

MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE THAILAND-LAOS-CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC. VOLUME 16, ISSUE 4

2015 TLCB Boston Reunion After Action Report

by John Sweet, TLCB President

The 2015 TLCB Reunion began with the usual initial gathering on Thursday, as members and spouses arrived in the afternoon of September 10 for commencement of our reunion activities. Since hotels in Massachusetts do not allow brown bagging of alcohol, we set up an open bar in Sweet's suite for Thursday evening following dinner in the Crowne Plaza's "Best of Boston" award-winning restaurant/pub. Comments by all were favorable about the Crowne Plaza rooms and staff.

Friday morning we were scheduled to visit the historic sites in the towns of Lexington and Concord, but due to heavy rain we switched the schedule and held the Forward Air Control (FAC) slide presentation, which had been scheduled for the afternoon. Bill Tilton and Jim Kidd presented a comparative of how they conducted operations and the differences between 1966 and 1971. They compared the 01 and OV-10 aircraft as well as the operations in central Laos and southern Laos. It ran two and a half hours, was very informative, and everyone loved it.

Following a late lunch, there was insufficient time to go to Lexington and Concord, so everyone chatted for a while, catching up, until 4:00 p.m. We then headed down to the Woburn

Town Common, the location of a fantastic, granite memorial wall to more than 12,000 men who served from the town in all wars.

(Full report on the Woburn Common ceremony is on page 4.)

Friday night, as usual, we held our lively annual Assistance Auction, which did very well, raising \$2,453. Additionally, the sale of Rosie's quilt tickets raised approximately \$2,300. Everyone had a good time; and we enjoyed meeting some new members, including some Army vets, who, at the close of the reunion told us how much they enjoyed the events and the warm reception they received. They are looking forward to attending

(See **Boston** continued on page 6)



President John Sweet presents a challenge coin to Woburn Mayor Scott Galvin after the ceremony in the center of the historic and picturesque city center. Photo Bill Tilton

Table of Contents

Boston Reunion After Action Report	1
Editor's Notes, December 2015.....	2
Remembrance on Woburn Common.....	3
A First-Timer's Reunion Impression	5
TLCB Website Needs Help!	5
New Member Profile	7
Newest Member List	7
Why I joined the TLC Brotherhood.....	8
Leaving Our Mark in Laos	9
Thank You Joyce, Debbie, Carolyn, and Nancy.....	12
Board Gives Special Recognition Plaques	16

Editor's Notebook

This issue of the *Mekong Express Mail (MEM)* focuses on this past September's TLCB Reunion in Woburn, Massachusetts, for a selfish reason. It was the first reunion that I have been able to attend since agreeing to be the Editor of the *MEM*. So, let me say right at the outset, I and my wife, Eileen, enjoyed it enormously. The camaraderie and sense of brotherhood and sisterhood, that is at the core of TLCB, is enhanced significantly when one spends the better part of three days and nights together. John Sweet, our president, provides a recap of the events, starting on page 1. A special presentation by TLCB at the Woburn Common, with many photos, begins on page 3. And there is more that follows. Next year's reunion will be in the Washington, D.C. area from September 15 through 18. Traditionally, this location draws our best reunion attendance. I am certain we can count on many of the "usual suspects" to show up, but let me add my encouragement to you to start planning on being there. *You will enjoy it.*

As usual, The Assistance Fund and its work in Thailand and Laos provided some of the most memorable reunion content, and photos from Assistance Chairman Les Thompson's presentation provide the basis for a review (page 9). There is also a brief appeal from Our Man in SEA, MacAlan "Mac" Thompson, for additional member support of that most important of all of the TLCB's activities.

Gerry Frazier, Jim Kidd, Bill Peterson, and Bill Tilton mesmerized the attendees on several facets of the air war in Laos and North Vietnam, and I hope that their presentations will be adapted into *MEM* articles in some future issues.

I also call your attention to a feature I fervently wish more of our readers would contribute to, "Why I Joined the TLCB." As you will see, for this issue, I called on two members I have a certain influence with. However, all you potential writers out

there, remember that there are no dull stories. The dull ones are only those that remain untold.

Lastly, please note that the reunion was also made noteworthy by special recognition of three of TLCB's most valued members. Mac Thompson was honored for his arduous work delivering the Assistance Program throughout Thailand and Laos; Bill Tilton was thanked for his achievements as well as, just about everything a TLCB member can do; and David MacDonald was named Editor Emeritus of the *MEM* and I can only say I am proud to be following humbly in his footsteps.

John Harrington
jharrington@nscopy.com

TLC Brotherhood Reunion and Annual Meeting

The National Capital Event—September 15-18, 2016

Watch the Forum for details: www.tlc-brotherhood.com



Photo by permission of Jessica Veltri Photography

Mekong Express Mail ...is an official publication of The TLC Brotherhood, Inc. This newsletter is furnished to all active member households in support of the Brotherhood's objectives. The views expressed in articles published in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not reflect official TLC Brotherhood policy unless explicitly stated, nor is the TLC Brotherhood, Inc. responsible for the veracity of information furnished by our authors. All rights reserved by The TLC Brotherhood, Inc. in 2015. The TLC Brotherhood, Inc. is a tax exempt, non-profit charitable organization under IRC Section 501(c)(3), and was incorporated in the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1999.

TLC Brotherhood, Inc.

Tax ID #54-1932649

Board of Directors and Committee Chairmen

2015-2016, showing year of term end

President: John Sweet (2016)

Vice President: Les Thompson (Reunion Committee) (2017)

Secretary: Gary Beatty (2017)

Treasurer: Bill Tilton (2016)

Chaplain: Debbie Stein (Memorial Committee) (2017)

Board members-at-large

Paul Lee (2016)

Mike Potaski (2017)

George Shenberger (2017)

"Willi Pete" Peterson (2016)

Non-board committee chairmen

Assistance Committee: Les Thompson

Communications Committee: Jerry Karnes

Exchange Shopkeepers: Thelma and Bill Tilton

History Committee: John Lorenzen

Membership Committee: Gerry Frazier

Public Relations Committee: "Willi Pete" Peterson

Mekong Express Mail

Editor Emeritus: David MacDonald

Editor: John Harrington (jharrington@nscopy.com)

Asst. Editor: Thelma Tilton (thelmatilton@gmail.com)

Distribution: John Duffin (jduffin29@verizon.net)

Composition: Bill Tilton (billtilton@gmail.com)

TLC Brotherhood Website Contact

Jerry Karnes, Communications Chairman

(JKarnes@tlc-brotherhood.com)

Payments to TLCB

Via website—uses PayPal, which accepts credit cards.

By check—make checks payable to "TLC Brotherhood, Inc."

Write payment purpose and member number on check.

Mail to:

TLC Brotherhood

P.O. Box 343

Locust Grove, GA 30248

Reunion 2016: Washington, D.C.

Remembrance on Woburn Common



The Woburn Common sits in the center of Woburn, Massachusetts, a beautiful New England town just outside of Boston, the birthplace of the American Revolution. In the center of the Common is a memorial to all of the sons and daughters of Woburn who served in any branch of the American military, back to its origins in the Revolutionary War. More than 12,000 names in all. For those who gave their lives in those conflicts, there are separate monuments for each war, listing the fallen. Clearly, the town of Woburn is proud of and remembers its veterans.



Woburn, Massachusetts, Memorial Monument on Woburn Common.

On the afternoon of September 11, 2015, a group of around 40 visitors to Woburn, some with their spouses, gathered on the Common, along with the Mayor of Woburn, Scott Galvin; State Representative, James Dwyer; and the town's Veteran's Service Officer, Larry Guisepe. The visitors had trav-



Right, Mayor Scott Galvin addresses TLCB members. Photos by John Harrington.

elled from near (other Massachusetts towns) and far (Bangkok, Thailand) to place a wreath alongside the monument honoring the Woburn residents who had died in the Vietnam War.

The group comprised members of the Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood — veterans of the Vietnam War, whose duty was primarily performed in those three countries. They were in Woburn, holding their annual reunion at a nearby hotel. One of the reunion's most important events was the presentation of the wreath.

President John Sweet, a founder of the TLCB, thanked the Woburn officials, Messrs Galvin, Dwyer, and Guisepe, for their warm welcome, and with wife, Nancy, by his side, placed the Memorial Wreath alongside the Vietnam stone. Following greetings from Mayor Galvin and Representative Dwyer, TLCB Chaplain, Debbie Stein, delivered the group's message. Some excerpts:

We are gathered here, today, at this memorial site to remember that we are one... one nation with one flag. We are all proud to be Americans who live in a free society made up of many people and many races and from many walks of life. The freedoms we enjoy have not come without a price. Many of the names on this memorial monument, and those in cemeteries throughout this nation are men and women who gave their lives, so that we can live in freedom and without fear so that we can worship as we see fit. So that we can raise our children to believe as we do; so that we can travel from one end of this great nation to the other without having to ask permission to do so. We are free to vote for whomever we feel should be in public office and we answer to no



John and Nancy Sweet by the Vietnam War monument.

Woburn is continued on page 4.

Woburn continued from page 3.



Left to right: State Representative, James Dwyer, TLCB President John Sweet, and the Mayor of Woburn, Scott Galvin.

have served, and we rightly recognize your sacrifice, and give you thanks, as well.

The wreath before you represents our commitment as the Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood to remember the fallen. We also want this remembrance wreath to symbolize our honor to those who have served and those who continue to serve in the armed forces of our great nation and to their families who endure sacrifices everyday on our behalf.

The solemnity of Chaplain Stein's words lingered with the TLCB members as they moved around the Woburn monument, visibly touched by the town's pride in the sacrifices of its citizens, stretching back over centuries. The TLCB members were also moved by their own memories, of comrades who did not return from Southeast Asia, and of their brothers and sisters who were no longer able to join them for their bittersweet annual reunions.

Perhaps like me, they thought of how in communities across America, large and small, so many of its citizens had offered a share of the lives, and for some their lives completely, to their country. Much like some members of our group, some

one but our own conscience and faith. We have the right to succeed and we have the right to fail at whatever endeavor we wish to pursue. The United States of America was founded on the ideals of Freedom, Justice and Equality and our Nation stands as a shining beacon of liberty to the world. We thank those who gave their lives to keep us free and we shall not forget any who have served. We shall remember them all.

Many of us who are gathered here are veterans of the Vietnam War as well as those who served at other times, and perhaps in other wars and conflicts, where America has had to fight to protect the innocent and the oppressed. Many of us here have answered that call and served our country well. To all who have served, we are here today to say 'thank you,' and we are honored to know you. Some of us are spouses, partners, and family members of those who



Above, members of the TLCB Board of Directors present at Woburn, left to right: John Sweet, Bill Tilton, Les Thompson, Gary Beatty, Mike Potaski, George Shenberger, and Debbie Stein.

Below, Chaplain Stein giving her memorial address to the group.



turned out to be career types, finding the place in their lives where they were most fulfilled. For others, and this was my lot, they were for several years, most likely during their early and mid-20s, civilians in uniform. Always proud of their service, but essentially it was a stepping stone towards the rest of their lives. However, as they went on, it remained one of the most significant parts of their lives' many chapters, being in an exotic place, and doing their duties under varying

Continued next page.

degrees of danger. Now 40 or more years later, that long ago time remained so engrained in their personas that they sought the company of those who shared those experiences. And all across our nation, in places like Woburn, there were so many citizens, throughout history, who had offered some part of their lives in a similar fashion.

Before leaving, they gathered again to memorialize their visit to Woburn Common with a group photo and a photo of their Board of Directors. Then it was back to their reunion, but each of them will always carry in their hearts a bit of the Town of Woburn and its appreciation of those who have served.

JH



Most of the group gathered in the center of Woburn, MA, on Woburn Common to lay our commemorative wreath, at center, behind President John, and Nancy Sweet. To the left of the wreath are Mayor Scott Galvin and State Representative James Dwyer. Photo furnished by Bill Peterson, seated at left.

(Note to Thelma after the 2015 Reunion)
A First-Timer's Reunion Impression

To the best wife of the best pilot!

I am very grateful of the warm reception you welcomed to me at the reunion. I was very impressed with all the hard work and coordinating events at the reunion. If I had known what a great organization the TLCB was, I certainly would have joined sooner. It's for the "kids." It's that time of year when I will send some disposable cost and pay my membership. Thanks again.

Sincerely,
 Randy Jenness, "Army" Belfast, Maine

Bill and I spend a lot of time with TLCB duties because we enjoy being part of such a great group. Every now and then someone takes the time to share his or her reactions or feelings, which reinforces us. We treasure getting these, especially this one from Randy, his first time at a reunion. For those of you who were at the reunion, you will "get" the salutation and remember the good time we had with the FACs and their presentation.

Thelma Tilton



Randy's "disposable cost" will go far to fix a school like this in Laos.

How can we reach you?

If we don't have your current email address, you may be missing out on important messages about your Brotherhood. Please send email, phone number, and address changes to us at JKarnes@tlc-brotherhood.com.

The TLCB Website Needs Help!

Jerry Karnes, TLCB Communications Chairman and website manager, is asking for the following:

1. Someone at least partially skilled with the web design software WordPress version 4.2.5 or higher.
2. Someone versed in Microsoft.NET and/or MS SQL Server.
3. A person to lend a hand with our archive duties. John Lorenzen is helping us, but there is so much to do it just continues to stack up. This work does not require any website experience at all. I can provide easy online training for anyone who wishes to help us out.

Interested people should contact Jerry at jkarnes@tex-app.com. For information about the website, go to <http://tlc-brotherhood.com/wp/>

(Boston continued from page 1)

again next year in Washington, D.C.

Saturday, the election went smoothly and the proposed slate was elected by an overwhelming vote. The members were happy with the current officers, and it was felt that all are doing a wonderful job and care very much about the organization. They are working well together, which is an important plus. Annual reports were read and recorded at the annual meeting, which took place prior to lunch.



Jim Kidd with inert 40mm round. He and Bill Tilton gave a well-received FAC presentation.

Saturday afternoon there were well received presentations by William (“Willi Pete”) Petersen and Gerry Frazier about the air war over Vietnam and an intelligence briefing on Laos. Willie also gave a presentation on material he is working on regarding his theory on what may have happened to some USAF men who were on LS-85,

in Laos in 1968. That evening, we enjoyed the cocktail hour and annual banquet. Our guest of honor, former prisoner of war Hugh Buchanan, was very personable and gave an excellent presentation of his time in the Hanoi Hilton.

We had all of our flags up for the opening ceremonies: American, POW, TLCB, and overhead on the wall in back of the speaker were flags of Thailand, Laos (White Elephant Royal Flag), and Cambodia. Our color guard was a well-trained high school Ju-

nior Navy ROTC unit from Western Massachusetts, who performed well. As at our recent reunions, they were assigned seating, one at each table as our guests for the banquet.

I welcomed everyone to the banquet, Chaplain Debbie Stein gave the invocation, and I read and we performed the POW/MIA Ceremony, which had a perfect, meaningful table arrangement. Following that, our chaplain conducted a memorial service, the scheduling of which we had changed to include it at the banquet this year, since some members have to leave for home early Sunday morning and miss this important part of our reunion. This was followed by a toast and introduction of our guest of honor, Father Lucien Buchard, “The Keds Walking Priest” who walked the trails in Laos for more than 20



Above, Debbie Stein, our chaplain, feigns great concern as she pulls the quilt raffle winning ticket. Jim Roth keeps her honest!

years. “Our Man in Laos,” MacAlan (“Mac”) Thompson, and Father Buchard, who had not seen each other for more than 40 years, sat together at a front table. After the dinner, I read official welcome documents, which were passed by the Massachusetts State Senate and House of Representatives, to the TLCB. A highlight of the evening was the presentation of awards from the TLCB Board to three members. David MacDonald, for his many years as editor of the *Mekong Express Mail (MEM)*, was named the *MEM*’s Editor Emeritus. Mac Thompson was honored for his outstanding humanitarian work in Laos as our TLC Brotherhood Assistance Representative and William Tilton was noted for his many years of dedicated service and leadership in varied roles within the TLC Brotherhood.



OK—not Pete Fountain. Long time Assistance Chairman John Schillo, on the *Old Ironsides* tour.



A large number of us stayed all day Sunday for an accompanied tour in Boston. At center—is that Pete Fountain talking to Darice Schillo?

years. “Our Man in Laos,” MacAlan (“Mac”) Thompson, and Father Buchard, who had not seen each other for more than 40 years, sat together at a front table.

After the dinner, I read official welcome documents, which were passed by the Massachusetts State Senate and House of Representatives, to the TLCB. A highlight of the evening was the presentation of awards from the TLCB Board to three members. David MacDonald, for his many years as editor of the *Mekong Express Mail (MEM)*, was named the *MEM*’s Editor Emeritus. Mac Thompson was honored for his outstanding humanitarian work in Laos as our TLC Brotherhood Assistance Representative and William Tilton was noted for his many years of dedicated service and leadership in varied roles within the TLC Brotherhood.

(A full report of these awards, with pictures,

(Boston continues next page)

is on page 16.)

A grateful Dr. Vern Wagner won the TLCB Quilt Raffle drawing and Les Thompson, our National Reunion Chairman, notified him of his great luck and mailed it to him.

William Peterson, TLCB's chairman of our participation in the Department of Defense's 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the Vietnam War, presented each attending SEA veteran member with a specially designed 50th Anniversary pin, symbolizing the grateful thanks of our nation. This bestowal concluded events at the banquet celebration.

Post-Reunion:

For those who could remain in the area, the reunion extended

into Sunday and Monday with visits to historical sites in the Boston area, which included Old Ironsides and the Constitution Museum. Sunday, I escorted members on a tour of Boston and The Freedom Trail, and on Monday I guided a tour of Salem, MA where I had been the first licensed tour guide in 1965.

To sum it up, thanks to Jim Kidd, Mike Potaski, and all those who helped out to make this a great reunion. Joyce Kidd made up wonderful, Boston-centered goodie bags, and because of the local committee's hard work, the attending members had a very exciting time, with lots of activities. We hope all of you will join with us next year in Washington, D.C.



New Member Profile

Paul Carter

I live in Bangkok now using my GI Bill for a Masters at Chulalongkorn University. I spent 21 years in the Army, 8 enlisted, 13 officer, (Benning OCS). I was an intell weenie my entire time and did one tour with the 82nd in Afghanistan 2002-2003 (9 of my 21 years were at Bragg). I retired and went to work as an intell contractor at Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and did four civilian intell contractor tours in Iraq. No experience in SE Asia, but I have friends who are part of the TLCB.

My contact info is best here: Carterpt82@aol.com, my address is JUSMAGTHAI, Box 3039, APO AP, 96546-9998.

I have attached a picture from Afghanistan.



Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The 17 members listed below joined between the last issue of the MEM and the 1st of December. You can find more information on our website database. The Mekong Express Mail wishes you all a hearty "Welcome Home."

No.	Branch	Last Name	First	City	State	Email
1693	USAF	Smith	Cecil	Grants Pass	OR	CECSmithJr@gmail.com
1694	USAF	Earl	Stanley	Surfside Beach	SC	SEarl70@gmail.com
1695	USAF	Peak	Adrian	El Cajon	CA	coledt920191@netzero.net
1696	USAF	Nigl	Joseph	Rome	NY	Jnigl1@twcnny.rr.com
1697	USAF	Altman	Harry	Wampum	PA	tuslog@hotmail.com
1698	USAF	Schrieber	Ronald	Roscommon	MI	rrschrieber@gmail.com
1699	USA	Carter	Paul	Arlington	VA	CarterPT82@aol.com
1700	USAF	Harrington	David	Clyde	NC	southface225@Gmail.com
1701	USAF	Mozzo	Martin	Ocean City	NJ	MMozzo@aol.com
1702	USAF	Hajduk	Casimir	Maple Shade	NJ	HDuke401@Comcast.net
1703	USAF	Powell	Sam	Bozeman	MT	saddleup95@msn.com
1704	USAF	Gjestson	Ronald	Bozeman	MT	Ponydot@msn.com
1705	USAF	Davis-Jones	John	Keizer	OR	Brown0318@comcast.net
1706	USA	Courtney	Glen	Antioch	CA	GCourt@comcast.net
1707	USA	Owens	James	Canton	MI	jowens813@aol.com
1708	USAF	Candito	James	Bridgewater	MA	3139@gmail.com
1709	USAF	Holik	Gary	Caro	MI	KGHolik@gmail.com

Why I Joined the TLC Brotherhood

In the June 2013 issue of the Mekong Express Mail (MEM), we published an article by John Lorenzen, the chairman of the TLCB History Committee, entitled “Why I Joined the TLCB.” At the time, I had hoped John’s initiative would inspire other members to do the same and that “Why I Joined...” would become a regular feature of the MEM. Well, it was not to be. However, I have not given up on the idea, so in this issue, we’re including two versions of “Why I Joined...” by two members I have some influence with: me and Bill Tilton, who does the layout of the MEM and is a frequent contributor. (Let’s also note that Thelma Tilton, his wife, is the assistant editor of the MEM). We each tell our story from different perspectives. Bill was there in the early days of the TLCB, and I’m a relative newcomer, having found the group in 2011. So, once again, I am hoping that “Why I Joined...” will become a regular feature of the MEM and members will be inundating us with their stories. However, I will warn you, I’m not going to wait very long and I’ll be contacting many of you soon, asking (well, it may be a little stronger than that) for your memoirs.

Why I Joined...

by John Harrington, a relatively new member

I left Phitsanulok, Thailand in the final days of August 1968, after having spent a year there as the admin officer for Detachment 8 of the 621st Tac Con Squadron. It had been a fascinating time and, since I was still single, an enjoyable period for the most part. My next assignment was at Davis-Monthan AFB in Tucson, where after some training stops, I would spend the last two years of my Air Force days as a missile control commander. At the time, I was definitely planning on a return visit to Thailand, and particularly Phitsanulok, as soon as I could. But, as they say, life interfered with my plans.

By the time that January 1971 rolled around, I had enrolled as a graduate student at the University of Arizona in Oriental Studies, with a focus on Southeast Asia—far cry from the English major I had been when drifting through the University of Connecticut in the first half of the 1960s. However, I was not as consumed with my goal as I had imagined and I left in the spring to return to my home in Connecticut, and certainly not with enough cash to travel on my own to Thailand. By the end of the summer I was working as an account executive for a trade association management company; and most importantly, I had met Eileen Gallagher. We were married in August 1972.



John in 1968 at the orderly room.

Why John Joined continues on page 13)

Why I Joined...

by Bill Tilton, an early joiner

I was sitting in an office in Rockville, Maryland one quiet afternoon, sometime in 1998. I answered my phone, and an unfamiliar voice said, “This is John Sweet.” He asked if I had served in Thailand, and when I confirmed that I had, he went on to describe a group of people with whom I had something in common. *It was like a bolt out of the blue!*

What John told me was my first inkling that anyone cared a rip about what had been a unique assignment in my 20-year Air Force career, from which I had retired in 1991. The year 1966 stood out to me as though it had been just a couple of years back—“like yesterday,” I thought so often. While I had kept in touch with one or two friends from that experience, and had shown relatives my slides when I came home, it was really not understood by anyone and I never expected that it would be. At one time I had written a month-by-month account mostly for myself, so that I wouldn’t forget.

Thus, learning that there existed a group of veterans of that Thailand experience who really “got it” was dramatic news to me. I can’t describe that feeling any more than I can adequately describe the experience we shared, but the chance to connect with folks who would know electrified me. For days I thought about little else. When I first got into the email address list I was amazed. Stories were going back and forth and more and more guys—as well as two or three gals—were jumping



Bill on DEROS, January 9, 1967.

Why Bill Joined continues on page 14)

Leaving Our Mark in Laos

by Les Thompson, TLCB Assistance Chairman

In February of this year, John and Nancy Sweet, Roger Durant, Carolyn, and I traveled back to Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. The trip was originally planned in November of 2014 as a final visit to John Middlewood; we knew his condition was terminal, but didn't know at the time how dire it actually was. We were able to visit with his widow Maeo and offer her our deepest condolences along with those of the TLCB.

We modified our plans from a quick trip to Nakhon Phanom and then on, into one that would take us through the middle of Laos, then into Thailand and then on down to Cambodia. This allowed us to visit several of the schools we support in Laos.



Map of trip, bold lines are gps tracks of surface travel.

The first school was Naxala Primary School, where previously, one of their buildings had a leaking tin roof and dirt floors. The TLCB Assistance Motion 14-41 furnished new roofing material and concrete for the floor, and the parents and teachers provided the labor for the project. After presenting the school with books from Big Brother Mouse, we were treated to classical Lao dancing by the students. The group posed with the children and staff of the school in front of the building for a photo op.

The next school was Ban Phieng Ta Primary School, where we are funding a new floor and roof through Motion 15-05. The original building was in poor condition with dirt floors

Note: The photos in this report were part of Chairman Thompson's report at the 2015 Reunion.



Naxala Primary School. President John Sweet presenting books for the school.



Above, Ban Phieng Ta—Exterior of building during Mac's 2014 visit.

and leaking roof. Again, the TLCB provides the materials and the parents and staff provide the labor. They saved the heavy beams and other suitable lumber for reuse in the reconstruction after the floors were finished.

The last school visited this trip was Khon Sana Primary.

Mark in Laos continues on page 10)



Naxala Primary School. Group photo in front of new roof.

Here again was an aging building with bad roofing and a dirt floor. Motion 14-32 was proposed and funded to correct these problems. The TLCB had provided desks some time back for the old building.

While I was looking at the old building, there were a couple of students sweeping and cleaning up the dirt floor in the classroom. Back home there had been an uproar about not all of the classrooms at one of the schools having air conditioning. What would they think of *these* conditions? These students want to and are encouraged to study and learn.

This report and photos give you examples of what is done with your money raised at the annual assistance auction, the



Above, Khon Sana Primary School The girls are sweeping the dirt floors.

Below, Khon Sana Primary School—This photo shows Mac at the door of the kindergarten building.

Below, Khon Sana Primary School—Kindergarteners look forward to their new classroom, funded by *your* donations made to TLC Brotherhood Assistance.



Mark in Laos *continues next page)*



Above, Ta Khon Sana Primary School—The new wall is going up as we watch.

quilt raffle, and the other donations each of you provides. Every penny of money donated to assistance goes into the projects. Each of us on this trip paid for our transportation and expenses while traveling. No TLCB funds were used for the trip.

I wish that everyone could have this opportunity to see firsthand what the TLCB has accomplished. The TLCB has made the lives of a lot of children a lot richer. Will they remember us for it? Probably not, but that does not matter when you look at the long term good that the children receive.



Below, Mac Thompson and helpers at Ban Nong School. Left rear, long-time member Glenn Black; right rear in shorts, Paul Carter, a new member Mac recruited. Paul's profile is on page 7. Mac just to the left of Paul. Photo from Mac Thompson.

Below, 1a Khon Sana Primary School—This is the new building under construction. Nancy Sweet is in the foreground, and Mac is pointing something out to Roger Durant. This building will be a big improvement for the students at this school.



According to Mac Thompson, many of the villagers in the group photo below are Hmong who were previously refugees in one of the camps in Thailand. “A number of schools we’ve run into in our travels really need replacement rather than just rehab, but this village and leadership is one of the few who have volunteered to provide the wood for the project, which can be the most significant cost. They’ve gone into the forest and done the logging and sawing themselves!” Look for the story in the next *MEM*.



Thank You Joyce, Debbie, Carolyn, and Nancy Who Helped Make Reunion 2015 a Success

First, thanks to Joyce Kidd, who spent a lot of effort making our reunion goodie bags special. It obviously took her time to research each item and provide meaningful, tasty deposits into the flag-decorated goodie brown bags. She put together a sheet to describe each treat, which was far above the average effort.

Among the refreshments were a bottle of Poland Spring Water from Maine, the official drinking water of the Boston Red Sox; a box of Boston Baked Beans, a sweet and salty rendition of a New England staple; Cape Cod Potato Chips, and NECCO Wafers, a confection created by the New England Candy Company in 1837. These sweet, colorful treats have a long history as early as the Civil War and were a regular staple in GI ration kits provided during World War II, and Admiral Byrd took two tons with him on his Antarctic polar expedition during the 1930s.

Joyce also dropped in a box of Craisins, the original American super fruit, with Native Americans eating cranberries, raw or baked with cornmeal since 1550. The Pilgrims quickly adopted this abundant berry as a staple in their diet. She also included a great homemade Toll House Cookie and a Newton. According to Joyce, these cookies went to battle in 1997 as to which would become the official state cookie, with the Toll House Cookie the winner.

Our “Secret War” hat is off to her and her contribution for this well-thought-out and delicious part of our good time in Woburn. Her parting message on her sheet said, “Here is to a wonderful reunion as we celebrate the heroism of our veterans, from the

Minute Men to the men and women serving this minute; this is a special time to reflect and reminisce on your own.”

Our TLCB Chaplain, Debbie Stein, gave a most wonderful, moving talk at the Woburn Commons Memorial Park. It was obvious that she spent a good deal of time to make the event special for our invited speakers and all of us gathered from the Brotherhood. Members and guests close enough to hear, enjoyed the “Debbie and John comedy time at the lectern” at the banquet—unrehearsed and funny as most professionals!

For years, Carolyn Thompson and Nancy Sweet have been keeping the auction purchases straight. It’s a daunting job during a raucous time, and their efforts may go unnoticed. At the end of last year’s tally, Carolyn had the bright idea to assign a number to each bidder. So this year, as each offer was made, the bidder held up his/her card, making the recording process easier and more accurate for the ladies behind the “cash register” as well as for the busy auction hawkers.

It was truly another wonderful reunion. Thank you so much ladies for your contributions to the good times! *TPT*



An Appeal From Mac Thompson for the TLCB Assistance Fund

Guys & Gals, I was just up in northeast Laos on another TLCB school-checking trip, visiting three projects totaling \$9,520. Approved by the Assistance Committee in September, the projects were a two-room toilet project, complete, way up north at a Hmong school; four new concrete floors, complete; and at another school, a replacement building with the villagers providing the wood for walls and trusses, and TLCB providing funding for foundation, floor, and roof, which is about 40% done and looking very good.

An additional \$5,500 has been approved for floors at two more mostly Hmong schools also way up in the northern portion of Xieng Khouang Province. These bring just the northern Lao TLCB assistance up to about \$142,000 in the last eight years, of which almost \$30,000 is in this year alone.

It all sounds good, but available funds are now down to about \$10,000, and I keep running into new requests on these trips. Probably upcoming soon from Mr. Soundeuan, our contact at the Xieng Khouang Provincial Education Service and Sports, will be requests for new tin roofing for several schools, and floors and a toilet at another largely Hmong secondary school up in the NE of the province. And, there will be further requests over the next few months, I’m sure. The TLCB projects are well known in Xieng Khouang!

With nearly 600 members now, it would be nice if everyone would send in, say, \$25 or more to the Assistance Fund because such contributions would really help out our TLCB projects in Laos.

Mac, Assistance Coordinator in SEA

At The Exchange



There are now three types of “Secret War” hats. Take a look! Go to www.tlc-brotherhood.com and shop at “The Exchange.”

BUY MANY!

(Why John Joined *continued from page 8*)

Yet Thailand still consumed a good deal of my thoughts, and my ambitions for writing, fueled by my English literature studies, were also driving my hopes for the future. Encouraged and supported by Eileen, I spent nearly two full years, beginning around mid-1974 writing fiction—short stories and a novel. Much of my writing was set in Thailand, drawing on my year there. I did find an agent for my novel, *The Year of the Lieutenant*, set in a place that resembled Phitsanulok, and while the central character was an admin officer, that's where the similarity ended. It was most definitely a work of fiction. I still truly believe it was a publishable work, but it was then the mid-1970s, Vietnam had ended badly and publishers were just not interested in anything remotely connected with the war, especially from a new and unknown writer.

Drawing on my interest in publishing and my short work experience in trade associations, I managed to get myself hired as the editor of a trade magazine for an organization called the Council for Periodical Distributors Associations, which represented magazine and book wholesalers. My office was in New York. In a few years, I was the chief staff officer of the Council. Eileen was teaching high school history in Greenwich, Connecticut, we bought a house in Norwalk, and our son, Jim, arrived not long after that. It was late 1981, and quite clearly, I wasn't going to be going back to Thailand anytime soon.

However, that in no way meant that Thailand was not on my mind. I continued to follow the news from there, and I read about it and Vietnam voluminously, particularly fiction, which as the 80s wore on, was becoming more acceptable in the publishing world.

One might wonder why, now with connections in publishing, I didn't show my work around. Frankly, I was less confident in it as time moved on, and I was nervous about jeopardizing relationships that were important to my work. On the other hand, it didn't mean that I didn't drag out my manuscripts from time to time and reread them, and even make efforts to improve them.

For a while, I also maintained some correspondence with some Thai acquaintances from back in the day, but those connections eventually fell by the wayside. Still, one of my closest friends had become John "J.B." Steplen, one of the weapons controllers at Phitsanulok. He had separated from the Force when he left there, after six years and three tours in Thailand, a TDY at Don Maung in late 1963, and a year at Nakhon Phanom in the mid-60s



John and Eileen Harrington live in Rhode Island now.

in addition to Phitsanulok. He settled in Arizona and via my business travel we got together frequently. Much of the time during our visits together was spent recalling our adventures in Phitsanulok. I think our memories were accurate, but even if they became a little exaggerated with our sometimes liquor-fueled story telling, the experience increased the importance of that year in my mind. Sadly, J.B. died in 1991, and with his passing, my connection to one of my life's most important years was entirely within my own memories.

Then along came the internet. In the mid-1990s, the publishing distribution business shifted radically, virtually overnight. The association I was the president of saw its *raison d'être* evaporate and I was, at an uncomfortable age, needing to reconstruct my career. Thanks to the emergence of the internet, I was able to find a niche in the new but unsettled magazine distribution business that I would have never imagined only a few years earlier. The new means of connection allowed me to provide services and information that I was uniquely qualified to deliver, and thus began a business that still sustains me quite satisfactorily to this date.

And it also was a path to connecting, or more properly reconnecting, with Thailand and my years in the Air Force. After some time, I had become a frequent visitor to a website devoted to veterans who had been in the 505th Tactical Control Group, based at Tan San Nhut, and which had responsibility for the three Tac Con Squadrons operating in South East Asia, including the 621st in Thailand. The website was not a membership organization, but did maintain a message board which allowed me to post brief descriptions of my time in Phitsanulok and, hopefully, make contact with others.

Unfortunately, the contacts were few and did not lead to any extended contact. However, one day I came across a message that caught my attention, even though it was not directly about Thailand. The writer mentioned the recent (mid-to-late 2000s) posthumous awarding of the Medal of Honor to an Air Force sergeant for his actions at a remote site in Laos. While in Phitsanulok, I was certainly aware of our activities in that

neighboring country, since our landing strip (which was actually the local airport) served at times as a loading site for Air America flights, although it was not part of our group's mission. I followed the link provided in the message, and lo and behold, I found the Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood.

This was a revela-

**Why John
Joined *continues*
on page.14)**

Why John Joined *continued from page 13*

tion. These guys were talking my language, referring to places I'd been (I had travelled back then to all of the 621st's sites with the exception of Mukdahan) and using phrases that turned up all the time in the writing I had done. So, I joined. Heck, it was only \$25. That much disappeared out of my pocket every day without my remembering what I spent it on. I checked in practically every day to what was then an email board, enjoying, quite often laughing about the memories and sometimes outrageous opinions posted by some of the more active TLCB members.

Yet it was a little while before I became significantly aware of what has become for me the most meaningful activity of the TLCB, its Assistance Program. I was deeply impressed that this very diverse group of veterans, who shared a time in a faraway land, or lands, still carried such a connection with their time there and a fondness for their peoples, that they were making considerable contributions of time and money to improving the lives of some of the poorest Thais and Laotians. This was the remarkable distinction between the members of the TLCB and the other sites and groups I had made contact with, who to me seemed more or less veterans approaching geezer-hood who rambled on, with sometimes faltering memories about what they did approximately 40 years ago.

Before long, I was contacted by editor of the *Mekong Express Mail (MEM)*, David MacDonald, asking me if I would write an article about my time in Thailand. I put him off for a while, pleading work obligations, but as a writer-wannabe, I knew I would take him up on his offer. So, about six months later I wrote a brief memory of my time in Phitsanulok and included some photos. Not long after that, in the summer of 2011, I attended my first TLCB Reunion in Washington, D.C. (well, actually Alexandria, Virginia) and was particularly impressed with the presentation by Jeff Hudgens about the work he is doing in Laos, near the crash site where his father, Ed, died back in 1970. Clearly, the TLCB was a special group, doing special things.

I wrote another article for the *MEM* in 2012 about my return to Thailand earlier that year (yes, Eileen and I finally made that trip, greatly assisted by suggestions from members, and a meeting in Bangkok with members living there). It was called *Welcome (Back) to Phitsanulok*, and in it, I mentioned my somewhat suppressed literary ambitions, as I had done as well in the first article I wrote.

Well, the next thing I knew, Bill Tilton, one of the TLCB's founders and the production person for the *MEM*, is calling me and asking if I'd be interested in becoming its editor, because David MacDonald, up till then the newsletter's only editor, needed to step aside (Note: David was just named *MEM's* Editor Emeritus). I begged some time to think about, which of course was a ruse. How could I turn it down? TLCB is a singular group, both a fraternity and a sorority as well, and a service organization. It doesn't matter that I do not share all of the opinions and emotions of all of its members, and I doubt if any of the members do. I am just proud to share the bond of a time—the late 60s and early 70s—and a place—South East Asia—and a commitment to giving something back to lands that in their way gave us so much.



(Why Bill Joined *continued from page 8*)

aboard. At that time that was all there was to “joining.” You got on the email list and you were included in every message sent out to one or two hundred participants. It was exciting! The flood of emotions was overwhelming at times, as were the twenty or thirty emails that were pouring in every day.

Gradually from the context of the emails that went back and forth I learned something else that this group of mostly veterans was all about. There was talk of being put down by “real” Vietnam veterans for not being “in country.” This was an awakening for me—having flown out of Thailand and into combat, it had never occurred to me that the vast legions of warriors who were repairing and arming those planes, providing supplies and food, manning the radars, decoding the messages, handling the vital mail, patching the wounds, and doing all the vast array of duties other than getting to play with Uncle Sam's wonderful toys over incredibly beautiful Laos were and always had been, for the most part, in the dark about what they were supporting and how important their work had been. They were all told they didn't have a need to know, and the crews just assumed everybody knew. Wow!

However, I didn't join the Brotherhood so much as it grew up around me. It was already called the TLC Brotherhood, which was thought up by the small group who met with Jimmie Butler, author of the just-barely-fiction book, *A Certain Brotherhood*. The founding of TLCB has been told in these pages by several folks—and I was not a founder. It was already an entity by the time John found me (he doesn't remember where he located my contact information). Before long someone—I think it was Jeffrey Glasser, author-member who was interested in getting some organization going—suggested that as many of us as possible should meet face-to-face at Dayton, Ohio, because of the Air Force Museum, and suggested that we make reservations at a certain hotel on a certain up-coming weekend. I jumped at the idea and soon had my leave approved and reservations made.

Of course at that time there was no logo or hat or shirt to identify people by, but you could sort of tell who belonged in our group as you entered the lobby. And wait a minute! There WAS a logo and a shirt—one of the group, Bob Pruiksma, had made up a supply of shirts with a logo designed by Dusty Henthorn, and was selling them from the back of his pickup. I still have and cherish that first TLCB shirt. As I recall, we found each other in the hotel lobby and in the bar that evening, and then next morning word went around that we could hike about 20 blocks (it seemed) to a breakfast place. There at breakfast was the first commander of the 23rd TASS, retired Col Robert Johnson! What a time we had!

In Dayton at that time lived Dick Strong, a FAC I had known at Nakhon Phanom. Dick knew that we would need a place for “show and tell,” and rented a room at the guest hotel on Wright-Pat AFB for several hours that afternoon. I had brought some slides along in case there were such an opportunity, and so had others. Someone had bought a case of cold Singha Beer, too. So we gabbed and met and talked for hours, and it was a

(Why Bill Joined *continues next page*)

great time for all of us. And that evening, again informally, we learned that we should all meet at a restaurant south of Dayton. Somehow we did, and we had pretty much of one room to ourselves, though a few unlucky “outsiders” had an odd dinner experience that evening.

At one point John Sweet stood up and asked for our attention. He described the on-going charity work at the Orphanage called Tha-re, which is located near Sakkonnakorn, between Udorn and Nakhon Phanom. For most of us this little speech was our introduction to what eventually became our Assistance programs, and we learned that John had gone back to visit Tha-re and had brought home some souvenirs to raise money—actual pieces of PSP (pierced steel planking, for forward runways and aircraft ramps) and some pebbles he had collected at the actual base at NKP. For a small donation, many of us grabbed up these rare souvenirs.

On Sunday we met in the memorial garden next to the Air Force Museum, where someone had arranged for us to meet a base chaplain for a memorial service. The young officer had a portable tape player, on which he played a little bit of appropriate music. Ignorant of our special status, he spoke of the in-country experience, which was moving but not at all appropriate for our group, and then he did a wonderful thing.

In the sunny silence of that memorial garden, surrounded by various unit statues and monuments, the chaplain invited us to name people we wanted to remember. When there was a lull I swallowed hard and stepped forward, saying, “Lee Harley, May 18th, 1966, and Warren P. Smith, June 21st, 1966.” My voice may have cracked a little, but it was such an opportunity to honor my best two friends within a group of like-minded souls who could appreciate how I felt.

Finally, the service ended and before too many could wander off, we took some group photos. Then Jeff Glasser called the group back together. He wanted a show of hands regarding how many of us would like to organize into something more formal. There were some who definitely did not want to do that, but it didn’t require a count—clearly most of us supported the idea.

That afternoon my wife, Gay, and I did the tour in the Museum, of course finding examples of most of the aircraft that I had flown or seen in Southeast Asia. As we were wandering around, we happened to run into John Sweet and Rodney Bell, whom we had had breakfast with that morning. They came out of a little side door near the early aircraft exhibits, and shortly after chatting a little, Rodney said he and John were wondering if I would be willing to run for president of the TLCB when we held our first vote. For some reason I didn’t hesitate to think about it, and said I



Yankees Bill and Thelma Tilton live in Georgia now.

would. So it’s pretty much their fault!

Jeff Glasser set a date and called for candidates for a list of positions on the first board, which was the same composition that we have today. In the months following that gathering in Dayton the email participants started to discuss another such get-together to visit *The Wall*, the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington. We lived in nearby Springfield, Virginia, and so I figured I could pull together a committee and organize some of the functions that had been nearly left to chance at Dayton. I volunteered to chair a local committee and was immediately drafted. The unintentional result was that my name got out there all the time as we made the preparations for the 1999 Tysons Corner reunion. By the time the vote for the first board of directors was held, the name recognition got me elected. I felt sorry for Jeff, who had done all that preliminary work and clearly expected to be the organizing president. He took it well and didn’t hold it against me, but he pretty much drifted away after that.

By this time I was deeply immersed in the Brotherhood, even though I was (and still am) working full time. I was spending hours late into the night corresponding with the other new board members and many others. The initial board of directors met at the first formal reunion and we got to work compiling bylaws and policies. An early order of business was recognition as a tax-exempt charity by IRS, which required incorporating and which in turn required drafting of articles of incorporation. With help from very sharp early members we got that all done, established a member database, and inaugurated a quarterly newsletter, the *Mekong Express Mail*. We benefitted a lot from member initiatives in those days, just like those shirts that Bob Pruiksmas showed up with at Dayton, and the room that the late Dick Strong rented for our show-and-tell there. Soon we had an Internet server so that each message didn’t have to have all the addresses of all the members, and Jim Bartholomew got the idea of selling hats, shirts, and coins to members, buying the initial Exchange inventory with his own money.

After more than fifteen years, I can’t say that I still feel quite the excitement I felt in that first year—I could draw some analogies I suppose, but most readers will get it. I don’t get the daily emails that used to excite, annoy, and sometimes infuriate me. Going to the Forum has made the atmosphere much more civil, but we have to accept that that element is missing. And there aren’t too many surprises at reunions any more, even though each one still seems better than all the others. On the other hand, most of the friends I have in the world are in the Brotherhood, which is a remarkable thing to say.



*Dave MacDonald, Mac Thompson, and Bill Tilton
Saluted at 2015 Annual Reunion*

Editor Emeritus



David MacDonald, with his wife, Sally, proudly holds the plaque he received in honor of his being named "Editor Emeritus" of the *Mekong Express Mail*. Dave was editor of the *MEM* from its first issue, June 2000, until the June 2012 issue.



President Sweet, left, presenting Outstanding Humanitarian Award plaque to MacAlan Thompson. Mac came all the way from Bangkok, Thailand to attend.



Treasurer Bill Tilton accepts the Leadership Excellence Award from President Sweet.

The Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood



Outstanding Service Award
Founding Editor & Longstanding TLCB Secretary

David MacDonald

Is hereby declared

Editor Emeritus

of *The Mekong Express Mail (MEM)*

Presented on September 12, 2015 by The Board of Directors

The Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood



Outstanding Humanitarian Award

to

MacAlan "Mac" Thompson

For Programs Initiated and Conducted As
TLCB Assistance Representative: Laos

Presented on September 12, 2015 by The Board of Directors

The Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood



Leadership Excellence Award

to

William T. Tilton

For Outstanding Leadership, Service,
& Dedication

Presented on September 12, 2015 by The Board of Directors