



# Mekong Express Mail

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The Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood, Inc.

www.TLC-Brotherhood.org

## Early Days of The Secret War

by Tom Williams

*Tom (Doc) Williams is writing a book about his experiences in Southeast Asia, 1959 to 1962, when he was a Navy Corpsman assigned to RCST U.S. Marine Special Unit 73.2.1 and 73.2.2 operating in Laos and Cambodia. The unit operated from the USS Maury, did search and rescue missions and reconnaissance missions from Udorn and Sattahip, did insertions by night jumps and sometimes by Thai gunboats. He treated Thai sailors for shrapnel and gunshot wounds, and malaria. The unit also used Ko Chang Island as a base camp and did search and rescue into the highlands of northern Laos and the Plain of Jars. Tom gave the MEM permission to use some excerpts from his manuscript. - Editor*

One evening, on the bank of the Mekong River, across from Vientiane where fighting had been going on for two days, and an Army medic assigned to the unit had been working with me to treat casualties, including refugees from across the river, I saw a rather dirty looking fishing boat, painted black, that had been beached. We had a squad of American soldiers with us at the time. There seemed to be some confusion and discussion going on between two guys clothed in black pajamas and the



"Doc" Williams using his training to help refugees in 1961

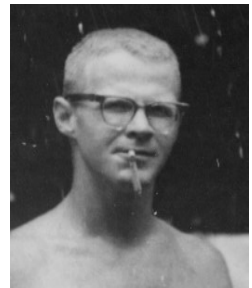
traditional grass hat. One of them was waving his arms and seemed to be caught on something that was preventing him from getting off the boat. Two men were sent to the boat to investigate. Suddenly, someone yelled, "Satchel Bag!" and all hell broke loose. The

two black pajama guys had satchel charges but one of the straps from a satchel charge bag was caught on something on the boat. They were about to use them. Automatic gunfire filled the air and I was slammed to the ground by the Army medic, my ears ringing from the gunfire.

They must have emptied their ammo clips into these two guys, I tried to look up, and my head was shoved back down into the mud. I was told to keep my head down. The Medic had covered me with his own body; I had no Flak Vest on. It was back in the chopper. I had forgotten it. I was too green to realize that you do not go anywhere without it.

One black pajama guy was hanging half way off the boat.

He had no face left. He was hanging by the strap from the satchel charge bag that was still caught by something on the boat. The other one had jumped from the boat, tried to get away and was lying at the edge of the water covered in his own blood, still moving. The colonel yelled, "Get over to that SOB and finish him off," and someone did. Automatic weapons fire rang out again. The edge of the water and mud all around the place was splattered with small pieces of tissue and blood. The back of his head was split open, as if someone had hit him in the head with a meat cleaver. He moved no more. The colonel and two men examined the bodies and checked the satchel charges, removing them from their bodies. The colonel took papers from their bodies.



Tom, younger

I was trembling like a wind blown leaf in a storm. The Army medic held me to calm me down. He knew then it was my first time. My worst fear was that the satchel bags, would be hit by gun fire and that would we would all be blown to hell. I got up when we were told "all clear" and looked around for my two pilots, who had jumped into the river. They were covered with mud and fuel oil. I checked them both out and only their pride was hurt. While there, we worked with an elite U.S. Army unit. They were like us, with no identification of any sort car-

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### Time is Running Out!



Reserve your hotel room before the reunion-rate block of rooms is released. With just a little over 30 days to go, the hotel will not hold them much longer. Reunion shirts: see page 12. Registration form: on a separate sheet with this edition.

# TLCB Assistance Is Helping NKP Schools

By Ed Miller, TLCB Secretary

I am proud to report to our membership about my trip to Thailand, this past January/February 2002. Our name is becoming known and being spoken with beautiful Siam "Smiles." We all can thank our brother, John Middlewood. These schools offered many "Thanks" to the TLCB and to me for the support. Their sincere conversation and hospitality shown me expressed their desire and hope of a continued relationship.

As we traveled to each school and strolled through its walkways, children flocked to John to say, "Hello, how are you" or another short English phrase. John had a monthly question in English and the student was expected to answer correctly in English. The reward if answered correctly was one baht. It was obvious the respect the children and teachers had for our Brother John. Having mastered the Thai language and being an ordained pastor gives John tools to perform this special work and represent the Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Brotherhood so well.

Our first day visiting the schools, they had scheduled a presentation. Ban Kam Noon Kham school located about 3 kilometers east of the old air base, had recently received the sleeping mats and had a certificate of appreciation for John and the TLCB. This school was new to TLCB assistance.

The sleeping mats, which have become so popular with the schools, are locally made and are soft and colorful. Each mat costs approximately 150 baht (\$3.50). That includes cloth material, padding and labor. And each has our TLCB initials sewn on it. These mats roll up and have a carrying strap.

We visited only a couple more schools that morning since we had an early afternoon meeting with the Nakhon Phanom provincial Governor and other government members.

The school district that John Middlewood has targeted comprises the elementary schools that are approximately 8-10 kilometers outside the city limits. He chose these schools because they are far enough away from town that the poorer families cannot afford to send their children to the better equipped and staffed schools in town. Many of the children in this area will not attend school past the sixth grade, becoming farmers along with their family.

The TLCB Assistance has provided these 11 schools with sleeping mats, playground equipment (refurbished), sound lab equipment, school supplies (pencils & notebooks), window screens, sports equipment, repaired computers, food baskets, Children's day (over 2000 students received cookies), and recently winter jackets.

I could see the use of the winter jackets, that were recently provided to many of the children. I believe now over 350 used jackets have been purchased and personally cleaned by John and his wife, Maew. Before giving them to the schools, each jacket was washed and dried at John's home, using a Thai washing machine. Let me assure you that is work—washing machines there would hardly please an American housewife.

The following week we continued our visit to seven more schools, including my wife's school, where she attended. Many of these schools haven't changed much over all these years.

Much of the building improvements are self-help but there was some construction at a couple of the schools. On this particular day, one school had designated it a school workday, which meant the students were outside doing the cleaning, cutting, and digging. Can you imagine that here in the USA?

Each school had its own characteristics and usually was the spirit of the school headmaster (principal). The appearance of the schools was very indicative of the headmaster, to the fact if they could get the village people to support the school. John Middlewood has built a very strong relationship with each school headmaster. This was very apparent as we exited our vehicle and approached each school—we were always quickly and warmly greeted, Thai style.



Ed Miller, John Middlewood, and school headmaster Mr. Kambot display student sleeping mats.

John pointed out to me as we toured the schools, at each school library, the condition of the books and the age. English books to read were minimal but yet the teaching of the English language has become the 2<sup>nd</sup> language taught. Another item which the headmasters asked for was a computer. If the school had a computer, it was used normally to operate the school's language Lab. I started asking the schools the support items that they would like to have the TLCB to assist them with purchasing or providing. Common answers were computer, used clothes, sports equipment, and supplies concerning the raising of fish and chickens.

All of my brothers and sisters of the Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood can be assured your monies donated to the Assistance fund are being used in this area usefully, wisely, and resourcefully. When you see the impressions on the faces of the children and teachers you feel the joy and the thankfulness.

Please continue supporting our Assistance fund with your tax-deductible donations. Thank you and may God Bless your giving.

[NOTE: See page 12 for the latest Assistance Committee accomplishments.]



# What Really Happened to Karl Richter?

By Bill Tilton

It was a morning in June, 1966. As I arrived at my assigned O-1F for the day's mission I found a very young-looking officer standing awkwardly by the tail. He was a stranger and not likely a FAC, judging from his flight suit and his junior rank (lieutenants were rare in SEA). This was Karl Richter, now a legend but then just an aggressive, competitive, and very well liked fighter pilot in the 421<sup>st</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron (TFS) at Korat. I was in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Tactical Air Support Squadron (TASS) at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base, located on the Mekong river in Northeast Thailand.

Karl introduced himself to me and explained that he hoped to get a ride with a forward air controller (FAC) to see some of the targets from our unmatched observation altitude and speed. Like us, the fighter pilots got their weekends in 4-day groups about once each month, and this was how Karl had chosen to spend his time off. I told him I would need permission, and somehow I obtained that very quickly. So we headed into Laos, and for about 3 hours he observed, listened, asked questions, watched airstrikes, flew my plane from the back seat, and even fired my M-16 out a rear side-window. That experience led to a later repeat on which Karl brought along his best friend, Ed Harvey. John Taylor and I flew Karl and Ed back to Korat (see photo) on that occasion. And in November Glenn Bremenkamp and I flew to Korat on a crew orientation visit.

At the 421<sup>st</sup> we found the most famous mascot in Thailand, a yellow dog named Roscoe. A fighter pilot had owned Roscoe, but he was shot down. So Roscoe became the pet of everyone, always sitting in on the commander's staff meetings and often riding slowly across the base in the bed of the commander's pickup or even on the trunk of his car. There is a memorial to Roscoe at Korat today.

We also found that Karl already held a special position in the wing. It probably was a combination of his youth and his attitude, but Karl was almost (yes, *almost*) universally liked and respected. It was a time when nerves were very stressed, daily tension was high, losses were frequent, and normally-bold and fearless fighter pilots openly discussed their dread of Route Package Six (the Hanoi area). A few resented him for what they took as excessive self-promotion, but clearly the leadership and most of Karl and Ed's fellow pilots admired their aggressive attitude. Karl frankly realized that he had a lot to offer, and that he was becoming more effective with each mission. And while Ed, who was married, wanted to hurt the enemy as much as possible and then go home, it was not so for Karl.

Karl Richter was, by the summer of 1966, approaching 100 sorties, called "counters," into North Vietnam. According to the rules, when he reached 100 counters (on October 13, as it turned out), he would be entitled to go home up to two months early, while keeping full credit for his remote assignment. In the meantime he would be given administrative duties on the ground. He was approaching what all the other pilots dreamed of from their first bath of fire in Route PAK VI until the day they died, were captured, or went home (and at that time 43% failed to reach 100 for the reasons given). And he was trying

to *delay* it. Karl told us that if a mission was forced to abort a strike "up North," he would develop some aircraft problem that would make him fly back to Korat without entering Vietnam at all, thus avoiding a counter when it didn't involve a chance to strike the enemy.

Karl explained his motive for this, in terms we understood. We understood, that is, but I am not so sure any of us would have considered doing the same. To Karl, the "counter" system of combat tour curtailment would pull him out of the action just as he was reaching his greatest power to contribute to the war effort. It was such a contradiction, to him, that he had made up his mind to try and stay. Karl Richter had formally requested that he be permitted to fly a second 100 strike sorties into North Vietnam. After some delay, his request was granted.



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Karl and Ed had many ideas about prosecuting the war effectively. They felt frustrated at how poor many of the targets seemed to be on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, with the obvious movement of trucks every night right under our noses. And one of their big causes, soon to be lost, if not already, was a proposed refinement of their beloved F-105D "Thud." Karl told us about a variant that Republic had proposed. The 64-foot fuselage of the enormous F-105 was only ten feet shorter than that of a World War II B-17 "heavy bomber," with its four engines and crew of ten. But in this F-105 fuselage was included a nearly-useless bomb bay designed for the intended role of delivering nuclear weapons in

tanker-escorted "wolf packs." The bomb bay was equipped with a heavy *kicker*—a ram designed to eject the contents of the bomb bay during high-speed bomb delivery. The bomb bay could hold a modest fuel tank, but the ram was dead weight. In Republic's new model the fuselage frames would run clear across the bottom and the recovered space would be filled with fuel. The result was expected to yield greatly enhanced range and performance, but of course it never happened. They thought it was to have been the "G" variant, but the next year that letter was used to designate the modified two-seat "F" trainer that was used for Wild Weasel radar-killer missions.

As it was, Karl explained to us, there was no plane in the world that could touch the F-105D at low altitude. This probably grew out of the Thud's breeding. The Republic F-84 family, sometimes called "Lead Sleds," were famous for long takeoff rolls and high wing-loading (pounds of weight per square foot of wing area). The joke used to be, "If all the runways in the world were laid end-to-end, Republic would build a plane that

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ried. We were told if we were captured we would be denied as being U.S. Military. The Orders that I signed stated that if captured, you would never disclose your orders, or anything pertaining to your unit.

The war I am talking about was the first Secret War, or the actual beginning of the Secret War everyone talks about. We



Udorn from helicopter in 1961

am told, we were not there. However, I do have pictures of those areas where we never were. On The Wall in D.C. one can read names of fallen Brothers from 1960 to 1962.

During one run across the Mekong we took on some small arms fire and the door gunner let loose with everything we had. Our pilot was coming in on his run as low to the water as he could on a banking and zigzagging run, when the door gunner took what probably was a 37 mm in his head. There was nothing left of his head. The remains of his head and helmet were splattered all over the inside of the crew compartment. Another crew member took over the gun when a couple of T-28's came up from behind us, tree top level and let go of everything they had. We got in and out pretty quick, but it seemed like forever.

While on the ground I thought I took a round in my left leg, just above the knee. It slammed in to me, burned like hell and knocked me down. I got up and I kept running towards the chopper. I could see the pilot waving his arm at me and shouting something. I was pulled in to the chopper, we did a catapult liftoff and were airborne in seconds and headed for the Mekong and the border once again with the T-28's covering us and our second gunner was pounding away towards the incoming tracers.

Looking at my leg I saw it was a piece of shrapnel. I still have that piece, approximately 2 inches of twisted steel. It had just penetrated my leg about 1/2 inch deep on the front of my leg, passed most the way through my leg sticking out the other side. It made a nasty hole and burned. I put a tourniquet on it and another crewmember tied a camo dressing on my leg. I was in shock, because I do not remember anyone pulling the dead body of our door gunner off of me. I was covered with his and my own blood. I was numb. When we landed in Nong Khai, I went to pieces. The Army medic was there for me, checked me out and held me until I calmed down. This was the second time this man who became my Brother, had looked out for me. I was taken to the Thai Hospital and the piece of shrapnel was removed. I remember

we were never told anything. There is not too much written about it. In every search I make for information I find

they just pulled it out with a large hemostat, no local anesthesia, covered it with a thick dressing and wrapped it. I meekly placed my hands together like I was saying a prayer and bowed my head and said Saw-wa-dee-kop. They released me to go



back with my crew. I was given morphine for the pain, lay down in the chopper and fell into a state of floating, eerie sounds ringing and echoing in my ears and soon nothing. I had dozed off.

We made several more runs across the Mekong the next couple of days picking up more survivors and each time flying under the watchful eyes of the courageous Royal Thai Air Force in their T-28s. Without them we most likely would not have survived. We flew back to Udorn several days later, strung out and weary with the adrenalin still running high. The U.S. Army Command Post that was based there treated us to a home like cooked meal made up of 5 in one Rations. After a couple of cold



H-34 sits on a beach in Southern Thailand

Singha beers, I think I slept for 12 or 14 hours.

At that place we had showers but the water was ice cold. I remember taking my first shower there in days and the water

The war I am talking about was the first Secret War, or the actual beginning of the Secret War everyone talks about. We were never told anything.

was so cold I was screaming out loud and dancing around under the freezing water, when in the doorway appeared this big 1st Sgt with a large cigar in his mouth, his eyes as big as tennis balls. (He reminds me of Rodney Dangerfield every time I now think about it) He had in his

right hand a .45 cal. cocked and ready to spit out some deadly rounds. He walked into the shower, calmly took his cigar out of his mouth, reached for the water faucet and turned it off, saying to me, " Doc if ever you pull something like this again, (all the while waving the .45 cal. at me) I will personally blow your friggin head off!!" He told me he had heard the screaming from the CP only 15 yards from the concrete shower room and thought we were under attack from the Pathet Lao. He said the Pathet Lao did cross the border from time to time, took no prisoners, they just cut your friggin head off and a couple of other things that they take with them for souvenirs. I said

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nothing to him because he was really enraged. He nodded his head to me winked, shoved his big cigar in his mouth and said gruffly, "Carry on Doc, and keep the friggin noise down" I did not sleep so good that night.

We rested up for a couple of days and went out again on RECON with the RCST unit, were dropped off at night at pre-determined coordinates and stayed in the bush for three days looking for any stragglers from Laos. We saw nothing but a

couple of cobras and black scorpions. We had no engagements. We returned tired and dirty and cleaned our weapons. I again took a cold shower but this time I placed a stick in my mouth so I would not make any loud screams. But I *did* dance.



## Note From The Editor

The mission of the Mekong Express Mail is to publish as wide a range as possible of information about SEA service of all kinds. Some TLCB members offer ideas or items they have written. Some agree to write for the MEM because we ask them. We cannot publish everything, or everything right away, because the MEM also has an important role as supplier of official Brotherhood information about such things as board decisions, annual reunions and committee activities, notably our Assistance Committee. We are very grateful to everyone who has written something for the MEM and want to emphasize that we are open to ideas and written submissions from the entire Brotherhood. We also welcome submissions from the Sisterhood, several of which we have carried. So, do *you* have personal experiences you want to share, great or small? Whatever you did in SEA mattered to the whole effort. This is one of the best ways you can make sure of recording these experiences for history. If you have vowed to write a book someday about your life during the Secret War, why not get it started by writing an article for the MEM?

Dave MacDonald

## Apportionment of Membership—

The board recently divided up membership among the members-at-large, in anticipation of future needs as we grow. As a matter of general interest, here is how we split up the states (and overseas):

Bartholomew Northeast Area 1	Getchell Southern Area 2	Butler Middle Area 3	Hughes Western Area 4
CT	AL	CO	AK
DC	AR	IA	AP
DE	OK	IL	CA
MA	FL	IN	HI
MD	GA	KS	ID
ME	KY	MI	MT
NH	LA	MN	ND
NJ	MS	MO	NE
NY	NC	TX	NV
OH	SC	WI	OR
PA	TN	AZ	SD
VA		NM	UT
VT			WA
WV			WY
			Overseas

## Mekong Express Mail

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needed the whole thing.” But Karl and Ed proudly described how this high wing loading made them able to escape from MiGs that managed to jump them. By “unloading” the wings (stick forward), dropping the MER (multiple ejection rack for bombs), and lighting the afterburner, the Thud could quickly accelerate to speeds no other production plane in the world could match in dense low-altitude air. While they were whistling smoothly out of range at twice the speed of sound, their attackers (and others like F-4s) were buffeting and yawing in a regime they were not designed for.

On September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1966, Karl was #3 in Ford flight, on an airstrike “downtown.” Captain Ralph Beardsley, the squadron vice commander, was on his wing as Ford Four. For some reason Karl was holding his element back while Ford Lead and Ford Two approached the target. But something was wrong. Some planes that didn’t look familiar had slid in behind the lead element ahead of him. Karl said later that it was so uncommon to come in contact with enemy planes that for several seconds he didn’t realize what was going on. But then it struck him—MiGs! The Thuds lit afterburners and swept in so rapidly on the MiGs that Karl worried about overrunning them and ending up in front as the prey instead of the hunter. But he soon had a MiG-17 in his sights, and let the 20mm gatling gun roar, aiming where the MiG would be when he broke left to get away. But that didn’t happen and Karl had to move his aim right at the fighter. This time he saw the rounds going home, and Beardsley said, “You’re hitting him!” But then the MiG reversed course. Karl stayed with him and ran his gun empty into the tough Soviet plane. The MiG lost a wing, developed an engine fire, and shed large pieces across the sky. Karl was delighted, but also he was relieved to see the pilot eject and get a good parachute, recognizing that he, like Karl, was doing his assigned duty. (The pilot lived, and is today well-known in Asia). This was only the sixth MiG shot down by an F-105, and the 28<sup>th</sup> air victory of the war. And Karl, the youngest pilot to get a MiG, was called to Saigon for personal



recognition by General Momyer, and even to attend a party with VNAF Commander Ky, where he danced with Mrs. Ky.

On November 23<sup>rd</sup> Glenn Bremenkamp and I visited the 421<sup>st</sup> on our “week end.” Karl had developed a serious relationship with Malee, or “Molly,” there in Korat. Molly spoke text-book English and was halfway through business school. She showed

Glenn and me the best Korat shops for silk, which was much more reasonable there than in Bangkok. When Karl died, Malee was six months pregnant. Their daughter, Karla, not too long ago was astonished to learn that her dad is an authentic American hero. (Malee later married an F-111 EWO, who adopted

Karla, so that she grew up a real Air Force brat.)

And what did happen to Karl Richter? This topic has come up on a number of occasions, and always a group of people jump in with *certain* knowledge on their side. But there has always been some contradiction and thus some doubt. I *think* I now know, thanks to some eyewitness accounts and records kept during the search and rescue (SAR), both of which I have seen.

One thing that is not certain is which “counter” Karl was on. Some say his 198<sup>th</sup> North Vietnam mission, and some just as firmly assert it was his 199<sup>th</sup>. The truth doesn’t matter. One source reports that Karl’s Form 5 actually shows he had already passed 200, which would not surprise me at all. Already he was assigned to the wing doing administrative duties in anticipation of his return to the states. And he had been given the principal speaking part in a morale-booster film titled “There Is A Way.” (Fighter pilots in Thailand often exclaimed: “...there ain’t *no way!*” ...to get 100 “counter” missions). Karl and a Major Piper were supposed to proceed to Saigon after his mission the next day. There General Momyer wished personally to present an award on the occasion of Karl’s 200<sup>th</sup> sortie, and Piper’s 100<sup>th</sup>.

On the day of this last mission, Karl was assigned to fly with a newly-arrived pilot in the unit, who was still flying his orientation missions to Route PAK VI. It was not an unusual mission in any particular way. It was July 28<sup>th</sup> of 1967. The new pilot was Maj Robert Barnett, a 44<sup>th</sup> TFS pilot who was assigned to fly lead as Hotrod 01 in a two-ship formation with Karl flying wing as Hotrod 02. Barnett was highly-experienced as a fighter pilot, already having logged over 4000 hours, which is very high. But this was only his 4<sup>th</sup> mission into RP VI, and his first as lead.

Within three months Barnett, too, would be shot down. On October 3<sup>rd</sup>, while on a strike just eleven miles north of Hanoi, Barnett was struck by a SAM missile. His plane was still flyable at first, and he headed toward the seacoast in flames. In short order he lost oil pressure, engine thrust, and then the controls, and was forced to eject. He landed in jungle northeast of the port of Haiphong and evaded capture for three days. He was a prisoner of war for the next 1,989 days.

The day of Karl’s last mission, things got a little mixed up, as they sometimes do. Barnett and Richter briefed the mission up in the Diem Ven Phu area, to be employed by a

Below: Bill Tilton, Ed Harvey, Karl Richter, and John Taylor at NKP just before leaving for Korat, October, 1966. NKP runway is in background. (John Taylor contacted Disney to get the Cricket patch, and is a principal author of “The Cricket Lament.”)



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Karl Richter and Ed Harvey, November, 1966

FAC against targets there, but when they arrived the FAC was not available. So they were diverted to join up with “Misty” FACs in the southern part of North Vietnam. When they got there they found Misty flight (of two F-100s) was taking a slow drink on a tanker. Misty advised them to return partway North to the area of the ferry at Ron, where they had seen a train, warning that it could be a “flak trap.” (According to “Wimpy,” the 421<sup>st</sup> beloved ops officer, Ed Harvey loved trains as targets, and I assume Karl did too.) And so Hotrod headed back up toward Ron, on the coast.

Jinking around and up and down, averaging about 6000 feet above the ground, Barnett and Richter looked for a “lucrative target,” as we say, for their 750 pound bombs (they were each carrying six). Jets burn fuel pretty fast at that altitude, particularly when loaded with external stores, and their loiter time was rapidly disappearing, so Barnett decided it was time to switch leads and have Karl, with his knowledge of the area, find them a target before they were forced to break off and go find a tanker. They swept along over a land of rice paddies and villages that was by now so familiar to Karl Richter, looking out the huge canopy sides as their magnificent F-105s sped along, turning this way and that to avoid making themselves easy targets. Finally, Karl found a small bridge or ford to attack and they climbed up to 9000 feet to get a decent dive angle (for accuracy). We would like to think this was a worthy target, but in fact my guess is that it was just the best harassment target Karl could come up with as their loiter fuel dwindled. Small water crossings were quickly repaired or bypassed.

Barnett decided to watch for Karl’s strikes and aim on where they hit. Looking back to observe Karl’s roll-in on the target, he noticed bursts of anti-aircraft fire at about his own altitude, no more than a half mile behind him. He warned Karl they were under fire, and Karl grunted “roger” as he continued his diving bomb delivery. At about 3000 feet above the ground, Karl pulled up after releasing his bombs, and just then Barnett saw a streak of smoke come from under Karl’s airplane. Karl immediately told Barnett he had been hit and at the same time turned the nose of his wounded F-105 toward Laos.

Barnett salvaged his bomb load and quickly joined up on Karl, who was now in a climb. As Barnett was moving in close to the stricken F-105, Karl reported that he had lost his oil pressure. If that were all that was wrong things may not have been too bad. A jet engine can run quite a while after all the oil drains out. But things turned out to be much more serious than a loss of oil. From only about 30 feet away, Barnett saw flames starting to appear out the J-75’s tailpipe and informed Karl he was on fire. He heard no reply.

Barnett then switched to Guard channel on his radio. This emergency frequency is monitored—and kept clear except in real emergencies—by everyone, including control towers and radar sites. He reported to all who could hear that Hotrod Two was on fire and would be bailing out. The Misty FACs (two F-100s) responded immediately that they were now off the tanker and coming to help.

The report that Hotrod Lead was hit was received by Air Rescue at 0133 Zulu time, or 8:33 AM in Thailand. The location was recorded as 103 nautical miles on the 315 degree radial of Channel 109 TACAN, heading 240 degrees toward Laos. Dong Ha, just below the DMZ, was Channel 109, so that location is Northwest of Ron (see map).

The fire coming from Karl’s plane had grown longer than his fuselage. Barnett got back on the radio and emphatically told Karl he had better get out *now!* He was still flying right next to Karl when he felt the sickening shudder, or “burble,” that warns a pilot his plane is flying so slow or at such an angle of attack that it is starting to lose lift in a wing stall. Since he was flying formation with Karl, this suggests that Karl’s engine thrust was not sustaining the climb and together they were slowing down. Barnett took his eyes off Karl to glance at his airspeed indicator. When he saw 155 knots he immediately lit his afterburner and simultaneously saw Karl’s nose pitch up, then drop violently. Somewhere during that loss of control, Karl ejected, firing the propelled seat Republic Aviation had designed specifically for the F-105. Circling to the left to keep Karl in sight, Barnett reported the bailout on Guard. The chute opened automatically as the ejection seat fell away. But Barnett saw

see RICHTER, continued page 9







## History Committee Page: The 1970 Hmong Evacuation

In early 1970 it became necessary to evacuate a large number of Hmong people out of Northern Laos to prevent them from falling prey to the advancing Pathet Lao and North Vietnam Army, who were on the offensive throughout the area. A limited number of unmarked C-130s were available, but there were thousands of refugees, carrying their most valuable possessions with them, and there were no suitable runways in the area. In just a few weeks the planning and arrangements were complete. The planners located a large open meadow-like area just below the Plain of Jars where C-130s could land and the refugees could stage. Many sacks of lime were used to mark out a landing area with a suitable centerline.

Containment areas for people (and some livestock and other things) were marked out and then the Hmong were notified of the imminent evacuation. They soon appeared from every direction, loaded with their most prized possessions. The first problem was keeping them off the marked “runway” that had been chosen.

As the refugees arrived by the hundreds, with sewing machines, fat pigs, and cart loads of possessions, it was soon obvious that the only way they would get out was through extraordinary measures. The planes were fitted with retaining ropes strung across the fuselage—the passengers would have to ride standing up! By this method up to six hundred (yes, 600) passengers per load could be lifted out of danger. But their possessions would have to be left for later.

When each plane arrived, it was hard to control the nervous refugees who were designated for that flight, and they crowded aboard the ramp while the engines roared at idle. Then the ramp was

Charlie Mann (below, right), U.S. Overseas Mission (USOM) Director, chats with an upcountry worker while waiting for air-evacuation to start.



Photographs by Ed Ulrich



raised and the laden plane thundered aloft with its forlorn and bewildered cargo, to the refugee camp that was set up about 80 miles away. It is said to have been a terrific morale boost when the abandoned baggage and belongings were airlifted to the people, once all of them had been carried to safety.

This occurred in March. The first airlift had been in January, and there was one more, by STOL aircraft while under fire, in April, 1970.





no movement of the figure hanging in that parachute harness. This was not good news.

At 8:40 Rescue was notified that Hotrod Lead had bailed out just 59 miles on the 062 degree radial from Channel 89 TACAN (NKP). That point is in extremely rugged karst mountain terrain that is so inaccessible that FACs seldom bothered checking it out. As seen on the map, it is somewhat Northwest of Mugia Pass, and well inside Laos. Jolly Green 52 and 55, HH-3 rescue helicopters, and Sandy Flight, A-1E rescue cover, were scrambled and enroute, and Misty One One and One Two were cleared to enter Laos to assist. Misty reported heavy but lifting fog in the rescue area at 9:00 AM.

Barnett showed Misty where Karl had entered the clouds, then headed for the nearest KC-135 tanker, as his fuel state became critical. From the tanker he returned to Korat, leaving the SAR in the hands of Misty and the rescue professionals who were headed for the scene.

Crown was a C-130 SAR control aircraft. Crown-1 reported negative voice contact with the ground at 9:03. At 9:10 Jolly 55 and Sandy Flight reported their ETAs at the scene as 24 and 40 minutes after the hour, respectively, and Splendid/Cheetah Flight reported to Crown they were in the area to help if needed. In the tradition of that "certain brotherhood," all available resources were converging to save this anonymous brother who had just gone down.

At 9:14 Jolly 55 told Crown he would hold on the scene until Sandy Flight arrived, and just then Plymouth Flight, Korat F-105s, reported they were in the area. Misty reported they were searching in the area.

Six minutes later, when they were just 4 minutes away from the bailout site, Sandy reported negative voice contact with the ground; they were hoping to hear Karl calling on his survival radio.

Meanwhile back at Korat there was considerable dismay and confusion. The switch of lead aircraft could not have helped. They weren't sure who had gone down, even though Barnett had given the tail number of Karl's aircraft to the command post. The wing commander, General Chairsell, had followed Karl's exploits for a year (his replacement took over just four days later), and had great expectations for Karl's Air Force career. When Barnett landed, Chairsell met him at his parking spot, needing to learn the facts as soon as possible, and hoping to hear something good. They proceeded to the general's office for a thorough debrief of the mission.

The rescue helicopters had an exceptionally long hover that day, mainly because of the gradually-breaking clouds, which formed fog at the landing site. At 9:29 Sandy Three assumed on-scene command of the SAR and commenced a search as the fog gradually lifted and Sandies One and Two held in the clear. Sandy Three was still attempting to contact Hotrod Two (Karl) on Guard channel, but there was no response. At 9:40 he reported having heard a beeper, or automatic survival beacon, chirping from a hill in the clouds briefly, but it had stopped.

At 9:55 Sandy Seven arrived and assumed on-scene com-

mand. Sandy Three reported the clouds were breaking up at last, and at 10:02 Sandy One got a glimpse of a parachute but suspected it was just a flare chute (these parachutes that made flares hang up high while they burned were all over the mountains from many months of nighttime operations over the Ho Chi Minh Trail). Then at 10:15 Sandies reported unfriendly forces (villagers) in the area and drove them back, probably by flying toward them. The location was still clouded over, but it was now starting to break up in earnest, so that by 10:29 the pararescue jumpers (PJs) on both helicopters reported orange and white parachute panel sighting, and ten minutes later Jolly 52 reported a positive chute sighting, hanging in a tree. This time it was Karl's parachute.

At 10:45 Charles Smith, the PJ on Jolly 55, went down the wire...Everyone waited anxiously to hear his report... In fact... Charlie found a very sad scene.

At 10:45 Charles Smith, the PJ on Jolly 55, went down the wire; it had been over two hours since Karl Richter had ejected from his violently maneuvering

Thud. Everyone waited anxiously to hear his report. Even Navy Rescue had a helicopter on station out over the water, in case they could help (the callsign was Clementine). The first report from the ground that was entered in the SAR log was that the PJ found the pilot alive and called for a basket. In fact, however, Charlie found a very sad scene. The pilot, Karl, lay flat on the ground near a "steeple shaped" karst (the extremely rugged limestone outcrops that give the mountains of Laos that appearance of classic Chinese landscape paintings). His helmet lay about ten feet away, and his parachute harness was still fastened, though the parachute was entangled in a tree. Charlie saw that Karl had sustained severe injury, and he recalls attempting to declare "code 5" (meaning the subject did not survive), and being overridden because he was a medical technician and not authorized to declare death. On the spot, Charlie Smith already knew in his heart that the ejection seat must have killed Karl.

With much difficulty Charlie wrestled Karl's inert body onto the litter, and at 11:03 Jolly 55 reported they were raising the basket. Since there were "unfriendlies" in the area, Charlie went up in the same basket. At 11:07 Karl Richter was back in American hands, but Jolly 55 reported they were "not too optimistic." They proceeded to Nakhon Phanom, where they reported the flight surgeon was checking Karl at 11:40. At quarter past noon on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1967, Karl Richter was pronounced dead on arrival at NKP.

Apparently Karl Richter's body was then transported to Korat. The squadron flight surgeon who participated in the forensic review of the cause of death is said to have told people around him that Karl had sustained high fractures of both femurs (thigh bones) during bailout and had suffocated on vomit in his mask (which is worn tightly fastened during ejection). He also is reported to have said there was non-fatal damage to Karl's scalp during his landing in the karst. It seems likely Karl's legs were violently broken during ejection, probably sending him into immediate shock. He was probably unconscious when he suffocated, and the subsequent violent landing, possibly hanging in the tree and then swinging hard against the karst, was enough to rip his helmet off and damage his head, then leave him flat

see RICHTER, next page

RICHTER, continued from page 9

on the ground, lifeless.

Why did Karl break his legs during ejection? What was he going through in the final moments in the cockpit, besides suffering loss of thrust and a raging engine fire? We will never know the answers to those questions. But his spirit and exuberant attitude will forever be a model for fighter pilots who must face the most fearsome opposition in order to do their job. Even though he died in an era when America refused to acknowledge there were heroes, Karl was soon recognized as a person the Air Force did not want to forget. A painting was commissioned for the Air Force Art Collection, and hangs prominently in the Pentagon. Later a 10-foot bronze statue of Karl was erected at the Air University, near Montgomery, Alabama, and at the Air Force Academy a dining room in the student center was named for him. Just last year the new high school in Holly, Michigan, where Karl was first encouraged to apply for appointment to the

Air Force Academy, was named for Karl Richter. A lost Brother of T-L-C gradually gets the recognition he deserves.

*The information for this article came from a number of sources, including personal recollections as recorded some years ago. I was most dependent for factual information on David McNeil, who found me through an internet search. David attended Fenton High School, about five miles from Holly. He and Karl took driver's ed together. He also remembers getting the amused Karl in a lucky tackle in football. After high school they went their separate ways and he learned only recently of Karl's exploits and fame. Now David is in touch with many people who were involved with Karl Richter, including his daughter, Karla. He knows of several books in preparation on this subject. —author.*



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## Fallen But Not Forgotten

*Those who were there will count themselves lucky!*

Our Banquet Speaker at the 2002 TLCB Reunion in Manassas, Virginia will be a Vietnam veteran who is the former Director of Casualty and Memorial Affairs for the U.S. Army, Colonel Ward B. Nickisch.

He will talk to us about America's search and recovery operations to bring home the remains of members of all services who remain unaccounted for from Southeast Asia, Korea and World War Two. Using color slides, he will show us actual recovery missions and explain some of the scientific processes used to identify the recovered remains and return them to the service member's family.

He will give us an update on recovery missions in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) and about a very significant World War Two recovery of Marines from the South Pacific.

Col. Nickisch says there are over 1,900 service members who remain unaccounted for from Southeast Asia, over 8,100 from the Korean War and over 78,000 from World War Two.

A native of South Dakota, Col. Nickisch spent 30 years in the Army, including a tour of duty in Vietnam 1970-71.

His last assignment as head of Casualty and Memorial Affairs involved his supervision of the U.S. Army's famous Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii. This laboratory conducts the search, recovery, identification and repatriation of service members whose bodies were never recovered from all prior wars.

He has taken part in recovery missions in Vietnam. He served as a senior member of the U.S. delegation to the first bilateral talks with North Korea that led to an agreement for the conduct of the first Joint Recovery Operations in North Korea in July 1996. Further negotiations produced agreement for three joint recovery operations in 1997 and five in 1998.

The colonel was directly involved in the planning and implementation of the events leading to the disinterment and identification of the remains of the Vietnam Unknown from Arlington National Cemetery in May 1998.

Col. Nickisch is active in veterans' affairs at the local, state and national level. He is Chairman of the honorary board of directors for the Vietnam Veterans National Memorial (Angel Fire, NM).

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## A Monument in Thailand

You will be hearing lots more about this soon. Last year the board considered a monument in Thailand, but dropped the idea because of concerns about maintenance and security. Then Nick Hoffman independently discussed the idea with the townspeople of Nakhon Phanom, and with his friend there, Nick Ascot, and Ed Miller later discussed it with the city officials as a representative of the board. The happy result was that your board of directors was formally invited by the governor of Nakhon Phanom Province to place a friendship monument in a new park in NKP city. The board of directors has agreed to design the monument, subject to approval by the governor's office, and to fund its construction by raising money for the purpose. The province has agreed to furnish 400 square meters of land (about 65x65 feet), and to maintain and protect the monument.

I have appointed a powerful committee to design and raise funds for the monument, and to consider the sensitive issues of purpose, wording, and meaning to those who go to see it. By mutual agreement, it will be erected in the memory of military members of Thailand and the USA who lost their lives during the Vietnam War. Watch for more details, photos, drawings, whatever, in future issues. Our plan is to dedicate the construction of this monument during the special "NKP Days" celebration October 1-4 in Nakhon Phanom, with B/Gen Heinie Aderholt representing the veterans from the United States. This will be right after the big ACA all-veterans bash in Bangkok.

# The Mysterious Flashes In a Deserted Village

by Chaphakhao Red, Kham P. Manivanh

It was a pleasant day at Louang Prabang, or L-54—only a few scattered lingering clouds. Our mission was to go to a target, then go to LS-25 (Ban Houai Sai), work out there, and the last mission was to be RTB (return to base) to L-54. We took off as a flight of two with S/Lt. Sourivanh as my wingman.

S/Lt. Thong One, the army guy, was my GIB (guy in back) to confirm the impending target, a village where the bad guys stored some supply of ammo and rations.

We arrived at the target an hour before noon. I looked at the coordinates and asked for confirmation from my GIB. He confirmed and cautioned us about small arms ground fire. I rocked my wings to signal my wingman for combat ready.

I rolled in hot with my 2x500 lbs aimed for both end of the village—less than 10 huts. My wingman rolled in 3 second later from a different angle to cover the other side and blocked all 4 corners. As usual I chandelled up and look over my shoulder to look at my score—the 2 bombs hit the house at both end as I intend to, but something flashy caught my eye as my wingman released and pulled up.

“Two! Watch out; I see something flashy down there!”

“Roger Two.”

“One in hot.” I rolled in and aimed my 2x250 lb bombs at the flashy area and told my GIB to look for tracers from ground fire. There again was that flashy mystery across one side to the other of the village but I saw no tracers at all.

“Two, did you see that flashy thing?”

“Negative; Two in hot.”

I watched #2 bombs blast and still saw that flashy thing across one side to the other of the village.

“One in hot. Two, watch over me; I’m going down to look at that flashy thing.”

I rolled in for my rockets pass, as I screamed down at 275 kts, firing single all my 14 rockets, flew close to trees tops, and passed over the village. Now I really saw that mystery flashy thing fly away from my rockets to the other side of the village—

it was a damned scary white chicken, so white and brilliant it reflected the sun while it flapped its wings, and looked

like muzzles flashed from a distance above.

“Two cleared in hot—disregard the flashy thing, only a GD scary white chicken!”

“Roger, two in hot.” Two rolled in laughing for his rocket pass.

“One in hot; last pass, gun.”

We strafed around the village perimeter and as I pulled out, heading to Ban Houai Sai, I looked back at my GIB and saw he was grinning and smiling about my curiosity.

All in all, we bombed the hell out of a deserted village and scared the crap out of a damned frightened white chicken.

The rest of the day’s mission was eventful with no surprises for me like that scary white chicken. At L-54 that evening everyone got a good laugh about the dueling between the damned chicken, and me. The chicken survived my bombing and strafing, anyway.



## A Quilt Worth Winning, For A Worthy Cause

A highlight of the TLCB reunion each year is the Quilt Raffle run by the TLC Sisterhood. The quilt is put together each year by Rosie Wheatley, a very talented seamstress who puts in hours of careful work to produce a work of art. This year’s quilt, still being worked on, will again reflect Rosie’s high standards and dedication to raising funds for the TLCB’s Assistance Program that helps children and families in Southeast Asia.

What will the quilt look like this year? Rosie uses a basic pattern and then works her special magic to produce a quilt everybody wants to win. Look for vines and yellow roses on the white picket fence. Yellow roses are the symbol of the Sisterhood. In the border you can look for the seal of your branch of military service. Each branch will have its own seal displayed. On top of the quilt will be the words that mean so much to TLCBers because they heard them so rarely when they returned from SEA: Welcome Home!

The TLC Sisterhood is again running the quilt raffle at the

2002 reunion.

After our banquet on Saturday evening, the drawing for the quilt will be held. If circumstances prevent you from attending the reunion this year, you can still win Rosie’s quilt. You do not have to be in the banquet hall to win. If you do win and are not there, we will email you or phone you to give you the good news.

You can buy a chance to win the quilt and help the children in SEA at the same time by getting your supply of raffle tickets.

Tickets are \$2 each or three for \$5. In this issue of the MEM you will find a sheet of raffle tickets. You can buy them all to increase your chances of winning or you can sell tickets to friends, relatives and neighbors. If you need more tickets, just photocopy the ticket sheet as often as you need to.

**Good luck!**



## Memorial Service Unique Site

Mayfield Fort is a little-known Confederate redoubt almost in the middle of a Manassas subdivision. There is a good chance the first major battle of the Civil War was preceded by the real "Battle of Bull Run" just a cannon-shot from this spot, at Blackburn's Ford, on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1861. On this hallowed ground the Brotherhood will assemble around a rustic flagpole, protected by "Quaker guns," on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2002, to remember our fallen brothers.

## ORDER YOUR REUNION 2002 GOLF SHIRT NOW

Our handsome light gray Reunion 2002 golf shirts are ready for orders.

Dusty Henthorn's striking and colorful reunion logo is beautifully embroidered on the left front. They are cut generously by our maker so you should consider ordering a size smaller than you normally would. For online members, you can see our shirt on the Reunion 2002 page of the TLCB website.

For small, medium, large and extra large shirts the price is \$25. For XXL the price is \$30. If you will pick them up at the reunion, please add 4.5 percent Virginia State tax. The price for shipping one or two shirts is \$5. Payment MUST be made at the time of ordering.

Place your orders at the Brotherhood Exchange by writing to:

Brotherhood BX  
8304 Liberia Avenue  
Manassas VA 20110-4653

Or you can email your order to: [res003ky@gte.net](mailto:res003ky@gte.net).

## Stand Tall at the Wall

## TLC Assistance Funds In Action April - May 2002

Here is a summary of the Assistance Committee's activities in Nakhon Phanom Province during this period.

Provided to the Nongkai Boy's Home:

- 22 steel lockers
  - water pump
  - 22 pairs of shirts/shorts and 6 volley balls
- (\$1162)

TLCB purchased a wheelchair for a very poor woman who lives in SriBunRueng (\$86)

Purchased school clothes for 120 students at the following schools:

- Ban Dong Moo, Ban Na Ratchakwai Noi, Ban Kham Non Kham and Ban Don Muang.

Purchased school clothes for 120 students at the following schools:

- Ban Koh Kong, Ban Don Ya Nang, Ban Nuen Sa At and Ban Sang Hin.

(This is a continuing program to provide school clothes for at least 30 students at each of the schools we are supporting. Further schools will be assisted during the second semester of school. The cost per student is \$2.50.)

Funded the upcoming attendance by the boys from Nongkai Boys' Home for the Independence Day picnic, held by

VFW Post 10249 at the Udorn city park. (\$210)

Purchased sleeping mats for pre-K and K students, educational materials for pre-K and K students, and notebooks and pencils for First grade through 6th grade students at Koh Kong Elementary School. (\$320)

(This school is located about 16 km west of Nakhon Phanom and almost directly across the highway from the base. It is approximately 5 km off the highway back in the jungle. It is an extremely poor village with about 135 students in Kindergarten through 6th grade. Thirty students are in pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten.)

Purchased sleeping mats for pre-K and K students, educational materials for pre-K and K students and notebooks and pencils for First grade through 6th grade students at Don Muang Elementary School. (\$320)

(This is a school, about 16 km west of Nakhon Phanom, and about 4 km back off the highway, just west of NKP runway. In fact, you can see the control tower from the village. It is a very poor school with about 130 students, 30 of which are pre-K and kindergarten.)

Thank you for your continued support of our Assistance Program.

*Warmest Regards To All—*

John Sweet

Assistance Committee Chairman