



Mekong Express Mail

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DID COMPUTERS PREDICT VIETNAM WAR OUTCOME?

By Gerry Frazier

Editor's note: For those who say that generals are always fighting the last war, here is some interesting history on vigorous attempts the generals have made to avoid doing just that. It was written in response to a question posted on TLC Brotherhood's "Mission" Internet server., asking if it might be true that the outcome of the war was predicted twice by computer simulations before it was ever fought, as alleged in the book *Back Fire*.

I work in an organization known as the Modeling and Simulation Information Analysis Center—MSIAC for short. In various past military and civil service jobs, I worked with computer-driven simulations, primarily for training. Currently, my duties in MSIAC involve support to an information Help Desk about models and simulations (M&S).

First, I have not read *Back Fire*, so I don't know in what context they discuss the war gaming aspects, but as the question was asked, I think the statements are basically correct. However, I would caution readers not to put too much emphasis on the seeming accuracy of the computer-generated predictions.

War-gaming, as a technique of exploring possible future courses of action, has a long and honored tradition in the US military. It is often asserted that the WWII battle for the Pacific was won during a series of war games at the Naval War College, in the 1930s. Likewise, the Army's Louisiana Maneuvers of the 1920s and early 1930s tested concepts of mass and ground maneuver that were later employed successfully in Europe. The Louisiana Maneuvers involved lots of field exercises, but there was an underpinning of conceptual thought that recognized many of the errors of WWI, and attempted to introduce new concepts that took better advantage of technology improvements such as the improved reliability, speed, maneuverability, and firepower of the tank, better ways to employ the machine gun, etc. Mitchell, Spaatz, Chennault, and others were conducting the same kinds of concept development for military aviation during this timeframe.

The Navy (and Marine) war games at Newport were more cerebral. They were conducted by Admirals and senior Captains who gathered together for the purpose of examining hypothetical problems, in advance, to determine what improvements in Naval force would be required to overcome them, and how best to execute winning strategy and tactics.

The computer began being applied to military (and political) issues in the 1950s. Applying an 'electric adding machine' to complex political and military issues involved developing some pretty involved 'algorithms' (mathematical formulas) to express complex cause-effect relationships, but that was simplified by the emergence in WWII of a mathematical specialty known as Operations Research. (The ULTRA SECRET is now given much of the credit for practically any Allied victory in WWII, but as early as World War I, the British were leaders in the application of the science of Operations Research to military problems. At least one book credits the allied victory over the German submarine force in the Atlantic to the successful application of Ops Research principles to narrowing the Allied search areas over the Atlantic to those in which submarines were

most likely to be. From mid-1943 or so, the kill rate against the Wolfpack began to improve dramatically.)

So, take Ops Research principles and make them run on computers, and you begin to develop ways of quantifying the qualities of war, and arriving at 'likely' outcomes for possible scenarios. That, in essence, is what was described in the passage from *Back-Fire*. As the science of simulation advances, we are able to expand the range of "what-if" scenarios, and increase

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Operation Frequent Wind

By Jim Henthorn

The following account of the operation comes from:
<http://www.history.navy.mil/branches/avchr10.htm>
(an official Navy web site with historical information by year).

"APRIL (1975) 29—In a period of three hours, Operation Frequent Wind was carried out by U.S. Naval and Marine Corps helicopters from the Seventh Fleet. Frequent Wind involved the evacuation of American citizens from the capital of South Vietnam under heavy attack from the invading forces of North Vietnam. The military situation around Saigon and its Tan Son Nhut airport made evacuation by helicopter the only way out. President Ford ordered the evacuation when Viet Cong shelling forced the suspension of normal transport aircraft use at Tan Son Nhut. With fighter cover provided by carrier aircraft, the helicopters landed on Saigon rooftops and at Tan Son Nhut to evacuate the Americans. The airport became the main helicopter landing zone; it was defended by Marines from the 9th Amphibious

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the number of variables to arrive at realistic predictions of supply consumption, the optimal layout of communications (and computer) networks, and to explore the feasibility of complex maneuvers that previously, simply exceeded our means to visualize in adequate detail.

The simulations used prior to Vietnam were not crystal balls, and “predicted” the outcome only to the extent they reflected accurate assumptions, correctly expressed for the computer environment. That is still a challenge. An early watchword in the computer world was “GIGO” (Garbage In-Garbage Out). In other words, the computer processes what it receives from the operators. It processes bad assumptions just as fast as good ones, and does not evaluate them (although there are now ways to provide criteria the computer can apply to the data it receives to tell you whether the data meets your standards). Today, we

try to minimize the input of bad input, or the effects of bad (inaccurate, or inappropriately applied) algorithms (i.e. the program, rather than the data) through a process known as Verification, Validation, and Accreditation (VV&A). The product of a good VV&A program is documented assurance that (a) I modeled the Right Thing, (b) I modeled the Thing Right, and (c) this use of this model (or simulation) is appropriate.

Modern analysis simulations are the sort described in the Vietnam scenario. They tend to take a ‘big picture’ view of forces, and capabilities, which is to say they model divisions rather than platoons. Concepts such as maneuver, superior equipment or training, and other factors that are important at the

“The genius of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, aside from its invisibility, was its inefficiency.”

engagement level, tend to be averaged out at the higher level, so you are left with a result that concludes that ‘this force beats that force two thirds of the time.’ As the state of the art improves, the specificity of critical deciding factors increases, and that helps planners judge which new systems would actually represent improvements in capability, and which are most cost effective.

I have tried to demystify the idea that the computers ‘predicted’ the outcome of the Vietnam War. If they did, I submit, it was based on a lot of luck, or perhaps they broadly interpreted the results of a fairly narrow set of factors. We are still not so wise or proficient that future conflicts can be predicted by applying mathematical formulas.

Finally as a veteran of the Vietnam conflict, I often see assumptions made today about the nature of current issues, that suggest those involved lack experience in Vietnam. The genius of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, aside from its invisibility, was

its inefficiency. It was too dispersed and labor intensive to be efficient in any true economic sense. However, it succeeded in its ability to counter our strength; our ability to concentrate overwhelming force over a small area

for a brief period of time. By covering a vast area all the time, it minimized the risk of a decisive loss due to a few or even many local attacks, and inexorably ‘pushed out the bottom’ of the system, some useful fraction of what entered the top. Even with M&S, and much improved ways to detect activity under trees at night, I think we are still vulnerable to determined application of a dispersed mass, controlled by an enemy who will accept high losses to achieve a long-term objective.



Secret Project 972 Convoys Could Not Be Stopped

by Jose L. Benavides

Editors note: the following article is adapted from a letter Jose wrote to “my fellow truckers.” We have many members who served at Camp Friendship, near Korat, but Jose’s experiences and opinions will interest us all.

I feel compelled, first, to identify myself so that some of my comments later will be understood. I am a Cuban-American that landed on these shores back in 1960. My parents understood that the political situation brought on by Fidel Castro did not lend itself to be good to two young boys, my brother and I, at an age that made our existence in Cuba very dangerous. My brother was 18 and I was 16. Also, they thought that in Puerto Rico, due to the commonality of the language, the transition into adulthood was going to be better than Miami. So, we were away from the emotions of Miami and in my case too young to participate in the “Bay of Pigs” invasion.

Life went on pretty good in Puerto Rico but in my mind I always felt that I needed to do something against communism. I don’t mean to get controversial or argumentative, but I was, and still am, a fairly idealistic fellow. So as soon as I could, I enrolled in the ROTC program and when the time came, I volunteered for Vietnam. I became a US citizen in 1965 and got my commission in August of 1967. My first assignment was to the Transportation Corps, in the 519th Transportation Battalion of the 291st Transportation Company, at Camp Friendship, Thailand (near Korat).

After my initial Basic Training at Ft. Eustis, in Virginia, I arrived in Thailand sometime in the early days of December of ‘67. Lieutenant Colonel Middleton was leaving and Lieutenant Colonel Schwartz had just taken over as commander of the 519th. Colonel Schwartz introduced me to the battalion staff and then took me to his office to give me a briefing about what the Army was doing in Thailand and what specifically the 519th was doing. Initially I was somewhat frustrated for not getting a Vietnam assignment, but after he explained about the support mission to the different components of the armed forces of the USA towards the support of the Vietnam efforts I began feeling better regarding my idealistic feelings towards doing something against communism.

Although I was not shooting at anybody directly, I was

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involved in certain aspects of the active war. Understanding the Army concept of FEBA (forward edge of the battle area) and RTO (rear theater of operations), I was “there”. And I, as a transporter and RTO individual, was contributing directly to the fight against communism. Again, let us not get argumentative. The fact is, the representatives of North Vietnam were communists and we, whether we agreed or not, were there fighting communism. In my idealistic Cuban-American mind I was putting my small contribution into the fight against Castro and all he stood for.

As a 519th/291st officer I was part of the team that took moved cargo from Korat to NKP. Later I had the sole responsibility for the Phanom Sarakham to Korat route. And oh, I had a world of fun!

Initially we were working in the neighborhood of 12-14 hrs 5 days a week. But soon came “Project 972,” and we began almost a 24-7 transportation mission. [Project 972 was also known as “IGLOO WHITE.” See September 2000 MEM article by Gerry Frazier. Ed.] We had general cargo to distribute—and then we had 972, supposedly a secret weapon/bomb device that was going to be dropped over Vietnam, out of Nakhon Phanom (NKP). I understood it to be some sort of anti-personnel explosive and electronic signaling at the same time. We had 972 convoys at least twice a month for the first 6 months of my assignment.

The 972 container was a canister that was chemically pressurized and had to maintain the pressure or the device would be rendered a dud. For this we had to do a formal convoy operation with all kinds of unusual support. We had MP escort to take us through the whole route. We had Thai police support to open our way through the Thai roads. With that local authority our job was easier. We had emergency medical support, and all kinds of direct maintenance support in the convoy. We had spare tractor-trailers for immediate replacement if needed. We had a team of Chemical Corps officers in the convoy, to work with the 972 canisters. We had an indicator in the cab of the tractor that was constantly monitoring the pressure of the canisters. If the signal went to red it meant there was a problem with the canister and the convoy had to be stopped for the chemical guys to check it out and either fill it up again or disconnect it and declare it a dud. (There was never any danger of an explosion of the canister while in transit.) This mission was monitored directly by a staff at CINCPAC Headquarters, in Hawaii. We had been assigned some very powerful communications radios, the AN/GRC-6, that could communicate with the Philippines or Hawaii, and we had to identify our position and conditions at designated checkpoints and/or times.

Our 972 convoys could not be stopped! They had to continue traveling, with the exception of mechanical problems or scheduled stops, at all times. If stopped for any reason we had to report by radio immediately and explain the stop. One day

my convoy got stopped and I didn’t know why. I proceeded to investigate and, as a young, arrogant, aggressive, and immature 2nd lieutenant, began yelling and using all kinds of profane Army language inquiring who dared to stop *my* convoy? After a couple of minutes of my idiotic ignorance, I was informed through my interpreter that the *king of Thailand* was coming and he *did* take precedence over my convoy. With my tail between my legs, I stood at attention when the king’s entourage came by, and saluted with the greatest respect. I thought that was a story I could always say about “what I did in the war” to my children!

Between the 972 projects, the 809th support and our regular general cargo distribution, our battalion did a lot for the war effort. Some of our accomplishments:

- Helped to build the “Inland Road” between Sat-tahip and Korat.
- Helped to build the Thai Military Training camp for the “King Cobra” regiment, in Kanchanaburi (an elite Thai Army unit to be part of the Vietnam/US allied forces).
- Supported the Air Force on every need except JP4 fuel.
- Supported the mission of the 9th Logistics Command and USARSUPTHAI.

Our record in ton-miles was huge. Unfortunately, with so much done, so many miles run, our accident rate, although not high, was very deadly. We were a combined service organization, in that we had a lot of LN (local nationals) assigned to us as drivers. Between the variety of drivers (LN and US), the road conditions, driving on the “wrong” side and the steering on the wrong side for left side driving, and the many miles we drove, we had a lot of deadly accidents, for both Thai civilians and US personnel.

...a transportation battalion in Vietnam ... closed their *year* of operations with approximately the same ton/mile record that we had in one *month* in Thailand! ... Our brothers in Vietnam were heroes. But still, our record was great. We carried food, we carried bombs, we carried spare parts, we carried general cargo, toilet paper and such, we carried construction equipment, we carried dirt, we moved what our government told us to move.

Lieutenant Linsley once read in the *Star and Stripes* about a transportation battalion in Vietnam that closed their year of operations with approximately the same ton/mile record that we had in one *month* in Thailand! I do understand that there is a huge difference, and I don’t mean to belittle the importance of that record in Vietnam, set under

war conditions that were very different from the way we were doing our work. Our brothers in Vietnam were heroes. But still, our record was great. We carried food, we carried bombs, we carried spare parts, we carried general cargo, toilet paper and such, we carried construction equipment, we carried dirt, we moved what our government told us to move. We did it well and with a lot of professionalism.

Many thanks are needed. First of all, to our Thai drivers. Their life with us was not easy, but they worked as hard as they could and as well as they could. Many, many of our accomplishments are due to their efforts. Thanks to our US maintenance teams. They kept our tractors and trailers ready and available.

See **Freight**, next page



R and R At The Beach !

Last Minute Details and Reminders from Ed Miller

It's time to start packing for your "R & R at the Beach." The reunion hooch headquarters is the Radisson Beach Resort, on Okaloosa Island (Fort Walton Beach) and official start date is September 28 and ending on September 30. The Air Commando Association's reunion will follow our reunion the very next weekend and the 16th Special Operations Wing "Reunion Weekend 2001" starts October 4 at Hurlburt Field, which has given us a special invitation to participate.

You might still call the Radisson directly 1-877-333-4904 Toll Free or (850) 243-9181 for making a reservation and possibly get a good rate for the TLC Brotherhood Reunion.

The Reunion registration fee will be \$50 each person and \$30 registration for children 12 years old and under. Registration fees need to be received by September 24. Your registration fee will cover your Saturday night Banquet Dinner expenses, continental breakfast, tours with local transportation, and other miscellaneous costs of the reunion. Please complete a Registration Form and mail with your check or money order: 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". You can download a copy of the Registration from our Reunion Web page:

www.tlc-brotherhood.org/reunion2001.html

Our gala Saturday night Banquet dinner will start at 1900 hours at the Radisson Beach resort. Our All-Star agenda includes Brigadier General Harry C. "Heine" Aderholt, Major General Richard V. Secord, an advisor with many Laos operations and Colonel George C. "Bud" Day, Medal of Honor recipient and former POW. No shorts at the Banquet. Party suits/memorabilia shirts are encouraged at the Banquet. Any guests you wish to bring will cost \$30 each. Please arrange with Ed Miller.

For those arriving Thursday, we would recommend you to sign up and go on the tour to Eglin Air Force Base on Friday afternoon. This tour will include the Climatic Lab and lunch at the Officer's club, (nominal fee for lunch extra), and the Armament Museum.

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. TLCB Chaplain Lonnie McIntosh will be leading this service.

Memorabilia (T-shirts, Golf Shirts, Beach Towels) of the Reunion can be ordered **ONE last time**. All orders must be received NLT 1 October 01, **and include an additional \$3.95 shipping and handling charge**. This order will be right after the Reunion and all mailed out to you by "Priority Mail."

Off-line members feel free to call me at (850) 243-1602. Sunday afternoons would be the best available time. If you need any special arrangements (late payment, partial payments, or questions) please ask me before deciding not to attend.



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Those maintenance warrant officers and their teams did more than what was expected of them. Thanks to our Leaders, Colonels Middleton and Schwartz, and all those that followed. And, of course, thanks to Thailand, a country of beautiful people that allowed us to be there, and helped the US in a very special time of world history. What a country!

I knew Colonel Schwartz for 32 years until his death, and he always said that the 519th had been the best Army assignment of his career. And although my career with the Army was short, it was the best for me also. As a Cuban American I am proud and happy of "what I did in the war," and of what *we truckers* did in the war. And I tell my children so!



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Brigade flown in for that purpose. All but a handful of the 900 Americans in Saigon were evacuated. The last helicopter lifted off the roof of the United States Embassy at 7:52 PM carrying Marine security guards."

This is the first site listed if you use "Google™" (an internet web site search engine) to find "Operation Frequent Wind." And many people do not read past the first or perhaps second site when searching for information.

The numbers look like this:

- Total evacuees: 7,806 US citizens and foreign nationals
- Total sorties by USAF/USMC helicopters from the US Embassy Compound: 72
- Total sorties by USAF/USMC helicopters from the US Defense Attaché Compound: 122 *Note: the compound was adjacent to Tan Son Nhut Airport*
- Total support sorties by USAF/USMC helicopters: 444
- TACAIR sorties: 204 (CAP)
- AH-1J Sea Cobra combat sorties: 24
- AC-130 Spectre Gunship sorties: 8
- EC-130 (ABCCC, Airborne Command and Control Center) sorties: 5
- KC-135 tanker sorties: 44
- HC-130 SAR Support sorties: 2

And the human cost:

Two USMC Embassy Security Guards killed when an artillery shell hit near them. Two USMC CH-46 search and rescue helicopter aircrew members were presumed dead following a crash at sea.

Operation Eagle Pull

As the war in Southeast Asia shifted into its final phases, hard reality demanded that preparations be made to evacuate US citizens, military personnel, and government officials from the

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Frequent Wind, continued

capitals of countries in danger of falling to communist forces.

Operation Eagle Pull, the evacuation of U.S. Ambassador John Gunther Dean and Cambodian President Sauthm Khoy, and other foreign nationals, from Phnom Penh on April 15 went off without a hitch and can be viewed as a "dress rehearsal" for Frequent Wind. Indeed, many of the same players would be involved, including the Marine Heavy Lift Helicopter Squadron HMH-463 from the USS Hancock and the 21st Special Operations Squadron from Nakhon Phanom RTAFB.

Operation Frequent Wind

Operation Frequent Wind was an evacuation plan with four options, of which Option IV was finally ordered on April 29 by Ambassador Graham Martin. This was the most dangerous option of all: the helicopter evacuation. Long anticipated, forces were in place well in advance to accomplish the mission.

The Forces: USAF

Based at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base, the 21st Special Operations Squadron and the 40th ARRS were the two primary helicopter squadrons for remaining operations in Southeast Asia following the American withdrawal from South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The 21st SOS had already flown missions in support of Operation Eagle Pull. The 40th ARRS was the primary Air Rescue service. It was natural to include these two assets in the planning for Operation Frequent Wind. The 21st SOS was tasked for eight helicopters and crews with several additional backup crewmembers. The 40th provided an additional two helicopters and crews.

Air Force 16th SOS AC-130E gunships would be flying close support from Korat, 7th ACCS (Airborne Command and Control Squadron) EC-130's out of Udorn would be providing

overhead command and control in the air space over Saigon. KC-135 Stratotankers would handle airborne refueling needs while an HC-130 from the 40th ARRS provided SAR support.

Assembling the Force: Air Force

At Nakhon Phanom, units continued to be briefed periodically on both Operations. It was not until April that final planning was accomplished. Following Operation Eagle Pull by only a few days, 10 helicopters and crews were alerted to depart for U Tapao. Arriving on April 18, air crews were briefed on ship-board operations by two naval aviators flown in for that purpose.

As pilot Mike Lackey related, the "Same crews that flew in Mayaguez flew these missions with exception that Ron Vickroy didn't fly in Mayaguez. LtCol Denham (21st SOS CO) led the way. We took off in the middle of the night from U Tapao, off the coast of Cambodia, around the end of South Vietnam out of radar range. We met up with a Navy E2B that gave us TACAN cuts (azimuths) to find the (USS) Midway. Midway was total emcon (*electronic emissions blackout*), not transmitting, no lights, nothing. We were real short on fuel when we found them."

The five-hour flight out to the Midway was relatively uneventful - other than the heart stopping scare one crew received when a pilot, returning to his seat, accidentally stepped down on the collective. This suddenly dropped the helicopter several hundred feet and lit up the master caution panel in a blaze of red/yellow lights. Things were quickly restored and pulse rates returned to normal.

Shortly after the ten helicopters were safely aboard and positioned at the bow, the Navy E-2B from VAW-115 (US Navy Early Warning Squadron) landed. The helicopters remained at the bow so that somewhat normal flight operations could be

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MEM Interviews: Bob Harris

Bob Harris, who now lives in Hahira, Georgia, is a TLCB member who was stationed at NKP in 1966, a time of immense growth for the multi-mission forward base in Northeast Thailand. 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. This interview is continued from the June, 2001, issue of Mekong Express Mail.

From the previous issue:

MEM: 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!"

Our interview continues:

BH: Now it was time for me to get started on the task of bringing a Base Clothing Sales Store to NKP. Securing the appropriate manual and directives came first, along with making some calls to other Thai bases to find out if any of them had an operational CSS.

MEM: The clothing situation must have been pretty grim. Did you find a way to provide immediate supplies, before your store could be set up?

BH: Yes, that beating-with-a-stone type cleaning took a real toll on our clothes. Udorn was my choice as I made contact with the NCOIC there, and he made me feel like he was a man I could work well with. I forget his name, but he was a great guy and supplied me with a working arrangement we could both live with until my own store was ready.

MEM: How did that work?

BH: Before my first trip to Udorn, I placed a letter on the NKP base bulletin board identifying myself, and my mission,

I couldn't load ammo, bombs, fuel; I didn't fix or repair, cook or give VD shots; but I absolutely *knew* I could bust my butt on the assignment the Old Man had just given me!"

and asking the GIs for a list of their needs. I included a deadline before my departure to pick up their orders. Once I was back on NKP, I placed another notice on the board saying I was back, and when and where for pickup, hanging onto the money I collected until I made my next trip to Udorn where I would pay for what I had signed for.

I began round trips as often as needed. On the day before deadline, I typed up my own travel orders for the CO's signature and caught anything flying in the direction of Udorn. Sometimes it was a roundabout way, and I caught rides on just about anything flying in and out of NKP or Udorn.

MEM: And what was going on with your future store; how did that come about?

BH: Between trips, I kept in touch with "Red Horse" about the hooch they were building for my store, and followed the CO's suggestion that I should check out the base open storage area for anything I might recognize as my equipment in "Operation Bitterwine" property.

Looking for snakes first as I lifted tarps to try and identify items, I was always amazed at what I found in outside storage: bowling lanes, a Hammond Organ and a world of other stuff that would later be used to bring NKP in as the base it was to become, all in weatherproof containers. All the time I was thinking to

myself, "*no way!*" With bunkers just about all over the place and a stack of empty sandbags the size of a double bay barracks, even with all the construction going on, I had trouble believing NKP would have bowling alleys, let alone a real chapel with a Hammond Organ. In

time the reality of what I was establishing on base would hit me, and I would forget about writing a book about all the waste I had seen in a little patch of cleared jungle.

As construction of my building got underway, I began plac-

ing orders through channels for store equipment that I couldn't find in outside storage, and soon began placing orders for my initial lay-in of Uniform Allowance stock for shipment to NKP. Meanwhile, construction slowed, and my uniform items began to arrive with no place to store them. I had no choice but to store the goods outside on pallets, under tarps, which worried me to no end. Each morning at daybreak, I breathed a sigh of relief when I found all was still there (and

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Photo by Bob Harris, taken at the 1966 NKP Bob Hope Show. Dolores Hope, center.



no clothing stock ever was stolen throughout this whole year).

MEM: It sounds like you were caught in a real bind, with inventory and no store. What did you do about it?

BH: When the CO told me, "Take care of it yourself, Sarge," I applied more of my "Sgt Bilco" tactics in getting the job done. I looked for a place, any place empty, and found a large empty room connected to the mess hall, with a connecting door and an outside door. Then I hired a couple of wandering Thai laborers, checked out a pickup truck, and went to Base Supply. There I scrounged lumber, plywood, hammers, nails, saws, and an outside door lock. Without saying anything to anyone, we secured my storage room, and moved all my stuff from outside to inside. I never heard a peep from anyone as long as I used it!

MEM: What was it like when you finally opened for retail business?

BH: The day finally came when I could uncrate my store furnishings and begin construction of the warehouse storage area. CE brought me a generator and showed me how to fire it up for electricity, and I was able to open up for business at about the end of my 10th month. Priority was given to my clothing items, and stock was in good shape. There were no female personnel assigned to NKP, and no stock was ordered for them, although my store was "uptown class" and had two fitting rooms.

I had no electricity one morning after starting my generator. I saw nothing wrong, and called the experts for help. The three of us looked and scratched our heads, before one of the guys looked up the tree where the temporary line ran to my building, and there no *was* no line. It had been cut from the tree to the store. I had heard that wire in the scrap yard was short lived, as "Charlie's friends" had a real knack for making good use of the night time.

Finding a Brother Can Be A Moving Experience

Jim Bartholomew at the 3rd Freedom Festival, held at Manassas, Virginia, Airport in August, had a table set up to sell TLCB goods and meet candidates for membership. He sent in the following message afterward.

"One individual today made the long weekend well worth it. He came to the table and stared at a TLCB hat, then said, 'I have never seen a hat like that.' I asked him if he had been there and he said 'Yes, but I have never seen a hat like that.' He bought a hat and bumper sticker and gave a few dollars for the Assistance Fund. I stood up and handed him a brochure, shook his hand and said 'Welcome Home!' He walked away with tears in his eyes."

Time passed a lot faster as I kept myself busy during those month. I worked alone my whole time on NKP, and can't remember a single other troop in the Services field, though I'm sure there were others as assigned personnel continued to grow. My

year at NKP had been a busy one, filled with many experiences, and never free of other duties as daily events dictated. Best of all, I was proud that I enjoyed the initial operation of the NKP Base Clothing Sales Store, all by myself from start to finish. I had a new boss by now, and my replacement came in a couple of weeks before I was to rotate. We inventoried everything and I signed over accountability to him, and left him, as I had been, all by himself. But by this time, NKP was reorganizing, with a long future ahead, which included the 56th Services Squadron, with me serving as temporary 1st Sgt.



"What was it like when you finally opened for retail business?"



L-54 (Luang Prabang) Attack in 1972

By Kham P. Manivanh

On this occasion L-54's Spooky (C-47 gunship) was out for repair and I was the replacement from L-08. My bird was parked right outside the outermost revetment close to the runway. We had run-up and postflight-checked both engines, and were in the Operations Room, and some of my crewmembers were playing cards to kill time. I was lying down on some makeshift bed about to fall asleep. Suddenly there were several big bangs outside and someone was yelling "INCOMING!" Instantly everybody sprang into action.

When we raced out to our bird, I noticed one of the incoming rockets had hit the front side of the hangar roof and one in the T-28 revetment. My flight engineer grabbed the control surface locks and got in with my copilot while I was running around the plane with a flashlight to make sure every control surface lock was removed, and I yelled to the copilot and flight engineer to start the right engine when I passed the right wing. That engine came to life as I stepped up in the plane. When I strapped in my seat the left one was roaring. I turned to the flight engineer and shouted, "GEAR PINS." He showed me that he had the pins

See **L-54 Attack** next page

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L-54 Attack, continued from page 7

and clicked them together before he stowed them away. Then he gave me two thumbs up.

I jammed up the throttles, and taxiing out I lined up and called tower for altimeter. I throttled-up without waiting for the tower. In moments we were roaring down the runway, the tail lifting and here came another barrage of rockets straight at us! "EVERYBODY HANG TIGHT!" The flight engineer was busy with the throttles and instruments and my co-pilot sat with mouth wide open after setting his altimeter and looking up at the incoming rockets. Meanwhile I had no choice but holding straight and checking the airspeed until we had enough to take off.

Most of the rockets passed over us but one landed right in the middle of the runway about 50 yards in front of us, the same time as I lifted off. The blast blinded me and sent our bird airborne faster than usual, and some shrapnel hit us. I was flying truly by the seat of my pants now, and closed my eyes for a few seconds to clear the blindness, while I called to my crew: "EVERYBODY OK BACK THERE?" Their replies shot back: "Load (loadmaster) OK, skip." "Gunnery OK." "Navigator OK." As I came out of the blindness I made a quick check of the instruments and banked left to the Mekong River, climbing and circling over Xieng Ngeun for altitude. Meanwhile my flight engineer and co-pilot were busy checking every instrument more thoroughly than usual. So far so good: we found nothing abnormal.

During the takeoff roll I had enough time to see where those bloody rockets came up and I remembered the position against the shape of the terrain background. After a few orbits I headed over the runway at the spot where I saw the rockets come up and headed to the target. My navigator was busy plotting the coordinates from the information the Army ground station provided. We hosed down that area with all our ammo for a good time. We headed back to Luang Prabang after going Winchester ["guns empty"], but realized that a rocket had landed on the runway. I asked tower for the runway condition. He informed that there was a crater. It was not too big, but at night it's hard to see and might require some evasive action to avoid. It was kind of risky and they preferred us to head back to L-08.

Next day we were informed that our bird suffered some minor damage from the blast, but nothing serious. Some T-28s had suffered serious damage. The Army sent us the message that they went up the target area to clear it out and there was evidence of a blood trail and dragging trail, although there were no bodies. There probably were some casualties, but of course that enemy never left bodies behind to be found.

That was probably the last attack before the cease-fire. I also was in Luang Prabang during the second attack by the sappers,

when they blew up T-28s with satchel charges. That's another story. Hope this story brought back some memories of your good and not so good times over in SEA.

Chaophakhao Red and Spooky 13.



Ban Loboy at Water Level

By Steve Long, ex POW

No trip through Laos in 1969 would be complete without a night ride through Ban Loboy Water Crossing and Ban Karai Pass. The site of a treacherous supply route between mountainous karst ridges, it was the obvious conception of what a target



Canyon of Death: Ban Loboy, notorious chokepoint on the Ho Chi Minh Trail near Ban Karai Pass and Harley's Valley. Photo taken in June, 1966 by Bill Tilton, Nail FAC in the 23rd TASS at Nakhon Phanom. See page 10 for more details (and how to get prints).

Truck

analyst thought an interdiction point should be. It was easily recognizable by the absence of vegetation in a barren landscape between the imposing karst ridges. My passage on the evening of March 2, 1969, was memorable for its desecration by a F-4 Hunter-Killer team. As we splashed through the fords at Ban Loboy, I was able to sit up in the back of the truck and see the karst to the west and I realized exactly where we were at...the most bombed target in the history of aerial warfare, heading straight for Ban Karai! My thoughts raced that we were headed for the most dangerous place in the world! The F-4s, having spotted a single truck rumbling around the bomb craters in the middle of the moonscape scene, declared the truck fair game. The lead F-4 rolled in with its 20 mm Gatling blazing, not knowing that the truck carried a terrified American pilot laying in the back. Completing the strafing pass, the lead aircraft pulled off, banking left and right, exhaust cans glowing. That was when

Ban Loboy, next page

both sides of Ban Karai Pass opened up on him. I was amazed that an aircraft could fly through that much flak and still avoid being hit. Thank goodness the second F-4, having witnessed this ominous scene, showed some respect and discretion for the ridge-positioned gunners, and chose not stick his nose in that fight. The glow of engine tailpipes from the lead aircraft was my last contact with an American for a long time to come.”



The Only Bentley in Laos

by Jim Michener

Patrice, whose grandfather was French but whose grandmother was Lao, was in and out of one of my bookcases more than usual the other day. Also, he asked why portions of some pages were missing from a book featuring traditional Lao recipes. I replied that drawings had appeared on some pages, that I had reproduced them in Lao Aviation’s inflight magazine in the 1990s. Little more was said.

The next day came. We talked about similar drawings that had appeared in a book about Lao fish. “And do you know who drew those fish? My brother Elian. He was 17 then.” Patrice continued when he saw surprise cross my face. “A big Bentley used to pull up to my grandfather’s house. It had a cream-colored body and an earth-tone top. There wasn’t another car like it in all Laos. It was Alan Davidson, the British ambassador. Fresh from the market, he would carry fish—whole fish or just big heads—upstairs to the room Elian and I shared. It was two rooms connected, one being the study area. Immediately, Elian would begin drawing.”

“Other times,” Patrice recalled, “Ambassador Davidson would come in the Bentley and collect my brother. Thao Singha and Thao Soun, two of Elian’s friends, also drew quite well. In his Bentley, the ambassador would collect them too. Then my brother and his art school friends would draw fish at the ambassador’s residence.”

The book Patrice kept removing from a living room bookshelf contained the recipes of Phia Sing. Phia Sing, born in Luang Prabang in 1898, had been the royal chef at the king’s palace. But the recipes had been given to Ambassador Davidson by the crown prince in 1974. (Phia Sing died in 1967.)

The story Patrice told had an amusing ending. Ambassador Davidson had apartments in Paris and London. One of the boys studied in Paris. The other two in London. Sometimes all three were invited to the London apartment, where they and the ambassador would cook up a feast of fish. “And what amused my brother and his friends,” Patrice said, “was that the ambassador would help clean up afterwards, even rolling up his sleeves and washing the dishes with them, all lowly students. In that way he was such an extraordinary individual. In 1975, with what was left of Indochina collapsing all around him, he, with his exquisite education of Empire, his blue blood, his distinguished titles, proper manners and impeccable clothes, was more interested in asking the king which streams the best trout ran in.”



maintained. The Navy was very concerned that the Midway be able to maintain fighter operations even with the space-consuming Air Force helicopters aboard.

Air Force crews bunked with the Navy according to rank and took whatever bunks were available. Daily routines included checking the helicopters, routine maintenance, and cleaning the rust off on the mini-guns. Corrosion on the guns was an unexpected surprise but one that had to be dealt with due to the salt air aboard ship. Evenings would find the crews gathering at the helicopter to share a few quiet moments and a little liquid refreshment as all hands waited for the “go” order.

The Midway (CVA-41)

The USS Midway, CVA-41, had disembarked a portion of her air wing at Subic Bay and proceeded to rendezvous with the ten USAF CH-53/HH-53 helicopters flying out after launching from U Tapao in Thailand. The rendezvous was successful with all helicopters landing on the flight deck. Most were short of fuel due to the long flight.

Kick Off

The warning order reached the Fleet on the morning of April 29 and flight operations commenced at 1430 hours. With the exception of one flight to retrieve the last Marines, the last flight returned at approximately 0430 after 14 hours of non-stop operations. Those 14 hours will be the subject of “Part 2: The Operation”



To be continued in a future issue.

TLC Brochure Now Ready!

The TLC Brotherhood has produced a color brochure in trifold format that has been designed to attract anyone who served in TLC, or anyone who knows someone who served in TLC. The front bears our *color* logo and name. Inside, it tells the story of how the TLCB got started and developed, what we are, what we do, and how to contact or even join us.

If you have an opportunity to distribute these, ask Communications Committee Chairman Dave MacDonald for a supply.

Buy your quilt raffle tickets now

This is your last chance to buy your raffle tickets for Rosie Wheatley’s 60 by 72 inches red, white and blue quilt before the Fort Walton Beach Reunion. The proceeds go to our Assistance Fund to help poor and disabled children in Thailand. Use the included ticket sheet. Copy it if you need more tickets. Members and non-members can take part.

One ticket is two dollars. Three tickets cost five dollars. Complete the tickets, add your check, made out to TLC Brotherhood and marked Assistance Quilt, then mail to John Sweet, c/o TLC Brotherhood, P.O. Box 2371, Seabrook, NH 03874.



23rd TASS “War Stories”

By Bill Tilton

The first 23rd TASS squadron commander was Robert (Louie) Johnson. He was a B-52 pilot who had first set up the radar site at Dong Ha and then was sent to Thailand to lead the experiment of Trail interdiction with FACs. His checkout in the O-1 was quick and casual, and he was openly uncomfortable flying our missions. And sure enough, he had an engine failure and was forced down. I believe the backseat passenger was a Thai pilot assigned to fly with us, and on several occasions before the engine quit, Johnson asked him to please quit stomping his feet on the floor.

They were rescued quickly and without incident, but the plane had to be destroyed by fighters, since it was too far into enemy territory and night was approaching. Thus we never knew what caused the engine failure. Johnson had tried switching tanks and turning on the boost pump, and even pulled on the carburetor icing knob (even though they were all disconnected in the Southeast Asia Bird Dogs).

It seemed days after the incident that Col Johnson remembered the stamping feet and the fact that his passenger kept saying that he wasn't doing anything. It was then he realized it may very well have been ground fire that took out their engine, and in their ignorance of what groundfire sounded like, they might not have known it.

The most tragic aircraft malfunction I knew of back then resulted in much loss, and was deep in enemy territory, but no enemy action was observed or suspected. It happened while I was in Bangkok on one of our monthly 4-day “weekends,” and so it is 3rd-hand stuff. Maybe somebody else has more information about it. The trouble started when an F-4 came off an undefended target and experienced a double flameout. Relight attempts failed and the crew was forced to eject, with little time to try alternative solutions even if they could think of any. Nobody had a clue as to what caused that problem, but there are several old rules of thumb that suggest high probabilities. This one comes under: if all jet engines fail at the same time, the crew has mismanaged the fuel. (A corollary is: if a two engine prop plane has failure of both engines the crew feathered the good engine after the other had failed).

So two Jollies and four Sandies launched from NKP to pick up the crew. The downed pilots were located and lead Jolly swooped in for a successful extraction, while Sandies orbited, #2 Jolly stood by, and FACs observed from a distance. Crown Control ran the show. After the pickup, lead Jolly climbed out for NKP, into that good old setting sun again. It was late in the day.

Suddenly lead Jolly reports a transmission overheat, chip light, whatever. He intended to set her down and requested his wingman (rotorman?) to follow him in and pick them up. This was done very quickly, and soon they were safely away once again, with both crews on the 2nd Jolly. Score: US -2, Vietnam—0.

Since it was late in the day, and the area was near the Trail and totally in enemy hands, Crown directed the Sandies to destroy the unfliable H-3. Tragically the lead A-1 never pulled up

from his strafing or bomb run and flew straight into the ground, causing the loss of a 3rd aircraft and death of a crewmember as well, still without hearing from enemy guns. Two of these three losses seem likely to have resulted from crew action and the helicopter problem was a serious transmission breakdown.



Ban Loboy Water Crossing

The photograph on page 8 is an early shot of the legendary Ban Loboy water crossing, sometimes a bridge, sometimes a ford, sometimes just craters. It has been said that it became the most-bombed spot on Earth. Photographs taken just a year later than this one depict the area as totally barren and cratered like the Moon.

Ban Loboy is a village just about ten miles inside Laos from the North Vietnam border, on Route 912. Harley's Valley is the next feature going East, and then Ban Karai Pass at the border. This route was opened to bypass the heavily harassed route through Mugia Pass, about 60 miles further North, and it was discovered by some 23rd TASS pilots in late March of 1966. At the time the photo was taken, in June, we knew it only as “the New Road.” On a 1972 map many roads are shown in the mountains around Ban Loboy, but this route appears to have remained the main way across that river. Nearly 20 crash sites of Air Force fighters are known within ten miles of this spot. One of those was Steve Long's OV-10.

There aren't many Americans who have seen Ban Loboy with trees and just a few craters, nor at a low angle like this. Steve Long called it the most dangerous spot on Earth. But in June of 1966, although even then it was a weird and spooky place, I got down in there at about 800 feet AGL, threw open the left side window, and snapped two photos, without encountering any groundfire. Glenn Bremenkamp, now a Brother, recalls coming upon a 23mm antiaircraft gun position in this area one day. Lucky for him, it didn't open fire!

The other photo is vertical and shows a second crossing in the foreground. The camera was a Pentax Spotmatic using a standard 55mm lens and a fast shutter speed to overcome the blurring of hand-held aerial photography. The film was Kodak Plus X Pan (black and white), which has an ASA of 125. I developed the film at NKP and never did get around to printing the photos until this year. What a surprise! And I still have many to blow up and look at. But I suspect these are the best.

We will have 11x14 inch prints of these photos on sale at the reunion. They are priced at \$15 each or two for \$25, which is a few dollars more than they cost for printing, to raise some Assistance money. After the reunion, any left-over prints of these photos will be available from the Brotherhood BX. I will also display four shots taken during an airstrike on the road at a bend on the ridge just Southwest of Ban Loboy, but before the Parallel Ridges. If people find these interesting we will get more prints to sell.



Vichit Anchors Our Thailand Assistance

The TLCB assistance program has been helping children in Thailand with everything from clothing, shoes and school supplies to food for those not having enough to eat, reports Assistance Committee Chairman John Sweet.

Donations from TLCB members to the Assistance Fund have fueled these efforts by the whole committee to give help where it is most needed. TLCB member and Assistance Committee Assistant Chairman Vichit Mingrachata is our needs assessor and distribution organizer. Helped by John Oles and VFW Post 10249 Post Commander Dale Wages, he has got the goods bought with those donations to the children, wherever they are. Member John Middlewood, who teaches English to children in a Northeast Thailand village, helps us by advising the assistance committee on projects worth considering, using his on-the-spot knowledge. The committee then considers all proposed projects and votes on which ones to support.

Four boys and six girls attending Ban Yang Lor School in the Sribunreuang District were given uniforms. A lunch program was established with the help of John Middlewood to help hungry children and keep them in school. A committee of teachers and John assess which children should be helped each month. The criteria used are need and active participation in learning, not necessarily students with high grades, but those who are trying. The idea is to give the kids an incentive to keep working hard in school, and also to help support their families.

John is using the same committee approach to assess financial need when buying school clothes and school supplies for students from pre-kindergarten to Grade 6. The TLCB assistance fund helped the Boys Home at Nongkhai by buying 117 pairs of rubber shoes for the boys. John Oles and his wife, Vichit, Dale and another VFW member and his wife went to the Home to deliver the shoes. You can see pictures on the TLC Assistance Page section of our website.

Two 50-kilogram bags of rice and canned food were given to the Ban Saeng Tawan home for poor children. Two 50-kilogram bags of sticky rice, 10 baskets of steamed fish and 11 packages of Vietnamese pork were given to the Udon Home for poor children. The Ban Pha Sing School also got two bags of rice, while the Ban Yang Law School got one bag of rice.

In addition to supporting John Middlewood's Student Food Program, TLCB donations have paid for 20 pairs of shoes and 100 pairs of socks for 20 pre-kindergarten four year olds. Another donation bought educational materials for 45 pre-K four year olds. These materials included Thai and English building blocks, modeling clay, alphabet games, hand puppets, crayons and drawing paper. A more recent donation paid for eight additional Sound Lab Stations to be installed in the school where John Middlewood teaches English.

Currently emergency assistance in the form of rice is underway in Laos to families in desperate need due to heavy flooding. These donations are being conducted for the TLC Brotherhood by our Assistance Committee Assistant Chairman-Laos, Jim Michener who is coordinating efforts with representatives of the government of Laos.



Certificate from the LAO PDR National Disaster Management Office to the TLC Brotherhood, as part of Lao-American cooperation. For the Kasi District village that was destroyed, help in the amount of \$1500. August, 2001.

Dinner With The Police Chief

By Kham P. Manivanh (Chaophakhao Red)

During my T-28 training at Udon early 66, I was riding a 125cc Honda motorcycle, which belonged to a far relative, back from Nongkhai to Udon. When I heard the siren come from behind me I wandered to the right (like I used to in Laos) instead of moving to the left, and guess what: I got struck by the police squad car. The police came down on me angrily with several hard words. He mistook me for some Vietnamese refugee that settled in Thailand and asked for my ID. (Riding motorcycles didn't require a license at that time.) I had hurt my knee substantially, and also the bike suffered substantial damage. When I handed my RLAF [Royal Lao Air Force] ID it caught them by surprise, and the police came up with: "No wonder you move to the right."

Since I was a RLAF officer and a neighbor foreigner they radioed back to the station for advice, and here came my surprise: I ended up as the police chief's dinner guest after I was treated for my injured left knee and leg. The bike was fixed at police expense, and then I was escorted back to the Prachapakdy Hotel in the police pickup truck, with the bike, after dinner. I was DNIF (duty not including flight) for several days until I could walk and get on the plane without any help. Although I learned the hard way, during my training I was the only one who rode the motorcycle in Udon. Some of us didn't even know how to ride a motorcycle yet. Our main transportation to the base and hotel was handled by Thai Air Force personnel during the 70's, and later on some of the RLAF T-28 IP's brought their cars to drive in Udon (but they had to have an international driver license), and some of our crews were trained and licensed to drive half ton and two-and-a-half ton trucks from Suan Varunee to Base during my MTT-IV AC-47 Spooky training in 1970. I was the only one who had a mishap, as far as I can remember.





Mekong Express Mail Guide to South East Asia Bases and Sites During the Vietnam War Era

