

MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



The newsletter of the Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood, Inc. Volume 20, issue 3

WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.com

Editor's Notebook:

The New Members' Issue: Thoughts on a spurt in membership

Several years ago, at the request of the then-new President Gary Beatty, I chaired an ad hoc committee on the future of the Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood (TLCB). The results were summarized in the September 2017 issue and reported on at the same year's Annual Reunion. The end message was, after analyzing some organizational options, that the TLCB was essentially a "sunset" group that would fade away as fewer potential members were available to replenish our ranks. However, at the reunion discussion, there was a broad consensus that there was still a substantial opportunity to expand the membership by increasing the TLCB's visibility.

Reaching Out

Well, those efforts, and there have been several, apparently are succeeding. On page 3, take a look at the list of new members who have joined in the three months since the last issue of the *Mekong Express Mail (MEM)*. There are 26! The usual figure is around 10, give or take one or two. Some of these newcomers were attracted by a presentation made by TLCB members at a gathering of Nakhon Phanom veterans held this spring. Additionally, several came to the TLCB via an upgraded TLCB Facebook page, which Ray Boas administers. (If you search for it, be sure you get to "The Official Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood" page).

Beyond the leap forward in attracting new brothers and sisters, there is a new level of willingness to share their stories with the wider membership through the *MEM*. As new members join, I contact them and invite them to introduce themselves by submitting a profile (or even any kind of article) to the *MEM*. Generally, the response rate is one or two per quarter, and sometimes, although rarely, zero. In this issue, we are introducing four newbies: Rick Tober, Hugh Gill, Jim

Hoover, and David Geryak, who does double duty with a reprint of an article, published in *The New York Times* two years ago. Beyond that, we have several more submissions in the pipeline, something to look forward to. The TLCB membership now stands at 507, which is about where it was a year ago. Keep in mind that veterans of the Vietnam era are of a vulnerable age, so an improving membership attraction rate is offset to some extent by an inevitable and unavoidable attrition rate.

New Members continues on page 2.

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One-to-One

There is another way that membership expands: by one-to-one contact. Most members are still in touch with colleagues from our days back then, and it is unlikely that all of them have been convinced to cough up the “outrageous” \$30 annual membership dues. Beyond that, many of us serendipitously run into persons who have varying levels of interest in America’s relationship with Southeast Asia. I hesitated at saying SEA veterans, because some new members are not veterans in the traditional sense, but have had experiences with Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. And, you never know when or where you’ll come across prospective members. If you see a vehicle with Vietnam ribbons on its plate, place a TLCB business card in the door. If you contact the TLCB Exchange, you can get a few to keep in your wallet. The Exchange includes a membership application to non-member buyers. Recently, I was at a luncheon for a seniors’ continuing education group,* and it turned out that the fellow I happened to sit next to was in Thailand about the same time I was, as an F-4 pilot out of Ubon. I just sent him the link to our website, along with a couple of back copies of the *MEM*.

Referring back again to the discussion at the 2017 Reunion, the prevailing opinion was that intensifying the TLCB’s outreach, both formally and informally, would have positive results. That’s proven to be true and the lesson learned is potential new members are all over the place!

*OLLI, or Osher Lifetime Learning Institute. Chapters are located on around 125 college campuses across the United States.

The Ongoing Lives of the TLCB Members

In addition to bringing new TLCB members into the fold, the *MEM* has worked at enhancing its appeal by encouraging regular members to share their experiences. Frankly, that does not just mean recounting their experiences from back in the day, although those stories are certainly welcome. However, as a review of many of the new profiles demonstrates, members have continued to live exceptional and interesting lives long after they left SEA. They are regularly active and contributing members of their communities; in other words, good citizens. I think many of us would like to read about what our cohorts did in the years since coming home and what they are up to right now.

Related to the above, the *MEM* has occasionally run a series of articles entitled “Why I Joined the TLCB.” Those have proven to be, for lack of a better term, inspirational to our readers, often motivating others to submit their version on the theme. I started this feature about five years ago and it generated a fair response, but I must admit it has slowed up a little.

In an effort to get both of these reader-generated features—“What I’m Doing Now” and “Why I Joined”—cranked up, I intend to start putting the arm on of some of our more visible members to tell us their stories. Of course, you, any of you, do not have to wait to hear from me with a request. You can beat me to it and send something to me right now. Don’t worry about style, format, and grammar. Our staff will take care of that.

The point, and this is important for increasing TLCB’s exposure, is that our members and our contemporaries not only contributed to their country by what they were doing 30, 40, and sometimes 50 years ago, but continue to serve their communities today.

New Members continues next page.

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Reunion 2019: Las Vegas, Nevada

While the Sun is Still Shining

Yes, it may be true that the Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood is eventually a sunset group, however the sun is still shining, and clearly is valuable and meaningful to a wide group of people—men and women, and veterans and non-

veterans. When our current members and our new recruits tell their stories, the impact will be that the inevitable sunset is still a long way off in the future.

John Harrington
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Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood



The 26 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
1871	USAF	Brassard	Andre	Deltona	FL
1872	USAF	Geryak	David	Ft Worth	TX
1873	USAF	Mills	James	Tupelo	MS
1874	USAF	Sullivan	Kevin	Anchorage	AK
1875	USAF	Haley	John	Oakdale	MN
1876	USAF	Tober	Richard	West Seneca	NY
1877	USAF	Ball	Richard	Bristol	VA
1878	USAF	Gill	Hugh	Sinking Spring	PA
1879	USAF	Hebert	James	Waldorf	MD
1880	USAF	Silvis	Thomas	Colorado Springs	CO
1881	USAF	Flowers	Alan	Frederick	MD
1882	USAF	Hoover	James	Lynchburg	VA
1883	USAF	Davis	Donald	Muldrow	OK
1884	USAF	Able	Robert	Graniteville	SC
1885	USAF	Franklin	Keith	Albuquerque	NM
1886	USAF	Willoughby	Donald	Sioux City	IA
*1887	USAF	Catt	Rodger	Port Huron	MI
1888	USAF	Nordberg	Stephen	El Paso	TX
1889	USAF	Wahl	Richard	Farmingville	NY
1890	USA	Jones	Tommie	Morristown	IN
1891	USA	Rogers	Tim	Botkins	OH
1892	USA	Perry III	Robert	Roanoke	VA
1893	USAF	Nordberg	Gerald	Oakdale	MN
*1894	USAF	Davey	Donald	Las Vegas	NV
1895	USA	Simpson	John FL	Lacy	WA
1896	USAF	Brown	Richard	Anacortes	WA

*** New member attending reunion.**

New Member Profile: Rick Tober

I was at Nakhon Phanom from August 1969 to August 1970, working as a medical technician at the dispensary. I spent the first nine months on the night shift, working from 4:30 p.m. to 7:30 a.m., two days on and two days off. Sometime in June, I took over the Flight Surgeon's office after Charlie Vickers left to join the "Pedro" squadron, detachment 9 AARRC of the

20th Tactical Fighter Wing—multi-purpose vehicles used for fire fighting and air rescue; a few were even fitted with guns in the rear.

Some of my many memories are regarding the patients I treated. The Thai Air Force was a very proud group of men who used our facilities the least of all. I remember treating one



Above: "Me (on the right) and some of the medical crew."
Below: Rick playing his bass, now. Photos provided by Rick Tober.



young airman who was so thankful that he had to take me and my partner, Carl Simmons, to dinner. I never experienced the "other" side of Thailand until that afternoon. He took us to a diner downtown (way off the beaten path), and the staff there treated us like kings.

Another memory is of an airman who fell off the back of a pickup truck (while intoxicated) and split his lower lip wide open. I spent the majority of my time picking gravel out of the wound. All he kept telling me was that he didn't want a scar. I managed to close the wound without much trouble. About two or three months later, I was having a drink in the NCO club and this guy taps me on the shoulder and wants to buy me a drink. He said, "You don't remember me, do you?" I had to admit that I didn't. He showed me his lip and there was no visible scar, and he was so thrilled with the result.

One of my most precious memories was my ride with the Pedros. I had taken over the Flight Surgeon's office after Sgt. Vickers left for reassignment. 56th S.O.W. called and needed a Medevac for an Army lieutenant who had been bitten by a cobra—a life or death situation. The doctor and I met on the

Tober continues next page.

airfield to board the HH-43B (tail number: 59-1575).

As it turned out, he had not been bitten, but had been spit in the eye by the cobra. Many blood vessels in the eye provide a rapid route into the bloodstream. At the time, I didn't know that a cobra is very adept and accurate at spitting venom. During the entire flight back to 56th USAF Dispensary I flushed his eye with saline (about 4 liters). The lieutenant was awake and responsive the entire flight, and his life and sight were saved that day.

There was a guy in the lab that I hung out with—Chris Bickell. Some of the doctors' names were: Denning Payne, Michael Gilchrist, Craig Lehman, and Col. Paul Hoffman (Dispensary Commander).

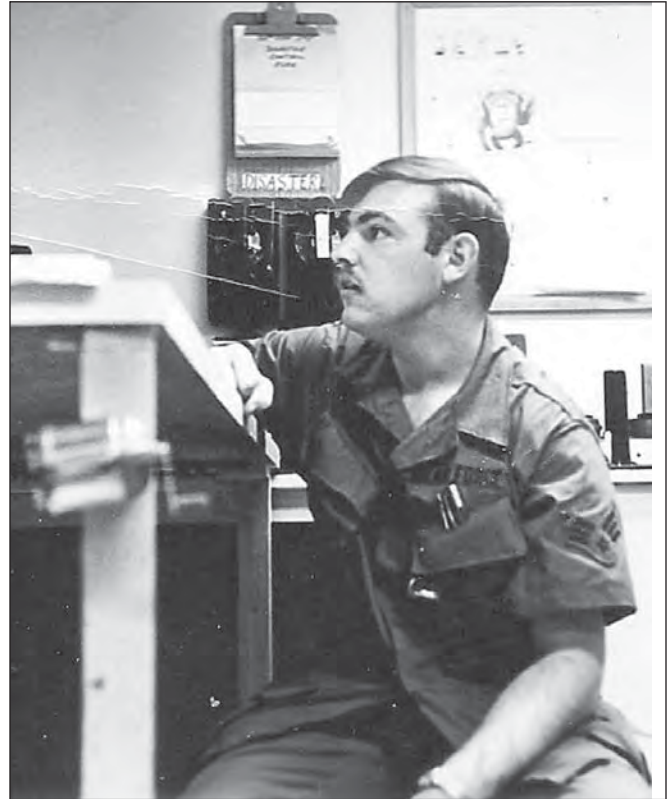
After I returned stateside and processed out, I returned to my job with the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene, working with the developmentally disabled. I spent 36 years with them before my retirement in 2002.

I now play bass with Straight Path Music Ministries, a group

"Me in flight suit to fly with the Pedros."



"Me in the Dispensary (then)"



that plays the local nursing homes, giving them the Gospel through music, along with love and attention. You can contact me at our website: www.straightpathmusic.org or by phone at: (716) 649-6515.



Mekong Express Mail Index

For an on-line index to all *MEM* articles ever published, starting with our first issue in June of 2000, go to our wonderful TLCB Website: www.TLC-Brotherhood.com. 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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It's not too late!
See page 14 for details.

New Member Profile: Jim Hoover

I arrived at Nakhon Phanom on 19 May 1970 and departed 12 May 1971. Seems like I moved around some within the squadron. Served two months on B Flight (swing shift) Security, guarding the flight line, POL/Munitions Dumps, Pedro Chopper, C-123s, F-4 transient aircraft, C-47s, A1-Es and the A26s until they departed early in my shift. Then I was transferred to A Flight (day shift) Law Enforcement where I generally worked the Main Gate, Officer Trailer patrol, and when we had prisoners, the jail and correctional custody facility. As soon as they found out that I could type, they moved me to the orderly room for the last 5 months. I worked directly under Master Sergeant Cagle, the First Sergeant, and later for Master Sergeant Earl F. Twigg, an outstanding First Sergeant and man of high integrity. Lt Colonel Raven was our commander, followed by a Major shortly before I left. Raven was a true warrior.

I was on standby for helicopter launch during the Son Tay Raid. That was a big deal, but since the rescue mission was aborted after the Green Berets discovered that the prisoners had been vacated, we were not sent in. Often during alerts, we were in 25-man sweep teams for long hours. Once, I was on duty for 26 hours. The alert was cancelled but I remained in a tower after the sweep and was forgotten. Tough time staying awake in that tower!

I understand that while I was there, we were awarded the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with V device for valor for the following efforts: TET 69 Counter Offensive, Vietnam Summer Fall support, Sanctuary Counter Offensive, Southwest Monsoon, Commando Hunt V, and Commando Hunt VI operations. I was awarded the Air Force Commendation Medal upon return to CONUS for these efforts. Many other ribbons too, such as The Presidential Unit Citation, Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with Combat "V" Device, and the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Crosses with Palm, but the Commendation was especially noteworthy

I returned to Vandenberg AFB, California, made Sergeant (E-4). I completed my enlisted career as a Staff Sergeant, and retrained into Admin 70250, and was NCOIC of the Base Commander's Office. I was offered a commission, attended Officer Training School, and was assigned to Shaw

AFB as the Chief of the Deficiency Management Branch of the 9th Air Force Inspector General's office. Inspections of Connecticut Air National Guard (ANG) and Puerto Rico ANG were highlights. I Learned a lot about every aspect of USAF Operations, Logistics, and Support. After four years I was transferred to the Armed Force Courier Service at RAF



A1C Jim Hoover, two Thai Military Police, and Sergeant Paul Montes of Texas. Taken circa fall 1970. "Like Barney Fife, they only gave me one bullet." Photos from Jim Hoover.

Mildenhall, England where I assumed my first Command. This basically supported Intel and spying. I attended Cambridge University while there, studying international relations.

After three years of that rather stressful assignment, I was transferred to Edwards AFB, California, where I was squadron section commander of the Air Force Rocket Propulsion Laboratory. Yes, there are Rocket Scientists, but they were not the stereotype "why is there air" kind of folks. Very bright. Later at Edwards I became the squadron section commander for the headquarters squadron and Air Force Flight Test Center (AFFTC). I was able to promote many of my NCOs via the Stripes for Exceptional Performers (STEP) program; in fact, I promoted more than any other Air Force commander.

Looking toward the future and knowing there were few civilian jobs for commanders, I decided to retrain into being a contracting officer. That led to assignments at Edwards and the Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Engine Company as part of the Plant Representative Office (AFPRO), which was a learning experience that I applied to the next 14 years in the aerospace contractor environment. Working on the Mars Explorer Mission for NASA was a highlight. I had to retire

Hoover continues next page

at 56 medically, owing to heart issues related to our Agent Orange exposure at NKP.

I also served as a Vernon, Connecticut, town councilman for three terms and lost an election for state representative. After retirement, I was an American Legion post commander among other duties. I served as a justice of the peace for 12 years in Connecticut performing 90 weddings and authenticating warrants. Lastly, I am a lay chaplain with my church and currently am assigned to nursing home and hospital duties as I am able.

I am retired as a USAF captain and proud of it. USAF pays me now to not show up for work!!!! My wife Emily, who spent two years in the Air Force Nurse Corps and was honorably discharged, and I have been married since January 1970 and have three great sons, three even greater daughters-in-law, and 10 grandchildren. Men in my family are notorious for proposing to superior women. We reside in Lynchburg, Virginia.



Jim and Emily Hoover today.

New Member Profile: Hugh Gill

I was born in Palo Alto, California and graduated from high school in Soquel in 1965. I entered the Air Force in April 1966, completed Basic Training at Lackland AFB, Texas, and went direct duty to Barksdale AFB, Louisiana, in Base Fuels. In May 1968 I was reassigned to Ubon Royal Thai AFB and remained at Ubon until December 1969. At Ubon, my Supervisors were Master Sergeants Golden and Ewing. I also worked with Tech Sergeant Gerry Snodgrass, Staff Sergeant Joe Gentry, and many others I really don't remember. I drove a jet fuel truck refueling airplanes, a diesel and gas truck refueling generators, and was the night shift fuel truck dispatcher.

I went directly to Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Vietnam, again in Base Fuels, and stayed there until December 1970. I then re-enlisted, returned to the states, and retrained into Air Traffic Control and was subsequently assigned to Hamilton AFB, California.

In January 1974 I was reassigned to Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, and worked in the Radar Approach Control until January 1975. At NKP I worked with Lieutenants

Vinney Dimattina, Jeff Mogiloweiz and with Pete Quinn, Bob Kolhouse, and Bob Engle. My supervisor was Master Sgt Joe Eberle. Major Jago was the Chief of Air Traffic Control and Lt Col Campo was the Commander of the 1987th Communications Squadron. I also worked with Tech Sgt Darrell Waldhauer. I worked night shift in the Radar approach control.

I was then reassigned in Richards-Gebuar AFB, Missouri,



Hugh Gill at Ubon. Photos supplied by the author.

See Gill on page 8

Gill continues from page 7

in the Radar Approach Control, and in April 1976 I accepted a special duty assignment to the Air Force Communications Command NCO Academy as a Professional Military Education Instructor. I moved with the AFCC NCO Academy to Keesler AFB, Mississippi. In September 1981 I retrained again into Computer Operations, and upon completion of technical training at Keesler AFB I had additional assignments to the Pentagon, Bolling AFB, Ramstein AB, and Langley AFB. I retired from the Air Force as a Chief Master Sergeant in July 1996.

After retirement from the Air Force, I obtained employment in the Travel Department at The American Automobile Association. Our family relocated to Sinking Spring, Pennsylvania, and I continued with AAA until retirement in June 2015.

My wife, Mary Forster Gill and I were married in February 1975 in Carson City, Nevada. We have two daughters Elizabeth and Mindy, and Mary and I have three grandchildren: Seth, Ethan, and Irene.

I have two Associate Degrees from the Community College of the Air Force in Education and Computer Technology, a bachelor's degree in business administration from William Carey College, and a master's degree in human resources development from George Washington University. I also graduated from the Air Training Command NCO Academy in 1979 and the Senior NCO Academy in 1984.

Hugh Gill and his new friend (Hugh is the one on the left). He provided these photos.



Mary and I are both retired and we live in Sinking Spring. I play golf and volunteer at the Reading Hospital. In addition to membership in the Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood, I am a life member of the Vietnam Veterans of America and The Veterans of Foreign Wars. Mary and I also travel, attend church, and spend time with our family.

One more thing. I was at Ubon on the night of July 12, 1968 when the base was attacked by sappers who penetrated the base perimeter. The explosions were very loud and I was scared into next week.



New Member Profile: David Geryak

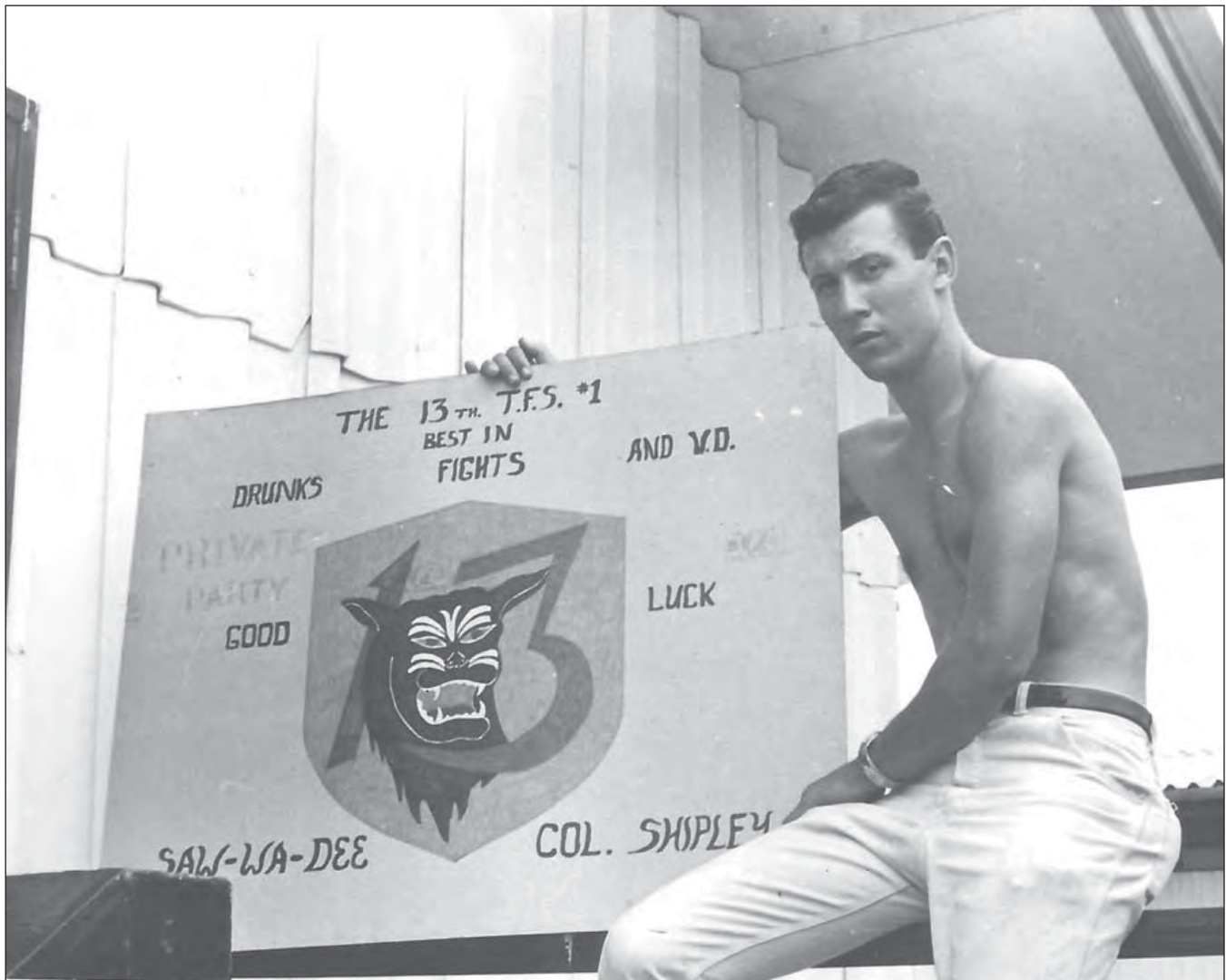
My affair with aircraft started in high school when I read every World War II aircraft-rated novel I could find. After graduating from HS in '62, I had a 50% New York State scholarship, so I tried my hand at architecture as I had grown up in a trades and railroad family in Buffalo. But by the end of the first year, I knew that profession wasn't for me. My father was a WWII veteran of the Army and had earned a Bronze Star, and I spent time reading his division's books of their journey through Europe into Germany. I thought I might join the Army; however, after talking to an Air Force recruiter, that is what I decided on doing.

I started basic at Lackland in San Antonio in May 1967 and very quickly learned how hot and humid it could get in Texas; it was my first time out of Buffalo



David Geryak, Korat, circa 1966. Photos provided by David Geryak.

Geryak continues next page.



David Geryak, Korat, circa 1966, injecting a little humor into a grim place and time.

NY. I broke my left wrist on the obstacle course right before basic graduation. I finished and proceeded to weapons (46250) school in Denver, at Lowry AFB.

They wanted to have me do desk duty until my wrist healed, but I was able to convince them that I could do the course and they allowed me to stay with the class I came with from basic. It took some doing but I was able to finish the course. I was assigned my first duty section at the then-Carswell AFB in Fort Worth, Texas with the SAC 43rd bomb wing and the B-58 Hustler Bomber Squadron. There was also a Squadron of B-52s stationed there at the same time.

As I went through my first Operational Readiness Inspection (ORI) exercise and as we stood on the ramp and watched two full squadrons of bombers lined up nose-to-tail on the "active" and taxiway and then start their rolling and takeoffs as fast as they could; it was the first time I really appreciated the awesomeness of the Air Force and the service I had joined.

The second ORI was at Bunker Hill AFB in Indiana with the B-58s in the dead of winter as they were short a full load crew and we were tapped to fly up there from Texas on a C-130 with no heat and really no winter gear until we got there and drew

some out of supply.

In December '64, our bomb wing picked up and moved lock, stock, and barrel to Little Rock AFB about 15 miles outside of Little Rock, Arkansas. Little did I know at the time it wouldn't be the last time for a full move of a squadron. There was also a B-57 Canberra Squadron stationed there with the 58s.

Fort Worth was where I met my wife-to-be and we were married in Little Rock in February 1965. A couple of months into 1965, I found a small notice on a bulletin board that personnel could volunteer for service in Southeast Asia. At that time news about Vietnam was not front and center and this notice wasn't specific about location, time frame, etc., and so I thought it would be an interesting assignment. Shortly afterwards, I received orders to Cam Rahn Bay in South Vietnam and I finally had to tell my new wife what I had done. My marriage did last 48 years, but my youthful stupidity volunteering almost cost me it during the next 17 months overseas.

I also very unwisely gave up an opportunity to possibly attend the AF Academy Prep School while in Arkansas. I had a letter

See Geryak on page 10

Geryak continues from page 9.

of recommendation from the Squadron Commander and had taken the physical and entrance exams. Just before departure in December 1965, my orders were amended to Kadena AFB, Okinawa, instead, with no reason why.

When I inquired stateside, I was told it was because I was the last male heir to the Geryak name that they could find. Of course, that was before internet search was available, and come to find out in later years there were Geryaks all over the country.

I arrived at Kadena Air Base in Early January 1966 and was hooked back up with friends from Carswell whom I hadn't seen in a while. They were working on the F-105 in TAC at Kadena, and found out they were rotating to Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base on TDY while it was being built in late 1965.

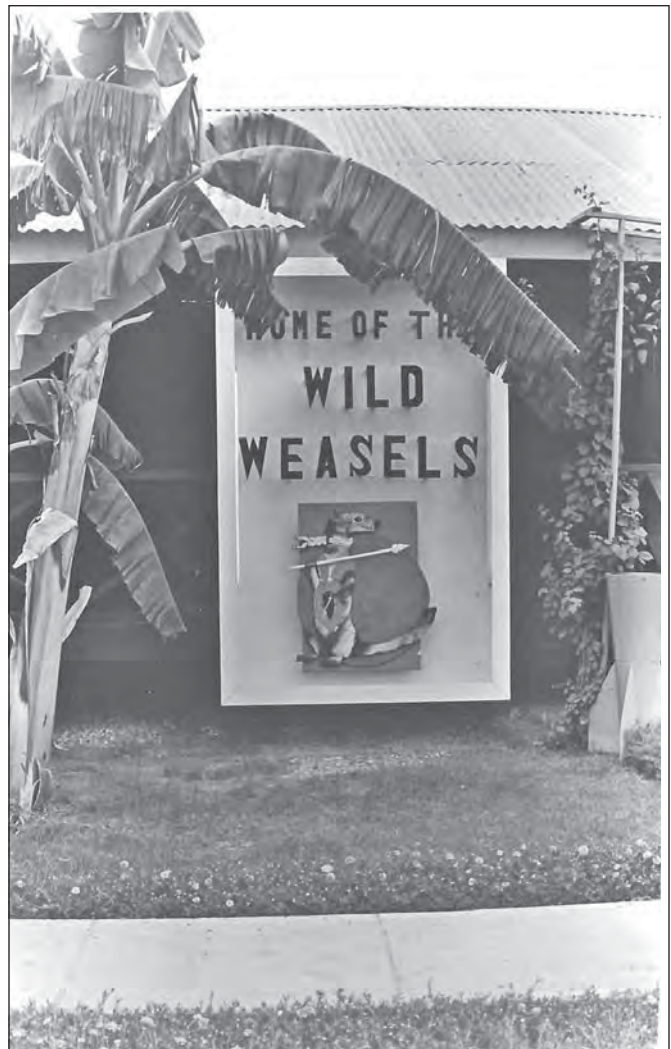
In only a month or so, it was announced that the new 13th



13th TAC Fighter Squadron headquarters at Korat RTAFB.

Tactical Fighter Wing was being organized in Kadena and moving lock, stock, and barrel to Korat. Again, I was eliminated from going due to the same "Geryak" issue. After talking to the Chief Master Sergeant, and eventually to the squadron commander, my orders to Korat were cut.

My first, and to this day my only, experience with an earthquake happened one early evening when my roommate, Richard Dudley, was at the desk writing a letter and I was on my bunk waiting to go to chow when I started to feel nauseous and a touch of vertigo. Everyone was vacating the building and as we were gathered outside, I felt the ground sway and saw the concrete block buildings we lived in sway ever so slightly. Once was definitely enough to experience such an event.



"Wild Weasels" were 2-seat F-105 fighters that located and destroyed enemy radars, typically controlling anti-aircraft guns or SAM missiles.

Korat was a world apart from stateside in so many ways. Getting off the C-130, I was immediately assaulted by the heat and humidity and the smells of the jungle and the jet fuel. Something I don't think I will ever forget. Barracks were not completely ready, and we hit the ground running as the 105s were tasked to fly missions almost immediately.

Our shack was on the line at the end of the loading ramp and revetments. I didn't really have much time to spend in Kadena except to look around some and have a few drinks with the guys. Korat was a pretty good shock to the system, to realize the way the Thais lived and survived. It was obvious that we were a great boost to their economy with the money we had to spend. It is no wonder they often thought we were rich. Many times, they wanted to see pictures of America and were in awe of our houses, cars, etc., while we watched water buffalos herded down the streets and witnessed the lack of even the most primitive sanitation necessities.

My first experience at the end of the runway launching and recovering aircraft was another eye opener. They took Dudley and me out there with five gallons of ice water and told us they

Geryak continues next page.

would bring lunch. There was a small pad just at the parking areas for the plane's pins to be pulled before they took off, with no shade of any kind. Our only company out there was a lone Thai guard, with what looked like a WW II rifle and a box for him to sit on. He was there in the morning when we got there and was there when we were picked up after the last recovery. We never spoke, but we did share our water with him. We never knew if the rifle was loaded. As time passed, we did notice the jungle retreating back away from the taxiway. That was one of many trips to the end of the runway when we were short a



David Geryak today.

load-crew hand, or it was our turn to clean the black powder charge cartridges for the MER (bomb) racks.

Forty-eight years later, my first hint that something was wrong with me physically was when my second wife (my first wife had passed away) insisted that all of the illnesses I had were not your typical autoimmune diseases: lung spots, Sjogrens, and a few others, but quite possibly from exposure to herbicides, like Agent Orange. Most of these diseases I later found out are always there, but in remission. The more she and I dug, the



David Geryak, Korat, circa 1966

more we uncovered evidence of spraying. Thai veterans claim that the spray was used throughout SEA, not just in Vietnam. We are still fighting that issue.

I can say truthfully that my experience in the USAF the four years I served were years that I wouldn't give up a minute's time for something else. At one time, I thought about reupping, but my military occupational specialty (MOS) was frozen and I would have been sent right back over to SEA. USAF was an experience that I know, now, helped to anchor me and allowed me to follow a career path and take the chances to move forward that I did.

I spent 50 years in consulting, engineering, and project management on industrial cement and lime plants all around this great country of ours, and I met my share of good people and had the opportunity to live in different places around the US of A. My second wife has seven grandkids and four greatgrandkids who range in age from thirty years to eight months old. I was extremely lucky to find a second wife, whom I love as much as my first, who has opened up the rest of the world to us through her retirement from American Airlines and her flight privileges.

I can't attribute all of the rest of my life success to those four years in service, but I can say that without them and what we did and experienced during that time; I do not believe my life would have turned out to be as satisfying as it has.

Postscript: In late 2017, I had the opportunity to contribute to a series in The New York Times titled, "Vietnam '67." The MEM is reprinting it here.



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***The Official Thailand-Laos-Cambodia
Brotherhood page***

In Thailand, I was Exposed to Agent Orange. The VA Doesn't Agree.

By David Geryak [reprinted from the New York Times]

During the Vietnam War, I served in the Air Force at the Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base, one of seven facilities the American military utilized to support the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign. I was a member of an armament loading crew for the supersonic F-105 Thunderchief fighter-bomber. The American buildup in Thailand, which began in 1961 and included thousands of airmen and Army personnel, is an often overlooked part of the war, because it was long a secret—we could not tell friends or even our families where we were going and what we would be doing, nor could we wear or display patches on our uniforms. The military was simply not ready to acknowledge our presence outside of Vietnam.

Most of us were involved with the intense pace of the bombing campaign, a 24-hour, 365-days-a-year effort. We'd work 10 to 12 hours a shift at the far end of a runway; occasionally our food was brought to us to save time. Everything moved fast: We had to crawl under the aircraft dodging sharp corners, opening flaps and avoiding jet blast while duck-walking underneath to inspect each weapon, pull the safety pins and everything else involved in getting a plane ready. When they landed, we did it all again, in reverse. In between, we waited, with no shade from the blistering sun. The sequence repeated itself all day, every day.

During my 17-month tour, there were two crash landings by battle-damaged aircraft, the pilots physically shaken at the end of their bombing run. Another time I found myself facing a full rack of armed bombs that had gotten “hung” on an aircraft during the bombing run. The pilot, not being able to eject the hung bombs or rack before having to land, brought the F-105 down to the runway in a practically vertical position and slowly, carefully lowered his nose wheel knowing that he had, at best inches of clearance between the bombs and the concrete, and could have set off the bombs with contact to the runway. When he rolled to a stop at the end of the runway, my partner and I had to disarm the bombs while the pilot waited, nervously, inside the cockpit.

I arrived back to San Francisco in May 1967 when my enlistment was up. Being in Thailand had made it hard to get news from loved ones about how the war was being perceived back home. As I walked through the terminal at the San Francisco airport with other airmen, we passed a group of protesters. I remember being called “baby killers;” some people were spitting at us. I encountered antiwar sentiment again when I went back to college. I learned to fit in; I grew my hair long and didn't let anyone know what I did during that war. Even when the public's attitude toward veterans began to soften in the 1980s, I didn't talk about my service to my country.

It wasn't until 2014, during my second marriage (my first wife had died), that I began to open up. My second wife had been in college while I was in Vietnam, and we were able to

compare experiences. At a professional conference, we met a Marine general who, on hearing where I had been stationed and that I had type II diabetes, insisted that I visit the VA.

Type II diabetes is common among veterans who had been exposed to the Agent Orange. After extensive research, my wife and I found that the defoliant had been used in Thailand to clear the jungle around the base perimeters. I submitted a claim, only to learn that except in a few isolated incidents, the VA does not recognize that Agent Orange was ever used in Thailand. Unless you had been assigned to patrol the perimeter, you could not

qualify. Everyone else on base, including the airmen who worked and lived at or near the perimeter, are excluded from Agent Orange disability benefits. This despite compelling evidence of widespread exposure, including photographs showing bunker foundations built out of empty Agent Orange barrels.

What I never would have guessed until I did the research was that so many of the ills I faced in the years since were likely the direct result of Agent Orange exposure. Over the years I have been treated for multiple autoimmune diseases, another common illness among Agent Orange-exposed servicemen. And yet, as my claim rejection notice said I was “denied because there is no evidence that this condition is associated with herbicide exposure,

denied because the required service in Vietnam is not shown, exposure or service diagnosis or treatment for these symptoms while still in the service”—disregarding the fact that some of these diseases and cancers can take years to manifest themselves, long after one has left the service.

Ironically, my location in Thailand, long a secret, was now the sole reason I was being denied coverage. Had I spent even a single day in Vietnam, by the VA's own rules, I would have been granted disability immediately. I'm not alone: In my research, I encountered many other Thailand veterans with far worse medical conditions than mine whose claims were also denied and who are still trying to receive their deserved benefits.

To add insult to injury, shortly after I received the denial of my disability claim, I received a notice from the VA Health Benefits Department that another claim I had submitted, asking for 10 percent disability for stress-related incidents, was approved, with the notification stating that I am “determined to be a Vietnam era herbicide exposed veteran.” In other words, one part of the VA recognized my condition, but another didn't.

I do not regret my service to my country. I volunteered to serve in Vietnam, but instead was sent to Thailand. I should not be denied the benefits given to others who were exposed to Agent Orange, but happened to be assigned to the other side of an artificial line on a map—a line that the toxins in Agent Orange did not recognize.

David Geryak is an Air Force veteran and retired project manager and civil engineer.



David, in Thailand



Alice (Harley) Waller and her brother, remembered at the Virginia War Memorial

By Bill Tilton, MEM staff

The Virginia War Memorial honors persons who were willing to serve and sacrifice to defend the United States from World War II to the present day. Dedicated in February of 1956, its newest addition is the on-going memorial honoring those who have fallen in the War on Terror since 2000.

The memorial's "Walk of Honor" is paved with bricks paid for by support donations from those who wish to leave lasting evidence of their support and remembrance. At a service on May 26 of this year, TLCB member Reuben Waller donated two bricks. The first was dedicated to the memory of his brother-in-law Lee Harley ("Duff"), a forward air controller (FAC) lost in "Harley's Valley" on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The second was for his wife, Lee's little sister Alice, who had joined the TLCB in honor of her brother. She died earlier this year, but had never given up the search for Duff's remains, which have not been located to this day.

Reuben Waller joined the Brotherhood, in honor of Alice and Lee, after Alice's untimely death. He reports that Alice had long wanted to purchase a memorial brick in honor of Duff, but had

not yet gotten around to it. Consequently, Reuben purchased these two memorial stones in fulfillment of her wishes.

(Then) Capt Lee Harley and observer Amn Andre Guilette were shot down on May 18, 1966 while returning to base from a mission out of Nakhon Phanom RTAFB.



Above, memorial bricks in the Walk of Honor.
Below, Alice Harvey Waller, sister of Lee Harley.



The Virginia War Memorial is located in Richmond. At the South end of the Shrine of Memory is the 23-foot marble statue, "Memory," shown above. This photo from the Memorial's web site. Photos at right provided by Reuben Waller.



All Signs Point to Las Vegas!

It's Not Too Late....But time is short! Here are the basic facts:

2019 Las Vegas Reunion and Annual Meeting, October 3rd through the 5th

The 2019 Reunion in Las Vegas will take place at the Alexis Park Resort All Suite Resort on 375 E Harmon Avenue, Las Vegas, Nevada, which is near the airport and the Fashion Show Mall.

Reservations:

To make reservations call 1-800-582-2228 or 702-796-3322. You probably will not be able to get the group rate any longer (but you can try). The 2017 pricing contract expired on September 2nd, but Alexis Park room rates are reasonable.

And don't forget to REGISTER with the Reunion Committee—you can do it online at www.tlc-brotherhood.com.

Reunion highlights include:

- a TOUR to NELLIS AFB (if approved, and if spaces are still available)
- the ever-popular Nipa Hut, where members and guests can mingle while sipping and snacking
- the great (and fun) TLCB Assistance Auction (bring your SEA “white elephants”)
- a tasty buffet-style banquet dinner
- a stupendous banquet program, featuring musical entertainment by the famous Dick Jonas and an acclaimed presentation by Christina Olds, daughter of legendary fighter pilot and commander, Robin Olds.



Memory Quilt for “Rosie’s Raffle”

This year we celebrate the late Rosie Wheatley’s past work and honor the nature of her efforts to contribute so much to the success of the TLCB Assistance program. Rosie was the above-and-beyond, paramount fundraiser through the years. It is to her memory that this year’s quilt symbolizes a kind of raffle renaissance. This “Memory Quilt” was won in 2005 by John and Maty Pierre-Benoist, obtained from them by another member for the price of a donation to Assistance, and now donated by that member in memory of Rosie.

For more information, see the June issue of the *Mekong Express Mail*.

At right: detail from the 2005 quilt that was donated in memory of Rosie for 2019.



Scholars of the Student Assistance Fund

With all the Assistance Fund activity focused on underserved children in rural Laos, we may have forgotten that we continue to support the education of a dwindling number of students in Northeast Thailand, through the Student Assistance Fund (SAF), established by the late John Middlewood. The fund remains adequate and will carry the remaining students through graduation.

Our Thai Assistance Committee representative, Khun Satawat Sri-in, administers the SAF in Northeast Thailand. Each month during the school year, Khun Satawat requests tuition funds from the Assistance Committee and meticulously furnishes signed receipts showing that the funds were received and properly employed. In January, we received this note from Khun Satawat:

“Happy New Year. Thank you TLCB, for the scholarships for Miss. Suwanun Niwongsa. She has graduated and is now an English teacher at a school in Bangkok. For your helping, we would like to say thank you very much.”

From Miss Suwanun herself: “Thank you T.L.C.B. very much for your kindness that gave scholarships to me. I had received scholarships from T.L.C.B since I had studied in grade 12 to bachelor degree. Now I [have] graduated and I can do my dream to success. I am an English teacher and I can take care [of] my family. I wish every T.L.C.B’s members have happiness, healthy, successful and prosperous.”

In June, Khun Satawat forwarded these eleven photographs of students still enrolled in this very successful program, now all in college. We can be very proud of these hard-working students!

NPU is Nakhon Phanom University

KU is Kasetsart University (Sakon Nakhon Campus)

Burapha University is at Bangsaen, Chonburi.

MCU is Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University at That Phanom

SNRU is Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat U.

UBU is Ubon Ratchathani University



Sawini Manaonol
1st Year UBU



Achiraya Thiauthit
1st Year NPU



Matchima Khanda
2nd Year SNRU Math Teaching



Above:
Nittaya
Manasen
3rd Year
NPU



Left: Natsupha Pholman
3rd Year Burapha University



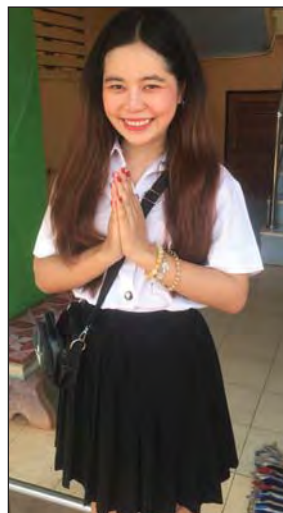
Above, left:
Dararat Promarrak
3rd Year MCU



Above:
Thamonwan
Thungnathad
3rd Year NPU



Nutchanat
Niwongsa
4th Year
NPU



Left: Wipada Phetsuwa
4th Year KU (Sakhon Nakhon)



Above: Juthathip Siriwong
4th Year NPU English Teaching



Nantawee Chanapoch
4th Year NPU

Remembering Mac Thompson

They All Remember MAC

Editor's Note: *In the June MEM, an excerpt was inadvertently left out of Glenn Black's excellent report on the first Assistance trip made without the heroic MacAlan "Mac" Thompson. It deserves print.*

"The team stayed at three different hotels in Phonsavan. I, a creature of habit, opted for the Dok Khoun Hotel, Mac's old standby, due to the parking and proximity to nearby restaurants. Somphou also stayed there. The owner beamed his usual welcome and helped us unload. He then asked where Mac was and registered shock upon hearing that Mac had left us."



Mac and the Bird Dogs

Mac Thompson sent this photo to Bill Tilton at least ten years ago, and probably more. He advised that the Cessna O-1s belong to the Thai government and were given as military aid after the Vietnam War, and were therefore not available for purchase and restoration. At that time they were located near Bangkok, but Mac did not say exactly where, nor did he identify his little companion, perhaps by now a pilot or an aircraft mechanic.

Christmas At the Exchange



The "Secret War" with winter can be won with this beverage porter! A great gift, too!

The long-sleeved insulators shown here are sure to please and protect your favorite veteran (even if that is *you*).



Above is our long-sleeved golf shirt, and at left is the TLCB denim shirt.

Go to:
www.TLC-Brotherhood.com

