

MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE THAILAND-LAOS-CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC. VOLUME 15, ISSUE 3

To Hear a Baby's Heartbeat

by Jeff Hudgens, TLCB Assistance

Note: Major Ed Hudgens perished in Laos in 1970 when his Skyraider crashed after enemy fire. His son, Jeff, has since travelled to the crash site and helped establish a school there. He visits regularly, delivering goods and services, many provided by the TLCB Assistance Program.

On March 21st, the 44th anniversary of my father being shot down in Laos, a team of two doctors, a nurse, a college student, and my 16 year-old daughter arrived in Nakhon Phanom (NKP), Thailand. Mix ups in scheduling made us a day late so we quickly took a short tour of the base – and whatever else we could find to see in a shortened time – before crossing into Thakek, Laos, via the Third Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge.

It was mid-afternoon, so we quickly purchased supplies and headed to Lang Kham, Khammouane Province, a drive of just under two hours. There is now a new hotel in the area that includes beds, showers, western toilets, and a TV. This is in the area of the intersection of Routes 12 and 28.

There is increased activity of the Vietnam border crossing, and this area is growing. They are even building a steel factory next to the hotel, which has resulted in an increased population

and an influx of students in the Lank Khan Pre-K-12 school campus. It is encouraging that the government has funded new school buildings and provided teachers; but there still isn't enough room or supplies. This is where the TLCB stepped in and funded its biggest expenditure to date in Laos.



Jeff Hudgens at a TLCB/Air Commando Association site in Thakkek Province of Laos, 2011. Photo by Bill Tilton.

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The TLCB is providing:

- Roofing materials for the old school building (a storm blew off the tin roof)
- Partitions to divide the classrooms up into smaller rooms and make up a library
- Student desks for the new classrooms
- Blankets, towels, and toys for the preschool
- School supplies for 700 students and teachers, such as notebooks, pens, pencils, erasers, rulers, pencil sharpeners
- Sports equipment and uniforms for the soccer team.

Heartbeat (continues on Page 4)

Editor's Notes: September 2014

I truly believe that this issue of the Mekong Express Mail is the best one that Thelma and Bill Tilton and I have put together since I was asked to take over the editor's position from the nearly legendary Dave MacDonald two years ago. It has four remarkable contributions. First, a continuation of the amazing work of Jeff Hudgens, who in commemoration of his father, Major Ed Hudgens who died in Laos in 1970, has returned again and again to that country, in a wonderful and selfless act of great charity. Second, is Eugene Rossel's memoir of his exciting years in Laos in the 1960s and early 1970s. Once again, we are re-publishing something From the Archives, this time the exciting and humorous adventures of long-time TLCB member, Les Strouse. I think there is a wealth of great stories in the MEM archives that many of the more recent members, including me, need to read. And, lastly, continuing with a special project of mine, The TLCB Member Fiction Collection, we have an excerpt from Alan Melton's novel, The Champa Flowers, which is available on Amazon.com, BarnesandNoble.com, and BooksAMillion.com. Actually, I should not have said "lastly." We also have a contribution which we really should see more of, a letter to the editor, which is printed at right.

Remember, the MEM really is the members' publication and I encourage all of you to let us hear from you. Each of us has interesting stories to tell and probably more ability to tell them than you realize until you sit down and write. So, please tell us what you like and what you don't. Tell us your stories, even if you have to make them up, as Al Melton and I have.

I also would like to apologize that, once again, I am not going to be able to make the TLCB Reunion and annual meeting. For the last three years, the dates have fallen on times when I have a business commitment. I attended the Arlington, Virginia

gathering in 2011 and found it fascinating, and I sincerely look forward to getting together again, hopefully next year. For those of you who are going, enjoy, and if you hear anything that should appear in a future MEM, please let me know.

John Harrington
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July 16, 2014

To the MEM Editor:

In reference to the "official date" of the Second Indochina War, a.k.a. the Vietnam War, one might question why the U.S. Department of Defense would choose 2015 as the 50th anniversary. U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia (SEA) began in mid 1940 with the financing, in large part, France's effort to retain a hold onto Vietnam, until they were ousted in 1954. Thousands of U.S. military and civilians served in SEA prior to 1965, hundreds were KIA and WIA between 1961 and 1965. President Eisenhower's chief SEA concern was Laos. President Kennedy deployed thousands to Thailand in 1962 because of the Laos concern and quietly increased the number of troops in Vietnam in spite of accords reached at Geneva.

Veterans organizations use various dates in reference to the "Vietnam era." None point to 1965 as an "official" date for what the Vietnamese call the "American" war.

I was pleased to see that the TLC Brotherhood will be participating in the "50th" program. Many thanks to William Peterson and all at the TLC Brotherhood for all that you do.

Joseph P. Konzem, SEA 1962
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Tax ID #54-1932649

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

The TLCB Member Featured Fiction

Alan Melton is a retired Foreign Service officer, whose first overseas tour was with USAID in Vientiane, from 1968 to 1971. He also put in three years in Thailand from 1974 to 1977, and subsequently served in France, El Salvador, and back in Washington. Since retirement he has done some consultant work in Washington and in Williamsburg, Virginia, where he lives. He has been a TLCB member since 2007.



The Author's Introduction: *Attached are a few pages from my novel, The "Champa Flowers," which is set in Vientiane, Laos in the spring and summer of 1968, and deals with CIA officer Peter Ivorson. He has just arrived from Saigon, with his nerves in tatters following a very narrow escape from death by assassination during the Tet Offensive. He welcomes the idea of a tour in quiet Vientiane, only to discover that his predecessor was murdered, and he has been handed the impossible assignment of getting a picture of the North Vietnamese Embassy code machine, which has some sort of oriental bias that has baffled NSA for year. On top of that, the USAID personnel officer assigned to protect his cover can't stand either Ivorson or the CIA, and the Station tech officer claims credit for all Ivorson does. In this excerpt, he has just discovered that the French/Vietnamese beauty he has finally gotten into bed has been working for the North Vietnamese Embassy's intel chief the whole time, and has just led him into a death trap.*

The book, as well as a couple more of mine, is available on Amazon, either in hard copy or Kindle. It can also be bought for Nook readers at the Barnes & Noble Website. I think TLCB members might enjoy it. I have written another Ivorson book, with an El Salvador setting.

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The Champa Flowers (an excerpt)

"Nga," he said quietly, walking after her and trying to appear casual, "keep on moving toward the trees downstream."

"What, Peter?" she asked over her shoulder.

"Don't look around, or act frightened honey," he said, "but we're not alone out here."

She turned to face him, and smiled. It was a smile he had never seen on her face before: a hard, mirthless smile that held not the faintest hint of humor or affection. "Oh, I know that, Peter," she told him. "I brought you out here for them."

He stared, uncomprehending.

"You don't understand, do you?" she asked him, her voice ice-cold. "You thought I like having you in my body. You think I am honored to be chosen by a white man to spill his seed into."

He shook his head, trying to clear his shocked mind. This couldn't be happening. Beautiful, passionate Nga, couldn't be talking to him like that.

"You are all alike," she hissed. "French and Americans, my father and you." Her voice became more agitated. "You come to Asia, sire your half-breeds, and then expect us to love you. Well, I don't love you, Peter. I hate you! I hate you, do you hear me?" Her voice shrilled upward in a crescendo of fury, and the sickening reality of what he was hearing could be denied no longer.

She had set him up. She had played the oldest trick in the history of espionage on him, and he had fallen willingly into the honey trap, just like all the previous suckers.

She'd said she brought him out here for "them." That meant the one across the creek wasn't alone. Christ, there could be a platoon or more of them! He could be completely surrounded.

The Fear washed over him, inundated him, drowned him.

He couldn't fight against odds like these. He didn't have a chance. God, it wasn't fair! He wanted to just lie down on the grass and cry, to surrender, to throw himself on the mercy of his unseen captors.

His suddenly treasonous mind tried to rationalize surrender. Why not? After all, what did he know that would really damage the U.S.? He wasn't running any agent operations. Tran van Cao had proved a traitor, and Wilbur was dead.

Wilbur was dead. The thought brought him a measure of self-control. Wilbur would never surrender, no matter what the odds, and neither would Orville, but if Ivorson surrendered, their whole family was doomed. Those people depended on him for their survival. For that matter, so did all of his fellow case officers in Vietnam and Laos, whose identities would be tortured out of him if he surrendered.

Nga was looking at him with a face of such terrible malignancy that he could scarcely recognize her. She started to raise a hand to her mouth, as if to call someone, and he realized that if she did that, all of his options were ended. If he was going to fight, he had to start now.

"Don't be so angry, sweetheart," he said to her. Only part of the words came out coherently over his fear-dried vocal cords, but the conciliatory tone reached her. Her hand stopped in mid-motion, and she looked at him with angry disbelief. Holding his arms out, he moved slowly toward her.

"Are you deaf, you fool?" she asked him, speaking Vietnamese for the first time. "Don't you understand plain English?"

Come on, Ivorson, he thought. If you've ever played a convincing role in your life, do it now. Still approaching her, he

Champa Flowers (continues on page 12)

Heartbeat (continued from Page 1)

Other projects at the school are also underway. There is now Internet in the school's area, with three new computers and printers. One of the teachers also knows IT and will be teaching the students. This is a pilot program and we will be watching it closely. Finally, they want to start a musical program, so



A teacher shows off the new guitar. Photos from Jeff Hudgens unless otherwise noted.

we provided instruments as well. The school officials, teachers, and students were very excited to receive these gifts, and I can't wait to see how they are utilized.

My team thoroughly enjoyed handing out the school supplies to each student, which kicked off the interactions between the Laotians and the "falangs." All students said "Good morning" when they met each of us and "thank you" when they received their supplies. This encouraged their English, and also helped them get



Nurse Amanda Ingram checks this boy's vital signs. We think he had diabetes and there wasn't much we could do for him.



Students receiving their school supplies. Joy shows in everyone's faces.

over any fear of interacting with "falangs." It's always a highlight of the trip.

After distributing the school supplies, we took photos of groups of the kids, printed them out, and distributed them to some of the students. Unfortunately, we didn't have enough printer paper for all 700 students. Before calling it a day, we did some crafts with the younger students and played games.

We spent Sunday prior to the school activities on the medical program. As mentioned, we had two doctors who are chiropractors and have travelled in various parts of the world engaged in medical programs. We gathered under some trees at the Thongkham Primary School, where the TLCB has funded projects in

the past. While there, I kept feeling like it was sprinkling on us but there wasn't a cloud in the sky. After inquiring with the locals, I learned it was cicada bugs urinating on us – all day long.

Anyway, the local people would sit with the Lao team we work with, tell them their medical problems, and the Lao team would write each down on a piece of paper. The local would keep the sheet until it was her or his turn to see the doctor. Another Lao would translate the paper and inform the doctor of the patient's issues. The doctors would then treat the patient with medicine and provide much needed muscular-skeletal adjustments. We treated many gastrointestinal issues resulting from poor drinking water and food preparation. There was a malaria patient, worms treatment, and lots of aches

and pains treatment for the elderly. There was also a boy with diabetes, and sadly, there was not much we could do for him. We couldn't solve all the issues long term; however, the Lao people greatly appreciated the relief we provided. One patient had restricted breathing, and after an adjustment, was so happy that he could really breathe. The smile on his face said it all. We treated a pregnant woman and the doctor listened to her baby's heartbeat, then took the stethoscope and put it up to the patient's ears. It got very quiet and then a huge smile came across her face as she realized she was listening to her baby's heartbeat. Rewards like this make it all worthwhile.

Heartbeat (continues next page)

Right: Dr. Tammi Clark and Dr. Nick Grant adjust patients.



On our last night, we moved into Ban Nahom village where we held our final night “party.” This consisted of feeding rice and beef to the village of 200, a treat they only get when we visit. After dinner, we showed pictures of the previous few days of activities. They can never get enough of seeing themselves on the “big screen” – a sheet held up in a bamboo frame. We capped off the party by showing the Thai version of the Disney hit movie, “Frozen.” They get enough TV in the area so they know Thai, and I enjoyed the English subtitles.

Below, Jessa Hudgens, Dr Tammi Clark, Aubrey Thompson and Amanda Ingram hand out supplies. At right, Jeff meeting TLCB President John Sweet and “Brother” George Shenberger just outside Vientiane in 2011. Photo by Bill Tilton



Jeff and 16 year old daughter Jessa, in a remote village in Central Laos, near the site where Jessa’s grandfather crashed in an A-1 Skyraider after being hit by groundfire in March, 1970.



A Personal Note by Jeff Hudgens:

As I mentioned, I brought along my 16 year-old daughter Jessa. It was great to take her on a brief tour of NKP, including where her grandfather had lived and worked. Later during the trip, I took her to the area where the rescue of Wolf 06 occurred and where Dad’s A1 was hit while covering the RTB of the Jolly Green, after successfully recovering Richard Rash. A few hours later, we hiked to his crash site when it unexpectedly started to rain (rain during the dry season in March?). We spent a short time there and took a few photos next to the rock that bears a plaque in his honor: Grandfather, father and granddaughter, a very special moment.



Jeff signs the inventoried school supplies. This list is for district officials.

From the Archives:

(originally published in the March 2004 issue of the *Mekong Express Mail*)

Eventful Pilatus Porter Flight from Switzerland to Saigon

by Les Strouse

In July 1965 I was tasked to go from Saigon to Stans, Switzerland to pick up a new Pilatus Porter. I was to arrive a few days before the airplane would be ready because in my “luggage” I would carry some radios for installation prior to the certification by the U.S. FAA. I departed Saigon for Bangkok where I would pick up my “luggage” before catching a Swissair flight to Zurich on the 27th of July.

Everything went as scheduled, and I did not even have a problem clearing customs in Zurich with my 65 pounds of excess baggage. The train ride to Stans was a real tourist thrill since I had never been to Switzerland before. The scenery was spectacular.

A representative from Pilatus, the manufacturer of the Porters, met me at the train station and took me to the hotel where I

checked in and unloaded my personal luggage. The rest went with me to the factory. After a tour of the factory I “met” my new airplane. It was ready except for the radios that I had hand carried and for the U.S. FAA certification that was to take place in two days time.

The FAA representative came from Frankfurt as scheduled, but the certification did not happen. What was supposedly a new airplane was really a remanufactured one and would require different paperwork. It had flown in the Swiss Army and had been wrecked. The FAA rep headed back to Frankfurt to get the required forms. I never did find out why he didn’t just call and have them sent.

On 2 August I test flew the airplane and the certification was ready on the 3rd. The airplane was certified and I had a ferry permit allowing me to fly daylight VFR only and at 10% over normal gross weight. I was ready to go! On the 4th I departed Stans for Zurich. I could not leave from Stans on an international flight and I had to fill the ferry system with fuel at Zurich. The stop at Zurich was purely technical and I was soon off for Naples. It was a very nice flight. I got to check out my ferry system, which was made up of three 55-gallon drums lying down in a cradle in the cabin of the airplane. There was a pilot-controlled pump connected to the interconnect between the wing tanks by clear plastic tubing.

The flight from Zurich to Naples took 3 hours and 58 min-



The picture of N184L depicts the same model of airplane and engine as the one that I ferried on the flight in 1965. I flew N184L when the Air Commandos did an evaluation of the Porters in 1963/64. Photo by the author

utes. I was met by a “follow-me” vehicle and escorted to the transient area, where a “gopher” met me, and who, for U.S. \$10 would handle all of my “formalities.” Without his services I would have incurred a considerable delay, so I paid. I decided to continue on to Beirut even though it would be a violation of my ferry permit to fly at night. Off I went into the setting sun.

Shortly after dark, I was passing over Cypress when I got a red warning light. There were two on the panel, one above the other. and the first time it flashed I was not sure whether it was my *oil low pressure* light or *fuel filter clogged* light. I soon found out as the *oil low pressure* light came on steady.

At that time, Cyprus had a notice to airmen (NOTAM) that prohibited civilian aircraft from landing there. Well, I had an emergency and so stated and was cleared to land. By this time

I was passing over Cyprus when I got a red warning light. There were two on the panel, one above the other and the first time it flashed I was not sure whether it was my *oil low pressure* light or *fuel filter clogged* light. I soon found out as the *oil low pressure* light came on steady.

my engine was feathered. I did NOT want to run my new engine without oil! I glided to a nice landing at Nicosia International Airport and was greeted by a weapons carrier load of British Military Police. They were polite and when they determined that I was not there to restart the war, they agreed to tow my airplane off

the runway. “Why don’t you use your engine?” they asked. I just told them that it quit running and that was why I was there in the first place. Once I had the airplane secured I went to the air traffic control center and had a message sent to Air America in Taipei explaining my circumstances. Then I went to the Ledra Palace Hotel, right on the green line. Hey, I just came from Saigon; I did not want to be in another war zone!

Next morning I called the Pilatus factory in Stans. Air America had already contacted them and a mechanic was en route, in a roundabout way. He had to go to Tel Aviv to get to

Porter (continues next page)

Nicosia. I cooled my heels until the next day, 7 August. The mechanic arrived and determined that the rear bearing seal was leaking and that we would need support from the Astzou engine factory in France. Another delay until the French engine specialist arrived—with one of the tools that was needed to pull the broken rear bearing. He was going to call France and have another one sent but I took the broken tool to the Cyprus Airways shop and had it repaired. The French mechanic threw it on the ground and said he would not use it. At this point, I got up on the maintenance stand and started to pull the rear bearing. Hey, I worked on my Dad's dozers and on my own Piper Tri Pacer so I did know a little bit about mechanic-ing! As soon as one of the bushings holding the bearing in squeaked, the mechanic took over. New bearing installed. By now it was 13 August and I was REALLY ready to go home.

I went to the U.S. Embassy... and I BSed my way to the CIA office, where I was told that they did NOT want to know that I was there and they were not about to get involved.

The test flight determined that we had accomplished nothing. Oil consumption was much too high to continue my ferry flight. A new engine was ordered. Okay, no civilian cargo flights into Nicosia. I went to the U.S. Embassy (they had a weekly support flight from Athens) and I BSed my way to the CIA office, where I was told that they did NOT want to know that I was there and they were not about to get involved. But I did get enough information to have the engine shipped to Tel Aviv and brought on an El Al flight to Cyprus.

Changed the engine and then discovered that we had a propeller problem. Electric prop! The new prop was called for, delivered, and installed. It was now the 21st of August and the test flight was okay. I forgot to mention that I was well over my 10-day visa upon arrival. The immigration guy told me that it would take 10 days to renew it. Well, it only took U.S. \$20 to ignore it. I was cleared to leave.

On the 22nd I left Nicosia for Damascus with an over flight of Beirut. When I called Beirut with my ETA, they insisted that I had to land. Legally I was supposed to be cleared for the over flight, but so it goes. I landed at Beirut after only 1 hour and 9 minutes of flight time. I was grossly overweight for landing but managed to squeak it on. I went to the tower and had to pay a U.S. \$2.50 landing fee and was then cleared to go to Damascus. I was off.

When you are ferrying a small airplane solo it is best to not get the trots. I learned much earlier in my career that Coke and bread can keep me sustained without fear of the dreaded two step.

It took all of 33 minutes to reach Damascus. Hey, look at all of the Russian airplanes on the lollipops off the side of the runway. Migs and Beagles! I did not expect this stop to be too friendly. "Park your airplane as close to the tower as you can." I put the wing tip in the door! I went up to the tower as instructed and they had my paperwork all made out for my

flight to Bahrain. All I had to do was sign it. They asked if I needed anything and I said that I would like to pick up some Coke and bread. Fingers snapped and a little Arab kid showed up. I gave him U.S. \$2 and within 10 minutes he was back with my Cokes and bread. (When you are ferrying a small airplane solo, it is best to not to get the trots. I learned much earlier in my career that Coke and bread could keep me sustained without fear of the dreaded two step.)

So, I was off to Bahrain. Well, not so fast. The temperature was over 100 degrees and my airplane was still overweight. Would you believe a 3,000-foot ground roll in a Porter and then a climb rate of about 100 feet per minute? I saw a lot of the 10,000-foot runway and also a lot of the desert off the end of it. The rest of the flight to Bahrain was uneventful.

On the 23rd of August I left Bahrain for Karachi. The clerk at the hotel gave me some Pakistani money in my change! It was hot, hazy, and rough. I arrived in Karachi planning on going on to New Delhi but was presented with a cable from New Delhi telling me to go from Karachi to Ahmedabad. No problem, I am flexible. I paid my landing fee with Paki money! Wrong move. It is illegal to bring Paki money into Pakistan. I said, "But the pilot who brought the last airplane through gave it to me and I did not know that it was illegal." They bought it and let me go. I later found out that an air freighter crew spent a couple of nights in jail for bringing Paki money in. Whew!

As I exited the airplane I had a rifle pointed at my nose and was told that I was under arrest for illegal entry into the country. Me, "I have a cable in my flight kit authorizing me to land here." Him, "I'm sorry but your airplane is impounded and you cannot get in it!" Off we go to the local jail.

Off we went to Ahmedabad, a short flight of only 2 hours 45 minutes after 7 hours and 43 minutes from Bahrain to Karachi. The airplane was a bit heavy but no problem. I was cleared to land and taxi to the transient area. I did so and as I exited the airplane, I had a rifle pointed at my nose and was told that I was under arrest for illegal entry into the country. Me, "I have a cable in my flight kit authorizing me to land here." Him, "I'm sorry but your airplane is impounded and you cannot get in it!" Off we go to the local jail.

The cops took me directly to a cell that was occupied by about 10 Indians. I was not booked and did not know if anyone would ever know that I was here. Me, "I want to call the American Embassy." Him, "American Embassy in New Delhi, cannot call." Five and a half hours later a well dressed man came and got me out of the cell and said we had to go to the airport to take care of customs and immigration formalities. No explanation whatsoever. The formalities took a couple of hours and by now it was early morning. Him, "I take you to the hotel, okay?" Me, "NO, I want to file a flight plan and go to Calcutta." Not really. I wanted to get back to Bangkok or

Porter (continues on page 8)

Porter (continued from page 7)



The Air America ramp at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airbase shows a Dornier DO28A in the foreground and immediately behind its tail is a Helio Courier. At the back edge of the ramp at left is an Aztazou Porter. In the foreground is an SYT (Sweet Young Thing). In the background are military C-123s. Photo and sly remark by the author.

Saigon but I had to go via Calcutta to get there.

I left as the sun was rising, looking at an 8 hour flight. About half the flight was clear of clouds but the weather in Calcutta was deteriorating. Still legal, but it would require an instrument approach. They had radar and Ground Controlled Approach (GCA) on request. "Make request one hour in advance," says the airway manual. Two hours out I requested GCA. Request approved, continue and call XXX checkpoint. One hour out I reconfirmed my GCA request and was again told to call XXX checkpoint. I did and was cleared for an Instrument Landing System (ILS) approach. I did NOT have ILS equipment on board so again asked for GCA. Voice says, "GCA not operational today." Weather was 200 foot ceiling with ½ mile visibility. I checked my charts and saw no high terrain or obstacles between me and the airport, so I made an ILS using only the course line indicator. I had no glide slope receiver so had to descend by guess and by God.

Everything worked out and I landed in very heavy rain. I could barely see the runway. I asked the tower for taxi instructions and was advised to taxi around until I saw a B-26 and park next to it. Luckily I did find it before I ended up in the mud off a taxiway somewhere. Now my problem was how to get to the terminal. Esso came to the rescue. The jet fuel truck pulled up and we refueled the airplane. I had to get up on the wings to fill the wing tanks, so I was soaked to the skin. But the job was done and the Esso truck took me to the terminal. The immigration officer refused to clear me until I dried myself off! I wrung out my handkerchief and wiped my face. He took my passport and gave me a "shore pass." "Pick up your passport before you leave." I didn't like that, but what choice did I have, and it had been a really long day, more than 18 hours of flying time since I checked out of the hotel in Bahrain. Combining that with the 5+ hours in jail and the other stuff, it was nearly 28 hours.

I got a taxi into Calcutta to the Grand Hotel. Calcutta at its

best is pretty dirty but when it is flooded it is really bad. The people who normally inhabited the streets were on the steps to keep out of the 12+ inches of water in the streets. We arrived at the Grand and the doorman put a plank out from the steps to the taxi. It was a great welcome and the place really looked good. I checked in and was given a voucher for two free drinks with my meal. I opted for a shower and bed. When I rose the next morning, I found that the Grand was anything but grand. Threadbare carpets. Chipped tile. Dirty staff uniforms. Coming in from the filthy streets and being overly tired led me to believe that I was in paradise.

Bangkok, and I was almost home. The AAM meet and greet crew were really staring at my airplane and I wondered why.

In the morning I had my Coke and bread breakfast and went to the airport. The city was still flooded. It was still raining. As I entered the terminal I heard an announcement that all flights were delayed due to weather. I decided that I would not delay my departure. Off I went, into the murk. I was not allowed to overfly Burma, so I set up for my offshore route. The weather was bad, very heavy rain, but until level off, I encountered no turbulence. When I reached my 7,000 foot cruising altitude, I looked back at my ferry system just in time to see it rise off the floor and slam back down. What a jolt—the only turbulence that I encountered during the whole 7 hour and 18 minute flight to Bangkok.

Bangkok, and I was almost home. The Air America (AAM) "meet and greet" crew was really staring at my airplane and I wondered why. When I got out I saw that the paint had peeled off the leading edges of all surfaces. What was a nice cream color airplane now had green, zinc chromate leading edges — quite UGLY. (BTW, AAM did not have the corporate paint job on the airplanes at that time.) It was now the 25th of August and I had been gone from home for almost a month. I got two days off in Bangkok while the airplane was inspected and given a thorough check. I got to EAT a REAL meal. I got to drink BEER. I got to sleep with a warm body next to me!

It was August 28, and I was going to go home. But AAM, in their infinite wisdom, would not let me fly over water. The shortest route between Bangkok and Saigon was off the coast of Cambodia. (Not permitted to fly over Cambodia.) My flight plan was Bangkok to Danang then on to Saigon—a long haul. Departure from Bangkok was uneventful except the AAM Ops people wanted to know why I had the ferry tanks filled. "...do not need that much fuel to go to Danang and there is lots of fuel there." As soon as I was out of Thai airspace there was basically no Air Traffic Control. I canceled my flight plan to Danang, filed for VFR direct to Saigon, and 6 hours and 35 minutes after departing Bangkok I landed at Saigon. HOME!

It was 31 days, 55 hours, and 54 minutes flying time. It had been a long haul, but the war continued and I was quickly put back to work flying N12450 which had had the paint touched up and really looked smart. It would be some time before it got its AAM feathers.



Growing Up With the Secret War

By Eugene D. Rossel

This article is excerpted from a much longer essay about Gene's colorful career, including details of his Air Commando experiences in other fascinating and little-understood areas of the world. We are grateful to Gene for his instructions to "Use as much as you like." We "liked" it all, but the MEM is small. Editor

Many of us in the Vietnam War were born during the depression, which limited our scope on the big picture. We were mostly concerned about the nearness of our families, which meant security, and our view of the world would have been about 50 miles from the flagpole. Whoever heard of Laos? My start was humble and never did I believe I would be involved in any of this stuff.

While attending St. Louis University to get a degree in electrical engineering, I joined the USAF Reserve Officer Training Command (ROTC); and got a commission as a 2nd Lt in the USAF when I graduated in 1959. I had orders to report to Keesler AFB, MS at the end of August 1959, to attend a six-month electrical engineers-only short course in radar. We all got our assignments when we arrived on base, not when we were ready to graduate, and I got Eglin AFB, Florida, which everyone wanted since it was an R&D base. All the others went to some remote radar site on a mountaintop in the U.S. or overseas, and I was stuck on a test site in God's country. Within a short time I was the radar officer for one of the newest height and search radars used in testing all aviation and missile test flights on the ranges at Eglin.

Top Secret Program

I was called in by personnel. They wanted to talk to me about a top secret program. They did not specify exactly what the program was, but I was asked six top secret questions. If I answered "no" to any one of them, I would not get into the program. It was right up my alley and all my answers were "yes." In October of 1961 they sent me to Randolph AFB, Texas for psychological and psychiatric testing. They had two tests to see how badly you wanted to get into the program. One was to stand barefooted in ice water and the other was to hold out your arms horizontal to the ground. The length of time you could do it would determine how much you wanted to get into the program.

In November and December we went to survival training at Stead AFB, Nevada. After interrogation training we went out for a week of escape and evasion and survival exercise. We next had to spend a week surviving in the mountains around Stead, where they had two or three feet of snow. We had to use snow shoes for travelling on the snow, and slept in a sleeping bag under parts of a parachute used as a tent. It got down to 25 below zero on our last night and they were going to take us out of the field, but instead waited till the next day. It was one of the coldest, most uncomfortable, and hungriest weeks I have ever experienced. I lost 19 pounds on the exercise.

Then on January 1, 1962, we reported in to Eglin Auxiliary Field Number Nine, known as Hurlburt Air Force Base, Florida, to become Air Commandos. I wanted to go to Vietnam since we had a detachment there and I was sent to replace my boss at Bien Hoa AB, South Vietnam (about 25 kilometers from Saigon) for 6 months. I left for there at the end of April and flew in a Boeing 707. This was really thrilling for me as this was my first overseas assignment and it was into a combat zone.

At the time, our presence was top secret because our pilots were flying combat missions, with a cover story that we were training Vietnamese pilots in our aircraft. This was absolutely not true. Our people flew the combat missions and they would have a Vietnamese in the aircraft in case it went down, and if newspaper people were around we could claim we were training the Vietnamese in the aircraft. Later they were grabbing young Vietnamese enlisted off the flight line and putting them in our aircraft. The young Vietnamese had probably only experienced



Bien Hoa base theater in March, 1966, taken from rear of BOQ. Photo by Bill Tilton

riding water buffalos before in their lives. They would get sick in the aircraft or grab hold of the control stick, which made it very dangerous. Sometimes at the end of one of these rides they would run away and go AWOL. The Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) then formed a cadre of 72 Vietnamese enlisted to put in the back of our aircraft. This covert operation went on to

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about July 1963. By then the whole world knew about it and it was declassified.

At Bien Hoa, we worked in old French hangars and had to get a lot of our parts made at the VNAF depot on base. We got about 25% of the parts we needed from the States and were using a lot of WW II and Korean War equipment. We lived in wooden hooches, normally four to a hooch, and our beds had mosquito netting to keep us from getting eaten alive. We did have electricity and running water for a shower. Each hut had sandbag bunkers on each corner, and when you looked at them they usually had rats as big as small cats in them. I would have been scared to jump in them if the Viet Cong (VC) ever attacked. The field in front of the hangars on the flight line was fenced off because when the French were there they mined part of the field. We kept our distance from the fences.

We were paid in script money (military payment certificates, or MPCs) so we couldn't trade on the black market. Food was lousy and what I missed most was fresh watermelon, milk, ice cream, and hamburgers. Booze was cheap. They used WWII milk machines and it produced a chalk-like milk that I couldn't drink. We were told not to eat the local food because of poor sanitation. Within two weeks after this warning I was eating at "Rosie," a small canteen next to the flight line. They had



Col. Harry Howton (left), commander of the United States Air Force Special Operations School at the time of its opening, cuts the ribbon for the schoolhouse 47 years ago. Back then, it was known as the Special Air Warfare School. (USAF courtesy photo)

fresh, hot French bread and butter and Vietnamese fried rice, which was delicious. We occasionally went down to Saigon in a bus with guns locked to the bus floor in case the Viet Cong attacked. I don't think we could ever have gotten to the guns if they had attacked.

[The morning after Eugene returned to Hurlburt Field from Vietnam, late in 1962, he was sent to Opa Locka, Florida, to support the Cuban Missile Crisis. Later he attended Squadron Officer School and had interesting and dangerous Air Commando assignments in Columbia and Panama. In 1966 he left Panama to attend an 8 month communication electronics course at Keesler AFB.]

In September 1966 I reported to the Special Air Warfare Center (SAWC), which is now called the Air Force Special

Operations Command. This was an exciting assignment. I was put on jump status and made 27 jumps from C-123s, C-47s, and UH-1 helicopters. I had a very good job since I could affect future communication plans for special operations forces. I initiated a committee for future communications and wrote a 231 page book on special operations communications, which had worldwide distribution. Even the CIA was interested in it. In this job I gave briefings to the SEALs, the USAF Communication School, and the USMC Communication School on SAWC communication equipment and operations. This was important because for many years the tactical forces could not communicate among the services, which is essential for joint operations. The primary reason was the type of equipment each service used.

A strange little country called Laos

When I was in high school in 1955 I read in the daily paper about this little country and the war that was going on in a small landlocked nation called Laos. Coming from a small town, I assumed I would never have the chance to see this exotic country that so intrigued and fascinated me. I was interested in the country because of the war, the Communists taking over the North, and the story about Doctor Tom Dooley and his efforts to treat the North Vietnamese fleeing to the South, most of whom were Vietnamese Catholics.

I had been in the USAF Air Commandos/Special Operations since 1961, and had been to Vietnam in 1962, and many of our people had been to Laos during this period. So we did get an inkling of something exciting going on over in this small country. In 1969 I had a choice of either going to the Pentagon or going to this strange place called Laos. The USAF Personnel Center was calling me to volunteer for Laos, since I was the only one in the Air Force at the time who was jump qualified in my particular specialty. They promised me if I volunteered that I would get my choice of assignment when I left. With all this in mind, I decided that Laos was my choice.

The assignment to Laos came under a program called Project 404 and the orders read "Dep Chief JUSMAAG Thailand," and not Laos, with civilian clothes authorized. This was a result of the Geneva Accord on Laos. We were to report in with our orders and no military uniform. They advised us when we got to Vientiane, we would be issued embassy IDs and our military IDs would be locked up in a safe. Furthermore, we would be assigned to the USAF Air Attaché Office, called AIRA, located in a compound in the middle of Vientiane, the capital of Laos. I was to find out that there was no jump slot in the program.

I arrived in country from Don Muang airport in Thailand, in an air conditioned C-47 operated by Air America. This was the first and only air conditioned C-47 that I had ever ridden in, and I had the opportunity to ride in quite a few different C-47s. Laos was divided up into 5 military regions, and the CIA was running the show. Air America and Continental Airlines would be our air carriers most of the time, with the AIRA C-47 and Raven O-1s occasionally available for a lift. We lived in the Air Attaché (AIRA) house, a small mansion for

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The Springs II: TLCB Reunion 2014

Location: Double Tree by Hilton, 1775 East Cheyenne Mountain Blvd., Colorado Springs, CO 80906.

Hotel # 719-576-8900. *For the discounted rate, you must mention that you are with the TLCB Reunion.*

Reservation information at:

<http://tinyurl.com/2014-TLCB-Reunion>, a special website for TLCB discounted reservations. Rates also apply three days before and after the reunion.

Registration Options:

- A. Go on line to WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.com, Reunion page, to register and pay fees using PayPal, or
- B. Mail the registration form with your payment to TLCB Reunion, PO Box 343, Locust Grove, GA 30248.

Leisure Time Information

If you have some free time during the reunion/annual meeting week, make plans to look around Colorado Springs and neighboring areas. It's a beautiful place. Talk it up with some of your brothers ahead of time and research what is available to do. The web is a great place to begin, and you may want to contact the Colorado Springs Convention and Visitors' Bureau for some ideas.

U.S. Air Force Academy, the Chapel, and the TLCB Plaque.

The academy is open to visitors daily. It is both a military organization and a university, and is celebrating its 60th anniversary. Due to the current force protection condition, visitors to the Air Force Academy must enter through the North Gate, accessed from Exit 156 on Interstate 25, 14 miles north of downtown Colorado Springs. North Gate visitor access hours will be 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Visit the beautiful chapel and the TLCB plaque in the memorial area. Check out the website for more info and updates. <http://www.usafa.af.mil/index.asp>

Places to See – Colorado Springs has a lot to offer. Check out the web, <http://www.visitcos.com/things-to-do-in-colorado-springs> to see some of the attractions, both natural and man-made. You can get a free visitor guide too. Here are some of the actual quotes from the website:

Attractions – With a wide variety of Colorado Springs attractions to see when in town, you will have plenty to keep you busy. Feed the giraffes at the America's only mountain

zoo, take a step back in time in an old ghost town or roar with dinosaurs. The region features more than 55 incredible tourist attractions including Pikes Peak, Garden of the Gods, and the U.S. Olympic Training Center.

Casinos – In the nearby city of Cripple Creek, you can find more than 15 casinos that feature new high stakes gaming. The historic town is an exciting place to heat up the slots or test your poker face.

Whitewater Rafting – Colorado Springs whitewater rafting near Canon City is outdoor adventure at its best! The Arkansas River is the most popular river for rafting in the U.S. No matter what your skill level/budget, the whitewater rafting outfitters have an exciting trip for you.

Parks & Trails – Parks in Colorado Springs are a great place to take a stroll, see great geological formations, or spend time in nature. If you're an outdoor enthusiast you'll love the many Colorado Springs area parks which offer a variety of outdoor activities: jogging, rappelling, viewing fossil beds, or leisurely strolls. Many are open to the public and free of charge.

Train Rides – Experience scenic beauty and historic travel from a bygone era with train rides on some of the most revered scenic train rides in the U.S.

Shopping – Enjoy one-of-a-kind boutiques, discount stores, world-famous chains for fashionistas and leisurely strollers. Old Colorado City, Manitou Springs, Monument, and downtown Colorado Springs offer a unique charm all their own. Larger malls are great for picking up essentials or that one special item.

Old Colorado City Art Walk – Take this self-guided visual arts walking tour featuring art galleries and open artist studios along W Colorado Ave, between 23rd and 27th streets. You can see and purchase as many as 100 art pieces in just one location in these art galleries. They and generous sponsors bring art enthusiasts a monthly Art Walk, free of charge. See more at: <http://www.colorado.com/events/old-colorado-city-artwalk#sthash.LMUHszJ7.dpuf>



A high-quality shirt with embroidered logo

This year's reunion shirt is a real "collectible," with its "15th Anniversary" lettering and stunning logo of the Air Force Academy chapel. And for the first time it's got long sleeves. Order blank is on the reverse of the reunion registration form, or you can order online at www.TLC-Brotherhood.com.



Champa Flowers (continued from page 2)

threw back his head and tried to laugh. It was a pitiful excuse for the real thing, but it caused her to stop in her tracks and stare. She was still four feet away. He kept edging forward, his arms extended to her.

"Come on, Nga," he said, hoping he sounded like the buffoon she had played him for. "You know I can't understand Vietnamese. Tell me why you're so angry with me. You know I love you." He almost choked on the words, but he'd tell her anything to keep her attention focused on him. Two feet to go.

"Love?" She spat the word at him as if it were an obscenity. "You pig! You fascist! Don't you understand? I have led you to your death!"

Smiling foolishly, he touched her fingertips.

She saw her danger in his eyes then, but she was just a heartbeat too slow. He got her by the wrist and pulled her tightly against him. She opened her mouth to cry out, but his other hand clamped down on her throat and squeezed her voice to an anguished croak. He bent his face over her, feigning a kiss.

He sensed some sort of motion behind him, near the bamboo grove. His spine crawled at the thought of the rifle bullet which might already be flying toward him. He had move NOW!

Maintaining the charade of a kiss, he lifted her bodily and began moving toward the edge of the jungle in front of him. She tried to struggle, but another vicious squeeze on her throat froze her against him again.

He had to keep his ambushers from guessing his intentions; keep them immobilized until he got to the tree line. Only how the hell could he do it?

The idea seemed outlandish at first, but it might conceivably work. His ambushers had probably been living without women for months. Anyway, it was all he could think of. He shifted the hand he had around Nga's waist until he felt the thin woven copper belt that held her Lao skirt. He closed his fist on it and twisted. He felt it break in his hand. He tossed it aside. The Lao skirt loosened. He yanked at its waistband and felt it start to slide down her thighs. Pray God his audience was as horny as he hoped they were!

He rolled his eyes along the edge of the tree line ahead of him. At first he could see nothing. Then, ten yards to his left, bushes moved, and a brown face appeared through the leaves, its eyes glued to Nga's bared thighs. Below the face, the barrel of an AK-47 poked out into the clearing. Jesus, an assault rifle!

Not letting himself think about the gun, he carried Nga forward for another ten feet, looking feverishly for signs of another ambusher. If there were another one, closer to the stream, he really wouldn't have a prayer.

He couldn't see anyone but the brown face with the AK. Now he was less than five feet from the trees. Right ahead was a very large hardwood of some sort, which formed part of the jungle's edge and, behind it for a short space, the brush was less dense. If he could get in there, behind the tree, it would protect him from fire. It was a very faint hope and a very temporary refuge, but it was absolutely all he had.

Nga was semi-conscious now from lack of oxygen, but feeling her skirt fall around her knees, she began to kick again.

He was almost there. He abruptly threw her to the ground, his body on top of hers. They landed hard on the rain-softened turf. He heard the wind whistle out of her lungs. He rolled over on his left side, pulling her with him, so that her body was between him and the clearing, released her throat and grabbed the waist of her underpants with both hands. He yanked them down her thighs with a motion that brought him to his knees and half-turned toward the trees.

The big hardwood was no more than a yard away. He launched himself for it with all his strength, every nerve screaming in anticipation of the awful impact of bullets. He brushed by the tree and dived headlong into the hollow in the vegetation behind it. He heard the first rounds thump into the tree a micro-second before his ears filled with the roar of AKs firing on full automatic fire. The sight of Nga's beautiful ass had diverted them just long enough for him to get to cover!

He wasn't covered from all sides, however. Slugs were whipping through the leaves close over his head. Maybe from Brown Face. An instant later, the roar of automatic rifle fire not thirty feet away showed him his error. THAT was brown face. The rounds lashing the vegetation above him must be coming from the guy he'd seen across the creek.

As close to the earth as he could get himself, he wormed his way deeper into the vegetation. Vines caught at him and thorns gouged him, but, thank God, there was some kind of small animal trail that led away from the tree into the bush, which let him wriggle his way deeper into the jungle. Above him, bullets were still tearing at the leaves, but the level of fire had dropped a lot.

That encouraged him until he realized that it must mean the ambushers were on the move, running from their original positions toward his present location. The thought was devastating. He'd been lucky as hell to make it this far, but as outnumbered as he was, his liberty was likely to be very short-lived. All they had to do was surround the area he was in and beat the bushes until they found him.

Viciously banishing that thought from his mind, he kept wriggling, deeper and deeper into the jungle. It was incredibly dense. Had he been standing, or even crawling on his knees, he couldn't have moved at all.

Suddenly he heard a shout behind him, and the sound of firing ceased. From an incredible din, the jungle fell into a deathly silence. Ivorson froze. Brown Face was close enough to hear him, if he continued thrashing through the undergrowth.

He tried to control his panting and strained his ears for any rustling of leaves that might indicate the approach of Brown Face. He could hear nothing but insects.

He rolled his eyes around as far as he could without moving his head, but he could see nothing but leaves on either side. He looked ahead of him. Beyond his torn and bleeding hands, the tunnel, made by whatever animal it was, continued. It was a couple of feet wide at the widest. He couldn't move further without making noise. Until they started firing again, all he could do was lie here.

"Monsieur Ivorson!" The voice was so close behind him

Champa Flowers (continues next page)

that he almost cried out in fright. "Come out, monsieur," the voice continued. "This is quite useless. You are completely surrounded. You cannot possibly escape." The words were spoken in familiar, chirping, sing-song French. The voice belonged to Tran van Cao.

Ivorson was paralyzed. Not so much by the presence of Tran van Cao as by the magnitude of his own incredible blindness and folly. He had made himself Nguyen van Huu's prisoner here in this few acres of jungle, as surely as if he had walked into the North Vietnamese Embassy and sat down in a chair. What was worse, between Cao and Nga, he had been in Huu's clutches from his first day in Laos.

Nga. His mind still couldn't fully adjust to that reality. She had played him like a violin; made an absolutely, unmitigated ass of him. He could hear her voice now, faintly, speaking in Vietnamese. What wouldn't he give for one clear shot at that bitch!

He mentally shook himself. If he didn't quit bemoaning his past blunders and start thinking, she was the one who would have the clear shot.

He tried to recall the burst of firing that followed his dive into cover. It seemed to him that there hadn't been more than five or six weapons involved. Plus Brown Face, who'd fired later. Say seven, plus Nga, but she didn't have a weapon. Cao might be armed, but only with a hand gun. His right arm couldn't have healed to the point of firing an AK.

Eight altogether, then. Six of them armed with automatic assault rifle, against Ivorson and his pathetic little PPK. The PPK! Jesus, did he still have it? He could feel the holster against his skin. He arched his back slightly and felt the butt touch his lower spine. Very quietly and carefully, he brought one of his hands back along his body to the hem of his sports shirt. He tugged it upward until his fingers closed on the butt of the gun. He pulled it from the holster and returned both hand and gun to a position ahead of him, pointing down the tiny game trail he was in.

Now he could hear a number of voices, including Cao's and Nga's, and they were speaking in Lao. His ambushers must be a Pathet Lao unit. That might make a lot of difference before the day was out. Ivorson's experience with the VC had left him greatly impressed with both their courage and their cruelty. The Lao were not noted for either quality.

The voices fell silent, and for a time he lay there, straining his senses for some clue as to what was happening; not daring to move for fear that they were listening as hard as he.

Then, behind him, he heard a faint rustling of leaves. He cocked his head, first to one side and then to the other, trying to isolate and locate the sound. Finally, he understood. Someone was very stealthily slithering toward him along the game trail!

His mouth went dry with the adrenalin surge that accompanied the realization. Whoever was coming would catch up with him in a lot less time than it had taken Ivorson to get where he was, because he had enlarged the trail by his passage. For that same reason, he couldn't possibly outrun his pursuer, and, anyway, the noise of the attempt would bring a concentration of automatic weapons fire upon his position. He had only one option: to kill his pursuer before he could get off a shot of his

own. Of course, that, too, would bring counter-fire, but the brush was thick. Maybe it would miss him.

The furtive sounds in the underbrush were getting closer. He needed to get himself in position to fire back down the trail behind him, but the narrow tunnel which formed the game trail was tightly encased in brambles and vines. Any movement at all was difficult, and silence much more so.

Very quietly, he pulled his arms back underneath his chest and shoulders and then tried to roll over on his back. It didn't work. The additional bulk of his arms pinned him against the green roof of the tiny tunnel he was in.

The sounds behind him were becoming very clear now. In just a few more seconds, his pursuer would be in position to put a 7.62mm round clear through Ivorson, from bottom to top.

The thought moved him to Herculean effort. He put both hands out ahead of himself again, then attempted to roll over on his back. A dozen thorns drew blood, but he was able to effect the maneuver.

Now, on his back, he pulled his gun hand back down, wriggling and undulating his shoulders to slip the weapon past his face. He had almost succeeded when his wrist got caught by a slender vine. The muzzle of the automatic was pressed firmly against his own ear. He carefully took his finger off the trigger and moved the weapon back above his head an inch or so. The vine released him, and he tried again. This time the gun slid by his face unimpeded.

The rustling in the undergrowth behind his feet sounded very close indeed. Still working his gun hand down to his side, he pulled the toes of his sneakers apart and raised his head as high as he could, trying to see down the length of his body and through the narrow tunnel in the foliage behind him.

It was very hard to do. The view was obscured by leaves and vines, and a small branch was pushing down on his head. He gritted his teeth and shoved the branch up with his skull. It gave a couple of inches. Now he could see better.

But not very far. A few feet beyond his shoes, the tunnel bent in the undergrowth. The sounds of approach were completely obvious now. As Ivorson strained to hold his head up against the downward pressure of the branch, he saw the muzzle and foresight of an AK-47 slide into view around the bend in the game trail. His pursuer was pushing his weapon ahead of him, ready for a shot.

Ivorson's automatic was still only waist high. Its muzzle was caught on the trunk of a slender tree which formed one side of the tunnel, and his elbow was wedged into the matted wall of vine which composed the other side. He strained to push the elbow deeper into the vines and free the gun barrel.

The barrel of the AK appeared, and then a shock of straight black hair came into view at the edge of the bend. Its owner raised his head to look in front of him, and his eyes locked with Ivorson's.

Ivorson read the surprise and fear in them. The Pathet Lao gave a violent heave, and the muzzle of the AK began to swing toward Ivorson.

With a furious effort, Ivorson jerked his elbow, pointed the pistol between his spread feet, and pulled the trigger three times, as fast as he could.



Your next chance to help the kids (and win a quilt!)

by Bob Wheatley

Summer is racing by, and very soon the TLC Brotherhood will convene in Colorado Springs for our 14th annual reunion since our incorporation. Each year, beginning with our 2000 reunion, Rosie Wheatley of the TLC Sisterhood has fashioned a hand-made quilt to be raffled off during the reunion banquet. This year's queen-sized quilt is made from various fabrics of red, white, and blue and will be finished with a special TLC Brotherhood patch depicting the iconic Air Force Academy Chapel. It will serve as a beautiful memento of our 2014 Brotherhood reunion for the lucky person whose name is on the winning ticket. As always, one hundred per cent of the proceeds will go to the TLCB Assistance Fund to help finance our various assistance projects in Thailand and Laos.

If you have not yet purchased your tickets there is still time to do so. If you do not plan to attend the reunion, that is not a problem, for you need not be present at the drawing to win. Enclosed in this issue of the MEM is a sheet of ten raffle tickets. You may purchase any number of tickets, and if you wish more than ten, you may simply copy the sheet. Fill in the tickets with your contact information and return with your check made in the amount of \$2.00 per ticket (\$20 per sheet of ten) to:

TLCB Quilt Raffle
P.O.Box 343
Locust Grove, Ga., 30248

Please make your check payable to TLC Brotherhood, Inc., and include a note in the memo line, "Quilt Raffle." Should you wish to purchase a large number of tickets, we will make it

very easy for you to do so. Simply send your check with a note detailing how many tickets you want, and we will print them and enter them in the drawing on your behalf. Your generosity in the past has benefited countless numbers of needy, deserving children in Thailand and Laos. Let us all pitch in and make this year's raffle another resounding success in the name of our Brothers who did not return home with us.



Rosie Wheatley hard at work on this year's quilt for raffling to raise Assistance funds. This raffle is an important source of revenue every year. Keep at it, Rosie! Photo Bob Wheatley.

Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The members listed below joined between the last issue of the MEM and the 8th of August. You can find more information on our website database. The Mekong Express Mail wishes you all a hearty "Welcome Home."

Member	Branch	First	Last	City	State	Email
1605	USMC	Charles	Junek	Hattiesburg	MS	CPashoppe1@aol.com
1606	USAF	Timothy	Cassady	Greenville	SC	Bocassady@hotmail.com
1607	USAF	William	Braund	San Antonio	TX	WilliamB@satx.rr.com
1608	USAF	Jesse	Ellis	Redding	CA	JDEWalrus@aol.com
1609	USA	David	Lewis	Newton	NC	lewisgeothermal@bellsouth.net
1610	USA	Robert	Morris	Samut Sakhon	Thailand	Resp.TH63@Gmail.com
1611	USAF	Gary	Parker	Rose Hill	KS	mqm107@aol.com
1612	USAID	Harold	Lierly	Alamosa	CO	xet@gojade.org
1613	USAF	Duane	Johnson	Denver	CO	VndJohn@aol.com
1614	USA	Michael	Frazier	Indialantic	FL	mike.frazier29@Gmail.com
1615	USA	Byron	McDaniel	Frisco	TX	ChiefBEM@Yahoo.Com
1616	USAF	Guy	Dube	Arlington	TX	GPDube@ATT.net
1617	USN	Charlie	Roongsang	Skokie	IL	none given
1618	USAF	Blecher	Bill	Beebe	AR	Billblecher@gmail.com

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the officers attached to AIRA. It was a very exciting assignment with a lot of combat to go with it. We worked with the Lao three-headed government, the CIA, the Russians, General Vang Pao, and others.

Captain Kong Le and other charms of Laos

In January of this year, 2014, Mike Thompson sent me this: "This is to inform that the former General Kong Le of the Kingdom of Laos has passed away over this weekend. He was a great leader and a brave soldier and a great general who has fought for justice and freedom in Laos. May he rest in peace. Let us remember him in our thoughts and prayers."



With high ideals, Kong Le installed Souvanna Phouma as prime minister of Laos and tried to reform the government. He went into exile in 1966.

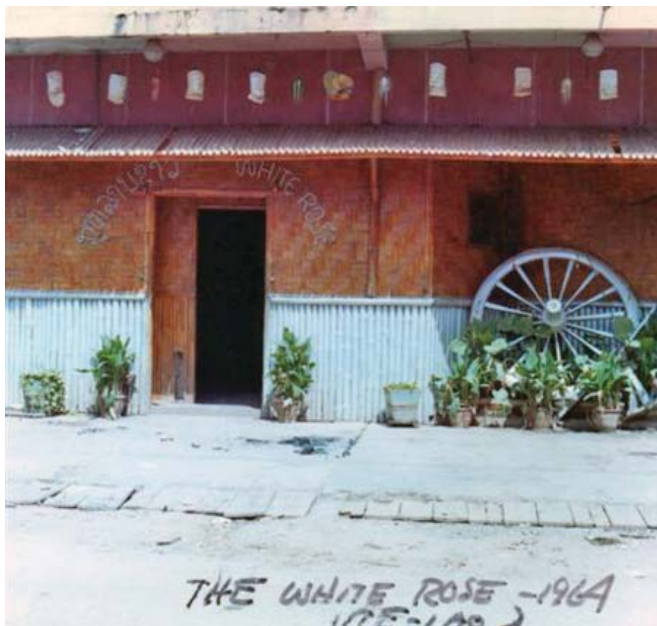
Captain Kong Le, a young Lao Neutralist paratrooper, who became very famous in 1960 by taking over Laos in a coup, died on January 18,

2014 in a Paris hospital. When I read about Kong Le in 1960 I was completely amazed that a young captain could take over the country of Laos. He was in the news frequently in 1960. He got his military training in the Philippines, lived in the U.S. for a while, and later went to France.

I never got the chance to meet Kong Le, but many of my fellow Air Commandos had met him during Operation Farmgate before he left in 1966. I did find the country and its people very interesting and was involved and amazed by its war, its Geneva Convention rules, the U.S. covert operations, The CIA, Air America, the news reporters trying to find out what was going on, and its three-headed government. The Russian involvement and the USAF Air Attaché (AIRA) and his relationship with the Russian attaché, who looked at you as if he was measuring you for a coffin, just seemed to be from an exciting movie. When the Russians asked for pictures of the road the Chinese were building into Laos, it caused plenty of hot message traffic between AIRA and the White House. The communist Pathet Lao (PL) was another thing, as they were able to live in the capital of Vientiane, about a block from the U.S. Embassy, because of the three-headed government of Laos. But if you went outside the capital for fifteen miles, they might kill you. It was a period of my life I will never forget. We worked with the Lao military, the embassy, USAID, Air America, Continental Air Services, and hosted many visitors, many of whom wanted to see the "White Rose." There was another special place called "Madame Lulus," and both places were written up in Playboy and other magazines.

AIRA, Gen Vang Pao and LS-20A

Gen Vang Pao (VP) was the military region commander and Hmong commander for the Long Tieng area. I traveled all over the country in my job and in particular to Long Tieng, which was known in the papers as the CIA Secret Operating Base in Laos and as LS-20A (A for Alternate; Vientiane was LS-20). The most exciting place to go to was 20A, and I went there almost weekly. Every newsman wanted to go there and one



At left, the fabled White Rose in 1964. Below, another Vientiane legend was the Purple Porpoise, operated by an Australian name "Monty." These were favorite hangouts for Air America regulars and visiting officials. Photos from Mac Thompson.



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almost lost his life getting in there.

You had to get out of 20A before 6 PM because of the lack of lights and navigation aids. I got out three times right at 6 PM and when I arrived back at Vientiane, the Pathet Lao were sending rockets into the runway and housing. On another occasion I got out at 6 p.m., and later that night the Pathet Lao infiltrated the base and used Bangalore torpedoes to blow up or damage



Air America C-46 evacuating Lao refugees from LS-20A, also known as Long Tieng, in May of 1975 as Communist forces overran the country. Refugees are lined up behind the seriously overloaded aircraft, awaiting their turn to leave. Photo by Les Strouse.

about six of our aircraft. Vang Pao forces killed the infiltrators and captured three. We received word that VP questioned them till early morning and when they got all the information they needed, VP and his men were supposed to have cut the hearts out of the men and eaten them, in their belief that by doing this they got the strength and power of these men.

The real guy in charge was the person who had the money and controlled Long Tieng with the power of a U.S. general. This was a young Controlled American Source (CAS), a CIA agent named Tom Cline. Our people at the AOC took operational orders from both men and also occasionally from the AIRA who tried to get some input. The AIRA had the power to assign and withdraw personnel from the Air Operations Centers (AOCs), which made him a player in the fiefdom. There was also a USAID unit called Requirements Operations (RO), who did not have a great deal of power, but had the bucks for ordnance and other little goodies. They could say “no” to some things, but if someone got a little carried away with his power, the chief could resolve it and also reassign or get rid of the few that occasionally created problems because of their assumed power.

The Ravens

We had Forward Air Controllers (FACs) at five AOCs: Vientiane, Pakse, Savannakhet, Long Tieng (20A), and Luong Prabang. The FACs, with the famous “Raven” callsign, flew small Cessna O-1 aircraft and wore no uniforms. They carried their ID card in their wallet and carried a military hat in their pocket, in hopes they would not be shot as spies. They would fly to locate the enemy, and then call in the fighters to strike them.

Air America used to fly in USAF technicians from Udorn,

Thailand each day to maintain the aircraft at some of the AOCs or when the area was in danger of attack. The technicians in civilian clothes would be given different names for the aircraft-boarding list each day, because of the Geneva Accord of 1962. The technicians at 20A lived on site and every 30 days we would rotate them back to Vientiane, because Vang Pao had a rule that if you touched one of his girls you had a wife. Everyone believed it. When they arrived in Vientiane most of them headed for Lulus, a specialty house, or the White Rose where the madams would take care of their needs.

I finally left Laos and the Secret War in 1970 and spent

the next eight years in my dream assignment: Torrejon AB, just outside Madrid. The reason I stayed so long involved my adoption of three children there, and my punishment was assignment to Los Angeles Air Force Station in support of the Space Shuttle program. The shop was rank heavy, and the commute was 55 miles, to a place I could afford in Chino. This was followed by an assignment to the Ballistic Missile Office at Norton AFB, California. Finally I retired from USAF in June of 1987 and later worked as an engineer and a VP of Marketing in the defense contracting industry. Finally at age 70 I really retired, and now have a kick-back lifestyle, mostly on the computer and traveling. I still live in Chino.

Eugene spends a lot of his computer time discussing those Secret War days.



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