. Carter P. Luna."



in 2009 to raise money for a memorial to be placed at the new V.A. Medical Center in Orlando, Florida.

When I wasn't wearing the bracelet, it was secured, and amazingly survived many life situations over 40+ years. However, sometime late in the first decade of 2000 I began to wear the bracelet daily; and in 2009, I began diligent research of "Lt. Col. Carter P. Luna." It was during that time when I started having thoughts that I wanted to someday travel to Laos to honor Carter Luna.

Although my research was not continuous, I began amassing documents, photographs, and historical information related to Lt. Col. Luna, and the "Vietnam" war. In 2017, my research advanced at a quicker and more intense rate. The thought of traveling to Laos became a reality since my son was living and working in Bangkok. What were the chances that my son would be assigned to Bangkok which afforded me the opportunity to travel so close to Laos, almost 50 years after the last known day of Col. Luna's life?

I made a two-week trip to Bangkok in late 2017, which included a weekend voyage to Laos, where I realized the challenges in reaching the crash site of Col. Luna's plane. On my return, I was able to read next-of-kin letters from the Air Force to the Colonel's wife and parents. It was at that time that he became "more than a name on a bracelet," and Objective Laos became an obsession for me.

Almost without thinking, it became evident to me that I would return to Laos, but this time I'd be prepared to travel to a village near Col. Luna's last known location. Through another source, I made contact with the USAF regarding the possibility of contacting Col. Luna's next-of-kin. I wrote a detailed letter to Col. Luna's next-of-kin in May 2018 and the USAF forwarded it to them.

Memorial Day, May 28, 2018: I received a phone call and when I saw the name on the caller id, I knew. I began a special conversation with the wife of Col. Luna.

So, all of my efforts, even more than detailed here, lead me to conclude that Objective Laos is my mission: To return to Laos, to travel to villages, to seek information/evidence, and to accomplish my goal to honor a lost hero.

And I welcome any assistance and advice that any members of the TLCB can provide me.

susan@susankcrosby.com



In Memoriam

Stephen “Steve” Long

Stephen Long, a member of the Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood (TLCB) and a former Prisoner of War in Vietnam, died on August 10, 2018 in Las Vegas of complications from Parkinson’s Disease. Steve was 74. He was born February 16, 1944, in Hastings, Nebraska. He is survived by his wife of 45 years, Katherine; son, Shannon Long; daughter, Katie Long Silvia, and several grandchildren.

Flying out of Thailand, he was shot down by enemy fire Feb 28, 1969 over the Ho Chi Minh Trail inside Laos and spent 1,490 days in captivity as a POW. Steve wrote about his capture for the *Mekong Express Mail* in the December 2001 issue, and we are reprinting it here. Additionally, in our next issue, we will be publishing an eloquent and moving memory of Steve by TLCB member Roger Durant, who loaded Steve’s doomed plane on that fatal February day in 1969.

USAF official photo of Steve Long taken pre-capture.



Steve Long continued on Page 12.

John Loftus

John Loftus, who served as president of The Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood (TLCB) between 2008 and 2010, passed away on July 13, 2018 in New Jersey. He was 76 and was born and raised in Philadelphia, PA. During his 22-year U.S. Air Force career, John served in Vietnam and received many awards and decorations for his service. After his retirement, he worked for RCA (Lockheed Martin). He was also an EMT for Beverly-Edgewater Park Emergency Squad, a fire commissioner for Beverly-Edgewater Park, and an EMT instructor, as well as a NJ State EMT evaluator/inspector. John was a member of the former Beverly-Edgewater Park VFW and a member of American Legion Post 39 in Roebing. He is survived by his loving wife of almost 57 years, Margaret (Chatary) Loftus, and his children, John J. Loftus, Cathryne Smith (Greg), and Barbara Primiani (Anthony). He also leaves behind five grandchildren, Noah, Zachary, Peter, Kayleigh, and Nicholas, as well as extended family.



John Loftus at the Space Coast reunion in 2009.

More John Loftus photos on Page 12.

Auke Koopmans

Auke Koopmans, a Dutch ex-patriate living in Thailand, and a member of the Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood (TLCB), who accompanied Mac Thompson on trips to Laos in support of TLCB’s Assistance Program, died on June 18, 2018, of a heart attack. He came to Thailand with UN-FAO, the United Nations’ *Food and Agriculture Organization*, and he also worked on occasion with a Dutch NGO and Asia Development Bank (ADB). He was a motorcycle enthusiast and also an esteemed mapmaker. A Thai ceremony was held in honor of the country he fell in love with more than 35 years ago. The three-night service for Auke was held in his long-time hometown of Chiang Mai, starting on June 22nd at Wat Puak Pia, with the cremation on Monday,



Auke photo posted on Ride Asis site.

June 25th. He is survived by his children.

Vaughan Smith, who has been working very closely with Mac Thompson, along with **Paul Carter** (see lead article in this issue), recently wrote:

During my travel with Auke he mentioned his career in SE Asia with the different agencies. I recall thinking how lucky he was to have been able to be based in

Chiang Mai during almost his entire career in development work (mine took me all over the globe). I recall FAO, ADB, and EU and Dutch-funded projects in Laos on several occasions, and otherwise he worked in Thailand. Auke’s work was at the ministerial level but also included project oversight.

Auke continued on Page 14.

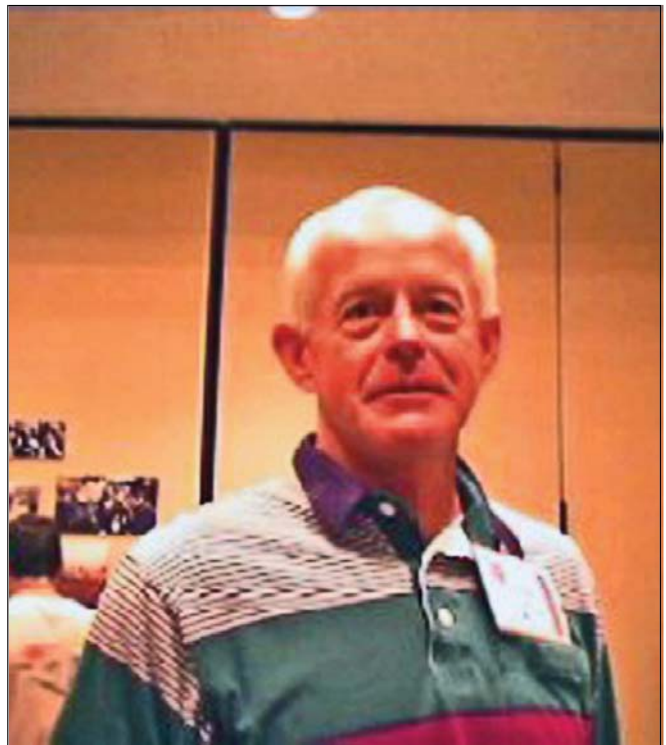
Steve Long continued from Page 11.

From the Archives: September 2001

Ban Loboy at Water Level

By Steve Long, Ex POW

No trip through Laos in 1969 would be complete without a night ride through Ban Loboy Water Crossing and Ban Karai Pass. The site of a treacherous supply route between mountainous karst ridges, it was the obvious conception of what a target analyst thought an interdiction point should be. It was easily recognizable by the absence of vegetation in a barren landscape between the imposing karst ridges. My passage on the evening of March 2, 1969, was memorable for its desecration by a F-4 Hunter-Killer team. As we splashed through the fords at Ban Loboy, I was able to sit up in the back of the truck and see the karst to the west and I realized exactly where we were...the most bombed target in the history of aerial warfare, heading straight for Ban Karai! My thoughts raced that we were headed for the most dangerous place in the world! The F-4s, having spotted a single truck rumbling around the bomb craters in the middle of the moonscape scene, declared the truck fair game. The lead F-4 rolled in with its 20 mm Gatling blazing, not knowing that the truck carried a terrified American pilot lying in the back. Completing the strafing pass, the lead aircraft pulled off, banking left and right, exhaust cans glowing. That was when both sides of Ban Karai Pass opened up on him. I was amazed that an aircraft could fly through that much flak and still avoid being hit. Thank goodness the second F-4, having witnessed this ominous scene, showed some respect



Steve Long photo taken in Las Vegas a few years ago. Photo contributed by Roger Durant, who stayed in touch with Steve for many years.

and discretion for the ridge-positioned gunners, and chose not stick his nose in that fight. The glow of engine tailpipes from the lead aircraft was my last contact with an American for a long time to come.”

Editor's Note: *At that time, Steve Long probably did not imagine he still had nearly 50 years of life ahead of him.*

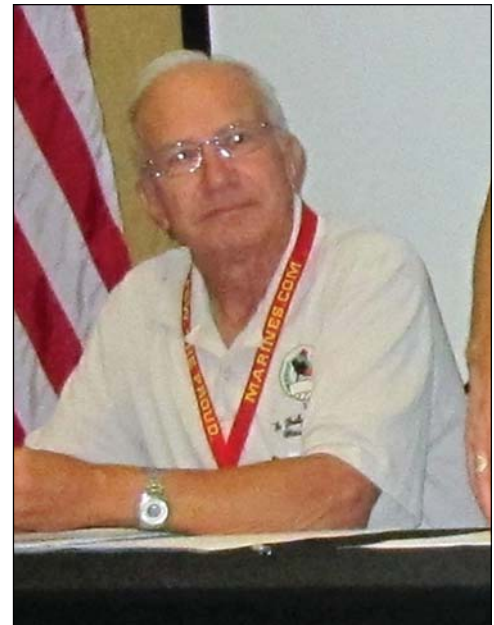


John Loftus continued from Page 11.

Vice President John Sweet presents outgoing President John Loftus with a very special gift from the TLC Brotherhood in appreciation for his service as president.



The aircraft is a model of John's beloved RC-121, on which he flew many combat hours in Southeast Asia. The occasion was the reunion banquet in 2010 (Atlanta). At right, John Loftus presiding at the 2009 annual meeting at the Space Coast in Florida. Photos by Bill Tilton.



New Member Profile:

Al Anderer

I grew up in Philadelphia (Fly, Eagles, Fly!) and left home at the age of 18. After getting my degree and commission, my military active duty started with 20 months of pilot training at Moody AFB, GA (where I met my wife), and C-130 training at Sewart AFB, Tennessee. Then it was off to Columbus, Ohio and Lockbourne AFB. I was stationed there but spent



Al, recently. Photos provided by the author.

most of my time TDY to Evreux, France, and flying throughout Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. There were several trips to the Dominican Republic, transporting the 82nd Airborne Division in 1965. I also rotated to the Panama Canal Zone where we stood on alert and traveled throughout South America.

while flying north at 22,000 ft. over Quito, Ecuador, a familiar voice came on the air and gave me instructions to switch to a private frequency. It was one of my roommates heading south at 21,000 ft. He gave me the news that we both had orders for Okinawa with departure in November, 1966. My wife and I were engaged in February and married during May in her hometown of Atlanta, Georgia. I left for Naha AB, Okinawa, in June of 1966. (I'll leave the story of the departure date and marriage date sliding closer and closer for another time).

From June 1966 I flew out of Naha AB on the southern tip of Okinawa. The normal mission was to rotate to Cam Ranh Bay for 15 days, ferrying troops and supplies in country. Our primary focus was SVN with occasional trips to other SE Asia locations. No C-130s were permanently stationed in SVN. Almost all were TDY from Okinawa, Taiwan, and Japan. (Okinawa was still occupied by the U.S. at that time).

In July 1966 I was headed back to Okinawa from an orientation trip to Thailand when our aircraft was diverted to Khe Sanh. It was my first landing in SVN and was memorable for what I would later observe. Khe Sanh wasn't even on the navigator's maps. He had the coordinates, but said there were no navigational aids and only a village named Xom Cham or something similar. As we were flying above a cloud deck at about 10,000 feet, he said that it was right below us. A break in the clouds opened up, and we dove into the hole and spiraled

down. As the sun broke through the clouds, it revealed a lush, green valley with a short runway on the edge of a cliff. After landing, the Marines shared a steak lunch with us while we waited for a bulldozer to be loaded on our aircraft. The steak was cooked over a firepit off one end of the runway and we had a beautiful view of the entire valley, an uneventful and deceptive introduction to the war zone.

The last time I airdropped cargo at Khe Sanh (which was on the maps by then), it looked like the moon. Supplies had to be dropped just off the end of the runway, and I could look out and see the defined perimeter of the base, outlined with bomb craters from B-52s running out from the perimeter for hundreds of yards. Weaving among the craters were lines that apparently were collapsed tunnels that had been heading toward the perimeter. The B-52s put an end to that endeavor. There was an unbelievable change in the scenery around Khe Sanh in less than 2 years – lush to mush!

In addition to the everyday mission of hauling and occasionally dropping troops and supplies, the rest of my 33-month tour was broken up by two forty-five-day TDYs to Ubon, Thailand, flying the "Blind Bat" mission to destroy and disrupt truck traffic along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. At the start of the mission in 1965 out of Da Nang, each C-130 operated as part of a four-ship formation, along with a pair of B-57 bombers and a Marine EF-10 for electronic-countermeasure support. Whether the group operated over North Vietnam or over Laos, the C-130 would drop flares on truck traffic while the B-57s bombed and the EF-10 jammed enemy radars. In 1966 the operation was moved from Da Nang to Ubon after several C-130s were lost to a mortar attack, and the mission was moved further south along the trail as stronger and more robust antiaircraft fire was encountered. The mission used the call signs Blind Bat and Lamp Lighter and changed to 7 or 8 hours along the trail as a flare/FAC operation from 6 pm to 6 am each night.

The C-130s were no longer accompanied by the B-57s and EF-10 and often encountered 37mm flack traps. One gun would fire and two others would triangulate on the first set of tracers. The 3 sets of tracers crisscrossing would provide wider and



Official USAF photo of Capt Al Anderer, a few years ago.

more complete defensive coverage. In addition to the B-57s that would be scheduled to fly with us, many of the aircraft we worked with, Air Force, Navy, and Marine, had been on bombing runs up North and still had munitions to drop before returning to base. Occasionally we worked with the Air Commandos out of Naked Fanny when they needed more flare

Anderer continued on Page 14.

Anderer continued from Page 13.

support. After my second Ubon tour and about 350 hours and 54 missions over Laos, 11 into NVN, my Blind Bat missions were over. It was back to the Cam Ranh Bay grind for the rest of 1968 and into 1969.

I was due to separate from the service in mid-March, 1969, but my squadron managed to squeeze in one last fifteen-day TDY tour in February. After 33 months of this, I expected the last tour to be like all of the others; however, in order to get my broken aircraft out of forward Army airfields (mortar bait in the vernacular of our Army comrades), I wound up having to make two three-engine takeoffs at sundown in the last week

of the tour. I completed 957 combat sorties and just over 1500 hours of combat time.

After separation, most of my feather merchant life was filled with sales management positions with Federal Express and Greyhound Corporation, as well as my own recruiting company. Now retired, I spend my time with family, Vietnam Veterans of America, Military Officers Association of America, and volunteering with Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, and I just added TLC Brotherhood membership. My Georgia Peach and I have two children and two grandchildren, and we have lived in Arizona for the last 37 years.



Auke continued from Page 11.

On the May 2015 trip, Auke's truck and winch came to the rescue getting Mac's rental Ford Ranger (Sampeu's) up the last steep grade of the very muddy road and onto the Plain of Jars. On this same trip, Auke's winch again came to the rescue of [TLCB's Lao point of contact] Soenduean's pickup on our last school visit of the trip during a fast, torrential rain.



Above, Auke directs winch use on muddy road to Xaysombon. Below, Mac watches operation (foreground) Photos from Mac Thompson.



Mac Thompson, the TLCB's Laos coordinator, and Auke dancing with Hmong children at a school in Northern Laos several years ago. Photo from Bill Tilton.

Auke was a pleasure to travel with and incredibly knowledgeable about Laos and getting there from Thailand. Though Auke drove his 4-wheel Hi-Lux on all trips, he liaised extensively with the moto-touring people and shared/exchanged the latest GPS information with them and road information. Auke was a strict mapper and did not allow for any map features that were not one hundred percent accurate. Thanks to his friendship and participation with Mac and the TLCB, Mac was able to generate those wonderfully detailed maps that appear in the Assistance Reports. Furthermore, Auke was always aware of the current state of road conditions around the areas of Xiengkhoang and Xasomboon Provinces where Mac and all TLCB travelers frequently went to carry out the TLCB school assistance work. His generosity with map assistance, knowledge of conditions and travel practicalities, and good humor were important assets to the TLCB on uncountable occasions. I've mentioned Auke as a TLCB member and advisor. Auke was able to provide up-to-date info on open routes and road conditions and GPS map tracks of the road in advance of a trip. His good nature, humor, and personality will be greatly missed.

Auke continued on next Page.

From his son, Sietse, as posted on one of the Ride Asia Websites:

Please let me take this opportunity to express my gratitude. You see, my parents weren't just parents to me, but two remarkable pillars in my life; my "Supermom," as I'd like to call her,



This photo of Auke and his family, from an earlier time, was posted on a "rider" website.

and my hero understatedly titled "Pap." As far as I can remember, they've always taught me the value of humility and generosity that continues in their legacy, proven by your heartwarming anecdotes. Only in adulthood have I come to realize the magical upbringing I've had that was only made possible through sacrifice, dedication, and of course, love. It's been such a gift, and if I would only become a fraction of what they were, I'd consider myself lucky.



At a Lao "Baci" ceremony. Strings ensure that you return. Photo from Mac Thompson.

But honestly, I still have to find peace with fate as we're not seeing each other eye-to-eye at the moment. I'd like to imagine my parents together on a trip somewhere beyond our comprehension, as the dynamic duo I've always known them to be. Pap marking waypoints and Supermom keeping them both fed and hydrated,

and occasionally stopping at wondrous sites void of earthly maladies or barriers. Should heaven need a map, they've got just the right man to do it. And should they require a feisty matriarch, it's their lucky day as well.

Web comment from "BSACBOB"

Auke, the Lone Rider, had been one of the key players in the formation of Ride Asia and was an incredible encyclopedia who helped many riders travelling in Laos and Thailand. His mapping work was legendary, and his mapping of Laos in GPS and paper format, as well as Northern Thailand, produced some of the best maps ever published [See At the Exchange, page 16. Ed.] Auke was also closely involved in the Thailand Laos Cambodian Brotherhood (TLCB), helping less fortunate families and schools in the region.



Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The 10 members listed below joined between the last issue of the MEM and the end of August. You can find more information on our website database. The Mekong Express Mail wishes you all a hearty "Welcome Home."

No	Branch	Last Name	First Name	City	State
1843	USAF	Covington	James	Newsome	VA
1844	USAF	Lyons	James	Mc Cormick	SC
1845	USAF	Faber	Donald	Golden	CO
1846	Other	Crosby	Susan	Hot Springs	NC
1847	Other	Cosenza	Thomas	Windermere	FL
1848	USAF	Johnson	Donald	APO Bangkok	AP
1849	USAF	Anderer	Albert	Phoenix	AZ
1850	USAF	Lin	Long	Pasadena	CA
1851	USA	Zamora	Guadalupe	San Antonio	TX
1852	USAF	Bixby	Russell	Bernardston	MA

2018 Raffle Quilt Photo Disclosed!

Bulletin! Bob Wheatley, famous husband of the consistently amazing quilter, Rosie, has disclosed that the image at right will be the face of the 2018 TLC Brotherhood Assistance Quilt, which will be won by a lucky ticket holder at the annual meeting banquet in Biloxi on October 13th.

If you received this issue of the *MEM* by mail you will find an inserted sheet of raffle tickets. PLEASE DO NOT CUT THESE APART--we have a very sharp paper cutter for that purpose, and if you do it there is a greater risk that some of your loose tickets will get lost. If you mail this sheet to arrive at **TLCB, PO Box 60, Aspers PA 17304** before October 1st you only need to put your information on one ticket--we will print up as many as you pay for (a bargain at just \$2 donation per ticket), and put them in the box.



Alternatively, you can just fill them all out and bring them and your check with you. At the reunion, hand them to Rosie Wheatley, who will see that they get into the drawing before the banquet.

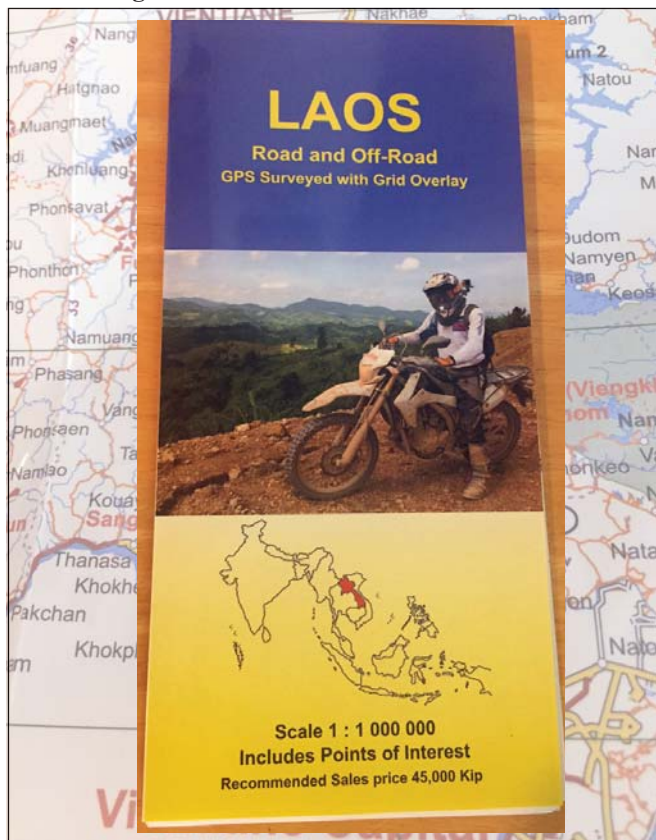
Good Luck!



At the TLCB Exchange

The Auke Koopmans map of Laos is available in limited numbers at the Exchange. See page 11 to learn more about Auke and why this map is so good.

Get yours NOW! Go to: <http://tlc-brotherhood.com/wp/the-exchange/>



It's not too late: Biloxi!

October 11-13 / 195 Beach Blvd, Biloxi, MS

Hotel Reservations:

To see if you can still get a room, call the Margaritaville Resort Biloxi direct at (800) 794 1582 or call the local number (228) 271 6377. They may still give you our excellent room rate. To register for the REUNION, go to www.TLC-Brotherhood.com. It will pop right up!

Stuff to do? Besides the casinos:

Start with seafood! In fact, in 5 minutes you can walk to the Maritime & Seafood Museum. On Friday, we'll hop on a bus and head west to the **Stennis Space Center**, where all of the rocket engines launched from Kennedy are tested. They are currently testing the engines for Apollo, and SpaceX is doing a feasibility study to build a launch complex here. While there, you will want to tour the **Infinity Science Center** and walk through a section of the **International Space Station**.

Shopping:

Gulfport Outlet Mall - Not far from the airport.

Downtown area - Has mall shops and some open-air sidewalk restaurants.

Ocean Springs - Just on the other side of the bridge by the hotel, small craft shops.

Cruise Options:

There is a paddle wheeler, a working shrimp boat, and a tour boat to the barrier islands.

