

# MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE THAILAND-LAOS-CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC. VOLUME 15, ISSUE 1

## John Middlewood's Story

by Thelma Tilton, Assistant Editor

John Middlewood arrived at Nakhon Phanom (NKP) in 1969 and was stationed in the clinic performing administrative work. He has been a TLCB member since November 2000 when he quickly started working with TLCB Assistance projects/motions. He was already living in NKP, and had recently married Maeo, who was at that time a 6th grade school teacher. John was in the process of becoming a minister and the two lived downtown for a couple of years, blocks from the river. John worked for and earned master's and doctorate degrees, and also preached Christianity in Thai prisons.



Dr John. Photo by Bill Tilton

John and Maeo moved farther out, and he commenced to build his church and home near the school where Maeo taught. They became active in their community and continue to hold worship services in the Christian Mission of Ban Naratchakwai; help many people with the "Soup of Love" outreach; and teach many Thai children in their boarding school. English is one of

the important subjects taught to children in their school. Many of the high school and college students they have assisted have earned special honors throughout the years.

The TLC Brotherhood is fortunate to have John to discover deserving students and help with the scholarship program that TLCB members make possible through the TLCB Student Aid and Assistance programs' donations. John's dedication is an inspiration. He continues to encourage and lead young people to a better life through Christian love, education, and fine example.



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## Student Aid Fund: Where are they now?

by Dr. John Middlewood

The TLCB student aid program has been in operation now for eight or nine years. It has advanced approximately 200 students directly, because through the funds from the TLCB they have been able to complete their educational goals. For some students this has meant completing high school; for others, technical school; for still others, earning a university degree. This strategy has directly benefited students that otherwise may have had to drop out of school. It has been, and still is, one of the best programs that the TLCB provides here in Nakhon Phanom. The operation has gone from about 20,000 baht per month and 15-20 students to our current level of 36,000 baht (about \$1000) and 28 students per month.

See SAF, continued on page 4.

# Editor's Notebook

The March 2014 issue of *The Mekong Express Mail* might well be subtitled *The Assistance Issue*.

The heroic John Middlewood, who looks after TLCB's contributions to the schools in the Nakhom Phanom area, has written our cover article, detailing not just the achievements of our program, but the great progress of a remarkable group of students. I also call your attention to the informative introduction to John's piece, put together by *MEM's* assistant editor, Thelma Tilton.

The wandering Mac Thompson, known to some of us as "Our man in Southeast Asia," uses his genuine story telling skills to bring us along with him and travel companion, Auke Koopmans, as he delivers the goods to and checks on the progress of the TLCB Assistance Program in Laos. Mac's a pretty busy guy, but he could probably start and operate a travel business over there. He's also a pretty good photographer, and you can see from the selection that *MEM's* layout man, Bill Tilton, has included along with Mac's narrative. More of Mac's photos are available online, at the photo service, Picasa, [www.tinyurl.com/d729tv8](http://www.tinyurl.com/d729tv8).

"Why Are We in Laos," by the TLCB president, John Sweet, is a quick write up of how the Assistance Program moved beyond its origins in the Isan area of Northeast Thailand into the wilds of Laos. In it, he also touches on the noteworthy

initiatives of Jeff Hudgens, who courageously ventured into Laos and found the crash site, where the father he never knew, Major Ed Hudgens, died back in 1970. Getting deeper into the history and growth of TLCB's work in Thailand and Laos lays bare one incredible story after another. The roots go all the way back to work John Sweet was doing on his free time, when he was an airman, back in the late 1960s, in Nakhon Phanom.

The depth of TLCB's commitment to the Assistance Program is clear by looking at the last two year's list of contributors, which also appears in this issue of *MEM*.

A slightly different perspective on Laos is the second of two articles by Phil French about his adventures in the "not-so-secret war" in Laos back in the late 1960s. "TDY to the Back Side of the Moon" looks at, from the air, Laos and some of the places where now TLCB is making a different kind of contribution. He also shares with us some startling photos of the Laotian Hmong leader and hero, Vang Pao. Many TLCB members had contacts with him, "back in the day."

TLCB is a unique organization, even among the many groups made of up of Vietnam War era veterans. At least from my perspective, the singular fact that our group continues to contribute to the people of Thailand and Laos, so many years after we spent parts of our long-past youth there, is the factor that distinguishes the TLCB among all of the others.

John Harrington  
Editor, *MEM*

## How can we reach you?

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

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**Reunion 2014: Oct 2-5, Colorado Springs, CO**

# TDY To The Back Side Of The Moon

by Philip French

This is an account of my brief temporary duty (TDY) in the so-called “Secret War” which took place over a period of nearly fifteen years in the Kingdom of Laos. That chapter in the history of the protracted war in Southeast Asia was very much not in the news of the day. In fact, the unique war in Laos, and especially the direct involvement of the United States military, was only dimly known to the outside world. Now that nearly forty years have passed, government documents about the war in Laos have been declassified and accounts of it are widely detailed in books and on the Internet.

In September of 1969, *Operation About Face* was in full swing in northeast Laos. That operation, commanded by the legendary Lao Major General, Vang Pao, had resulted in a significant rout of North Vietnamese Army (NVA) forces from the Plain of Jars, also known as the Plaine de Jarres, or PDJ. Vang Pao’s troops, composed mostly of his native Hmong hill tribesmen, had impressively swept the PDJ and captured huge caches of NVA weaponry.

After many earlier, marginally successful campaigns and some downright disastrous ones, *About Face* was going well. Spirits among the Hmong and the supporting Americans were high.

The nerve center of the war in northeast Laos was at the small, bustling town of Long Chieng, which was nestled in a remote valley among imposing limestone karst formations all around it. Vang Pao lived there in a large, two-story stone house with several of his wives, their families, and other trusted supporters.

The local CIA headquarters was just up the hill and the USAF Forward Air Controllers (FACS), known as “the Ravens,” were headquartered nearby.

Air America had a strong presence, and there was almost non-stop air traffic at Long Chieng airfield, particularly at the height of operations such as *About Face*. The airstrip was designated as Lima Site 98 or Lima Site 20 Alternate, but was commonly referred to as simply “Alternate” by the aircrews.

There was so much going on in that region of Laos at the time that Air America must have had a bit more business than it could reasonably handle in airlifting Lao troops and CIA operatives into the field of operations on and around the PDJ. Consequently, over a period of several months, my unit at Nakhon Phanom Thailand, the 606th Special Operations Squadron, was assigned to weekly rotations at Long Chieng. Alongside Air America U-10s and Pilatus “Porters,” we airlifted troops and supplies to Vang Pao’s forces.

However, our USAF U-10s did provide an added mission capability beyond that normally undertaken by Air America.

We were very much accustomed to the psychological warfare activity of leaflet dropping. Consequently, the CIA, our “client” at Long Chieng, utilized us accordingly. So my crew chief, Sgt Dick Saunders, and I departed north-northwest from NKP on September 11, crossed the Mekong River east of Vientiane, and headed toward Long Chieng and our first visit to “the world’s most secret airbase.” We were dressed in civilian clothes rather than the standard USAF flight suits,



Phil and TLCB “base” hat.



U-10 Helio “Super Couriers” Flying up to Long Chieng. Photos furnished by the author.

and our U-10 did not carry USAF markings. We finally spotted the valley in which the town of Long Chieng was half hidden. Part of the hard-surface runway appeared in the distance. As we descended and set up our approach, we began to get an eye-popping first look at the incredible outpost. The 3100 foot runway ran almost due north/south, but a huge forbidding limestone karst jutted

up several hundred feet at the north end of the runway. This meant that we had to land north and take off south, regardless of the winds. The valley did open up somewhat to the south, so a reasonably sane approach from that direction was possible. C-123s, C-47s, T-28s, the Ravens’ O-1s, as well as the more agile Porters and Helios routinely operated out of out of Long Chieng.

Dick Saunders and I parked our U-10 near similar birds on the ramp, unloaded our personal gear, and headed up the hill to the CIA headquarters. We were met by a fellow who was expecting us and who introduced himself using first name only. He seemed to know a heck of a lot about us, though. Long Chieng was instantly proving to be quite an intriguing place to be assigned, though out in the middle of nowhere—definitely on the “back side of the moon”!

Adjoining the patio outside the CIA offices was a cage holding two Asian bears, of all things. They were quite entertaining and they thrived on beer.

See **Moon**, continued on page 5



**SAF, continued from page 1.**

One of our first success stories is Meechai, who was one of the initial recipients. He completed his BA in education in Khon Kaen and started teaching in that province. He has since set up his life there, purchased a home and a vehicle, and has gone back to school to get his MA in education. He provides support for his mother and is also looking forward to returning to school to get his doctorate in education.

Another early student was Narit. At the time we first met him, he was in the 6th grade and taking care of a mother who was suffering from AIDS. As she was dying, his mother asked us to keep an eye on Narit and take care of him. Narit completed high school and went to junior college, has had several jobs in Nakhon Phanon, and now works for Gobal, a very large construction materials supplier. He is married, has a beautiful wife and daughter, and continues to help support his grandmother.

A more recent success story is Nun. She graduated from Piya High School last year from the Mini English Program and is currently in college near Bangkok. She helps take care of an invalid aunt and goes to school. She recently took first place in a speech competition.

Our brightest star is Kultida, an 11th grade student at Cheng Yuen. A few months ago, she was in a competition concerning Thai customs and traditions and placed third in the Kingdom of Thailand. How exciting it was for her when the Princess of Thailand presented her with a certificate. On February 6, 2014, I received word that she completed competition in another category and was selected as the *top in the Kingdom*. Kultida will be making a trip to Bangkok and will receive her awards from either the Princess or King of Thailand. At a



Kultida demonstrates proper "wai."

recent interview in the latest competition, she publicly thanked the TLCB for the support she had received, and I was glad to be able to speak to the inspection team and tell them a little bit about the TLCB.

Most of the students we support are from dysfunctional families—either they have no mother, no father, or have lost both parents. One current student's father died last year and her mother

a week or so ago. Many live with grand parents or aunts and uncles; all of them have financial problems, and most of these youngsters would not be able to continue their education without the support of the TLCB.

Recently, the emphasis for providing support has been shifted to students in high school interested in being English majors and university students who show interest in nursing or teaching degrees. We are also changing our emphasis toward students who attend the local university because this allows for closer supervision. Currently, three of the eight university students assist in our "Older teaching Younger" Saturday English Camps.

We are looking forward to another exceptional year, beginning in May. On behalf of the kids, I thank all of you for your continued support for them. [additional photo page 9]

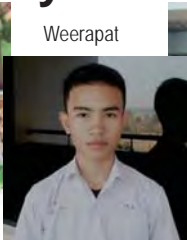


**Gallery of TLCB Students**

Left, Nalita, Suwanan (NKP University).  
Below, Wipada



Above, Matchima, Namthip, Suphachai.



Weerapat



Wathinee (NKP University)



Below, Meow and teacher with Phannee, Achiraya, Nutchanat, Nantawee

Below, Jenjira, Amonrat, Nittayah, Nootjira, Pongpat



Above, Saowalak, Tidaporn, Dararat



Below, Suchada, Weeraya, Woraparat, Kulthida



Poppy



Antoothida



## Moon, continued from page 3.



Approaching Long Chieng, Laos from the southeast. The tall limestone karst at the north end of the runway, aligned beneath the tie-down ring, got pilots' attention

After hastily stowing our gear in the quarters provided near the CIA offices, we got a mission briefing from our "handler." He explained the progress of *Operation About Face* and that the key town of Moung Soui was currently in NVA hands. In addition to transporting personnel, we would be tasked with "psywar" drops over contested locations, including Moung Soui. The CIA was determined to lure defectors from the other side and gain intelligence of benefit to Vang Pao's forces. So, we launched our first leaflet drop mission that same afternoon and extended the flight to familiarize ourselves with the PDJ and surrounding areas. (PDJ is the "Plain of Jars," located north of Long Chieng. It was the main battle zone in Laos.)

The following days were filled with transport missions into various Lima Sites, small airstrips located throughout Laos. My logbook indicates six round trips between Long Chieng and LS-9, Lat Houang, in one day. We hauled all manner of war-related cargo and people, American and Lao, back and forth. One of those sorties involved quickly loading the cargo compartment overly full with battle-weary Hmong soldiers for the trip back to "Alternate." No passenger briefing. No seat belts. *Just stack 'em in and go.*




Earlier I mentioned the psywar side of our mission at Long Chieng. Aware of our leaflet dropping experience over the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the CIA folks wanted to add this dimension to the *About Face* initiative. They had a supply of simple, but rugged transistor radios, which were tuned to receive pro-Lao

AT LEFT: Sgt Dick Saunders, in "civvies," is ready to make a drop of special "psywar" packages over Moung Soui, Laos, during *Operation About Face*, September, 1969

propaganda broadcasts going over the air. We packed several of these radios along with small bags of rice and "free conduct pass" leaflets in large packages for drops over Moung Soui and other crucial locations. Later, after Sgt Saunders and I returned to NKP, we still had no idea if any defectors had been won over by those unusual drops.

One morning, the CIA people tasked us with trying to pinpoint the location of a troublesome footbridge that NVA and Communist Pathet Lao soldiers used to cross a small river. So here we were—instant reconnaissance experts! After navigating to the general area and much searching, Sgt Saunders and I did finally spot this bridge. I snapped some photos of it with my trusty old Nikon, noted the coordinates, and returned to Long Chieng with the information and film. The CIA operatives were pleased to have this, so Sgt Saunders and I felt as if we had made a small, tangible contribution toward the war effort. I assume that bridge soon received an unfriendly visit from a Raven FAC, directing a Royal Lao Air Force T-28, or USAF A-1, to destroy it.

So, there's a look at USAF U-10 operations in one of the truly remote battle areas in the Southeast Asia War of the late 1960s. Believe me; the memories are still keen after all these years. The experience was unusual and priceless. 

### General Vang Pao after Operation About Face



Photos given to Phil by CAS officers in September of 1969 during the aftermath of the very successful *Operation About Face*. Above, General Vang Pao (VP), fabled commander in Military Region 2, with a destroyed enemy truck near the PDJ. Below, VP faces the camera, with three American advisors and two Hmong soldiers, very tough but almost too small for their American weapons. Phil was offered his choice of battlefield "booty" piled high on a flatbed truck. He took four rifles to NKP.



# The Springs II: TLCB Reunion 2014

by Les Thompson, Vice President/National Reunion Chairman

First, I would like to thank Joe Wilson for stepping up as the Local Reunion Chairman. So far the local committee is just him and Nick Cressy, so if anyone is local and wants to help, give Joe a shout at: [jjwilsonjr@yahoo.com](mailto:jjwilsonjr@yahoo.com).

This year's reunion will be at the DoubleTree Hotel in Colorado Springs from Thursday, October 2nd through Sunday, October 5th. Room rates will be \$103 per night, exclusive of tax. This rate will be available for 3 days prior to and 3 days after the reunion. You can make your reservations at any time by visiting: <http://tinyurl.com/TLCB-2014-Reunion>

For those who didn't make Ft. Walton in 2013, you missed a great reunion. Ed Miller and his group were thrown a curve by the weather and the government shutdown. In the end, there were a lot, *and I mean a lot*, of comments

about how everyone actually enjoyed being able to sit and visit without the pressures of being ready for a tour. So, when I met up with Joe in Colorado Springs later that month, we discussed this reaction and decided that we were going with the KISS guidelines. We decided that the primary focus of this reunion will be on Brotherhood, not sightseeing. If there is something you want to see in the local area, we will provide brochures and recommendations for you to pursue at your convenience and schedule — no 0800 bus calls out front.

We encourage maximum use of the hospitality suite because this is the year to renew old friendships and start new ones. We have a great speaker lined up for the banquet. We will post more information on the Forum and in the upcoming MEMs.



## ***TLC Brotherhood, Inc. ELECTION NOTICE:***

The nominating period for the 2014 elections begins April 1st and ends Midnight EST, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The election for the TLCB Board of Directors will be held on Saturday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014, at the DoubleTree Hotel, Colorado Springs. This will be the first order of business during the annual meeting of the corporation.

During the nominating period, you may submit nominations via email or USPS to any member of the nominating committee. Prior to submitting a nomination, make sure that your nominee is willing to serve. The board will not accept nominations after the nomination period closes.

### ***Members of the Nominating Committee for 2014 are as follows:***

Chairman:	Ken Schmidt	4069 Crystal Drive, Three Rivers, CA 93271
Member:	Ed Miller	139 Fulmar Circle NE, Ft. Walton Beach, FL 32548
Member:	Robert Santo	16 Todd Court, Huntington Station, NY 11746

***Address for submission via email is: [committee@tlc-brotherhood.com](mailto:committee@tlc-brotherhood.com)***

### ***The following board positions are up for re-election in 2014:***

President	Incumbent: John Sweet	Eligible for reelection
Treasurer	Incumbent: Paul Lee	Declines nomination
Member at Large	Incumbent: Willi Pete Peterson,	Eligible for reelection
Member at Large	Incumbent: Bob Wheatley	Not eligible for reelection.

The publication of candidate bios is optional. The nominating committee will provide the bio publication procedure to the nominee and nominator upon receipt of a nomination. Bios will be published according to policy as set by the chairman of the Communications Committee.



# Lao Assessment Trip: Winter

by MacAlan Thompson



Dawn finds the Xaysomboun morning market in full swing. Mac and Auke had breakfast here on a chilly morning high in the mountains. Xaysomboun is a good stopover point, with a decent hotel and a location near many schools we help. Photos by the author.

In late October, it dawned on me that it was about time for another TLCB run to NE Laos to check on several projects that had been funded the previous July. Indeed, the July trip amounted to a disbursement of almost \$15,000 of TLCB Assistance funds spread over five projects, plus another batch of books from [www.bigbrothermouse.org](http://www.bigbrothermouse.org).

Our regular Lao driver, Mr. Somphou, was on a three-month TDY to the Phu Bia gold and copper mine project up in Xaysomboun district. Rather than work with a new guy, I emailed a Dutch friend in Chiang Mai, Auke Koopmans, and asked if he wanted to accompany me—using his 4WD pickup, him doing the driving, and the TLCB picking up the diesel cost. Auke is a valiant soul and a GPS mapmaker, who does numerous upcountry trips in both northern Thailand and all over Laos, so he gave me large “yes,” and a “ready to roll.”

Auke had previously accompanied me on a TLCB trip in May 2011, which was written up in the September 2011 *Mekong Express Mail* (MEM). For the driving side of things, I had about 725 miles from home to Nong Khai and back. Auke put about 850 miles on his pickup, round trip Chiang Mai to Nong Khai, then in Laos with Auke’s pickup, another 810 miles. It sure made for a lot of sitting, along with some bouncing around.

On Friday, 29 November, I was off to Nong Khai while Auke drove down to Loei to RON. Saturday morning we met up near the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge at the secure parking area and headed across and on into Vientiane. We picked up a batch of books from Big Brother Mouse, received a delivery from Art Crisfield of an additional three bags of school supplies from a Lao friend of his in Hawaii, and we headed to our hotel. We had dinner with some American friends at the Via Via eatery, [www.viaviapizza.com](http://www.viaviapizza.com). It was a busy place, since it was the high season for tourists.

Sunday morning saw us on the road, stopping by briefly at the Khoksa Airfield to check on the action—one ultra-light was just departing for Thakhek area and a few others were hanged. This is the only private airfield in Laos these days, restricted to ultra-lights, some of which look pretty much like

real flying machines. Then we motored on to Xaysomboun (XSB), an easy five-hour run of which about half is decently graveled. This is the main haul road for the Phu Bia Mine, so they do spend a bunch of bucks on maintenance. If there were no road, there would be no ore concentrate out or supplies in for the project, such as fuel, etc. One must be careful of the 18-wheelers heading up and down the road, because it’s not very wide in spots, with lots of 12% grades.

We RONed as normal at the pretty decent one-star Phu Bia Hotel. At least it has electricity, hot water, sitters as opposed to

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



Where there’s copper and gold to be mined, the roads must get better and Mac benefits.

**Assessment**, continued from page 7.

squatters, and Satellite TV, which Sunee likes when she’s along on a trip. We had dinner, also as usual, at the restaurant in the market area where I have eaten a lot over the last few years, so now there is almost no need to order because the owner just starts out with Beer Lao and continues on with food.

On Monday morning, 2 December, we breakfasted at the morning market. It was a bit cool at the 3600 foot elevation and there were buses waiting for passengers to Vientiane and KM52, a large Hmong area north of Vientiane on Route 13N.



Girls selling produce in the Xaysomboun market. Mornings can be chilly up here.

It was Lao National Day, celebrating the change of government back in 1975. Schools were closed, but all we needed to do was meet briefly with the district school chief and check out the new tin roof at the Ban Khi Xang (that’s Elephant Dung) primary school, which we had funded on the July trip. By the way, the school is up on a slight rise on the east end of XSB town, and it supposedly got its name from being an army encampment 200 to 300 years ago when elephants were the main heavy-lift means of transportation. They left their mark there, so watch your step when strolling the school grounds.

I had been a tad concerned about a seeming lack of progress on this project. I had made several phone calls, which had elicited responses of “rains, mud, rice harvest, no materials,” etc, all of which are legitimate, but adding them up - *hmmmm*. In any case, the roof on the nine-room building is up and shining, and lo and behold, this is the first time we have seen the translucent light panels used, two per room in this instance. It



TLC Brotherhood Assistance grant paid for the new roof and the new translucent panels that light up the room. Most schools do not have electricity up here.

does make things a bit brighter inside the classrooms, since there is no electricity to the building. Oh, and a teacher who happened to be there and walked around with us, allowed that the roof had gone up late the week before. Perhaps that was a result of our impending visit? They got worried? Good!

OK, good, one check off the “Trip List.” On to Long Tieng. Note: we didn’t get an official permission note this time because of the holiday, but we decided to give it a go anyway. We wanted to take that shorter route up to Phonsavanh on the PDJ via Long Tieng, Sam Thong, and on.

When we arrived at Long Tieng, the south gate was up, so we just headed on up parallel to the runway to the restaurant—lunchtime. We managed to contact both the primary and secondary school chiefs and they came over to the restaurant. We passed on a few bundles of the Big Brother Mouse books to them.



Mac, left, ceremoniously handing Big Brother Mouse books to heads of primary and secondary schools in Long Chieng, with fabled Skyline Ridge for a backdrop. BELOW, Long Chieng is changing! Modern bus to Phonsavanh preparing to depart.



A couple of Lao police showed up asking us what we were doing there. After we explained, they phoned their boss in XSB, and got back a strongly worded reply—that we should continue on to Phonsavanh as we normally do. OK! Not going to argue with the authorities, for sure not in Laos, so we just went to the

See **Assessment**, continued on page 10.



# Why Are We in Laos?

by John Sweet, President of the TLCB

Since the earliest beginnings of the TLCB Assistance Program, our focus has been directed to Isan, the Northeast and most impoverished area of Thailand, and more specifically the province of Nakhon Phanom (NKP), in Isan, on the border of Laos. As the years passed and the opportunity presented itself, we were able to “hop across the fence” into Laos where the conditions were even more horrendous.

At Nakhon Phanom over the years, our TLCB representative there, Dr. John Middlewood, has improved conditions at more than fifty schools in the surrounding area and upgraded everything from water systems, desks and chairs, hundreds if not perhaps more than a thousand concrete benches and tables, bathrooms, kitchens, and schoolrooms. He has done all of this while also creating an English language program, building his church ministry, and obtaining his doctorate degree. In addition, he has also set up a TLCB Student Aid Fund, which continues to assist many needy students with their college and high school educations. Local school officials select these students.

Progress slowly reached the sleepy riverside town of Nakhon Phanom about the same time the TLCB started our projects there, around twelve years ago. The airlines used to have flights a couple times a week from Bangkok. Now they have a new terminal building and two airlines that fly there several times a week. The old poorly paved road from the base into town was widened several years ago, and now has two lanes of traffic in each direction, street lights, and bushes planted in the center strip.

All over town and the surrounding area, the general quality of life has improved, which is quite evident from the many vehicles, including motorcycles, and the construction of quite a few smaller hotels and guesthouses. This is especially true since the opening of the new bridge across the Mekong a couple of years ago. There is hope of NKP being discovered by tourists, and there is planning in the works for expanded travel across from Vietnam, now that Route 9 and Route 12 across Laos are complete and paved.

John Middlewood recently told me that even though I've made frequent visits over the years, “You will not recognize the place. We have Macro and Big C grocery stores that are at least as big as the one in Udorn, and our Lotus store will be about four to five times as large when they finish remodeling. Macro is open now, Big C is supposed to be open about the 15th of February 2014, and Lotus should be finished by the end of the same month.”

Laos is a different story altogether. It was through the efforts of Jeff Hudgens that we were able to start a program. It began with Jeff's visits to central Laos and the village of Ban Nahomm, off Route 9 near the border of Vietnam. Jeff's father, Major Ed Hudgens, perished in the crash of his Skyraider back in 1970, after it was hit by anti-aircraft artillery. He was flying out of NKP.

Jim Michener, who resides in Vientiane, Laos, initiated a project to deliver rice and supplies to a flooded town in the mountains of Northern Laos back in 2002. Our program in Laos then came into being when Mac Thompson, who had worked

with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), began travelling through Northern Laos where the most desperate conditions exist. Many places are without electricity, roofs, or non-dirt floors in the schools. Much of the area, as an example, was without paved roads, water supplies, or much of anything else. The program has been very successful at delivering “The Most Bang for the Buck,” which has always been the motto of our TLCB Assistance Committee, ensuring that the greatest good is achieved with every cent our generous members and supporters donate in memory of our departed brothers and sisters.

The several trips that some TLCB members have made with Mac into the remote areas of Laos always plant lasting impressions with these visitors, not only of the poverty, the vast amounts of unexploded ordnance (UXO), and the rugged beauty of Laos. They also fondly remember, in a special way, the kindness and warm receptions the Lao people showered on them. Most of these people, especially in the northern areas, had their lives so affected by the war, and today still do. Many of the schools, for example, conduct their classes among bomb craters, and many have found UXO of 500 and 1,000 pound bombs in the immediate vicinity.

Your support and outreach continue to make dramatic differences in the quality of life of the many tribal children within Isan and Laos. Truly, our brotherhood reaches across both sides of the Mekong, in the same humanitarian manner as the legendary Tom Dooley did so many years ago.



## Top in the Kingdom



Meow Middlewood, award winning student Kultida, and John Middlewood in Nakhon Phanom. Kultida will be “royally” recognized as “Top in the Kingdom,” in Thai customs and traditions, and will receive her award from the Princess or the King of Thailand.

## Assessment, continued from page 8

area where the new school facilities had been completed last year. Very nice. I don't know who funded the large project, but it was built by a Vietnamese construction company.

Back in January, we had left funds for a replacement kitchen for the small dormitory used by some secondary school kids who lived too far for commuting. I wanted to see what it looked like. Big changes! The secondary school has expanded from grades M1-3 now to include up to M7, a full high school there, and no more sending kids all the way to XSB for grades M4-7. But with the change from XSB to Long Tieng, they needed a larger dormitory, so they built one...bamboo, dirt floor, and they scrounged up some used roofing tin. Evidently, it is so

"New" dormitory built in Long Tieng to meet rising need.



Long Tieng dorm interior is just like home for many of these kids, who live too far from any schools to attend from home.

crowded that they built several huts close by. The kitchen that the TLCB funded is available to all of them.

By the way, the roof for the primary school at Sam Thong, just an hour on up the road, is not finished and we were unable to make a visit to determine just why. This needs a check on a subsequent trip.

It was time to head back south to find a guest house. We went south 3-1/2 hours to Long Xan/Moung Hom and found a pretty good one that had all the necessities for a RON - TV, hot water, sitters, and a restaurant next door.

Tuesday morning, 3 December, saw us on the road at 0600 hours. We had a long way to go to get on around the horn to Phonsavanh. We headed back south to Tha Bok on the Mekong,



Because self-help dormitory, left, at Long Chieng was not large enough to meet the demand, villagers built these huts, above, for additional space.

downstream to Paksane for a khao pat breakfast, and then we turned north. Glenn and I had been up this way in July with no problems with the road; however, it turned out that one 30 km stretch had gone really bad during the rainy season. It took over an hour to pass this single section.

We got up to the Tha Thom District area and checked in at the Phon Chalern Primary School, where the TLCB had previously funded a small office/meeting room building and furniture for the classrooms. In July, we had passed on funds for a new tin roof for the school, which was all complete. The school could also use a concrete floor, but they are hoping for a new building and held off requesting such.

Up on the north side of Tha Thom, there is the Xam Ko Thong Primary School which we had visited in July. It has two buildings, one of which was in really sad shape and not utilized at all. TLCB funding provided a new tin roof, concrete floor, and furniture for student desks. All those projects are complete and look good.

Next, up the road is the town of Tha Vieng, which has a nice foot and motorcycle bridge across the Nam Ngiap River. You can ford the river in the dry season, but not in early December. When fordable, it makes a great shortcut from Xaysomboun

**Assessment** is continued next page.



TLCB funded this kitchen and the windbreak, which provides a place for students to cook their meals. Remember this the next time you must eat "institutional food."





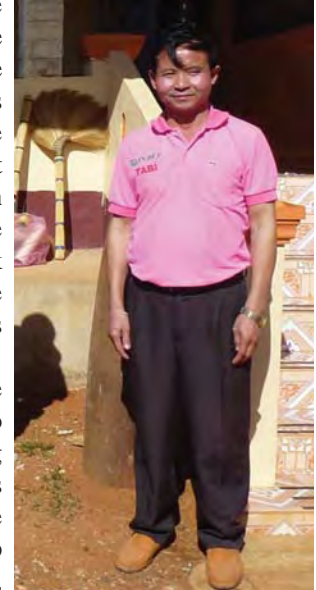
Convenient foot and motorbike bridge at Tha Vieng.

east to Tha Vieng on this N-S road, an easier way to get to Phonsavanh. We scouted around and found a guy with a large truck who said he can carry pickups across the river, even when it is fairly high. I got his cell number for future reference.

We moved on to Phonsavanh and our favorite place, the Hmong-run NICE Guest House. It was full, perhaps because the week was Hmong New Year in NE Laos, and especially so in Phonsavanh. We checked in at the Dok Khun Hotel across the road, which had WiFi in the rooms, a good thing. There are two farang eateries in town: The Craters, an older place, and the new one, The Bamboozle, run by a Scot and his Lao wife. We split our meals between the two. Plus another upgrade—there are now two mini-marts in town, one of which is run by a young Lao gal who did her high school and college time in

San Diego. I do wonder if she is having a bit of culture shock with the return to Laos.

Next morning, Wednesday the 5th, we picked up Mr. Soundeuane, our primary contact with the Xieng Khouag Provincial Education Service and Sports. It is Soundeuane who makes all the contacts with the schools and local officials in the several districts in the province to assess needs, determine capability, and most importantly, gauge the enthusiasm of the local people to implement a project that he suggests. This usually involves several trips for him before he recommends a project to Art Crisfield in Vientiane, then on to me and the TLCB Assistance Committee. Note that such work is not his primary job with the government. So much of this is done on his own time. Good guy!



Mr. Soundeuane

Along with Soundeuane, we went to the outskirts of town to take a look at some of the Hmong New Year celebrations. It was early yet, so not too many people were there, but they were set up for parking lots of cars, tuk tuks, and buses. A few Hmong gals were there in their finery, kids were starting to play some games, and the sports field was getting a finish before the soccer games.

We then headed up to Phou Kout District and the Nayxaythong Primary School, which had received funding for a new toilet back in mid-November. We met with the village head and some of the teachers who were setting up a meeting with the villagers so they could work out the plan and timing for digging the hole and doing the construction. Thus, a pending project.

On up the road in the same district is the Ban Mixay Secondary School where earlier this year the TLCB funded a new tin roof, concrete floor, and paint for one of their buildings. They had also requested a concrete floor for another building they had built themselves. Funds have been delivered to the school and implementation is pending soon. This school draws on several villages in the area and now has over 600



Display of weapons collected on and near the PDJ, in the lobby of a hotel in Phonsavanh. This town is a favorite for tourists who come to see the ancient jars.

See **Assessment** continued on page 12.



Assessment, continued from page 11.



Above, villagers pitch in to instal new school roof. TLCB Assistance provided funding to purchase this currogated steel. Below, good for another ten or so years.



students, going up to 700-plus soon. Some of the students, who live beyond commuting distance, bunk with some local villagers. The school administration said that they sure could use a dormitory, a costly project as we found out a few years ago with one very nice facility up in lower Houa Phan (Sam Nuea) Province. It was costly, but very well received. Now to find the funds....

It was coming up on lunch time, so we motored on 20 minutes to the village of Yodt Phair and stopped at the house of an Ozzie friend. He wasn't there, but his wife and her family treated us fine, a couple sips of Lao Lao, more of Beer Lao, and a good lunch of sticky rice, chicken, fish, seaweed, and perhaps some

Mac and family of an Australian friend in Yodt Phair.



Hmong girls in New Year finery are amused to see older woman absorbed in texting. Outskirts of Phonsavanh.



items I didn't really want to ask what they were.

It turns out that the old man of the house, a bit younger than I, was in the army for 20 years—the other army. We were comparing stories and timelines and I figure that he might, just might, have been one of the guys who put nine holes in my H-34 helicopter back in April 1969 when I was working out of Sam Thong. He said “he didn't think so,” but that was in his job description at the time, same as mine was, milling around overhead. Nice guy, these days.

It turned out that Mr. Soundeuanne knows the local primary school principal well. He joined us for lunch, and afterwards we walked over to take a look at his school. It needs new roofing, three buildings. This will probably be a forthcoming project for the TLCB.

This pretty much ended the school visits for the day so we headed back south to Phonsavanh, and we got as far as just past Naxaythong when we encountered a heavily loaded truck stuck in a mud hole, blocking the road. We thought perhaps we would be RONing back in the village, but no, lo and behold, a road grader came along and cleared a bunch of dirt to make a bypass for us and the other vehicles also backed up there. The last time Auke and I were on the road together, May 2011, about the same thing happened. We were also rescued by a road grader, but on a different road. Are we lucky, or jinxed?

We moved on to Phonsavanh for dinner, and RONed. It was coolish up in this area at the 3600 foot elevation, and it was 57F in my room at night, all bundled up. I got an email later from a friend who said it had dropped to 41F by mid December. OK, not so much if you are used to Montana in the winter, but to us—**COLD!**

On Thursday, 6 December, it was time to head back to Vientiane. First, we had a meeting with Mr. Soundeuanne to go over our observations on school projects in Xieng Khouang, reimburse him for several expenditures he has made on behalf of the TLCB, and hand over six of the FUJI One-Use 35mm cameras to photograph future school projects. I like these cameras because with them, they can get some shots of village self-help work in progress when during a project. I later take prints of the photos back to the school for their use.



On the road, we passed by Nong Tang, aka Moug Soui, motored on to Phou Khoun, junction of Routes 13N and 7. We enjoyed a pit stop and lunch at a really neat view point, if one is lucky enough to have decent weather for photos. We traveled on through Moug Kassy and Vang Vieng, arriving at our hotel in Vientiane at 1800 hours. Dinner, crash, tired.

The last gasp item in Vientiane on Friday was breakfast with Barbara and Dori Shimoda, Americans who have funded construction of a bunch of schools in Luang Prabang and Xieng Khouang province through their NGO, *Give Children a Choice*.



Vientiane, Americans Barbara and Dori Shimoda with Mac and Art Crisfield (in center) at prefab school building donated by a U.S. contractor.

They found a needy, lower secondary school on the outskirts of Vientiane that needed new classrooms. Looking for a solution, they talked to the U.S. contractor who is building the new U.S. Embassy, who then donated a prefab building, and the site work: did the fill, put in the pad, installed the building, wired it up, and added interior partitions to make a four-room school. It is an interesting project with an inventive solution.

After looking at their project, Auke and I continued on to exit Lao Immigration at the bridge and headed over to Nong Khai at about 1100 hours, where Sunee's van was parked. Auke drove on back to Chiang Mai, getting in at about 2000 hours. I headed back home, a bit NE of Don Muang Airport, and got there about 1900 hrs. All in all, *a very productive trip*.

I ended up with two more projects to be submitted to the Assistance Committee plus end-use checks on three completed projects needed on a future trip. Plus I still need to visit Sam Thong, north of Long Tieng, to see what is the hangup on the school roof project. This might take two days as I would need to get back to Xaysomboun to confer with the District school head. By the way, Xaysomboun "district" has been designated as a new *province* for Laos, so a totally new administrative structure will come into being, including Long Tieng which will be a new district. It will be interesting to see what changes come to pass with our current relationships there.

NOTE: Photos for this and earlier trips are available on Picasa; follow along with the narrative: [www.tinyurl.com/d729tv8](http://www.tinyurl.com/d729tv8)



## The Exchange Offers New Items

We have been racking our noggins to come up with some new ideas for The Exchange, and we picked others' brains at the Ft. Walton Beach Reunion to try to find out what would sell. Our job is to make a profit for the TLCB so we all can contribute to the projects in Thailand and Laos. It's quite a responsibility to spend the TLCB's funds and we want to do it wisely. We need your suggestions!

We have let stock dwindle on purpose so we could perhaps offer new



items/colors in place of the existing ones, and have researched the sizes and items that sold in the past. We have come up with a couple of new offers.

**NEW - LADIES:** someone suggested that we offer a pink hat for the ladies. You can now buy them in The Exchange.

**NEW:** You can now own embroidered **red** TLCB golf shirts. We hope you folks like and buy them.

**NEW:** There is another type hat for sale, a military style in light olive drab. If these sell, we will order them in other colors.



See **EXCHANGE** on page 14.

**EXCHANGE** continued from page 13.

**RETURNING:** As requested, we are again stocking up on long sleeve denim shirts for you. And we may offer ladies' sizes also if we get any encouragement.



We have a few more ideas, and may try some of them out at the upcoming reunion. We sold embroidered TLCB barbecue aprons in Ft. Walton Beach. Any enthusiasm for something like that? We used to sell jackets. Anybody interested? Ladies?

We have had requests for T shirt sizes that are sold out. We are trying to find a vendor who will make just a few of those missing sizes. We will have to incur

Visit your TLCB Exchange Website on the TLCB Forum, at [WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.Com](http://WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.Com)  
 You can order items from the online store, using PayPal, or by sending an order and your payment to TLCB, PO Box 343, Locust Grove GA 30248.

a setup fee for that purchase, but we are trying to fill the request.

We look forward to hearing proposals and ideas. Please send any ideas

you can provide to [BX@tlc-brotherhood.com](mailto:BX@tlc-brotherhood.com).

Bill and Thelma Tilton, Shopkeepers



## *Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood*

Since the new TLCB Forum was inaugurated over a year ago, we have grown by approximately double the rate of new members. The members listed below joined between the last issue of the MEM and the 20th of February. We have listed their locations, branches of service, and email addresses. You can find more information on our website database. The MEM wishes you all a hearty "Welcome Home."

Member	Last	First	City	State	Branch	Email
1568	Alnor	Kenneth	Medicine Park	OK	USAF	txcaver@aol.com
1572	Babine	Philip	Portland	ME	USAF	PBabine@live.com
1577	Brosowski	Robert	Warren	MI	USA	NBFLTRI@Gmail.com
1579	Cariker	Curtis	Stratford	OK	USAF	ccariker@wildblue.net
1569	Criswell	Tony	Khon Kaen	Thailand	USA	blue172@u.washington.edu
1570	Dollison	Charles	Odessa	TX	USA	Madollison@cableOne.net
1583	Elkins	William	Littleton	NC	USAF	USAF432TRW@Gmail.com
1580	Harmon	David	Hardeeville	SC	USAF	davidharmon@hargray.com
1581	Jenness	Randall	Belfast	ME	USA	
1567	Lengsavath	Manlika	Lilburn	GA	Other	
1571	Lenihan	John	Hampton Bays	NY	USAF	JTLeni831@aol.com
1565	McKinney	Andy	Wayne	WV	USA	Angelridge1997@frontiernet.net
1582	Mejia	Richard	Sonoma	CA	USAF	Hozr4U@SBCGlogal.net
1566	Nichols	Stephen	San Antonio	TX	USAF	nichols.steve@aol.com
1575	Noble	David	Newburgh	IN	USAF	DWnoble@Yahoo.com
1574	Preus	Karl	Waterbury Center	VT	USA	KPreus2@gmail.com
1576	Roach	Daniel	Crestview	FL	USAF	Kermie@Cox.net
1584	Ryer II	Richard	Pickens	SC	USAF	Ryer@Charter.Net
1573	Stewart	Philip	Ballwin	MD	USAF	KMStews117@gmail.com
1578	Wilkerson	Gary	Cambria	CA	USAF	240RWILK@Charter.Net



# Combined Donors Honor Roll, 2012 and 2013

Of the Four Objectives of the TLC Brotherhood, our charitable work gets the most publicity and the most funding. Members support this work in various ways, but the most helpful is financially. We didn't publish the list of donors in December, so we decided to combine 2012 and 2013 into one list.

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## ***Secretary Jim Closs steps aside; appoints George Shenberger assistant***

I am a PhD student, and last summer I began an extensive restructuring of my program with an aim at accelerating the process. I have considered different options regarding my continuing as TLCB Secretary since I am falling further and further behind in those duties. As a result, I have appointed an assistant secretary, George Shenberger. Had I known the intensity of these revamped studies at the time of last year's nomination and election, I would not have accepted my nomination and re-election.

I feel it is in the organization's best interest that I step aside until after my doctorate is completed and I can come back with a lightened burden. President Sweet and I spoke about this a couple times, and he convinced me to stay on until the reunion, giving time for overlap with my eventual replacement, George Shenberger. I placed a caveat on the agreement—the limit of one Board of Directors meeting between now and then. This recognizes the requirement the Board must meet to officially accept, then announce, the slate of candidates from the nominating committee in the June MEM and allow the candidates to provide their optional biographies.

I don't want my departure viewed even remotely as coming from any negative position or opinion because it is not—I continue my commitment to our Brotherhood, but must accept the reality that I cannot dedicate the necessary time to secretarial duties. I encourage everyone to embrace and support George the same way you have me in this capacity.

Thanks very much,  
Jim Closs