



# Mekong Express Mail

Volume 13, Issue 1

THE THAILAND LAOS CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC.

www.TLC-Brotherhood.org

## Jolly Green rescue missions out of LS-36

By Sgt Bill Jaynes

I arrived in Udorn, Thailand in December of 1966 after going through survival schools in Seattle and the Philippines. I thought I would be flying right away, but all the flight spots were already filled when I arrived. My best friend, Russ O'Neal, got on before I did and I was quite upset at the time, not because he had a flight crew spot and I didn't, but because I wanted to be flying and doing the job that I had been trained for. I worked on the flight line doing preflight and phase work for about a month. I finally got my chance to fly because we had a loss on 6 February, 1967 at heavily defended Mu Gia Pass, on the



Bill Jaynes in 1967 standing by nose of a Jolly Green helicopter. Tail rotor of another Jolly in upper right corner. Photos from the author.

Ho Chi Minh Trail main route into Laos. We had three crewmen killed on Jolly Green 05: Pilot, Patrick Wood; Co Pilot, Richard Kibbey, and Flight Engineer, Donald Hall, my Flight Engineer instructor. He had taken me on my indoctrination flight just a few weeks before this mission. Captain Kibbey, Russ O'Neal, Al Abend, and I had gone through the survival school together at Fairchild Air Force Base, Washington.

Our Jolly Greens flew regularly to LS-36, in Laos. This was a forward base North of the Plain of Jars that we used for rescue missions. In June or July of 1967 our unit moved to Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, but we kept on flying from there to LS-20A or directly to LS-36 for a week or so each time, sometimes longer depending on helicopter availability. Our orders read "Air Embassy Laos" for those trips, since we could not be stationed in Laos.

The first time that Lima-36 and I "met" I thought I was in the world that time forgot. The site had an encampment off the side of the runway, complete with trenches and gun positions. Our little piece of heaven was a plywood shack with a door, no windows, and a parking

See Jaynes, continued on page 2.

### **Look! Look!**

Are your address and email address current with TLCSB?

If not, you may be missing some important communications from your Brotherhood.

Send current info to:

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area where we could re-fuel and sit when on alert. The shack had a radio that the pilots monitored from after dawn to just before dark. The base had Hmong troops that looked like school kids, but they were a tough bunch and I continue to have all the respect in the world for them. I met the SF guy one time, but he was not very talkative at the time so I left him alone.

Most of our missions were in North Vietnam, but quite a lot were in Laos and a few in Thailand. The Jollys from Vietnam took care of the Gulf of Tonkin. They went to Quang Tri as their forward alert strip.

After each mission we had a debrief with the Tactical Units Operations Center (TUOC) and our own people.

At the end of the day we would fly back to Alternate 20 and spend the night, then do it all over again the next morning. The volunteer maintenance crews would usually stay up North (as we called it) for two to three weeks at a time, taking care of any servicing and aircraft problems we might have. On arrival, we would fly low and fast over 36 and make sure the

right flag was flying before we would commit to landing. I never found out if the Pathet Lao or North Vietnamese knew what flag was supposed to be flying, but needless to say, we never got caught. I guess we were lucky.

In our daily routine, after refueling we would put the helicopter in a quick start configuration so we would be in the air within minutes of the scramble alert. There were days of pure boredom at L-36. To fight this stagnation, we would

See Jaynes, continued next page.



LS 36 showing very posh alert shack in 1967. Trailer in foreground is refueling equipment.

**TLCB Brotherhood, Inc.  
Nominating Committee  
Appointed**

TLCB President Frank Marsh (TAG) announced the appointment of Chuck Somebody as chairman of the 2012 nominating committee. Other members of the committee are Ray Boas and Joe Blow. The trusted agent to handle ballots this year is John Duffin.

The committee has designated the period of April 13th through May 12th as the open period when they will accept nominations from any member. Send nominations to ChuckandKit@Yahoo.com during that period.

Only nominate members who have agreed to run for the office. Up for election this year are two member positions and the offices of president and treasurer. Bill Tilton has served three terms as treasurer and cannot run.



play cards or take out the M-16s and fire them just so we could clean them. There would be the days when the MAYDAY call sounded and we would be off and running to get the helicopters ready for flight. The pilots would get the information on the shot-down crewmen's locations. After engine start, we would taxi to the top of the runway and make a turn to line up for a running takeoff since we had a full fuel load. We would roll down the hill with max power and gain transitional flight just about three quarters of the way down the runway, always hoping we would make it over the hill in front of us. I had to drop the tip (auxiliary) tanks on one trip so we could make it.



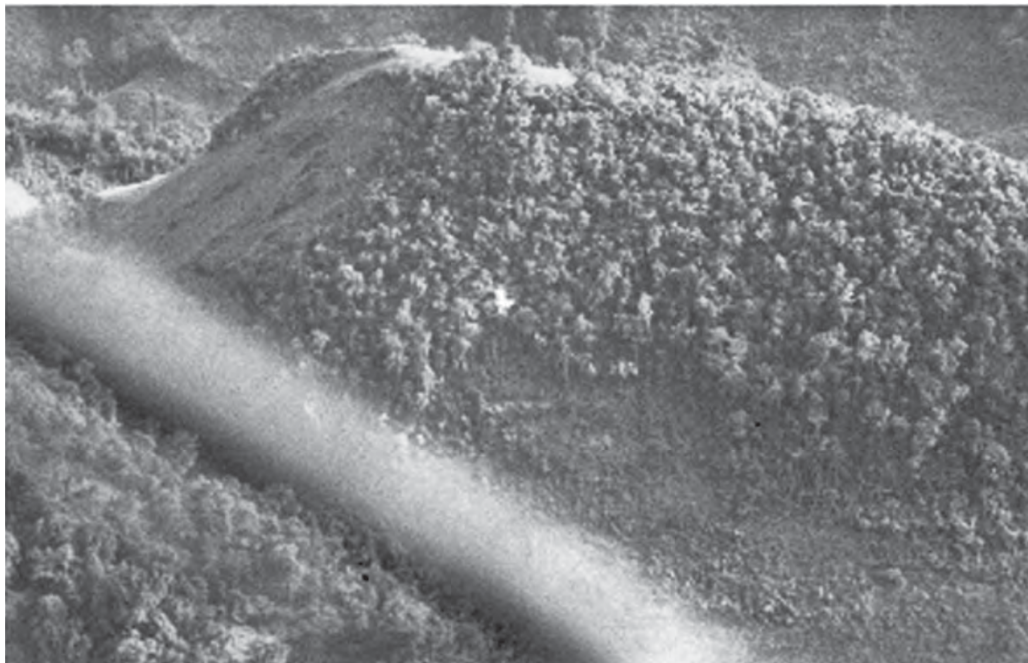
20th SOS Pony Express CH-3 gets field transmission change near the shack.

After gaining altitude, we would head into North Vietnam and meet up with the A-1-Es and orbit until ordered in to try to make the pickup. I hate to tell you how many we couldn't get to in time, but we sure tried. At times, it seemed to take the 7th AF forever to let us go, and in those instances, sometimes the pilots were either picked up already or the North Vietnamese had set up their antiaircraft weapons...just daring us to come in! Even with those threats looming, we often tried to make the pickups when we thought there was a chance.

As an example of a mission, I remember one day we were

told the strike was inbound so the pararescue jumper (PJ) and I went out to make sure everything was set. That included putting on all our survival gear and making sure we were all set to launch. Within three minutes we got the call on the radio the pilots constantly monitored. That day I was in what we called the high bird so the other Jolly would be first in (called low bird). They took off first and we were right behind them. We crossed the border and started our orbit waiting for the go ahead from command and the Sandys (A-1s). The aircraft that was hit, an F-105, was heading out from Hanoi trying

to make it back to base or at least get closer to us. The pilot finally called and said he was ejecting. We picked up the emergency beeper signal from his chute and headed in his direction. When we located him on the ground, the A1s went in trolling for ground fire. There was none, which was very unusual. Jolly Green 37 located the survivor, the crew hoisted him into the helicopter, and we made our getaway without one shot fired at us. See the picture of Jolly 37 making the pickup. It is



Jolly Green rescue in action, photographed by a FAC (wingstrut across photo). Helicopter is just left of photo center, down in the trees.

See **Jaynes**, continued on page 4.





LS-36 base in December of 1966, with runway mid photo.

Jaynes, continued from page 3.

hard to see, but it's there.

As for ground fire, we had been shot at with everything the enemy had at one time or another, even SAMs and other missiles. One time, we got an engine shot out on one of the birds. Antiaircraft artillery hit the engine starter, and after we landed we had to restart by taking the starter off one engine and installing it on the other. This enabled us to have two engines running. This was not my Jolly. I never got shot down, Thank You GOD.

We who served in Air Rescue hold the motto, "THAT OTHERS MAY LIVE," deep in our souls. We all ask God to bless them that gave it all. Never forget them.

**Note:** Bill Jaynes was an HH3-E Flight Engineer at Udorn and Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, 1966-1967. He is a charter member of the TLC Brotherhood and lives in Deland, Florida.



Sgt Bill Jaynes today. Quite a catch!

## Hank, Ray, and John, MEM stalwarts

Getting every issue of the Mekong Express Mail out to our U.S.-based and overseas members has been one of the most important functions since MEM's first issue was published in June 2000. A small team of dedicated helpers has done a spectacular job of making the delivery system work.

Our first helper was Hank Maifeld. He enlisted his grandchildren to gather round the kitchen table and go through the lengthy and tedious process of folding the MEM, stuffing it in our brown envelopes, sticking on the labels, sliding in single sheets for our quilt raffle, reunion information, dues envelopes, shirt orders, and any other kind of information needed to keep our members informed, and getting each one *right*.

Ray Hayes took over the MEM delivery task from Hank, driving in all weathers to get the MEM to the Manchester, NH, post office. When his long stint ended, Ray passed the torch to our current delivery expert, John Duffin, whose experience with the postal system has been invaluable.

MEM salutes these dedicated members and thanks them for their service.

Dave MacDonald  
MEM Editor

# WAR COMES TO DONG HENE CLUSTER

## Part 3, Conclusion

### (Memories of my First Foreign Service Assignment)

Jack Huxtable, 2011

#### RECAP

After three months of required area studies and six months of language instruction, Jack became a Foreign Service Officer. His experience began in a remote Lao village near the Ho Chi Minh Trail in 1966 when he was 28. Jack's job with USAID included close association with villagers and lots of field work. He kept up communication with his family in upstate New York during his travels, and those saved letters helped him document times, places, and events for this article.

After a June wedding in Saigon, Jack and his bride Marge, a USAID nurse in Vietnam, left to continue his efforts with community development. Following a cluster concept, the close-knit team surveyed needs, developed plans with local leaders, and started small projects with hopes that the villager enthusiasm would spread with support for the Lao Government and its efforts to contain communism. This proved quite dangerous, deadly at times, as you will read about their various adventures.

#### A MIDWIFE, A BABY, AND A SCORPION

In Ban Houei Sai of Houa Khong Province, our friends Tony and Rosie Cauterruci gave us a warm welcome. We toured the town and came to realize we were in the middle of the Golden Triangle, where Burma (now Myanmar), Thailand, and Laos meet. We didn't know it then, but seven years later we would be assigned there as USAID Area Coordinator. A day or so after seeing the sights of the Golden Triangle, we clambered onto USAID's next milk run south and back to the unfinished reconstruction in downtown Phalane.

Marge used her Vietnamese to communicate with Balai, our capable housekeeper and cook; she was determined to also speak Lao, so lessons began. Marge went to the 6 A.M. market, flashlight in hand, bathed in the river like everybody else, and made friends. As one of her first community assignments, she remembers helping Somphong, our assistant, to compose a cluster newspaper that described ongoing activities in both Lao and English. It wasn't long before women in the village became aware that Marge was an experienced midwife and they called upon her for help. When she assisted our carpenter's wife giving birth to their 7th child, I played cards and drank Lao lao with the men in an adjacent room. That same night a scorpion stung my elbow. We applied Ya dang (mercurochrome), followed by a variety of ointments. Finally, when the sting continued to swell, we asked Nya Paw Nyee, a leader of the Phalane refugees who reportedly had magical powers, to take a look at the festering wound. He said prayers, blew Lao lao over the afflicted area, and applied what looked like battery acid. We could sense distinct satisfaction in Paw Nyee's demeanor three days later when it was evident that the bite was healing.

#### THE LAST BLAST

By early July, after 2 months of continued excavation by hand and machine, they had not yet found bomb number 18. Its entry site was in a sandy area near the temple on the east side of the river. Our familiar ordinance expert, Eddie, was quite sure the bomb was down there and that our team of faithful refugees was digging in the right place. Their one-eyed

leader, Paw Nyee, from the hills of Tcepone was also optimistic and happy to receive the daily payment of rice and kip. Some others, including Phalane's district leader, were beginning to have doubts and thought about giving up. Torrential rains filled the hole despite the continued use of a sump pump. The process slowed when a small bulldozer became engulfed in a sea of mud. Nearby, the Sesamsai River was rising. Our daily situation reports (sitreps) denoted progress, but there were plenty of problems too. A visiting air attaché from Vientiane reported what we already knew. Our frustrated leaders, Ambassador Sullivan and USAID Director Mendenhall, were anxiously awaiting results.

Inside a crater big enough to engulf a house, six villagers were still digging away on July 11 when someone's shovel made a distinct sound of metal hitting metal. Following usual procedures, Eddie attached a blasting charge, cleared the area for at least a half kilometer, and detonated bomb number 18. Clumps of earth rained down on the nearby temple and through several more thatched roofs, but we were thankful the nightmare was over. I remember touching a piece of hot shrapnel that landed 300 meters away from the explosion. After transmitting a message to Savannakhet and Vientiane we celebrated that evening with roast pig and plenty of Lao lao. As far as I could tell, the news about bombs never leaked.

#### COMPLETED CONSTRUCTION

Downtown Phalane was beginning to look like a different place. I found a copy of my 44-year-old, October 10, 1967 report to USAID Director Joseph Mendenhall via Sandy Stone describing our accomplishments. In the six months since the bombs fell we had constructed 16 new houses, 3 granaries, a policeman's residence, a working rice mill, a village market, and a district office. Repairs were complete on 81 damaged houses, 3 schools, and the village temple. An American well drilling expert, Jack Harrison, and his assistant, Thongsavan, had drilled two wells and installed hand pumps. The villagers were pleased.

A committee that included village elders, the Chao Muang,

See **Dong Hene**, continued on page 6



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##### **Board of Directors and Committee Chairmen**

##### **2010-2011, showing year of term-end**

President: Frank Marsh (2012)

Vice President: John Sweet (Reunion Committee) (2013)

Secretary: Jim Closs (2013)

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John Binfield (2012)

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BX Shopkeepers: Thelma and Bill Tilton

Communications Committee: vacant

History Committee: John Binfield

Membership Committee: Paul Lee

Public Relations Committee: Floyd McGurk

#### **Payments to TLCB**

Make all payments payable to **The TLC Brotherhood, Inc.**  
Mail them to the treasurer, at:

**TLC Brotherhood  
P.O. Box 343  
Locust Grove, GA 30248**

**Write payment purpose and member number on check.**

#### **Examples:**

Dues	Student Assistance Fund
Assistance	BX purchase
Medical Fund	etc.

**Reunion 2012: San Antonio, Texas, Oct 18-21**

**TLCB tax return and board minutes:** On web site, in *members only* section. Password: Pollux as of 4/1/12

**Dong Hene**, continued from page 5

and USAID representatives had reviewed over 450 claims for incurred losses. Factors under review included physical injuries, housing/goods damages, and animals/crops losses etc. Many from nearby villages had heard about the process and had climbed on the claim bandwagon. All of a sudden many poor villagers said that they had lost gold and jewelry. A clever Phalane merchant had printed a claim form in Savannakhet and then sold the blank forms to villagers. Our assistants, Thongseun and Khambang who were natives from the area, knew villagers by name and were able to catch the really fraudulent cases. Finally, after months of review and considerable bickering, the committee agreed on payments to 125 villagers.

The dry season was approaching and we were concerned about the annual dry season enemy offensive. Col Ly gave us an old house on the military compound in Dong Hene, which we repaired and stayed in three to four days each week. As usual, we spent considerable time with local FAR troop leaders and villagers discussing security. Whether it was safer for us to sleep in the confines of the camp or in the village always entered into the decision.

With reconstruction in Phalane nearly complete, we began a self-help program to resettle 120 of the displaced Lao Theung families. The district officer agreed on a favorable location called Dong laoluang, eight kilometers west of Phalane on route nine. Paw Nyee, the one-eyed group leader, organized his flock to weave bamboo walls and make necessary roofing thatch. Somehow we found the necessary framing material.

Enthusiasm was high. They were poor, poor people and we wanted to show support.

One day Marge, Balai, Somphong, and I all went there to work. We took sleeping bags and provisions for an overnight in the forest. After our dinner of sticky rice and bamboo shoots, someone, I won't say who, found a plastic bag with a supply of local leaves called saa. None of us will ever forget our evening at Dong Lao Luang smoking those exotic leaves. How young and foolish we were!

Another excursion we both remember, but don't have dates for during that time, was on the Caribou flight from Udorn that supplied our Tactical Air and Navigation Control (TACAN) stations. We boarded the plane at the airstrip in Phalane and landed in Saravane. Galen Beery gave us a tour of the town. From there we remember going by jeep to Khong Sedone where a bearded IVS member, Larry Olsen, entertained several villagers and us by playing his violin.

December came and we started to worry even more about security. On the 20<sup>th</sup> I sent a happy birthday letter from Phalane to my father, which was among the letters Hope saved. It said "four armed soldiers go with us everywhere." I noted that Director Mendenhall and the Deputy Prime Minister, Phoui Sananikon, had visited a week earlier and I was called upon to translate. "They've hinted about a promotion for me," said I. Our Christmas preparations included the production of a card in both English and Lao showing a photo of Marge and me with village children. It read, "From our House to your House, Prayers for Peace in the New Year." Balai was knitting a

See **Dong Hene**, continued next page

beautiful sweater for me that I estimated would be worth \$35 if sold in the states. We planned to roast a commissary turkey for Christmas at our place in Dong Hene, and invite Col Ly and his family.

## **FRONT LINE RUMORS**

Talk of trouble began. One of those December days we noted that our displaced Lao Theung friends were beginning to show hesitation regarding their proposed eight kilometer move away from Phalane. Their apprehension and the main street rumor mill told us to raise our vigilance. We slept some nights in Phalane and some nights at the military compound in Dong Hene.

Concern for our well being continued in the days before Christmas. Dry season rumors kept coming in. We shared whatever information we had with our TACAN friends, John, Peter, and Mike, who were living at the end of the airstrip. Whenever we drove into Savannakhet it was our habit to stop at their plywood quarters to check if they needed supplies. Most of their support came directly by air from Udorn. A Caribou flight would stop at our airstrip, Lima Site 61, and then proceed to Saravan, Lima Site 44, directly south of us. Enemy troops had threatened Saravane on December 6 and the nearby TACAN station, Phu Kate, but the technicians escaped injury and the equipment was undamaged.

The Heavy Green technicians of these outposts often rotated in and out. They kept in touch with each other (Udorn, Phu Pathi, Phu Kate, and Phalane) by radio and were updated daily by CIA security reports. Unfortunately they did not speak the Lao Language and often had communication difficulties with the troops posted nearby. I remember being concerned also that they would not hear any enemy activity because a big generator located close to their quarters was always humming away. We all knew their equipment was a prime target for the Vietnamese and Aye Non, so did the operators of other Heavy Green facilities at Saravane and Phu Pathi and everyone up the chain of command.

## **CHRISTMAS EVE MIRACLE**

When Marge and I left Phalane for the 103 km drive to Savannakhet in the afternoon of December 24, the alert level was high as usual, but nothing told of an imminent strike. One of our young Lao Theung guards was to sleep in our house as he always did when we were away. Balai was already in Seno with her family. Our plan was to pick her up the following morning, return to Dong Hene, and cook our Christmas turkey. As usual we stopped at the airstrip to check with John and Peter before proceeding to Dong Hene and west. We talked about security and their plans. They were expecting to receive a special meal from Udorn on Christmas Day. We stopped in Seno to see Balai for a few minutes and proceeded to Savan where we met Sandy and Ruth Stone at their guest



house facility. After dinner and Midnight Mass at the French Cathedral in Savannakhet, we slept soundly.

## **ALIVE AND WELL**

At seven the next morning when Sandy gave us startling news about Phalane, we realized how lucky we were to be alive. North Vietnamese sappers and PL forces had launched a combined mortar and ground attack on the FAR command post near the airstrip. Friendly forces were scattered. We knew our house was a target and would have been hit. No one knew what had happened to our American friends at the TACAN site. One Air America and four Thai technicians were also working at the Phalane airstrip that night. All we knew at the time, 7 A.M., was that the air strip had been hit.

The incredible story of our 1967 Christmas was about to continue. Convincing Sandy we would be safe, Marge and I climbed into our jeep and returned the 30 kilometers to Dong Hene with Balai to cook our Christmas turkey. Arriving at the Dong Hene camp we spoke with Colonel Ly who said simply, "Phalane is off limits. Keep in touch." Sometime around noon, our friend Mick McGrath landed with his H-34 chopper and said, "Jack, do you want to accompany me to Phalane?" I knew it was an important mission, but begged off noting we were preparing to entertain the Dong Hene military brass with a Christmas dinner.

At 4 P.M., an hour before our scheduled dinner, Captain Thongsuk came to inform us that more serious intercepts were heard, that security was deteriorating, and no one would be able to come to dinner. We cranked up the generator and heard Sandy say that McGrath's chopper was down somewhere in the vicinity of Phalane. "Talk about being young and foolish," we said to ourselves and continued to cook dinner, keeping the radio on to monitor the situation.

About 7 P.M., shortly after dark, it became even more obvious that we had been mistaken in our decision to have Christmas dinner at Dong Hene. McGrath was in the jungle,

See **Dong Hene**, continued on page 8

Dong Hene, continued from page 7

Col Ly was reporting more bad news, and Sandy was attempting to have us picked up. Twenty minutes later we heard the roar of a Jolly Green chopper and the pilot's voice, with an unmistakable American accent, came in on our hand held radio.

The landing of a Jolly Green in unfamiliar territory after dark was a memorable event. Dust flew. Floodlights blazed. Crew members came out of the chopper with M-16 rifles ready. I approached the craft to provide identification while Balai wrapped the half-cooked turkey in foil. Marge grabbed a few duds and we flew to Nakhon Phanom (NKP). We enjoyed Christmas dinner in the officer's mess and were happy to be safe, but we wondered about our friend Mick and what had happened in Phalane. In his book, "One Day Too Long" Timothy Castle described Mick's near fatal trip to Phalane as follows:

*Scattering the Royal Lao forces the attackers fired B-40 rockets into the TACAN equipment and living quarters of Heavy Green technician's staff Sergeant John D. Morris and Sergeant Peter W. Scott. Expecting to spend that afternoon enjoying a specially prepared meal sent in from Udorn, the unarmed Americans were caught by complete surprise and killed. The assault then shifted to town where an Air America radio station and USAID office were destroyed. Four Thai were reported killed at the station and a Filipino radioman taken prisoner but an American USAID employee and his wife managed to escape. The Royal Lao Forces offered token resistance before fleeing west leaving behind a 75mm recoilless rifle, 3 M79 grenade launchers, an M60 machine gun and a Toyota truck.*

*Reaction from the CIA and Air America was swift – and nearly catastrophic. Unsure if there were any survivors, an Air America H-34 piloted by Thai national, Sariphan Bhilakhoul, flew CIA officer, Mick McGrath, to LS-61 where the adviser conducted a dangerous and inconclusive search of the Heavy Green living quarters. Meanwhile the waiting helicopter came under mortar and small arms fire, wounding Sariphan in the head. Returning at a run, McGrath clambered aboard as the barrage continued and the bleeding pilot successfully fought to raise the damaged aircraft to a safe altitude. Suffering more than a hundred hits, the H-34 rapidly lost oil pressure and was forced to land some ten kilometers west of Muang Phalane. After an uncomfortable evening in the midst of enemy forces the men were retrieved by an Air America helicopter.*

According to Castle's account, on the following day the presidential advisor, Walt Rostow, thought the incident was important enough to alert President Johnson at his Texas Ranch. It was reported that the attack was specifically aimed at the U.S. presence at Muang Phalane. Without the bodies, the embassy was proceeding with the possibility that the two Americans might have been captured. No doubt, Ambassador Sullivan was concerned about what might be printed and its

ramifications regarding the Geneva accords. Both John and Peter carried Lockheed identification cards for their cover, but apparently Heavy Green casualties never became an issue.

## **TURKEY TALES CONTINUED**

On December 26 after breakfast in the officer's mess at NKP, we retrieved our turkey from a refrigerator, flew back to Savannakhet, and learned the good news that Mick was safe. Ruth Stone put our turkey back in the fridge. I don't need to say that cocktail conversation that night at the Stone's house was lively. Balai was still confused as to where we had been and remarked how clever it was that the Americans had such a facility in the middle of Laos. Although enemy forces had not reached Dong Hene that previous night, we realized once again how lucky we were to be alive. Over the days, months, and years that followed, Marge and I continued to ask ourselves why we drove back to Dong Hene that day. We knew the situation was volatile but we took a chance because we had made a Christmas day commitment to our good friend and protector, Col Ly.

For a while Lao military forces claimed that North Vietnamese had moved tanks into the area. We never saw any photos and I don't remember ever talking with anyone who actually saw tanks. When FAR troops finally regained control of Phalane on December 31, they found the corpses of our friends and their burned living quarters. An Air America chopper returned the decomposed remains to Udorn. We needed a break so we spent New Year's Eve in Vientiane, probably at the ACA Club. In her January 3, 1968 letter to Hope, Marge wrote that we were back in Savannakhet and "Things have been a little topsy turvy for us." Marge was also concerned that the Phalane attack would be in the media reports back home.



TACAN navigation transmitter and generators that FAR troops destroyed at Phalane. Both technicians were killed.

## **PHALANE SURVEY**

That same day I accompanied the deputy Governor, Chao Khwaing, and a Social Welfare representative back to Phalane by H-34 chopper to survey the situation. How, I don't know, but a copy of my 44-year-old report, written the next day to Director Mendenhall, survives.

Our survey group landed first at Dong Hene for a briefing by Col Ly. He said that Phalane was now safe, that we could set down at the airstrip or in the village, and that field phone connection between Dong Hene and Phalane was restored.

See **Dong Hene**, continued next page



We should not fly more than five km north of Rt. 9 at low altitude, he added.

At the airstrip in Phalane, we found what was expected. Total destruction of the TACAN station and FAR facilities was before us. Soldiers who recovered the bodies said one American died in the initial blast and the other started to run but was brought down by gunfire 20 meters from where they were sleeping that night. A familiar Captain told us we could safely land in the school yard at Phalane. When we got there only a few male villagers were found. Most of Phalane's inhabitants had fled to Savannakhet or other nearby villages.

Destruction by enemy forces seemed to be selective. I described what I had seen in the "Damages Observed" section of my report. The community center eight km west of Phalane, where we were planning on resettling 120 families, was burned to the ground. The frame of our house was still standing, but the ceiling and all four walls were blown out by the explosion of a B-40 rocket. Bounshoo, our young guard, who was reportedly sleeping in our bed, was killed instantly by the blast. The generator, radio, and all our bedding, clothing, bikes, and household equipment were missing. Virtually all the houses and shops of the town had been ransacked. There was a gaping hole in the eastern half of the bridge. I reported that it would no longer support a vehicle. You could see several unexploded Chinese grenades in the rubble.

When we arrived at the Chinese Restaurant, Paw Tek's place, the tassang and a few villagers were sitting there drinking Lao hai from an earthen crock that they claimed had been stored underground. They said that soldiers and villagers from

surrounding areas were responsible for the looting. I remember being surprised that none of the newly re-built houses were burned. Only one of the new houses built by USAID was slightly damaged. Our good friend, Col Ly, was able to send a truck from Dong Hene to recover our kerosene refrigerator before it was hauled away by looters.

Some of Phalane's villagers were staying with relatives in Savannakhet. FAR was providing rice and relief supplies to those who had fled to Ban Pon Bok, between Phalane and Dong Hene, and to Km-4 on the road to Kengkok. A few days later, Marge and I remember visiting Paw Nyee and his family and the survivors. They were huddled under tarps and make-shift huts made from branches. Many had spent the last few years escaping a variety of war-torn environments. Initially they fled conscription by the Vietnamese and resettled temporarily in Phalane where they were mistakenly bombed by the Americans and were finally driven out again by the Vietnamese-backed PL. We wondered how they could hold up.

### **PHALANE MAKES NEWS**

For weeks we were astounded that a story of the attack on Phalane never appeared in local or national media. We knew the reason. Events in Vietnam prevailed in the headlines. One small item entitled, "Pathets Admit Attacks" appeared in the *Stars and Stripes* (December 28, 1967) which read,

Pathet Lao radio, in a report quoted by Hanoi Radio, admitted that fighting had broken out in Laos but made no mention of North Vietnamese Forces being involved.

See **Dong Hene**, continued on page 10

View of Dong Hene, on Route Coloniale 9



Dong Hene, continued from page 9

U.S. commanded forces of the right-winged Government in the Phalane District have been committing crimes against the local population. Regional liberation forces and guerillas assisted by the local population attacked the 'enemy' and completely seized control of the situation. They wiped out a major part of the enemy forces, killing among others, three U.S. Advisors and many cruel agents of the U.S., the broadcast said.

We never returned to live in either Phalane or Dong Hene after the Christmas attack. FAR forces were spread too thin. Many troops from Dong Hene had been dispersed to Nam Bac. Our confidence in local security had diminished. Although friendly forces did re-capture the area at the end of 1967 and some villagers did return for a while, Phalane was subsequently lost again in February 1968 and burned to the ground. When I went there with the air attaché we saw a discouraging pile of ashes from all the new houses we had built.

New refugees from the Tcepone area were temporarily camping at the school. They showed me an impressive ar-



Pots and pans villagers made from weapons canisters.

ray of aluminum pots and pans they had pounded out from flare canisters. When asked why they left their villages, they responded with the usual answers: They didn't want to do coolie work for the Vietnamese and they didn't want to face the incessant bombing raids from U.S. jets. I took a few photos of the burned-out town and wondered how many more times control of the area would flip flop. On the way back to Savannakhet, the Air America pilot took a daring high altitude swing east over the trail where we could see the forest canopy dotted with flare parachutes. According to Ministry of Defense sources, the village was returned to RLG control again in August 1968, during Operation Fa Nguem.

## LAHANAM INTERLUDE

Marge and I lived in Jack Harrison's house in Savannakhet for a few weeks following our departure from Dong Hene. We joked about our Christmas turkey that was still in Ruth Stone's freezer. In early February, we loaded the cooked but uneaten bird into a freezer box, took what belongings we had, and moved to a new assignment in Lahanam. We replaced Tony

and Marcia Babb who had finished their tour. Tony's Lao assistant, Kiane Keopradith, who is from Sae Bangfai, departed Lahanam at the same time to work in Vientiane. Kiane and family finally moved to Springfield, Virginia in 1976.

Located on the bank of the Se Banghiang River, 70 Km. southeast of Savannakhet, Lahanam seemed like a quiet, peaceful village. Successful USAID-supported projects included several new schools, a fancy new muang office, and a very popular irrigation system. River water was pumped through a series of canals to farmers' paddy fields, which enabled three crops per year instead of one. A farmers' association, established then, was still operational 43 year later when we visited Lahanam in 2010. USAID's portable sawmill, which could be moved from village to village, was very effective in producing the lumber necessary for construction. Frank Bewetz, an immigrant American IVS volunteer with engineering experience was earning a formidable reputation building anything anyone needed. Fellow volunteers, Keith Sanders and Jiro Oi, were also highly motivated and well liked by all the villagers they worked with. Their schedules were full helping villagers build schools, dig improved wells, and install water seal toilets.

Compared to the trauma we had been through in Dong Hene and Phalane, life in Lahanam seemed peaceful. We finally consumed our commissary turkey with friends, but the story of its prior movements continued to be the subject of many conversations. The house was comfortable with an inside toilet and running hot and cold water. Unfortunately, because it was built by USAID with painted white plywood and an aluminum roof, it stood out like a sore thumb. We knew if there were any bad guys around they could find us without asking. For this reason we sometimes crept silently away with our sleeping bags to sleep in an undisclosed location.

A month after we had settled in at Lahanam, Marge voyaged three km upstream to visit Madam DuFour, a famous Swiss missionary nurse, who lived in the village of Songkhone. For over 20 years Madam DuFour had provided needed community medical services in the area. She was also the adoptive mother of at least 10 orphaned children. When the Vietnamese-backed Aye Nong attacked Songkhone in 1968, Madam staunchly resisted for a time but finally had to leave her beloved clinic and children and return to Switzerland. She passed away in her native land leaving sorrowful memories in the hearts of Songkhone villagers after one or two unsuccessful attempts at returning to Laos. Today, when we return to retrace our steps in Songkhone Madam DuFour's daughter spreads a welcome mat for us. Elizabeth, 60, is also a trained nurse and is locally known as Mae Bet.

## ANOTHER CLOSE CALL

Unfortunately our 1968 assignment in Lahanam lasted only two months. Bad guy rumors began and soon intensified. One afternoon in early April just before Lao New Year, several villagers including Tassang How and Captain Tongsuk told us we had to leave. PL troops were headed our way. With Somphong and a few personal belongings, we scrambled to our jeep and again

See **Dong Hene**, continued next page



left town just in time. Balai remembers already being in Seno. We were jinxed! Sure enough the Aye Nong came to town that night looking for us. They reportedly told villagers that anyone caught harboring the Americans would be punished by having their skin slashed and salt poured into the wounds.

Returning to Lahanam a few days later with Sandy and Col Nuphet, we found both our house and USAID/Muang office completely ransacked. The intruders tore our mattresses apart looking for money. Feathers from several down sleeping bags were scattered all over the house. Villagers told us the PL loaded our goodies into several boats, made a flag of Marge's underwear, and went back upstream from whence they had come. In 2010, when we returned to Lahanam, the shell of a house was still standing and students were using it for storage. We talked with elderly villagers who recalled details of that eventful night. They could remember our names and the projects, particularly the irrigation system.

By hot footing it out of Lahanam we had escaped death, or at least captivity, once again. Safe and sound in Savannakhet we again breathed a sigh of relief. A few days of rest were in store. Keith Sanders, Marge, and I will never forget going on a short trip to Ubon, Thailand. Everyone was in a festive mood because it was in the middle of water festival (SongKla). Ubon teenagers climbed on the city bus with a fire hose and sprayed all of us somewhere downtown.

For the next few weeks we cooled our collective heels, supported refugee activities, and wrote end-of-tour reports back at the Harrison House in Savannakhet. My first tour of duty in the Foreign Service was ending and in May we were headed for home leave and a rest in downtown Richfield Springs, NY.

In early 1968 other important events in the secret war were unfolding, but we had been pre-occupied with our own scene. On January 13, the important FAR outpost of Nambac, north of Luang Prabang, fell. Over a million dollars worth of equipment, ammunition etc., and 500 troops were lost in the fiasco. On March 10, less than a year after it became operational, the important TACAN/TSQ radar site at Phu Pathi was overrun with the loss of 12 U.S. Air Force personnel. Our friends, Jerry Daniels and Frank (Bag) Odem, were involved in supporting the spectacular evacuation attempt. The Ambassador's FLASH cable to the secretary of state reportedly read, "We may have pushed our luck one day too long in attempting to keep this facility in operation."

## **GOODBYE KENGGOK CLUSTER**

The walls of another nearby USAID cluster were crumbling. On May 8 that year our good friends, Frank and Urai Gillespie and their children, narrowly escaped death in the village of Kengkok. Had it not been for a floor containing three inches of concrete in their bathroom the AK-47 bullets fired from directly below would have resulted in tragedy. Their village house, built on stilts, took multiple shots through the floor and sides during the attack while the family huddled in the bathroom. Fortunately and for reasons unclear to this day the PL did not attempt to enter the house, but left the village

after the initial assault.

Another IVS friend who was in Kengkok that evening, Jerry Nell, remembers the harrowing event as well. We always traded security-related rumors with Jerry wherever we were posted. This practice intensified when we moved to Lahanam. On the evening when PL forces attempted to kill Frank and Urai Gillespie and their children, Jerry and his wife Linh, who was eight months pregnant, were also sleeping in Kengkok. They narrowly escaped by slipping into the nearby forest. According to Frank's account of the incident, local FAR forces had simply run when the PL came to town. The oldest USAID-supported cluster in Laos was no longer safe for foreigners. No one wanted to leave town. The Filipino Operation Brotherhood Team resisted for a long time.

I continued to ask myself, "If this is what one tour with USAID is like, should I be thinking about a career with this outfit?" We were about to depart on home leave and were about to meet each other's relatives, some for the first time. Many would be skeptical about our policy objectives in Laos. What would we say? Our two-month home leave was another adventure. Landing in Tehran, we went by train to my old Peace Corps stomping ground in Rezaiyeh and then overland to Moscow, Helsinki, and New York.

Marge and I went back to continue with USAID Laos for 7 more years after our initial leave in the U.S. Challenging jobs took us to several interesting locations until the Communist takeover in June, 1975. Those were exciting times too. As area coordinator, I interacted with provincial leaders and reported directly to the ambassador. I was fully occupied with planning, managing, and reporting on a variety of USAID-funded activities. Marge did voluntary nursing work in orphanages and local hospitals. Assignments took us to Vientiane, Sayaboury, Ban Houie Sai, and Luang Prabang. I had the good fortune of working with many highly motivated Lao and American personnel who wanted to achieve program results and improve the living conditions of the Lao.

In early 1975 with the departure of U.S. Forces in Vietnam, it became clear that changes were in the air for Laos. Students protested against government corruption while the PL faction of the coalition government pressed forward for complete control. In June, after disruptive protest activities in several provincial towns and a confrontation in Vientiane's Nai Hai Dio Compound, USAID/Laos closed its doors.

Departing Laos after almost ten years was a bittersweet event. Dependents, including Marge and our two children, were evacuated to Bangkok. I remained in Vientiane for a few days with a group of others, Gordon Ramsey, Edwin McKeithen, Bob Daken, Jerry Nell, Bea Perez, Bobby Allen, Doug Clark, and Mac Thompson, in an effort to transfer USAID resources worth millions to the Communist victors. It was a sad goodbye.

My involvement with the Lao continued in August that year when I returned for temporary duty in our embassy in Bangkok to help organize a refugee parole program. We were determined to help our former employees and those who supported us—but that is another story for another day.



# Reunion 2012~Come to San Antonio

## Let's take a stroll on the River Walk!

### Our Next TLCB Reunion 18-21 October 2012

As previously announced, the TLC Brotherhood Reunion will be held in San Antonio, Texas on the Riverwalk at the Crowne Plaza Riverwalk, located at 111 E. Pecan Street. The room rate is \$109.00 per night plus tax, which is currently 16.75%. The price includes buffet breakfast for two and parking is free.

Hotel URL: <http://www.crowneplaza.com/hotels/us/en/san-antonio/satps>

**RESERVATIONS:** Each member must make his/her own reservation by calling (888) 623-2800 before 09/16/2012, the designated cut-off date. Identify yourself as a member of the TLCB to get the reunion rate. All reservations will include a first night room deposit guaranteed by a major credit card. The hotel will also honor the TLCB group rates three (3) days before group arrival and three (3) days after based on rate and space availability. Make reservations early to ensure availability.

**CANCELLATIONS:** If you must cancel your reservation, you must do so at least 72 hours prior to your stated arrival. Failure will result in a charge on your credit card for one night's room and tax.

**ACCOMMODATIONS:** You can check in at 3:00 p.m. on arrival day with checkout at 11:00 a.m. on your departure day. If you want special consideration for late checkout, inquire at the front desk on the day of departure. If you leave prior to your reserved checkout date, the hotel will add an early departure fee to your account, currently \$50.00, unless departure is due to illness.

**TRANSPORTATION FROM THE AIRPORT:** There is metro transportation from the airport for those who fly into San Antonio. The cost is approximately \$16.00 per person each way.



San Antonio is justly famous for its "River Walk" on the San Antonio River.

**EVENTS:** We are in the planning stages for reunion events. Those we are working on and are under consideration include attendance for graduation ceremonies at Lackland AFB and a visit to the Alamo. Of course there are many exciting things to enjoy on the charming and beautiful Riverwalk. At present, our local reunion chairman, Dan Decker, has a tentative schedule which includes:

**Thursday Night:** Still in the planning stage.

**Friday Night:** Our Annual TLCB Assistance Auction. Be sure to bring some junk that others will see as treasures for the auction; we need items from you all to make the evening fun and profitable! As usual, we will have our own liquor and beer, freely dispensed, after payment of our nominal charge.

On **Saturday** after breakfast, we will have our annual meeting for members. On Saturday night we will enjoy the banquet and guest speaker, Dr. Donald R. Spoon, POW Jan 67 - Mar 73 in the "Hanoi Hilton." Of course, we will include our tribute POW Table.

**Sunday morning** will feature our Annual TLC Brotherhood Memorial Service, paying homage to, and remembrance of, our departed brothers and sisters.

We are looking forward to a great turn out!

**John Sweet**

**National Reunion Chairman**



Tower of the Americas, with its rotating restaurant. This is a likely tour site for the Brotherhood.