



Mekong Express Mail

Volume 13, Issue 3

THE THAILAND LAOS CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC.

www.TLC-Brotherhood.org

Welcome (Back) to Phitsanulok

by John Harrington

March 19, 2012

I was confident that I was on the right street. I had followed the road out of downtown, the one just south of the railroad station, and then taken the first right turn. The distances all felt right. Of course, the road was maybe twice as wide as I remembered it. Back then, two cars could barely slow and slip past one another, now cars sped by in each direction and there was room for parking on either side. In fact, a tour bus was pulled over to one side and it didn't slow traffic at all. And the klongs, once filled with fetid water and who knows what else, were gone. I was walking slowly along the street, looking at the solid rows of stores and homes on each side. I had left my wife, Eileen, a little ways back at a shop, telling her that I wanted to explore a little further along by myself.

By then, not only was I sure I was on the right road, but was also convinced that I was near the place I was looking for, or at least near where it had once been. There was an alley to the right and it curved a little as it left the road. The alley had been a dirt driveway, with swamps on both sides, but was now bordered on one side by some storehouses and on the other by a hotel. Not a high rise tourist stop, but still a modern four-story building with parking beneath and rooms above, each with decks. It might pass for a businessman's hotel back home. Still, the driveway did turn as I remembered and I was in what I thought was the right place.

I moved slowly down the path, peering ahead to my left. There were two homes alongside each other, not too modern, each with two floors. They were lived in, open and airy, behind gates, and shielded a little by palm trees. They were familiar and my stomach began to flutter some as I walked farther down and stood in front of the second one. Then I turned about. I was staring at a much more modest bungalow, on stilts, boarded



John Harrington, new editor of Mekong Express Mail.

up, the front door locked, and the shutters sealed in front of the windows. It had been painted and was now a faded yellow, with some peeling green trim. I thought I was about to cry as I realized I was standing in front of the house in Phitsanulok, Thailand, that I lived in for nearly a year, from September

of 1967 to August 1968, when I was a lieutenant stationed at the nearby USAF radar site. I shared it with my long-departed friend, John "J.B." Steplen.

My expectations had been low about finding any of the places or people I had known. It was, after all, more than 43 years since I had left Phitsanulok, then a somewhat sleepy provincial capital with a population of around 20,000, about 200 miles due north of Bangkok (see footnote). I always thought I would get back much sooner, but life, as they say, had interfered with my plans. When Eileen—we met and married a few years after I came back from Thailand—and I began discussing what warm place we should choose as our usual March respite from the chills of the Rhode Island coast, the thought came up that perhaps this should be the year we would go to Thailand, while we could still handle the travel. So, we planned a trip that included Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and even a visit to Luang Prabang in Laos, but the focus of our itinerary would be Phitsanulok.

Via Google, I had bored in on the aerial photos of the town. Clearly it had flourished, with its footprint extending miles and

Footnote: In 1968, there was a single hotel, the Hao Far, in Phitsanulok that westerners would dare stay in. It was three stories, non-air conditioned, with overhead fans, and windows that opened on the noisy streets of the center of town. Today, there are about ten high-rises with more than ten floors and modern facilities, featuring pools, spas, restaurants with multi-ethnic menus, and most adjacent to enclosed shopping malls featuring international, fashionable shops. I was told the population was now more than 60,000, and I don't believe that included the suburbs, a term you would never have considered for Phitsanulok in 1968.

See **Phitsanulok**, continued on page 2.

Phitsanulok, continued from page 1.

miles beyond the places I had remembered. Still, I had enough memory of the streets I travelled so often that I could follow a path to where my house had been, but there was no way to identify specifics of any of the structures. And when I tried to locate the radar site, Detachment 8 of the 621st Tactical Control Squadron, call sign "Dora," my luck was no better. It had been adjacent to the landing strip at the Phitsanulok Airport, abutting a Thai Base whose personnel worked the place with us. I knew that our Air Force had left the location some time in 1971 as the air war in Vietnam shifted focus. I also had heard that the Thai Air Force operated it as late as 1993, but



Aerial view of Phitsanulok base in 1968. Photos from the author.

nothing beyond that. Again, on Google, it was clear that the airport had expanded, but there were no indications of any other facility, let alone a radar tower.

On the evening we arrived by train from Bangkok, I arranged for a driver at the hotel in Phitsanulok to take us around the town the next day and help us search for my past. In Bangkok, the day before we got the train upcountry, Eileen and I had a lunch with TLCB Thai-located members Mac Thompson, Les Strouse, and Tom Ross. When telling them about my hopes of finding places and people in Phitsanulok, Les urged us to visit the Sergeant Major Tawee Folk Museum there, where I could get a broad look at the region. It turned out that the museum, a fascinating collection put together by a retired Thai sergeant, was on the street I had lived on and not far from where I figured my home had been. Going through some of the museum's artifacts, particularly the maps and photos, convinced me how close I was and set me off walking down the street.

After I had caught my breath and gathered Eileen and our driver, I brought them back to the bungalow. The driver, Bounthong (Boon),



The bungalow, as seen today. Being restored but still much like it was inside.

who spoke halting English and was just coming to understand what I was trying to do, went to the hotel on the property and told the woman behind the desk what was happening. She seemed skeptical at first. She and Boon were around 30 years old and were hardly, if at all, aware that a group of American airmen had once lived in the town. But soon I found myself on her cell phone talking to a man who Boon said was the owner of the property. Cell phones are ubiquitous in Thailand. Mac Thompson told me there are more cell phones in the country than people, including infants.

He spoke excellent English. "Hello, my name Pramote. Who am I talking?" "My name is John Harrington. A long time ago, I lived in the house I'm standing in front of. 1968." He replied, "My father-in-law was owner then."



Pramote and John at Phitsanulok

A flash of memory came to me at that moment - a thin, graying man, who had a shop in town. I went to his storefront business in town each month to deliver him the \$100 rent that J.B. and I paid for the bungalow. And then my memory saw a sign that had been at the end of the driveway, Pan Ngarm House.

I said, "Yes, Pan Ngarm. My landlord. Pan Ngarm House." There was a gasp on the line, and some talking between Pramote and someone else. He was back on, "Were you GI?" "Yes, yes, GI. I was GI. We rented the house from Pan Ngarm. Me and J.B., a captain in the U.S. Air Force."

There was a pause. Then, "I out of town, but back tomorrow. Please come back and wife and I let you in, show you house."

Eileen and I were there the next morning by nine. When we got to the end of the driveway, a man and

See **Phitsanulok**, continued on page 5.

Glitches and stitches over and back

by John Sweet

Arrival: My First Day

This goes to show that not everything in life goes according to plan. In truth, going according to plan is almost always the exception! My first day turned into my second day as well. It seems that we were scheduled to fly out on Continental Airlines from Travis in the late afternoon on August 24, 1969. I know the date well....it's my birthday.

The first malfunction in "the plan" began about an hour out over the Pacific when we had engine trouble and the pilot elected to return to Travis. No problem, except that we were delayed past midnight while obtaining another plane, and for that reason, we lost a day's credit in SEA. They did give us a free meal while we were waiting. Upon departure, everything went smoothly and we landed at Hickam in Hawaii all straining out the window to see Diamond Head. We changed planes shortly thereafter and departed for Clark AFB in P.I.

Glitch number two began about two hours away from Clark when we encountered severe turbulence, and everything not nailed down headed for the ceiling - including me as I was in process of lifting myself out of the seat while headed for the bathroom. Suddenly I was rising on my own! It was just a second earlier that I had released my seatbelt! I was sitting in the middle seat, and when I grabbed both seat arms they went up in the air also along with me! There was a tech sergeant sitting to my left and a master sergeant on my right who pushed me back down into the seat. Turned out they had served together at Wright Patterson AFB (Ohio) as "MT"s or something like that, which came in real handy a couple of minutes later when two of the stews (stewardesses) had been tossed in the air and landed hard. The master sergeant lay across the aisle and held one of them down so that she would not be tossed again on the other side of the downdraft. Turned out she had a broken back and the other had a slash all the way across her face. The stew with the broken back was in the rear, about four rows back of the place which had three bathrooms in the back. Two of them could not open the doors and had to remain inside the bathroom for the duration of the flight to Clark.

The third, and perhaps the most memorable malfunction of the trip, began when the only guy to get himself out of the bathroom was covered in you know what and sat next to me for two hours in his 1505's, apologizing all the time. I told him not to worry about it as there was nothing he could do about it....but GOD what a stench!!

Once everyone on the plane was aware of the critical situation of the two stews, they started taking up a collection, and I'd say if there was anyone who didn't throw in at least five bucks I'd be amazed. As soon as the plane landed on the tarmac, an emergency crew removed the stews first, then we disembarked and walked across the tarmac to the terminal, meeting a bus about halfway. I've often wondered how the stews made out. Is there anyone in the TLC who was on that flight? (Stranger things have happened!)

From there, the rest of the flight to Bangkok was uneventful. Except I should add, unlike most others, I never had a

night in Bangkok on the way up country. We arrived and then departed on the C-130 for NKP about an hour and a half later. I can still remember looking out the little round window at the brown square in the green ocean of jungle on the way in....

PCS: My Last Day

Show Me The Way To Go Home!

I was a bit leery stepping onto the ol C-130 headed to Bangkok my last day at NKP, as I recalled only too well how my first day had begun in SEA on the way over. Well, this trip was uneventful, except for the fact that when we stopped (CRS) to pick up more guys headed in—lo and behold there was my old fellow "road guard," Brother Mott from our basic training flight at Lackland—September 1966. Here we were almost four years later to the day! Who would have ever thought it?...Stranger things have happened, however. As I recall (yes—see, I *can* remember something!) he informed me that he had married a Thai. I began to get a bad feeling about meeting ol Mott. It seems my first day at NKP, I ran into a guy named Green who was in my basic training flight and at Lowery with me as well for tech school. First Day—Last Day?

When we hit Bangkok, it was off to the Trocadero Hotel. What a crock is the Troc! Except that it got worse. I entered the place with my duffel bag on my left shoulder and approached the desk. Just as I was about to speak, I heard this all too familiar bellow of bitching from the bar to my left. It couldn't be! My first sergeant had left three days before I did! I won't tell you his name.

There was no doubt about it. He was in the bar and had been there for some time. He was a mean drunk and hated "slopes" as he referred to all Orientals. There was a bar girl on either side of him and he was getting ready to strike! They had no idea of what they were up against.

The desk clerk was a middle-aged Thai who had turned his attention to the commotion. I passed over my duffel bag from my shoulder in one motion—told him to watch the bag and went to get the girls away from him.

Now, I was a young staff sergeant and he was a senior master sergeant, so I had to be careful. Just as he was rearing back to let a fist fly at the girl on his right, I yelled out, "Hi Sarge! Let me buy you a beer," and forced myself in between the two of them on bar stools. It took him a couple of seconds to recognize me and then I got a big smile. While this was going on, rather than gratitude, the bar girl behind me wanted revenge for the almost punch, and she tried to reach around

See **First-Last**, continued on page 4.

First-Last, continued from page 3.

and smack him in the back of the head with her pocketbook. This failed because I leaned out fast enough to my left to prevent it; however, right on queue the other girl joined in and whacked him in the head, spilling the beer he was holding.

Things went downhill real fast then when he elbowed the bar girl on his left in the face. The two girls ran out of the bar crying and screaming in Thai. I thought it was over and proceeded to drink the damn beer and relax. Wrong! Out of nowhere, in comes “mommasan” and slams him in the head from behind with a really big, black, fan-shaped pocketbook! Wham!

In less than a second, he turned and delivered a left hook straight to her chops, and she fell back on her rather hefty butt with a very surprised look on her face, which turned to sudden tears as she got up and fled out of the bar entrance behind her. So far so good. It’s over. I turn back to finally drink my beer and tell the first shirt, “It’s time to get out of the bar.” No. No



Staff Sergeant John Sweet at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB in 1969. Photo from the author.

go! He says, “He owes me one and it’s his turn to buy me a beer.” Ok, fine.

Well, I had maybe a sip or two of the second beer, I don’t recall exactly, when I heard a screaming Thai guy from behind us. Turning around on the bar stool, I saw a very “mak mak moho” Thai, about eight feet away, in a white shirt, black pants, and pointed plastic shoes. But what is really drawing my attention is the .38 jammed in his pants behind his belt buckle. I think he got out about two sentences before drawing the gun, but it may have been three: cocked and two handed, shaking like hell.

I stepped off the bar stool and stood in front of the first shirt. Drunk or not, he did not deserve to die for whacking a bar girl—and this guy did not want to shoot me. I was counting on it. While this is happening, all at once and suddenly, there is another American standing next to me, shoulder to shoulder blocking the Thai from having a clean shot at the first sergeant. He is blonde, wearing a white shirt also, and a bit taller than I. Boy, was I ever glad to not have to stand there alone! Neither one of us spoke a word to the Thai, who then screamed a couple of more sentences and ran out of the bar. While this was going on, the first sergeant was screaming at the Thai and trying to fight his way off the bar stool between us. Thank God I had not stepped farther out from the barstool. There was no room for him to get down!

That was it, except that we took him up to my room so they could not find him. He had exhausted himself and then locked himself in. The desk clerk would not or could not give me another key, nor let me in my own room, so I ended up sleeping in the lobby. What really pissed me off is that in the morning, the first sergeant was pissed off at me for not letting him “...punch out the slope.” Go figure.

Thank God the rest of the flight was uneventful. I figured my last full day in Thailand fulfilled the requirement. These are the reasons I will always remember exactly my first and last day, so help me God!

A story from John Sweet’s NKP website: Nakhon Phanom During The Secret War 1962 – 1975 : <http://aircommandoman.tripod.com/>

Sequel—small World

John,

I was an Air Traffic Control officer at NKP from Dec 1968 to Dec 1969. The Stars and Stripes on-line had an article yesterday about the loss of our vice wing commander on July 4, 1969. I won’t forget that day as I had had several encounters with Col Fallon before his loss. The article caused me to do a google search for NKP and I found your site. Wouldn’t you know, I read the story about your first day and your flight to Thailand. The guy in the bathroom when the plane hit the downdraft was an air traffic controller who came to work for me. I believe he was a tech sergeant but I don’t remember his name. What a coincidence!

David G. Woodward



Phitsanulok, continued from page 2.

a woman emerged from another property in the compound. It was Pramote and his wife, Toy, and it turned out they lived in the newer house, which had not been there forty-plus years ago. All of us raised our hands in front of our faces with our *wais* and greeted each other with our "*Sawadees*." Pramote, we soon found out, was sixty, and Toy we assumed was a little younger. Although it was friendly, the meeting had a tentative quality as well. I pointed out some things that had changed about the house, and the properties in general, which seemed to assure him that I had indeed live there.

He explained that he was restoring the bungalow and that it was in crude condition, but with that qualification, he offered to show us inside. I said, "Tee neung," (Number one!). We were soon standing in front of my old room. It was much the same, although the furniture and overhead fan were gone and the screens were rusted away. But some things had changed about the other rooms. It was my memory that a small sitting area was between J.B.'s and my bedrooms, but now that space was one larger room.

Also where our bathroom was, which was then an open space with no dividers between the shower area and the toilet, there was now another room. The remains of the bathroom were now in part of the space that had once been a kitchen. I tried to explain the changes, but



Ball court, Thai-American Lounge, and theater at Phitsanulok, 1968.

Pramote and Toy were firm that the space had not really changed.

As I scratched my head, I laughed, pointed to myself, and said, "I bah bah bah bo," which I remembered to mean "crazy." Somehow, that broke through any walls that were between us. They each laughed loudly and ingenuously and said, "Oh, John speak Thai." I assured them that while I once might have been able to get by with patient listeners, the most that could be said now was that I remembered some phrases.

Still, the atmosphere had changed and we were now being treated as honored guests, soon sitting on their veranda, drinking iced tea and water and trading stories about our lives. I explained to him that the afternoon before, after we left Pan Ngarm Way, at my request our driver, Boon, had tried to help us find if the old radar site still existed. We had headed for the airport, which was now greatly expanded and was still in essentially the same location as that of 1968. But, what had once been the terminal building was now the offices of Thai Air Police and the Air Force base was expanded. Boon was not

able to get us onto the grounds.

Pramote smiled and said, "Tomorrow we go there. I have work today, but pick you up at hotel at nine." In the morning as we left the hotel, Pramote said, "I have surprise. Someone who remembers you." It turned out to be a retired samlow driver, Somchit, who lived near Pramote. I can't say I remembered him, but he did refer to me as "Lieutenant John," and he said I lived with "Captain," which was generally how Thais referred to my housemate, J.B. Steplen, a large charismatic man who had served two previous tours in Thailand, one in Bangkok around 1963, and another in Nakhon Phanom in 1965 and 1966. Since he had probably brought me home on many nights after some partying, I was thankful that he did not say what he remembered about me, especially with my wife present. I showed him pictures from my time there, particularly of J.B.'s and my going away party, which of course we threw for ourselves and to which we had invited the site's Thai employees. Somchit pointed to a woman in one of them, and said she was still alive, but that he did not know where she lived. The name I

remembered her as was Linda and she sold wood carvings at the site, as well as made contacts throughout the town. I had in my mind that her real name was Wanida, and I remembered something about Buraket, but that was very uncertain. For the next several days, we tried to find her through several avenues, but I am afraid we never did.

The meeting with Somchit was only the start of things however. Pramote soon had Eileen and me back out to the Air Police offices and we stood and watched as he cajoled several levels of command, and finally turned and smiled, saying, "We go on base."

I still was not hopeful, as we and Boon had a few days before circled the entire airport, but could not find anything that resembled our old radar site. In fact, at one point, in an area that I calculated might be in the area where it was located, I had Boon stop by an open area that was about the size of the site. Something had been cleared there, and I suspected it was where Detachment 8 of the 621st Tac Con Squad once sat. I was doubtful of finding anything more, despite Pramote's enthusiasm.

On the far side from the police shack, Pramote turned off the perimeter road and through an open gate. I was sitting in the passenger seat, the left front, the Thais driving on the

See Phitsanulok, continued on page 7.

Mekong Express Mail ...is an official publication of The TLC Brotherhood, Inc. This newsletter is furnished to all active member households in support of the Brotherhood's objectives. The views expressed in articles published in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not reflect official TLC Brotherhood policy unless explicitly stated, nor is the TLC Brotherhood, Inc. responsible for the veracity of information furnished by our authors. All rights reserved by The TLC Brotherhood, Inc. in 2012.

The TLC Brotherhood, Inc. is a tax exempt, non-profit charitable organization under IRC Section 501(c)3, and was incorporated in the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1999.

Editor: John Harrington *Composition:* Bill Tilton
Distribution: John Duffin

TLC Brotherhood Contacts

Ed Stein, list master (estein1945@hotmail.com)

TLC Brotherhood, Inc. Tax ID #54-1932649

Board of Directors and Committee Chairmen

2011-2012, showing year of term-end

President: Frank Marsh (2012)

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

Secretary: Jim Closs (2013)

Treasurer: Bill Tilton (2012)

Chaplain: Deborah Stein (Memorial Committee) (2013)

Board members-at-large

Bob Wheatley (2012)

Les Thompson (2013)

Gary Beatty (2013)

[Vacant] (2012)

Non-board committee chairmen

Assistance Committee: John Schillo

BX Shopkeepers: Thelma and Bill Tilton

Communications Committee: Jerry Karnes

History Committee: Jim (Dusty) Henthorn

Membership Committee: Gerry Frazier

Public Relations Committee: "Willie Pete" Peterson

Payments to TLCB

Payments may be made on the website, using **PayPal**, which accepts credit cards. Written checks should be payable to **The TLC Brotherhood, Inc.** and mailed 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 website: TLC-Brotherhood.org for announcements, BX, history, MEM, the Forum, and more!

Join the stampede to win the quilt!

Soon we will be gathering for our annual reunion, this time in old San Antonio in the great state of Texas. Rosie Wheatley has again put together a beautiful quilt to raise funds for our TLC Brotherhood Assistance Program. In keeping with the reunion venue in Texas, this year's TLC Sisterhood raffle quilt follows a desert Southwest theme. The finished quilt measures 80" x 80", which is adequate to cover a full or queen-size bed. In the center panel is a beautiful graphic depicting the final battle of the Alamo. A panel above it will feature an embroidered 6" TLC Brotherhood patch. In various other blocks will be scenes one might typically find in the great state of Texas, such as the Texas State Flag, oil rigs, longhorn cattle, etc. As always, Rosie has sewn this quilt with a great deal of "TLC" using quality materials to make it a work you can be proud to display in your home.

Inside this edition of the MEM, you will find a sheet of 10 raffle tickets. The price is \$2 per ticket, or \$20 per sheet. You may purchase as many as you wish, from 1 ticket to 100 or more. If you desire more than ten tickets, you may simply photo copy the enclosed sheet. Alternatively, you may fill in ONE ticket completely, specifying the total number of tickets you wish to purchase. The TLCB will print the tickets for you, made out with the contact information you provide. If you wish, you may sell tickets to your friends and family to help the cause. Just be sure to fill in their tickets with the appropriate

contact information.

Make your check payable to TLC Brotherhood, Inc. Please write "Quilt" and your member number in the memo line of your check. Your member number can be found on the mailing label of the MEM. Mail your check and ticket sheet(s) to:

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

The drawing will be held at the reunion banquet in San Antonio. However, you need not be present to win. If the winner is not present, the quilt will be sent by registered, insured USPS within a few days of the drawing. We hope you will dig deep and help make this yet another successful fundraiser to benefit the people of Southeast Asia in the name of our brothers who did not return.



left side of the road. Pramote urged me to look up. Ahead, not far, was a water tower and I said, "It reminds me some of the one on the site." I stared at it more intently. "In fact, it could be...." And my voice drifted off. We had stopped. I looked to my left and a plain, one-floor white building seemed to transform itself in front of my eyes. Again, as had come over me a few days earlier, I was trembling as I opened the car door, stepping out and saying, "Omgod, that's the dispensary. We built it." I turned and looked back where we had entered. "Oh Jesus, that is the gate." And I turned again and looked at the plain building opposite the old dispensary. "That's where my office was, the orderly room. It's gone, but it was right there."

I rushed excitedly about. Less than a hundred yards further into the area was a dilapidated basketball court, two hoops without nets, still standing. I pointed at it, saying, "That's the basketball court we built. We held inspections on it." Beyond that I recognized the vehicle maintenance shed, which seemed to be now still serving the same function. I turned again, looking back past the dispensary, which in fact now seemed to be the site's offices, and beyond that was a radar tower, behind another level of security, almost the same as it had been more than forty years before. The whole experience was dizzying. I had out my sheets of photos and was going through them and pointing out to Pramote and Eileen where things had been, some that were still there, some that were transformed. Eileen had our camera and was snapping away, while Pramote and the captain who was accompanying us smiled. I walked towards the basketball court and said, "There is where our club was. We called it the Thai-American Lounge since it was open to everyone. The movie theater was next to it, and when USO entertainers came through, they used it too." Both were gone now and a non-descript open shelter stood on that part of the land.

The captain confirmed that a theater had been there and said they had only torn it down a few years before. He smiled and told us, with Pramote translating, that some of the seats were now over in an open-air building where our mess hall once stood. The Thais used it as a break area. Pramote grinned and said, "John, you can go watch a movie."

I was flitting about, holding my photos and trying to understand which buildings the Thai Air Force had flattened and which they had remodeled. I was in a zone, never having really allowed myself to think I would find so much of the site intact.

And then, almost as quickly as it began, it ended. A Thai major, the site commander, appeared and he was clearly not pleased that someone besides him had allowed a civilian and an American on the site. I showed him my pictures of the old site, which included a circa Spring 1968 aerial photo on the entire facility. Although he spoke some English, he was remote and icy. When I asked if I could take



The basketball court, now. Vehicle maintenance shop is one of the few unchanged buildings.

some more pictures, he was quick to issue an emphatic and authoritative "No!" Pramote and I quickly understood it was best to leave as quickly as possible, before, as Pramote said, "He takes your camera." As we drove down the road away from the site, which was now part of a much larger Air Base, my thought as I looked back was, "I hope that captain, who was enjoying my excitement, is not in trouble." And I never got to go into the radar area.

The trip had become magical. The year in Phitsanulok has always remained embedded in my memory. In the mid-1970s, I spent more than a year writing a novel set in a place like Phitsanulok, with a young, somewhat callow and carefree and careless admin officer at the center of it. It truly was fiction, although of course I drew on some incidents and blended some of the people into the characters in my story. I didn't even call the town Phitsanulok; in my fiction, it was Nakhon Badong. Still, the radar site in my story was the same as Det 8, as Nakhon Badong was Phitsanulok, and as I wrote and developed the characters, they moved through Phitsanulok and Detachment 8. Hence, my memory of both was detailed

The radar antenna for "Dora" in 1968.



See Phitsanulok, continued on page 8.

in my skull.

(By the way, although I did secure a literary agent, the novel was never published. The mid and later 1970s were not a welcome time for novels remotely associated with the Vietnam War. Later, I moved into a relatively successful career in publishing, but I never tried to use my contacts to publish what I grandiosely called, "The Year of The Lieutenant." I still look at it, and have worked on some other stories set in Thailand, but I remain ambivalent about the book. I am sure that if I wrote it today, it would be very different).

The daze and excitement of our findings was profound. Eileen, a historian at heart and a family genealogist as well, was in some ways as moved as I was. At the heart of my find was the friendliness and generosity of Pramote Chalermbock, my old landlord's son-in-law. We spent a good

deal of time with him, his wife, and two of his daughters, one an air controller in Bangkok, at Suvarnabhumi Airport and home for a few days; the other still a student in music; a third, once a flight attendant on Japan Airlines, was now studying business at Chulalongkorn University. At my suggestion, the six of us went to dinner a night later, and despite my ardent protest, Pramote picked up the tab.

Incredibly, our rendezvous with the past in Phitsanulok was not over, although the next part was more Eileen's story than mine. Shortly after we married in the summer of 1972, Eileen came home from her job as a high school history teacher in Greenwich, Connecticut, excited to tell me that there was an American Field Service (AFS) exchange student from Thailand in the school. Even more startling, the girl was from Phitsanulok. We befriended Churai Nakarat, having her to our home and visiting with her American family several times. The young girl was amazed and delighted to meet people who knew of her hometown, even had pictures of its temples, schools, its streets. Eileen, of course, saw her much more frequently at school.

We remained in touch with Churai for many years. She went to a university in Bangkok, became a nurse, returned to Phitsanulok, and married. But, in time, maybe in the mid-80s, our contacts faded. So when we decided to visit Thailand and Phitsanulok, Eileen contacted AFS to see if they had a more recent address. It was distressing to hear a simple message back

from them that their records indicated Churai was "deceased."

Eileen wrote to "The Nakarat Family" at the last address we had, but although the letter was mailed nearly two months before our trip, we heard nothing back. Of course, Nakarat was the family name and it was likely her parents had also passed away, and that since she had married, it was also possible there was no longer a Nakarat family in Phitsanulok.

On our first day in Phitsanulok, after finding my old house, and failing then to get on the air base, we asked our driver, Boon, to try and find the address, 95 Wong Chan Road, we had for the family. We had no luck. In fact the number we had on

the street did not appear to exist. Boon, who was getting more and more interested in our searches, was trying hard, driving over several sections of the streets more than once.

One small hope we had was that when we mentioned Churai to Pramote and his



Above, this is as close as we got to the radar site today, but there is no mistaking it!

wife, Toy, she said, "Oh, yes, I knew her in school. Her nickname was 'Jep.' Her father was the head of the school here." That did ring a bell for us, recalling that Churai had mentioned her father was a school leader, and it also fit in that he would have had influence in getting her into the AFS exchange program. But Toy did not know that Churai had died, and had really no news of her since they had both been in school together more than forty years ago.

On our last full day in Phitsanulok, with no specific plan in mind, we hired Boon again, the third time, to drive us about, exploring a few places we had not yet seen. We started with an art gallery at Naresuan University and then meandered. After a while, we decided to search once more for the Nakarat home. Earlier, Boon had taken us across the Nan River, which divides Phitsanulok, then turned north. However, I had a nagging memory that 40 years before, when Churai was telling me where she lived, that it was south, not north, after crossing the river. It turned out that there was a continuation of Wong Chan Road that did go south along the Nan.

It started out promisingly. The road was well maintained and the businesses and homes seemed prosperous. We came to a large complex, majestic even, with well-tended grounds and gated. Boon told us it was the new cultural center, and then added with emphasis, "Coming soon!" and we all laughed. We stopped several times to take some pictures. But, the road

Phitsanulok is continued next page.

was narrowing and the houses were shabbier, not where you might expect a relatively prosperous family to live. Then as I settled back into my seat, resigned to not finding our goal, Boon stopped the car abruptly and called out, "Nakarat, Nakarat, Nakarat!"

When we looked up, he was pointing to a sign, in Thai, outside a gated home. "Sign say Nakarat." Again, the sense of anticipation stirred us. We were soon out of the car and Boon was talking excitedly to a workman just outside the gate. There were family members at home and the workman went inside. Within moments a middle-aged couple was coming,

seemingly puzzled by the farangs at their gate. Eileen spoke first, "Hello, we are looking for the family of Churai Nakarat. We knew her in Connecticut." I added, "We are from Greenwich, we knew Churai."

The woman raised her hand to her neck, visibly moved, she said, "Oh, Churai. Oh. I am the sister of Churai. Oh." Within moments we were inside the estate,

which indeed had been the father's home, and now that of Chanjar Suntayakorn and her husband. Chan was a nurse as well, actually the head of nursing education at Naresuan University where we had been earlier in the day. Her husband was a pediatrician there.

"Churai is here," Chan said and led us to the above ground burial site of Churai, beside those of her parents. Eileen stretched her arm across the stone top and bowed her head, offering a prayer. Chan brought out tea and family pictures, and Eileen, the historian and genealogist, took pictures of them. Then Eileen told Chan of Churai's time in Greenwich, a small, pretty girl, who was popular with students and teachers.

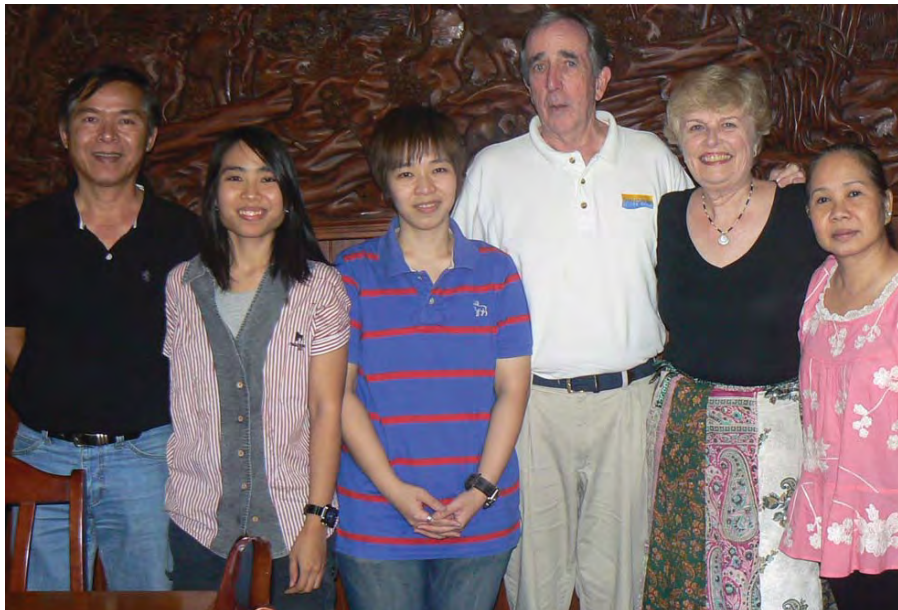
Chan told us that when Jep, as they referred to her, was around 30, it was discovered that she had a congenital heart condition. Still, she had married a doctor from the hospital and worked there. She had several surgeries, but her heart continued to deteriorate and she passed over when she was in her mid-30s, more than 20 years ago.

Several times, Chan's emotions caught her and left her without words. Especially when she was telling us that her daughter, away at a university in Bangkok, was named Churai, and called Jep Nit Noy, or "Little Jep." Later, Chan went back inside and emerged with two pins, gifts for her surprise visitors who brought what might have seemed to be a message from the other side, at least the other side of the world.

The return to Phitsanulok was nearly mystical, moving, and meaningful to a depth that surprised me. Lincoln, in his first inaugural address, referred to "the mystic chords of memory." My memories of Phitsanulok, and of Thailand, had been with me for more than 40 years. Having dabbled in fiction, I sometimes have worried that I might have more of the novel in my mind, than of the history. But the sentimental journey to the sources of those mystical chords convinced me that memories were real, that one of the most important years of my life has enduring value. My closest friend from that time, J.B., died in 1991. I have lost touch with the others, both fellow airmen and

my Thai friends and neighbors. Now, this time, I shall not lose touch with my new friends in Phitsanulok, and shall keep close to Pramote and Toy Chalermbock and with Chanjar Nakarat Suntoyakorn. With luck, I will host them here in America. Heck, I owe one of them a dinner.

PS: Our trip lasted just over three weeks. We started out in Bang-



Pramote Chalermbock, with two of their three daughters (the air traffic controller and the music student), me, Eileen, and at right, his wife, Toy

kok, went to Phitsanulok, Chiang Mai, and on to Luang Prabang, Laos, at the

suggestion of Mac Thompson. And then back to Bangkok for a few days. In planning the trek, I asked TLCB members for recommendations. Several, including John Sweet, recommended the Centre Pointe Silom in Bangkok, which turned out to be excellent. Sometime before we left, we met Skip Chervak and his wife, Karen, for lunch in Connecticut. They are frequent fliers to Thailand and they had many helpful suggestions. As I mentioned earlier, we had lunch with Mac Thompson, Tom Ross, and Les Strouse and his wife, Mai, just before heading upcountry. It was Les' suggestion that, in Phitsanulok, we visit Sergeant Major Tawee's Folk Museum, which got me off on the right foot for my quests. We had hoped to visit the TLCB projects in the Northeast, but our scheduling did not work out. Ed Miller, who lives part of the year in Nakhon Phanom, was still in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, and the heroic John Middlewood, who runs our program for the schools there, told me that it was school holiday time.



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 changes to us, at jkarnes@tlc-brotherhood.com

New Website, Forum, Archive, Exchange, and Member List Updates

Jerry Karnes, Communications Chairman

As of August 1st, the old website was shut down and redirected to the new one at www.tlc-brotherhood.org. The email servers are running but those are set to be shut down in the very near future. All of these changes have been implemented in order to help our members and facilitate a better exchange of communications. The email system was long outdated and responsible for driving away as many members as those who enjoyed it. You will now be able to easily do all the following:

- **NEWS:** Get the latest news for TLCB at the website www.tlc-brotherhood.com. This includes urgent member news, BOD meeting minutes, latest assistance news, reunion news and signup, candidate bios, the member list, membership signup, dues and donation payments, and many other features too numerous to mention.
- **FORUM:** At the forum, www.tlc-brotherhood.org/Forum, you can chat with fellow members in any number of interest areas. The forum is set up so that you can go directly to the sections you are most interested in, whether that concerns areas where we served, new members, lost friends locating, hobbies, items for sale or trade, assistance news, or even the "Jungle" where you can relax and get political or outside the box with your own views. There is a lot in the forum that we could never do before using only email.
- **ARCHIVE:** At the Archive, www.tlc-brotherhood.org/archive, you can browse every single item of data the TLCB has ever saved. The photos, articles, reunion details, back copies of the MEM...all there. You can download any item and the archive has an easy search feature that lets you look up a specific item. We are currently indexing the archive for even faster searches.
- **BX:** At the newly redesigned Exchange, www.shop.tlc-brotherhood.com, you can order all the TLCB logo gear. This new on-line store allows quick and easy payment using PayPal. You can use your credit cards or even your bank account with PayPal, which is fast and easy while being truly secure.

All of the above is now ready and waiting for every member. These updates bring the TLCB website up to par with any other military organization and help our website exceed most others. Take a few minutes to learn how to use the various sites and you will be amply rewarded.

Member List. One area where we really need your help is the Member List. We recently did an email blast to all members and we found that we could not locate over 100 members at the email address we had on hand, which brings up a couple of issues. Number one is that it shows the email servers were not the best method of communication for our members. The second is that without a proper email address we really have no practical way to contact you to let you know your email address is incorrect. We hope all members reading this MEM will go to the website and look up their own name in the member list. If what we have there is wrong, please contact the webmaster at jkarnes@tlc-brotherhood.com and provide your current email address.

Photos/Bios. We will also be adding the member photos and military bios to the member list very soon. If we do not have a current (or old) photo of you, please send one to the webmaster. This is not mandatory of course, but many members like having the photos.

Mekong Express Mail. Finally, we wish to add that the MEM is now in full color on the website. The hard copy will still be in black and white because of the cost of printing in color, but you will really enjoy seeing everything in color on the web. If you find that you don't care to receive the printed MEM any longer, we have provided an opt-out button on the website. Part of your dues pays for a mailed paper edition, and of course you are welcome to continue receiving it.

Don't forget to tell your friends and buddies about the TLCB. Thanks to all your hard work and devotion, we are now able to move our organization ahead to the 21st century where there is a huge audience that can benefit from what we have to say. Let's tell them!

Welcome Home...!

Back to the Hills—TLCB in Laos, May 2012

by MacAlan Thompson

Here we go again, another TLCB run to NE Laos, this time accompanied by TLCB members Tony Tambini and Glenn Black. Sunee stayed home this time, allowing me to practice my time-worn Lao “skills” and freeing space in the pickup for Tony and Glenn. Art also stayed in Vientiane this trip.

Tony met me at the McDonald’s at Klong 3 and we hauled out in Sunee’s Toyota HiLux van at 0345 hrs. It was a handy place to meet since it’s open 24 hours. I got there early and had another coffee and a not-so-swift burger; the breakfast menu not up until 0500 hours, boo. We were on to Nong Khai at 1210 hours, some 626 km, 388 miles. We left the van there and went across the bridge to Lao immigration, and on into Vientiane to the Asian Pavilion Hotel, formerly called the Constellation, which is mentioned in a number of pre-1975 books and articles.

Glenn flew over to Vientiane from his home in Chiang Mai and met us at the hotel in the early evening. The hotel is a bit run down from its glory days and the elevator wasn’t working. Tony got Room 302, sans toilet seat. I mentioned this to the guy manning the desk when we went out shopping. On return, they had solved that minor problem and now he had one. Later that evening, Tony complained a bit that he was “bitten” by the seat...seems like it had a small crack. This ever happen to you? It can be an attention getter, kind of like getting caught by your pant’s zipper. By the way, it was low season for international travel and the rate at the hotel was down to baht 600, about \$20, including breakfast and free WiFi. The restaurant is pretty good, too, for dinners.

Next morning, Wednesday, 9 May, we were on the road to Xaysomboun (XSB), formerly called Moung Cha, LS-113. We had a couple of schools to visit and some TLCB Assistance funds to hand over to the District Education Service Chief. It’s about a five hour trip to XSB, so we had time for a quick “pho” lunch and time to visit the schools about an hour east of town in the Moung Om area. We checked on TLCB-funded furniture at the Tham Lo Primary School, and then we went on to the Moung Om Primary #2 school to check the area there for a proposed concrete floor.

Thursday morning, we had a short meeting with the education chief, hand over kip 18,150,000 for a concrete floor for the Tham Lo school, then went on to the XSB police station to request a pass to get through the gate at Long Tieng, which was just handwritten and not a formal document. Taking this



Sometimes the hardest to reach communities are the ones that need TLCB the most.

route to Phonsavanh cuts the road time from two days to a five-to-six-hour trip.

We were then on to Long Tieng, which was about a two-and-a-half hour drive, mostly on a decent dirt-gravel road. On the way we passed by the Phu Bia Mining gold and copper operation, which is really large and apparently profitable. (www.panaust.com.au/laos). We stopped at the south gate by the Lao Army guys, but since we had the pass, he called the local police guy to come down and log us in. It was no

problem, just a bit of a delay. We visited the old primary school which had been in service since the mid-1960s, all abandoned now. Nobody was there, so I wasn’t able to ask what had happened to the school furniture we had funded a couple years ago, or the roofing, tin, and cement blocks of the four-room crapper we had also funded. These questions are on the list for next visit. It would be nice if at least the furniture was moved to the new school.

We stopped for a coke at the noodle shop where Sunee and I had RONed four years ago. We didn’t stay for lunch as we didn’t really want to get tied up with



Mac meeting with education chief about concrete floor for Tham Lo School. Photos provided by the author.

See Laos, continued on page 12.

Laos, continued from page 11.

a bunch of Lao Army officers having a promotion party and well into their Beer Lao. Probably not a problem, but....

We went on up the road a few minutes to check in at the new school facility with really nice new buildings, built by a Vietnamese contractor over the last couple of years. The older building, which TLCB had assisted a bit, is now used as a student dormitory, illustrating just how popular education is these days in upcountry Laos. These kids live too far away to commute on a daily basis but now they can continue their studies and perhaps go home on the weekends. I will be requesting some

Dinner that evening was at the new Bamboozle Restaurant. We dined with a British lady who is doing her PHD on the Jars on and around the PDJ (Plain of Jars). It is an interesting effort and I am looking forward to her dissertation. Since the trip I've been emailing with her and some friends, getting the story of how at least two of the jars were moved off the PDJ, one ending up in the Smithsonian's warehouse in the D.C. area, the other in Vientiane at a wat. These jars are HEAVY, as evidenced by the troubles moving them even by a Jolly Green.

Friday morning, 11 May, we picked up Ajan Soundeuan,



North end of the Long Tieng runway today, showing the karst arresting gear that has never failed to stop a plane! At right is legendary Skyline Ridge. Village, with General Vang Pao's house still intact, is to the left. Lao Army installation at right.

TLCB funds for helping out with the dormitory for the next trip up through there.

We departed the Long Tieng area and drove on up the road 45 minutes to Sam Thong, a real quiet village these days. We passed the every-other-day "bus" that runs between XSB and Phonsavanh, an open-air, six-wheeler truck, not real comfortable, but manageable on the sometimes rough road. There was no one at the Sam Thong school, so we just motored on along to Tha Tham Blueng and on towards the PDJ. We would have made a fairly quick run of the entire trip, but we ran into some heavy road reconstruction which delayed things by an hour and a half. In August 2011 there was a semi typhoon that passed through northern Laos creating massive damage to roads in the region, some of which is just getting repaired or rerouted now. It's nice to know that funds are available for infrastructure. We were on to Phonsavanh finally, after about nine hours on the road. We RONed at the Nice Guest House, a good place, Hmong owned and run. We stopped on the way to look at a PT-76 tank hulk by the side of the road (photo at right). It was still raining a bit. There are several sets of monuments to the war dead up on the hillsides here.

the representative on the Provincial Education Service who has been our main contact in Xieng Khouang for four years now, a real good guy, active, knowledgeable, and an excellent worker with the local school and village administrations which makes his proposed projects move right along. On to



Laos is continued next page.



Plain of Jars student from Britain at dinner with Tony Tambini, Glenn Black, and Mac, at the Bamboozle.

Phou Kout, about an hour west, and to the second school in the district that the TLCB is assisting. There was a group meeting with local school, district, and village officials. There were speeches (me, too, but not very long, it was in Lao), and the handing over of kip 14,472,000 for a concrete floor and roofing tin. We gave school books and had lunch, lao lao, Beer Lao, more "fun." The school will be requesting additional assistance for a second building upgrade and perhaps for a pipeline for access to water. This is a lower secondary school which seems

large area of jars. This was a first visit for Tony, but Glenn had previously been to the PDJ. I ran into a Canadian fellow, who had been a civilian POW pre-1975 and who now has a small school there in Phonsavanh. Will look him up next trip. He told a grim story of his group's time. Two Canadian women were murdered post-capture.

Saturday and Sunday, 12 and 13 May, were exploration days.

We wanted to see

some new country. We left Phonsavanh and headed north on to Vieng Thong, aka Mounh Hiem, aka LS-48. The road was mostly good; with a few areas of reconstruction going on, post last August storm. We did hit one toll bridge, constructed since January when



Who it's all about!



The "Big Brother Mouse" books are very popular in Laos. Mac delivers them at Phou Kout.

to be missing out on Lao government assistance, which is currently focused on primary schools. There are about 600 plus kids here of Phuan, Hmong, and Khamu ethnicity.

We departed Phou Kout and stopped in to visit an Ozzie NGO, MiVAC, which has been doing UXO clearing for a few years in Laos and has now moved into community development. They are WELL funded and have Ozzie engineers working with them. We'll probably not be doing any co-funded projects with them, but I will be referring some items that are probably too large for us to undertake. They are at: www.mivactrust.org/. Good folks.

It was on to Jar Site #1 for a good look-see and walk around the



The "Standing Stones" enroute to Ban Pakha.

our driver had been up that way and used the ford. I asked the guy there who built the bridge, and he said that the villagers had. They will use the funds for their own community development. It's a good idea, if it works. Entrepreneurial! We stopped in at LS-36, Na Khang, reported in the June MEM issue. My previous, and only, visit was late February 1969. We hit the hot

See Laos, continued on page 14.

Laos, continued from page 13.

springs at Vieng Thong, went back to the decent guest house in town, had dinner, and crashed. It was a nice day and I got to travel a new road.

Sunday saw us on the road again. We wanted to take a look at the dormitory that the TLCB had funded up in lower Houa Phan (Sam Neua) Province. We made a brief stop the Hin Tang (Standing Stones) archaeological site, which perhaps predates the jars on the PDJ, then we went on to Ban Pakha and the dorm, about an hour down the dirt road.

I consider this perhaps the best project I've been involved with in Laos. It was a bit costly, which was shared with the Air Commando Association, but really worthwhile. It solved the problem of lower secondary school children (grades 6-9) who live too far from the school to commute daily. It was designed for about 70 kids, with boys' and girls' rooms, but some 180 showed up for the opening three two years ago! They cut it down to about 80 or so, with some others building grass/bamboo huts on the hillside so they could avail themselves of the cooking, bathing, and toilet facilities that were part of the project.



Above, road improvements and typhoon damage repair were seen in a number of areas on this trip. Right, Russian MI-17 outside a small village along the way.

On this visit, it being a Sunday, many of the kids had gone home for the weekend. But we still found a bunch there, in both rooms, plus those living in the huts. They told us that over 70 kids had built the huts and are living there. It looks like they could use another dorm building! We noted that several of the kids speak English, a bit of a surprise. Perhaps they will be our guides one day.

We finished up at the dorm and scooted on back to Phonsavanh, almost six hours on the road, which was paved after we got back to Rt 6, and travelled on down to join Rt 7 at the Ban Ban/Moung Kham junction.

Monday, 14 May, we were on the road south from Phonsavanh, headed to Tha Thom, about three hours down the road, where we have a small project at a village a bit south of town. Note that this road is being reconstructed by a Vietnamese company. It's really



Mac illustrates another of his ferry stories!

nice and quite scenic, with wide curves and deep cuts in places. It's now mostly fast dirt-gravel, and it will be great when paved. We had previously funded a portion of the costs for a small building housing an office and meeting room for the teachers and a small sleeping room for a couple of them. A local sawmill had donated the wood for the building. Unfortunately, the wood was insufficient to cover the doors and windows so TLCB provided additional funding for this and some furniture. What they really need is a new school building because the one they have is village-self-help built about 20 plus years ago, and is in bad shape.

About 20 minutes south of Tha Thom we hit a bit of a blockage, high water in the Nam Xan, and a bus was stuck trying to get up the nearside muddy ramp, such as it is. We noticed a ten-wheel truck carrying a six-wheeler across in its bed. The innovative "ferry" looked like a good idea and our driver went back to check it out. I crossed over in a long-tail boat and Tony and Glenn got the VIP ride with the truck. Cost was kip 200,000, about \$25, a bit high I thought, but given the alternative, it was worth it. I asked the truck driver what he was going to do when the river went down in six months, and he said that he would go back to work hauling logs from the forest. I didn't manage to get a receipt for the trip as the driver split to volunteer his



Laos is continued next page.



Up in the hill country, cooking rice the old fashioned way, in prepatation for another feast in honor of our TLC Brotherhood.

service to another vehicle. Capitalism strikes again! It looks like the large bridge here won't be completed for a while, as it has been under construction for more than a year already.

We stopped for some khaopat at a nice restaurant in Pak-sane then motored back to Vientiane and again RONed at the Asian Pavilion. By chance, I got Tony's prior room 302, and, yes, also suffered the friggin' toilet seat bite!

Next morning at breakfast we met an older, retired French

priest who had formerly worked down in the Pakse area for lots of years, pre-1975. He was just back for a visit to the old haunts. He knew Pop Buell and Father B from the old days. Glenn did the translating for Tony and me, as we didn't know any French. Glenn's got some hidden talents there.

We stopped at the Beer Lao office and picked up a few of their umbrellas, but they were out of hats and bottle openers, sorry to say. Next trip? Glenn elected to stay around Vientiane for a few days before flying back to Chiang Mai. Tony and I then headed back to Thannaleng for Lao Immigration and on across to Nong Khai to pick up our van. We were off to home, eight hours down the road. Tony caught a taxi near our place at Klong 10 back to the McDonald's at Klong 3, and had a burger while waiting for his wife, Chinda, to come and pick him up.

All in all, it was a good trip. We saw progress on several fronts between infrastructure of the country and schools we work with. I got to see some of what are now old friends, met some new ones, and made some kids happy, I hope. Now it's time to get planning for the next trip.

Here is some additional information:

PDJ and the Jars: www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plain_of_Jars
School books from the **BIG BROTHER MOUSE**, www.big-brothermouse.com/

One **dollar** = kip 8,000

Photos: hundreds more at <https://picasaweb.google.com/mactbkk/?fgl=true&pli=1&fgl=true> or here: <http://goo.gl/S9Ygq>



What's happening in TLCB; a Note from the President

By the time this issue hits the presses we will be packing to go to San Antonio, back to most of our roots; you AF guys for basic, several of us Army guys for medical training at Fort Sam Houston.

The Board has made several decisions over the year and has listened to what you all have to say. The one request I would make is that if you have an issue with the rules, regs, or the way anything is being conducted in the organization, I would ask you **contact any Board Member back channel to express yourself**, by email or letter if you like. Do not whine about it on the forums or the website. Please help us make this organization the best it can be by offering objective and constructive suggestions and not just bitching and moaning like a few malcontents insist on doing, resulting in many hours of answering emails and putting out fires.

MEMs and TLCB Board Meeting minutes are posted on the new website as they are approved. We are still working through some details and the Commo Chair has put in many hours developing this for us. There will be kinks, as with any new system, but we will work them out. He has posted his contact info on the site if anyone has any problems. The old website is shut down and the two servers will soon be removed at his discretion, which will save us more money too. Thanks for understanding.

The Exchange is able to take your order electronically now. You don't have to use PayPal, you can use a credit card, or you can still do it the old fashioned way if you desire. You can also pay dues and make Assistance donations on the new site as

well as register for the reunion, buy quilt raffle tickets, and buy a reunion shirt or other logo products the Exchange offers. I have personally done all these things.

I have made some appointments to committee chairs due to some folks stepping down for various reasons. My appointments are as follows:

History Chair: Dusty Henthorn. Welcome back to decent health Dusty and thanks to John Binfield who has done a great job for years now but needed some time.

Communications Chair: Jerry Karnes. Welcome Jerry with your computer expertise and unlimited time for all of us. Jerry has donated many hours of his own time and money to set up the new site, bringing us into the 21st century and saving us much money also. He has donated the start-up money as well as the yearly fee and so much of his time, considering he still works full time. He has let everyone know he is available for any of your questions.

Membership Chair: Gerry Frazier. Thanks for helping yet again Gerry. We all know how much you have done for the club in the past with the reunions and other committees as well. I would like to offer my deep thanks to Mike Vale for handling the job (he still helps) all these years while he was also working full time.

See **President** continue on page 16.

President continued from page 15.

Public Relations Chair: William Peterson. Welcome Willie Pete. We all know the job you did for us in DC with the press; it is only fitting that you have the job. Thanks to Floyd McGurk for all the years he put in this position.

MEM Editor: John Harrington. Welcome John, you have big shoes to fill. Dave MacDonald has edited the MEM from issue one, giving many hours of his time to the mission.

Exchange: Thelma Tilton. Welcome Thelma and thanks for taking over the PX/BX. Bob Pruiksma did an outstanding job for years despite working full time.

Once again I must bring up this issue. We have donated funds for folks who cannot afford their dues. Just contact me and let me know you need some help with dues. I don't need a reason; that's your business.

I want to thank all of you who have sent "memorabilia"

to Texas Tech for the archives. We see these folks at our reunions on occasion, San Antonio for sure. Their policy has always been to keep the original material and send back copies; we all know that. Several of you have told me directly or indirectly that you have not received anything from them after sending your memorabilia to them. I would like you to contact me thearmyguy.09@verizon.net directly and tell me what you sent and when. I will make a list and address the issue with them in October when we see them. We all agree that despite how busy they are this is not good Karma. When you can, provide me with your name, what you sent, and when you sent it to them.

Thanks for your time and welcome home, in Brotherhood

Frank Marsh (TAG)

SGM, USA, ret

President, TLCB



Rare trove of spectacular photos

Steve Umland was a photo interpreter (PI) at Task Force Alpha at NKP from Nov 1969 to Oct 1970. Steve was a PI his entire time in the Air Force, until he was discharged to attend college in December, 1972.

Steve says, "I have been very careful with the binder that held these 8x10 prints. I have shown it to a small number of people since 1972. I moved my studio, where the binder was, from Minneapolis to my lake home in Wisconsin eight years ago. Only after corresponding with MEM did I start opening sealed boxes from the move and found the binder last month.

"The problem is, very few people understand what we were doing where and why. If [they] don't have a background in intelligence or a history of being there, people look at you with a blank stare. That's one of the reasons why finding TLCB has been refreshing for me. Finally someone gets it and understands."

One of our newer members (March of this year), Steve is prepared to contribute something really interesting to the

growing storehouse in our website Archives. Here are some samples, and soon you will be able to view many more like these. Steve tells MEM that he hasn't decided what to do with the original images yet, but is considering one of the large repositories of Vietnam era material so that they will be accessible yet properly preserved.

Left, trucks in staging area in North Vietnam sanctuary prepare for arduous trip down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. At right, reconnaissance plane caught photo of F-105s refueling in Thailand. Fighters are loaded and headed "Downtown." Below, Steve at his light table in Task Force Alpha, probably in August or September of 1970.

