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THE THAILAND LAOS CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC.

www.TLC-Brotherhood.org

Finding Magpie 91

By William R. Peterson, former
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On April 17, 2008 Jim Bourke, a retired lieutenant colonel of the Australian Special Forces and a leader of Operation Aussies Home, reached out to me with a request to help answer specific technical questions and provide background information which might clarify the context for the November 1970 loss of a Royal Australian Air Force Canberra bomber, callsign Magpie 91. In the USAF the English Electric Canberra was designated the Martin B-57. The aircrew members were the last two Australian MIA of the Vietnam War. I was happy and honored to do what I could.

I had served the month of June 1967 on the tactical scope of the Combat Reporting Center (CRC) on Monkey Mountain, callsign Panama, 6 nautical miles (nm) northeast of Da Nang. I was waiting for final clearance to assume duties as a Senior

Director at the top secret Special Sources Tactical Air Control Center—North Sector (TACC-NS), callsign Motel, adjacent to the CRC. TACC-NS had a state-of-the-art computer derived from NORAD and modified to employ digitally networked radar and special intelligence from all sources in the SEA Theater. I served there until 1 June 1968.

To ensure that Bourke was given the best possible answers, I asked several experts to add anything they might know about Magpie 91 or the environment in which that aircrew was lost. These included expertise in: search and rescue (SAR) and Medevac, LtCol Tom Read, USA, Ret, Dustoff; the Combat Skyspot/Combat Evaluation Group, Col Gerry Clayton, CS Commander; and the Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood (TLCB), comprised of every U.S. DOD service and agency with virtually every skill ever employed in SEA.

For my own part, I decided to attack some problems I saw

See Magpie, **continued on page 8.**



RAAF Official Image Ref No 000140858

Magpie 91 (RAAF-2A84-231) Dropping Ordnance in Vietnam. Photo furnished by the author.

Sorrow's Heart

by Jim Michener



We offer a sad episode extracted from some of the writings of "Mekong Jim" Michener, a charter TLCB member who lives in Vientiane, Laos, and was an Army helicopter pilot in 1966-67, flying a great deal in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Of the cause for this crash, Jim writes: "As I remember it, Harold Saurer, the copilot, said some GIs rushed to get on at the last minute. It wasn't a hot LZ; there was no firefight. I had been in the LZ 24 hours before, even flying the exact same chopper. It was an outpost on a ridge. I think they simply miscalculated the load. I did that once myself, and couldn't clear the barrier either. I 'kicked left pedal,' which turned the chopper 180 degrees around counterclockwise, at once saving a tremendous amount of power, then swooped down into the LZ, which was an artillery battery facing Ratanakiri. Then I turned right above the artillery pieces, and made a steep 'climbing escape' more or less in the same direction, east, over a slightly lower section of the same barrier which was not accessible from the original takeoff pad. One passenger was a lieutenant colonel who was rotating home. I will never forget how he yelled and screamed at me when we got back to Kontum and were on the ground. He shouted, 'What are you, a stunt pilot?' I'll have to admit it was pretty scary!"

Sorrow's Heart

On 23 April 67, just two days before my 23rd birthday, an aviator friend burned to death as the result of a helicopter accident in the savage magnificence of Vietnam's Central Highlands. His name was Ed Wells, a sort of loner in the company; he was 20 years old and scheduled to rotate to CONUS the next day. Harold Saurer, probably no older than 21 or 22, was his copilot. He looked particularly vulnerable with his baby face and skin. Within days if not hours, a severely burned Harold was evacuated to a burn center in Texas. His ultimate rating was 100 percent disabled and he was permanently retired by the Army.

On short final approach to landing on the Phan Rang Plain, I had been involved in a bizarre accident caused by mechanical failure only the month before. Once the racket of ammunition-induced explosions began to falter, the upside-down aircraft, as full of fuel as it was of ammunition, briskly burned to the ground with orange flames and billowing smoke curling upwards into an unruffled sky. Ironically, Harold had been my copilot. Other than possessing shattered nerves, Harold and I escaped unscathed.

The aircraft Ed and Harold were flying that fateful day was tail-number 525. I had flown 525 just 24 hours prior to Ed's death. The operations officer, Bulldog 3, routinely warned every aviator who flew 525 that the "bird" was "power deficient." In the final analysis, however, the accident investigation board ruled 525's demise to be "directly attributable to pilot error." It was, of course, the blind machinery of the mission that put Ed in such peril.

Many pilots heard 525's panicked Mayday call. Because

their mission was identical to mine on the previous day, I knew where Ed and Harold were flying. They were resupplying a 101st Airborne Division "Screaming Eagles" outpost on the slope of an unforgiving mountain south of Ban M'Drak, in the far interior of Khanh Hoa province. My crew and I were airborne and we flew towards the suspected crash site. From our altitude of several thousand feet, we saw a knife-like ridge to our southwest with an ominous column of black smoke slowly rising. It confirmed my worst suspicion. We flew to it immediately.

Our helicopter was the first to arrive. Upon exiting the Huey, the heavily armed crew chief and I descended the craggy mountainside to rescue Wells, Harold, and as many others as we possibly could. Somewhere behind us, the troops, "Screaming Eagles" all, moved one by one, shouting among themselves for direction, negotiating the heavily canopied ridge. Upon joining us, they helped pull the twisted, intertwined bodies from 525's semi-intact but radically fissured midships. Both of Wells' legs were crushed, hopelessly pinned between the dislodged instrument panel and the bottom half of his armor-plated seat. It was obvious that we could not extract him without amputating his legs at the knees. As a wet-cheeked, cursing corpsman prepared two tourniquets, someone unsheathed a rifle bayonet and handed the razor-sharp instrument to me.

It was no use. Surging flames and escalating heat catapulted us backward. Obscuring our vision in the noonday darkness, whirling, incinerated vegetation enveloped 525 like a suffocating shroud. Intuitively sensing our abandonment, Wells shrieked in absolute horror. He wailed a bloodcurdling cry, summoning us to return, screaming my name. The sound pierced our ears as it reverberated from tree to tree throughout the contemptu-

Top: Central Highlands of Vietnam. 2008 photo by the author.

ous, smoke-choked forest. The living were doomed to remember as a perverse and ruthless death stalked and ravaged the piled-up fuselage, claiming its once gung-ho cargo, taking bits and pieces of our souls and sanity with it.

Around our camouflage-booted feet, silver rivers of molten metal silently slid down the slope and vanished into mist-veiled ravines. Beneath a dusky heaven, the area unexpectedly became an expanding, all-consuming inferno of hot white light — momentarily lifting the pall of swirling, sorrowful smoke three and four meters. Through 525's open cockpit door where the crew chief and I once struggled in vain to free him, we saw Wells' form with outstretched arms and head tilted upward in agony - a defiant, dark silhouette. Unashamed, young battle-hardened GIs wept openly.

Unabated, the accelerating fire roared on as a dozen of us combed the sepulchral site for separated survivors, particularly

those who had fallen. With the lone exception of Wells, those who did not pull through the initial catastrophe were dragged across prehistoric roots, rocks, vines, and tropical undergrowth; face up. "Screaming Eagles" assembled the god-forsaken side-by-side on higher ground. Having carried blasting caps somewhere in his jungle fatigues, a sergeant major who was a

veteran of both World War II and Korea was retrieved in pieces. We carried casualties in pairs, any way we could. We hauled the first group of maimed, mangled, and disfigured victims up the perilous slope, now obscured by the smoke of sacrifice, to the engine-idling, whining chopper.

The cockpit instrumentation was state of the art, but fuel gauges were incongruously absent in the Hueys flown during the Second Indochina War. Pilots had to calculate "time flown" and "tonnage hauled" in order to determine the approximate moment for refueling. On that day, at that hour, each second was critical. Having offloaded the first sortie of 525's injured, Harold included, at a Nha Trang field hospital 20 minutes after pickup zone (PZ) lift off, we decided to take a chance and return to the site of the disaster without refueling. We knew it would be really close. The ship might run out of JP-4 on the return leg to Nha Trang (November Tango), but troops' lives -

the heinously broken cargo of bones and impassive flesh were at stake.

In less than 45 minutes, our command and control airship again became a medevac (Dustoff) and executed its second run for mutilated and burned infantrymen. Scurrying hospital attendants wearing camouflage uniforms met us to unload. In pairs, they toted taut, olive drab canvas stretchers. Once the cargo bay was empty, we straightaway came to a hover, rose above the barbed wire security fence, flew across the perimeter road parallel to the single-story surgery ward, and landed at an adjacent POL point, whereupon the turbine engine abruptly quit. Climbing out of the sooted aircraft with our hearts pounding in our throats, we, the crew, gawked at each other in quizzical silence, open-mouthed in indubitable disbelief.

Every week for 52 weeks there were these nerve-wracking, horrible setbacks. True, one could become immune easily,

effortlessly and become careless and reckless. I saw it happen to well intentioned warriors numerous times. These consecutive weeks became the epitome of exhilaration also, life and death hanging in the balance. To the good, I intuitively felt one could influence the odds stacked against him - not that I took uncalculated



chances, but I did believe in definitive ones. Consequently, the times I was swept off my feet were wild shots, wholly-out-of-the-blue, and to fathom why one was suddenly, swiftly reprimed at the final, decisive second was beyond all human comprehension.

I have agonized over the Wells tableau since that dreadful day, mentally scrutinizing similar scenes witnessed during the Southeast Asia conflagration, asking myself why I was an onlooker or participant. Both the ancient and the contemporary write that those who outlive death in war behold a compression and intensification of life. Moreover, I believe this is why combat-tempered soldiers carry so much emotional baggage with no place to put it. No, I do not agonize over guilt - there is none, but I do feel the weight, or trial, of sorrow to this day, wherever I go. Wells' screams and carbonaceous afterimage ceaselessly beseech me.



Assistance Tops a Quarter Million!

by John Schillo, Assistance Committee Chairman

At each reunion, the chairman of the Assistance Committee gives a report outlining the activities for the previous year. This brief report does not do justice to all of the work accomplished by the people who support the Assistance Program. This issue of the MEM contains a list of the members who shared their hard-earned money in 2008 so the TLCB could help others. This recognition is just a small way to say thanks and recognize you for your support. This article contains the 2008 donor list. We will publish the list of 2009 donors in the last issue of 2010.

Rosie Wheatley created a beautiful red, white, blue, and gold quilt and offered it for auction at the annual TLCB reunion. The details of the quilt were in keeping with the "Space Coast" theme, and her workmanship and creative, artistic talent once again produced a splendid keepsake of heirloom quality. Rosie does not receive reimbursement for her time, work, or materials. Many of us buy tickets with hopes of making her quilt our own treasure. Each year, Rosie's creation adds over \$2,000 to the Assistance Fund. A good CPA could perhaps figure a way to get a tax deduction for her effort, but that is not why she takes on the project. All we are able to give Rosie Wheatley are our compliments for a job beautifully and lovingly done and a heartfelt "Thank You."

The following direct quote from the IRS may help clarify any donation questions:

Donors who purchase items at a charity auction may claim a charitable contribution deduction for the excess of the purchase price paid for an item over its fair market value. The donor must be able to show, however, that he or she knew that the value of the item was less than the amount paid. For example, a charity may publish a catalog, given to each person who attends an auction, providing a good faith estimate of items that will be available for bidding.

We never know the total number of items we will have until

the day of the auction, and we certainly do not have a clue as to the items' fair market values. For example, we sold a roll of Thai toilet paper for \$5. What is that actually worth, 5 baht? Another example; I bought a sensor for \$50 but later found out that the person who donated it paid four times that much for it. Do I have to claim that as a capital gain?

This year, the auction raised over \$4,000. We had many items to sell and plenty of buyers, with some folks spending small amounts and others over \$400. We may not know what items we will have to sell, or how much they will bring, but we can always count on Frank Marsh to be there, bidding and buying for the TLCB cause. If things slow down, Frank picks up the pace and price. You can also count on a bidding war between Bill Tilton and my wife over something. Bill, being the perfect gentleman, allows Darice to win, but only after the bid rises sufficiently.

In order to have a successful auction, you not only need buyers—you need auctioneers—and John Sweet, Bob Santo, Bob Pruiksmas, and Les Thompson were there to make sure we got top dollar for all of the "treasures." This year we also had some "guest" auctioneers. Ruben Encinas and his wife Bonnie hawked prize-winning wine from New Mexico. (Just like Jeremiah, Ruben had some mighty fine wine). Gary Beatty auctioned off a Thai Barbie, complete with appro-



Unfortunately, according to IRS Publication 526, "thank you" is all we can give those of you who purchased the quilt raffle tickets because purchases of raffle, bingo, or lottery tickets are not considered charitable donations. Most of you know that without Rosie's hard work and your ticket purchases, we would have a big hole in our budget.

Another gray area regarding donations is the reunion auc-

2008	Thailand	Laos	Medical	Stud Aid	ACA Proj	End 07 Total: \$177,379.50	
Qtr 1	\$7,731.80	\$995.65	\$578.19	\$1,919.00	\$2,168.25	\$13,392.89	\$190,772.39
Qtr 2	\$2,137.51	\$1,364.00	\$98.28	\$2,188.00	\$9,943.45	\$15,731.24	\$206,503.63
Qtr 3	\$3,218.35	\$1,633.00	\$286.81	\$0.00	\$3,867.10	\$9,005.26	\$215,508.89
Qtr 4	\$4,752.27	\$1,813.00	\$344.17	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$6,909.44	\$222,418.33
Totals	\$17,839.93	\$5,805.65	\$1,307.45	\$4,107.00	15,978.80	\$45,038.83	\$222,418.33

2009	Thailand	Laos	Medical	Stud Aid	ACA Proj	End 08 Total: \$222,418.33	
Qtr 1	\$4,108.09	\$1,741.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$4,500.00	\$10,349.09	\$232,767.42
Qtr 2	\$4,459.13	\$500.00	\$0.00	\$1,529.36	\$0.00	\$6,488.49	\$239,255.91
Qtr 3	\$4,431.23	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,831.00	\$0.00	\$6,262.23	\$245,518.14
Qtr 4	\$3,195.53	\$2,000.00	\$449.89	\$540.00	\$0.00	\$6,185.42	\$251,703.56
Totals	\$16,193.98	\$4,241.00	\$449.89	\$3,900.36	4,500.00	\$29,285.23	\$251,703.56

ropriate “documentation.” Thank you so much to everyone who donated items and bought from the Assistance auction.

Now that you know where the money came from, “Where did it go?” you ask. Below is a summary of our expenditures for 2008 and 2009. I included both years because last year, the 2008 figures were not complete, just like the 2009 figures are not all in for this year since we go to press before year’s end. As you can see, we are over \$250,000 of all-time grants. This is not too shabby for a small group. You all deserve an “atta boy.”

I track the Air Commando Association’s donations separately. In 2008, the majority of their donations were spent in Thailand, and in 2009, they have been supporting the Laos operation.

This brings me to my last big acknowledgement and “Thank You.” It goes to the guys who put their boots on the ground: John Middlewood, Mac Thompson, and Jeff Hudgens spend a lot of their own money and a lot of their time to make these projects happen. The Assistance Committee Chairman has an expense account that comes from dues money—not from donated money. This expense money might be used to rent a truck or buy some gas, but it does not even come close to covering their daily out-of-pocket expenses. Meals, personal travel, hotel expenses, candles in Laos, all come from their personal funds.

That covers what we have done; what about the future? During the upcoming school year, we will expand the Student

See **Assistance**, continued next page.

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Make all payments of *any kind*, as listed below, payable to **The TLC Brotherhood, Inc.** Mail them to the treasurer, at:

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Always write payment purpose on memo line.

- Dues (\$25 per year) Student Assistance Fund
- Assistance donation BX purchase
- Monument donation Medical Fund.....etc.

Reunion 2010: Atlanta, Georgia

TLCB tax return and board minutes: On web site, in *members only* section. Password (1/1/10): Junon

Assistance, continued from page 5.

Aid program by several students. We will have nine high school students and five college students. Three of these students do not have sponsors but will receive support from the Student Aid Fund. Many of you sent in a one-time donation to the Student Aid Fund with your dues renewal. Because of those donations, the fund has a surplus sufficient to let us add students to the program with the TLCB membership as their sponsor.

We are also getting more involved with an organization called World Teach. John Middlewood submitted the following:

“The World Teach Program has been in the process for about a year. It is a result of my Internet search looking for organizations willing to provide English teachers in underdeveloped countries. TLCB (I) and the Christian Mission (I) have been involved in the negotiations since the beginning. The Program Director for World Teach has been here for a visit, toured the schools, saw the program at this end and was favorably impressed. About six months ago the decision was made by World Teach to establish a program here. As the advisor in English to the Provincial Director of Educational Services District 1, I selected the schools and did the negotiations to provide necessary paperwork to set things up. The field director for World Teach Thailand arrived early in September and we worked together to process all the documents necessary to get things going. Process is almost completed for work permits for everyone; visas come next and they start teaching in their respective schools November 1. They will be teaching until September 30, 2010. This year we are serving 14 schools, with 10 teachers and the advisor helping to teach in one school. Plans for next year are a minimum of 20-25 teachers and 25-30 schools. So far I have invested about 200 or so hours; Christian Mission provided in-kind services of about 50,000 baht (approx \$1,500) - dormitory space, orientation classrooms, electricity and water, etc. TLCB will provide not more than 8,000 baht (\$250) to cover two lunches for an English Camp October 30-31 at Kam pawk. In February and March they will go out with me one Saturday a month, 9 am to 3 pm, to conduct English Camp at a designated village school.”

This is an opportunity for us to begin working with other international organizations and become recognized for our work. And we commend John for his efforts with this organization. We have also been in contact with the Air Commando Association and look forward to their support in the new year. We have submitted a proposal to them for another project in Laos. Mac Thompson has had conversations with another international group and things are looking favorable that they may offer some limited help with some of the Laos operations. While this is only in the very early stages, Mac has been working hard with several organizations to get our name before these groups.

To sum up, nobody makes the Assistance Program a success. Everybody does. It does not matter if you donate, support a student, buy something at the auction, purchase a quilt raffle ticket, or make the quilt. Success happens when everyone works together.



Medical Assistance for Sririlak



Sririlak visits Middlewoods' back yard.

The following is a case example of how the TLCB Medical Assistance funds benefit a new, young friend, Sririlak Sangdee.

Sririlak Sangdee received her threatening diagnosis of leukemia when she was in the 4th grade. She started treatments, but money ran out and her parents had to stop them. She finished part of 5th grade but has not been to school for the last 2 or 3 years because of her illness. She should be finishing 7th grade now, but has pretty much given up hope of getting more education, at least at this point. Sririlak is now 13 years old and lives in the village of Nong Bua Ratchakwai, where the TLCB has worked with the school for several years.

Sririlak Sangdee's plight first came to John Middlewood about three months ago. John represents the TLCB and someone suggested that her father should come to see John because the TLCB might be able to help the family. When her father came to see John, Sririlak was bedridden and they had given up hope.

Sririlak has an older brother, 15, and a younger brother in the 2nd grade at the local elementary school. Her older brother left school at the end of 7th grade to go to Bangkok to find work with his friends. He works as a laborer. Her father is also a day laborer, taking work wherever he can find it, making no more than 200 baht per day, less than \$5 U.S., when he is working. When we heard of their dilemma, he was harvesting rice while his wife was in Ubon with their Sririlak and her little brother. At home, mother assumes the role of farmer, taking care of the rice fields and the house.

Since the TLCB has been assisting Sririlak, she has been to Ubon for treatment three times. It costs about 3500 baht for a 12 to 15 day stay in Ubon—a price the family could not possibly afford. The money provides food for the mother, a place for her to stay, and transportation there and back. At this point, we

do not know how many trips Sririlak will have to make to Ubon to complete her treatment and go into remission. November 30 was her next scheduled appointment and they did not know how long she would have to be there. If she had not received help from the TLCB, it is certain that she would not be alive today. We are waiting to hear news of her progress.



Sririlak with her parents at home. Photos by John Middlewood.



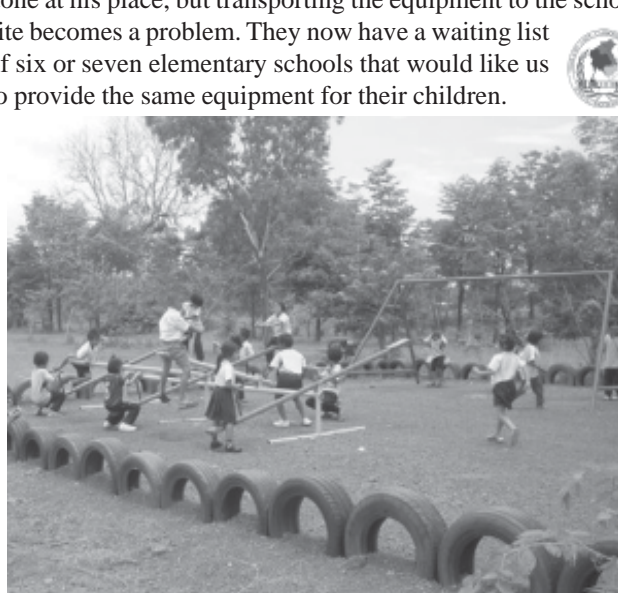
TLCB Begins Playground Equipment Projects

The idea of helping to supply playground equipment got started about four years ago. The TLCB assisted in repairing playground equipment for kindergarten classes at a couple of schools, but nothing ever came of the idea of purchasing new equipment. With some research, John Middlewood found that ready-made equipment is very expensive. About a year ago, the principal at Choak Amnuay approached him about buying the equipment and materials with the plan of village folks donating the labor for the installation. It sounded like a good idea, but at that time cost estimates for material alone were about 40,000 baht, so the project sat on the waiting list.

A few months ago, material costs dropped drastically - down to about 20,000 baht. The project moved to request for ap-

proval. The problem is that there are no welders in their villages to do the work. John also found that several schools have no lunch tables, so he plans to provide those first.

The project is complete at the Choak Amnuay school, which is on the provincial border with Sakon Nakhon, located on the main highway about 42 km west of the city of Nakhon Phanom. Everyone thinks the project is a fantastic success and the children love the equipment. John purchased the components from his local supplier and sent them to the school site. The villagers cut them and put it all together. The school is looking for a copy of the materials list. Once they find that list and the funds, he will find a welder interested in going from school to school to complete the projects. He had thought about having the work done at his place, but transporting the equipment to the school site becomes a problem. They now have a waiting list of six or seven elementary schools that would like us to provide the same equipment for their children.



Magpie, continued from page 1.

in the Australian data base. I believed it might be possible to locate, with some accuracy and a relatively high level of confidence, the patch of Quang Nam Province jungle that had held the Magpie 91 secrets for 39 years. The first objective was to locate the possible crash site, and the second goal was to put forth a theory of what caused Magpie 91 to go down. Due to space limitations I will not dwell on the data errors or problems encountered. I will simply relate the methodology employed and the results.

The best tool available was the contemporaneous voice transcript of the Precision-Guided Bomb Unit and the Magpie 91 aircrew, recorded as the flight took place. The Precision-Guided Bomb Unit was the Combat Skyspot installation at Phu Bai northwest of Da Nang, callsign Milky. The second item was the input provided by a former Panama weapons controller as to their Flight Follow of Magpie 91. The third was a log report by the 39th ARRS, the Monkey Mountain resident SAR control unit, which contained what is believed to be the accurate location of Magpie 91's target. I used all the above data and Google Earth to plot the course of Magpie 91 transmission by transmission, along with transmission times when known, employing a constant known airspeed of 400 knots at an altitude of 22,000 feet.

Flight Profile RAAF Canberra Magpie 91. Lost in action in Quang Nam Province, South Vietnam—3 Nov 1970. Graphic from the author.



A84-207 / 207 (cn 7) An RAAF Canberra overflies Avalon Airfield during a flight demonstration in 1971, with wheels down and bombbay open. The display was at the Government Aircraft Factory (GAF) facility. This aircraft was delivered to the RAAF in Aug 1954, to be displayed at Geraldton West Australia after retirement from service in April 1972. Now she is post-mounted at the Wanaka Toy Museum in New Zealand, with fading paint and tiptanks. By permission of Wal Nelowkin.

The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) 2 Squadron was based at Phan Rang in southern coastal Vietnam. The target was west-southwest of Da Nang near the Laotian border. My calculations produced a Magpie 91 flight profile [see graphic] that began when Magpie checked in with Panama at a bearing of 180/82 nm at 1950 local time (L) on 3 November 1970.



Panama provided Flight Follow services for the next 51 miles as Magpie flew due north and then left Panama Control at 1958L "to go tactical." Magpie actually turns left, flies 325 degrees for 33 miles, and checks in with Milky Control.

Milky is one of a half dozen "overtly discreet" (or covert in some cases) very highly specialized radar control units located in Laos and Vietnam. Typical radars produce a "blip" on a screen and many blips create a trail. Milky, a Combat Skyspot system, did not use a ground-based radar echo but instead was linked by a special transponder aboard Magpie that provided extremely accurate positioning data directly from the aircraft to Milky.

The objective is to determine the bomb release point in three-dimensional space and then vector (guide) Magpie from where it is to where you want it to be. Milky would know the exact target location, the type of ordnance to be used by Magpie, and compute the bomb release point. Then, working backwards, Milky would compute a flight path to that point during which Magpie would get precisely on course and maintain a steady, unchanging speed and altitude. To arrive at the beginning of that path, Milky would establish an Initial Point (IP), another three-dimensional point in space—latitude, longitude, altitude. Backing up one more time, we would see Milky establish positive identification, then discuss the bomb load and the target parameters and the Time Over Target (TOT), a critical data point. In this case it was 2022L.

At 2003L Milky begins to direct Magpie as the Canberra begins flight maneuvers to establish contact and reach the IP. During this time we learn that there are equipment problems with one of the designated ground navigation systems, the TACAN at Phu Bai, and the calculations are now computed using the TACAN at Da Nang. Another problem is that the primary target is changed and a new target substituted. It is believed, in our analysis from logs and transcripts, that this new target was a high-value North Vietnamese HQ, known as BT 44, moving from Laos into South Vietnam. The third important change in the environment is the announcement by Milky that there would be “heavy artillery” working near



Identification of crash site crater of A84-231. RAAF Official Image 8526964 0068 provided by the author. Excavation work in July 2009. For scale, see small stool at upper right.

Magpie’s target. Heavy artillery usually means massive howitzer friendly fire over a long range to a distant enemy ground target, although on some occasions this was a euphemism for USAF B-52 Arc Light mass bombing. The warning in this case typically required aircraft to avoid a specified area at specified altitudes. Typically it would be announced on 243.0 MHz, UHF GUARD, “This is Panama on GUARD. Heavy artillery warning at 2010 hours at 200 degrees off Phu Bai TACAN at 35 nautical miles below 20,000 feet. I say again...”

Using the speed of the aircraft, the known positions at certain times, and the target location, I was able to produce a Mag-



An RAAF Canberra taxis in at Avalon Airfield after a flight demonstration in 1971. The display was at the Government Aircraft Factory (GAF) facility. This aircraft was delivered to the RAAF in Aug 1954, and was retired from service in April 1972. She is similar to 2 Squadron aircraft A84-231 and A84-228, lost/shot down in Vietnam on 3 November 1970 and in March 1971 respectively. By permission of Wai Nelowkin.

pie 91 flight profile that actually gets the analyst from 1950L with Panama all the way through the IP to the Bomb Release Point and the target location. Magpie approached the target on a course of 204 degrees, bombs were on target at 2022L, and Magpie broke left. We know from the transcript that Magpie and Milky very briefly summarized a successful mission as reported by Milky, and that Magpie was breaking left off target heading for home base at 2023L:

91: 91 has six away breaking left

Milky: Roger sir [pause] and Magpie 91, Milky has words

91: 91 is ready to copy

Milky: Roger 91, your TOT 1222Z target number 6736S target description: known enemy location—support 1st ARVN

91: Magpie 91

Milky: That was an excellent run sir; it looked real good down here and we enjoyed working with you, and see you again another day

91: Magpie 91 (this was Magpie 91’s last transmission forever)

Normally, the last Magpie 91 task would be to check in with Panama, or another CRC control agency, for Flight Follow back to Phan Rang AB. Logic and SOP would indicate that Magpie would roll off target and head southeast to intersect their return to base (RTB) flight plan leg somewhere due south of Panama Control. By flying 120 degrees, which should be the reverse of their earlier flight from home base, they would be under Panama radar coverage. They never actually left Panama radar coverage when they left the Panama radio frequency to talk to Milky. They would be afforded Flight Follow services by Panama for the northern portion of this 280-mile RTB segment.

See **Magpie**, continued next page.

Except that Magpie never checked in; Magpie 91 was gone and remained a mystery for the next 39 years. They were flying at 400 knots, which is 6.67 nm per minute. One minute of time was used talking about mission success, up to 2023L, and Magpie would have been almost seven miles off target, heading 120 or at least southeasterly to avoid the Laotian border, 15 miles to their right, when that last transmission occurred.

The crash site had to be somewhere along this path of flight. Because Magpie 91 never checked in to Panama for Flight Follow, I assumed there was a problem that was immediate and catastrophic which prevented them from even making an emergency MAYDAY call. We have speculated as to the cause of this, and the likely options are:

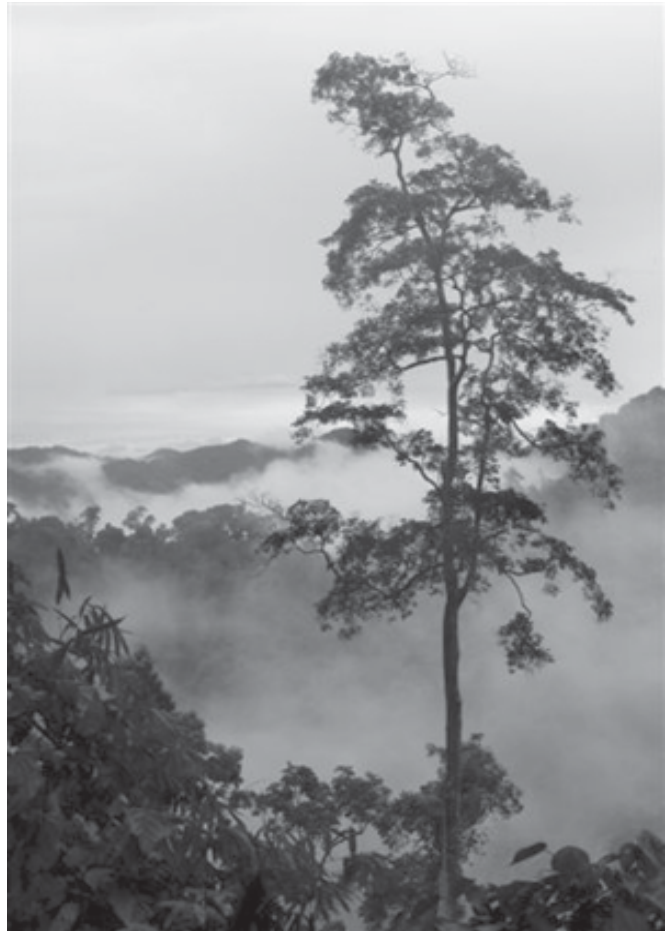
1 hostile ground fire, very likely because the target was a high value enemy unit which would have been heavily defended

2 friendly fire, because of the known presence of “heavy artillery” in the precise area at the same time associated with callsign LOPEZ, which could have been ARVN as the transmission log suggests, or maybe an O2-A Skymaster USAF FAC out of Da Nang.

3 hung ordnance on Magpie 91, unknown to the aircrew

4 massive incapacitating aircraft equipment problems with immediate effect.

Now, 39 years later, we know that Magpie 91 impacted the earth with both officers aboard at 15°42'40.30"N



View of the remote and rugged landscape looking out from the crash site of A84-231 during Operation Magpie's Return. RAAF Official Image 8526964 0050 provided by the author.

what happened during the final 14 seconds of the flight of Magpie 91?



Wreckage of A84-231 engine found below the main crash site during Operation Magpie's Return. RAAF Official Image 8526964 014. Photo provided by the author.

107°37'45.20"E. There was an intensive, but fruitless, three-day search coordinated by the ARRS at Monkey Mountain, and Magpie's Squadron flew 38 sorties in a valiant effort to find their mates. The projected impact location, based on flight profile analysis, is a mere 1.6 nm from the excavation site actually located in July 2009.

But the second question remains: What caused the crash—

This article explained the U.S. contribution to the 39-year Australian effort to solve the mystery of the 1970 disappearance of Magpie 91. Australian TLCB member Jim Bourke, who has played a key role in the arduous Australian struggle to find and bring home the crew, will provide the complete story in the March MEM.

Please Let Us Know

If you change address or email address we need to know about it. Please send an email to Membership chairman Mike Vale, at Mevale762@gmail.com, or a card or letter to TLCB, PO Box 343, Locust Grove GA 343 and tell us so we can update your records.

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REUNION 2010: ATLANTA

President John Loftus announced that the next annual meeting and reunion of the TLC Brotherhood will be held in Atlanta, Georgia. Incoming Vice President John Sweet has appointed Bill Tilton as local committee chairman, and plans are already underway. The timing and exact location are still unsettled, but most likely it will be after the hot summer and before November, as we have done for the past few years. Meanwhile, we are pleased to show a few photos of the 2009 revelry, hosted by Gary Beatty on the Space Coast. As you can see, it was both fun and interesting—and it helped “the kids.”



Dues Season is Here

Please notice that the board has enclosed an invoice and a self-addressed envelope for your convenience. The invoice explains what year you have paid through. If it is 2009, then you need to pay dues for 2010 by the end of January. You may pay for as many years as you wish, but the TLCB has no “life membership” provision at this time. We urge you to pay now before you forget! Send dues and donations to: TLCB Dues, PO Box 343, Locust Grove GA 30248. Annual dues are still just \$25.

At left, general chaos of the TLCB Assistance auction somehow always raises thousands of dollars for the kids. Left, middle, Gerry Frazier and Verne Wagner enjoy Bonnie Encinas' shameless hawking of New Mexico wine she and Ruben donated to the auction. Left, bottom, high bidder Frank Marsh and Alice at airport for their donated flight over the Space Coast.



Above, Bob Pruiksma and Bob Santo standing under recently returned Shuttle Atlantis. NASA engineer explains the types of heatshield tiles the recovery crew was replacing. Below, a group of members in a special launch viewing room in the Kennedy Space Center Launch Control building. Photos by Bill Tilton.

