



Mekong Express Mail

Volume 5, Issue 4

THE THAILAND LAOS CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC.

www.TLC-Brotherhood.org

Viking Control site just a memory

MEM Interviews New TLCB President
Interview by Bill Tilton, former president

Note: both former TLCB President Bill Tilton and newly-elected President Hoppy Hopkins traveled to Thailand this past October to see our Assistance activities and to revisit places they remembered from the 1960s. During the trip, MEM staffer Tilton interviewed Hoppy about the trip.

MEM: So Hoppy, tell me about when you got your orders to come over here.

Oh yeah, I remember the day. I got a call from a friend up at McGuire (AFB). He said hey Hoppy we got consecutive line numbers. I said where we going; he said we're going to Thailand. I asked where. He said Det 5, 621st Tactical Control Squadron. I asked where's that and he said I don't know.

MEM: Now what were doing at that time?

I was at Key West NAS, Florida, at the NORAD control center down there and working in Movement and Identification, surveillance radar, weapons assignment, and intercept control technician.

MEM: What was your grade at that time?

I was an E-4 at that time—airman 1st class—that's in the old rank system. So next thing I know I've got my orders to go to Thailand with a stop at Hamilton [AFB, in California] on the way for some combat training on M-16s and M-60s, and the art of hand grenade toss which had me wondering a little bit why I was getting training on that when I was supposedly going to a non-combat zone. After that I arrived in Bangkok.

MEM: Was Bangkok what you expected?

Well, I really didn't know *what* to expect, even though I had been in Europe for nearly four years. I spent the night there and then they piled me into a C-130 and we ran around all over Thailand for a day and a half. I think we

landed on everything large enough to land a C-130 on. When we got to NKP I was snuggled up under some cargo netting on a pallet of cargo so I wouldn't bounce off, and I was asleep when we landed. When we landed on the PSP [pierced steel plank runway] it scared the fool out of me! I thought we had crashed—I had never landed on it before.

MEM: What was it like?

Lot of noise and bouncy, the aircraft was bouncing all over the place. I thought, "What am I into now?" Then he taxied up in front of what was Base Ops then. It looked to be a 16 by 16 foot building with screen sides and a tin roof on it.

MEM: Was it what you expected?

I expected more than that. But I did think this was where I was supposed to be, and when I looked up and saw Invert [NKP radar site] I thought that's where I would be working. I started walking toward Ops and this guy stepped out and said, "Are you Hopkins?" I said I was and he said, "Throw your bag up into the back of that truck and we'll go get something to eat." I said that I'd much rather get a shower and get cleaned up and that I wasn't really that hungry. He said, "Well you better eat now and get yourself something to drink 'cause we've got about 80 miles to go through the jungle." I said, "What?" He replied, "You're not going here; you're going 80 miles down through the jungle to a place call Muck-duh-hahn." I asked him what was at Mukdahan and he said, "Det 6 of the 621st Tactical Control Squadron." I explained that there had to be a mistake because my orders were to Det 5. He simply said, "No mistake; you're going down there. Let's get something to eat." So we went and ate. After we ate we climbed aboard the deuce and a half and headed out. As soon as he cleared the main gate of NKP he floor-boarded it and he didn't let up until we got to Mukdahan.

see **Hoppy**, continued on page 4

In this issue:

Reunion 2005—in DC (early details on page 5)

Dues News: 2005 dues time starts January 1st. See details on page 5.

Out of Ubon came the life-saving Pedro

by Vernon P. Wagner, M.D.,
Ubon '68-'69, Nha Trang '70

Photos furnished by the author

On a moonless night, the crash phone rang at 2330 in the 8th TFW Hospital at Ubon RTAFB with the chilling words, “PHANTOM DOWN!” As the Medical Officer of the Day (MOD), I dashed to our HH-43B ‘Pedro’ pad with two NCOs where we launched a midnight SAR effort (Search & Rescue). An F-4, returning from Laos, had dropped off the scope with no visible fire, and no ELT signal.

Flying over the presumed flight path, we picked up a faint beeper within the hour. Circling the spot, we found a parachute streamer over a tree, and I went down to investigate. The GIB (Guy in Back) was on the ground, leaning against a tree with a crushed chest, and four fractured extremities. His helmet was shattered, but it had protected his head, and he was fully conscious.

The Phantom hit turf before he pulled the handle thus crimping the fuselage around the canopy, and breaking his seat’s rocket firing lanyard. He had survived an unbelievable zero altitude ballistic ejection, through a closed canopy, without benefit of seat rockets. He recognized me, and said, “Doc, I’m hurt!” I injected morphine, and rendered first aid while waiting for ‘Pedro’ to refuel, and return for the pickup. When he was airborne, I returned to the crash site where I spent the remainder of the night finding the pilot, and extracting his remains from the wreckage. The GIB was stabilized, and flown to Bangkok before I returned to base in the morning, so I never saw him again.

Ten years later, I attended a medical conference at the USAF School of Aerospace Medicine. At coffee break, I noticed one doc wearing both pilot’s, and flight surgeon’s insignia. To our mutual surprise, it was the GIB I’d rescued at Ubon. I was especially happy to hear he had amnesia for the entire event since I’d slipped in mud, and dropped him in a rice paddy while putting him into the helicopter. His state of shock, and the morphine had worked well. While recovering from his many injuries, he had become an M.D., and was flying again as a pilot-flight surgeon. Years later, during Desert Shield & Desert Storm, he was in A-10s, while I was with KC-135s, in Saudi Arabia.

Flying was a dream that began the day I was born in 1938. While still in the Newborn nursery, my first toy was an XFM-1 ‘Airacuda’. When WWII erupted, my dad served as a civilian radar tech on the Pacific Coast Defense Net. I went with him as much as possible, and spent countless hours on flightlines where I could see real pilots, and even touch their P-38s, P-47s, and P-51s—the stuff of dreams! In 1945, a

cousin took me up in his Taylorcraft, and I was totally hooked on flying. In the late 1940s I was thrilled watching Howard Hughes test the ‘Spruce Goose’ from my dad’s boat, and by the early 1950s, Dad was at Cal Tech’s (NASA) Jet Propulsion Laboratory where his frequent TDYs to Edwards AFB Rocket Test Center allowed me unlimited opportunity to become enchanted with the idea of a USAF career. These were the days of Chuck Yeager, and the X-planes—heady stuff for a teenager.

Part 2

I went for my first FAA physical at age 17, and was horrified to discover I had substandard vision plus deuteranopia (red-green color blindness). I knew then that I could not qualify for undergraduate pilot training (UPT), or an ATR so I would have to lay careful plans if I wanted to spend my life in the air. With an FAA Waiver for defective color vision, I earned my private pilot’s license with ease, and took my girl friend for a ride in the Goodyear Blimp to celebrate.

The war in Vietnam began in earnest while I was in medical school so I joined the Air Force Reserve in 1961. By 1966 I was ready for duty, and applied to the USAF School of Aerospace Medicine—rejected! Unknown to me, normal color vision was also required for duty as a flight surgeon. Stunned by the news, I quickly memorized the color dot test, and was accepted. I spent the next 30 years attempting (with limited success) to change the unnecessary perfect color vision requirement for flight docs. I wore my flight surgeon wings with utmost pride, and when later rescuing injured airmen, I was never quizzed on the color of their blood.

At Tinker AFB, I began flying T-33s, C-124s, C-141s, KC-135s, B-52s, and loving it, but flight docs returning from Southeast Asia made me realize I was missing the action



I...was assigned to the 433rd Tactical Fighter Squadron, ‘Satan’s Angels’ (the squadron in which Col. Charles Lindbergh had flown P-38s during WW-II). On day one, the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing Commander asked me if I wanted to fly Phantoms. My “Yes, Sir!” was easily heard in Hanoi.

A flight of "Satan's Angels" heads across the fence (Mekong River) out of Ubon, toward North Vietnam



so I volunteered for duty in SEA. Upon arrival, I flew the Klong around Thailand seeking a place to disembark for Laos without knowing my intended Air Commando unit had vanished. I was eventually allowed to unpack my bags at Ubon, and was assigned to the 433rd Tactical Fighter Squadron, 'Satan's Angels' (the squadron in which Col. Charles Lindbergh had flown P-38s during WW-II). On day one, the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing Commander asked me if I wanted to fly Phantoms. My "Yes, Sir!" was easily heard in Hanoi. Quickie training began at once, and I was ready to fly in two weeks.

My first F-4D sortie was a Mach 2 dash up the Ho Chi Minh Trail in weather - busy, busy. Over the next 12 months I logged more supersonic time than anyone in the squadron, and had received my first Air Medal. Words are inadequate to describe the thrill of being at the controls the first time I took a Phantom supersonic. As I passed the Mach, I recalled what I'd overcome to get there, and 'YES' it was worth it.

In addition to the Phantom, I was required to be current in other assigned aircraft, and all flight docs were required to fly a minimum of four hours per month. Ubon was primarily a Tactical Air Command fighter base, but we had the HH-43B 'Pedro', C-47s, AC-130s, O-2As, plus assorted Air America, and Continental Air Service birds. We were to fly all aircraft in order to have personal knowledge of the stressors in each airborne environment. If we hadn't been there, we'd be poorly prepared to effectively address medical issues in the cockpit. A flight doc who doesn't fly cannot maintain optimal rapport with aircrews, because pilots speak only to pilots.

Part 3

DEROS came too soon, and I was sent to the USAF Medical Service School (MSS) at Sheppard AFB as an instructor. After Thailand, I adapted poorly to Wichita Falls, and requested a return to SEA. Sadly, there was a mandatory six-month delay

for reassignment. In the meantime, being an instructor at the MSS was not all bad. Single male instructors were on a list of potential dates for newly commissioned female nurses who were there for three weeks of Basic Military Training (BMT). Most of the nurses wanted an escort for the monthly Dining In, and we did our best to oblige. I found myself in a very tight spot, however, because I was dating a club waitress between BMT classes, and ordering drinks from *her* for a new *date* was always a challenge. Oddly, she never quite understood that I was just doing my job.

My wish for reassignment was eventually granted, and I flew off to Cam Ranh Bay in early 1970. Cam Ranh had enough flight docs so I joined C-7A aircrews until I found a spot at Nha Trang where I dropped my bags, became OIC of the 327th CSG Medical Aid Station, and flight doc for about 1,100 USAF & ROCAF (Republic of China Air Force) personnel. My assigned flying unit was the 15th/90th Special Operations Squadron flying MC-130E 'Skyhooks'. No one at Nha Trang knew of my former duty at Ubon, or NKP so when I flew my first Special Ops sortie to Laos, and Thailand, the flight crew was amazed when I stepped to the front of the MC-130E, and began naming peaks, and rivers. The new doc wasn't supposed to know the route of their Top Secret sortie. On several occasions I was invited to ride the Fulton Recovery System, but for some reason, it just didn't seem like something I needed to do. Even the brave have limits. By the time I left SEA, I had logged 230 combat support, and SAR sorties in 15 types of aircraft.

Aerospace Medicine is a branch of Occupational Medicine, and is heavily involved in a wide range of Public Health issues. Our flight, and clinic duties are the most visible, but we also perform shop visits, food service inspections, and life support inspections as well as base water purification, and waste management functions. We'd often work with Red Horse on these projects, and with the base vet on K-9 care. In overseas

areas, we also dealt with vector control such as rodents, insects, poisonous reptiles, and other things they forgot to teach us in medical school. Each day brought new, fascinating challenges.

Following my years of SEA duty, I returned to CONUS for additional medical training, and returned to Active Duty with AFSCs in Aerospace Medicine, Primary Care, and OB-GYN. This combination of specialties allowed me to provide health care for not only aircrews, but for their families as well. When

I retired at age sixty, I counted the years, and discovered I'd worn a blue suit for half of my life, and one third of the 20th Century. I'd also practiced medicine in fifteen countries on five continents. Determined to serve? Uh-huh, and I'd do it all again in a minute!



Doc and UH-1 Huey near Nha Trang, 1970



MEM: Those roads weren't paved in those days, were they? No, it was dirt roads, with wood and bamboo bridges, dust and ruts, and it was unbelievably hot—I was sweltering even though I had just come from Key West, and I was wondering to myself, "What did I do to deserve this?"

By the time we got to Mukdahan I was so mad at this maniac who was driving—the way he was driving. I climbed down out of the truck in front of the orderly room and the First Sergeant met me and he said, "Welcome to Viking." I said, "Thanks a lot, and the next thing on my agenda is what are we going to do about this idiot and his driving?" The First Sergeant said, "Well, there's a reason he drives like that, and you should be glad he does because you just came through one of the hottest insurgency areas in Southeast Asia." I said, "Really?"

MEM: There're a lot of people who would dispute that but we've learned since that there was a lot of Communist activity. Can you tell us something about that?

Well we were getting the intel reports all along about what was going on around us. NKP was our main support base so we made a run to NKP just about every day. We had to leave after daylight and be back before dark because of the TC—or Thai Communist—activities out in the area. Now, what was interesting on this trip was that when we went to Thare Orphanage Archbishop Khai made the comment about the Communist activities in that area during the war, and the fact that the Chinese, the Vietnamese and the Laotians had that part of Thailand all divvied up on a map. I'd like to see that map—get my hands on it—but his comment confirms what we were being told through intel sources.

MEM: Did Archbishop Khai remember the Communist activity?

Oh yes; in fact he seemed to remember it quite clearly. I would like to have time to talk with him at length about it and about what he knew. There was what we called a "CPM" at Mukdahan—that stood for Civilian Police Military, I think it was—and we had developed some friendships with Thai forces that were based near there, and they pretty well kept us advised on when there was activity. There was always news of firefights—the Thais were always coming and going with their helicopters and short takeoff and landing aircraft, and bringing in prisoners and one thing and another, so we knew there was a lot of activity. At times we could hear shots being fired at the CPM and on a couple of occasions we saw marks on our radar antenna that looked like somebody had been taking shots at it, as well.

MEM: We're really curious about the base at Mukdahan. In the September issue MEM ran a story that you gave us about how Mukdahan base was created. So, when you got there they had large concrete barracks, of course, and a big dining hall and a hospital, and so forth [Hoppy laughs]; so tell us what the base was like.

Well, your vision of the base in early June of 1966 is quite different from what it really was [laughs again]. When I got there I think the orderly room was actually a wood

building with screen sides—a typical hooch that they built over here. But everything else on the base—I think the dispensary was built by then—was wooden platforms raised a foot or so off the ground, with squad tents draped over them. The chow hall was that way, the officer's club was that way, and the NCO/Airman's Club was as well...I mean, everything else on the base was tents. In fact the first night they didn't have a bunk for me and I ended up sleeping on a cot in the back of a deuce-and-a-half. And most of the people who were there were TDY (temporary duty) and they were just starting to fill in with permanent party people. I was one of the first radar ops people to get there PCS (permanent change of station).

MEM: Now; you weren't married at that time; right?

Nope, sure wasn't. I was single and about half scared to death; didn't know where I was or why I was here, but we soon found out.. And it turned out to be—all said and done—that turned out to be one of the best assignments I had.

MEM: That's what everybody seems to say, in the Thailand area. You were already very competent as a radar operator. Tell us about the work.

Well, most of our work involved the tanker operations. We handled the Blue Anchor and the White Anchor [fixed refueling orbit areas along the border of Laos]. I think those names were changed later on, but basically at that time it was those two, refueling the F-105s out of Takhli and Korat and the F-4s out of Ubon on their twice-daily raids to the North. We had other operations such as monitoring the [Mekong] river for insurgency helicopter traffic.

MEM: Did you see any?

Yes, we saw some helicopter activity. We usually had a couple of Thai T-28s out of NKP patrolling the river at night and we would just patrol up and down the river with them trying to catch one of the helicopters. I don't know that we were ever successful at it, but we sure had some fun chasing those guys up and down the river and dropping flares every once in a while on things we thought were helicopters. But the Thais never told us anything about what they saw. Once we vectored them in on a target they just kind of took things on their own from there.

We also had an operation that worked with Air America people out of Savannakhet [Lao town on the opposite side of the Mekong River]. It was called Red Baron—I think the callsign was changed to Blue Baron later on.

MEM: Did anything funny happen to you while you were doing that?

Well, not a lot of funny things to me; other than we would get a set of coordinates out over the trail and we'd drive these guys around [give radar vectors] at night from point to point. I remember the first time one of them checked in with me for control. I asked him to "say type aircraft," and he said, "Beech 18." I said, "OK."

MEM: Beech 18! That's almost World War Two, isn't it?

Yeah, that's World War Two; it's like the old Sky King aircraft; that twin-tailed Beech. It was a fairly small aircraft with

see Hoppy, continued on page 6

Editor's Corner

In this issue we have a lot of good information from the post-reunion trip to Southeast Asia by a group of members. It brings us up to date on how the Thai authorities are thinking about our proposed monument. It drives home how effective our Assistance program has been in helping kids in Thailand, thanks to the generosity of members and the hard work in country of Vichit and John Middlewood, our trusted agents, as well as VFW volunteers. The genuine gratitude of the kids, their teachers and local officials, makes it very worthwhile.

The detective work needed to find something of the Viking Control base at Mukdahan after three decades plus, demonstrates the great changes that have come to parts of Thailand.

The Mekong Express Mail could do with some help from TLCB members that would not cost them a dime. When you move to a new address, it is smart to fill in the USPS form that gets your mail redirected for a period. However,

it is even smarter to tell the TLCB promptly that you have moved and where. The point of contact for new addresses is Mac Macdonald, our Membership Committee Chairman, who can be reached by using the new address for membership applications and changes of address in the Page 5 info box in this issue of the MEM. If you tell Mac, he will get the word out to those of us who need to know. Each time we mail MEM, some come back to us as undeliverable, while others are discarded and we are simply notified that we owe money for mailing with a bad address. Our bulk mail permit does not cover re-mailing, so money is wasted on each second mailing, this time first-class.

Notifying Mac of snail mail address changes helps you to get your MEM when everybody else does. It also saves the TLCB effort and money. If you can remember to do this, it will be appreciated.

Dave MacDonald

Reunion 2005~~Time to start thinking about being there!

Accommodations will cost less than \$100 per night, including parking, yet be in a Hilton that is no more than two miles from The Wall, with METRO, interesting shops, many restaurants, and other attractions within walking distance.

A program that will be unmatched and unforgettable, yet with relaxed time to visit with members and spouses. Visits to Arlington Cemetery, the Wall, a very special D.C. memorial service, and tour options like no place else on Earth.

They have all been good...participants will talk about this one for years. *Find a way—be part of it.*

July 8 through 10, 2004. Arlington, Virginia. Watch March MEM for registration and much more detail.

2005 DUES: due in January. If not paid by March 31st membership becomes inactive. Mail to address shown below, and don't forget—this is a good time to include a donation to Assistance.

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The TLC Brotherhood, Inc. is a tax exempt, non-profit charitable organization under IRC Section 501(c)3. The registered address is 7813 New London Drive, Springfield, Virginia, 22153. TLCB was incorporated in the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1999.

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Reunion 2005

July 8-10
Arlington, Virginia

Watch for announcements!

TLCB tax return and board minutes: On *Assistance* page, in *members only* section. Password, 1/1/05: **Eliane**

Hoppy, continued from page 4

not a very good radar return, to be honest with you. And they didn't carry IFF [Identify Friend or Foe, radar transponder] so we had to follow them with raw radar. So I asked the height finder guy to give me a height finder cut on him, and he said "I got him at 25,000 feet," and I said, "What? A Beech 18 at 25,000; that's not possible!" Well that raised some curiosity, but everything was so secret that we really didn't know what they were doing over there, so a couple of us decided to go down to the local bar on the riverfront one night and watch them take off and see if we could figure out what kind of aircraft they were. It was a Beech 18-looking aircraft, but the thing of it is, it had two big old turboprops hung on where the recipis normally are, and I said, "Wow." So apparently those Air America folks had modified the Beech 18 with turboprops and I guess they had them pressurized so they could get to those altitudes. Basically the mission, as I know it, was radio relay for the road watch teams, and it was before the Igloo White sensor operations, which were probably just beginning when I left there in June of 67.

MEM: Yes, Ed Witt tells us that they started laying sensors in September, so they hadn't even started yet. Now, you've just come back from a visit to Mukdahan, in October of 2004, so what did you find of the base?

Hah, hah! *What* base? Mukdahan and Viking Control as far as any kind of an operating base is simply a memory. There's nothing left that would tell you there was a radar site there. If you hadn't been there you would never even be able to figure it out. When we first came into town we came via the old roads from NKP, as best I could remember them, and when we got to town I went 'Wow' and was completely disoriented. I had no idea where I was. The town has – well, 'exploded' is not the word for it.

MEM: So it's not the same town you left?

By *no means*! The place is a metropolis now. The way I finally figured it out was by going to the riverfront, to the crossing to Savannakhet—the customs house and immigration office right at the river. At that time it was just a little shack; there wasn't that much traffic at that time, for obvious reasons. I knew that if I walked straight out that street from the crossing, toward the west, I would walk straight out to the site. You would come to an intersection, and once you got to that

intersection you knew that the site was off to the right. Once I got my bearings we walked out and found where the base was located—now it's covered with soccer fields and official buildings, and...

MEM: Did you find anything you recognized?

I found one thing that might have been part of the - where the main gate might have been. There was an asphalt pad that could have been the main gate or the ground power pad; I'm not sure. But it's very hard to tell and locate where things were because they planted so many trees and there's all kinds of concrete architectural type fences throughout the area, there's soccer fields, there are large three and four-story buildings...

MEM: How about in the whole town; was there anything else there that you recognized?

Well one of the things that I wanted to find, and some of the other Vikings who were at the reunion talked about, was the bungalow that we rented.

MEM: Who else?

Well, in the Brotherhood we have Warren Sheasley who was a warrant officer there; Pat Fitzgerald, who was in radar operations with me; Cliff Mack is one of them, myself, and one of our former members, Jim Harrod; we were all together at the same time on the same crew. So as a side note we might say that the Viking Det. 6, 621st TAC Control Squadron, has probably the highest percent representation in the TLCB of any unit. Mitch Johnston and Sherold Watkins were also there later.

MEM: Yes, it's probably the most complete unit in the whole Brotherhood!

What did you find that you recognized?

Well, I found our bungalow! One of the things we wanted to do was see if we could find it and see if Papasan might still be around. Once I got oriented and found where the base had been, from that I knew that the bungalow was one street over. So I went over one street, and at first I turned the wrong direction and soon realized I wasn't picking

up anything familiar, so then we turned around and started walking back up the street toward our hotel, and then I spotted the bungalow across the street. It had been painted light gray. The street is four-lane now, whereas in 1966-67 it would have been about half a paved street. It wasn't much of a paving job, but it held down the dust anyway. They have knocked down the front porch we used to sit on and play with the kids and whatnot. Other than that and the tile roof that replaced the old tin roof (I believe), and the paint,



Hoppy and that Bungalow, reunited.

there is no difference. It is definitely the house! The whole downstairs was basically a living room with folding doors that could open the front of it, and I kind of stuck my head in there—there's people living in there—but I could see the same tile floor we had. But there's nothing around it that looks like it did then. There was a building next door where Papanan—he was an Indian—had a shop there but it's now a two-story concrete building. The whole street is - there's just not much to recognize on that whole street anymore. Inside there was a fishnet that we had draped in the ceiling. I could not believe that fishnet is still hanging in there.

MEM: How do you suppose it survived when everything else got replaced?

I don't know; maybe it's because the family still owns it.

MEM: Well, did you have some good times in that old hooch? Oh yeah, we had some times in that hooch we probably don't want to publish [laughs]. But we had a lot of good times there. It kind of became the gathering spot for the guys out at the base, and it was a place to get away. When the natives weren't restless we would hang out there.

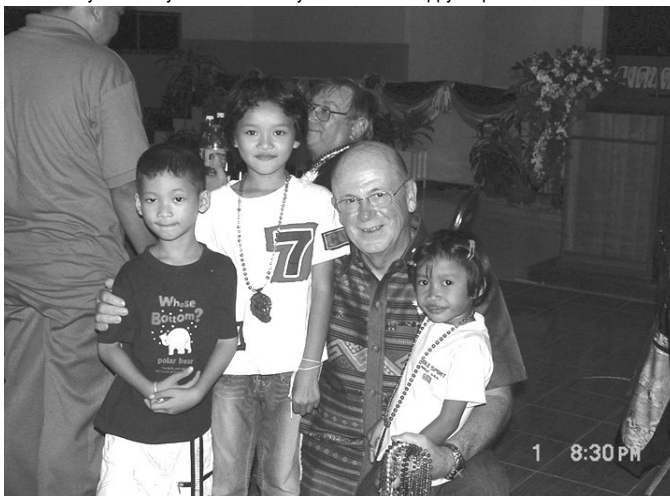
MEM: On this trip you visited some of the schools where TLCB does its charity work. Can you tell us something about your experience there?

I don't know if I can put it into words or not. I mean, when we got there from Bangkok the first night—I don't remember the names of the schools—but we went to a rural high school for a party, I guess you would call it; and I can't remember ever in my life having the red carpet rolled out the way they did there. Those folks welcomed us with open arms; the kids put on their shows, the dancing and so forth, The kids ranged in age from pre-kindergarten—three or four years old—to teenagers. There were a number of speeches extolling the virtues and how much they thanked the Brotherhood for how much we've done to help these kids...

MEM: So you think their appreciation is genuine?

Oh, there's no doubt that their appreciation is genuine, not only there but all the other places we visited they are beside

Little heart patients in Isan: "The one on my right with the "7" on her shirt is Sakoona and MoMay is in the yellow shirt on my left." Photo: Hoppy Hopkins



themselves with gratitude for the things we are doing.

MEM: Did you get the impression that the things we do are actually helping?

Oh, definitely it's helping, but you know; there's a lot more that could be done—but *wow*, it's just unbelievable the impact we've made with these kids and these people in Northeast Thailand. We went to another school in Udorn [province] that was really quite poor. I mean, the facilities were in pretty bad shape, but the kids were there and there were some desks we had given them, but the physical plant needed some work that the government needs to do. There's more we could do; I made a quick survey, and they could use some more desks and some other things—but the thing of it is, the kids are really appreciative. But we have just scratched the surface—we haven't even made a dent in what needs to be done up there.

MEM: Well, you've just become the president of the Brotherhood now. Have you formed a vision yet of what you would like to see the Assistance program become?

Well, I'll say this. I kind of dug pretty deeply into this before I became a board member and now the president of the organization. I found the program is quite effective; it's under-funded, we need more money and we need to develop outside sources for funding. We probably need to work on developing relationships with other organizations. I mean—we're not looking for huge dollars—the dollar goes so much further over here—when you buy things the cost for materials and all. I think we've spent something close to \$92,000 since this program started over here and what I've seen done with \$92,000 I can imagine what we could do with half a million dollars, say. I mean it's just mind-boggling what could be done!

MEM: It looks to you like there are plenty of uses - that that money could be put to good use?

Oh definitely; there's *hundreds* of opportunities to expand the program and put that kind of money to good use. The people we have over here—the trusted agents...

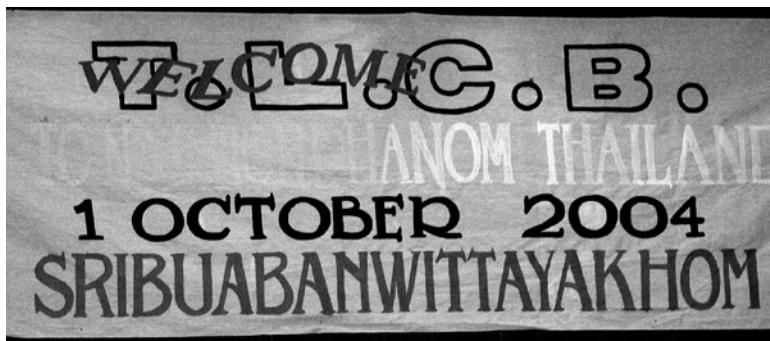
MEM: Do you feel that our money is being carefully used so that it's not being skimmed off?

Oh absolutely! I mean there is no indication whatsoever. Anybody who's got the idea that the money is being skimmed off and is not all being spent on what it's supposed to be spent for is nuts and they don't know what they are talking about. If they don't believe it then [they should] get on the big silver bird and fly the 8000 miles and come out here and look for themselves. I want to tell you, it's being spent effectively and efficiently, and there's just no way that there's anything like that happening. All you've got to do is look at the people—see the emotions—look at what's been spent. It's here!

MEM: Let's talk about another project you looked at. Our readers know that we are building a monument at NKP. What was your impression of the Thai side—you and I met with officials in Nakhon Phanom.

Well we met—I guess it was the second day we were here—met with Thai officials trying to ascertain the status of the

Hoppy continuedt page 10



Following the TLC Brotherhood's annual meeting and reunion in Ontario, California, a group of members joined informally and took a trip back to Thailand. John Middlewood had notified the schools in the NKP area and our first night there was an overwhelming experience. Children from 12 rural schools put on dance and music performances, there were speeches of gratitude, and there was even a very touching "Baci" ceremony.

Photo: Mac Macdonald

At right, Karen Chervak, Peg Hopkins, Betty Witt, Vickie Macdonald, Darice Schillo, and Nancy Sweet join some of the children (in dance costumes) in front of a pile of food packages that were later handed out by TLCB members directly to the needy children.



The most precious group of all, below, needed some prompting from their teacher, but did their very best!

Photo: Mac Macdonald

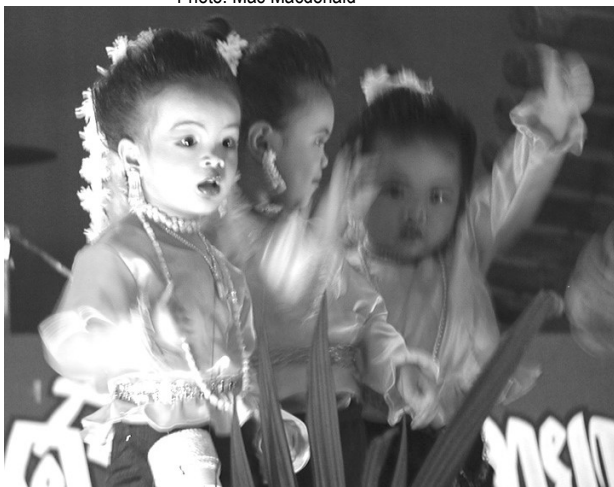


Photo: Mac Macdonald

In the Baci ceremony children tied pieces of string on the wrists of TLCB members to make sure we would have good fortune and would see them again.

At left, Assistance Committee chairman and TLCB vice president, John Sweet, shows children the pictures he just took.



Photo: Hoppy Hopkins

TLCB Assistance—mem

Photo: Hoppy Hopkins



Above, the hall was full of grateful parents, school officials and teachers, and of course the children, seen here with TLCB members for a photo.

Below, at the school for orphans in Thare a holy sister gives a stirring speech of welcome and gratitude, followed by music played by students on traditional Thai instruments.

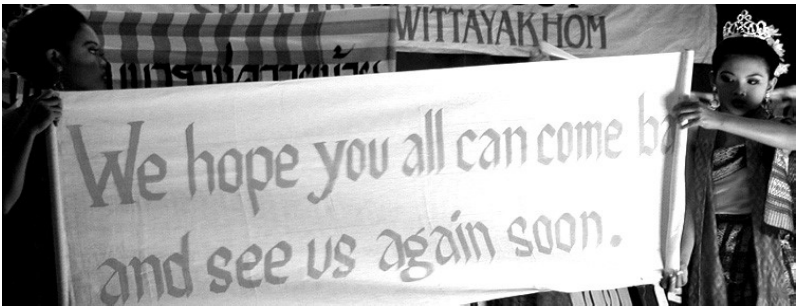
Parcels of food and supplies were then handed to needy children, one by one. At right, Mac Macdonald's turn to present a package to a little boy in need of help.



Thare Photos: Bill Tilton



Banner photos: Mac Macdonald



Members feted in Thailand

See page 16 for reunion and other trip photos.

Hoppy, continued from page 7

project, the park, and all that. The meeting went very, very well—everything seems to be in place; they're excited about it, as we are.

MEM: Do you think they are frustrated that we are not moving faster?

No, I don't think so; and I'll say this, I don't think we could have moved faster prior to this point. We learned in the meeting that they have their request for the appropriation for the site work and all of the park—their part of it—and they have requested 15 million baht appropriation for the park. That's all the site work for the monument. When you think about it, 15 million baht in Northeast Thailand, is a huge chunk of money. That works out to about three hundred seventy five thousand dollars in US money.

MEM: Did you see any example of the kind of work that they do with that kind of money?

Oh yes, we looked at some of the salas and things like that, and they have stock plans for salas, and in some of the other parks they've done a beautiful job with them. They seem to pretty well keep them up as far as maintenance is concerned—in a climate like this maintenance is an ongoing process and sometimes difficult. The parks are outstanding and the people use them; there are paths through them. They seem to cope well with the extreme climate but I think we are going to need to budget for nearly perpetual maintenance when we do our budget.

MEM: Do you think the design work is progressing well?

Oh yes; Jepp [the late Chris Jeppeson] has done an outstanding job. It is one of the best and most detailed—if not *the* best—sets of plans that I have ever seen, and I work in the construction industry.

MEM: Hoppy, all in all, would you recommend to others in the Brotherhood that they make a trip like this?

Oh absolutely. I mean, if you can see your way to make this trip, you've gotta do it. I mean, you just won't believe

the changes out here. I didn't know much about NKP, but judging by what the guys said who were there it doesn't look like NKP [the town] has grown much—nothing compared to what's happened at Mukdahan.

MEM: Do you think the people of Thailand have changed much?

No; that's one thing I don't think they've changed here. The friendliness is still here, they are always smiling; you may not speak the language but the body language and the smiles are what tell you what they really think. That goes for Mukdahan as well as NKP—in fact there was one couple sitting there in front of a store along the street and the kids were playing there, and we kind of got in a conversation with them. I mean everybody is interested and they want to talk to you, and they smile. There was two girls driving around on a motorcycle that night and every time they went by they said, "hello." One reason I liked the assignment at Mukdahan is the Thais and their friendliness and what kind of people they are.

MEM: How about the food—did you find that the food was still good?

Oh yeah; Thai food is still good. I had my fair share of fried rice and all the other things. I think some of the parties we went to I ate some things I'm not sure I want to know what they were, but that's no change from the last time I was here. But the food was good, hospitality was great. If you need a really nice vacation and really see what's going on out here, it's worth the trip.

MEM: Well how about creature comforts? Did you find there were good accommodations for a more *senior* couple, for instance?

Oh yeah, the accommodations were great. I mean, you have to get used to some of their nuances. Like, you almost need to bring another light to get enough light in the bathroom to shave with, and you need to get used to the fact that you are not going to get much English broadcast on the TV. But other than that it's been very good. You can always find a bathroom—not quite Western style perhaps—and the road system is very good. One thing I did notice was no samlors [pedicabs that used to be in every town]. Now they call that mode of transportation a "tuk tuk," and it's a motorized three-wheel cab.

That road from NKP to Mukdahan—we sent somebody up there just about every day; we were more or less volunteers, and I guess I drove it at least once a week. That road as I knew it had no pavement at that time. Because of the TC [Thai Communist] activity you had to drive it pretty much wide open, and in the daylight.

MEM: Tell us some of your experiences on that run.

Well, two in particular come to mind. One of them, well, in retrospect I guess it must have looked pretty funny; I wish I had had a movie camera. I was returning from NKP one day, loaded with maybe a ton or so of cargo—mail and things like food, building supplies, whatever we needed at the time. Now the road had a lot of long straight stretches, which we liked. There were rice paddies on both sides

Hoppy continued next page

Secretary's Notes

For our offline and online members only, we include with this edition of MEM a copy of the Minutes of the Board of Directors that take us from last year's Annual Meeting to this year's Annual Meeting. What you will find are the Minutes for the 2003 Annual Meeting, the January to March 2004 full board meeting, the June 2004 Special Meeting, the July to September 2004 full board meeting and the 2004 Annual Meeting.

All these Minutes are also available to members on the Brotherhood's website at www.tlc-brotherhood.org. Until Jan 1, 2005 the password for our members-only area on the site, will remain the one that you found on Page 5 of the September MEM. On New Year's Day, the password will change to the one on Page 5 of this MEM.

Dave MacDonald
Secretary



The once-ubiquitous samlor. Photo courtesy of Bob Arnau.

so you could kind of see what was going on around you. So I was coming back from NKP that afternoon and saw coming toward me one of those old Thai intercity buses with a capacity of 40 and load of 80 people plus a few pigs and some baskets and so forth. This guy was right in the middle of the road and we were meeting head-on, and he wouldn't give. He just kept coming on, and I waited until I judged I couldn't delay any longer and just made a left turn into the rice paddy with that deuce and a half. It buried it up to the bed, and I'll bet the water really flew! Water, rice, mud; it all flew everywhere.

There were always two of us on those runs, and fortunately the truck we had that day had a winch on the front. We just stretched the cable across the road and pulled ourselves out of the paddy by using a big tree for an anchor. The bus stopped and everybody was standing around going, "chatter chatter chatter." They probably thought, "...boy we're gonna get some goodies out of this mess." I think they were kind of saddened that we managed to get it out of the rice paddy and go on down the road to Mukdahan.

MEM: What was the other incident you were thinking of?

We had gone for a long stretch with no mail. It was not unusual to miss a day or two, but we had gone for something like two weeks. We heard a rumor that the C-130 was carrying mail into NKP on this particular day, so I decided to push the envelope a little and risk not getting in before dark, and see if I could get the guys some mail. The 130 came in, and I did in fact get a couple **...the water really flew! Water, rice, mud; it all** could be put back down around the tower—it's stacked back there. I don't know what kind of participation we could have at this point, but the idea's on the table and the reaction was good.

Now about 40 or 50 miles south of NKP there's a section of road that's a switchback—a series of sharp bends. Most of us thought that if we were ever going to get ambushed it would be in that section there, because we really had to slow down. Well, sure enough, I got down there and came around a curve and there were four or five guys out in the road, with a bunch of brush and stuff piled up on the road. I told the guy that was riding with me, "You duck because we're going through here," and we blasted through and kept right on going. I just remember brush and people flying through the air, and we kept on going. That was

always my fear—of getting ambushed—because of all the TC activity, and Archbishop Khai kind of reinforced that fear in his little speech at the orphanage.

MEM: Yes, the hills that are known now to have been the center of TC activity aren't too far away from that road. No they are not—they are right there southeast of Sakhannakorn—not hills, actually; they are mountains. Some reach up to 2000 feet. I guess they were a good place for those folks to hide. Also, they told us there were close to ten thousand North Vietnamese refugees living around near the site there.

MEM: Did your route take you through the village of Nakhon Phanom?

No; the first time I ever went there was on this trip.

MEM: Well, you did see the base many times. Give us your impression of the base.

Well, it's just a big jungle now. The only thing I saw that I recognized, and I didn't see it until I was leaving, was the tower. But we did find the foundations to the old Supply—you kind of knew where that stuff was. I tried to figure out where Invert [radar site] was, but I couldn't figure it out. We walked out where the old parking ramps were, past the old tower.

MEM: We understand you came up with an idea about that tower that others were kind of electrified by. Would you tell us about that?

It came to me after we met with the Thai officials. I got to thinking about what happens if that 15 million baht budget request for the park doesn't get approved? It often happens with municipal projects in our own country. So I thought, what does that do to our monument plans. What's going to be our "fall-back" position? I thought, we have that old abandoned tower out there, and with a little repair and some paint it might make a pretty good monument. I threw that idea out to a local official at a dinner party just before we left NKP. The reaction of the Thai officials was good. After all, they are focused on getting tourist activity into the area, and this sort of thing could help. They thought it might be a real good idea to restore the tower and maybe make it into a museum inside and little park outside, and as a fall-back position it could be a nice monument. Perhaps some of that old PSP [steel runway]

could be put back down around the tower—it's stacked back there. I don't know what kind of participation we could have at this point, but the idea's on the table and the reaction was good.

MEM: Hoppy, how do you think the spouses did on this trip? Do you think it was worth it for them?

I definitely do. By the way, a little side story I should add. I had met my wife on leave between Key West and coming to Thailand. We dated when I was on leave and then we corresponded after I got to Viking, and then I asked her to marry me in a letter from Viking. After I got home we did get married. The other day in Mukdahan we went over and I pointed out where I thought the hooch was where

Hoppy continued next page

Hoppy, continued from previous page

I wrote that letter to her. It was kind of neat. This was her first trip over here, and the first Thai food she ever ate was about six weeks ago, but she just fit right in. I think all the wives had an excellent time. They certainly did plenty of shopping to spend our money as well.



The old control tower at NKP (modern tower in background). Future museum and airport observation spot? Photo: Bill Tilton



June 1967 ©Dr. George B. Stoneman

"I visited Korat, Thailand to research some young fighter pilots flying to North Vietnam. Surely one of the most outstanding and outspoken was Lieutenant Karl Richter, 24 years old who was on the wing staff and was completing his second hundred missions. We talked and I painted him between missions from life for several days. A month and a half later he was shot down on his 198th mission and died during his rescue out."

~ Artist Maxine McCaffrey

Above, Karl Richter poses for famous painting, which is now at the Air Force Academy after hanging in the Pentagon for many years. (Used with permission of Dr. George Stoneman, Karl's flight surgeon at Korat.)



Patch, above, given to Karl. He was shot down on what may have been his 200th mission to North Vietnam (Karl is thought to have avoided logging some weathered-out missions north so that he could prolong his service as an F-105 pilot out of Korat). Patch photo: Dave McNeil

Below, Bob Arnau photo depicts Jim Burns pointing a 37mm shell at the damage this weapon could inflict on the tail of an H-3 helicopter.



TLC History

Thais enthusiastic about our monument

As noted by TLCB president Hoppy Hopkins several of us met with Thai officials to discuss the monument project. We found that NKP city has a new engineer, and that he seems to be well aware of—and favorable to—the monument. It appears that the park will be important on his public works agenda for 2005, assuming the funding that Hoppy mentioned is appropriated. How likely is that? We were told that he was about 90% sure it will happen. We should know before the end of January.

At the meeting we were given the city's costs for three different sizes of sala, the attractive little pavilions that the Thai people like to place in parks. Since NKP uses several standard designs, we were able to photograph just what they will look like, as shown in the photo. One of our fund-raising methods will be to offer to place the name of a large donor on a sala. Learning the actual unit costs enabled us to develop a scale for donors (we will ask at least \$25,000 donation to purchase a sala). The engineer is going to analyze all the monument cost estimates done by his predecessor, to see if he agrees with them, or to modify them where needed.

At this time the park looks very rough, but they have dumped some rubble and fill on the land, since it will be raised about two meters to make sure it is always above the water level. We toured another park in NKP to get an idea what the finished landscaping will be. Gerry Frazier, Monument Committee chairman, took some photos of the same park last year. We were very pleased with the quality of grading and landscaping, and the obvious care taken with this park. If Elephant Head Lake Park ever becomes a special destination of veterans to visit our monument, we feel sure the park will be a suitable and dignified environment for it.



Photo at left shows a standard public works sala (pavilion) design in an existing park in Nakhon Phanom city. Plans for Elephant Head Lake park show five or six structures just like this located conveniently about the park. One of these has been placed by the Royal Thai Navy and has a medallion with an anchor design in the center of the floor. Photo at right shows the lake and land where the new park is expected to be landscaped in 2005. The large tree at right is very close to the location that will be reserved for the TLCB monument.

The morning we left NKP a young lady came to the hotel to meet us. She had just gone to work for the city as an architect, having recently graduated from college, and is so young that her father came along. She seemed to be brimming with enthusiasm and eagerness to get working, and we suspect her arrival will be a very good thing for the monument project. Through our interpreter, Quan, she told us she will start by verifying the cost estimates.

Send donations to—

TLCB Monument Fund
PO Box 425
Springfield, VA 22150

We expect to have some important progress to report in the March or June issue of MEM. The monument fund is now well over \$10,000, and members continue to donate nicely. But of course we need some major corporate donations if we are ever to reach the estimated \$150,000 needed to build and maintain this significant monument. Members who want to know

more about how the monument came about and what it will look like should look in back issues of MEM on our website, www.tlc-brotherhood.org. You will find something about the monument in every issue since the board agreed to design and fund it.



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

to

TLC-Brotherhood Membership

November 2004

The first two months of my tenure have been very interesting to say the least. There have been highs and lows, there has been Brotherhood and no Brotherhood. I guess one way to sum up some of it up is by the answers I gave to an email from a member after I asked him to take a thread b/c.

I really am sorry and you are 100% correct. I suppose I just like to be a peace maker. I get b/c emails from many who are so upset and I just ask them to ride it out. Hell, I know you don't have an easy job. I will do a better job in the future.

No sweat. Just trying to get things under control. And no it isn't an easy job with all this dissension. It has to stop, not later, now. As for the b/c email, tell them to give us a chance. We can't accomplish anything if we have to deal with a ruckus every four of five months.

I hope I can ask this question with no hard feelings. Is it in fact true that no one can "question" a Board decision. I have never heard anything official about that, just something I heard. Maybe I am wrong but I don't think that is something you have said. I do believe that those type of questions should be b/c though. Ever since DB started all the turmoil, it appears that many are mad at whatever.

This is absolutely not true as far as I'm concerned. I was very clear at the Annual meeting that my door was always open and the door is open to the Board of Directors. I cannot speak for the past regime. But that is not the way we are going to operate. You or anybody else for that matter can ask away. You will find that I have an open door. I will tell you what I think, (although some may not like it, but that's OK too) I will be clear, and I will be honest. The only things that will get me mad is someone going behind my back, attacking me either face to face or behind my back, or acting unprofessionally. In those cases my best advice is to Duck.

Maybe one of the Board Members could write a letter to all saying, if you have a complaint or want to discuss something about the TLC, write to one of the Board Members **back channel**. I would think this would take a great deal of pressure off of you.

You are absolutely correct these complaints or discussions should be b/c. Putting it on the servers is like pouring gasoline on the fire. In fact this has already been done. If you will read my message to the Membership which I posted in both HTML and Plain text on 31 October 2004, entitled "SERVERS" the last paragraph states as follows:

"If you have an issue with the way the regulations are written or the rules for enforcing those regulations, please feel free to contact myself or a Board Member back channel (B/C) and express your objective and constructive comments and/or suggestions. Do not post them to any servers. Objective, constructive suggestions will be considered by the Board. No tirades, attacks or accusations will be condoned or considered."
I do not know how to make it any clearer.

You have taken on a very difficult job at the moment. As you know, so many were angry with the past. Well that's over, and a new history is to be written. I think everything will work out as time goes on. It will take some time. But in my humble opinion, the President doesn't have the time to answer questions that should be back channel. You will never accomplish anything.

The job does not have to be difficult. However, as I have said many times, we can do this the easy way or hard way. It is their choice. As you may know, I spend a good deal of my time in my business in adversarial situations. When you work in the legal world, that is the nature of the beast.

You are correct, the past is the past and a new history is beginning. They just have to put the past behind them. There is nothing they or we can do about it. We must look to the future.

During the two week period surrounding the Server ruckus that started on 26 October 2004, I handled over 400 emails, plus 200 or so emails normal for my business, traveled to Hattiesburg, MS (drove), worked three days in the field on that project, went to Biloxi to visit Nolley Byrd, reviewed three sets of plans, wrote three reports returned all business and TLCB phone calls, and started a Board of Directors Meeting. Can I handle b/c emails from the members you ask? Yes I can. I have committee chairmen and committees to handle the day to day work and I have good people in place to do that. Micro managing is not my MO. The answer is yes I can, provided I am not trying to stop a fire on the servers.

Let's take a further look at my first two months in office, beginning when I was elected President on September 25th. I have spent 12 days in Thailand plus two days traveling back and forth. Much of my time during the trip was spent in meetings with various parties and Thai Officials conducting official business of the TLCB; I have appointed a new Secretary, and new Membership Chairman, who is in the process of reorganizing the Membership Operation, completed the transition from Bill Tilton to myself which entailed numerous discussions, paper work, etc. Been cut to ribbons by certain members, tried to get the Membership to understand that by IRS rules we cannot get involved in Current Politics, and hopefully stopped a fire and the loss of members. (loss to date is 7). I have instituted the reorganization of the BX and have appointed a new BX Shopkeeper, filled the two vacant Member-at-Large Board Positions. And oh, by the way, have run my business as well.

The membership needs to lighten up and give us a chance to get going here. We are going to do things differently. Board Meeting Minutes are going to be posted on the Web Site. In addition, I plan to have the Web Site the focus of information both for the public and the Members. In fact the web site is about as up to date as it can be at the moment. It will take some time to get all this going in the right direction. We need the members to help us pull the wagon, not try to ambush it at every bend in the road.

Again, I am not trying to tell you what to do, just offering an idea for what it is worth. Hell, I would be happy if you sent this to another Board Member to answer.

All I'm going to say here is, the Membership put the big britches on me and I intend to wear them.

Definitely, the most outstanding part of my first two months in office was the trip to Thailand and in particular seeing up

close and personal the effect our Assistance Program has. The Thais rolled out a red carpet fit for royalty at the welcoming party at NKP. When we arrived there was a reception line where the students presented us flowers. Then it was on to speeches by several dignitaries and officials. Then there was the entertainment put on by the kids, with traditional Thai Dances in traditional costumes. There was food, food, and more food. There were displays from schools with photographs showing what our Assistance Program had provided for them. The school officials, teachers and parents could not say thank you enough. The display of gratitude and affection was mind blowing. There were a lot of smiles and a lot of tears of joy.

I have a new friend. She is about 5 years old, cute as can be, with a big smile. She is one of the kids that needs heart surgery. When my picture was made with her she just snuggled up to me. Everywhere I went, I would look around and she was right behind me watching my every move. Later in the evening she came up to the table and gave me a vase filled with artificial flowers. It is sitting here on my desk. Toward the end of the evening she came running out of the crowd with a hand-made, heart-shaped card. On the front it said "from MoMay and Family." Inside it said, "Thank you very much" and are you ready for this — "TLCB Love You." She also passed out another red heart that said on the front "Thank you TLCB from MoMay."

Every time I get disgusted with what has been going on for the last week on the servers, and think, "is this worth it", I look at that card and vase of flowers sitting here on my desk and say, HELL YES!

From NKP we went on to Ban Tha Rae and the Orphanage,

where we were welcomed with open arms. The kids again provided the entertainment and a tour of the facilities. We passed out the assistance packages to the kids. Archbishop Khai made an inspiring speech and they served a traditional snack.

It was then on to Udorn. There we visited two schools and delivered assistance to both. We met with the VFW folks and Tommy Thompson.

The TLC-Brotherhood was presented with an Award from the Pacific Department of the VFW for being the Outstanding Post Contributor for 2004. Historically this award has gone to Korea. This is a first for Thailand.

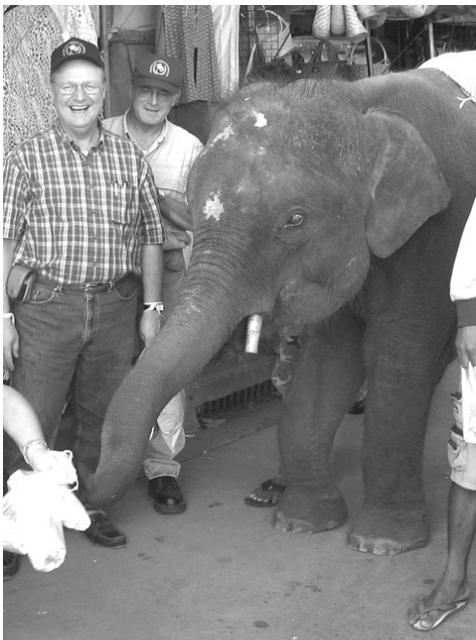
I'm also pleased to report that after meeting with the Thai Officials the Monument is alive and well. The meetings (two) with the NKP Official went very well. You will hear more from the Monument Committee later.

We definitely are off and running. The committees are active and work is going on to improve operations. The Web Site is about as up to date as we can make it. It is becoming the focus of information for public consumption as well as the membership.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dick Hopkins
President

The Reunion and the trip



Top right: this man stopped a TLCB group in NKP, waving and grinning. He had heard Phumphan talking about us on the radio. He said he had worked at NKP and many Americans "back then" promised to write him when they got home, but none did. In the photo he is writing his address. If you want to help make up for our thoughtless predecessors:

Mr. Smien Thakor
58 Moo 3 Thakor Village
Thakor Canton
Changwat Nakhonphanom
48000
Thailand



Top left, reunion tour group on the parapet above the Pacific Ocean, at Fort MacArthur. The coastal defense works and WW 2 preservation efforts were fascinating.

Left, Bill Tilton, John Sweet and friend. Peg Hopkins' hand, at left, holds sugar cane the elephant owner sold her to feed the beast. This was in Mukdahan. We saw some of these tourist elephants in Udorn, also. Above right, dog cemetery maintained by Los Angeles. Fort MacArthur was the K-9 training base. Unfortunately most of the graves have the same date of death, when they closed the camp at the end of the war. Below: reunion group photo after the Sunday morning memorial service. March AFB, at Riverside, CA.



Above, favorite expat watering hole in Bangkok. There are always some regulars here to greet you and they have American burgers and the like, for those times when you get a little homesick.



Photos: Bill Tilton