



Mekong Express Mail

Volume 12, Issue 2

THE THAILAND LAOS CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC.

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Special cargo, red flares, smoke, and a Buddha chain

by Les Strouse

I was a C-46 Captain for Continental Air Services, Inc. (CASI) with my home base in Vientiane, Laos. In early January 1975, I was sent TDY from Vientiane to Bangkok to take over a C-46 that was on contract to the U.S. Embassy on a Bangkok-Phnom Penh schedule. This was to last a month while the pilot, who had been on the contract for several months, was on home leave.

By the way, he left me stranded in Bangkok when he returned. He did not even stop in Bangkok to say Hi! But I get ahead of myself.

The daily schedule was to depart Bangkok at 0700 with normal arrival in Phnom Penh two hours later, then a 1630 takeoff for the return to Bangkok. Hurry up and wait! I flew one trip with the Captain that I was replacing. "Come overhead Phnom Penh at 7000 feet or above in order to stay out of small arms range. Then do a steep spiral descent, close in." That was his advice.

We landed and toured Phnom Penh. He knew all of the places to check for Asian artifacts and antiques. We departed Phnom Penh on schedule at 1630. That would be the last time I would get to spend the day in Phnom Penh.

My crew during this TDY was a Thai copilot, a Thai flight mechanic, and a Thai Loadmaster, all of whom I knew from Vientiane. It was a fixed crew, which was very unusual for CASI. It was nice to know who would be flying with you more than one day in advance.

The first day after I took over these flights, we arrived in Phnom Penh on schedule. The airplane had been unloaded and we were sitting in a bunker when a loud siren went off. The entire ramp was immediately cleared of personnel. I found out that the siren gave a five to ten second warning of incoming rockets or artillery! Someone in the field would call Phnom Penh Tower and report that they heard rockets being launched or artillery being fired. A couple of rounds did impact the airport area but not close to us.



Les Strouse at expat reunion in Bangkok, 2006.
Photo by Mac Thomson.

Our "customer" determined that I should take the airplane to an outlying strip until it was time to pick up the passengers for the return trip to Bangkok. He suggested a couple of "secure" airstrips that were suitable and we followed his advice. Normal procedure was now to unload in Phnom Penh in the morning and go sit on a "secure" strip until time for the return to Bangkok. Since the shelling of the Phnom Penh Airport had become an almost daily occurrence, so much for touring/shopping in Phnom Penh!

Our loads between Bangkok and Phnom Penh were a combination of cargo and passengers. The cargo was a mix of official diplomatic stuff and refugee supplies for Catholic Relief Services and the like. Passengers were mostly civilian, including journalists. There were the very rare times that the load was entirely passengers.

One such day, we had a load of Cambodian soldiers who had just returned from training in the U.S. All passengers, right? Well, not entirely. I think these guys had cleaned out every PX that they saw and we were loaded to the gills! Max gross weight. About half way to Phnom Penh, one of the engines started to backfire. I reduced power. The backfiring stopped temporarily, but soon continued. I decided to

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return to Bangkok because of the risk of losing the airplane if we were to be stuck in Phnom Penh - not ignoring the risk to the crew! We could no longer maintain altitude.

I instructed my Thai copilot to declare an emergency, get clearance for our return to Bangkok, and request descent clearance; we were to advise Air Traffic Control when we reached an altitude that we could maintain. All was well and good until he called ATC to advise them that we were at 4000 feet. ATC asked what we were doing down at that altitude. It was below minimum safe altitude for that area. The ensuing conversation was all in Thai and I could tell by my copilot's tone of voice that he was not being too nice. We were cleared to maintain 4000 if possible



Above, Phnom Penh airport.



The Caravelle Ramp at Phnom Penh. Photo by the author.

and to advise if we needed further descent.

My copilot commented that the stupid ATC person did not remember that we were on an emergency clearance and were cleared to descend at our discretion. We continued our hill top skimming flight until ready for descent into Bangkok where we made a normal landing; however, the loadmaster would NOT let the passengers off of the airplane when we parked. He said, "Captain, you have to put your Buddha chain outside of your shirt and walk down the aisle! I told these guys that if it was not for the Captain's good Buddhas they would probably all be dead!" I did as requested to the bowed heads and "wais" of all of the soldiers.

One more special experience:

We were delayed in departing Bangkok one morning due to the late arrival of a VIP. A bit of bitching about the delay,

but we had to put up with it because after all, he was a VIP. We would not have delayed for a normal passenger. We departed Bangkok 30 minutes behind schedule and landed in Phnom Penh 30 minutes late. We were instructed to park in an area that we did not normally use, in the large bunker reserved for the Royal Air Cambodge Caravelle! No problem; we were flexible.

After parking and completing the after-landing procedures, the crew deplaned. We then learned that two 122mm rockets had landed in our normal parking spot FIVE MINUTES after our scheduled arrival. WOW! It was surmised that the rockets were normal harassment and just by chance, they landed in our parking spot...122mm rockets were not accurate enough to have been actually aimed there. Still, it got our attention big time! After our return to Bangkok, the copilot and mechanic

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Sorrow for Sririluk

By John Middlewood

As you all know, many members of the TLCB contribute to the Medical Assistance Fund, which provides money to enable families to travel and remain with their sick children during hospital treatment. We do this because having parents nearby is important to the child's recovery and peace of mind. You may remember the *MEM* article about Sririluk Sangdee, a thirteen year-old girl from the village of Nong Bua Ratchakwai, where TLCB had worked with the school for several years.

That article told that Sririluk was first diagnosed with Leukemia when she was in the 4th grade. At the time her father came to see me, she was bedridden and they had given up

they discovered some kind of meningitis and another lung problem other than pneumonia. After being in the hospital for over a month, on about March 24-25, the doctors told her mother that there was nothing more they could do. Sririluk was so weak that she could no longer walk, so mom asked the hospital to provide an ambulance to return her home, which they did.

Her dad called me on March 30 and told me that she was back home and in very serious condition, but he did not tell me how grave the situation had become. Maeo, the girls here and I decided to visit her on March 31. When we got there in the morning, things were already set up for the funeral. Sririluk had died around 8 pm on March 30 and as far as I can find out, she died peacefully in her sleep. We visited again and left an envelope on April 1. She was cremated that afternoon. I expressed the sorrow of the TLBC Assistance Team specifically and the TLCB Membership in general. I will be visiting with the parents again and will see if there is anything I can do to help them through this period.

Of all of the children TLCB has helped with medical problems over the past years, this is the first child we have lost. At least she is at peace now. She is going to be a hard one to forget. We thank those with all of our heart who have helped provide hope for our kids here and pray that it will continue and we can help others.



hope. Treatment had stopped when money ran out, and her illness kept her out of school. She had finished part of 5th grade but could not attend school because of her illness.

Sririluk has an older and a younger brother. Her father is a day laborer, making no more than 200 baht per day, less than \$5 U.S., when he is working. TLCB assisted the Sangdees with her trips to Ubon for Sririluk's treatment many times, each costing about 3500 baht for a 12 to 15 day stay. TLCB paid for her mother's food, transportation, and a place to stay during Sririluk's confinements.

When we met Sririluk a couple of years ago, TLCB was her last hope. Without our help, she would not have been able to go to Ubon to receive the treatments that gave her an extra two years. When we saw her at the end of last year, both she and we were beginning to hope that she might have beaten the odds. She was recovering, looking well, smiling, and happy. In January when she went down for her treatment, they found that she had developed some other problems, one of which was a light case of pneumonia. That in itself was not serious, but it meant that she could not receive her chemo treatments, a real setback. She came back home for a few days and went back again. This time

The Sangdees at Sririluk's funeral. Photos by John Middlewood.



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went to the temple to thank Buddha for taking care of us. The next morning I had to add two Buddha amulets to my Buddha chain. I was now up to seven and before each morning flight, the crew checked to make sure I wore my chain.

By the way, a "Buddha" chain is required to have an odd number of amulets on it. I already had five, so I could not add one more; it had to be two. If someone had given me one I would have had to secure it someplace other than on my "Buddha" chain until I received another.

On one return flight from Phnom Penh, we decided to take a small detour and look at Angkor Wat. None of the crew had ever

seen it. There was no radar to track our change of route so we didn't need clearance. We got a good view of Angkor but the sound effects got our attention immediately. We were taking ground fire from the area of the main temple. Even at 6000 feet the sound is distinctive. The Khmer Rouge troops were IN the Temple shooting out. The good guys were outside and would NOT shoot into the Temple. Inside the Temple was a good place for the bad guys to be. Safe!

We had just landed in Phnom Penh and gotten off the airplane when the siren went off. Everyone just flopped down wherever they were. I was on my belly under the wing of the airplane! Not a very good place to be, but there I was on the ramp under the gas tanks. I even got my picture taken and published in *Newsweek Magazine* and *Pacific Stars and Stripes*. I did see the photographer, on his belly about half way to the passenger bunker, but never gave it any thought. Small pieces of shrapnel did bounce off the airplane, but did no damage. No one was injured.

Press service photo of author, foreground, under C-46 wing looking at photographer as siren warns of Khmer Rouge attack.



The Air America bunker at Phnom Penh. Photo by author.

After landing at Phnom Penh, we were instructed to return to Bangkok to pick up some very special cargo. We returned to Bangkok and got our very special cargo, a foot locker-sized box, not very heavy. The U.S. Embassy rep who delivered the box said that it had to be in Phnom Penh that afternoon and "DO NOT BRING IT BACK TO BANGKOK!" No reason given.

It was a normal flight to Phnom Penh, but, the ammo dump to the northwest of the airport had been hit by artillery, which resulted in a major explosion. There were all sorts of explosive devices on the west end of the runway. Our Phnom Penh "customer" advised that there was 2500 feet of runway cleared on the East end. "We need that cargo!" When I lined up, there were red flares and red smoke coming from a military jeep. I was advised to ignore the flares and smoke. We landed, and two armed customers came onto the airplane and asked for the escort. What escort? There was none. "You brought a million dollars U.S. currency with no escort?" We sure did.

Nothing was ever said about the flight after that until more

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Your illustrious Capt. Les Strouse taking refuge!

Josh Eiting, Air America Foundation President

by Pam Franks-Crone

Josh Eiting suddenly passed away March 2, 2011. He was probably one of our newest and youngest members, only forty-two years old. Josh and his wife, Shirley, attended the TLCB Atlanta reunion last September. He was president of the Air America Foundation and that relationship was the reason he had an interest in the TLCB. He was hoping to visit Laos some day and accompany Mac on one of his trips outcountry.

Most folks, who knew Josh well, knew that he was independently wealthy, but you would never know it unless he told you. Josh Eiting was a member of a wealthy family that started a business in the early 1900s that did rather well, and he had stock in the family business.

Josh moved from Ohio to Florida in 2005, I think, something pretty close to that. He loved warbirds and was a member of the TICO Warbird Museum, which is how he got involved with

the Air America Foundation. Sometime in 2008, Josh became a member and eventually, he became the largest donor. After Paul Vasconi passed away at fifty-six years old, Josh took over as president.

The foundation was supported for the most part by donations from Josh. He was determined to get that foundation off the ground and he had the funds to do it. Josh had mentioned that he had heart problems and that he had a heart attack when he was in his thirties.

None of you had the time to get to know him very well,

but I wanted you to know of his death and about some of the worthwhile projects with which he was involved.

Many of the retired Air America pilots who live in the space coast area knew Josh. We at Air America Foundation will continue to miss Josh.



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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.

Editor: Dave MacDonald (Dav16Mac@AOL.com)
Distribution: John Duffin **Composition:** Bill Tilton

TLC Brotherhood Contacts

Ed Stein, list master (estein1945@hotmail.com)
Bob Norway, web master (examiner@cfl.rr.com)

TLC Brotherhood, Inc. Tax ID #54-1932649

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Make all payments payable to **The TLC Brotherhood, Inc.**
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Write payment purpose and member number on check.

Examples:

Dues	Student Assistance Fund
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Reunion 2011: Washington, D.C.

TLCB tax return and board minutes: On web site, in *members only* section.

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Below, Curtiss-Wright C-46 "Commando" on the CASI ramp at Phnom Penh
Photos by author.



Les and the late B/G Heinie Aderholt, in Bangkok in 2006. Les and Mac Thompson organized an all-hands reunion as the "Assembly of Expats SEA" or AESEA. Photo by Mac Thompson.

than ten years later when I was in Khartoum, Sudan. I met a U.S. Army attaché at a social function. General discussion determined that he had been in Phnom Penh during the time I was making my daily flights there and that HE was the guy firing the red flares and putting out the red smoke. To that day, he did not know why I insisted on landing! Small world it is.

The rest of our operations to Phnom Penh were normal and we flew the last evacuation flight on 10 April 1975, with less than half a load of passengers. People just did not want to leave or were too complacent.

I returned to Phnom Penh in 1990 as Co-Captain on a Bangkok Airways Dash-8. The man who was my copilot in 1975 was now my Chief Pilot and the mechanic was now the Chief Mechanic. The same crew who flew the last Western Civilian airplane out of PHN in 1975 flew the first

non-communist airline flight back into Phnom Penh some fifteen years later.



Ad Hoc Admin Officer

by John Harrington

Detachment 8 of the 621st Tactical Control Squadron was located in Phitsanulok, the capital of the province of the same name, about 200 miles north of Bangkok, straddling the Nan River. Det 8 was one of six units of the 621st, which was headquartered in Udorn, in the northeast, a little south of the Mekong River. The call sign for Det 8 was "Dora."

The other units were in Nakhon Phanom, further east, and on the Mekong, across from Laos; Mukdahan, south of Nakhon Phanom, and also on the Mekong across from Laos; Ubon, a large base in the southeast; and Green Hill, between Bangkok and Korat. The 621st was part of the 505th Tactical Control Group, located at Tan Son Nhut, South Vietnam. There were two other squadrons, the 619th and 620th, both in South Vietnam. A website, with the address <http://www.squawk-flash.org>, is devoted to the 505th.

Det 8 was opened sometime in early 1966 and was operational later that year. It was closed sometime in 1970 as a USAF site, although I believe the Thai Air Force continued to operate it.

I arrived, still a 2nd lieutenant, in the early days of September, 1967, assigned as the administrative officer. At the time, there were approximately 100 personnel at the site. Our commander was a major. We had around

Lt John Harrington in front his "empire," the unit orderly room. Photo from the author.



Central Phitsanulok. Photo given to author by RTAF recce pilot.

10 officers, most of them in operations, serving as weapons controllers. All of the officers, as well as senior NCOs, E-7s and above, lived off base, renting bungalows. The rest of the men

lived in hooches on the site, which was not much more than four or five acres. We had a mess hall, a movie theater, a dispensary, and a tiny BX only open a few hours a day, which did not matter since it did not have much to sell.

We had a club, the Thai-American Lounge, open to everyone, airmen through officers and the Thai military as well. When I arrived, it was not air-conditioned, which made the beer taste even better. The site was adjacent to a Royal Thai Air Force attachment, and its personnel worked with us. During World War II, the location had been the

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Part of Phitsanulok base as seen from the water tower. Photo by the author.

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site of a Japanese prisoner of war camp, housing American and British POWs.

A provincial capital, Phitsanulok had a population then of around 20,000, and although some of us lived in the town, and most of us spent a good deal of time in it, our economic impact was minimal. There were no gaudy bars, nightclubs, and other attractions that characterized the larger U.S. bases at Takhli, Udorn, Korat, Ubon, and Nakhon Phanom.

The main job at Det 8 was support of the 355th Tactical Fighter Wing out of Takhli, about 100 miles south of Phitsanulok. Takhli was also our support base, providing supplies and personnel support. Most of the air traffic was refueling support for F-105s with KC-135 tankers. There was also recovery work and some contact with EB-66s, also out of Takhli. Frankly, as the admin officer, I was not directly involved in operations and my memory of details of the mission may be somewhat foggy.

As I said, I arrived in early September 1967, looking forward to putting on my silver bars at the end of the month and becoming a “real” lieutenant. The commander was Major Carl Sheets, who admitted to me that they were not entirely sure what I was going to be doing since they had only a few months before gotten an admin officer authorized in the unit manning document (UMD), so I was the first one in the position. Besides the normal responsibility of managing the orderly room and generally assisting the commander, I ended up with just about all of the extra duties, things like theater officer, supply officer, club officer, the library officer, USO liaison, and a hand full of other things I cannot really remember.

The site, other than operations which were on a 24 hour schedule, operated essentially on a five and half day basis: Monday to Friday, 7:30 am to 5:00 pm, and till noon on Saturday. However, for the most part, most of the people were there all the time.

Although it was not my job, I spent a good deal of time in the operations room, watching and keeping track of what the whole place was about. The bombing of the north was picking up in those days, and it was pretty busy. A common

phrase, which anyone who has ever been in a radar room will be familiar with, was “22 hours of boredom and 2 hours of sheer terror.”

One of the benefits as the admin officer on a small site adjacent to a good-sized town was the opportunity to attend a number of official local events. Major Sheets was usually invited to attend, as the senior American in the area, and he generally “ordered” me to accompany him. Early in my tour (I remember I was then a 1st Lieutenant, so it was probably in October), Major Sheets was invited to a large dinner at the governor’s mansion and he insisted I go along to keep him company.

We wore our civvies and were seated at a large table with Thai military and police officers. There were probably about 500 or more at the dinner. I was not familiar with Thai food and in fact was a rather fussy eater, but I figured good manners required me to eat everything they served and also use the chopsticks, which one of the Thais gave me some instructions on using. I also figured I should try the beer, Singha, and the whiskey, Mekong. The Thai officers were into both of them pretty good.

About halfway through the meal, most of the Thai officers were gently laughing at me as I made my way through my food. When I noticed them, one with a broad smile asked me if I knew what I was eating. I, a little anxiously, said, “No.” Then with an even broader grin, he said, as the rest of the table broke into laughter, “Monkey brains.”

I gulped, looked down at my plate, and forced myself to smile. Then I said, “I like it. Could you pass me some more, please?” The Thai officers broke into applause. The funny thing is, ever since then I have eaten just about anything that I came across, but I have never had the opportunity to try monkey brains again.

Another time, probably in the spring of 1968, since our commander was then a Major Robert Lichvar, we were invited to the installation of the first Rotary Club in Phitsanulok. The

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speaker, who was the head of Rotary for Malaysia if I remember right, went on for quite a while, and he spoke in Malaysian. When he was done, his talk was translated into Thai, and it seemed like it was even longer than the original. I had picked up some rudimentary Thai by then, but still did not really have much idea what was being said. About halfway through the Thai translation, the audience was groaning, mainly because the Mekong on the table had run out.

When the translation was finally over, everyone began to stir, ready to head out, and in Thai fashion for the men, party some more. But before anyone could really move, the master of ceremonies got up and announced that in courtesy to their American guests, Major Lichvar and Lieutenant Harrington, the speech would now be translated into English. That one was definitely the longest of the whole night.

Back to the War. The workload was tiring, especially on the ops crews. Then, in February 1968, not long after the shocking Tet offensive in Vietnam, Major Lichvar and I went to a 621st Squadron Conference in Chiang Mai, with the commanders from the other sites, several personnel from our Udorn headquarters, and the group commander, Colonel Delbert Smith, from Tan Son Nhut. I went because I had been assigned to set up the conference, which meant I got two trips to Chiang Mai. Not bad duty. I think I was being tested a little to find out if I could do anything except sign 1098s and watch over the library, the BX, and whatever else I was supposedly responsible for.

The last event on the conference was a top secret briefing for the site commanders from Colonel Smith. When they got out of it, Major Lichvar and I got on a C-117 to get back to Phitsanulok. The Major took me aside and said, "We're

going to win the war."

Colonel Smith had told the group that General Westmoreland was back in Washington and was going to get another 200,000 troops and we were going to bomb everything day and night. As soon as we got back to Det 8, the Major sat the rest of the officers down and told them all the same thing. The mood was quiet, not jubilant, but there was some sense of relief that some steps were going to be taken to get the war off the grim standstill it seemed to be mired in.

For nearly a month, nothing changed, but the crews were practicing extended shifts and multi-tasking, to use a more modern phrase. We all wondered when the big push was going to start. Then, on March 31, along with the Major and the rest of the orderly room staff, we sat listening to a special address from President Lyndon Johnson. We assumed it was to announce the increased offensive. First, we were shocked when the President said he was ordering a halt of the bombing of the North, and then totally floored when he announced that he was not going to run for reelection.

It is now so long ago that I am not sure I can honestly recall my reactions and emotions at the time. I was essentially a civilian in uniform. I never thought of myself as a warrior, but I did believe I was contributing to something important, even if I felt there were many problems with our whole program in Vietnam, from the way we drifted into it to the way we were conducting the war. I felt some of the minor corruption that was endemic to the Thai military was probably even more pronounced in Vietnam. I, granted with a very limited knowledge, was skeptical that we would ever "win the war," at least in conventional terms. I will leave it at that, but March



Aderholt Note

Presentation to Mrs. Aderholt, by Ed Miller and Woody Freeman, at the monthly meeting of the Air Commando Association, of the banner and plaque dedicated at Choak Amnuay Elementary School, Nakhon Phanom, honoring the memory of B/G Harry "Heinie" Aderholt, in whose name the school's dining facility was dedicated. TLCB's Assistance program paid for the facility. Details about this project may be found in the December, 2010, issue of *Mekong Express Mail*. Photo by Joyce Harrington.

31 was certainly one of the most memorable days of my life.

After the bombing halt, the workload at Dora practically disappeared. It was primarily reduced to monitoring some recon flights and working on training operations. The shift in urgency created some morale problems; however, Major Lichvar began initiating a lot of site improvement programs. We built an officers and senior NCO lounge, which also served as a staff meeting room. We air-conditioned the Thai-American Lounge, which was still where just about everyone, officers and senior NCOs as well, kicked back. Some of us also got more involved in outreach to the community, working with local organizations such as schools and the hospital.

Still, there was a distinct shift in mood during the spring and summer of 1968. I am sure many have seen "The Bridge on the River Kwai" and remember when the British Colonel, played by Alec Guinness, says to some of his junior officers, something to

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the effect, "Gentlemen, you know that if we didn't have enough real work for the men, we'd have to invent some." So true.

A short, final moment. A month or so before I rotated back in August 1968, we received a new UMD. The position of the admin officer was deleted. Major Lichvar said to me, "Well, John, it looks like you were one of a kind." Frankly, aren't we all?

Epilogue: In the mid-1970s, about three years after I left USAF, I began work on a novel loosely based on a place like Phitsanulok, involving a group of junior officers. I did finish something I called "The Year of the Lieutenant." I obtained a literary agent who began showing it around the New York publishing world. It was not a friendly atmosphere for Vietnam-related books and after about 18 months, I took it back and began a rewrite. About that same time I got a good job in the magazine publishing business, which has been where I have worked ever since, even maintaining a consulting business today. As I continued



"Leaving the BEST" at Phitsanulok base gate. Photo by the author.

the rewrite, I became increasingly displeased with my original work and have not ever tried to sell it again. I still take it out and work on it, and probably will until my final days, but I doubt if it will ever be available to the public.

As Charles Dickens said, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."



Mac Gets Through Lao Mud

Mac Thompson just returned from his latest foray into Laos in the middle of May. He reported it was another good trip. They visited two completed school projects in the Phonsavanh area: a concrete floor at a village east/northeast of Phou Kout, and a new library building at Khang Don, Nong Pet, 25 km east of Phonsavanh, after which they headed south to Paksane with a night at Tha Thom, where there are three guest houses.

Mac reports that they did hit a spot of bother on the road. The first instance was some mud, but a grader came along and created a bypass for their pickup. Next morning they heard that some forty logging trucks were stuck at that spot! Then at one of the fords (the bridge is not yet complete) the water was coming up, so they arranged for a tow (photo). This cost Lao kip 100,000, which Mac says, "was pretty reasonable I thought." That's about \$10 U.S.

Tha Thom is the spot where Mac got "mudded" out last year, and had to cancel the visit. He was thinking they would have to cancel again because of the grand mud hole, but they made it through. This visit hadn't been on the schedule, but Mr Soundeuan was able to arrange it on a short notice. He had been trying to get with this district for some time, as it's a bit off the beaten track. Mac says, "While there, we came up with a project that I'd like to implement in the near future: a teacher's dorm, with space for kitchen and lesson preparation/eating area. They had already costed this out and have received a donation of the wood for the project, but they need



roof and floor. Looks good to me and I will get [a formal request] written up shortly; about \$1,400 I think."



Above, ten-dollar tow gets Mac through flood. Below, mud nearly stopped the second attempt to visit Tha Thom, but somehow they made it. Photos by Mac Thompson.



Meechai and Narit: What goes around...

By John Middlewood

Meechai was one of our first students to receive assistance. He was a recipient for four years so he could complete his BA in Khon Kaen University. He was selected to become a teacher in the city school system before he even graduated - he was that good and well liked when he did his student teaching.

Once he started teaching, he decided to go back and get his MA in education. When I asked him if he wanted TLCB student assistance for that program, he said "no, give it to someone else" because TLCB had already done more than he ever dreamed to help him out. Two years ago he completed his MA and he recently donated 10,000 baht to the Christian Mission for use in helping our live-in students meet their living expenses.

He has also bought a three-bedroom house in Khon Kaen. When I asked him when he is getting married, he said that he did not know, but he wanted a place where his younger niece could come and live when she enters Khon Kaen University this year. He also wants his other relatives to be able to use the house when they come to Khon Kaen for medical appointments. His plans for obtaining a Doctorate in Education are still in the mill, but not of immediate concern. He is one of the very few students that stops back to visit. That was April 15.



Above, right, Meechai and his mother at home.
Below, Narit with his wife and two year old daughter.
Photos by John Middlewood



On April 16, I got another visit, which was a real surprise. **Narit** was another one of the very first students to whom TLCB provided assistance. We came across him as he was entering 7th grade and ready to drop out of school. His mother was dying from AIDS and he had a sick grandmother and grandfather and a retarded uncle. Before his mother died shortly thereafter, she asked that Maeo and I keep an eye on her son.

Narit completed 9th grade and then went on to the local Technical School where he completed his three-year program and got his high school diploma. We encouraged him to go for two more years and get his associate degree in automotive/motorcycle mechanics. About six months before graduation he told us that he could no longer accept TLCB assistance because he had gotten married. However, he hung in there and completed his program. He stopped by today during the Thai New Year to show his respect for us and to thank Maeo and me for the help we had given him, his grandmother, and uncle. They are both still living and he still helps take care of them. He presently works in a used car parts store, says he is very happy and that thanks to TLCB, he has a life of hope and a future. Every once in a while a little light does shine, doesn't it?



Welcome to Alexandria!

TLCB Reunion 2011

Start planning now because you will not want to miss this reunion. Perhaps you remember one or more of the reunions here in 1999, 2002, or 2005, which were super events, but this year we promise more of some things and some new highlights as well. This too will be an enjoyable and memorable event. Here is some helpful information.

HOTEL LOCATION: The Sheraton Suites Old Town is in a very scenic and historic neighborhood of Alexandria, VA and is convenient to some great shopping, dining, and sightseeing spots. You can walk to many attractions, take the hotel courtesy bus, or ride the free Alexandria trolley shuttle service around the area. Our hotel is two blocks from the shore of the Potomac River and just a few METRO stops to downtown D.C.

RESERVATIONS: The cutoff date for reservations into this room block is **JULY 19, 2011**. To get the reunion rate, you **MUST**:

- Make your reservations at **Sheraton Suites Old Town Alexandria through Sheraton Reservation Center (800) 325 3535**.
- **Make reservations no later than 19 July 2011, at 5pm EDT.**
- Mention the TLC Brotherhood Reunion.
- Confirm the \$95.00 rate at the time of your call. (Single rate & double rate plus 14% room tax and a \$1.00 per room per night occupancy tax")

SHOULDER DATES: To get the same rate before or after the reunion dates (shoulder dates), **you MUST**:

- Make these reservations with the hotel.
- Speak directly with the Sales Manager, Mr. James Rattray at (703) 836 8793.

CANCELLATIONS:

- You must make your cancellation 72 hours PRIOR to your/the guest's scheduled arrival date.
- If you failure to do so, you will be charged a cancellation charge of one night plus applicable taxes.

PARKING: Hotels in the D.C. area normally charge about \$15 per night for parking, but parking during the reunion dates will be **complimentary for our group**.

SCHEDULE:

Thursday, 18 August – Registration will begin at noon in the "Nipa Hut" – the Potomac Room in our hotel. Plan to check in to the hotel by late afternoon on Thursday, August 18th.

VIETNAM WALL: The first event of the reunion will be our traditional visit and wreath laying at the Wall. We will depart the hotel by bus at 7pm for the trip and re-board for return to the hotel at 9pm.

Friday, 19 August: 0900 – Depart hotel to METRO Rail to the Pentagon for a one-hour, guided tour of this historic building. After security check, the tour begins at 1000. Weather permitting; the tour will include a short visit to the new memorial to those killed in the attack on the Pentagon on 9-11-2001. We return to the Pentagon METRO station, then to the hotel for lunch.

[NOTE: There are special security requirements to visit the Pentagon. Those not pre-registered three days in advance are not permitted to attend. We will provide more information on signup to those who register.]

Friday afternoon you are on your own to visit Old Town Alexandria. You set the pace and see what you want to see. Suggestions include the historic Torpedo Factory on the Alexandria waterfront – now an art "factory" where numerous artists work on their creations while you watch. Local boat tours are also available at an extra cost. Return to hotel by 8pm.



ASSISTANCE AUCTION: 8pm - Annual TLCB Assistance Auction in the hotel banquet room, adjacent to the NIPA hut.

Saturday, 20 August: 0900: TLC Brotherhood Inc. Annual Meeting in the hotel banquet room. Spouses may choose to return to Old Town Alexandria for more sight-seeing.

1330 – 1530: Optional bus tour to the Air Force Memorial and Marine Corps War Memorial.

Free time until dinner.

1800 – Cocktail hour/social hour prior to banquet.

1900 – 2230 Banquet in the hotel Banquet Room.

Sunday, 21 August

0900 – **MEMORIAL SERVICE**, location TBD

1130 – Reunion officially ends

Besides the opportunity to make eye contact with old friends and meet new ones, we are certain you will find this reunion particularly rewarding. Alexandria offers a chance to see real American history around every corner, and the city is justly famous for its beauty and charm. We hope to see your name on the sign-up roster soon!

The D.C. Reunion Committee