



Mekong Express Mail

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The Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood, Inc.

www.TLC-Brotherhood.org

Volunteers Provide an Irreplaceable Service At the Nation's DVA Hospitals

By Dave MacDonald

When my World War Two U.S. Army vet mother in law was a patient in the Nursing Home Care Unit at our local VA hospital, I got my first look at a remarkable bunch of people—the volunteers. I watched them carry trays into the rooms of the bedridden and help them to eat. I saw them open butter wrappers, cut food and put straws in drinks for vets in wheelchairs in the dining room. Others came in and told jokes to the vets, helped them to straighten up their rooms or read to them.

We heard about the Therapy Dog program, in which dogs come in and share affection with vets who have few visitors or just like dogs. We put our Pekingese, Hannibal, through the application process with the volunteer program, checking that his shots were current and getting him clearance to visit patients. He loved trotting through the corridors, stopping to visit with patients. When we visited Sarah in the Nursing Home Care Unit we would visit her neighbor, an army colonel who had cancer and was weak but liked to have Hannibal lie on the bed beside her while she stroked him. She was a former chief of nurses in Saigon during the war and must have helped to save a lot of lives. One Saturday Hannibal dropped in on her. She was weaker. He spent an hour watching her as she held one of his paws and smiled at him. Three days later she died. It was an introduction to the power of volunteering, by people and dogs.

This year, the Department of Veterans Affairs is celebrating the service to veterans, and to the 163 VA hospitals, provided by 107,000 volunteers all across the country. All civilian hospitals have a certain number of volunteers from their communities. The VA volunteers are something special because of their numbers and because their volunteer hours constitute a personal salute and sacrifice of free time to mark their respect, love and gratitude for the men and women who sacrificed so much to defend this country.

VA volunteers perform a remarkable range of tasks for VA hospitals, freeing up professional staff to concentrate on their areas of expertise. Jim Delgado, head of the VA Volunteer Service at DVA headquarters in the nation's capital, says it is not

unusual for a VA hospital to have nearly as many volunteers as paid staff. At

some facilities, he says, they have *more* volunteers than paid staff. Because the volunteer force is aging, with about 70 percent of volunteers across the country aged 70 or older, and a VA policy shift from inpatient to outpatient care, the student volunteer program is particularly important. It currently has about 25,000 enthusiastic participants and is a good omen for the future of the volunteer program. A corporate program is also being developed. Delgado cites as an example one company that is donating 17 large-screen televisions to the first 17 VA facilities that ask for them.

The value of that single donation indicates the importance of the national program to the VA. Delgado says that without volunteerism the health care program would come to a stop. Although it is not possible to measure the precise value of the program, volunteer hours are recorded. Last year, volunteers raised and donated \$40 million in hard cash or equivalent in

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Honoring CAT/Air America

By Leigh Coleman Hotujec

They were part of the war just like anyone in the military. They made the same sacrifices. Many of them died. From 1947 to 1975, they operated in secret—civilian pilots, kickers and other aircrew members, ground maintenance and support personnel—working for the CIA on missions they could not even discuss with their families. Some of the surviving employees and family members of CAT/Air America, like myself, are now active members of the TLC Brotherhood.

Civil Air Transport began life as a commercial airline during the Chinese civil war in the 1940s and was purchased by the CIA in 1950. CAT's name was changed to Air America in 1959, though some commercial flights continued under the CAT logo until the late 1960s. As a secret arm of the American government, CAT and Air America flew supplies, munitions and personnel for the next quarter-century throughout Indochina, especially during the "secret war" in Laos. Air America's role—in fact, the existence of the airline itself—was largely unknown to the American public until congressional hearings into CIA activities in the late 1970s.

Even after its role in Southeast Asian wars became part of the record, Air America never see CAT/Air America, next page



Have YOU Registered Yet?
Details: See Page 4!



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goods. He says the estimate of the annual value to the VA of the national volunteer program is \$196 million.

Last year, the national program had a net loss of 7,000 volunteers, so innovative ways are being sought to retain current volunteers and to bring in new groups. An example of how the program works at the local level is provided by the VA Hospital in Washington, D.C. DeWayne Vaughn, who heads the volunteer operation, says a prime goal has been "retaining the volunteers we have, trying to make it interesting for them, making sure they are appreciated." He says it is important to make sure that volunteers understand, "when they come in to see you if they have a complaint or something they want to tell you, that you are listening to them and that what they are saying is important to you."

Despite a downward trend in numbers because volunteers are getting older, he says his program "actually had an increase of over 16,000 volunteer hours over last year to a total 90,000 hours." He said his program should do about 90-100,000 hours a year. In the last two years there had been an increase in donations received. The hospital had depended on such organizations as the DAV, the VFW and the American Legion, whose members were getting older, so they were now trying to increase the involvement of such groups as the Elks and Eagles to increase the volunteer base. "We have right now 60 percent of our volunteers under 50 and 40 percent over 50 and are getting a large number of younger people coming in to volunteer, including some special ed kids who work in the canteen and a special ed group working in our marketing program."

He quantified the impact of the volunteers on the Washington VA Hospital, including hours and donations at \$1.5 million last year and \$1.7 million this year. Most of the volunteers come in around 0700-0800 and are gone by 1400. Another large group comes in the evenings and weekends, usually sponsoring patient activities.

Volunteers fill out an application form and have a thorough briefing on the program's policies and procedures, an important one being about the confidentiality of patient records, violation of which can lead to being let go. They are trained in safety issues and what to do if fire breaks out.

Disabled volunteers are welcome. Jim Delgado said there are quadriplegic volunteers across the country that are able to control a powered cart only with head movements but they help by running errands such as carrying specimens around the hospital. In DeWayne Vaughn's program they want receptionists for offices, data entry volunteers, dental lab technicians, nursing assistants to help nurses by giving ice water or taking patients to clinic appointments, escorts for patients in walking programs, book cart operators, visitors to talk with and read to patients with few visitors, escorts to guide visitors through the maze of hospital corridors and those volunteers we first saw helping patients to enjoy their meals.

Across the country, volunteers find ingenious ways to help. One volunteer in Georgia puts ads in his local newspaper asking for furniture, clothing or household items and donates them to an organization that helps homeless vets to move into apartments. Volunteers in one Pennsylvania VA hospital run a post

office for patients. A former Army nurse runs a creative writing class in upstate New York that has been therapeutic and brought pride to vets. In Nebraska, families that have to travel to visit patients have available overnight accommodation at one VA center thanks to the efforts of the widow of a Vietnam vet. It is all in a day's work for those remarkable volunteers.



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rose into mainstream consciousness. The veterans faced the ambiguous feelings many Americans felt toward the Vietnam War. In the 1980s, members of Air America and CAT raised \$15,000 for a bronze plaque, which hangs in the special-collections section on the second floor of the McDermott Library to memorialize the 242 employees killed in the line of duty. A smaller version of the plaque has been placed in the CIA headquarters in Langley, VA. One of the names is that of my father, Benjamin F. Coleman, KIA in Laos, July 25 1972.

On June 2, 2001, 25 years after Air America ceased operations in Southeast Asia, some of the obscurity was removed. The government finally recognized them when representatives of the United States Central Intelligence Agency presented Civil Air Transport and Air America with a Unit Citation Award recognizing and commemorating their collective service and sacrifice in Asia and Southeast Asia. The CIA also presented individual citations recognizing the specific accomplishments and contributions of Hugh L. Grundy and Robert E. Rousselot. Jim Glerum and another senior representative of the CIA presented the citations during the joint CAT/Air America Associations Banquet where more than 850 association members, former CAT and Air America personnel and their families, had gathered in Las Vegas, Nevada, to swap stories and remember missions many Americans know nothing about. They also honored the 242 people who died or disappeared during the secret missions. Former employees and surviving family members were presented with special medallions from the CIA in honor of the occasion.

Though Air America was dissolved a quarter-century ago, the citation—a framed certificate—was the first official expression of appreciation by the U.S. government. The citation singled out the aircrews and ground personnel for their courage, sacrifice and superior airmanship.

As the daughter of a pilot who flew for both CAT and Air America, and an active member of both the CAT and Air America Associations, I have been attending their annual reunions for the past several years. This year the gathering began on May 30 and by the time the four-day event was over nearly 1,000 people had signed in at the registration desk. Events included Las Vegas shows, tours of the local area, the ever-popular hospitality suite and a special Memorial service conducted on Saturday morning. As a Board Member and current Public Relations Coordinator of the Air America Association I was extremely honored to be the main speaker at the Memorial service where I delivered a tribute to the memory of our lost comrades and a reading prepared especially for this event by CAT/Air America pilot and author, Felix Smith. Dex Dexter, a member of the Air America Association ended the service with a tradi-

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tional requiem ballad on the bagpipes.

Las Vegas presented the perfect opportunity for a small group of TLC Brotherhood members, and past guests, to share in this special occasion. Aside from myself, TLCB members in attendance included Bill Shelton, Wendy Liles, Gayle Morrison and Ward Reimer. Past members, guests and visitors to the TLCB included Steve Maxner, Judy Porter and Greg Burch.



Aircraft Maintenance Experiences At The 23rd TASS

by Bill Tilton

In the 23rd TASS we must have had about 99% in-commission rate, not counting scheduled downtime. Our maintenance folks called themselves "F Troop," after a popular TV spoof on the military, and "TWA," for Teenie Weenie Airlines. They worked in temporary buildings and tents, with Conex containers for parts, personal equipment, and tools. Because they had a very simple plane to maintain, it may have been too little challenge for them, but they did all they could to make the best of it.

In 1966 we had at least 8 stripes per aircraft. The crewchief was usually a tech, and the assistant usually an airman 1st or higher. At least that's what it looked like. There had been a sparkplug crisis some time before I got there, when Operation Cricket was a small detachment of the 505th Tactical Control Group out of Tan Son Nhut. Col Johnston says he had to make some trouble with 7/13th Air Force Headquarters in order to obtain proper plugs and get engine performance and reliability up where it should be.

By the time the 23rd TASS was formed, in April of '66, the crewchiefs were *hoping* for problems, and not getting many. I can remember how eagerly they would ask me if anything was wrong. Like your children when you come home from a trip: "Did you get me anything?" And that look of disappointment when I shook my head and reported that this time everything was fine. How bizarre! I have watched crewmembers on KB-50s writing 10 and 12 *pages* of writeups (four to the page), many of them very serious, after a typical refueling mission. And *never* saw an OK flight in two years.

My worst mechanical incident at the 23rd TASS was more my fault than maintenance. It was the closest I ever came to capture, so far as I know. Even in 1966 we feared capture much more than death. A quick death would have been merciful compared to what we imagined might be the quality of life of an American pilot captured in an area where his government denied it was operating. Brother Steve Long found out.

My incident occurred one day when I was following another O-1 on a long FAC mission, most likely out the "New Road" that came across the border at Harley's Valley, snaked

through Ban Loboy water crossing, and joined the older route structure a few kilometers north of Chokepoint Alpha. On this particular day I was very busy, as high man, in communicating with Cricket Control and Invert (NKPs radar site), and in feeding a long string of fighters to the lead FAC, for numerous airstrikes. And my eyes were constantly out of the cockpit, watching out for lead and the fighters.

Finally we were done and it was getting late, and I told Cricket we were RTB. Lead and I climbed up to 5000 feet to cool off. I settled back for a relaxing hour into the sunset, about a mile behind lead. I leaned out the mixture, and the engine purred reassuringly.

Just as Chokepoint Alpha was passing under my left wing I suddenly fell forward against the shoulder harnesses...the engine had *quit*. Oh, the constant-speed prop kept the rpms up, but it was creating drag instead of power, and my altimeter was unwinding. As I started to think about looking for an open field I also did what we had been trained to do. Without even looking at gauges or calling on the radio, in one quick sweep from left wingroot to instrument panel I switched fuel tanks and flipped on the fuel boost pump. Then I called lead and started to assess where was best to land.

There was no good place! Many of us had been shot at from the air we were now over-flying, and the Trail was obviously very active every night. But before I could even really begin to worry about getting as remote as possible when I touched down, and what might happen to me anyhow, the engine roared back to life and I was suddenly climbing very smartly. I was laughing. Cheated you this time, you Commie bastards! Ah, sweet Continental; your roar is the finest sound known to pilot! "Hey, lead! Press on, buddy...false alarm...all is fine back here!"



Do not look up the rocket tube when arming rockets.

Once the butterflies had got back on their perches and the stomach-roost had settled down again, I realized that the cork float was stuck. That right gauge still showed full well past three hours of flight. How could I have missed that?

Up till then, my fuel management routine was to run for the first hour on the left tank. Then I switched to the right tank and watched the wingroot gauge occasionally until it got nearly empty, whereupon I would switch back to the left tank for whatever part of the 4th hour it took to get home. Few O-1 sorties squeezed more than 4 hours out of our 40 gallons (except for some flown by good old Dick Strong! But he paid a price for that, with cussing wingmen doing S-turns to avoid overrunning him). The fuel gauges were pretty simple: they were needles connected to cork floats. My habitual glances at the right gauge, after I had switched tanks, should have alarmed me. Instead I just took the visual cue that the tank was full. And every time I took that routine glance, in my subconscious it was still full and all was right with the world. That day I did not disappoint the crew chief when he eagerly greeted me back at NKP.



R and R At The Beach !

TLCB Reunion and Annual Meeting Update

By Ed Miller, 2001 Local Chairman

It's time to get those FIGMO Calendars out and start your countdown to "R & R at the Beach." The reunion hooch headquarters is the Radisson Beach Resort, on Okaloosa Island (Fort Walton Beach) and official dates are September 28th through 30th. Remember, the Air Commando Association's reunion follows our's the very next weekend. And the 16th Special Operations Wing (Air Force Special Operations Command) "Reunion Weekend 2001" starts October 4th at Hurlburt Field. The 16th SOW has given us a special invitation to participate. You can't go wrong staying in the area through October 7th.

Hotel Information. We have been given excellent rates for beachfront accommodations. Poolside or inside rooms are \$69.00 per night and Gulf side rooms or suites are \$79.00 per night. You should call the Radisson directly (850) 243-9181 to make your reservations, and be sure you refer to the TLC Brotherhood Reunion. (HOTEL Notice: In the event a guest who has reserved a room within the blocked dates checks out prior to the guest's reserved check-out due date, the hotel will add an early check-out fee of \$25 to that guest's individual account. Guests wishing to avoid an early checkout fee should advise the hotel at or before check-in of any change in the planned length of stay.) Remember, it is the individual's responsibility to reserve and pay for their room(s). To receive our special rates, your hotel room must be reserved not later than August 28th.

Reunion Registration. The adult fee is \$50.00 each person. We have recently approved a \$30 registration for children 12 years old and under. The registration fee will cover your Saturday night banquet, continental breakfast each day, tours with local transportation, and miscellaneous costs of the reunion. Please complete the enclosed registration form and mail with your check or money order to: TLCB Reunion 2001 (Ed Miller), 139 Fulmar Circle NE, Fort Walton Beach, FL 32548-6431. Your check or money order should be made out to "TLC Brotherhood Reunion 2001". Upon checking in to the reunion you will be given your tickets and the merchandise you ordered.

Transportation. Arriving by Air? Okaloosa County/Eglin AFB Regional Airport (Airport Code - VPS) is the closest to the area. It is serviced by Northwest Airlines (800-225-2525), AirTran (800-247-8726), US Airways Express (800-428-4322), and Delta Airlines (800-282-3424). The Pensacola Regional Airport (Airport code - PNS) is located about 55 miles west and might be better connections for others. Best to rent a car if arriving into Pensacola airport. Pensacola is serviced by Northwest, Delta, US Airways, American (800-433-7300), and Continental (800-523-3273) airlines. TLCB rental van will assist our reunion guests from Okaloosa airport when possible. The hotel location puts all your needs within walking distance.

Schedule. Our gala Saturday Night Banquet will start at 1900 hours right at the Radisson Beach resort. We have an "ALL-STAR AGENDA" scheduled to share from the past and

the present. How could you come to this area and not listen to Brigadier General Harry C. "Heine" Aderholt? He was part of so much of TLC history. Major General Richard V. Secord was a well-known advisor with many Laos operations and served under the secretary of defense. Our third guest, Colonel George C. "Bud" Day, is a Medal of Honor recipient and former Vietnam POW. Colonel Day's current law practice has made him a well-known fighter for military retirees. Recently, he won a major class action lawsuit for veterans. A Memorial service is scheduled for September 30th, at 1100 at Hurlburt Field's Memorial Air Park. Please include this special event when making your travel arrangements. Our own Chaplain Lonnie McIntosh will be leading this service and a special speaker is planned.

Dress. No shorts permitted at the Saturday Night Banquet. However, party suits, memorabilia shirts, etc., are encouraged.

Other Recreation Opportunities. Golfers and fishermen will be in paradise here on the Emerald Coast. We do not have sufficient time to schedule a Golf tournament, but you could squeeze a quick round in Saturday or Sunday afternoons. For assistance I have asked Bobby Barry (avid local golfer) to help anyone make plans or arrangements. You may e-mail him at bobbyphon@cfi.net. Fishermen can wet a line right behind the hotel (surf fishing) or walk about 500 yards to the local fishing pier.

Memorabilia. T-shirts, golf shirts, and beach towels for the reunion can be ordered using the registration form for any member, whether attending or not. All orders must be received by August 1st to ensure the goods arrive at the reunion in time. For individuals not attending the reunion, you need to include an additional \$3.50 shipping and handling charge. We will have a limited supply available for sale during the reunion.

More Information. Remember to check our reunion web page at www.tlc-brotherhood.org/reunion2001.html. We think you can find all your questions answered there. Off-line members feel free to call me at (850) 243-1602. Sunday afternoons would be the best available time. Also, if you need any special arrangements (late payment, partial payments, or questions) please ask me before deciding not to attend. So get your TDY orders ready for "R & R at the Beach."



TLC Brotherhood Reunion - Ft. Walton Beach, Florida



Cremation in Laos

by Jim Michener

Friends frequently ask me to write another Lao story, meaning a local story. Such stories have become infrequent for two reasons. One, I've lived in Vientiane a long time, making "real" Lao stories complicated (I would rather put the energy that that calls for into a different type of writing). Two, the ongoing economic depression guarantees that the falling kip will fall further (indeed, the country is in "retreat mode"). Still, I'm curious, and I enjoy walking the same beat when I stroll the local roads for exercise throughout the week. Like happened yesterday, something new (even if it's old) often pops up.

I was on the road behind a whitewashed one-room schoolhouse. It was built in the 1920s by the French. On the opposite side of the road, actually the right side, were the four cremation platforms at Wat Nongbone. A low wall separated me from them. I've been to quite a few cremation ceremonies there. The last time was barely two weeks ago. It's good, I think, to be reminded how temporary, even fragile, life is, and not get too excited about it, and not get too excited about dying either.

What caught my eye yesterday was something I'd never seen before beside a cremation platform. There on the ground, made of mounded-up ash, was a life-size replica of a human figure. The sprawling image was the kind a child might make on a beach during summer. What was particularly odd, though, was a line of candles, spaced about four inches apart, going from the head to both feet, and another line going from one hand to the other. Yes, a stick figure in orange candles. (The earth being essentially ash color around the cremation platforms, I mightn't have noticed anything if it hadn't been for the orange candles.)

I looked for Sithong, my houseboy, as soon as I got home. At a desk, I took a sheet of paper and, saying little, drew the platform and the outline of a human figure. I drew in black ink. I used a pen with red ink to make dots showing where the candles were. I wasn't even done making the dots when Sithong exclaimed, "Candles on a figure next to a cremation platform!" After telling him where I'd been, I asked him to explain the figure and candles. "We did this when my father died. It's to get his spirit to go into the box." I flashed a look of bewilderment. "You know, everybody stands around the figure, the candles burning, the monks chanting, and we beg the spirit to go where it belongs—in the box. After all, whether its you're father or not, it simply won't do having a restless spirit following you around for the rest of your life. Generally speaking, spirits are nuisances. So we beg them to go into the box with

the bones. After that, we seal the box. Later, the monks put the box in the pagoda wall."

After looking at the drawing more, Sithong said, "Did you maybe miss something? Usually you don't." The admonishment brought a frown. I maybe even pursed my lips. I concentrated. Eventually I picked up a pen with green ink. I drew a coconut on the first step at the west end of the cremation platform. Next, using a pen with blue ink, I drew a bucket on the first step at the opposite end, the east end. "That's right. You pass. Bones are washed three times with water. The fourth time they're washed with coconut milk."

Within eyesight of the cremation platforms is Pha That Luang or Great Stupa. It contains a breastbone of Buddha brought by Ashokan missionaries from India in the third century BC.



The Effort to Recover VO-67 Crew 2 Remains

by Larry Gire

The U.S. Government and military have worked hard over the last three decades to bring back the remains of all the brave Americans that gave their lives for their country in Southeast Asia.

However, the site of VO-67's aircraft and Crew 2 members that were lost on 11 January 1968 was found on the steep face of Phoulouang Mountain in the Khammouan Province of the Boualapha District of Laos, but remained unrecovered. The crash site was closed in 1996 by the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting (JTF-FA) after a short visit by a recovery team that rappelled down to the site and recovered a few dog tags and some bone fragments. The site was closed due the high risk, high winds, cloud cover, falling rocks, poisonous snakes, steep cliffs, and unexploded ordnance.

In the latter part of last year, a VO-67 Reunion Sub-committee took on the task of initiating a letter writing campaign to urge the recovery of the remains of Crew 2. Headed up by Mansour Salahu-Din and including VO-67 members Hank Morris, Alex Alexander, Herb Reynolds, Mike Walker, and Bob Reynolds, the effort resulted in many letters to the government and an extensive article in the Pensacola News Journal.

In December of 2000, General Harry B. Axson, JTF-FA commander, flew over the VO-67 Crew 2 crash site and reopened the site. He deemed the site: "risks are manageable." The assigned recovery team underwent extensive training for the difficult steep terrain recovery mission. The recovery team, led by

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Lt. Col. Franklin Childress, arrived at the crash site on March 13, 2001. VO-67 members held their Second Reunion in Reno, Nevada on the weekend of March 24th. At the Saturday night banquet, David Olson, the son of the former Commanding Officer and Executive Officer Del Olson, reported that the JTF-FA recovery crew was camped on the crash site and, despite steep terrain and the presence of poisonous bamboo vipers and centipedes, were carefully working the site and making good progress.

Earl Swift, a contributing writer to *Parade Magazine*, was also at the site and is writing an article for *Parade* on the recovery of the remains of VO-67's Crew 2. It is scheduled to run in the newspaper magazine insert the Sunday before Independence Day. The DNA tests on the remains recovered are presently being conducted. The recent tragic loss of another recovery team of 12 U.S. and Vietnamese near Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)

in a helicopter crash shows how dangerous these recovery missions can be. (As part of the search arrangement with the government of Vietnam, JTF-FA teams are required to use Soviet-made helicopters for transport in their country.)

The last VO-67 flight crew remains recovered and identified was that of John Hartzheim, Crew 7, in 1999. He was buried with full honors in a beautiful ceremony in Winneconne, Wisconsin on 31 July 2000. If all the remains of Crew 2 members are recovered and identified through DNA testing, all of the VO-67 flight crews lost in Vietnam will have been returned with the exception of Captain Paul Millius. He was seen to have bailed out of his stricken aircraft on 27 February, 1968, but extensive efforts by the Air Force at Nakhon Phanom and an Army extraction team inserted into the area the morning after he bailed out were unsuccessful due to the heavy NVA gunfire encountered. No trace of Captain Millius has ever been found.



The Day the Automatic Washers Vanished

Bob Harris, who now lives in Hahira, Georgia, is a TLCB member who was stationed at NKP in 1966. According to the base welcome booklet, this was a time of immense growth, when the remote outpost was converted from a SEATO radar site into an operational multi-mission forward base. Bob says it went from having a camp-like feel to a bustling, all-business beehive of activity. As an NCO in the services field, Bob was an Air Force expert in commissary operations, but NKP had no commissary sales store and he had no job when he got there. MEM asks him about his experiences in that event-filled year.

MEM: We understand you were stationed at NKP during the big buildup in 1966. What did you like most about that assignment?

BH: I think what I liked most about NKP, was the feeling of being a "settler" in an all new base buildup, and knowing that I played an important role, and that of sharing all the same hardships and rewards with my comrades.

MEM: Most of us don't get that kind of opportunity; it sounds exciting. What did you like the *least* about your tour?

BH: Knowing my wife needed me from time to time for those things that happened during that year, when my 4 year old son broke both arms, and my oldest daughter began to fail in her school work because she missed me so, and my younger daughter accidentally knocked her front teeth loose, and went through a painful time with brace work. I knew how much I was needed for the help I could provide, especially since my family remained in Montgomery, Alabama, where I had been stationed the past 7 years, with no family members to help within hundreds of miles. But my wife took it all in stride like a champ, and if she suffered, she never told me about it. A true AF wife, who tried in every letter to reassure me that she had all in control, and was on a daily countdown of days remaining just as I was.

MEM: How did you learn about that assignment, and how much did you know about what personnel expected you to do there?

BH: I was Commissary Office Manager at Gunter AFB, in Alabama. One day in February 1966, the office phone rang, and I was told to report to Maxwell AFB, across town on the other side of Montgomery. There a guy in the CBPO [person-

nel] told me that I was going to SEA [Southeast Asia]. SEA, to me, was spelled V-i-e-t-n-a-m, but he then told me that I was going to a "remote" assignment in Thailand [no accompanying family]. Up to this point my job had included doing all the buying for the Gunter commissary store for the past seven years, and I felt like I had squatter's rights.

Being in the Services field, I had experience in many of the jobs falling within the AFSC, but still wondered what was in store for me. CBPO could tell me nothing about that. The assignments clerk saw the question reflected in my face, and showed me a map of SEA, but could only tell me that the assignment was somewhere in Thailand. As I went through the clearing process for shipping out, it included my making out a will. This told me that where I was going was not exactly the King and Queen's Palace. Before I knew it, I was leaving my family in Montgomery, and had orders to report to San Francisco International Airport for a flight out on Pan American Flt #1, to Bangkok. It was a top-notch flight with movies and pretty stewardess's, and a half dozen other guys from Gunter and Maxwell, and none of them knew any more about their final destination than I.

MEM: What were your experiences going over and arriving in Thailand?

BH: After three days and a couple of nights in Bangkok's Trocadero Hotel, with indoctrination about Thailand, customs, snakes and VC, I boarded a C-130 for a place "up-country" called NKP. When we landed there in May, 1966, it looked like the TV pictures I had seen of Vietnam. I later found out that the stuff I stepped down on when we landed was called

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PSP. The Base seemed a bee hive of activity, with *Red Horse* doing all kinds of construction, including many hooches for all the guys later to be assigned.

MEM: Your orders were so vague; how did you know what to do next?

BH: After signing in and being assigned a hooch, I found that I had no one to report to except the Base CO. There seemed to be a great deal of confusion and I felt sorry for the *Old Man* as he tried to cope with all that was going on. The next day was a very long one, as I tried to look like I had something to do. Every time we bumped into each other, I would bug the CO about something for me to do, and remind him that I was a Services field 7-level, and had to have something to do. Otherwise, how could I get started on my "figmo" chart?

MEM: What did the colonel do when you put him on the spot like that?

BH: He would tell me things like, "Go check on the Base Laundry, and see if you can do anything to make it better." The Base Laundry consisted of a dozen or so Thai women with a Thai woman in charge, all scrubbing GI dirty clothes with tubs and scrub boards, and many clothes lines. While they were very polite, they got the point across to me that I was needed like a hole in the head. One day a couple of modular units arrived, outfitted with automatic washers and dryers, which I checked out. But to this day, I don't know where those units went, and the Base Laundry just kept on operating as usual.

MEM: That's a riot! Now, how did you come to be NKP's haberdasher?

BH: After what seemed like weeks of wandering around in the midst of busy people who knew what they were doing, both Thai and GI, I was finally called in by the CO, who told me that he had a full time job for me. He said that he wanted me to do something about getting uniform items, mostly underwear, socks, boots, fatigues, etc., for the troops in need, and to establish a Clothing Sales Store (CSS) on NKP. And he said to do whatever it took to do the job. I was elated! I couldn't load ammo, bombs, fuel; I didn't fix or repair, cook or give VD shots, but absolutely *knew* I could bust my butt on the assignment the Old Man had just given me!

"But first," the CO went on, "I want you to take this food order for our Officers Club and fly to Don Muong, get it filled, and bring it back ASAP." So I located the pilot of the base *Gooney Bird* and off we went to Bangkok. After taxing to a stop at Don Muong airport, the pilot gave me a phone number to call when I was ready to go back. I checked into a hotel, called for an early wake up, and next morning made my way to the Bangkok Commissary.

Knowing commissary operations made my task easier and I soon had the order filled. Now came the question of: "How do I get this stuff back to NKP without all those steaks and frozen food thawing and ruining?" I somehow got a Thai truck, with a driver who knew where to find dry ice in Bangkok, and packed

it in and around the grub I was trying to protect. I made a call to the number where my pilot could be reached, and found him waiting in the plane when we reached the parking apron. With all that chow on board, we were soon on our way to NKP.

About 30 minutes out of NKP, I asked the pilot to call ahead and request a truck, to unload his plane. The truck was waiting and so was my CO. He said to me, "Sarge, I can't believe you got this done in only one overnight in Bangkok. These guys have been jerking me around with stories that it took them as many as three days, and if I had not already given you an assignment, you would have this job for the rest of my time here." I was glad to hear this as I figured I was safer at NKP than fighting that Bangkok traffic with the wild driver I hired!



[To be continued in a future edition of Mekong Express Mail]

News from our Assistance fund

A number of TLCB members picked up on advice we carried in the MEM and are making regular monthly donations to the TLCB Assistance Fund. This is easier for members and makes it possible to keep helping those that need our help in SEA. Thanks to these thoughtful and generous members.

The Assistance Committee has allocated \$250 for the purpose of establishing a food bank for distribution by John Middlewood in Thailand. The committee also approved an amount of \$500 to buy school clothes and school supplies for 10-15 students for the beginning of the school year.

Items bought include two shirts for each boy, two blouses for each girl, two pairs of pants for each boy and two skirts for each girl, one belt and one pair of shoes for each child. Each student will also get pencils, notebooks and other related school supplies. The estimated cost for each child is about 2,000 baht.

Vichit Mingrachata, who helps us by assessing needs and distributing items to the needy, is a member of the TLC Brotherhood and Assistance Committee Assistant Chairman in Thailand. He has been helped by Dale Wages, service officer for VFW Post 10249 (AFTN) in Udorn and due to become Post Commander on July 1. They make a great team and we are very grateful to both for helping out since Tommy Thompson had his stroke.

Vichit reports that he and Dale went to the Sribunreuang District of Nong Bua Lamphoo. "At Yanglow Wittayakarn School we presented 20 school uniforms, including shoes and socks, for 20 poor students. They are all happy and appreciate very much the assistance of the TLCB." The school principal thanked the TLCB for this help.

Vichit and Dale also traveled to a school in SiBuaLung to distribute uniforms and 20 pairs of shoes and socks to the children there. Dale has helped Vichit on many occasions, including delivery of materials from the TLCB to Thare Orphanage, the Udorn Home of the Aged, The Children's Handicapped Home and several schools in the area.

We are also grateful to John Oles, who keeps us informed of Tommy's progress and helped us with information for this report.



*Don't Miss the Next Issue:
September, 2001.
Submit change of address ASAP.*



Creating an Education Center for the Wall

by Dave MacDonald

A move is under way to create an education center at the Vietnam Wall in Washington, DC that would help the younger generation to understand better the Wall and the War.

Congressional Vietnam veterans and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund have taken the first step towards making it a reality. Working together, they have come up with a concept and introduced legislation that would allow the center to be established on the National Mall.

The idea is to replace the existing National Park Service kiosk with a structure measuring 1,200 square feet that would contain interactive displays about the time of the Vietnam War and would tell the story of how the Wall came to be built.

Last fall, Senator Chuck Hagel, a squad leader with the 9th Infantry Division in 1968, stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial with fellow Vietnam veteran Congressman John Murtha and Jan Scruggs, who founded the Vietnam Veterans

Memorial. The Nebraska Republican, whose brother Tom served with him, also as a squad leader in the 9th, explained the purpose of the planned legislation. "Many of the 4.4 million annual visitors to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial are students too young to fully comprehend the meaning of the Memorial," he said. "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Education Center will help to teach these individuals about the human side of war and the impact that the Vietnam War continues to have on the United States."

In early February of this year, bills were introduced in the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives. Senate sponsors included Senators and Vietnam veterans Hagel, Max Cleland, John Kerry and John McCain. House sponsors included Representative Murtha, Representative J.C. Watts, chairman of the House Republican Conference, and 30 other co-sponsors. The bills, S.281 and H.R.510, are now in committee. The more senators and representatives who agree to support the legislation, the faster these bills will get out of committee, on to the floor of each chamber and get passed. The bills are needed because Congress must approve all memorials and related structures on federal parkland.

Once Congress passes the legislation and the President signs it into law, the National Capital Planning Commission will have to assess and approve the design and structure of the center. The next stage will be raising the funds to pay for it.

The education center will not be paid for with tax dollars. Jan Scruggs, president of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, said the two million dollars estimated cost would be raised through donations from corporations, foundations and private citizens.



Got your quilt raffle tickets yet?

In your MEM you will find a sheet of tickets for a quilt raffle that will be held at the Reunion at Fort Walton Beach in September. You can have a try with one ticket for two dollars. You can get three tickets for five dollars. No limit on how many you buy.

This raffle is in aid of a really great cause and it has a stupendous prize. The cause is to help needy people and kids in Thailand through the TLCB Assistance Fund, in memory of those of our Brothers who never came back. The prize is a 60" by 72" quilt whose color scheme will be red, white and blue. The motif will be a variation on Debbie Mumm's "Americana Stars."

It is a project of the TLCB Sisterhood, with Rosie Wheatley doing the crafting of it. Rosie has been a seamstress all her life and a quilting enthusiast for 20 years. She was involved in the TLC Sisterhood's Signature Quilt Project last year that was raffled at the Colorado Springs Reunion and raised quite a commotion, along with a great deal of money for the children of the Thare Orphanage in Thailand.

You could use it to cover a twin bed or to wrap around you on those cooler nights when you are sitting around a campfire. As with last year, this quilt will be of the highest quality.

If something keeps you from attending the reunion you can still take part! If you need more tickets, just photocopy the one in your MEM. Then put your information on your raffle tickets and mail them, with your check made out to the TLC Brotherhood and marked "Assistance Quilt" on the memo line, to the Chairman of our Assistance Committee, who will supervise the raffle and get into lots of other trouble at FWB.

Mail to: **John Sweet**
c/o TLC Brotherhood
P.O. Box 2371
Seabrook, NH 03874

From The President—

By the time the September issue reaches us it will be time to head for Fort Walton Beach. We have all heard great descriptions of the arrangements those Brothers in Florida are making, and anyone who has ever attended a TLCB reunion can tell you: even if they did nothing at all it *can't fail*. There is no way to describe adequately the emotions that you experience when we gather together for this annual face-to-face greeting!

But there is another aspect to these reunions. As a corporation, we must have an annual meeting, and we choose to have ours when the most members are likely to be attending. The board meets first, and then we have the general membership meeting. The first order of business is the election, and our by-laws stipulate which positions are up for election for the staggered two-year terms. This year the offices of vice president and secretary come up, along with two board members at-large. Also we have to fill the position of chaplain, which is also an officer of the corporation and can't be appointed at large.

Vice president Paul Lee says he's going to take a rest, so I asked him to chair the nominating committee. Members will have ample opportunity to send in nominations, as Paul will announce. Details and schedule are in the bylaws.

See you at Fort Walton Beach!

Bill Tilton

