



# Mekong Express Mail

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THE THAILAND LAOS CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC.

www.TLC-Brotherhood.org

## Reviewing the Mayaguez Recovery

By Bob Blough

The short-lived but intense Mayaguez crisis of May, 1975 off Cambodia still stirs deep emotions about the fate of the Echo Company gun team, LCPL Joseph Hargrove, PFC Gary Hall and PFC Danny Marshall.

I was on FOL [forward operating location] rescue alert at Korat on 13 May 75 when I got a phone call to report to the TUOC [Tactical Units Operations Center] ASAP. When I got there, an NCO handed me a telephone headset which was connected to what looked like a mini-refrigerator with flashing lights on it. He gave me a quick brief on how to use the "secure telephone". On the other end of the line was an Air Force captain in the Pentagon who sounded like a cross between Donald Duck and Goofy. Goofy Duck asked me if I could land my helicopter on a ship. I said, "It depends: how big is the ship, does it have a landing pad, how big is the pad?" etc, etc, etc. I explained to him that the H-53 isn't your run-of-the-mill Huey. The rotor span is over 70 feet, it has wheels instead of skids, and grosses out at about 42,000 pounds. Most ships don't have landing pads big enough or strong enough to handle it. That's about all I knew about landing on ships. We'd never had any kind of training in shipboard operations.

Goofy refers me to a photograph handed to me by the TUOC NCO which shows not a navy ship, but a cargo ship with the deck full of what looked like truck trailers. Near the bow and the stern are big masts with rigging and cranes. Oh, boy. This could get interesting. The sharp Lieutenant (me) says: "OK, it looks like we could hover over the ship above the masts and use our rescue hoist to raise the sick seaman into the helicopter." He says: "You don't understand. What we want you to do is land a combat team on top the trailers to take over the ship." Hmm, says I; this could get interesting. "Okay, sir, we could come in from the side, 90-degrees to the ship, but we couldn't land because the wheels would probably punch through the

### Background to the Mayaguez Incident

by MEM

*At the end of April, 1975, the Saigon government fell and the remaining U.S. personnel were evacuated from Vietnam. President Ford declared that the Vietnam War was finished. In Cambodia the peculiar Communist radicals called Khmer Rouge had taken over and their gunboats had started to raid the shipping lanes near Cambodia. At 1400 hours on May 12<sup>th</sup> the container ship SS Mayaguez was stopped by a warning shot across her bow, about eight miles from Poulo Wai, an island about sixty miles from the coast of Cambodia. Around noon the next day she was anchored off Koh Tang Island, where Air Force and Navy aircraft kept her under constant surveillance (reportedly they were P-3s, F-4Es, F-111As, A-7Ds, and an AC-130H). The ship's crew was removed around 1900 hours.*

*By evening of the 14<sup>th</sup>, after diplomatic contacts had failed to obtain release of the crew, President Ford ordered military action, declaring the takeover an "act of piracy." The hasty plan was to move a Marine detachment from Subic Bay, in the Philippines, and have them board the ship, accompanied by civilian volunteers from USNS Greenville Victory who would know how to operate the Mayaguez. The attack team gathered at U'Tapao while three Cambodian gunboats were sunk by airstrike.*

*The three Jolly Greens (Air Force HH-53 Sea Stallions) that carried the team from U'Tapao to the USS Harold E. Holt were too large for the frigate's helicopter pad. They left UT around 0300 on the 15<sup>th</sup>. When they got to the Holt, one Jolly sent its team down rope ladders and the other two touched rear wheels down lightly so the team could exit via the cargo ramp.*



thin aluminum on the top of the trailers. We could do a low hover and have the assault team jump from the aft ramp of the helicopter onto the trailers, but there would be room for only one helicopter at a time. Do you expect any resistance from the people on the ship?" "Yes," he says, "but only light automatic weapons fire." Hmm, even more interesting. The helicopter's a sitting duck in a low hover while the assault team jumps out, with *only* light automatic weapons fire directed at the helo from

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close range, probably coming down at us from the high bridge of the ship. "Sir, I think you should be talking to my commander at NKP. He needs to hear about this wonderful plan."

At this moment, one of my PJ's runs into the TUOC and tells me we've been scrambled. A Knife (21st SOS CH-53) just crashed west of NKP. It turned out to be Jimmy Kays, a good friend of mine from the Academy, with a full load of Security Police from NKP [all 23 persons aboard perished in this famous accident]. An inauspicious beginning to the Mayaguez recovery operation.

*[Bob leaves off at this point and skips ahead to the evacuation and the controversy that persists. MEM hopes he will fill in the blanks in a future issue.]*

I came aboard the frigate USS Holt as Jolly Green 44, and added 25 tuckered-out 2/9 Marines to Holt's crew complement. It was dark as the inside of a coal mine that night in the Gulf of Siam. It took us two or three wave-offs before Holt's LSO (landing systems officer) finally coaxed us aboard her tiny helo pad, warning us not to put the full weight of the helo on the pad.

Holt's John Hamrin has told me my rotor blades were "fifteen freaking inches" from the hanger bay. It was so dark I couldn't see that, and just trusted the LSO and my crew to put the soft rubber parts on the deck while keeping the hard spinnny things from scraping Holt's paint job. I sure would like to meet that LSO some day and shake his hand. He had uncommon nerve—I had seen what flying rotor blade shrapnel could do to a marshaller standing in front of a helo. I thank all the crew of the Holt that night, for being there. Their skill, courage and professionalism made it possible for us to get back to Koh



Marines onto Koh Tang.

Eventually, we were able to get the command elements ashore with enough Marines to widen their perimeter. The Echo Company commander, however, injured his knee jumping off the helicopter, limiting his mobility and his effectiveness. He was eventually evacuated with the wounded, leaving Golf Company commander, CPT Jim Davis, in command of both intermixed companies.

The extraction phase that night was touch-and-go, with the Khmer Rouge keeping constant pressure on the Marines' shrinking perimeter, within grenade-throwing range. We were down to three helos in the middle of the ocean to extract the last 150 or so Marines after dark, and room to land only one helo at a time on the beach. Captain Davis and Golf Company Gunnery Sergeant Lester McNemar were the last Marines to board the last chopper. AF TSgt Wayne Fisk made a final sweep of the beach alone in the dark to check for wounded and stragglers before the last helo left. That last helo, piloted by 1Lt Dick Brims (AF Cross), sat exposed on the beach for nearly ten minutes without the benefit of

Tang quickly for another load of Marines. And we knew that the crew of "Downunder" would be there for us if we wound up in the drink.

My helo and one other Jolly Green were the last to leave Koh Tang the night of 15 May 1975. We orbited just off the island for what seemed an eternity while Command tried to determine if we had extracted all the Marines left alive. This was not an easy task, because Marines were scattered all over—some in Thailand, some on the USS Holt, some on the USS Wilson, and some on the USS Coral Sea.

From the beginning of the operation, the chain of command was jumbled, with small groups of Echo Company mixed in with small groups of Golf Company. For the first couple hours, the most senior officers on the island were a couple "green" lieutenants who did a hell of a job just keeping their tiny, separated forces from being overrun. Helicopters with senior officers, NCOs and radiomen were being shot down or shot up so badly they were barely able to limp to safety without off-loading their

Marine covering fire, waiting for any stragglers. Ten minutes in that situation is like a life time, and they were truly fortunate that it took the Khmer that long to realize that the Marines had abandoned their positions. During that time, no one saw or heard any outgoing fire from Marine positions.

At the Jolly Green Association reunion in 2001, Joe Guilmarin, a two-tour Vietnam Vet and noted historian, hosted a seminar in an attempt to find some answers about the fate of the gun team. The seminar was attended by many of the key Marine officers and NCOs involved in the Mayaguez recovery, including Davis, McNemar, and several Echo Company NCOs. Joseph Hargrove's wife Gail was also there, praying for answers. Each Marine in turn stood up and described what he remembered of the gun team. Each of those Marines, especially the officers and NCOs, exposed himself to the judgment and potential ridicule of other Marines and the grieving widow, searching for answers. After nearly four hours of emotionally charged debate,

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we were left frustrated, without the answers so many needed.

I sat with those Marines for several hours after the seminar, rehashing what had just occurred. They were emotionally drained and frustrated at not being able to finally determine the fate of the missing gun team. I could only imagine the turmoil and self-doubt they had endured for 26 years—Marines don't leave brother Marines behind. But when Davis and McNemar both stated flatly that if there had been any doubt in their minds 26 years ago, they would have stayed and died if necessary to get the gun team out, the look in their eyes left absolutely no doubt in my mind that they would have done so.

I would like to caution you that the *theory* that the gun team was left behind alive is just that—a theory. Ralph Wetterhahn, in his book *The Last Battle*, supports this theory with a lot of research, including interviews with a former Khmer Rouge officer who claims that the gun crew was captured and executed on Koh Tang. But other interviews claimed the gun crew was captured and sent to the mainland. The JTFFA [Joint Task Force/Full Accounting], following up on both claims, excavated sites on both Koh Tang and the mainland where the Khmer claimed the gun teams' bodies were buried, but they could find no human remains.

Joe Guilmartin also did exhaustive research and interviews for his book *A Very Short War...* Guilmartin is convinced that the gun crew was killed before the last helo departed Koh Tang. He also questions the motives of Khmer witnesses Wetterhahn cites in his book.

As for me, I fear that we'll never learn the truth about the fate of Joseph Hargrove, Gary Hall and Danny Marshall. The best I can do is honor their sacrifice and celebrate their courage in defending their brother Marines and AF helo crews—and pray for their sacred souls.

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*In the confusion of many boats moving about, the crew of the Mayaguez was believed to be on Koh Tang island. In fact they were being released at about this time from nearby Kach Island in a previously-captured Thai boat, along with the Thai crew, after a brief stay at the Cambodian port of Kompong Som. By noon all 39 Mayaguez crewmen were back aboard their ship, and the civilian volunteers were returned to Sattahip at 1930 hours. But at 0600 that morning the Marine attack on Koh Tang island had proceeded, unaware of the crew's location and imminent release. (To this day it is not known why the Khmer Rouge suddenly released the Mayaguez crew.)*

*The Marine assault force was strongly resisted as they arrived at two Koh Tang beaches. The HH-53s were riddled by heavy fire that erupted only after they approached very near the chosen LZs, and by 0730 just over half the force of 180 Marines had been landed.*

*A second wave went in at 1130, just before word of the Mayaguez's crew release was received. Only four Jolly Greens were usable when the assault suddenly was converted into an evacuation, on hearing the news. Khmer troops were converging on the tiny assault force, but fighter bombing attacks were holding them back. There were only three Jollies operating when the final pickups were made.*

*As the last Jolly Greens left, around 2000 hours, the hasty headcount Bob Blough refers to did conclude that three Marines were missing. According to most accounts, one of these was killed while foraging for food in the Khmer Rouge camp and the other two were captured and killed a few days later. Supposedly all three were buried on Koh Tang Island. As Bob explains, we don't know.*



## Khon Kaen Revisited in 2003

By Joe Wilson

*Joe was a truck driver in the 569<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company, stationed at Camp Khon Kaen in the 1968 to 1970 period. He is also the original webmaster and website designer for the Brotherhood. See Joe's previous article, "Army Transporters in Thailand," in the September, 2000 issue of MEM. He maintains a personal website devoted to Army supply trucking in Thailand. In this issue he tells of a return trip he and his wife, Motrian, made earlier this year.*

As our plane touched down at Don Moung International Airport in Bangkok my mind began racing back to the first time I made this trip in February 1968. The first thing I noticed was the absence of US military aircraft on the military side.

What made this trip memorable most definitely was the people. Whether they are shy, friendly or openly hostile, it is the people that make up the mood and attitude of any country. Thailand would not be the attraction it is, were it not for the people, smiling, laughing, and crying. It is the people of Thailand that made this trip worthwhile.

After clearing immigration and customs, we drove north through Korat to Khon Kaen. As we traveled along the main road (Highway 2) I noticed that it was, for the most part, a four-lane divided highway and stretched all the way from Bangkok to the northern town of Nong Khai, then crossed the river into

Laos and the city of Vientiane. I could not help but think back to my first trip north. Then, Highway 2 was a two-lane road with lots of potholes, and road construction was a continuing thing. We traveled then in a military bus to Camp Friendship. Those who were going to Camp Khon went in a military 2½-ton truck.

I watched the cars, trucks and buses, many of which looked the same as before. Occasionally, we were passed by Toyota 4-Runners, Mercedes Benzes, and BMWs whose drivers seemed to pay no attention to the 100 km speed limit.

The baht buses could have been (and probably were) the same ones on the road back in the 60s and 70s. As we went further north, we saw those long-handled 2-wheeled tractors (Kubota) that had the farm wagon attached. It looked like the entire family rode along, at possibly 2 kph.

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**Khon Kaen**, continued from page 3

Our drive north, with a slight detour at Korat to drop off one passenger, took us all afternoon, and well into the evening. It was after dark when we reached the house we built in 1995, in the village of Bon Srithon. It has one air conditioned bedroom (for our yearly visits). Our new brick and stucco house stands on the site of my in-laws old wooden house, which had been torn down in early 1991 or 1992. Though it was only about 8:00 pm, there was nothing else to do but prepare to bed down for the night. I thought about 1968 and '69, riding the baht bus to Sambliem (the main intersection in Khon Kaen), then walking along Highway 2, turning up a dirt road, walking past the wat and into the village of Bon Srithon. I'd go thru the wat, down another dirt road, on to a footpath and into my girl friend's house.

Today, the dirt road is paved, and has one of Khon Kaen's three hospitals standing to the right as you head toward the wat, which has grown and has a newer, much larger temple next to the old one. One has a choice of going around the village, or going either direction around the wat grounds to reach the houses of the village. Most of the streets in Bon Srithon are paved (except the road in front of my sister-in-law's place).

Back then Khon Kaen was a typical farming community, with a rather small downtown area. There were a few hotels, with the Kosa Hotel being the largest. There were several bars and clubs, and many GIs frequented the Silver Star bar. Also there were two cinemas, one near the Kosa, and another near the market area. Both locations ran foreign as well as Thai movies.

Today Khon Kaen is a large metropolitan center, and some say it is larger than Korat. It is the transportation hub of Northeastern Thailand, boasting three bus terminals and a train station. Khon Kaen has several hotels, with the Sofitel Hotel next door, and overshadowing the Kosa Hotel. The old Silver Star bar is still standing, but I think no longer in business.

The main modes of transportation back in 68 and 69 were bicycles, sam-lars (bicycle-taxis), motorcycles, taxis, and buses. Very few Thai people owned cars back then; mostly they owned water-buffalos. Today there are still lots of bicycles, sam-lars, motorcycles, and taxis. There are tuk-tuks (3-wheeled Cushman style taxis), and lots of cars and pickups.

Today in Khon Kaen there are modern shopping centers, where stores have 3 or 4 floors. There are K-Mart and Wal-Mart style centers as well called Lotus and Big C that are 2 levels, with food courts, travel agencies, even 21 flavor ice cream and Dunkin Donuts or Dairy Queen and KFC. (I was told by expatriate Forest Williams a few years ago, not to use the catsup dispenser at the table, as it is rarely emptied and cleaned, but

simply refilled. This can cause untold germs to linger, grow and mature inside the catsup dispenser.)

One can drive or walk down the streets of modern day Khon Kaen and find places to go online, for those of us who must check our email daily. This trip I brought my laptop along thinking I would use it to watch movies in the airports, while waiting time to change planes, or write letters while flying (I did both).

As many people now have telephones in their homes and businesses, I found that Thailand even has something I never

saw in the states: companies that sell "phone style" cards for internet access. One such company is CS Internet, with a card that I purchased giving me 10 hours of internet access for 140 baht (\$3.50). They have local access numbers all over Thailand. CS Internet is only one of many different cards and different plans available; some offer unlimited access for 30 days for around 500 baht (\$12).

I used to walk around the open air markets, looking at the goods being sold (fruits, vegetables, meats,

eggs, clothing, costume jewelry, food and more) and today it is still the same as it was back then and I still enjoy walking thru the market.

One day I decided to rent a car for 24 hours. I drove to Nong Khai for lunch and a little shopping in the market place overlooking the Mekong River and Vientiane, Laos. Then I decided to drive along the Mekong and see if I could drive to Nakhon Phanom by following the main roads. The evening prior, Northeastern Thailand was hit by hurricane force winds and evidence of this was ample as we headed east and south. Trees were blown down, and there were branches across roads, fences and sometimes on homes. The countryside was really nice, with corn fields, fruit trees and more.

I found it hard to believe that just 30 years prior I'd have been gravely at risk on such a journey. That thought became more pronounced as we traveled along the river, and I looked over into Laos and saw the karsts and thought of Harley's Valley and the stories from the TLC brothers who flew those routes back then.

When we reached Nakhon Phanom, we went around the Ho Chi Minh clock tower, and stopped next to the river, at 6:00 pm. Then we drove past the park where the TLC brotherhood and the townspeople of NKP erected a sign at the site of a future memorial to our lost brothers, and headed south toward Mukdahan, still following the Mekong River.

When we reached Mukdahan it was 7:30 pm and I thought of my neighbor Jim Harrod and my friend Reed Wilson in Denver, who were both stationed there. It was really dark by this time, so I could not see what was around us. I decided to break away from the Mekong River and head overland to Khon Kaen.

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Another thing I learned was to pay attention to the signs. We passed a sign that said the road will end in 2 km. I thought to myself, "that's a stupid sign to put up on a main road; it is not really going to end." A moment later we passed someone in a reflective vest standing off to the side of the road. Next the road became littered with cow dung and water buffalo droppings, *lots of it*. I came to an abrupt stop at the edge of the road, which had suddenly turned into a cow pasture. Puzzled, I turned around and found the guy in the reflective vest to ask: "what happened

to the road to Khon Kaen?" He said to go back two kilometers and turn right, and follow the road. We did, and the road did take us to Khon Kaen, but it was under construction most of the way. We pulled into town around 11:00 pm.

All in all I found that the Thai people were extremely friendly, especially the further north we went. I urge you if you have not been back, do so, but make plans to go with someone who knows the area and can take you to places off the beaten path. Just remember to "read the signs."



## President's Notes

*TLCB Changes and Assistance "Excessive Success"*

Last summer our History Committee chairman, Ed Ulrich, asked to be relieved of the job owing to failing health. Gerry Frazier was already our Monument Committee chairman, but he agreed to keep History alive for the time being. I am pleased to announce that Mike Cosenza recently agreed to appointment to that chairmanship.

Meanwhile our original Brotherhood BX Shopkeeper, Jim Bartholomew has finally made his move to Arizona. Rather than lug all that merchandise out to the desert, Bart found a new neighbor right in Manassas to take on the job: Jim Roth. You might note that only the street has changed. Our deep thanks to Bart for all that hard work, and welcome to Jim.

As this issue was going to press our Communications Committee chairman, Dave MacDonald, announced that Mike "Doc" Souza had agreed to accept the webmaster task from Bob Norway's broad shoulders. We have to thank Bob—he took on the job "temporarily" as a favor, back in 2001, when we suddenly found ourselves with no one to keep our website.

Doc is a web designer and lives in Massachusetts. In '73 and '74 he served at the Coast Guard LORAN station at Lampang, Thailand and was a hospital corpsman.

It appears The Brotherhood has been *too successful* in our Assistance work in Thailand! We are getting a reputation for our good works helping the kids and others (see page 12) and now they tell us that new requests for help are popping up all over the Northeast. Unfortunately our resources are limited. Mostly we rely on what you and I contribute toward this work, and our programs depend on a steady flow of funds. We know that many members are just able to support themselves and could not responsibly donate to Assistance. But most members can and do donate when they perceive there is a need that is worthwhile. That's why each issue has photos and stories of how our Assistance resources are put to work. If you can, please consider a regular monthly or quarterly donation to Assistance. The mailing address is in the *Page 5 Box*, below.

By the time the September MEM comes out many of us will be preparing to head for Fort Walton Beach. On the next page Ed Miller, 2003 Reunion Chairman, provides every kind of practical information. I hope to see all my old acquaintances and to meet many of our newer members.

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# All You Want To Know About TLCB Reunion 2003

By Ed Miller, Local Reunion Chairman

It is time to get those calendars out and start making your plans to visit the Emerald Coast for this year's TLC Brotherhood Reunion. The world situation and war in Iraq has calmed down and our country's economy has perked up. It is a great time to take advantage of many discounts offered by our airlines. Even the price of gas has started downward, as the beginning of summer has arrived.

The reunion will be at the Radisson Beach Resort, on Okaloosa Island (Fort Walton Beach), starting October 2nd continuing thru October 5th 2003. We encourage you to add additional days before or after our reunion dates to enjoy this area. Remember the Air Commando Association's reunion will follow our reunion the very next weekend period. The Radisson Beach resort is located right on the Gulf of Mexico and its white sandy beaches. The resort is under new management and some renovations have been accomplished. You can expect "First Class" accommodations and service normally associated with the Radisson hotel chain. Go to <http://www.radisson.com/ftwaltonfl> to view and get info about the facility. You should call the Radisson at toll free: (800) 333-3333 or call directly (850) 243-9181, for making your reservations—and make sure you refer to the TLC Brotherhood Reunion.

Check in: 4:00 pm. Check out: 1100 am. A credit card is required to hold rooms later than 6 pm on day of arrival. There is a 10% occupancy tax. Standard room rate is \$75; Poolside \$85; Gulf Front or Gulf View Suites \$95. All rates are valid for occupancy by up to four persons in each room.

You can also do most everything from our web page: <http://www.tlc-brotherhood.org/reunion2003.htm>. Most all your questions can be answered on the web page but feel free to contact me at [thankp69@cox.net](mailto:thankp69@cox.net) or my cell phone (850) 582-2452, or any one of the committee members (watch for their email signature elements identifying them).

We are planning to provide you tours of Eglin AFB, Armament Museum, and Hurlburt Air Base and you say, "so what, been there, done that and seen that!" Congress has identified the McKinley Climatic Laboratory for possible closure, so it might be your last opportunity to see this amazing facility. And Hurlburt Field has grown into an Air Base and the home of the 16th Special Operations Wing with other support Special Operations units and training facilities. It is not only a focal point for many of us in the past but the center point for many current contingencies around the world.

Our gala Saturday night banquet dinner will start at 1900 hours right at the Radisson Beach resort. We are currently staffing this event to bring a guest speaker or speakers for your entertainment and historical interest. Our primary memorial service will be October 5th, and tentatively planned at 1100 at the Armament Museum location. Also, we are planning a shorter type memorial on Saturday afternoon on Hurlburt Air Base at the Memorial Air Park. This is becoming a traditional event at our TLCB reunions: "Reading of the Deceased/MIA



Names from the TLC." John Sweet and Jimmie Butler have inspired this event starting at the DC 1999 Reunion and Jimmie maintains the data.

Other new items at this year's reunion will be: An additional room to our hospitality area, the Electronic Media Hooch, where you will be able to watch TLC programs on VHS, check your email or use a computer, and use Video Cam from the reunion (more on this in the next Reunion article). For some wild fun we hope to have a "Paintball Shoot-out" with the winner getting a special trophy. You will register for this event at check-in and additional costs will be required. All profits will go to our Assistance Fund and it to be held at Hurlburt Air Base on Saturday afternoon.

For those that just want to take it easy and enjoy the beach and pool, or socialize, we will have our Hooch Bar stocked for your enjoyment but remember drinks from our Hooch Bar must be consumed in our hospitality area and are priced as suggested donations.

Finally, don't forget to order your memorabilia T-shirt or golf shirt. Complete information is on the registration form or reunion web page. This year's reunion T-shirt is really going to look sharp. It is *black*, with our colorful large reunion logo on the back, and over the front pocket will be the POW/MIA logo, all for only \$15. This shirt was specially requested and at the time of our selection, the war with Iraq was expected to begin and we felt it was a time to show mourning for not only our past and present POW/MIAs but also our expected losses.

Please complete the enclosed Registration Form and mail with your check or money order: TLCB Reunion 2003 (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 2003." Remember, it is your attendance that will allow us to provide you a great Reunion.

# When Aussie F-86 Sabres flew at Ubon RTAFB

by Mal Barnes

Because of the uneasy tension and spill over threat to Thailand from the communist actions in Laos during the late 1950s, early 1960s, Thailand was worried about its security. Under the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) the United States and other SEATO members looked at ways to assure Thailand that their territory would be protected in the event of any communist actions. The Australian government viewed several 'airfields' in Northeast Thailand that could be used to support a 'deterrent force'. Initially Korat was chosen, but later this was switched to Ubon.

In May 1962 President John Kennedy sent 5,000 Marines to Thailand. New Zealand provided a small force and Australia provided a Squadron of F-86 Sabre aircraft. On May 31, 1962, (the same day as the Australian Army Training Team left for South Vietnam) Sabres from Nos. 3 & 77 Sqns based at Butterworth in Malaya flew to Bangkok and reformed as No. 79 Sqn then flew to Ubon. (They nearly didn't make it as the lead aircraft lost radio contact and a severe storm blocked out the way.) In

ing of Southern Laos, did not require any allied help, but this could lead to phase two, a more involved operation requiring allied support. Thus "Rolling Thunder" began!

In early 1965 the Australian Government agreed to the USAF idea of using the F-86 Sabres at Ubon in the air defense system. At meetings held in early 1965 General Moore, Comdr. 2<sup>nd</sup> Air Division USAF, outlined the use of RAAF Sabres on 'Alert 5' as a daily CAP at Ubon for the protection of USAF Assets located at Ubon. The Rules of Engagement were altered to mirror the USAF rules—the Sabres were to fly armed, and permission to destroy hostile aircraft was given. The first eight F-4 Phantoms (later to increase remarkably) arrived at Ubon on 7 April 1965 and began ops straight away. After the usual 'SNAFU' hold ups, the Alert 5 got officially under way on 25 June 1965 with 2 Sabres on alert 'dawn to dusk' at the ORP area near the control tower. The secret war had come to Ubon!

As the USAF effort increased and USAF equipment and personnel grew at Ubon, so did Ubon. The runway was lengthened, brick buildings sprang up on the other side of the strip, and more aircraft of various identities arrived. By 1966 the RAAF had about 200 personnel at Ubon on one side of the strip, whilst the USAF had about 2,000 personnel on the other side. Now we started to see Aussie and Yank ingenuity come to the forefront. The Clubs downtown competed for custom, with Yanks being paid once a month and Aussies being paid fortnightly. Also in 1966, the RAAF provided Airfield Defence Guards (ADGs) to patrol 'outside' the perimeter fence, something the USAF



1963 the Australian government considered withdrawal of the Squadron at Ubon, but was persuaded by the United States to remain 'as long as the US were to remain'.

At that stage Ubon RTAF base consisted of a small runway, an RTAF Sqn of T-28's and US 'Lion' Radar unit. Living conditions for the Aussies consisted of a Tent City, red mud, buffaloes, rain, and heat! In the event that 'no action' ruled, the Squadron returned to training exercises with the RTAF and US radar, flying along the border to show the flag. Later in 1964 work started on building a more permanent tin hut city to house the RAAF personnel. Life was good for young airmen, forgotten and left alone in a town of Thai beauties, Mekong whiskey, and Singha beer. What more could a young single man want?

As the war in Vietnam started to deteriorate (the Gulf of Tonkin incident, etc.), the US examined increased options. During 1964 an air defense system for Thailand was set up as the USAF was looking towards the use of Thailand in the war effort. Several meetings were held late in 1964 as plans for escalation began to unfold. Ambassadors were informed of US thinking and late in 1964 President Johnson asked for allies' help. The two-stage escalation plans were revealed. Phase one, the bomb-

Aussie Base - Ubon 1968



see Aussies, continued next page

Lee Aaron Adams\*Richard Kenneth Allee\*David Jay Allinson\*Glendon Lee Ammon\*Donald Henry Asire\*Joseph Clair Austin\*John Edward Bailey\*Ralph Carol Balcom\*William J. Barthelmas\*Seymour R. Bass\*Burriss Nelson Begley\*Frank Everett Bennett\*William George Bennett\*Eugene Paul Beresik\*Larry William Biediger\*John Williams Bisschoff\*Gordon Byron Blackwood\*Christos C. Bogiages\*Michael J. Bosiljevac\*Joseph Edward Bower\*Dwight Pollard Bowles\*Joseph William Brand\*Robert Edwin Brinckmann\*Aquilla Friend Britt\*Charles Richard Brownlee

Aussies, continued from page 7

was not allowed to do. In doing so, the RAAF ADGs kept the Thai Cong/ VC away. RAAF Firecrews attended all aircraft accidents and mishaps.

In 1966 the OC of the 8<sup>th</sup> TFW “The Wolf Pack”(Robin Olds) implemented a plan to use RAAF Sabres in ‘training dog fights’ as USAF F-4s returned from bombing missions. The Sabre was not unlike the MiGs encountered in Vietnam, so this training proved most helpful to young USAF ‘green’ pilots. All in all, life and war went on 24 hours a day, day after day at Ubon. Yellow, Orange and Red alerts became more common. The USAF increased its presence, the RAAF remained on ‘Alert 5’, the ADGs patrolled out to about 20 kilometers away, securing any suspect village activity. During 1967 and 1968 the war continued to grow to new heights. More effort was required.

By 1968 Ubon RTAF Base had grown to 230 Aussies and about 3,500 Yanks, 70-plus Phantoms, C-130 Spectres, O-2s, Jollys, etc. and a Thai Sqn of T-28s. The noise got louder, our movies (held in our outdoor theater next to the strip) were interrupted by Phantoms taking off (ever tried to watch and listen to a movie with F-4 afterburners running through the screen). Didn’t you Yanks ever sleep? As the NVAF

and CHICOM had no night flying capable aircraft, the RAAF Sabres were seen as sufficient at Ubon. If needed, USAF aircraft at Udorn could be utilized for night alerts. The threat to Ubon was then seen as coming from insurgents. Shots were fired at landing aircraft in the Ubon circuit, unidentified helicopters were becoming more frequent, and the RAAF F-86s were being scrambled more and more. The ADGs were used to patrol out to suspect helicopter landings north of the Ubon field.

We had our fun too. Who can remember the Corsair, the Mustang and all the other clubs that sprang up in Ubon, where “drinking games” were held? Games of various types in the O Club, Messes etc., the friendly volleyball games on the flight line, the soccer games next to the strip, and the Aussie stealing of the 8<sup>th</sup> TFW mascot “Snoopy - on a drop tank” located inside the USAF base area. That led (after our request for payment

‘in beer’ to return “Snoopy” was refused) to the ‘zapping’ of Red Kangaroos on to everything that moved on your side of the base—cars, buses, aircraft and even high up on storage tanks. Memories will continue to unfold of the Aussie time at Ubon, serving alongside the Yanks.

Our government decided to withdraw us from Ubon in August 1968 (much to my personal disgust). They used the reason that we were “of not much military help” to you. But the defensive shield provided by the RAAF was broken and Ubon was attacked by sappers on three occasions over the next few years. The role of the RAAF at Ubon was indeed needed and necessary.

I personally enjoyed my time at Ubon from January to August 1968 and have great pride in our part of the War in Southeast Asia. The war has been over since 1975, but we “down under” are still fighting our government for the “correct” recognition of our support role all those years ago. Our government still insists that we were only in Thailand for the “air defence of Thailand” and we had nothing to do with the Vietnam War. We had some success, unfortunately, but truthfully, our Ubon service has been split into two periods 1962 to 24 June 1965 (seen as non-warlike service; awarded only the Australian Service Medal) and from 25 June 1965 to



31 August 1968 when the Rules of Engagement changed and Alert 5 was our supportive role (warlike service; awarded the Australian Active Service Medal, but no Vietnam War medal).

Strange, but I guess like all TLC brothers, if you did not serve “in country,” your government thinks you simply weren’t there! Even stranger, in the Australian medal system there exists a medal called “The Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal.” Support? Hmm.

We now have irrefutable evidence, we have always had the truth, and we will prevail! One Day!

*Mal Barnes, once of the Royal Australian Air Force, is a TLC Brotherhood member. He is an accountant and lives in Mt. Warren Park, Queensland, Australia.*





# The Day Karl Richter shot down a MiG-17

Karl Richter has become famous as the 421<sup>st</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron (TFS) F-105 pilot who volunteered for a second 100 missions to North Vietnam in 1966 and was shot down and fatally injured as he ended his combat assignment, on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1967. Among his many exploits in those dangerous 200 missions, was the time Karl got his MiG, which was not so common for F-105 pilots, whose main mission was to bomb targets.

The story has been published (*Air and Space*, November, 2000); MEM has received some additional material from a pilot who was on Karl's wing that day, Ralph Beardsley, and from Karl's high school friend, Dave McNeil. For a report on how Karl died, and more about how he lived, see the June, 2002, MEM, page 3, "What Really Happened to Karl Richter?"

Ford Flight was part of a morning "Iron Hand" strike package scheduled to launch from Korat RTAFB on September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1966, and targeted against the bridge known as "JCS 16," a railroad and highway bridge at Dap Cau, about 20 miles Northeast of Hanoi. The force was comprised of forty eight aircraft: forty F-105s and eight F-4Cs.

Ford Flight was assigned to protect the strike force by suppressing surface to air anti-aircraft missiles (SAMs), and was to be led by a two-seat "Wild Weasel," an F-105F flown by Captain Bobby Martin, with Captain Norbert Maier as the Electronic Warfare Officer. Their job was to confuse and destroy radar-controlled anti-aircraft weapons. Martin and Maier were from the 13<sup>th</sup> TFS. The other three Thuds were from the 421<sup>st</sup> TFS. Major Ken Whittmore was in Ford 2. Leading the second element as Ford 3 was 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Karl Richter, with Ford 4, 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant Ed Rasimus on his wing. In the spare F-105 was Captain Ralph Beardsley. Before takeoff Rasimus had to abort and Beardsley became Ford 4.

The strike force proceeded out over the Gulf of Tonkin, where Ford Flight hit a tanker and topped off their fuel. From the tanker they ingressed into North Vietnam from over Pork Chop Island (see map). Then they proceeded toward the target area spread apart, with Karl's element hanging back so they would be in ideal position to pop up and attack missiles located around the radar van when the lead element engaged a SAM site by firing at the radar van.

Near Kep Air Base, lead picked up radar signals from an active SAM missile site about six miles from the base and launched a SHRIKE anti-radiation missile from a distance of just eight miles. After the strike, the flight then headed back toward the Gulf. As they did, Beardsley (Ford 4) sighted a pair of MiG-17 fighters that were approaching the lead element from the rear at a very high rate of speed, flying at about 4000 feet. The MiGs were rapidly closing in on the lead element from the six o'clock position, but were apparently unaware of Karl and Beardsley's presence. Beardsley



immediately advised Ford Lead to "Go to afterburner, go into an easy right turn, and depart the area."

Meanwhile Karl called for the element to jettison external rocket pods to reduce drag, while he began maneuvering into firing position behind the lead MiG. As soon as he had the MiG within his gun's kill area Karl fired a burst of 20mm shells from the F-105s deadly internal "Vulcan" multiple-barrel machine gun. This burst knocked off a part of the MiG's left wing, whereupon the pilot ejected and was noted to have a good parachute.

Meanwhile, Beardsley expected the second MiG to break off when Karl attacked his lead, so he delayed jettisoning the rocket pods. As he thought, the second MiG did break, and Beardsley followed him briefly, then salvoed the entire load of sixty eight 2.75-inch unguided rockets in his direction. The MiG broke off his attack, whereupon Ralph immediately rejoined on Karl's wing. This maneuver apparently chased the second MiG away long enough for the entire Ford flight to depart the area, Karl slipping back to Ralph's wing because he was nearly "Winchester" (out of gun ammunition).

The MiG pilot Karl shot down that day was Do Huy Hoang. His wingman was Nguyen Van Bay. Both survived the war and Hoang was the subject of an extensive periodical article in Vietnam just a few years ago. For this action, Karl was later awarded the Air Force Distinguished Flying Cross.



# Get your TLC Sisterhood Quilt Raffle tickets

With summer on the immediate horizon, it is time to start thinking seriously about the upcoming 2003 TLCB reunion. For each of the past three years, the TLC Sisterhood's raffle quilt has been one of the highlights of the reunions. To date, the Sisterhood's beautiful memorial quilts have raised \$4,134.00 for the Assistance Fund to further the aid to needy children in memory of those who did not return home.

As was the case for the first Sisterhood quilt, which was raffled at the 2000 Colorado Springs reunion, the 2003 raffle quilt will be a "memory quilt," as shown in the photos at right. The highly popular 2000 quilt was a huge success, raising over \$1,500. The banquet keynote speaker, General Robin Olds himself, signed the 2000 quilt personally. The Sisterhood anticipates this year's quilt will be as big a success as the first—maybe even bigger!

So what exactly is a *memory quilt*? In a memory quilt, each block allows space for signatures, verses, dedications, unit patches, photographs, and other "memories"—anything you want that is in keeping with the spirit of the quilt. Images of patches and photos provided by the purchaser of a block can be printed directly on the fabric. Actual unit patches, to be supplied by the block purchaser, will be sewn on the block. Signatures may be applied at the reunion, prior to the raffle, or for those not attending, an image of a signature can be printed on the fabric. The end result is a one-of-a-kind collection of memories that holds special meaning for all of us in the TLCB and TLCS.

The color scheme of this year's quilt will be Red, White and Blue. A TLCB patch will command the center of the quilt, with memory blocks spreading outward from it. Memory blocks may be purchased for \$5.00 per block. Purchase as many blocks as you like. Tickets for the raffle of the quilt are \$2.00 each, or three for \$5.00. You will find a sheet of raffle tickets is included in this issue of the MEM. *Hold on to this sheet.* If you need more, a photocopy is as good as the original. Buy as many as you desire, but because of the quilt's intimate connection to the TLCB, the Sisterhood requests that raffle ticket sales be restricted to TLCB or TLC Sisterhood members and their immediate families.

*You need not be present at the reunion to win the quilt.* To purchase raffle tickets, simply fill out as many blank tickets as you wish, then send them with your check made out TLCB ASSISTANCE FUND to:

Rosie Wheatley  
8018 W. 900 N.  
Carthage, Indiana, 46115

For further details on purchasing memory blocks on the quilt, contact Rosie at the above address or by email at [rewheatl@cnz.com](mailto:rewheatl@cnz.com). Make the subject line "Memory Quilt."



Above: In Colorado Springs, at Reunion 2000, from left to right: Jimmie Butler, Rosie Wheatley, Leigh Hotujec, and Jim Roper. The COS quilt was signed by many members, who "bought" squares and contributed to Assistance too. The 2001 quilt was dedicated to David Cloud, who died in November of 2000 while #1 on the list for new lungs. We all wanted to win it and donate it to Jane Cloud, but a total stranger held the winning ticket. John Sweet called them from the banquet, at Fort Walton Beach, but they refused to part with it. Jane Cloud had the most tickets, and was very disappointed—until she found out that the winners were lifelong friends who wanted the quilt just so they could present it to her in David's memory!

Below: detail from Reunion 2000 quilt.



## TLC-V Monument

Artist's concept of TLCB/Thai Monument, shown with sala added, as depicted by Canadian member Anne Faulkner. This memorial to those who served, and died, in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, or in North Vietnam while stationed in Thailand (the V), during the Vietnam War will provide a Southeast Asia focus for the memories of veterans all over the world. It will be in donated parkland in Nakhon Phanom.

# Tahkli, Pleiku, San Francisco and Texas

by Peter Reynolds

*Peter Reynolds, known as "Big Buddah," lives today in Paducah, Kentucky. He writes about his tour and coming home from Tahkli Royal Thai Air Force Base (TRTAFB), "where I dehydrated in 1965 and '66 under subhuman living conditions for the first five months of my tour."*

We took the Jesse James vintage Thai train to R&R—sat with chickens and even a water buffalo, on one trip. That S.O.B. was big! One guy got on the train returning to TRTAFB with a basket full of cobras—the jerk sat right down next to me. I got myself out of that rail car and into another, justifiably more content with the aroma of fresh dead chickens and watching them being plucked for sale at the next stop.

Back at TRTAFB I knew a Thai major who got the rank because his pappasan was a big shot in the village of Tahkli. He handled all the civilian personnel working on base and never hurt the shine on his boots or the creases in his uniform—he treated them the way a Japanese POW major in World War II might have. He told me his uncle was a POW under the Japanese and that's how he learned to treat people harshly; from his uncle. He had all the creature comforts of a semi king, then something went wrong and he was gone. Never saw him again. I always wondered if one of the workers cut his throat.

Then after Valentine's Day, 1966, I got tapped out and was sent TDY to Pleiku, in the highlands of Vietnam. There, as a munitions control, bumped up from an individual control equipment BEMO (supply) stateside job, I got to Bien Hoa and thought I'd taken the wrong TDY plane. Wounded lined up on stretchers, some looking horrible, almost dead, awaiting transport to Clark AFB; and if they passed that test, on to the World. The first two days we heard incoming, but it all seemed to fall short. I was placed as an inventory control clerk to balance out some shortages that naturally go on in a war zone. Somehow it's hard to say "no" to a bunch of PFCs in need of ammo, knowing you probably just issued it to an FNG (...new guy) who wouldn't need it longer than 3 or 4 days; then he'd need a body bag.

I used to count the shipping containers on the flight line after graves registration assembled them for shipment to mortuary workers at Clark or Hickam. How many of those coffins, these bright aluminum boxes, all glistening in the sun or dripping in the rain, had I issued just 30-40 hours ago? It got worse—I was placed on four missions which went back to former fire-fight zones, now considered cold (safer) to hunt for anything American. Weapons, back packs, cigarettes, patches, and yes, even bodies or body parts left behind earlier in the haste to exit the zone.

It was a crazy combat routine—the whole scenario was easily described: land, then surprise or die; die and we can't use you anymore, make it back to the LZ to chopper out of what you'd just won in the shooting. If you won the property, won the firefight, don't you want to keep it? When you finally got to agree with that situation of risk death for nothing except to hurt the VC awhile—maybe seek out and destroy a part of his tunnel network in that area. Maybe find a few dead Commie gooks and make souvenirs out of their ears. I saw some really good people do some really bad things—but was always told

"forget about it; don't mean 'nothin!'"

Well that 90 days resulted in PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder). I'm 100% service-connected disabled and never dreamed it could happen to me. I even had to zip the bags, some just filled with an arm marked "UNK" on the tag. I have for the last 37 years been compelled to wash my hands, still trying to wash the blood off. When I returned to Takhli, it looked like the finest real estate that I'd ever seen, to say the least.

When I returned to the states, there was the hippies and anti-war movements. I tried to get a flight out of San Francisco—but the first airlines strike ever was on and no airliner was going anywhere. With my discharge in hand, and that certain dislike

of hippies, I plowed through their lines and got in the San Francisco Continental Trailways bus terminal, amid chants of "war monger," "baby-killer"

and "lady-killer." It was all I could do to stop from killing the long-haired jerk who spit on my uniform. I had a Marine knife I'd found, in my duffle—why I didn't use it was probably because of the very courteous Trailways driver who helped me out of the crowd and into the terminal. He sold me a one-way ticket from San Francisco to Del Rio, Texas, and only charged me \$10.00 for the three day trip. He had been to Korea in the Air Force in 1953 and knew something of the civilian culture who didn't embrace his war either.

The further I traveled, the better things seemed to get—until there were no hippies, crossing Arizona, New Mexico and South West Texas. Mom sure looked good—my older brother Bill looked the same as ever. Basically that was it, Mom and Bill. Dad was killed in a construction accident in Colombia, South America in 1964. Grandma had died just after Thanksgiving, 1963—both while I was on active duty.

Mom still looks good for a youngster nearly 92. Bill died 18 years ago during the same week I was having emergency 4 way bypass surgery at the Texas Heart Institute. Left are me and Mom, my lovely wife Joann (32 years now), our son, his great kids 8 and 3 respectively.

Life in Southeast Asia was not what I'd hunger for, then or now. I'd never go to Vietnam even though the Vietnam Vets of America of which I'm a life member, the VFW, again a life member, even the AMVETS (life) and American Legion, DAV (life), all sponsor trips which even put you in contact with the gooks who may have been the ones creating my PTSD.

No thanks. However, Thailand has a much warmer,



# TLCB Assistance Vignettes, Thailand 2003

This *whole issue* of MEM could not hold all the news about Assistance in Thailand! In the past year all of our work has been limited to two areas, around Udorn and around Nakhon Phanom (NKP), in the proud but impoverished Northeast part of Thailand. So we have to pick and choose among our programs and photos to bring MEM readers some examples of where our efforts (and our money) are helping out. Both the Udorn and Nakhon Phanom programs have continued robust efforts to help the needy children in their areas. In Udorn our partnership with VFW Post 10249 has proven extremely successful. At NKP John Middlewood and local officials have concentrated on the poorest provincial schools.



On the 13th Of June, Vichit Mingrachata and a few other members from the Udorn VFW post, delivered \$1,000 worth of school supplies to Phundon Elementary School. The village had previously scheduled a town meeting, so there was an exceptionally large number of families and village officials on hand to help unload the trucks (photo above) and witness the presentation to the school's headmaster. Of course the children were more interested in trying out the new sports equipment. As always the students and the school staff were greatly appreciative. Below is Vichit explaining what TLCB has furnished.

Nong Bua School (below): This girl receives a food packet from TLCB, and has a small vegetable garden she takes care of by herself. Her teacher (shown) helped her set it up. This supplements her diet every day.



(Right) One of the main programs supported by TLCB funds in NKP is feeding students. Program started late in 2000 feeding five students at one school, to provide motivation for students to improve their behavior and school effort. This TLCB program now feeds 36 students at seven different schools.



(Below) John Middlewood with students at Dong Muang1, one of the schools that receive food packets. Each packet costs about \$10 and contains a case of "MaMa" (like a cup of noodles), with 30 packages, plus condiments and sauces. It provides the student a hot, nutritious meal each day.



TLCB, in cooperation with Omnimed, district school officials and Dr. Suwat, Ophthalmologist at NKP Provincial Hospital, began a project to insure that all children in the schools supported by TLCB have glasses if they need them.

