



# Mekong Express Mail

Volume 10, Issue 3

THE THAILAND LAOS CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC.

www.TLC-Brotherhood.org

## The Best Year of My Life

*A MEM interview with Jim Kidd*

Many TLCB brothers and sisters know Jim Kidd, a member since October 2003, who has attended a number of the Brotherhood's annual reunions. Jim was a forward air controller (FAC) at Nakhon Phanom (NKP) in 1970, flying OV-10s. Recently MEM enjoyed a short chat with him about his experiences.

Jim Kidd had three strong visions for his life when he was growing up. Number one was to become an Olympic athlete. The second was to become an astronaut. And third was to be a U.S. combat pilot. He had a good shot at the Olympics in bobsled, but did not quite make the tryouts. He never got far at becoming an astronaut, but he did achieve his third vision. The Air Force needed pilots in 1970 and sent him to Officer Training School at Lackland AFB, San Antonio, and then to Reese AFB at Lubbock, Texas, for undergraduate pilot training (UPT). Service in Vietnam was inevitable for all new pilots, and Jim found this particularly appealing because of his strong feelings about the state of things in the country at that time. He had joined the Young Americans for Freedom and had become very active in that patriotic group, which opposed some of the "counter-culture" groups that were causing much civil unrest and anti-military feeling across the country. In fact, an assignment to Vietnam was something he wanted very much.

At graduation, Jim was high enough in his UPT class to have his choice of two OV-10 assignments. One was "in-country" and one was out of Thailand. He reasoned that close air

support on the Ho Chi Minh Trail areas would involve less chance of accidentally hitting friendly forces, so he chose the Thai-based assignment.

But first Jim had to learn to fly the OV-10 and how to control air strikes in a battle area. For this he went to Hurlburt AFB, at Fort Walton Beach, Florida for about three months. Jim's flight log at Hurlburt is full of rides in Skyraiders and A-37s and just about anything else he could hitch a ride on before training flights started. But on July 15, 1971, he logged his first OV-10 ride. His instructor (IP) there was Jerry Harmond whom he remembers with respect and affection. Harmond taught the FAC students a particular technique that was to serve

Jim well when he got to the real thing. Harmond had found that it was very effective for an OV-10 to loiter directly over the target during the strike, instead of off to the side. This way, strike fighters could keep track of the target location, and would always know they were clear of the FAC during their maneuvering. Also, the FAC was right over the target for more accurate bomb damage assessments (BDAs).

FAC training involved 35 flights in the OV-10, which he found to be an excellent aircraft that never let him down. His last flight was in September, and finally he got travel orders to Vietnam, via jungle survival school at Clark AFB in the Philippines. Kidd says the time at Clark was very pleasant. They could go to the beach and they had some good classes and interesting practical training, but the best part was when they were given two red sashes and sent through the jungle with instructions to "escape and evade" Philip-



Jim Kidd climbing into his favorite ride in the summer of 1971. Photos courtesy of Jim Kidd.

See **Best year**, continued next page.



Back home after a mission. Jim lands his OV-10 at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base, as seen from the rear cockpit.

pine “negritos,” who had been hired to try to catch them. Apparently the negritos were paid according to how many sashes they collected, and Jim recalls that he did lose one of his.

His next stop was Cam Ranh Bay, about halfway up the coast of what was then South Vietnam. At Cam Ranh they did no flying, but spent about a week getting “theater indoctrination.” This mostly consisted of a series of fascinating briefings about operations and activities that he had never dreamed of. They learned what other services were doing, how the air war and the ground war worked, and many other details of which most of us have still never heard. When the indoctrination was completed, Jim’s travels took the familiar route to Bangkok, at Don Muang airport and then “up country” to Nakhon Phanom, which is known as NKP.

By 1971 the 23<sup>rd</sup> Tactical Air Support Squadron (TASS) at NKP was requiring new squadron pilots to undergo a “100 hour checkout.” This sounds like a huge amount of combat training because in peacetime, many pilots have trouble getting much more than 10-20 hours per month, but the anti-aircraft fire environment had become so violent that they had found this necessary just to ensure a new pilot would survive his first mission. Furthermore, it was not unusual for FACs to exceed 100 hours in a single month. Many of the checkout flights were flown with an instructor in the rear seat. The point was to make sure the rookie was familiar with all the flying areas and that he was very familiar with anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) and how to avoid it.

On one of his first missions, the instructor called Jim’s attention to some pretty clouds nearby. He asked Jim what they looked like. “Like clouds,” Jim said. “No,” replied the IP, “those are airbursts. They are trying to kill you.” Thus he

learned that Laos was not “The Friendly Skies.” He also learned how to do a lot of jinking and cross-controlling the plane to confuse gunners when they were trying to lead their fire to that spot in the sky where he might meet their deadly fire.

FAC missions were typically fairly long, averaging 4.3 hours, but they carried an external F-106 fuel tank that allowed about six hours if needed. On one flight Jim nearly tested that maximum and feared for his Air Force career. He was returning to base up the Mekong to NKP when he got a desperate assistance call from someone in the direction of Cambodia. The caller expected a “troops in contact” (TIC). This meant flying south instead of north and if he had to “expend,” he would have a serious fuel problem. To “expend” refers to the use of weapons: the 7.62mm machine guns and other ordnance they might have aboard. But he felt that he could not ignore the call. He did have to go all the way to Cambodia on this mission, but fortunately he did not have to expend. His mere presence solved the immediate problem and he was able to hand the action off and streak back for NKP.

Jim held his breath all the way back, figuratively speaking, as he watched the fuel state dive toward depletion. To flame out short of the base would be to risk a flying evaluation board (FEB), and probably a career-ruining black mark on his record, loss of flying status, and dishonor. Even if he flamed out on the runway he would accept it, but those turboprop engines were sucking up jet fuel (JP-4) awfully fast, and the base seemed so far away. The OV-10 fuel system warned of “MINIMUM FUEL” and then progressed to “EMERGENCY FUEL.” By that time any pilot would be sweating, wondering how much of the fuel at the bottom of the tanks could actually be retrieved.

Jim surmises that the OV-10 must have had a very efficient fuel feed system, and of course he did reach the NKP runway. Then he was able to taxi to the ramp and shut down with 50 pounds of JP-4 left, about ten gallons. That was way too close! He says the mission time worked out to a little over six hours,

See **Best year**, continued page 9.

## Tell us your new mailing address

If you move, temporarily or permanently, let us know as soon as possible. We cannot get your *Mekong Express Mail* to you without your current address. If we use your old address, the Post Office does not deliver the MEM, but notifies MEM that the address is bad and charges the TLCD a fee.

Prevent this from happening. Let your local Post Office know immediately if your address changes. Get and complete a free *Change Of Address* card at your Post Office or on USPS.com. Click on “Receiving Mail.” Send an email to the MEM editor at [Dave16mac@aol.com](mailto:Dave16mac@aol.com) and to Membership Committee Chairman Mike Vale at [Mevale762@aol.com](mailto:Mevale762@aol.com).

# On the road of 900 curves to reach Ban Pakha

by MacAlan Thompson

Sunee and I were off to Laos again to research additional school support projects on behalf of the TLCB. We checked out one completed project, investigated the possibilities for another, and checked a third just-about-completed one. The trip began 24 June and ended 2 July 2009.

In summary, our road time on this trip was:

- Thailand, round trip, home to Nong Khai and back: 1,325 km = 822 miles
- Laos, round trip: Vientiane to Phon Savanh to Muang Mok to Phon Savanh to Sam Nuea, and return: 1,551 km = 980 miles; 38:13 hours using moving time in Laos, which is an average of just 26 mph.
- Total road distance: 2,876 km = 1,802 miles

We left from home on day one, a bit NE of Don Muang Airport and drove on up to Nong Khai, which is 7-8 hours via the Friendship Highway. We left my van on the Thai side, dealt with immigration formalities, then drove across the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge to the Lao side. There was also immigration on that side, followed by a taxi ride to our hotel in Vientiane. We enjoyed an evening dinner and Beer Lao with friends and a couple of new acquaintances at the Sticky Fingers Restaurant, which serves good eats, semi “south of the border style.” There are lots of interesting farangs (foreigners) in Vientiane.

Regarding Lao travel, if you are not flying around in Laos like we used to do 30-40 years back, travel in Laos just takes TIME. The next day, we drove on up to Phon Savanh in our rental 4-door, 4WD Ford pickup, via the nicely paved Rt 13N, which rises from Vientiane’s 550 ft elevation up to a high point of 5,000 ft, with ups and downs in between. There are lots of beautiful vistas to see if it is not cloudy and drizzling as it was

this day. This is an 8-9 hour run, depending on pit stops and noodle (pho) breaks. Art, our main contact in Vientiane on educational matters in Laos, accompanied us.

Phon Savanh is a pretty active town that has several hotels, guesthouses, and eateries. It is a major crossroads for buses and cargo trucks passing back and forth from Vietnam. We stayed at what has become our sort of normal place now, the Nice Guest House, Hmong owned and operated. There are eats just down the street at the Vietnamese-run Craters Restaurant. Of course, this being the capital of the Plain of Jars (PDJ), the jar sites that have been cleared of unexploded ordnance (UXO) are very interesting to visit, which we have done on prior trips. The Mine Action Group (MAG) has an active office here with displays and a DVD to watch or buy.

Below, a scene all too familiar in the rainy season in Laos. This is the market in Muang Mok. All photos provided by the author.



Our first stop on day three was the Life Skills school building at Ban Phosy, which the TLCB had funded back in December 2008. The school was not in use at the time because school does not start until 1 September. The initial project tore the old building down and rebuilt it with wood reused after planing. The refurbished building looks good with its new tin roof, redone siding, concrete floor, and new furniture. This project ran about \$1,500, with \$1,250 from the TLCB Assistance Fund and another \$250 from a private donation from Bob Resseguie’s cousin. Bob is a former USAID/Lao guy

See **900 Curves**, continued next page.



and a new member to the TLCB.

The villagers had also joined in the project with a major effort to reroute the stream at the back of the school, which had eroded the steep bank near the old building during high water times. They dug a new channel further out from the bank to prevent additional erosion.



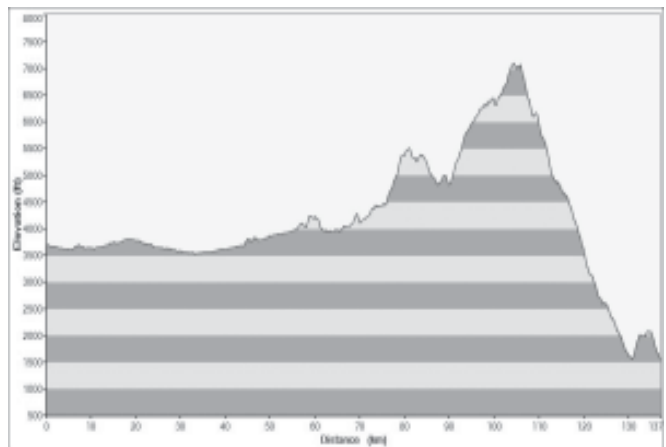
Completed 2008 project—rebuilt life-skills school building ready for school to open at Ban Phosy.

Ban Phosy is a real hard working village, good for self-help projects. Another U.S. NGO is funding a kindergarten at the school, which is also a self-help project. Note the crowd working on the other NGO's project, especially the gal who brought her baby along on her back. I expect we will hear more about a request for further project funding from this village.

We drove on to Muang Mok, old LS-46, to check out the possibility of a somewhat larger project, a dual-purpose building for use as a lunch hall for kids who live too far from school to go home for lunch. The building would also have a classroom and reading area for "life skills" studies, which provide additional, practical information beyond the set school curriculum. This can include "bombie" awareness (UXO), marketing of home products, farming and such. Mr. Sounduean, from the Phon Savanh Provincial Education Service (PES), joined us on this trip. He is a good guy and we have previously worked with him on two other TLCB supported projects.

Muang Mok was a bit of an adventure to reach, with the trip including some 100 km of dirt road SE of Phon Savanh. With the rains, it took four hours to cover the 60 miles. You can bet that we were glad we had the 4 X 4 Ford Ranger pickup on that road. We had started from Phon Savanh at 3,600 ft, went up to 7,000, then down to 1,500 by the time we reached Muang Moc. This was the highest I have been in Laos with feet on the ground. We wonder if this is about the highest road in Southeast Asia.

While this place is quite isolated, there is



Elevation profile created by Mac's GPS shows the extremes on the trip between Phon Savanh and Muang Mok. See text.

daily "bus" service to Phon Savanh, via a six-wheel, covered truck. We also saw a number of motorcycles slipping and sliding along the road because of the drizzle. There is a brand new Bailey bridge across the main river in town. I believe the Vietnamese government funded it. There is also the start of what looks like a pretty good dirt road on the other side, and we were told it is only about 1-1/2 hours to the Vietnamese border from there.

Actually, Muang Mok is a very attractive spot and adequately supplied with goods for sale and government services, for being so far away from any large towns. The town has cell phone service, but not much in the way of electricity. Upon arrival, we phoned the local school principal and made plans to have lunch with him and some other school staff and a couple of district officials. Following the meal, we went to the school for a meeting. After much discussion, it was decided to put this potential "life skills" project on hold. The local officials have

Local townsfolk from Ban Phosy turn out to work on kindergarten project funded by another non-governmental organization.



See 900 Curves, continued on page 6.



### REUNION COIN ANNOUNCED

The BX will offer 100 special copper coins, as shown in the images, except they will have vivid colors on both sides. The coins commemorate the 2009 Annual Meeting and Reunion of the TLCB and the design will be retired after 100 coins are struck.

Each coin is numbered, from 1 to 100, and they will be available for the first time at the Florida Space Coast Reunion of the TLCB. Remember, all BX profits go "to the kids" (Assistance).

After the reunion any remaining coins will be sold at the BX for \$9, including shipping. The BX will not accept coin orders before the 4<sup>th</sup> of October, nor can you reserve numbers.

For those who cannot attend the reunion at Florida's Space Coast, you may have a proxy make your purchase if there is a special number that you really want. There are plans to provide a way for members to bid on particular numbers. Check at the reunion registration desk for details.

## Election nomination information for TLCB, Inc.

The Annual Business Meeting of the TLCB will be held in Florida on October 3, 2009.

The period during which the Nominating Committee will accept nominations began August 9, 2009 and ends September 3, 2009.

Candidates must provide biographical and/or campaign information to the chairman of the nominating committee by September 5, 2009.

Nominating Committee Chairman is Frank Marsh. His email address is [thearmyguy09@cox.net](mailto:thearmyguy09@cox.net) and mailing address is 4029 Scotfield Drive, Chesapeake, VA 23321.

Committee member John Duffin's email address is [jduffin29@verizon.net](mailto:jduffin29@verizon.net) and mailing address is 6 McPherson Street, Philadelphia PA 19119-1616.

Committee member John Sweet's email address is [nkpm69@hotmail.com](mailto:nkpm69@hotmail.com) and his mailing address is 38 Seabrook Village, Seabrook NH 03874.

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#### Board of Directors and Committee Chairmen (2008-2009)

- President: John Loftus
- Vice President: Gary Beatty (Reunion Committee)
- Secretary: Dave MacDonald
- Treasurer: Bill Tilton
- Chaplain: Ted Ulrich (Memorial Committee)
- Board members-at-large (showing term-ends year)
  - Bob Santo (2010)
  - Bob Wheatley (2010)
  - Les Thompson (2009)
  - Jim Henthorn (2009)
- Non-board committee chairmen
  - Assistance Committee: John Schillo
  - BX Shopkeeper: Bob Pruiksma
  - Communications Committee: Frank Marsh
  - History Committee: John Binford
  - Membership Committee: Mike Vale
  - Monument Committee: Gerry Frazier
  - Public Relations Committee: Floyd McGurk

#### TLCB Official addresses and payments to TLCB

Make all payments of *any kind*, as listed below, payable to **The TLC Brotherhood, Inc.** Mail them to the treasurer, at:

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

#### Always write payment purpose on memo line.

- Dues (\$25 per year)
- Student Assistance Fund
- Assistance donation
- BX purchase
- Monument donation
- Medical Fund.....etc.

**Reunion 2009: SPACE COAST of Florida**

**TLCB tax return and board minutes:** On web site, in *members only* section. Password (10/1/09): Claudine



Slippin' and slidin' in the mountains. Curves on the high road to Muang Mok in the monsoon rains.

other priorities. They have concerns about the increasing primary school population and the lack of classrooms to accommodate them. They requested six additional classrooms, which might well be beyond the TLCB capability to assist at this time.

The principal invited us to his house to have dinner with the same group. Of course, everybody sat on the floor with the food served on large circular trays. The folks were really friendly and there was a lot of talk, which of course was topped off with Lao whisky. Lao lao, ugh.

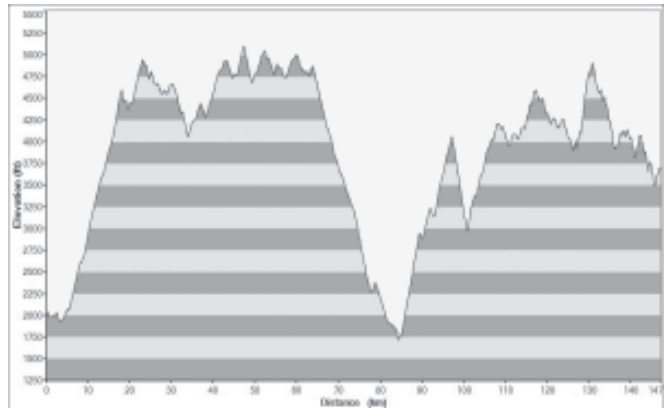
We spent the night at the District Guest House, after being cautioned to first visit the market and buy our own candles. There was one light out in the foyer, but the electricity was not sufficient to light up the individual rooms. Evidently the electricity is provided by what they call a "dynamo," a small water turbine that is lowered into the river. The problem at the time of our visit was that the river was flowing quite fast and they were afraid of losing the dynamo, so they pulled it out. A 12-volt battery powered the one lonely light. There was cool water for the shower, three hard, single beds per room and mosquito nets, but the sit-down crapper made my day.

Day four saw us on the road again as we traveled back to Phon Savanh for lunch. Art and Sounduean left Sunee and me at this point to take care of other school-related business there. They will be coming up with some additional projects for Xieng Khouang Province. Sunee and I motored on one hour to Muang Kham aka Ban Ban for the night. Ban Ban is one of the relatively famous "choke points" of yore. Note that we were down to 2,016 ft elevation by then from the 3,600 ft of Phon Savanh.

Muang Kham is a fairly large town these days and is a major junction, but we found only one guesthouse. Continuing on east takes you to the Vietnam border crossing and on to Vinh and beyond; turning north is the route on to Sam Nuea and from there on to Hanoi. During dinner at a local restaurant, a couple of long-haul buses stopped with Lao and Vietnamese passengers ready for their evening meal, after which they went on to Phon Savanh. Some motored on all the way to Vientiane, a long, long haul, especially at night.

On the fifth day, we headed on up to Sam Nuea Province via the "Road of 900 Curves." Next time I will take along my click counter to check the number of curves, but I tend to believe that approximate number. Somphou, our driver for seven trips so far in Central and NE Laos, did not even complain about the hurt in his left knee from pushing in the clutch so many times. This road hits 4,900 ft, then traverses back down to 1,800 ft and then up again to 3,600 ft by the time we arrived at Ban Pakha. All that plus managing the curves! I was glad that I was not driving that roller coaster road. We were five hours en route, including a short "pho" breakfast break at the low point. The road is all paved, except the 21 km from where you turn off to head down to Pakha, a one-hour trip.

Ban Pakha is the site of a co-funded school dormitory facil-



Elevation profile between Muang Kham (Ban Ban) and Ban Pakha, from Mac' GPS.

ity. The TLCB gave \$1500 and the Air Commando Association (ACA) provided \$4500 toward the project, which comprises a dormitory building, kitchen facility, and a shower/toilet building. The intended beneficiaries are 30 to 40 boys and about 10 girls in secondary school who live just too far to be able to commute to school on a daily basis. Without a place to stay, the girls and boys would have to drop out of school. This endeavor will enable them to continue their education.

At Ban Pakha, we met with provincial and Houa Muang District officials and the village leadership. These are the ac-

Co-funded school dormitory and kitchen facility at Ban Pakha.







Inside the new dormitory at Pakha—sawing planks the old-fashioned way.

tivities and our observations:

- The buildings look good with freshly cut pine and good carpentry. It is a fine self-help village-level project.
- A general meeting was held in the dormitory with the group of 20-plus people, including representatives from the 27 villages involved, totaling some 1,262 families/ 9,766 people.
- We handed over kip 8 million, which equals \$941, the last portion of the total project budget of \$5,841 as originally requested. This donation is for the local authorities to purchase bedding, mosquito nets, kerosene lanterns, kitchen equipment, and eating utensils.
- We also gave kip 4,250,000, which equals \$500, a new allocation for building a temporary latrine.
- The project was described as “difficult” because of several factors including communications and the scattered nature of the villages. They needed to have all lumber hand sawn out in the several villages on a particular quota, then delivered to the dorm site. The project also needed labor and sand and gravel for the concrete floor, also per quota. This all took time, lots of time.
- More significantly, the project budget as submitted by the District, was somewhat short sighted in that they deleted several items that have now turned out to be necessary for the final success of the project. Their explanation for this was that they were worried that the almost \$6,000 budget would be difficult enough to fund.

These deletions include:

- a facility with separate shower and toilets for the expected 30-40 boys and 10-15 girls who will be using the two rooms in the dorm. It is a long 300-400 meters to the school where the officials thought the students could use the existing facilities. This is a decidedly inconvenient distance, particularly in the middle of the night;
- paint and preservative for the pine wood walls;
- anti-termite chemicals;
- eventually, an electric light line and a few overhead bulbs;



Above, village ladies check straws on Lao hai jugs. Below, Mac and Sunee at Ban Pakha Baci ceremony.



Administrative break from the fun. Mac completing money-exchange documents while Sunee checks his work. What a team!



—a water line for the kitchen and shower/toilet facility.  
 The District and Province PES officials will work out a plan and a budget for these items. In any case, the facility looks beautiful and up to this point, is a success in my eyes.

see **900 Curves**, continued on page 8.

Following the general meeting, there was a small party at the dorm, complete with speeches and the baci string tying ceremony. Read about baci ceremonies at <http://www.laoheritagefoundation.org/ceremonies/baci.jsp>.

We enjoyed Lao lao, sticky rice, chicken, and goat innards, with some lao hai as we departed. The entire group of almost



30 people participated.

According to the Wikipedia article on Lao cuisine, “There are two general types of traditional alcoholic beverages, both produced from rice: lao hai and lao lao. Lao hai means jar alcohol (wine) and is served from an earthen jar. It is communally and competitively drunk through straws at festive occasions. It can be likened to sake in appearance and flavor. Lao lao or Lao alcohol is more like a whiskey. It is also called lao khao or, in English, white alcohol.”

I still get what Sunee describes as “chicken skin” when I drink that stuff. I break out in bumps on my arms. Thankfully, the bumps are temporary.

On the way back to the main road, we stopped at “Hin Tang,” or “standing stones,” for a photo op. This is a strange place, said to be 2,000 years old. According to some archaeologists, it perhaps marks old burial sites, possibly related in some fashion with the Jars on the PDJ. In any case, origin is unknown.

Day five continued. We moved on to the Houa Muang District education office where we had another meeting. These folks have a thought for another dormitory project in another cluster of villages and will work up the details for the Provincial Educational Service (PES) to review.

The District Educational Service staff here is active with people that were good to work with during this trip and look good for potential future projects. This town is relatively new and was relocated from the old site several years ago. It is built up with shops, local government offices, housing, and good paved road access.

We drove on up to Sam Nuea town for the night. Sam Nuea? It is kind of strange to be there. I had of course read about the town in the old days when it was the wartime headquarters for the current government. Now, it is a thriving city, busy, shops all over the place, complete with hotels and guest-houses for the many tourists that pass through. There is SAT TV, of course. As elsewhere in Laos, the Thai soap operas are very popular. This is a very likeable tourist town. Unfortunately, we did not have time to check out the sights and sites, nor to visit the caves there or just up the road at Vieng Say. There is air service to Sam Nuea several times a week from Vientiane and there is bus service to Hanoi from here to there.

The Provincial Educational Service engineer dropped off a proposal for our funding consideration, another dormitory project on further to the northeast at Sop Bao. Given that there are other Lao projects already in the pipeline, this one will be held in abeyance for the time being.

Day six began the three-day “retreat” back home, the seven-hour drive to Phon Savanh via the “Road of 900 Curves,” RON. Day seven included the nine-hour drive down to Vientiane, via Sala Phou Khoun, in the mist and rains. We took a lunch break at Vang Vieng on the way back to Vientiane and dinner with friends and another RON. On the eighth day, we drove across the Mekong and back to Thailand and headed back home.

Things are looking up for more projects in Laos and we continue to look for additional funding sources!

You can link to photos for all Mac’s trips at this URL: <http://tinyurl.com/km5yqf>.



View of famous Vietnam War town, Sam Nueua today. A “likeable tourist town.”





Jim Kidd, showing engine, main landing gear, and weapons stations on the OV-10 close air support aircraft. Note the PSP parking ramp surface. PSP is pierced steel planking, which was developed during World War 2.

but he cautiously logged only 5.9. Nevertheless, he heard from the ops officer soon after that and nodded, “yessir; that will never happen again.”

Flights in the OV-10 were solo about 90% of the time, but one passenger Jim carried decided that one trip was enough. It seems that Jim had an opportunity to take out an active AAA gun, something any FAC would relish. Hoping to fire a rocket “right down the barrel of that big gun,” Jim bored in for the kill. Instead, he nearly presented the gunners with a victory when their burst went off underneath him. He thinks it was an 85mm shell. The concussion of the burst threw them around violently. Fortunately there was no physical damage, but his passenger decided Jim was trying to kill him.

Cambodia missions were special. Jim developed a strong, emotional attachment to the brave but relatively gentle forces he was supporting there. Language was always a problem because Jim spoke almost no French. He learned to paraphrase his English instructions carefully and to have them repeat instructions back several times, since air strikes around friendlies could be very critical.

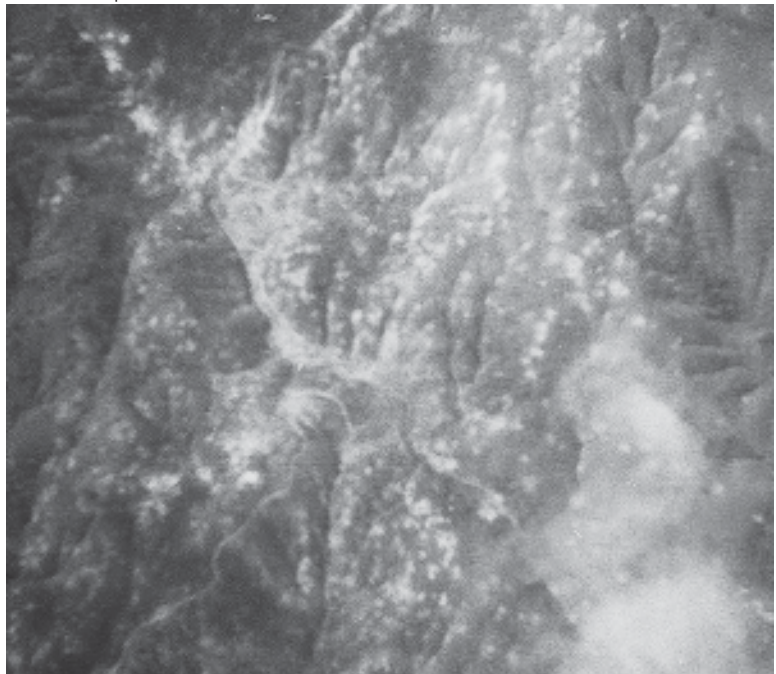
On what was probably his most memorable mis-

sion, Jim responded to urgent calls for help from Cambodian forces involved in TIC action. These people were mostly in Western Cambodia and were neither very well organized nor very martial. They depended a great deal on the “OVs” for help. On this occasion they were begging him for an air strike, but when he called the “Ramrod” airborne command post for clearance he got a surprise: “clearance denied.” In desperation, he began making dry passes, attack runs without expending ordnance, hoping to frighten the attacking troops by appearing to attack them. Knowing that this ruse could not succeed for long, he begged again for a clearance. Once again Ramrod replied, “clearance denied.”

After about seven dry passes, Jim knew if he did not fire on the next attack he would probably get shot down and the friendlies would be overrun as well. Things were falling apart. He had to make a fateful decision to either leave the Cambodians to be killed or to attack illegally, which would risk much worse than an FEB. He expected he would have to face a court martial for his disobedience. Now charged with emotion, Jim opened his mic button and called Ramrod one more time. He remembers his shouted words as though it were last month: “Ramrod, this is Spike two-nine. You tell those mothers I need a clearance and I need it right now!” To his amazement Ramrod’s reply to this outburst came after only a short hesitation. It was, “Spike two-nine cleared to strike.” He immediately rolled in “hot” on the enemy forces, probably Khmer Rouge, and fired gun and rockets until there was nothing left to fire. Actually one of his 7.62mm machine guns jammed at the end, so he cannot say that he fired the last bullets.

With this fierce attack, Jim was able to drive away the enemy unit. He learned later that none of the friendly Cambodians was killed. At that time, however, he could not help worry

Jim Kidd's photo of bomb craters pock-marking the hills along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the panhandle of Laos.



see **Best year**, continued next page

Best year, continued from page 9

about the reaction to his outburst. After all, he was only a first lieutenant and surely some general had had to evaluate his request for clearance. As he was heading to the parking ramp at NKP, one of his pals radioed a surprising turn-about. "Hey Jim, guess who's being nominated for a Silver Star!" His elation was not about the medal—he was *hugely* relieved that someone did not want his hide. (Jim did get a medal for this action, but it was downgraded to a Distinguished Flying Cross.)

It could have gone either way, but the greatest reward was the chance to strike a blow that helped save what he believes were good and deserving people. Sometime later he received a native dancer ceramic doll in full Cambodian costume, which was sent through the U.S. embassy by the Cambodians he had saved. This was a touching show of gratitude and he cherishes it still. Jim says he was never a doctor or a firefighter, but when he was a FAC, he had the chance to save someone's life. For that, he says, it was "the best year of my life."

Jim is retired now and lives in Massachusetts after a long career as a professional engineer, both mechanical and chemical. He worked for the Department of Transportation for a time, and then for the Department of Defense in materials man-

agement until he retired last August. MEM hopes to feature more tales of his time in Southeast Asia in future issues.



Bang Hieng River, Xepon (Tchepone) Province, 25 miles WSW of the DMZ in Laos, from OV-10.

## Monumental Accomplishments

By Gerry Frazier

A project begun several years ago by TLC Brotherhood members is nearing completion. There have been some changes and a few disappointments along the way, but, in hindsight, we can look back on this project and take satisfaction in what we accomplished.

As most of you will recall, the original plan was to build a monument to commemorate the lives of brothers and allies sacrificed during the Vietnam War years. That plan began with sincere and inspiring efforts by several TLC Brotherhood members to design, engineer, and finance the construction of a monument on parkland in the city of Nakhon Phanom. The land was verbally promised to us by a Thai official who supported the effort and envisioned the monument as a future attraction for visiting Americans, including ex-GIs who would visit NKP and stimulate the local, chronically depressed economy. However, when the time came to get serious about construction, communications with Thai officials became more difficult, and there was a noticeable lack of progress in building the park that would house the monument. As of mid-2009, the park is still not built.

It also became clear that local politics had



Town built this library room when they learned of library project.

changed. The generation of Thais who remembered the American partnership with Thailand during the war years has children and grandchildren for whom those years are ancient history. They live in a world in which there are two major bridges across the Mekong. One can now





Well-stocked new school library put to good use.

drive a private car to Hue, Vinh, or other Vietnamese destinations to visit a beach or to engage in commerce that benefits both countries. In fact, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand now share a free-trade arrangement that brings economic advantages to NKP, among other Thai regions, and the prospect of a monument to the role of the American and Thai military forces of the war era is seen as less desirable.

The TLCB Board of Directors recognized two years ago that based on our experience to date, the Thai government would never directly oppose building a monument, but would never actively support the project either. Their support was essential

to building the monument. Having raised over \$20,000 for the project, we now faced a dilemma as to how best to use the donations for a monument when a significant number of non-TLCB members have contributed.

At this point, John Middlewood, a full-time resident of Nakhon Phanom, proposed an effort to improve a number of local school libraries in the province. The board of directors supported this proposal. The library improvements and the contribution they make to the improvement of education in this poor region of Thailand are envisioned as a living memorial to those we originally intended to honor with the physical monument.

The library project is nearly complete. We have provided Thai and English-language primers and more advanced books to a total of 33 schools up to now. The remaining funds may be enough to help one more school. Each book contains a TLCB label showing memorial flowers, Thai and American flags, and the English words, "This book is a gift to the students of this school from the TLC Brotherhood. May what you learn here serve as a living monument to the memory of the soldiers and airmen of the United States and Thailand who lost their lives in the war in Southeast Asia." We used similar wording on a permanent sign placed in each library.

The former Monument Committee, now actually a memorial library committee, is preparing a final report of this effort that will be sent to all monument donors we can still locate. It will also be delivered to the TLCB Board of Directors, after which, this committee will complete its business and stand down.

Over its seven-plus years of existence, this committee has

benefitted from the work and support of many members, including the late Jim and Donna Bartholomew and the late Chris Jeppesen. Floyd McGurk, Ed Miller, John Sweet, Mac Thompson, Bill Tilton, John Middlewood, and probably others I have regrettably forgotten, also contributed to the committee's work. I extend my personal thanks and respects to all, but particularly to John Middlewood, who drove many miles and spent

see **Monument**, next page.



When villagers learned they could get a library funded by the Library Monument Project they built a room to house it. Shown at left, with construction well-along.

Monument, continued from page 11.



Above, the principal was away and John Middlewood got a rare informal photo of kids working hard—on the floor, of course.

untold hours to identify deserving schools, find “deals” for the purchase of books and other materials, coordinate with local school officials, arrange for printing of the book labels, schedule deliveries, and untold other tasks. In other words, for John, this project meant a lot of work and a major investment of his personal time. He served as our representative when the books and materials were formally presented at each school, which must have been enjoyable, as the photos show.

John Middlewood’s presence on our behalf has helped to demonstrate to the students the importance we place on these gifts to them, which honor those whose lost lives we will always remember. This may be a bit more than young children can easily grasp, but as chairman of this committee, I view this project as the completion of a living memorial that, under changing conditions, is a good-faith replacement for the monument we originally intended. We will soon bring this TLC Brotherhood project to a successful close.



Below, left, John Middlewood chats with schoolgirl about a new library. Below, right, John and teacher hold sign for new library that explains significance of the donation. Sign is in both English and Thai languages.



## It is Reunion Time!

The October 1-4 2009 TLCB reunion is fast approaching. We will be getting together at the Radisson Resort at the Port, in Cape Canaveral, Florida. The registration form and hotel contact information are on the TLCB Web site. You can make room reservations directly with the Radisson at either 1-800-333-3333 or using the local number 321-784-0000. I recommend the local number. Tell them that you are with the TLCB reunion. If you have any difficulty making a reservation, let me know. The Radisson Web site is <http://www.radisson.com/capecanaveralfl>.

You should try to get the TLCB room rate, even if the guaranteed date is past. **BUT YOU MUST MAKE YOUR RESERVATION NOW**, if you have not already done so!

This is shaping up to be one of our best-attended reunions yet—so do not miss it.  
Gary Beatty  
TLCB Vice-President  
2009 Reunion Chairman

