

MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



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The Sorrows of Spring

By Gary Larsen

The military passenger plane from Saigon to the US airbase in Thailand, Nakorn Phanom, was about to depart as I scrambled aboard. It was April 17, 1975. Saigon was not to fall to the Communists for another 13 days, but there was chaos everywhere and everyone was scrambling to get out. Although I boarded at the last minute, I noticed immediately that I was the only passenger. Several of the other seats were filled with ceramic elephants.

“ . . . today we have ended the war and (brought) . . . peace with honor to Vietnam and Southeast Asia.” President Richard M. Nixon (1/23/73).

On April 17, Phnom Penh falls to the Communists. The American Ambassador departs on the last helicopter from a schoolyard near the Embassy carrying a carefully folded American flag. Most of our allies are left behind.

“Let every nation know . . . that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, . . . support any friend . . . to assure the survival of liberty.” President John F. Kennedy (1/20/61).

“We are (in Vietnam) . . . because we have a promise to keep . . . and I intend to keep that promise.” President Lyndon B. Johnson (4/7/65).

On April 30 Saigon falls to the Communists. The American Ambassador, clutching a folded American flag, departs on the last helicopter. The courtyard of the US Embassy is filled with friends, allies, and families. They are left behind.

“(America) does not betray its allies.” Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to Laotian Premier Souvanna Phouma at the occasion of forcing Laos to accept a cease fire after the Paris Peace Treaty ended US fighting in Vietnam. (2/9/73).

On May 14, Long Tieng (Laos) falls to the Communists. Laos is doomed. The last American leaves by helicopter. The remaining Hmong, our allies, are left behind.

“Today Americans can regain the sense of pride that existed before Vietnam.” President Gerald R. Ford (4/23/75)

Our Indochina debacle comes to an end. Friends, families, allies are left to fend for themselves against a ruthless aggressor. Americans are called upon to regain their sense of honor amidst the confetti of high rhetoric, empty promises, and a few ceramic elephants.

“You’re going where?” This from Dennis Zvinakis, one of my best friends from the East West Center in Hawaii. “Back to Saigon.” “That’s crazy. You were just there last week. I was there three days ago. Saigon is a war zone. It’s surrounded. It’s dangerous. Anyone with any sense is leaving.”

“I have to make sure I did everything I possibly could.”

“You did! You were just there! Everyone is leaving! Jack, talk some sense into him.”

Sorrows continues on page 3

What’s Inside:

Editor’s Notebook:.....	2
Hmong Olympic Star Suni Lee.....	2
TLC Brotherhood Information.....	2
Our Trips Back to Thailand.....	7
Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood.....	11
TLCB Reunion Log.....	12
Together on Hallowed Ground (Reunion info).....	13
Rosie’s Memorial Quilt.....	13
When the Firing Stopped (Gettysburg).....	14

Editor's Notebook:

A Special Article at a Special Time

The lead article in this issue of the *MEM* is particularly timely and especially well written. Gary Larsen was a U.S. Foreign Service Officer in Udorn, Thailand, during the fall of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, a time eerily reminiscent of what has only recently occurred in Afghanistan. "The Sorrows of Spring" eloquently captures the chaos and disillusion of that sad period. Gary served eight years in the Foreign Service, and shortly after leaving it, he became a founding board member of Operation USA, an international relief organization for the relief of political violence and natural disasters. Based in California, it has provided over \$400 million to countries worldwide.

Additionally in this issue, Terry Brown recounts some of his experiences returning to Thailand many years later. The articles by Gary and Terry demonstrate a point I make often and clearly; the best material you read in the *MEM* is written by TLCB members, either about their experiences back in the day, or their lives today. You all have experiences worth writing about. Send them to me.

Missing a Reunion Again. Sadly, once again, I cannot attend the Gettysburg Reunion, due to a physical incapacity that my wife, Eileen, is hopefully temporarily enduring. It is ironic because she is at heart a historian and was looking forward to visiting Gettysburg. I have not been able to attend a reunion since 2017, but I will send a special report about the *MEM*, for the annual meeting.

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Hmong Olympic Star

Hmong-American Gymnast Wins Olympic Gold Medal

Suni (Sunisa) Lee, is an 18-year-old Hmong-American, the first Hmong American to compete in the Olympics. She won the women's all-around gymnastics gold medal at this summer's Olympic games in Japan, and is the first Asian-American to win gold in the all-around competition.

Suni is the daughter of two Hmong refugees from Laos who left the country as children shortly after the end of the Secret War. The family is part of the Hmong community in the St. Paul-Minneapolis area of Minnesota. Suni made history as the first Hmong-American to win an Olympic gold medal, and we celebrate her hard work and talent.



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Sorrows continued from page 1.

Jack Corman, also one of my best friends from the East West Center, had sat quietly through all this. “You know, Gar, if you’re going back, I think I’ll go with you. I’d like to see the end.”

Fine, every act of insanity deserves to be witnessed. And with that light thought we headed off to Lucy’s Tiger Den for a beer. “Betrayed by the country that bore us, forgotten by those we hold dear, . . .”

Now, a day later I sat in the departure lounge at Bangkok’s Don Muang airport waiting to board China Airlines’ noon flight to Saigon. Boarding had been delayed a couple of times and my stomach was fluttery. Fortunately, the lounge was staffed with several pretty hostesses, in tight fitting cheongsams, serving drinks. I smiled, “Dzai lai y bei, sye sye ni,” (one for the road). A few seats away a couple of Agence France-Presse folks fiddled with cameras and tape recorders while the dozen or so other passengers sat quietly. Jack had reconsidered.

“China Airlines is pleased to announce the departure of flight CA 21 for Saigon. We apologize for any delay. Please have your passports and boarding passes ready.”

[Six weeks earlier] It was night in Udorn, northeastern Thailand. The quiet of the countryside lay softly on sleeping lovers. The windows were open to enjoy the last of the cool season breeze which enervated a lethargic ceiling fan. Outside the light of the moon reflected on peaceful rice paddies, and in the distance one could discern the sounds of a Northeast love song.

Suddenly the phone in our house rang in a discordant jangle. It was early March, 1975. The call was from Saigon. It was my friend Ken Quinn from The National Security Council. Ken was in Vietnam with General Fred Weyand’s military review mission. They were evaluating additional aid to the South Vietnamese government as it struggled to cope with the recent onslaught of North Vietnamese attacks. Ken was guarded on the insecure line and I could hear fatigue and anxiety in his voice.

“Gary, the situation is getting worse. If you want to help your family and friends, you need to come to Vietnam as soon as possible.” Shaken, my wife and I discussed it the next morning. Of course I would go back. I had been assigned to the US Consulate in Udorn after service in Vietnam.

Udorn was a hot, dry, dusty, unattractive provincial outpost in northeast Thailand, some 30 miles south of the Laotian border. It was not even on the Mekong River. It was an assignment I viewed with trepidation since it was a special purpose post and existed solely as a consequence of our war in Indochina. After four years in Vietnam my war was over and I just wanted a peaceful pond on which to float quietly for a time.

That was not how one would describe Udorn, which for a decade had been a focal point of the war. During that time, its slow languid provincial atmosphere had been transformed into a raucous, gaudy, faux prosperity from the presence of

US troops and their money. The money was now drying up as the US withdrew from South East Asia. However, even as tinsel opulence faded, its consequent economic, social, and cultural dislocations persisted—tinder for any agitation. In addition, Udorn still housed six thousand service men, one of the last remaining air bases in Thailand and the largest signals intelligence listening station (Ramasun) in Southeast Asia.

It was also the CIA’s main logistics base for the “secret war” in Laos and the headquarters for its airline, Air America. The Consul was absent, and as Vice Consul I was in charge. Udorn was in turmoil and so I delayed my departure.

Several weeks earlier at Ramasun, MPs had roughed up a Thai civilian in the parking lot. This led to inflammatory news coverage in the press over the flagrant disregard of Thai

What was it all for? What did we take away? Endless commentary, endless analysis, endless argument — and ceramic elephants. Mistakes, failures, lost opportunities, “we must never . . .” But if the present is any guide, it will all happen again.

sovereignty; think piranhas on ham bone, and an unwelcome and unprecedented spotlight on the sensitive and secret activities which took place there. A police investigation followed with a summons to the offending

soldiers. In a desperate move to maintain the secrecy surrounding the base, the military had hurriedly transferred the soldiers back to the US.

This sparked long-simmering angst, and we had the first of several demonstrations at the Consulate. The day before I was to leave for Saigon, another demonstration was followed by bomb threats to our houses. In response we had evacuated everyone to the air base that night. We returned the next day. That evening I boarded the night train for Bangkok and left for Vietnam, leaving my wife and two daughters. My anxiety now included both Saigon and Udorn.

I arrived to find Saigon in a quiet panic. It was mid April. Everyone knew the end was approaching. Most did not want to admit it. The US government’s position was that we, America and Saigon, would come through this—the offensive would outrun its supply chain, a ceasefire would be implemented, and a coalition government would emerge. It was as if we could seal Pandora’s box and conjure up an unlikely reality out of the remaining whiffs of hope. As a consequence, the Ambassador refused to countenance any serious evacuation planning. To be sure, the Ambassador’s position was difficult. A hasty call to evacuate could produce the same violence and chaos which earlier had engulfed Danang, while a tardy effort could abandon allies, friends, and families to the Communists.

My friends and colleagues could see the impending disaster and gauge the dimensions of the rescue effort more clearly and they struggled with the paralysis imposed from above. Their persistent efforts to organize and get something going were sharply at odds with the official line. The anxiety was more acute among the Vietnamese. Throughout Saigon the atmosphere was tense, a London fog of fear and anxiety made toxic by the knowledge that everyone knew what was going to happen. The Americans were leaving.

“They’re burning their files and crating the china!” A bloodbath was coming. The execution of landlords in North

Sorrows continues on page 4.

Sorrows *continued from page 3.*

Vietnam in 1954, the selective assassination of officials and teachers in South Vietnam in the late 1950s, and the mass executions in Hue during Tet of 1968 were more than sufficient to predict the consequences of a Communist victory.

At risk were those Vietnamese who had worked with the South Vietnamese government, those who had worked with the Americans, those who had lived with the Americans, those who had loved the Americans, and those who had children with the Americans, as well as their families. The housemaids, the laundry women, the cooks, the drivers, the guards, anyone, everyone with any American association was branded with a scarlet "A".

This produced a suffocating, unreasoning fear and an insistent, overwhelming desire to flee, to escape. Merchants offered taels of gold, mothers offered their children, and young women offered their bodies. Families began to think the unthinkable. What if I must choose between my parents and children? Should my wife flee with the children first? Do I go with my lover or stay with my family? What does filial piety require? People could not sleep. They could not think. They scurried around looking for an exit thread, a crumb of hope, a tiny bit of relief.

But there was little to be found. What is more, the majority knew that they were not included in any plans. Those close to the Americans had their sponsors, the generals had their choppers, President Thieu had his plane; but as for the rest, civil servants, shop owners, wounded veterans, and of course the National Police and soldiers who manned the checkpoints dotting the city like measles, they knew. You're on your own.

Indeed, the tension was highest when passing through a checkpoint. Would they waive you through with a smile, "We're all in this together," or simply put their M-16 on automatic and start shooting. More than once as we pulled up, someone would

Saigon, U.S. embassy wall, 1975.



reach to the floor for the comforting but disconcerting feel of a gun. How ironic to be the last casualty from friendly fire.

I scrambled around Saigon locating friends and family, putting names on lists, discussing the orderly way, the surreptitious way, any way. I showed up at the house of my Chinese teacher in Cholon. Here are the names of you, your wife, your children. You are all set but you must

wait. Smiles, relief and gratitude, a small sliver of hope as I leave. "But Gary, wait; my parents, they're not on the list. I can't leave without them." Unspoken, but in his eyes, his voice, please don't make me choose between my family and my parents. "Surely, just two more."

Of course, back to the Embassy. I later reflected on my surprise at how deep the bonds of obligation, duty, and filial devotion were. Oh sure, I understood filial piety, the words in Vietnamese, the everyday obeisances, the poetic expressions, but to see those values play out in real time, the guilt that came with abandoning them, choices between a future and non-existence, life and death.

I was chagrined at how little I really knew. By April 17, I had done what I could. No one was moving in Saigon and no one knew when that might change. Udorn was still unsettled, and so I left. The day I departed, I had a dispirited late morning lunch with my wife's family. My wife's mother had made thit bo nhung dam (beef in vinegar sauce), a favorite of mine, but an atmosphere of ashes over the table rendered food tasteless and words stuck in one's throat. They were a middle-class family, many in the medical profession with several sons in the Army. They were split on uprooting generational ties to South Vietnam and fleeing to an unknown destination, an uncertain future. "Thank you for what you have done. We are not sure yet." I left the front steps with a grim smile but as I turned away, I could not keep the tears from my eyes. I thought I would never see any of them again.

As I trudged down the alleyway, my eldest sister-in-law caught up with me and thrust a cookie box into my hands with 120 taels (4 kg) of gold. She was a Northerner and had fled before in 1954. She had no doubts. "Please take it. It is all we have." Of course.

My friend Jim Hall was waiting on the street and he took me to the US military terminal at Tan Son Nhut. From there I would take the daily military passenger flight from Saigon to Nakhon Phanom in Thailand. I was surprised that I was the only passenger; however, I did note that the empty seats were filled with ceramic elephants. At least someone had their priorities straight. The soft drone of the jet engines and the quiet solitude of the cabin lulled me into a deep slumber only to be awakened by a tap from the co-pilot.

Phnom Penh had just fallen to the communist Khmer Rouge, and as we flew over the city the pilot circled for a better look. Even from our altitude you could make out what appeared to be dark lines of people clogging the roads out of the city. These were the citizens of Phnom Penh abandoning the city, trudging wearily without complaint—a pedestrian train to the killing fields. Several hours before, the last US Ambassador had folded the American flag and grimly boarded the last helicopter from a school yard close by the Embassy. In his pocket he had a letter from one of Cambodian's leaders, Sirik Matak, who had declined an offer of succor to remain. It read in part: "*I thank . . . you for your offer (of) freedom. I cannot . . . leave in such a cowardly fashion. . . . I never believed . . . (your great country) would . . . (abandon) a people which has chosen liberty. . . . (I) wish that . . . your country will find happiness. If I . . . die on*

Sorrows continues next page.

the spot, it is . . . (because I have believed) in the Americans.”

On the ground, dozens of people stood by silently watching as the rotor wash of the chopper flattened the grass and blew away their hopes and futures and lives. Several days later Siri Matak was executed by the Khmer Rouge. Phnom Penh and Cambodia had fallen so quickly. Would it be the same in Vietnam?

We landed at NKP and I had some slight concern as to how I might explain my golden cookies to Thai customs. No worry. The plane was met only by MPs and drug sniffing dogs. Gold has no scent and I walked away to the sounds of the ground crew busily unloading the plane. “Be careful of those ceramic elephants.”

I had returned to Udorn and a Northeast bubbling with unrest. The American security structure in Southeast Asia was cracking and Thailand was shaking. Almost immediately, refugees from

Cambodia began to appear on Thailand’s long border between the two countries. In Udorn, many Cambodian pilots in training clamored to return. We offered to bus them to the border town of Aranyaprathet on the Cambodian border along with a warning of what to expect. The pilots fragmented

bitterly, those who chose to stay feeling guilt and shame, and those who chose to go being accused of pro-communist sympathies. These feelings would play out again and again among those trying to decide what to do, among Cambodians, Vietnamese, Hmong, and Lao. (All of the pilots who did return were driven a short way from the border and executed immediately.)

Within a few days of my return and through the persistent, timely, and heroic efforts of many of my friends in both Saigon and Washington, refugees from Vietnam began to leave in large numbers, including several younger members of my wife’s family. This was a relief, but there was still no infrastructure in America to receive them, and so within the week, my wife and daughters left Thailand to help. I kept up with events in Saigon as best I could through phone calls to Vietnamese and Americans alike.

However, by the end of April, while the refugee flow was increasing daily, I became dissatisfied with the progress of those for whom I felt responsible. It was hard from afar to fully understand the tensions, the tugs and pulls of so many competing fears and obligations and the struggle to reconcile actions on the ground with disbelief in the mind. In one instance a family had boarded a bus for Tan Son Nhut and then had gotten off, wasting time and costing others a place in the process.

By April 26 I began to think I should go back to ensure that I had done all that I could. That evening I had dinner with two friends in Bangkok, John Lyle and Peter Tomsen. John, the assistant to the US Ambassador in Bangkok, was reading the most sensitive cable traffic and said the end was very near. Peter, who had just come from Guam where he had taken relatives and family, said that if I were there, I could simply put people into the car and drive them to the airport. Order was breaking down. Peter added, “Of course, you realize that if you go you might not get out.”

Visions of an interrogation cell in Red Saigon floated through my head later as I wandered the streets of Bangkok. “You speak Vietnamese and Thai. Tell us of your CIA activities in Udorn. A confession will bring leniency.” In the end I concluded that I must return and made a reservation for the Thai flight on the

morning of the 28th.

Unfortunately, an unanticipated early morning detour to pick up some money to give to a friend’s family left me with too little time to spare and the Thai flight had closed its gates. No problem, China Airlines had a flight two hours later and with so

few people clamoring to visit exotic Saigon, I rebooked easily. Now, as I stood in line passport and boarding pass in hand, a second announcement: “Ladies and gentlemen, we have just received news that Tan Son Nhut has come under a rocket attack. We regret to inform you that China Airlines is cancelling this flight.”

I would not land in Saigon again until September of 1980.

I returned to Udorn numb to the unfolding events, hopeless and helpless. On the night of April 29, I sat in my office at the Consulate listening to the radio we had installed for any chatter from Vietnam. On watch were my friend Jack Corman, Johnny Walker, and I. We had experienced an unseasonal early rain, the Mango Rains they are called, and through the open windows we could hear frogs croaking hoarsely in the surrounding rice paddies, a melancholy dirge to our morbid feelings. The song “Nights in White Satin” spooled repeatedly through a portable cassette. We drained Johnny of his consolation and fell into a troubled sleep, only to awake in the morning’s wee hours and trudge back to my house. We did not know it but sometime before dawn in Saigon that morning a second US Ambassador, carrying a folded American flag, had grimly boarded a last helicopter and departed from the US Embassy, the rotor wash



Desperate refugees swarm around an American C-130 in the Spring of 1975

Sorrows continues on page 6.

Sorrows continued from page 5.

again blowing away the hopes of the several hundred who huddled in the courtyard with quiet anxiety and their meagre belongings, scanning the sky for another chopper which would never come.

Henry Kissinger is reported to have quipped at some point close after, “*I am the only Secretary of State to have lost two countries in two weeks.*” But as with much else about America’s wars in Indochina, Secretary Kissinger got that wrong too. More was to come.

After the 1973 Paris Peace Accords, which ended American involvement in the war in Vietnam, Kissinger had imposed a cease-fire in Laos, the Vientiane Accords, with the solemn pledge “*we do not betray our friends.*” Now we were doing precisely that and as military activity increased in Cambodia and Vietnam political and military pressure began to increase on Laos. The same doubts, anxieties, and fears which had engulfed Vietnam and Cambodia like a firestorm now began to appear in Laos, but slowly, more like an irresistible lava flow.

These were felt first and most intensely among the Hmong in Xieng Khouang province and the CIA base at Long Tieng. The Hmong were a tribal people inhabiting the mountains in northern Laos, adjacent to North Vietnam. In the early 60s they had been recruited by the CIA as pawns in the US war against the North Vietnamese, “the secret war.” Fiercely independent, they had fought and died valiantly. However, in the aftermath of the “peace” aid levels had dropped precipitously and they had been reduced to drafting 14-year-olds.

Now the 40,000 or so in Xieng Khouang and Long Tieng came under fierce military pressure from the Pathet Lao (Communists) and North Vietnamese. This produced a flurry of activity at the CIA headquarters in Udorn and the adjacent Air America compound. Soon the Agency was flying select Hmong personnel into Udorn. However, as pressure increased on Long Tieng, those involved began to despair of getting all the people out.

The consulate was not directly involved, but I would run into those I knew at the officers club, the Charoen Hotel, or the Wolverine Bar. On one occasion, when I expressed disbelief that the situation could be as messed up as Saigon, I was offered a ride in on someone’s C-46—tragedy tourism. I declined when I realized that I would occupy the seat of someone fleeing on the return flight.

The remainder of Laos was coming under increasing pressure at the same time. At the consulate, we were recruited to drive the consulate car to Nong Khai at night, on the Mekong River across from Vientiane on behalf of the CIA. There we would pick up “high value assets” being smuggled into Thailand and deliver them to the airbase. This was usually without incident and the consulate sedan with diplomatic plates passed easily through the Thai border patrol checkpoint between Nong Khai and Udorn with a polite nod and a smile. However, shots were heard on one or two occasions at the riverbank, resulting in breathless flights to the car and a hurried, “get moving!” Many of the “assets” were Vietnamese and I would chat with them enroute to Udorn. Some were very pretty young women—Mata Hari in an *ao dai*.

On May 14, the pressure of Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces became unbearable, and Long Tieng fell. In this case the last American out on the last plane with General Vang Pao was CIA agent Jerry Daniels. In place of a folded American flag, Jerry had a case of beer. “It was therapeutic,” he later told me.

The rescue effort had succeeded in ferrying out some twenty-five hundred people. More than thirty thousand remained. For those left behind in the prop wash of the last airplane the word was, “find your own way out.” We had just lost the third country in our Indochina war.

The days after the fall of Phnom Penh, Saigon, and Long Tieng were filled with chaotic, scattered activities. It was not just that the American presence had been successively snuffed out in so many key places but that the vibrations rolled out sonorously—funeral marches to the grave. There were refugees on the Thai borders from Cambodia and Laos. There were demonstrations in Bangkok. There was unrest in Udorn. The local population gave vent to a decade of frustration and recent economic dislocation while government officials began to take a more nuanced view. The Americans, protectors for two decades, were becoming a liability.

By day I scurried around—by night I found a dimly lighted place where I could converse with past phantasms and the ghosts to come. Nada por nada. Why had my country done this? How had it happened? Who was to blame? Where did I fail? Of course, I found no answers. That would take years.

Raised in the warm afterglow of WWII, I had believed. JFK’s clarion calls to sacrifice, LBJ’s resolute promises of steadfast strength, and Nixon’s adamant peace with honor, which provided inspiration and confidence, had now turned to ashes. Our illusions had been incinerated in thirty days of napalm-like events. We had all grown up on the narrative of WWII. America defended freedom. America saved the persecuted. America stood by its allies. America won wars.

Now, in the short space of 30 days we had forsaken freedom, sacrificed the persecuted, abandoned our allies, and lost the war. Those who trusted us were left forlornly sitting, standing, watching, waiting, listening for a salvation which would never come. The only sounds of the future for them would be the muffled footsteps of those shuffling off to reeducation, forced labor, starvation, prison, and death. With pious pronouncements, sham dignity, and huffing displays of resolve, we had abandoned duty, honor, and all that our country stood for in a florid display of infidelity, represented most starkly in our parting words to those left behind at Long Tieng, “find your own way out.” Indeed.

As Vietnam was burning, Cambodia lost, and Laos sinking as surely as the Titanic, President Ford soothingly intoned that “today America can regain the sense of pride that existed before Vietnam,” hollow insincere sentiment, which inevitably follows every act of betrayal. How do you regain tears in the rain?

Shortly after, I found myself back in the US and assigned to the refugee program at Camp Pendleton. In an act of atonement, the US had opened its doors to the many thousands it had succeeded in rescuing and the additional tens of thousands

Sorrows continues next page.

who followed our parting words and did indeed “find their own way out.” The work was intense with little time to think—like Jerry’s beer, therapeutic, a tincture of virtue in a vial of betrayal. In the years to come I would watch and participate, while the US became a haloed beacon of hope, refuge and opportunity for countless people fleeing oppression. That was almost fifty years ago.

Those events now matter to fewer and fewer. What was it all for? What did we take away? Endless commentary, endless analysis, endless argument — and ceramic elephants. Mistakes, failures, lost opportunities, “we must never . . .” But if the present is any guide, it will all happen again. And maybe that was how it was supposed to be. Now as I sit in my garden on

a warm summer’s evening, my wine at hand, jasmine on the breeze and the faint tinkle of wind chimes, I can find both truth and solace in Virgil: “pleasant it will be one day, perhaps, to remember even this,” and I can hear Horace’s muse whispering softly in my ear,

Pay Jove his feast, then. In my [jasmine’s] shade
Stretch out the bones that long campaigns have made
Weary. Your wine’s been waiting
For years. No hesitating.

And I think of Udorn and the tinkling of the wind chimes becomes the toll of temple bells, and I can hear a Northeast love song drifting out across new rice shoots under a full moon.



Our Trips Back to Thailand

By Terry Brown

My first tour was to Udorn in 1971-72 as an F-4 Inertial Nav radar repairman. I returned to the States in '72, and was back this time to Ubon in '73. I met my wife, Ott, on my second tour of Thailand ('73 and '74), as a C-130 gunship Inertial Nav Targeting System repairman. It took some time for her to see my true charm. She wasn't very interested at first; well, actually completely *uninterested*. After almost a year together, we had planned on getting married by my end of tour in 1974. The paperwork was being done; however, a Red Cross Emergency sent me home in August '74, with a discharge along the way due to insufficient retention time left. Ott continued to believe in me and waited while I got my congressman involved and got her marriage visa done in 65 days. She arrived in Miami in December of 1974 and we were married in January of 1975.

I was working for Bendix Radar Company in Florida and Ott asked if we could go back in the Air Force. She thought it would be better for us, as I was working 10-12 hours, 6 days a

week, which is not helpful to a new marriage. I checked, and two months later we were headed for training at Chanute AFB in Illinois. Ott's savvy showed at Chanute. Our assigned base house was a disaster and needed repair. She fed the workers, made coffee, and they ended up staying for two weeks. The place was like new when they finished.

Ott has always been the type who wants to be near jet aircraft sounds. She really enjoys aircraft and having a military base nearby. Best part has been 46 years of marriage with a woman who always has my back and is the best mother her two sons could ever have. As a mom, she always made sure there was food ready for her boys and of course, the two to three friends they always had with them.

She truly has come to personify what it means to love your country and its freedoms. I can honestly say that I would never have achieved the success in life we had without Ott pushing, encouraging, and standing with me. She was just the solid rock foundation someone needs in life. We spent 27 years bouncing around the world: Spain, Italy, Hawaii, California (3 times), Mississippi, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas; not in that order, and finally here in Ohio. Never did she question moving as it always meant a more successful life and advancement for our family, and as she would say, “The job calls.” She also knew that there was a need to become adaptive to all of the changes and also a need to achieve her citizenship along the way.

She learned to speak conversational Spanish and Italian when we were there, and the people just loved her for her friendly personality. She was once picked by the Secretary of the Air Force to stand with him in a greeting line in Italy for our base function, since his wife did not travel overseas with him. Ott



Terry at the "Railroad" Market. Photos from the author.

TRIPS continues next page 8

TRIPS *continued from page 7*

was quite confused about that whole event, but carried on anyway. Ott has the capability to have people talk to her and seem like long-time friends even if she doesn't know them. She is just so very likeable and inspires trust from others. She decided to take up golf and now shoots around 90 for 18 holes and just is a fanatic about other sports. Golf is our way of cutting out about 20 hours a week for us to be together and enjoy life. Lots of good karma with Ott and the best partner I could ever hope to have.

We had always dreamed of getting back to Thailand, but life, work, and kids always seemed to draw our time and funds. Now Ott and I have been traveling back to Thailand for the last five years as we always dreamed about doing. We have been able to confer with friends from the states, and even new friends that have friends or family still in Thailand, to help our travels to be much more fun. Like many others, we started with some hesitation on our first trip, but it soon became familiar. Thailand never leaves your blood. To us it seems so natural to be back in country. Traveling back to some of the areas and bases is exciting and yet seems strange. They are just shells of what they were and they seem almost ghostly. If only they could tell the stories.

We have traveled to Bangkok, Rayong, Pattaya, Koy Samui,

Ott posing in front of the famous and spectacular "White Temple" in Northern Thailand near Chiang Rai and 220 kilometers north of Chiang Mai.



The White Temple

Wat Rong Khun, or the White Temple, is a privately owned modern Buddhist temple located in Chiang Rai Province, North of Chiang Mai and 15 minutes from Chiang Rai City. It was opened to visitors in 1997, but after an earthquake seriously damaged it in 2014, it did not fully reopen and was nearly abandoned until engineers confirmed the structure to be sound. The main building is covered in stark white plaster that makes a spectacular site as you approach from a distance. On the grounds, the bathroom building differs in that it is totally covered in gold. Some say it's the most beautiful toilet in the World!

A Chiang Mai artist, Chalermchai Kositpipat, being dismayed by the tattered condition of the old temple, took on the project of completely rebuilding it in the 1990s, using his own money. At last report he had spent nearly \$35,000 on the project. In addition, he plans to create a surrounding center for meditation and the teaching of Buddhist principles. Believing the project will afford him immortal life, he expects it to be completed by the year 2070. It is notable not only for the spectacular all-white brilliance of the main building, but also for the modern and ancient images the artist has created to symbolize the beliefs of Buddhism and the struggle between good and evil.

Phuket, Udorn, NKP, Nan, Chang Mai, Chang Rai, Golden Triangle, and a lot of UNESCO Sites in Thailand, such as Sukhothai Historical Park on the way to Nan and the Burma Railroad museum and river area. We have a routine of flying EVA Airlines as they have a stretch section with more leg room. With Ott having a fake knee, it has required us to change our travel planning. We fly through Taiwan and into Bangkok. Although EVA also now goes into Chang Mai, we normally plan our trips and always try to get by old bases, as I like to see how much they have changed. Even if an American flight, I just will pay for more leg room, as old bones do not like being cramped and I don't need the person in front of me resting in my lap.

Lesson learned one night by staying at a so-called resort for a cheaper price. I actually had better rooms back in the '70s. If your goal is to pay between 16-20 dollars a night for accommodations, be prepared for a less than comfortable room, and maybe have your bug spray. I normally set it at a 1000 baht or more (32

TRIPS *continues next page*



Remember the street-kabobs? These and other delicacies, often cooked in a wok while you wait, can be very good. Note the charcoal "stove" under the water vessel at left.

dollars+). I just will not stay at a less than decent room and also demand that my driver stays there also. A good night's sleep is worth it. We have had others traveling with us and they complained about a room for 32 dollars versus 18! I told them to stay there and we would pick them up the next morning. Really, a first-class room for 30-35 dollars and you want to sleep in a room that has a floor that you would hate to walk on, just to save 15 dollars? It's easy to forget what you pay in the states or other countries. Thailand seems to bring out the cheap in travelers; old habits, I guess.

The next lesson is that the Thailand Government takes security and traveling very seriously. Every place at which we stayed required a passport to copy, proof of visa, a phone number, and planned travel. With stays of less than 30 days, no advance visa needed. Over 30, plan ahead and get a visa through the Thai Embassy or Consulate. We got a call after we left one place, which I called Freddy Kruger, that one of the guests had not signed his form properly. The owner met us in town to get the proper signature. They are serious about doing security properly. Also, get to a doctor before you go, and get some shots and medications for whatever potential issues you might encounter, such as stomach problems. You can buy the

3 pack of antibiotics at most drug stores or shopping centers, like Big C in Thailand.

Lastly, what we have discovered is that we have a couple of very good and dependable sources that have 10-12 pack vans. We may invite a couple of friends or just go ourselves. We normally pay for the driver's meals, and most hotels/motels have a discounted driver's room. It cost us between 1800 to 2000 Baht a day for the van, plus gas. So, say 3800 Baht (122-130 dollars) a day, split by however many folks you have, gives you a decent, comfortable ride in a 10-12 pack van, which lets you shop, eat, or go where you want to visit. The drivers are professionals and know some of the better off-the-normal-path places to visit. Of course, we tip very well at the end of our trips. This method of traveling definitely beats any tour and being on a schedule. An example of a good driver is, we were headed to Nan and had stopped at the Sukhothai Historical Park on the way there. It was late in the day and no real places to stay. Our driver found a place that looked like Freddy Kruger lived there as we drove in. Turned out the guy had new bungalows, refinished and absolutely nice rooms, even if the area looked pretty sketchy. Our driver recommended a river restaurant that was terrific. The next day when we left, the owner of the hotel gave my wife and her friend some homegrown squash to take with them back to Udon. Awesome trip! Plus, treating the drivers

right will get you information on things and places to go of which others aren't aware. Just the freedom of traveling on your own schedule makes it so much more enjoyable and fun being in Thailand.

UDORN

Udon is pretty interesting in that most of it seems stuck in a '70s time warp. The base is now a joint Thai AF and commercial area. The old strip out the back gate is obviously gone. I had this silly hope that my hangout, "Mom's Place," would still be there, but of course, it wasn't. We asked if we could go in the gate, but the guards told us that it was a restricted area, so we went to town and into the commercial side. Although deserted, some of the old terminal, metal tarmac, old chow hall, are still there. But the swamp areas around the base are now condos and homes, so we drove the old shuttle bus route back around and out the back gate of the so-called restricted area.

Downtown Udon hasn't really joined the modern world yet. Yes, they have an international area, American fast food, and even a quite beautiful mall with hotel. The mall is great to visit in the heat of the day, get cooled off, grab an ice cream, and then head out. You don't buy anything there as the rich folks can afford to shop there and the normal Thai can't. Also, the best buffet breakfast in the city is offered at the hotel at the mall. This very modern hotel has a buffet and easily earns a 4-to-5 star rating, with awesome food and really great service. There are good-sized German and British ex-pat groups in Udon. With the ex-pats of course, there is a really good German restaurant,

TRIPS continues on page 10

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 Brotherhood page*

TRIPS continued from page 9

not in town, but worth visiting. The Irish Clock is a nice Irish pub with good beer, burgers, and fries. I wanted to go there for a beer and burger and check the place out. Ott and her friends decided to eat Thai, so they dropped me off. I of course am sipping my beer, eating my burger and watching BBC news. They come back in after about 30 minutes. The friends had convinced my wife that I was a target for the bar girls, being there alone. Of course, that's because the Irish Clock is in the party alley. No one even talked to me other than ask the "what do you want to order," question, since it was noon. Other times I went by and of course there were the usual questions, "where you going, need a girl friend?" But once they recognize you from passing through and you are not interested, they just ignore you. We also got to see the yearly festival celebrated by the entire town filled with street dancers. Every street is jammed and each color of groups represents a different area, and there is the night temple festival and lighting of candle balloons for prayers and wishes.

I had a routine of catching the Baht bus from our friends' house into downtown, walking around the city and shopping, and for my daily exercise walking a couple of miles back. That's when you saw the old Udorn; pretty dirty, a few dead rats here and there, and less modern living. Udorn does have a large Chinese temple compound with school and condos. It is a pretty rich area, and across the main street sits the old open markets. It's a pretty startling change of scenery, but I really enjoyed my walks, as vendors and folks would start to recognize me and they were friendly, saying hello. If you wanted one, there were a couple of modern coffee bars to get your caffeine fix. I even had families ask me to join them on their picnic as I walked around the lake at the Chinese temple. It was set up with exercise workout stations spaced evenly around the lake, nothing fancy, just some resistance machines, but helpful. The one thing you will notice everywhere in Thailand is the sheer volume of dogs just wandering around. Seems like so many, you wonder how they survive. They don't bother you and seem to know how to negotiate the traffic without getting hit. Udorn is a real picture of the '70s and the modern world trying to exist together.

NAKHON PHANOM (NKP)

Downtown NKP is pretty awesome now and quite beautiful with the river walk, dinner boats, and the beautiful Golden Naga water fountain. It's really a nice place to visit and pretty clean, especially compared to Udorn. NKP, the base, has been gutted and almost all is gone, and after driving by, it is hard to even envision what NKP used to look like. Lots of the old fence is still there and the small terminal is too, but that's just about it. Time as always has a way of erasing the old.

We traveled from Udorn to attend the Songkran Festival in NKP. Everyone was visiting the temples for the festival and sharing donations to the temples. I was fortunate enough to join in the procession of people making three rotations walking around the temple as is custom. They do the walk with a long orange roll of cloth that folks keep over their head as they walk



Girls marching in a parade during the annual street festival in Udorn City. Each group has its own color..

around, kind of like a real long dragon. I joined in at the end, as the last in-line person holds the heaviest part of the long roll of orange cloth, which covers everyone. I joined there as it looked like the last guy was having trouble with the weight of the roll. It was pretty heavy and two made it easier. As we got closer to the head monk who was collecting the orange cloth, all I could hear was people saying, "farang, farang," referring to me being part of the group and carrying the cloth. They stood around watching me, and my wife told me that they really enjoyed a farang knowing and participating in the customs. Apparently, they thought that was a big deal. The head monk actually asked me to sit for a minute and talk about where I was from and if I had a Thai wife. Pretty enjoyable. I have found this to be normal, since I smile a lot, am polite, and follow the proper customs, beat into me by my wife of course.

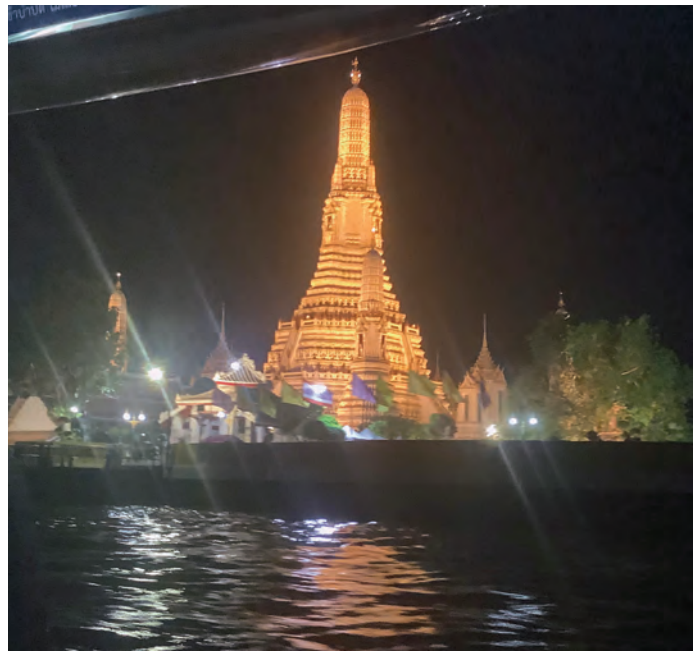
I also actually enjoy going to the temples. It is called the Land of Temples for a reason. The monks seem to really enjoy having a farang sit in and follow the proper religious practices. I will do the proper donation procedures and proper prayer positions, and it pays to know them. I have been fortunate enough to be called up front of gatherings and given some of the food donated to the monks, which is a really big deal as explained to me. People would "Oh and Ah" because the monks did that. Although it made me feel a little weird, you

TRIPS continues next page

show respect and do it. I have also been fortunate enough to receive blessed tokens from several different monks to add to my Buddha token-on-a-rope necklace. It was explained to me that they were important heads in the Buddhist structure. Monks, when they see me, will normally ask about the tokens and who and where I got them; then they want to add that I should consider it quite the honor and privilege that they are willing to do that for me. Smiling and happiness always helps!

The festival in NKP was such a good time, and the normal, very friendly Thai people only made it better. We then went from the temple to the river area, and it was nice to see how modern and improved it has become, plus, there were no hostile responses from the Laos side. The entire river walk area is paved and really pretty with the green river dragon statues protecting the river area and the new gold Naga Statue at the end. We spent the next day driving all over the area, including the Freedom Bridge space. I also went by a site that I had not known was there during my tours of Thailand.

Interesting enough that only a few miles from NKP is the home and museum for Ho Chi Minh, complete with guides looking like they just left the revolution. I was pretty hesitant about even stopping, but my wife's friends wanted to see it. Ott and her friends went in with our driver to get the full tour, which is free, but promotes his early years in Thailand and his legacy and achievements. I could not bring myself to enter the place because of too many emotions and feelings. I tried to talk myself into it, but it just didn't happen. It just was not something I could bring myself to do, so I stayed out front by the van, and it must be a somewhat normal reaction



Temple of the Dawn, or "Wat Arun," sits majestically on the West bank of the river in Bangkok. It is across the river from Wat Po. According to internet sources, the central stupa reached its present height of over 200 feet in 1851. It has been restored several times since then, most recently in 2017.

as one young lady came out and brought me tea and said she understood. Not sure she did, but nice of her to say. Still, not a place I would go by again.

End of Part 1.



Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The 12 members listed below joined between the June 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 sincere "Welcome Home."

No.	Branch	Last Name	First Name	City	State
1972	USAF	Deignan	Robert	Lowell	MA
1973	USAF	Fender	David	Calico Rock	AR
1974	USAF	Calloway	William	Austin	TX
1975	USAF	Wren	John	Georgetown	SC
1976	USAF	Trusty	LeRoy	Colorado Springs	CO
1977	USAF	Schlieder	Mark	Catawissa	PA
1978	USAF	Ramsey	Charles	North Charleston	SC
1979	USAF	Leone	Roland	Chesterfield	MI
1980	USAF	Sauer	William	Hoosic Falls	NY
1981	USAF	Van Ness	Tom	Albuquerque	NM
1982	USAF	Mitchell	John	Rocky Gap	VA
1983	USAF	Howe	Donald	Oakdale	NY

TLCB Reunion Log

# Reg	Year	Place	Chairman	Highlights	Slogan
30*	1998	Dayton	Informal	Informal, Air Force Museum Vote to organize & elect a BOD	Waitin' fer Dayton
54*	1999	Tysons Corner, VA	Bill Tilton	Name reading at The Wall. First board mtg, pre-incorporation.	Call to the Wall
61	2000	Colorado Springs	Joe Wilson with Jimmie Butler	Dedicated bronze plaque at AF Academy Banquet speaker Robin Olds	Fling at the Springs
90	2001	Ft. Walton Beach	Ed Miller	Attended by BG "Heine" Aderholt, MG Richard V. Secord and Col George C. "Bud" Day,	R&R at the Beach
69	2002	Manassas, VA	Bill Tilton	Challenge coin introduced and auctioned. Wreath-laying at Vietnam Wall.	Stand Tall at the Wall
87*	2003	Ft. Walton Beach	Ed Miller	Climate Lab tour at Eglin AFB Multiple memorial svcs; MIA names read	Back to the Beach
72	2004	Ontario, CA	Les Thompson	Fort Arthur coastal battery, Planes of Fame museum, March AFB. Banquet speaker "Mule" Parker.	Way Out West
77	2005	Arlington, VA	Bill Tilton	Wreath-laying on Tomb of the Unknowns, Nighttime Vietnam Wall ceremony	In Brotherhood
?	2006	Las Vegas	Jim Hopkins	"Ho Chi Minh Trail" by Jimmie Butler. B-52 midair survivor Harten guest speaker.	None
84*	2007	Dayton	John Loftus	Dedicated bronze plaque at AF Museum Memorial Garden. Banquet in Air Force Museum. Son Tay raid speech; Guenon.	Back to Our Beginnings
?	2008	Philadelphia	John Loftus	Tours of Philadelphia and Valley Forge.	Liberty and Freedom
88	2009	Cape Canaveral	Gary Beatty	Post-mission download of Atlantis shuttle in NASA tour; special challenge coin issued.	Space Coast 2009
82	2010	Atlanta	Bill Tilton	Symposium: Tuskegee Airman, DDay order typist, Enola Gay navigator; Tours of Delta Airlines and Chick-Fil-A HQ.	Brothers on my Mind
87	2011	Alexandria, VA	Gerry Frazier	Night wreath-laying at LS 85 panel at The Wall; Guided tour of the Pentagon. Monuments	Welcome to Alexandria!
76	2012	San Antonio	Dan Decker	Graduation ceremony at Lackland The Alamo and the Riverwalk	All Gave Some - Some Gave All
91	2013	Ft. Walton Beach	Ed Miller	USAF cancels tours b/c of Trop Storm Karen and govt shutdown; 100 at banquet (record) . Inspiring ex-POW speaker Hubbard.	Remembrance at the Beach
53	2014	Colorado Springs	Joe Wilson	Academy tour & service at TLCB plaque, FAC monument; "Mule" Parker speaker.	The Springs II
55	2015	Woburn, MA	John Sweet	Woburn Mayor at memorial monument Guided tour of Boston harbor	We Are One (with Revolutionary vets)
82	2016	Alexandria, VA	Gerry Frazier	Wreath-laying at The Wall; Mount Vernon tour Commemorative Partners pins.	Return to The Wall
94	2017	Dayton	Ray Boas	Memorial service at TLCB plaque at Museum, LS 85 and "The Black Mariah Story"	20 Years of Brotherhood
82	2018	Biloxi, MS	John Schillo	Tour of Stennis Space Center, Seafood and resort attractions.	Shining a Light on the Gulf Coast
70	2019	Las Vegas, NV	George Shenberger	Nellis AFB tour, Christina Olds and Dick Jonas at banquet.	Go For It!
0	2020	Newport, RI	John Harrington	Cancelled because of Covid-19 pandemic	Clear Vision, Clear Sailing



Together on Hallowed Ground: October 14—16 Gettysburg, PA



Guest Speaker Tom Dombrowsky

LTC (Ret) Tom Dombrowsky will be our featured guest speaker at the President's Banquet on Saturday evening. Tom is a 26-year Army veteran who has served in various command and staff positions throughout the United States, Germany, Japan, and two combat tours in Vietnam: first as a MACV Advisor to the Binh Duong Province PF Training Center, in 1968 and 1969. Then with the Third Brigade 1st Cavalry Division, 1st Bn/12 Cavalry as a company commander mostly in the War Zone D area of III Corps in 1971 and '72. He came to Gettysburg after a three-year tour in Japan, as the Professor of Military Science at Gettysburg College, and continued as an adjunct in the History Dept for 20 years. In his final assignment he served as the Director of Military History for the Resident Course at the Army War College (AWC), at Carlisle, PA, and then as a contract faculty instructor for 13 years in the AWC Distance Education Department. While teaching at the AWC, he taught one to two courses each year on American Military History and the Vietnam War as an adjunct in the Department of History at Gettysburg College. He has been a 36-year resident of Gettysburg and has provided Battlefield tours for friends, family, and local leadership programs.

Tom is married with three children and five grandchildren.

Rosie's Raffle 2021

Below is a photo of this year's "Rosie Wheatley Memorial Quilt." It was created by Natalie Hill, who is vice president of the TAC Tankers Association, and asked for nothing but the cost of materials. Raffle tickets are included in this issue and will be available at the reunion.

The quilt has two labels on the back, as shown below.



Wyndham Hotel Gettysburg
95 Presidential Circle,
Gettysburg PA 17325
717-339-0020

Tentative Schedule

This is for planning only.

Thursday, Oct 14

Registration: noon until 1700. See Jim Hebert after that.
Dinner: OYO—Suggestion: "Pakha" restaurant in Dillsburg
Nipa Hut closes at 10:00PM

Friday, Oct 15

0830: Meet guide Tara Wenzel in Nipa Hut
The morning and part of the afternoon are for the Historical Gettysburg presentation and bus tour, and the Battlefield Visitor Center, etc., with lunch options.
1800: Dinner at Nipa Hut (pizza)
1900: Assistance Auction
Nipa Hut closes at 11:00PM

Saturday, Oct 16

0830: Board of Directors
1000: Annual Meeting and Board election
1200: Lunch in Nipa Hut. (assorted subs, tentatively)
1300: Licensed guide tours of Gettysburg Battlefield
1600: Buses return tour groups to hotel
1830: Cocktails on Veranda
1900: President's Banquet
Nipa Hut after banquet: TBD

Sunday, Oct 17 Depart; no planned activities

Covid 19 and the 2021 Reunion

As this issue of the MEM went to press, there were no restrictions in Gettysburg or Pennsylvania that would interfere with the program we had planned. If attendants need to cancel for any reason, we have always refunded any costs that we had not already spent. Any changes will be posted on our TLC Brotherhood website. **Just in case—bring a mask!**

Changed your address? ...eMail?

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

When the Firing Stopped

A Family Connection to the Photographs of Gettysburg

By William Tyson Tilton

When the firing stopped at Gettysburg and General Lee led his defeated army back through Maryland to Virginia in the rain on July 4th, 1863, the local citizens were drawn to the bloody, body-strewn and badly chewed-up battleground that had been farms and woods in the region. While photography was still very new, four photographers did capture the scenes on glass plates. Among the four, only one was a resident of Gettysburg at the time. This was Charles John Tyson, co-proprietor of the only portrait studio in Gettysburg, and grandfather of my mother. In addition to the studio, Tyson had a portable photo lab on a horse-drawn wagon. At the time of the battle, he had lived in this area for only four years. Charles' 13-year-old apprentice, William H. Tipton, later purchased the studio and remaining images, and over the years became somewhat famous as "The Gettysburg Battlefield Photographer." This was before "selfies" or even snapshots with a Kodak Brownie, and tourists loved to get photos of themselves at famous sites on the battlefield.

When you tour Gettysburg, your guide may point out a small cannon ball embedded in the brick below a second-story window of a building just off the square on York Street and right next to the Wills House. It's above "Lulu's" ice cream shop. The Wills House, on the square at York Street, is where Abraham Lincoln stayed when he came to the dedication of the first national cemetery four months after the battle, in November of 1863. What is seen in Tyson Brothers' studio wall is actually the rear end of an 11 inch long, 3 inch diameter explosive round from a Hotchkiss rifle (see box on next page). No one knows if it has been disarmed or not, though Tyson expressed concern about that in a letter he wrote about his battle experiences. The Confederate artillery piece was fired from Oak Hill, now the site of the Peace Light Eternal Flame monument.

Charles Tyson did not dream of being a photographer, or, apparently, much of anything else. His schooling in Philadelphia, ended abruptly when "a cross old teacher broke his arm with a ruler." While his older brother, Isaac, was learning the new Daguerreotype method of creating images on copper plates from real-life scenes, Charles worked for a home furnishing store and later a grocery. Isaac taught the complicated photo processing techniques to Charles and they headed westward to set up a studio. Lancaster, York, and Hanover already had portrait studios, but Gettysburg did not. In 1859 they opened "Tyson Brothers Photographic Gallery"

and soon became very successful.

The following February they were invited to dinner by a Quaker family they met at a meetinghouse (Society of Friends "church") about ten miles north of town, and this family had a daughter, Maria Griest. After a proper courtship, Charles married Maria in April of 1863, just over two months before the battle. They set up housekeeping on Chambersburg Street. Isaac married a cousin of Maria and they soon returned to Philadelphia, where he opened a photo studio.

Prior to the battle, the people of Gettysburg were visited by Confederate Gen Ewell's corps, which was sent ahead by Lee to forage for supplies. Lee issued strict orders to avoid any unnecessary damage, theft, and other belligerent actions that might make life more difficult for them. The Confederate Army was accustomed to marching among sympathetic citizenry and Lee knew they needed to be seen as "good" invaders because

they would depend on the local citizens for supplies. On Friday, June 27th at 1500 hrs, Tyson saw the advance party of Ewell's Corp as they marched in from the West toward the main part of town. The men were shouting and firing shots into the air, but that was quickly stopped with an order to "Halt.....stack arms." With gate and doors locked, he and Maria watched through their Venetian shutters. They heard someone try the door and then read out "T-Y-S-O-N....I wonder who the devil *that* is." When they started chopping at the door he ran down and let them in, saying, "You look warm and dry. We have a well of good cool water in here. Come in and refresh yourselves." They asked for bread and butter, but Charles told them there was not enough to share with them. He wrote, "They were satisfied far more easily than I expected; [they] were very polite and gentlemanly."

Four days later, on July 1st, the Tysons awoke to find Gettysburg swarming with Union soldiers (who had arrived from



Portrait of Charles John Tyson

Tyson continues next page.



Emmitsburg, Maryland on a sweep to locate Lee). However, the stores were open and he opened the portrait gallery at ten. Later when he went downstairs to get change, he found the other stores closed and the streets nearly deserted. Seeing a judge he knew, he asked “What does this mean?” He was told it meant to “quickly and quietly get in your house” because the Rebels were going to shell the town. He immediately headed toward his house and met Maria on the way. At the house, she had already packed a small trunk, with evacuation in mind. They left the house with the trunk on a wheelbarrow and found that the streets were filled with people fleeing the approach of Lee’s expected shelling. Soon they met some acquaintances who had a wagon with room to carry them and the trunk. The four headed southeast toward Littlestown, but rain forced them to stop at the Benner farm (which also still has visible battle damage). When the rain stopped, they left their trunks with the Benners and continued on about ten miles to Littlestown.

Two days later, Charles met a man who had just come from Gettysburg, where the battle was then still raging. He said Tysons’ studio was gutted and his house “destroyed but still standing.” By then the Benner farm, where they left their belongings, was behind Confederate lines, so at that moment he and Maria thought they had lost everything but the clothes they were wearing. However, when they did get back, they found the house was intact, except that some of their letters and papers had been burned on his office floor and someone had traded their threadbare suits for his clothing. They were very relieved; even the new rug was undamaged by the burning of papers.

Charles found the studio still closed and locked, thanks to Mrs. Wills telling the Rebel soldiers that it contained dangerous



At left, tail-end of an 11” artillery shell is still embedded in this wall of Tyson’s studio. The helpful little flog is currently missing, as the window frame was recently repainted. This is above “Lulu’s” ice cream store on York Street just off the square, and next to the Wills House. The building belonged to the Wills’s.

Above, the Hotchkiss 3” rifle (see sidebar article, below).

Hotchkiss 3” Ordnance Rifle

For those interested in artillery weapons, the Hotchkiss 3” Rifle was known formally as the M1861 Ordnance Rifle. This federal artillery piece was noted for its accuracy, range, and safety (very few blew up when fired). It fired a 9½ pound, 11-inch explosive projectile in a rifled barrel. Rotating 350 degrees in eleven feet, the spin made the muzzle velocity very persistent, which had the effect of making the round invisible in flight, where Parrot gun balls could be seen in their trajectory. According to a Wikipedia article, the gun with registry number 1 served in Gilbert H. Reynolds’s Battery L, 1st New York Light Artillery at the Battle of Gettysburg and was captured by the Confederates. It was recaptured at the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House in May 1864. Gun number 100 served in Samuel Sherer Elder’s Battery B, 1st U.S. Artillery and fired the last shot at the Battle of Appomattox Court House. Gun number 233 served in John H. Calef’s Battery A, 2nd U.S. Artillery and fired the first shot at Gettysburg. Gun number 247 served in the same battery at Gettysburg, which was previously commanded by John C. Tidball.

chemicals (true). However, soldiers had entered the basement and emptied a barrel of 95% alcohol (used in photo processing), and a gross of 8-ounce bottles, which they were seen carrying out of the basement. There was damage here; there was a Minnie ball hole in a window and one-inch pine partition, and of course the artillery round in the outside wall that is still there.

Charles got his young apprentice and his photo wagon, and they took 592 photos of the battlefield and the town, though as a peaceful Quaker, he was unwilling to photograph the bodies of dead soldiers. I have been told that most of his glass plates ended up in the collection of Matthew Brady, who did not come

Tyson continues on page 16.



Tyson photo of Gettysburg in July of 1863. Also used by Timothy O'Sullivan. Photographers tended to take credit for images whether they actually took the photos or not. Neither Tyson nor O'Sullivan gave the location, merely labeling it as a view of Gettysburg. It appears to be on Taneytown Road, with a tent camp on the future National Cemetery grounds. Above that is the steeple of the courthouse. Yellow Hill, beyond Herr Ridge in the background, was a "station" on the Underground Railway..

Tyson continued from page 9

to town until later. There was very little interest in reliving the horror in the years after the Civil War, and many of those priceless battlefield negatives wound up as greenhouse glass. Fortunately, many survived.

After a few years, when apprentice Tipton was 15 or 16, Charles Tyson sold the studio to him. Tyson had bought 1/3

A Famous Tyson Brothers Photo



The famous scene above was taken of the procession to the new National Cemetery in November of 1863, when the parade turned onto Steinwehr Avenue from Baltimore Street. The sycamore tree on the right side of the street still exists. The glass plate negative is in the collection of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.

interest in his in-laws's tree nursery in 1864 and turned his full-time attention to fruit growing, buying the nursery outright in 1867. Tipton, who named his first child after Charles, was in danger of losing the studio to his creditors, and records show that Charles protected him by buying it back in 1867 and then selling it back to Tipton the next year. Then after getting into and out of several nurseries, in 1874 Tyson again bought a half interest in the studio from Tipton. Perhaps this was just a way to give Tipton a loan, as he sold it back again within ten years.

Charles Tyson then got out of the fruit growing business and opened a fertilizer factory near Baltimore in 1881. The original factory burned down in 1882 but was rebuilt as a new company, the Susquehanna Fertilizer Company of Baltimore, with Charles as president. This business flourished. He and Maria lived in "Mapleton," a three-story brick house ten miles north of Gettysburg, that had been a seminary and an inn, I believe, and also served as a branch office of the fertilizer company. In 1900 they built a three-story 15-room house on top of the hill above Mapleton and across the road from the Quaker Meeting house where he and Maria first met. Called "Hill House," this was a wedding gift for their son Chester J Tyson and his bride, Bertha Hauxhurst, and eventually, their twelve children, of whom my mother was the third born. Charles died in 1906. I grew up in Hill House, but that's another story.

