



Mekong Express Mail

Volume 7, Issue 2

THE THAILAND LAOS CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC.

www.TLC-Brotherhood.org

Did friendly fire take out AMS air conditioning?

By Howard "Hap" Wyman

This is part 2 of an article by Hap Wyman. Part 1 appeared in the March, 2006, issue. Hap is telling us about life as a radio technician at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base, on the Mekong River in Northeast Thailand.

A portion of the Comm shop assigned personnel worked in "The Project." They were located in an insignificant building on the civil engineering squadron complex grounds across the street from the base supply clothing and tool issue building. The troops assigned to "The Project" assembled and tested sensors for what was known as "Igloo White" or McNamara's electronic wall.

While I never assembled sensors myself, I did occasionally send some of my crew members to assist when they had rush orders. The sensors were dropped by aircraft in strategic locations to monitor enemy movements in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Due to the fact that we had to split our shop force both the Comm Shop and "Project" units were under-staffed, which placed an added burden on both crews. There I was, a lowly E-4 Sgt, occupying a TSgt slot because there was no TSgt available. The problem with the split force was not really rectified until a few weeks before I departed NKP nearly a year later.

The work was demanding and the war never slacked off or halted at NKP. There was no ceasefire over a holiday in Laos like there was in South Vietnam. We were not officially fighting a war in Laos according to the 1962 Geneva agreement. We did our job to the best of our ability with what we had. I don't recall my ever once not meeting the mission requirement. Parts for equipment repair were a major problem. It seems the war in South Vietnam had the parts priority. Most items we ordered went back order for an extended period. We had to cannibalize at times to repair the units but still got the job done thanks to the superb crew I had.

Radio configuration of the NKP aircraft followed two lines of thought. The A-26, C-123, U-10, and CH-3 were Air Force type planes. The A-1 and T-28 had been transferred from the U.S. Navy. Along with the Navy aircraft came one radio, the UHF ARC-27, which had a high failure rate and required a majority of performed maintenance. So high was the ARC-27 failure rate that if it had happened at a stateside base where a strict monthly reliability index was kept, heads would have certainly rolled. As it was I had 2-3 troops assigned to permanent ARC-27 repair. That may not sound like a lot but we only had 3 Skyraider squadrons and a handful of T-28 aircraft which used the ARC-27.

Register for the Reunion—see page 8



Jeff Hudgens on the runway at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand. For details of our latest joint Assistance venture, see pages 6 and 7.

The main problem was the unit was mounted inside the electronics bay of these aircraft. The unit was also sealed in a heavy aluminum pressurized case. This presented no real problem to an aircraft out to sea where there were cooler temperatures. With the baking hot weather of Southeast Asia the air inside the equipment bays reached unbelievable temps and the unit itself being comprised of the same standard size tubes one might find in an old TV set, power generated a lot of heat, and the combination of the two led to a lot of fried radios. I personally feel the heat and humidity also led to higher than normal failure rate of all units in Southeast Asia.

The squadron housing when I arrived was in an area of the base called "Sleepy Hollow," in an assortment of hooches scattered throughout the area. When the Navy VO-67 squadron and their P2V aircraft departed NKP in July 1968 our squadron was given two of the VO-67 hooches which were located on

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the hillside just below the base dispensary. Our squadron was housed in one central location from then on. Nice quarters and thank you U.S. Navy!

During my tour several major changes in unit designation took place. On 1 Aug 68 the Air Force changed the 56th Wing designation from Air Commando to Special Operations. The reason we were given was the Air Commando name sounded too warlike and the Air Force want a more generic sounding name for our type of operations. Looking back now I believe we were witnessing the first stages of what became the term known as “politically correct.” I know the new unit name did not set well with the troops. Next on 1 Jan 69 the Armament and Electronic Maintenance Squadron (AEMS) designation was changed Air Force wide to AMS, or Avionics Maintenance Squadron. The last change to another more generic name certainly proved that “politically correct” had infiltrated the lines.

I was really blessed with a *great* shop crew. Most of them were young first term Airman just like me. There was George Rose, my more than capable assistant and roommate. Other members of my crew were Fred Critch, Gene Cooper, Charlie Bowers,

Max Baer, Keith Smoak, Dave Kohane and Dick Johnson. Some of the other Comm Shop troops were TLC member Bill Burton, Frank Hausmann, the previously mentioned Mike Hayes, Big John “Max” Venable, John Jones, SSgts Foley and Hassert, and TSgt Dave Dillman, TSgt Moyers, and TSgt Nolley Byrd, a dear TLCB member passed away in late 2004 from brain cancer. Nolley worked in “The Project” sensor assembly along with Robbie Robinson and a guy from Chicago named Paul and several others whose names have departed with the years. There were a few others assigned to the Comm Shop flight line crew. I can see their faces but the names elude me.

Outside the double doors on the south end of the building was a raised dirt area where our AEMS Squadron Metro Step-Van was parked when loading. The van was used to carry troops and parts to the various base aircraft of our maintenance jurisdiction and contained a two-way radio for squadron communication with a base station at the Comm Shop dispatch desk. The van was also used for chow hall runs at meal time and an occasional hooch shuttle. Sometime even a run to the base package store for barracks refreshments. Sure beat carrying those heavy cases of refreshments in the Thailand heat and rain.

We never had a permanent driver for the van and the squadron troops would take turns at the wheel. A sort of go out and check over the flight line and clear your head kind of thing.

A couple of trips a day one could scope out the ongoing construction, look for new battle damage, witness strange aircraft on base and a multitude of other seemingly insignificant items which all made up our little corner of the war.

I remember a couple of squadron parties where nice steaks were requisitioned, grilled, and served with a baked potato and corn on the cob, along with a salad on the side. Two very large metal troughs full of soda pop, mainly beer and large chunks of ice were brought in to house and chill the refreshments. After the dinner was over and the beer took effect the squadron commander would bow out and depart.

That was usually the signal for the real fun to begin. Soon a



Hap enjoying a laugh with Phyllis and Larry Hughes at Ontario, California, reunion in 2004.

group of well oiled troops would sneak up on an unsuspecting soul and into the trough the poor sucker would go, the ice now mostly melted but still at around 33 degrees. Not too bad in the summer but right before Christmas and the temp in the 40s, it was Cold! The dunking process went on relentlessly until the whole squadron; including the Squadron Maintenance Officer was baptized.

I remember at the mid-summer party there were several scheduled contests that pitted troops from the different shops against one

another. One such contest was a hard-boiled egg eating contest to see who could eat the most eggs in one minute. Seems the military record at the time was 39 eggs by some Marine in a unit in South Vietnam. The Comm Shop troop chosen for the egg ritual was Big John “Max” Venable. Max was a great guy but somewhat of an animal and we all wondered how many eggs was a reasonable bet? The contest time came; the eggs and a few sodas to wash them down were set in front of the contestants.

The go command was given and Max ate an egg, figured that took too long, and started immediately swallowing his eggs whole. Somewhere around 30 he grabbed a Seven-up and gulped it down, then proceeded to down another 11 eggs for a new military record of 41 eggs when the minute was over. I was sitting right next to Max while he swallowed the eggs and I can still see them disappearing today. If you think there is nothing to it and want to impress the grandkids then try eating 42 hard-boiled eggs in one minute at the next family reunion! One more important item; Max did have to go to the base dispensary several days later and have the doc give him something to break up the logjam!

The daily routine never changed. The war never let up for the whole year and only the local policy would change every day. Aircraft, and sometime the aircrew, came back shot up or

Hap is continued on page 4

ABCCC: we knew them as Cricket and Alleycat, Hillsboro and Moonbeam

by Jim Stanitz

The war in Southeast Asia was fought, for the most part, in rugged terrain. With marshy lowlands near the coast and rivers, and jungle-covered mountains inland, Southeast Asia was an ideal location for waging guerrilla warfare. One of the most effective means of carrying the war to the enemy in this terrain was airpower.

My vantage point for the air war was from the Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center (ABCCC) flown by the 7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron from Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB) in 1968 and 1969. The mission of this unit was to afford a command extension of the ground command and control center, controlling all aspects of the air war in a designated area. The ABCCC could use available resources in aircraft and ordnance to the best possible advantage in fulfilling military requirements and react quickly to changing situations such as TIC (troops in contact), SAR (search and rescue for downed aircrew), and Prairie Fire emergencies [emergency extraction of compromised road watch or SOG (studies and observation group) teams].

This squadron flew Lockheed EC-130E Hercules aircraft. To make this versatile cargo aircraft into an airborne command center, LTV Electrosystems designed and built the ABCCC, an encapsulated system that could be used in the air or on the ground, and was easily transportable. With a wide variety of radio equipment, the ABCCC personnel could keep in contact with the multitude of aircraft and ground stations necessary to keep the air war operating. The capsule contained 20 radios, 16 operator and command staff positions, plotting boards, two protected voice circuits, automatic relay on all 20 radios, rest area, galley with hot and cold water, oven, flush-type lavatory and an integral environmental control unit. The interior of the ABCCC incorporated human engineering concepts in order to increase crew efficiency during the extended missions – though as typical for the C-130, it was sometimes way too hot, and sometimes way too cold. We always took our flight jackets along and used them on every flight.

Based at Udorn RTAFB in northeast Thailand, the ABCCC unit was ideally located, being but a short flight from the operational areas, yet having excellent facilities for off-duty relaxation free from normal fear of attack. The squadron maintained two orbits at all times, day and night. The north day orbit was call sign Cricket; the corresponding night orbit, Alleycat. The south day orbit was Hillsboro; the night, Moonbeam. Operational areas of responsibility could and did change, but generally speaking, during my tour, the north orbit was responsible for Barrel Roll (northern Laos), Steel Tiger North (northern part of central/southern Laos) and, until 1 November 1968, Route Pack 1 in North Vietnam. The southern orbit was responsible for the rest of Laos. If need arose, ABCCC would take on-scene command of actions inside South Vietnam, such as at Khe Sanh in early 1968.

After pre-flight briefings, the air battle staff collected their survival vests, which included many items that would be useful, should they have to bail out of the aircraft. Among the items in the vest were a Smith and Wesson .38 revolver with

ing mirror, and most importantly, the personal survival radio, for this was the primary means by which the survivor could contact the rescue forces, and indeed help direct his own rescue.

Once the survival vests were checked out and donned, the many pounds of maps, checklists, target lists, rules of engagement (ROE) and other manuals were loaded onto the crew truck and the crew proceeded to the aircraft. The normal complement of personnel was 12 in the capsule crew plus four in the flight crew. The capsule crew consisted of flight commander or Senior Controller (later changed to DABS – Director, Air Battle Staff), who was normally a colonel or lieutenant colonel; operations officer (later BSOO – Battle Staff Operations Officer); four aircraft controllers; four radio and maintenance technicians; and two intelligence personnel. The capsule had seats for a total of 16 people, so there were usually a couple of free seats. At times, other military personnel were carried on a mission for familiarization – typically fighter pilots, though the squadron chaplain made periodic flights as well.

Once the crew was aboard, the engines were started and the planes would waddle out to the runway. Each plane had a take-off weight of approximately 163,000 pounds, consisting in part of 62,000 pounds of fuel and 20,000 pounds of capsule. [Normal maximum take-off weight for a C-130 is 155,000 pounds.] As the aircraft took off down the runway, one could appreciate the great weight as it took some 45 seconds and 7,500 feet to get airborne. Once at altitude, the aircraft would loiter in orbit at about 250 miles per hour; orbit altitude was typically around 20,000 feet. Missions would typically last about 13 hours, from take-off to landing. Capsule crew days were longer, with a show time of three hours before take-off and then debriefing after the mission. The total duty day from sign-in to sign-out at the orbit shack was normally about 18 hours.

As the plane gained safe altitude and continued to climb out, the battle staff began planning how to handle their assigned sorties in accordance with the fragmentary operations order (the frag), matching ordnance against targets and keeping planes separated. The intelligence staff updated the assigned targets and plotted the information on the map boards. Communication would be established with the aircraft being relieved, which would brief the new aircraft on the current situation, as well as numerous airborne and ground stations.

see ABCCC, continued next page

ABCCC did not have radar, so the controllers relied on “shrimp boats,” plastic tags with masking tape loops on back. The call sign of the incoming flights would be marked with grease pencil on a boat, which was then stuck on the map board by the assigned target or route or sector. Once the flight had called off and given BDA (bomb damage assessment) if any, the boat was removed, wiped clean, and made ready for the next flight.

In effect, ABCCC was the same as a ground command post, except with a four-mile high antenna (co-located with the command post), which could be moved to suit the situation. Acting as the designee for the commander, ABCCC was in frequent contact with 7th Air Force at Saigon, 7/13th Air Force at Udorn, and various offices at Vientiane (the American Ambassador had overall charge of the war in Laos). While the Senior Controller had a great deal of latitude with resources assigned to the orbit, he could also call higher headquarters to have resources diverted from other areas to support urgent needs.

In the Barrel Roll, these critical needs were typically TIC situations, or SARs. The airborne intelligence officer was primary contact for the English-speaking FAGs (forward air guides) who were qualified to direct strikes on enemy targets. [Though I never was able to meet any of the FAGs face-to-face, I considered all of them to be personal friends – Hunter, Red Hat and Blue Boy were my most frequent contacts.] When a FAG reported trouble, we did everything possible to respond as quickly as possible. Sometimes, we could get friendly air overhead within 10 or 20 minutes; other times, especially if the weather was bad, it would prove impossible to get resources in position, or, it could take a very long time to get assistance from remote operational areas.

After landing back at Udorn, the crew debriefed the mission at 7ACCS operations. The intelligence crew had prepared statistics on number of flights handled, amount of ordnance dropped, and BDA (enemy killed, trucks destroyed and damaged, secondary fires and explosions (small, medium, large), buildings destroyed and damaged). Any unusual events were also debriefed, to include TICs and SARs.

For the capsule crew, the normal cycle was: day 1 – fly; day 2 – rest; day 3 – break frag for the crew flying next; and start all over again. It was an interesting, challenging and rewarding job, and we believed we made a difference.

Jim Stanitz was a lieutenant during his tour as an airborne intelligence officer with ABCCC Alleycat, from May, 1968, to April, 1969. He flew 131 missions with 1655 hours in that year. After a tour in Europe, he was selected for flight training and became a C-130 pilot. In 1974 and 1975 he flew out of Clark AB, Philippines, throughout Asia, including the Klonghopper base shuttle missions in Thailand. He also flew into Phnom Penh during the siege, and flew a mission in support of the ICCS (International Control and Supervisory Commission) from Saigon to Hanoi Gia Lam.

A short history of the ABCCC

The unit was first established as the ABCCC and arrived at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Republic of Vietnam, in September, 1965. All of its members were TDY (temporary duty), with the capsule crews coming from 7AF. The original orbit was Hillsboro, and Cricket was flown by the Navy in a C-118. Hillsboro moved to DaNang Air Base in January, 1966, and the Navy followed in April. ABCCC assumed the Cricket orbit in the late summer of the same year. Hillsboro originally controlled the Tiger Hound area of Laos.

The unit was then organized as Detachment 1, 6250 Support Squadron at DaNang. After a rocket attack which destroyed one C-130 and capsule and damaged another C-130 in July, 1967, part of the unit was moved to Udorn RTAFB on TDY. Wide-ranging discussions were held concerning the final location of the unit; overall US manning in Thailand was a subject of status of forces (SOFA) negotiations. While this was in progress, the unit was designated 7ACCS in March. On 31 October 1968, the unit’s move to Udorn was made official, and it became part of the 432nd Tactical Reconnaissance Wing. In April, 1972, the unit relocated to Korat RTAFB. A 7ACCS aircraft was the last American plane over Cambodia after the evacuation there, and 7ACCS played a critical role in the evacuation of Saigon and the Mayaguez incident. With the end of hostilities in SEA, in May, 1974, the squadron relocated again to Clark Air Base, Republic of the Philippines, leaving there for Keesler AFB, Mississippi, in August, 1975. The unit was then transferred to Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona, in 1994 as the 42ACCS, where it was deactivated in September, 2002. The ABCCC took part in the first Gulf War, as well as operations in Grenada and Panama.



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maybe failed to return altogether. The heat, humidity and heavy rain persisted throughout the summer into the fall when the dry took over for the winter. The red mud became fine powdered dust and settled on everything, giving the whole landscape a red tint. Around Christmas it started dropping down into the 30’s at night and gave us a short break from the ever oppressive heat. I remember breaking out my field jacket before Christmas and wishing I had a liner., doubling my two GI blankets over me at night and wanting more. Damp cold has a nasty way of penetrating everything.

The old troops started rotating stateside or to other foreign bases in the fall of 68 and a few replacements trickled in. During this period squadron 1stSgt Arthur Mills departed NKP and was replaced by Harry Bechtel. The local base policy grew more into a stateside type atmosphere and less Air Commando with each day. A Wing aircraft maintenance debriefing program was started but silly rules by the initiator did not allow the maintenance troop to ask the aircrew member(s) any questions and defeated the whole concept of maintenance debriefing.

The Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year holidays came and went and the war never missed a beat. If you were lucky to have the day off you celebrated but most worked the days.

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MEM Interview with Membership Committee chairman Dave Macdonald during his trip to Thailand in October, 2004

M We are speaking with Dave Macdonald, from Arizona, who is just winding up a trip to Thailand. We understand you got to visit some of the places where you were stationed; in what years were you here?

D I arrived at NKP (Nakhon Phanom) in February, 1968, and stayed to February, 1969.

M And you were stationed at NKP in what job?

D I was an air traffic controller and worked in the control tower there.

M Can you remember back to when you got your orders to come over here, and what you felt about it—what you expected?

D Yeah—I was really excited about it. But the strange thing was, at that time, everybody knew where Bien Hoa was, and everybody knew where Saigon was, but nobody knew where NKP was.

M And you got orders to NKP. Where were you at that time.

D I was at Keesler Air Force Base (Mississippi) at that time, teaching in the air traffic controller course at the tech school there, in the grade of E-4.

M Well, what were your expectations for NKP?

D [pause] I really didn't have the slightest idea what I was getting into.

M Well then, we'd be interested in knowing what were your first impressions once you got there.

D Well, that's funny, because we arrived there on the C-130, commonly referred to in those days as the "Klong Hopper," and I think NKP was about the fourth or fifth stop out of Bangkok, out of Don Muang Airport, and nobody told us that we'd be landing on a PSP [pierced steel plank] runway, and when they landed and put on the brakes I thought, "Well—I'm gonna die and I haven't even got off the airplane." It was just a lot of noise and shaking as they put the props in reverse and there were clouds of red dust, and it was—it was quite an impression!

M Well, now you've visited NKP and I understand you found something you recognize. Would you tell us about that?

D Yes, as we were coming into the town toward the hotel, it was on a road that I couldn't even imagine being built see Mac, continued on page 10



Mac and Vickie near Korat, 2004 trip.

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The TLC Brotherhood, Inc. is a tax exempt, non-profit charitable organization under IRC Section 501(c)3. The registered address is 1550 Hwy 138 SE, Suite A; Conyers, GA 30013. TLCB was incorporated in the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1999.

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TLC Brotherhood, Inc. Tax ID #54-1932649

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ALL payments of any kind, as listed below, are to be made payable to: **The TLC Brotherhood, Inc., and shall be mailed to the treasurer, at:**

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Always write payment purpose on memo line.
Dues (\$25 per year) Reunion registration
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Reunion 2006: August 14, 15, 16
 Gold Coast Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas, Nevada
 Room rate \$50: 13—17 August

TLCB tax return and board minutes: On web site, in *members only* section. Password, 7/1/06: **Junon**

TLCB helps people of Ban Nahom, Laos

TLCB Assistance Committee member Jeff Hudgens set out the day after Christmas for yet another trip to the Lao village of Ban Nahom, bringing a group of volunteers from his church in California, and supported in part by a grant from the TLCB for locally-purchased supplies. As chronicled in previous articles in MEM, Jeff makes these visits in memory of his father, an A-1 pilot who lost his life when his falling plane hit a small mountain very close to Ban Nahom, while flying cover for a rescue mission in 1970. With the help of Nick Ascot (who has a travel business in Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, and is a member of the Assistance Committee), Jeff located the village and the mountain, and even parts of his dad's aircraft. On a return visit Jeff mounted a bronze plaque on a boulder at the foot of the mountain. On all visits to Ban Nahom Jeff and his party have brought supplies and help to the village.



Above: the party all slept on the floor of the village leader's home. They found the night air to be very pleasant (it was January), and slept well until the roosters started crowing at four AM.



Left: Jeff and his brother-in-law will try anything once, it seems. These roasted silkworms were meant to be dessert after dinner in NKP. They turned out to have their own special flavor, "not like chicken," they said, and we will leave it at that. The photo also shows a plate of roasted crickets, known to be a delicacy in Isan.

Below, left and right: UXO (unexploded ordnance) is everywhere in Khammouane Province, where the Ho Chi Minh Trail system ran through Laos. Jeff gently hand-dug the hole for a goalpost after someone reminded him that it is hazardous to strike the ground with a pick.





Left and below, supplies purchased with funds granted to the visit party by the TLCB Assistance Committee. All items were purchased at local prices from merchants in the region and distributed to the people of Ban Nahom, along with items paid for by Jeff's church group.

Ban Nahom is just south of the base of famous Mugia Pass, in Khammouane Province, Laos.



Left: This is the village toilet, known to the Hudgens party as "the squatter." It is in the midst of the village.



Right: On the first night one of the members of the local Lao team developed severe stomach pains. The group drove him to Thakkek after midnight for medical help. A shot of some sort (cost: \$8) seemed to help, and he was back at the village by next morning, feeling well. On the morning of the fourth day, however, word came that the man's appendix had ruptured. Fortunately he was quickly operated on in a hospital, but because of the rupture he required twelve days of inpatient stay to de-toxify. The party took up a collection and were able to pay the bill, which totalled \$685 all together.



2006 TLC-Brotherhood Reunion

Gold Coast Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas, Nevada

August 14, 15 & 16, 2006

Note: time to register, using the enclosed form.

Our Reunion in Las Vegas in August will feature two first-rate speakers you will all want to hear. **Jimmie Butler**, who flew FAC missions over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos from NKP, will give us an illustrated talk on what it was like to operate in those unfriendly skies. **Don Harten** will tell us what it was like to fly a B-52 into a head-on, mid-air collision and live to tell the tale.

You can only hear these fine pilots if you make your reservations for the August 14, 15, 16 2006 Reunion at the latest by July 13. To do this, call the **Gold Coast Hotel &**

Casino reservation desk at 1-800-331-5334 and tell them you are with the TLCB Reunion and quote Reunion Code THA 0813. This will get you our special reunion room rate of \$50 per night. That rate applies from Sunday August 13 up to and including Thursday August 17. Arriving the night before the official start of the reunion has become a tradition for several reunion veterans. The hotel is less than five miles by cab from the airport.

The Nipa Hut will open on Monday morning, when you can register your attendance and meet both old and new friends. The Nipa Hut will stay open all day and will feature, in the afternoon, a **seminar by Social Security experts** on Medicare and Medicare Prescription Plans. In the evening, our famous and lively Assistance Auction will take over the Nipa Hut under the leadership of Assistance Chairman John Sweet.

On Tuesday our **Annual Business Meeting and Board Election** will be held in the Nipa Hut after breakfast. All attending should sign in to confirm their attendance at this important event. In the afternoon, in the Nipa Hut, Jimmie Butler will present *Crickets on a Steel Tiger*, The interdiction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail 1966-68. Included will be slides of photos taken during his 2003 trip to the Trail. Jimmie's book, *A Certain Brotherhood*, describes what it was like to fly as a Forward Air Controller (FAC) during the conflict in South East Asia, and is available for purchase through the BX. Jimmie will take questions after his presentation.

On Tuesday evening there will be the President's Banquet in the Nipa Hut, which will feature an All American Buffet. Our speaker will be USAF Maj Don Harten, retired, who has an amazing story to tell us. He was the **only pilot to fly the B-52, the F-105 and the F-111 in combat in the Vietnam conflict**, during five tours. He is writing a book on combat in each



plane. Maj Harten flew on the first Arc Light mission, wrote a book, "Arc Light One," and was the only pilot to survive the head-on, mid-air, collision at over 1,000 mph at night above a typhoon during that first Arc Light mission (see March 2002 MEM, bottom of page 2). He is a River Rat and a Daedalian, with a whale of a tale to tell.

On Wednesday morning after breakfast there will be our **Memorial Service**, during which we honor those who did not return from SEA as well as Brothers who have gone before us from TLCB. In the afternoon, it will be time to say goodbye and head for home. However, for those who want to stay an extra night, the reunion room rate of \$50 will still apply. Depending on demand, tours of various kinds can be arranged for those staying the extra night.

Complete and mail the registration form as soon as possible and send in your payment

TLCB Memorial Quilt Raffle

By Bob Wheatley

As in previous years, the TLC Sisterhood will raise funds for the TLCB Assistance program to help needy children in Southeast Asia by having a custom made quilt raffled off at the annual TLCB reunion banquet. Last year's quilt brought in more than \$2000 to aid such children of Thailand and Laos.

The theme of the 2006 raffle quilt will be "War Birds." Each block will display a photo or graphic of a famous wartime aircraft of the Twentieth Century along with a caption detailing essential information, such as its use in war, years of production, country of origin, armament, aircraft specifications, etc. Aircraft will be those of WW I, WW II, Korea, Vietnam and Desert Storm vintage. Members will have a chance to suggest specific aircraft to include. Watch the list servers for this opportunity. Members not on line may vote for their favorite war birds by mail.

Raffle tickets will sell for \$2 each. Tickets are available for purchase immediately. There is no limit to the number of tickets you may buy. A sheet of printed raffle tickets is in this issue of the MEM. Want more? Photo copy the sheet, or print more from the TLCB reunion web page. To buy a large block of tickets, send your check and contact information, and we will be happy to fill out your tickets for you and enter them in the drawing. Make your check payable to TLCB Assistance Fund. Mail it with your filled out tickets, or your contact information and request for a block of tickets, to Bob and Rosie Wheatley, 8018 W 900 N, Carthage, Indiana, 46115

Watch for further details and updates on the project on the List Servers. Questions? Contact Bob or Rosie Wheatley by email at rewheatl@cnz.com or call 765-565-6595 between the hours of 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM EST.

Note: time to register, using the enclosed form.

The Bob Hope show between Christmas and New Year's was a major highlight I will never forget but seemed to be over and past just as fast as it started. New Year's Eve most of the base was drunk and officers and enlisted fired Very Pistols and pen flares back and forth across the base at each other all night long.

With 100 days left of my tour I started filling in my short timer calendar and tied the traditional ribbon from a Seagram's VO bottle to my fatigue shirt lapel. The VO ribbon signified less than 100 days left in a tour. A small group of us in the shop had arrived within a week or two of the other so would be departing NKP around the same time. We all were homesick to see our loved ones and friends as most had not seen in a year. But we had formed friendships and a special bond that was hard to break and for some would rekindle later in life and probably last a lifetime. Part of me wanted to leave but the other half felt as if I was deserting my friends in time of war and would be letting them down. It was a rather confusing time for me.

Not too long before my tour was over the large air conditioning unit that cooled our squadron building stopped blowing cold air and it got extremely warm inside real quick. A call was placed to the civilian engineer squadron and a repairman soon arrived to assess the problem. During the inspection a large hole, approximately the size of a .50 caliber bullet, was discovered in the A/C compressor unit. Immediately behind our building was the MMS Gun Shop. A window in the gun shop was in perfect line with the hole in the hole in the compressor. It didn't take much to put two and two together and figure out what had

disabled the air conditioner. A subsequent interrogation of gun shop personnel produced a full chorus of "gee, I have no idea what happened" statements. What I find extremely funny and downright suspicious to this very day is how one TLCB member remembers exactly how it all happened but then claims he knows nothing about how the .50 cal slug ended up through the compressor.

The civil engineer squadron said they could fix the problem but didn't have a spare compressor for our type of unit on base. The unit would have to be ordered and would probably take a while to procure. To alleviate the lack of conditioning, they would bring in a spare unit and hook it up to the existing ductwork. The replacement unit that was brought in was on the back of a large truck, on skids, and about 5 times larger than our broken unit. There was no way the unit would fit in the space next to our existing unit to connect with the duct.

CES scratched their heads for a while and finally unloaded the unit at the south double doors where we parked our stepvan. They next proceeded to cut a 3-foot hole in the stationary door and to run a huge duct directly from the unit straight into the Comm and Radar shops. They attached a cable to the power pole outside and fired up the unit. It was like a 60 mile arctic breeze in our shop and the chow hall could have hung their meat in there, it was so cold. The arctic storm was still in place when I departed NKP some weeks later. The air conditioning

assassin is still on the loose.

The next monsoon season was preparing to unleash its fury once more. The Thai Water Festival or Songkran Festival is a traditional new year and starts on April 13th and supposedly lasts for three days. The Thai believe that water will wash away bad luck. So to celebrate and wash the bad luck away they drown everyone in sight for the festival period. But since some can't wait or seem to know when to stop, the festival lasted for about a week. You were never dry during the Water Festival. If you were, you were fair game. Water was everywhere. Inside the clubs, on the streets; I remember trucks with large tanks and pumps driving by and spraying people walking down the street. It didn't matter if you were inside or out.

Several weeks before I departed NKP the squadron finally received a substantial number of replacement personnel into the Comm Shop. The big influx included several MSgts, and some TSgts and SSgts. Finally the staffing we had so desperately needed during my tour was flowing in. It wouldn't help those from my time but might help make life easier for the next group.

On 18 Apr 69 I departed NKP on the afternoon C-130 Klong Hopper for Bangkok. My crew members Gene Cooper and Keith Smoak went along with me to Base Ops to see me off. I remember it was pouring down rain and couldn't have been a more perfect setting for a solemn, depressing event. I wanted to leave but still felt I shouldn't.

Three more days in-country R&R at the Viengtai Hotel in Bangkok and on 21 Apr 69 I boarded a military charter flight at Don Muang bound for Okinawa, Hickam and finally

"During the inspection a large hole, approximately the size of a .50 caliber bullet, was discovered in the A/C compressor unit. Immediately behind our building was the MMS Gun Shop."

Travis AFB, CA. The aircraft lifted off and soon the whole plane was cheering and clapping. The pressure of a year at war was not only removed from

my shoulders but from all aboard. Soon the troops grew strangely silent, probably all like me reflecting on the previous year, what we were leaving behind and what lay ahead. The flight remained eerily quiet all the way to Travis. Only when the airplane touched down in the late afternoon on 22 Apr 69 at Travis did another roar well up from those aboard and once again everyone came to life. As we departed the aircraft I saw several even get down and kiss the Travis tarmac. Yes indeed, what was probably the most significant year in my life had come full circle and it was now over. But it has never been forgotten.



Mac, continued from page 5

there, I thought I caught a glimpse of the top of the tower out there. And then later I found out, as one of the local villagers took us out to the airport, as we drove in, I saw the tower there. It's hard to miss, but kind of a squatty tower, not like one that you'd see today. But it was unmistakable, because that's where I spent about 364 days of my tour there.

M And did you get to visit the tower? But it's not in use now?

D Right; not in use now. In its place the Thais have built a brand new air traffic control tower. We got to visit, but the first day it was locked up. So we walked around the ramp with a bunch of the folks who had been stationed there, but not at the same time. Several of us were pointing out things that were remembered from different times, like, "This is where the A-1Es were parked," and, "this was base operations," and, "We think TUOC [tactical units operations center] was down thataway," and so on. That day the tower was locked, but one of the officials who was with us managed to arrange the following day to have it unlocked.

M So you actually got to go inside! What was it like?

D Well, the structure was sound. Because they were built well back in those days. The spiral staircase was OK because it was made of steel. All the equipment had been ripped out. The tower cab you could still see the positions where we worked, the glass is still intact, and there's good visibility.

M Was it primitive at the time you were working in it?

D Oh no, it was brand new, state of the art FAA control tower back in 1968, just like you would see back in the United States at that time.

M Do you think something could be done to preserve it, for others to come and see?

D Oh no doubt. One could refurbish it, and particularly if you got hold of some photographs so that visitors could look out and see what that airfield looked like back in 1968. Many of us have photos of the base from overhead, and people who never saw it have a hard time envisioning the base with all those A-1Es and A-26s, and other propeller-driven planes all lined up. It looked like something out of World War II.

M Dave, on this visit, how did you find the people up in the Northeast? Were they as friendly as you remember, or do they not like Americans as well?

D Oh yes, they are just as warm and friendly and... well, this is my wife's first time ever in Asia, and I let her know how I felt about how nice the Thai people are. And that is one thing that has not changed in all these years.

M Did she have a good time on this trip? Was she uncomfortable at all?

D Yes she had a great time and can't wait to come back. She hasn't been uncomfortable at all.

M I know that you participated in some of the Assistance activities on this trip. How do you feel about that experience?

D It was the high point of our tour. It's hard to express the feeling you get seeing the excitement and appreciation in the eyes of those young children. It made you feel really

good, and I think it's something the TLCB should be very very proud of.

M You spent all your time up there in the tower back when you were stationed here—can you tell us about anything unusual that happened during your assignment?

D Oh, my yes; something unusual happened almost on a daily basis. For instance, there was an officer position called the supervisor of flying, or SOF. Routinely during their tour of duty they would take a jeep and make a check of the runway. I remember this one evening during the rainy season, when the SOF called us for clearance, saying he wanted to make a runway check. It was raining really hard, and I said, "OK, go ahead." About halfway down, in a jeep, he called and said, "Tower, I think we've got a problem out here." He was

Mac is continued next page

Controlling Your Server Access

Self-service now easy

Thanks to our new software, all members now have the capability to subscribe to, or unsubscribe from, the TLCB servers on their own, without asking anyone's permission, or asking for help to do it. Why you unsubscribe is your business. It could be too-heavy traffic for you, or a sudden trip to be taken.

When you were subscribed to servers after the software change you received an email from the Mailman program containing your password and URL to change your email settings. If you cannot find that email, you can easily retrieve your password.

To change your email settings or retrieve your password, follow the steps below for the Brotherhood or Mission as the case may be.

1) You must copy and paste the appropriate URL shown below into your Internet Browser.

For the Brotherhood Server <http://www.nexus.net/mailman/options.cgi/tlc-brotherhood/jblow@email.com>

For the Mission Server <http://www.nexus.net/mailman/options.cgi/the-tlc-mission/jblow@email.com>

2) Replace "jblow@email.com" with your email address.

3) Click "GO" or hit enter.

That will take you to a page where you can change your email settings. If you do not have your password go to the "PASSWORD REMINDER Section at the bottom of the page and click on the "Remind" button and your password will be emailed to you.

That is three easy steps to control the delivery of your email.

If you have a problem, contact our List Master back channel for assistance. Do not post your request for help on the servers.

Further info on handling your email account can be found at the following URL:
<http://www.list.org/mailman-member/>



Mac, center, gets instructions on getting out of Laos from Jim Michener (far right) in Vientiane, October 2004.

reporting to us that the rain had actually lifted the aluminum matting runway—a whole section in the middle had shifted about fifty feet to one side! We had to immediately divert aircraft to other bases until the engineers could get out there and put the runway back where it belonged.

M Well didn't an A-1 crash because of something like that once?

D Yes, one time, again when it was raining really hard; it was raining so hard that we couldn't see the end of the runway from the tower. This A-1 was landing on runway three-three and it was a solid wall of rain. The A-1 was under the control of GCA [ground controlled approach—a form of radar-directed landing in weather], and he had passed the three mile point and was cleared to land. GCA called us and said, "Tower, we've lost contact and we think he's going around in the rain. It was raining so hard they couldn't see him in the ground clutter and rain on their radar. And they kept asking us if we had seen him yet, "...do you have a visual?" and so forth. Within seconds the rain started to diminish and we saw smoke coming from the end of the runway. There was a Jolly Green warming up for takeoff at the time, down there on the Jolly Green ramp at that end of the runway, and we asked him if he would swing by and confirm what we were sure had happened. He did; and, ah, well the pilot of the A-1 did not survive the crash. There was speculation



"It was the high point of our tour. It's hard to express the feeling you get seeing the excitement and appreciation in the eyes of those young children." Handing out TLCB Assistance supplies at Thare Orphanage.

later that—although the pilot never reported any problem or battle damage—there was speculation later on that the plane was actually shot down on final. They put the parts in a hangar to investigate the cause but I never heard the results

M We usually ask Vietnam War veterans about their experience coming home. How was yours?

D Well, you might be surprised. Of course it was by C-130 back to Bangkok, in February of 1969. The PAX terminal people took us right down to the Princess Hotel, I believe, and early the next morning we were to leave on World Air Lines. But that plane broke—it was a large one; I think a 707. After a few hours they scrubbed that flight awaiting some part and World took us to the Bangkok Hilton and had a free bar set up for us in the lobby. But we did get out then, and went over to LAX to get a commercial flight home.

M Did you have any problems in the airport?

D We had to travel in uniform in order to get the "space-A" discount and we got a lot of hostile stares in the airport, but not so with the airline. A sergeant Green and I had traveled together and we were both on standby. They always boarded the standby passengers last, and we got on board a flight and were seated together, and as we were getting ready to depart we heard an announcement over the intercom, "Would Sergeant Macdonald and Sergeant Green please come to the front of the aircraft?" We both looked at each other, and even the steward commented that we should have seen how our faces just dropped—because we were both fully expecting to get bumped off the flight. And we walked up to the front of the plane, where they greeted us and said, "We like to treat all of our passengers from Southeast Asia with a lot of respect, so please have a seat in the first class cabin."

M Wow! That's terrific! We've never heard of that happening before.

D Yeah, it was pretty surprising.

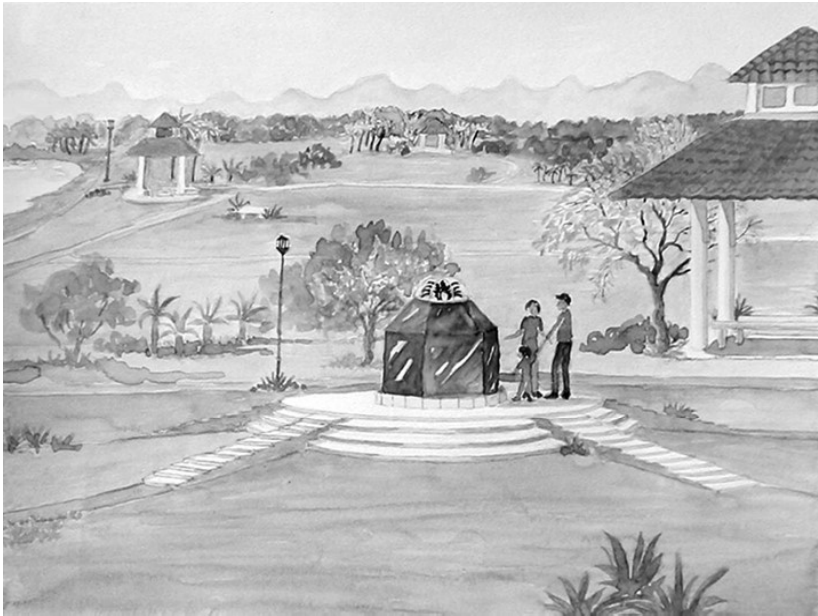
M One more question Dave: did you go to the Bob Hope Show while you were there?

D Oh yes, with Rosie Grier, and Joey Heatherton, and the Gold diggers; they were all there. Matter of fact, I worked Bob Hope's plane in, which was kind of neat. I remember, their callsign was "Hope One." That was a real morale booster. My memories of that tour of duty get better each year—I guess as time goes by you filter out the bad. But the other day when I stood in that old tower cab I thought about some of the bad things, like having to make quick decisions about handling battle-damaged planes and the crashes—things I really hadn't thought about in a long time.



A Monument to the Missing Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Veterans Just a Dream?

by Bill Tilton, committee chairman



June 2006 Status

As we have reported in this newsletter in the past, the TLC Brotherhood intends to place a monument in memory of those who were lost in the TLC area from the allied forces during the war in Southeast Asia. For several years we have been raising funds for such a monument. A suitable monument design was conceived by Jim Henthorn and rendered into engineering drawings by the late Chris Jeppeson, who designed the base and helped design the pedestal. **At left is an artist's concept of this design** as it might look when placed in Elephant Head Park, in the City of Nakhon Phanom.

Since the enthusiastically-received presentation to the mayor, engineer, and city fathers by Gerry Frazier the Monument Committee has encountered some frustration in communicating with the NKP city government, but through the

help of committee member Phongsee Penn, spouse of member Tom Penn, we finally re-connected with the new mayor last year. As MEM goes to press we do not yet know when the planned park will be ready for construction of a monument. We are told the city has said they "need some more time."

Funding not the issue

Thanks to the generosity of several members and one particularly generous friend of the Brotherhood, we now have sufficient funds to construct a substantial and suitable monument, if not yet enough to fund the full Henthorn/Jeppeson design. Major fund-raising probably will be impossible until we can assure potential donors where and when the monument will be placed. Although we are not certain the city of Nakhon Phanom will ever build the new park, unofficial communications from the mayor suggest that we need only to be patient.

Other options

In the meantime a number of alternative plans have been suggested from time to time. Several members have suggested placement of the monument in the impressive monument garden next to the Air Force Museum, where the first memorial service

was held during the pre-organization reunion of the TLC Brotherhood. A member has sent photos of the attractive veteran's memorial park near I-81 at Abington, Virginia, where a number of monuments have been placed.

At the present time the most interesting alternative option appears to be in exploring whether or not the city of Nakhon Phanom might consider granting space in an existing park. **Shown at right is a park at the North end of the city.** It is only a block from the Mekong River, and already contains some objects placed by the Royal Thai Navy, as seen at right. In this photo we also see the standard sala that is built to specifications of the city engineer.

The committee will continue to report our progress, however glacial. This significant project is well worth taking the time to make sure we get it right.

