

MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE THAILAND-LAOS-CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC. VOLUME 16, ISSUE 1

The Adventures of MacAlan Thompson

as told by the man, Mac, who was there the whole time

1964, How I Ended Up In Thailand

I was at Ft Belvoir, Virginia from November '63 to early February '64 for Engineer Officers Basic Course (EOBC). After EOBC, I had my orders in hand for Ft Devens, Massachusetts, for my two year ROTC active duty tour. Before leaving Oregon, I'd packed my car with all my hunting, camping, skiing, and skydiving gear, prepared to settle in.

Sometime in November or December, a guy came down from Personnel in the Pentagon and announced that anyone who wasn't really pleased with his current orders, and who could find another 2nd Lieutenant to swap, just let him know by a December deadline. Since we were all newbies except for the OCS guys who were steps ahead, and all had the same MOS 1331, no problem... except finding that someone to swap with.

I put my 3x5 card up on the bulletin board and stood by. One guy came up and wanted to swap with Korea. In January. Sez I, *no way*. Another guy came up with Germany, but that was for three years. I put him on hold.

About a day before the deadline another guy came looking for me, pleading that he was from about 50 miles from Ft Devens and that his wife was seven months pregnant. The assignment he wanted to swap for? Camp Friendship, Korat, Thailand! Of course I didn't know where in the hell Korat might be, but I did know the map for Thailand. Given the timing, with the deadline staring us in the face, we got on the phone to the guy at the Pentagon and said, "Swap us!" He did, and here I still are, 50 years later.

November 1965:

How I Ended Up In Laos

I was discharged from the Army in early November and back home in Lake Oswego, Oregon where I stayed in the furnished basement of my parents' place. At the end of the month, two former roommates from my earlier time at Oregon State U drove through from Anchorage. They were headed to Mexico City for the university there and they asked if I'd like to come along. *Sure, sez I; nothing else to do for the moment.*

First night was spent down in Ashland, Oregon, sleeping in my friend's '57 Ford station wagon. Breakfast in the morning was at the Southern Oregon College of Education's cafeteria.

On paying the tab, I noticed a 3x5 card on the bulletin board with job info, and wrote it down: International Voluntary Services, IVS.

It was on to Sacramento for a couple of days, then down to Los Angeles, where I about ran out of money. My two friends drove on south, while I caught a bus back to Portland, Oregon, and started writing job applications. I sent

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2nd Lt MacAlan Thompson, USA, 1964, at Korat. All article photos furnished by the author.

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Editor's Notebook:

The March 2015 issue of MEM has three feature articles that capture a great deal of the spirit of the Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood. On page 1 is the story of the guy I think of as "Our man in Southeast Asia," Mac Thompson, told with the wry touch we've come to expect from his accounts of visiting the sites of TLCB's Assistance Program. Phil French's account of his "Adventure to Phu Wua Mountain" (page 3) is a demonstration that there was ample opportunity for fun and games back in those days. On the other hand, "Dozer at Alpha, a FAC's Narrow Escape" (page 13), by Bob Hippler, reminds us that there really was a war going on, with some at great risk every day. Of course, as noted in the last paragraph, some faced those risks with a perhaps necessary dose of "gallows humor."

Shifting gears, members who don't regularly visit the TLCB website might want to take a look at it. Jerry Karnes, our communications director, is conducting a member poll of our opinions about TLCB's many features and services. Go to—

<http://tlc-brotherhood.com/forum/index.php?topic=4030.0>

Lastly, in this issue are two articles about the 2015 Annual Reunion and Meeting, in the Boston, Massachusetts, area, September 10 to 13. I certainly look forward to seeing many of you there.

John Harrington

MEM Editor

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How can we reach you?

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

Artifacts from the Past



Here are a couple of items Mac Thompson sent us, to accompany his article for this issue (page 1). The boot above is what the Army issued the "instructors" at Korat in 1964. He surmises this was post-WW II, but definitely "pre Vietnam." The shoulder patch shown at right was made by some of the Lao Air Force guys who were refugees in Udorn in 1975-1976, depicting their refugee flight from Laos to the USA, and the "missing man" formation for those RLAF people left behind at that time.



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Adventure to Thailand's Phu Wua Mountain

by Phil French

I trust most MEM readers will agree that the hunting trip recounted here was a unique adventure. While a few might conclude it was a heck of a waste of taxpayer dollars, there is a positive connection of compassion.

The genesis of this trip was an on-going USAF support effort with two American Catholic missionary priests of the Redemptorist Order, Father Michael Shea and Father Richard Strass. These two dedicated gentlemen had already lived and worked in the remote, extreme northeast corner of Thailand for over three years. Following contact with the missionaries by Capt Al Ryan, the Catholic chaplain at Nakhon Phanom (NKP), the relationship with the USAF began; medical supplies and many other useful goods were delivered to the church compound at Huei Lep Mur and other villages.



Father Michael Shea, left, and Father Richard Strass. Photos for this article furnished by the author.

Phil Silvers' character, Sgt Ernie Bilko, of 1950s TV. Bilko was a real "operator," as was Aaron, in spades.

Aaron arranged for our "ride" on this trip, an HH-3, #230, whose call sign was "Jolly One-Seven." This Jolly Green displayed the parachute symbols of 31 downed aircrew saves to its credit at that point in its illustrious career. Aaron had also "acquired" brand new military issue sleeping bags, hammocks, ponchos, jungle fatigues, radios to maintain contact with NKP, and enough cases of C-rations to feed a small army for at least a month.

The purpose of this hunting trip was to 'harvest' some large game animals to help add a more protein-rich boost to the diets

Major Tommy Wardlow, an A-1 pilot whose flying tour included half with the 602nd SOS as a "Firefly" and a "Sandy" and half with the 22nd SOS as a "Zorro." Wardlow's connection was having somehow traded auto engines from the Navy for a few dozen cots! He'd helped deliver those cots on an HH-3 to a health clinic operated by the missionaries.

Apparently, the author's ticket to being invited on the trip were my modest Thai language skills (which have mostly evaporated), and my keen interest in hunting.

Around noon on March 11, 1969 we launched. Our HH-3, Jolly Green 17, leveled off at 1,000' Mean Sea Level (average of 400' above the average terrain in Northeast Thailand) and 100 nautical miles/hour indicated airspeed, as we headed out of NKP on a north-northwesterly heading. Our first destination was the village of Ban Huai Lep Mu near the Thai-Lao border at the Mekong River.

The villagers were expecting our arrival, and the landing zone was crowded with curious onlookers of all ages. It was to be a



"Jolly Green 17," an HH-3, ready for liftoff to Phu Wua from NKP. Note 31 aircrew rescue "parachute" symbols behind cockpit window. Jolly 36 also had a remarkable rescue career and was the aircraft that crash-landed into Son Tay Prison.

Phu Wua continues on page 4

of nearby village folks. It was hoped we would be able to shoot a gaur, which at over 6' height at the shoulder and weighing as much as 3,000 lbs., is the largest of wild oxen. Other similar, though smaller, bovine species such as banteng were thought to inhabit the dense cover of our hunting area, too. It is no surprise that Phu Wua translates to 'Cow Mountain' in English.

So, in early March of 1969 this hunting trip was coordinated with the missionary priests and outfitted entirely by a very enterprising USAF Para rescue Specialist ('P.J.'). Tech Sgt Aaron Farrior. Aaron served with Det. 1 of the 40th Air Rescue & Recovery Service and retired as a Chief Master Sgt. As he put this trip together, I couldn't help but liken him to the



Phu Wua continued from page 3

brief pickup, so the engines were not shut down. Fathers Mike Shea and Dick Strass boarded Jolly Green 17, as did three more men—Thais of Lao ethnicity. We quickly launched from Ban Huai Lep Mu and took up a heading toward the elevated Phu Wua area—a distinctly high, rugged, rocky, and heavily forested area reaching to within about five miles of the Lao border. At 1,473ft., it really stood out against the 600' plains below.

The grand plan during this leg of the flight was for the Thai guides to help spot a special campsite in the prime hunting area where they'd been many times before. An unforeseen glitch occurred, though. They had never been airborne before, so the piercing noise of the engines and rotors, turbulence, and visual perspective from several hundred feet above the terrain thoroughly rattled them; they became quite disoriented. Finally, Father Dick Strass moved up to the cockpit to confer with the pilots, and they settled on a suitable LZ. Strongly influencing that choice was the brief chance sighting of a black panther (a melanistic leopard) running across the flat top of a rocky area out in the open below us. What a rare and beautiful sight!

We quickly offloaded our mountain of gear and proceeded to set up camp. Everyone scouted around for pairs of trees that were the correct distance apart needed to attach our hammocks. Believe me, the Thai guides were greatly relieved to be back on terra firma and away from that infernal helicopter!

The plan was for Jolly Green 17 to pick us up four days later. Toward evening every day the USAF *farangs*—Aaron Farrow, Tommy Wardlow, and I—linked up with a different Thai guide and headed out to hunt as pairs fanning out in different directions. I carried a heavy-caliber double rifle which I'd purchased in Nairobi, Kenya, four years earlier and had packed carefully, disassembled, in my duffel bag for the trip from the CONUS



Above, Thai guides return from hunt with a "muntjac," also known as "barking deer." Below, results of a successful monkey hunt. Aaron Farrow was also on this hunt.



to NKP. I'd brought it in hopes of just such a hunting trip. As I recall, the fathers didn't hunt much, but hung out in camp a good bit, and did some cooking to supplement the C-rations.

On the second night of hunting (yes, night, with spotlights!), my guide and I heard the distinctive sound of elephants grunting, wheezing, and breaking off tree branches. We crept toward the herd. Honestly, I had very serious reservations about shooting an Asian elephant, even if the opportunity at a large bull with heavy tusks had presented itself. Knowing that elephants were quite sacred to the Thais, and concerned about a legal issue, I was apprehensive, to say the least. This was not East Africa, after all! I was relieved when the elephants heard or winded us. They moved off quickly, and we continued in another direction in search of other game.

After three long days and nights of fairly rigorous, tiring hunting treks, Wardlow and I hung out in camp one day resting and chatting with Father Mike and Father Dick. Meanwhile, Aaron Farrow and the Thai guides, who were very savvy woodsmen, went out on a hunt. The main guide was an impressive fellow named Pho Lit; the other two guides were each very fit 62 year-olds. They returned late in the afternoon with a barking deer (muntjac), five large monkeys, and



Author Phil French preparing to catch a nap in his carefully hung hammock. One night Phil rolled over and fell out, so he says he is "Not a hammock fan."

Continued next page.

a newborn monkey.

Farrior recently told me he'd inadvertently shot the mother. Upon hearing the little one up in the very tall tree Aaron coaxed Pho Lit, and bribed him with a lot of baht, to scale the tree and make the rescue; he made it back down with the tiny monkey wrapped in his pawcowma, a one-piece wrap-around garment, also used as a pack sack. We adopted the newborn and spoon fed it "milk"—coffee creamer packets in water. Sgt Farrior intended to give it a proper upbringing at his hootch back at NKP. He related to me in a recent phone conversation that the monkey was quite well behaved and was allowed to run loose in his room..



Returning "Jollies" conducting training lifts to justify the trip, prior to landing at Phua Wua.

Farrior also adopted a black dog which he aptly christened "Tiger Bait." I'm not sure how we acquired this pooch (maybe the Thais brought him along from Ban Huai Lep Mu), but I do know we tied him out one night several hundred yards from camp—hoping to lure a tiger or leopard in for a shot. The mutt put up a terrible fuss; he may have sensed the approach of a hungry leopard. He eventually chewed through his tie-down rope and high-tailed it back to camp, no

doubt greatly relieved that our cruel and dubious scheme did not work. The story ends well in that Tiger Bait lived happily ever after back at NKP.

Though we still had enough C-rations to last several more days, supplemented with monkey meat, of course, Jolly Green 17 appeared as pre-arranged to extract us. Actually, it was a flight of two. Before landing to pick us up, they performed some practice lifts with their hoists nearby, thus filling some training squares to help justify this trip nearly 100 miles from their home base.

Regarding my not having taken any game on this hunting adventure: I've long since learned not to judge a hunting trip's success by whether or not I've harvested a critter. Honestly, it's about the thrill of the hunt and camaraderie of friends—even if no shot is fired. I'm forever grateful to TSgt Aaron Farrior for putting this trip together. Only through his ingenuity and connections did it happen. Of course, Fathers Mike Shea and Dick Strass were essential parts of the planning puzzle, too.



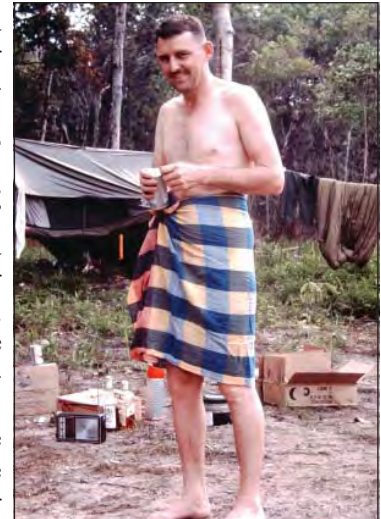
Loading gear for trip back to NKP via Huei Lep Mur.



This shows the entire hunting party, except for Phil who is behind the camera.

I'll conclude with an "it's a small world" connection involving the two Catholic priest missionaries. Earlier, September 1968, Father Richard Strass was suffering from a severe case of cerebral malaria. Upon learning of that medical crisis from Father Al Ryan, Catholic chaplain at NKP, Strass was evacuated by Jolly Green 36 from Ban Huai Lep Mu village to the hospital at NKP. Obviously he recovered, since he was part of our hunting trip entourage six months later. Father Strass passed away in 2004.

Father Michael Shea was a primary player later in a USAF medical assistance mission. He ably helped a USAF Flight Surgeon at NKP, Capt Richard "Doc" Dewey, in performing a cleft lip operation under crude field conditions; light was provided by the Jolly Green crew members holding flashlights! The patient was a teenage Thai girl from the village of Ban Huai Suem. Her severe disfigurement was greatly reduced, much to the family's and her pleasure. Though it was Doc Dewey's first-ever such operation, he'd studied up on the procedure and had become a local hero, as did Father Mike and the Jolly Green crew. U.S./Thai relations positively benefited.



Major Tommy Wardlow relaxing, Thai style, around camp.

Postscript: While preparing this article, I've been able to locate Aaron Farrior and Tommy Wardlow, both living in Florida. Even more recently I've exchanged e-mails with Father Mike Shea. He continues his incredible work as the last of the original 18 Redemptorist Order missionaries who were assigned to Thailand. He runs several HIV/AIDS support facilities in the Nongkhai area and has been in Thailand for nearly 49 years! Without a doubt, the primary pleasure of putting this article together has been my reconnection with the hunting party participants 45 years after the event.

The story has expanded and become more accurate due to the varied memories of all fortunate enough to have made that unlikely trip to 'Cow Mountain.'



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lots of applications out in December and January and even got a reply back from USAID: **Rejected**. I sent other applications out, private sector and government, including smokejumping in Fairbanks and to IVS. Out of money, so I got a temporary job in a local grocery distribution warehouse unloading boxcars to keep up with my gas, beer, and jump bills. It worked.

Along towards April 1966, I got two phone calls the same Friday evening. The first came from an IVS interviewer who was traveling the U.S. doing—what else but—interviews. He was passing through Portland Airport and asked, “Could I come

June 1966 saw me off to Washington, D.C. for a two-week IVS orientation program, including State Department and USAID briefings, followed by seven weeks of Lao language training at State’s Foreign Service Institute in Rosslyn, Virginia. Late August, I was off to the Philippines for two weeks of rural development training at the University of Philippines’ facility at Los Banos. Manila was next, early September, where my group of 20 or so people was put on hold as the Wattay Airport in Vientiane was flooded. I said I’d go on ahead to Bangkok and wait out the flood up in Korat, and did so.

About 13 September or so, I received a telegram (remember those?) from the USAID/Laos Bangkok Operations Office

(BOO), telling me to go to Udorn and report to the Air America office for a ride to Vientiane. Did so and caught an H-34 up to That Luang on 15 September 1966. After about a week in Vientiane, I learned that Wattay Airport had dried out sufficiently for smaller planes, and I got a Donier DO-28 hop up to Hong Sa, LS-62A, the start of my four years upcountry with IVS and USAID, followed by five years in Vientiane as the logistics guy for the USAID Refugee Relief program. My upcountry time was spent at Hong Sa LS-62, Nam Bac LS-203, Xieng Lom LS-69A, Moung Met LS-158, Sam Thong LS-20, and Ban Houei Sai LS-25, along with several months in spurts at Luang Prabang LS-54. These sites are all shown on TLCB member Jim Henthorn’s



Bob Hope’s first of many trips to entertain the troops, for Christmas, 1964. Hope cavorts with elephants and Jerry Colona.

out Saturday noonish for a chat?” *Sure, no problem.*

The next call was from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Fairbanks saying they’d had some no-shows for their current smokejumping training session and asked if I could get up there by Monday. I said I’d call him back on Saturday. Saturday, I met with the IVS guy and he sounded pretty positive, so I agreed to go with him. I phoned back to Fairbanks: *Nope, no go.*



Floyd McGurk, also TLCB member, and me, in the BOQ area, me with the pipe and one-finger salute. Floyd in the white T-shirt, standing.

super MapScan Project, which I use online quite often, here: <http://911gfx.nexus.net/sea-ao.html>

So, it was just a bit of luck that I noticed that 3x5 card with the IVS info, wrote it down on a cash register receipt, and managed to find it after the drive a few months earlier. That scrap of paper led to IVS, then USAID, and retirement in Thailand in 1992.

1968, June-August:

How I came to USAID/Laos

Mid-June finished the two year stint with IVS. I got \$500 to buy a plane ticket back to Oregon, but I spent it on local living expenses and job hunting in the area. I went down to Bangkok to submit a couple applications and also flew over to NKP in a Thai Airways DC-3 to the old gravel runway downtown, close by the Mekong River. Back in Vientiane, I was waiting for one of the applications to bear fruit and was running out of funds, hmmm. While having lunch one noon in August at the American Community Association (ACA) cafeteria with several of the USAID/Refugee Relief Branch guys whom I’d

Continued next page.



Camp Friendship, early 1964, looking north towards the Korat runway and all the bare land later filled in by the USAF starting in August of 1964. The U.S. Army arrived in Korat about two years prior to the USAF build-up that August, after the Gulf of Tonkin incident.

run into now and then upcountry, one of them said that he was going on home leave shortly, and why didn't I take his job on a short-term USAID contract while he was gone. Sounded like a good deal to me, so I did the paperwork for a four-month contract. The job was doing the Vientiane portion of the logistics of ordering up, storing, and moving relief supplies, rice, salt, pots and pans and blankets, etc. out to the field of refugees.

Seems as though I didn't screw that up too badly, so in December I was asked if I'd like to go to Sam Thong on the same short-term contract basis and work in the field. Sounds good to me, and I went to work for Pop Buell, didn't screw that time up too badly either, so I was asked if I'd like to convert to regular USAID foreign service status. Sounded even better; a real job, so I did the paperwork. In June '69 I departed Laos back to Oregon for a few weeks, USG security clearance cleared, off to D.C. for a month plus of orientation to the foreign services. I Bailed out of that early, and went back to Laos in September and on to ten months at Ban Houei Sai. June 1970, I transferred back to Vientiane to be the logs guy again, including the basic scheduling for the C-46 rice drop program flown by Air America and Continental Air Services (CASI). Les Strouse, also a long-time TLCB member, did this for lots of years.

1975, May-August:

USAID/Laos Shutdown and on to State Dept Detail

26 June is an anniversary of sorts, the day in 1975 when I departed USAID/Vientiane and shut down USAID/Laos and was the last direct hire out the door. This was late

afternoon, 1700 hrs or so, after Gordon Ramsey, the USAID acting director, and Bea Perez, his secretary, had flown out at about 1400 hrs.

As background, about 23 or 24 May 1975, a large group of leftist students and a few Lao USAID people, along with armed Pathet Lao troops, surrounded the USAID housing compound at KM 6 and the Na Hai Dieo USAID office compound downtown, locked everything up and said "Go home!" This resulted in a five-to-seven-day standoff. Then the USAID American staff, and many to most Embassy staff too, departed Laos in a semi-orderly manner, a whole lot different from the American

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Below, Lao Army camp at the bottom, International Volunteer Service (IVS) house, and primary school, fall of 1966, Mac's first posting upcountry. All three in the photo are gone now.



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departures from Saigon and Phnom Penh a few weeks earlier.

A number of USAID Americans, perhaps 20 or so, stayed around for a few weeks to enable a semi-orderly closeout of the Mission. People departed, mostly via air to Bangkok, day-by-day in the final drawdown towards the end of June.

For the previous 30 days, I'd been working on getting household effects (HHE) out of rental housing and moving them to the contractor packing them up for evacuation by air to Bangkok or Udorn. About mid-June I'd also started moving personal vehicles over to Nong Khai for onward shipping to the owners, wherever they might be.

About noon on the 26th, I'd gone back to the Embassy to say bye-bye to Gordon and Bea, as I was already on orders to stick around for another month working on HHE and cars. Gordon gave me *The Word*: all USAID staff in-country, all three of us, were now declared "persona non grata" by the Lao government. Seems like Gordon had been over to the Ministry of Interior that morning to turn over the USAID managed "counterpart kip account," really their money, but USAID controlled it. At times it was a lot, but USAID had been held up by the protesters earlier in June for increased severance pay, well beyond that required by Lao law.

Gordon, objected, but happily went along with it as the protesters were a small portion of the 2,000 or so Lao employees of USAID. He paid the severance out of the counterpart kip fund, actually paid for by the Lao



Elephants delivering cement, transported from the Mekong River, 3-4 hours walking to the north. They were "...doing a concrete floor for the school, just like TLCB is doing these days elsewhere. These days cement deliveries are by truck," says Mac.

government, even though they didn't know it. Guess that's what pissed them off when Gordon informed them that the remaining fund amount was rather small.

So, I'm told I also have to depart. The Charge D'affaire,

Continued next page.



Above, Mac in Bangkok office ca 1980. "Even more refugees and even more paperwork."



Above, in Xieng Khouang Ville, just south of the Plain of Jars (PDJ), when Mac was working out of Sam Thong, May 1967. Mac is standing in front of the mural commemorating the 1000th Yankee Air Pirate plane shot down by the Pathet Lao.

Below, same town had been pretty well destroyed in April 1969, before it was retaken by Gen Vang Pao's troops. The structures were not burned out, they were bombed and rocketed. The town is said to have been rather beautiful prior to the war. Mac has a friend in Portland, Oregon area who was there as a young boy prior to the family evacuating to Vientiane.



Truck that Mac drove part of a day shuttling refugees at Xieng Khouang Ville, L-03, from downtown out to the airport for evacuation.





Above, target practice at Hong Sa, 1966. Out on a picnic with the district chief and local Army commander. Who's the best shot? Mac won—that's him in the Stetson with the M-1 carbine.

Chris Chapman, said that I had to go along with Gordon and Bea at 1400 hrs. I said, "Can't manage that, need to go down to my house and get the few things I have left there." He said, "OK, go on to the Defense Attaché Office C-47 at 1600 hours." I said, "Can't manage that either, and besides, I have my VW Camper over in Nong Khai, and want to pick that up." He said something like, "Can't go that way, the road to Thadeua has a number of checkpoints and road blocks managed by the bad guys." To which I said, "Yes, and I've been through them lots of times recently, taking cars across to Nong Khai." That seemed to surprise him, but Gordon backed me up and said I could manage an exit before COB. OK, done deal.

My real reason was that I had about 20 cases of Australian Foster's Beer at my place that I'd just picked up from Ian McLeod and Steve Midgley, of the Australian Forestry Program, and I needed to change that back to \$\$\$! I also had my new dart board case, with swinging doors and three-headed elephant on the outside, being fabricated, and I wanted to pick that up, too.

There was a quick goodbye to Gordon and Bea, and around

the corner to the Ozzie office, also near the That Dam. Ian out, Steve there. We headed up to the That Luang area to check the dart board. Not ready. I arranged for Steve to pick it up in a week or so and then drop it off at Lung Mee's house down at Thadeua, across from Nong Khai.

I was off to my house, quick packing of clothes, loading of the Foster's, and getting my \$\$\$\$. I was off to Thadeua by 1700 hours, 26 June 1975, done deal.

Later I saw a USAID cable that Gordon had sent when he arrived in Bangkok saying that USAID/Laos was no more, and that the last employee, me, had departed.

I spent a few days around Nong Khai, as I needed to get my own HHE in the pipeline for shipping back to the U.S. Back on 9 May, after seeing Saigon and Phnom Penh for down the tubes (DTT), I'd loaded up about everything I owned—stereo stuff, books, boxes of crap, clothes, etc, in my VW Camper and took it all over to Nong Khai, and left everything there. After arriving Nong Khai, I reloaded the van and headed down to the Udorn branch of Transpak Lao—I think it was just south of



Above, Mac's IVS "house" at Nam Bac in the spring of 1967, way up north of Luang Prabang, the former capital of Laos.

the airbase. I'd met a couple of the Lao staff there previously in Vientiane, which was handy as I needed to get my HHE packed in a plywood shipping box and labeled as "Duty free, in transit" for Thai Customs, and get the proper shipping documents slapped on the box. They did that, and moved the box on to the airbase and put in temp storage with other HHE, already evacked from Vientiane. Nice folks, they were. I went on down to the USAID/Laos, Bangkok Operations Office (BOO) on Soi 1 Sukumvit to check in.

I then took a few days off and drove back up to Nong Khai, and on 15 July 1975, returned to Thadeua to pick up my dart board case. The Thai immigration guy said something like, "Hey, thought you'd been thrown out." *Well, yes, but there's this dart board case I need to get.* "OK, up to you," sez he.

Over at the Lao side, there were about the same



Above, Break time during an NVA attack on 11 March 1967. The attack started after midnite and carried on sporadically until the late morning. This is Mac, on the right, and Col Khamphay, the commander, who is in the Los Angeles area these days.

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Mac continued from page 7

comments. The “rightist” Immigration guy, who’d been there for a long time, and whom I’d passed by lots of times over a year or more, convinced the PL immigration guy that this was a reasonable request. No one would really want to abandon a new dart board case, especially one with a three-headed elephant carved on the front. Done deal; over and back to Thailand, then back to Bangkok.

I got the dart board (still have it) and went back to Thailand and on to Bangkok where I spent a couple of weeks helping to sort out the loose-packed HHE that’d been flown out of Laos and was just stacked in long piles in a warehouse. Then got a call from the Embassy, Tom Barnes I think it was, asking if I wanted to go up to Udorn and help out with the refugee influx from Laos. *Sure*, sez I; much better than the alternative of returning to USAID/Washington and getting laid off. I was still an “L” at the time, Limited Tenure, and USAID was then in a massive cutback program.

That State department “refugee” gig turned out to be about seven year’s worth, with a couple of six-month breaks back with USAID in D.C., and ended in August 1983. Interesting times.

It almost sounds like *Travels With Charley*, but below is what I sent in a postcard just after I departed Laos in 1975, found by Anne, my sister back in Oregon.

Postcard, Mac to Mom, 28 June 1975, mailed from Thailand:

Hi. As I’ve always said, be flexible! Wednesday afternoon, 25 June. Got a cable from State Department, approving 30 days TDY for me attached to Embassy, Vientiane. So, Thursday afternoon rolls around, the Ambassador calls, and I have to leave Laos on two hours notice. At least I was the last USAID out. The other two left by air at 1530 and I came out through Nong Khai at 1630.

I’ll be TDY in Thailand, now, for 30 days, and then, maybe a little vacation, so I should still be through PDX toward mid-August or early September, en route to D.C. After that, who knows?

Little did I know! During that month in Bangkok, July 1975, I got picked up by State’s budding Indochinese refugee program, and except for a split 13 months back in D.C. in 1977 and 1978, didn’t depart Thailand until August 1983, eight years on!

In late May 1976, I received a letter from USAID/Bangkok staying that my “TTLA” was being exercised. That’s Termination of Time Limited Appointment. I was an “L” at the time. This gave me 30 days to depart Thailand and get back to AID/Washington for out-processing.

I had the “big sads,” as we used to say in those days, when that same afternoon I received a relayed State cable from AID/Washington saying only “If you accept appointment to the AMED program, action requested refel will be negated.” Not knowing what “AMED” was, and given the circumstances, I accepted. About 31 May 1976, I packed up my gear at Udorn and drove down to the Golden Palace Hotel on Soi 1, then over to the REF office to see Lionel.

Next day, I was off to USAID/BKK to talk to the EXO there. He knew of the AMED program, and said that it was pretty difficult to get into. It was a new deal, a two-year intense OJT to train management/executive officers. An applicant needed to be nominated, interviewed, etc. Hmmm, not me. *What the hell*, I said, *go for it*. It was back to the office, confer with Lionel, cable off to Shep to see about postponing my arrival from August ‘76 to later in the year. Shep wrote USAID, and December was agreed upon.

After I got back to AID/Washington and had been in the AMED for a few weeks, with the other five guys, three of whom I knew from USAID/Laos, our training coordinator told me that Homer Stutzman had heard through the grapevine that I was being shit-canned. It turned out that Homer had pulled the strings that worked. FYI, I never had the opportunity to thank him for that, because he was down in Central America by then, on reassignment, and died not too long thereafter. I did manage to send Jean, his wife, a note at a later date. I’d known Homer in Vientiane and Jean assisted at the ACA Library, where I often traded.

Back to AMED, I dropped out temporarily in August 1977, when Lionel and Shep rang the bell for volunteers to go to Asia and work with refugees. I went to KL for two months, then extended my leave from AMED for another couple of months, October and November, to go back to Bangkok with Lionel and Tom Barnes. December 1976, I was back to AMED until June 1978, when the shit really hit the fan when Lionel phoned from Bangkok, saying in essence, “Get your ass out here, could use the help!”

I dropped out again from AMED, this time permanently. I had several high level counseling sessions saying I’d be ruining my USAID career by doing this, but what the hell, I figured it’d be more fun and useful in the end. And it was.

August 1983—April 1987 was spent with USAID/Washington, living in my small townhouse in Alexandria, Virginia. I still managed to spend about a month in Thailand each summer on vacation, if only to maintain my tolerance for Singha. April 1987 saw me off to Khartoum for two years with USAID. Sudan was not my favorite country, but happily I ran into several others who had spent time in Laos and must have been under a bit of a rain cloud. I got to know Les Strouse well during this period. Les also was my guru in making home brew beer, a necessary skill in Sudan. Bob Moberg was also there and it seems like we got together 4-6 evenings a week to tell lies about our former times in Laos. I should have taped these; had some good tales, all true, of course, no BS!

In June 1989, I transferred to USAID/Cairo, which was to be a four-year tour. I just couldn’t take that after Khartoum, so I called in lots of favors from just about everyone and made it back to Thailand with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in the Anti-Piracy Program. Vietnamese “boat people” were still escaping towards Thailand and Malaysia and being preyed upon by Thai fishermen, the “pirates.” The program was semi successful with at least 100 Thai fishermen arrested by the Thai Marine Police, the Navy, and civil authorities, taken to court and jailed. Then in summer 1991, the boat

Continued next page.

people just stopped coming to Thailand.

How I Decided to Retire

Fall 1991, I phoned back to USAID/ Washington asking what they had in store for me now. They asked if I wanted to go back to Africa. *No friggin' way* was my reply. Then how about back to USAID/ Washington? *Nope* to that option, too. So with nothing else on tap, and with sufficient time and age for early Foreign Service retirement, I punched out 3 January 1992, right here in Bangkok.

A contributing factor to the decision to retire early could be that Sunee and I'd gotten together by this time. I finally bit the bullet and got married while back in Oregon in 1999, after eight years of "practice." It seemed to be about time to do so. She's been with me on lots of the Lao trips.

After retirement, I was making the occasional trip up to Vientiane for short visits, but no upcountry runs. I heard about the TLCB and joined about 1998 or '99, about the same time as Les. Come 2006, I made my first real road trip upcountry with author Roger Warner, to Long Tieng, really interesting after a 20-plus year absence. That got me thinking about the TLCB's Assistance Program, so starting in 2007 I've made two to four trips a year working with local officials to improve their schools, largely new replacement tin roofs, concrete floors, toilets, furniture, etc, all funded by TLCB and some outside donations. A number of photo albums for these trips are online here: www.tinyurl.com/mfkz3rv



Where the tides of war once ebbed and flowed. Recent photo of Mac in one of the fields of mysterious, ancient stone jars in the war-torn Plain of Jars. Many schools Mac takes TLCB Assistance to are near this area.

Time marches on, family here gets larger, two new grandkids have joined the household, grandson March 2014 and granddaughter in September. Keep things hopping, they do, but I still manage to carve out time for the occasional TLCB Lao trip. December 2014 was the last trip to Long Tieng and the PDJ area, along with a February 2015 trip with five TLCBers also to the PDJ.

In summary, I must say that my nine years in Laos and seven years with State on the Indochinese Refugee Program were the best and most satisfying years of my working life, and I wouldn't change any portion of those times.



TLC Brotherhood, Inc. Election NOTICE

The nominating period for the 2015 elections begins April 1st and ends Midnight EST, April 30th, 2015. The election for the TLCB Board of Directors will be the first order of business during the annual meeting of the corporation, which will be held on Saturday, September 12, 2015 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Woburn, MA.

During the nominating period, submit nominations via email or USPS to any member of the nominating committee. Prior to submitting a nomination, make sure your nominee is willing to serve. The board will not accept nominations after April 30.

Members of the Nominating Committee for 2015 are as follows:

Chairman:	Ken Schmidt	schmidt-kenneth@att.net	40649 Crystal Drive, Three Rivers, CA 93271
Member:	Ed Miller	ed.pet.travels@cox.net	139 Fulmar Circle NE, Ft. Walton Beach, FL 32548
Member:	Robert Santo	bobsanto2@verizon.net	16 Todd Court, Huntington Station NY 11746

Send an email or mail submissions to any Nominating Committee member

The following positions are up for re-election in 2015:

- | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Vice President | Incumbent: Les Thompson | Eligible for re-election |
| Secretary | Incumbent: Gary Beatty, | Eligible for re-election |
| Chaplain | Incumbent: Debbie Stein | Eligible for re-election |
| Member at Large | (2 Positions open) | |
| Mike Potaski | Incumbent: | Eligible for re-election. |
| George Shenberger | Incumbent: | Eligible for reelection |

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

Come to Freedom's Forge

By Mike Potaski

When the Brotherhood gathers in Massachusetts in September for its 2015 reunion, it will find itself where our freedoms and independence were hammered out some 240 years ago.

History in the making:

While the Continental Congress was dithering in Philadelphia during September and October 1774, the yeomen farmers and tradesmen of Massachusetts were taking matters into their own hands. Calling up the militias of the various towns, they marched on their shire towns and forced the King's civil officials and military officers to beat a hasty retreat. After organizing their independent local governments, they completed the Massachusetts Revolution by organizing a Provincial Congress to coordinate civil activities and organize the military resistance. By the end of 1774 Royal authority existed only in the town of Boston and its immediate suburbs.

Six months later, on 19 April 1775, military governor General Thomas Gage sent a force toward Concord intending to capture military supplies stored there and arrest Patriot leaders Samuel Adams and John Hancock who had lingered in Concord after the Provincial Congress adjourned on the 15th. Local militias moved to intercept the Redcoats and an initial engagement occurred on Lexington Green. As the British pressed on toward Concord, the resistance grew in intensity and the Redcoats were forced to retreat back toward Boston.

Woburn and the Bloody Angle: Militiamen from Woburn, our reunion host-town, marched on the alarm of 19 April in three companies as an under-strength regiment commanded by Major Loammi Baldwin. Baldwin's units arrived at the action as the Redcoats were retreating. British attention was focused to their rear and flanks when Baldwin's regiment ap-

peared to their front along a steep and winding portion of the road. Baldwin's units engaged the Redcoats in a sector that is forever known as the "Bloody Angle."

Baldwin's Woburn units joined the pursuit of the retreating British and joined the siege of Boston as part of the Patriot's "Army of Observation." When George Washington arrived two months later to organize the Continental Army, Baldwin was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel as second in command of the 26th Continental Regiment. Baldwin was later promoted to Colonel and given command of the 26th which he led to New York. When Washington was forced to retreat from New York toward White Plains, Baldwin's regiment and two others were organized into a brigade, commanded by Colonel John Glover, that engaged British forces attempting to flank Washington's units.

Baldwin's regiment participated in the Battle of White Plains then crossed the Delaware River with Washington to participate in the Battle of Trenton. Baldwin then left the Army due to poor health and returned to Woburn where he pursued a political and engineering career. His professional successes have led him to be called the Father of American Civil Engineering.

Revisit history:

Reunion attendees might want to come early to Woburn and stay after the reunion. The Minuteman National Historic Park with its battlefields and original structures is a short distance away. Boston is a short 30 minute train ride from Woburn and provides the Freedom Trail, a walking tour of sites that figured prominently in the events of the 1770s. For the more adventurous, ferry service is available from Boston to Salem which was the site of the infamous witch trials.



Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The 14 members listed below joined between the last issue of the MEM and the 28th of February. You can find more information on our website database. The Mekong Express Mail wishes you all a hearty "Welcome Home."

Member No.	Branch	Last Name	First Name	City	State	Email
1647	USAF	Reed	Ernest	Bowie	MD	ear4751@Verizon.net
1648	USAF	Kell	Ronald	Monterey	TN	TNwhiskers@Yahoo.com
1649	USAF	Finn	John	Philadelphia	PA	JFinn529@aol.com
1650	USAF	Scheller	George	Lisbon	NH	Budscheller@yahoo.com
1651	USAF	Castle	Timothy	Commerce City	CO	Sewitmai@hotmail.com
1652	USMC	Beach	Ronald	Lafayette	CO	Ronald.Beach@Gmail.com
1653	USAF	McCarter	Edward	Winterville	NC	mccarters@mindspring.com
1654	USAF	Jefferson	John	Aledo	TX	PAjack1939@sbcglobal.net
1655	USA	Thompson	Kenneth	Richmond	VA	KMTtrt@MSN.com
1656	USAF	Hoofnagle	Benjamin	Portsmouth	VA	Hoofdo@cox.net
1657	Other	Kayga	Paul	Hempstead	TX	DKayga@tum.com
1658	USAF	Williams	Luther	Atkins	VA	gunsandsons@sbcglobal.net
1659	USAF	Robinson	Leon	Los Angeles	CA	droozdad@earthlink.net
1660	USN	Wesley	Steven	Owosso	MI	RubyW2@AD.com

Dozer at Alpha, a FAC's Narrow Escape

By Bob Hippler

Vietnam Era—July 1966 to April 1967

After finishing forward air controller (FAC) training in the O-1 (Army L-19), I arrived in Vietnam in July 1966 and reported for duty. Outside the colonel's office was a list of MIA and KIA, with some locations classified. Five of us new FACs reported to him and the colonel asked for three FACs for a classified location. No one raised his hand, so he picked three of us. I arrived at NKP a few days later and began the adventure.



Capt Bob Hippler at NKP, 1966. Photos by Bill Tilton, a fellow Cricket.

We had a good group of people, and within a short time I was checked out in the area by FAC Glenn Bremenkamp. [TLCB member also]

On a mission over the Ho Chi Minh Trail one day, I saw some bulldozer tracks, which were clumps of grass evenly spaced along a road. I was low man for that mission and I think my high man was Jack Taylor. I decided to go in low to see if I could find the dozer hiding under some of the low trees along each side of the road. The road came south from Mu Gia Pass through the Laotian jungle. The Agent Orange teams were clearing most of the roads, but in 1966/67 there was still much jungle cover for the North Vietnamese to use to hide themselves and their weapons and machinery. This part of the road crossed a little stream/river, before going up a hill and around to the south side toward the 911/912 Choke Point known as "Alpha."

I descended to a safe distance over the treetops just south of the hill, but low enough to be able to see under the canopy of the trees. As I made my way up the hill and started turning left around it, I was startled by lots of noise. I always flew with my side windows open for visibility and to be able to hear gun



FAC's view of bulldozer like the one Bob was after (circled, under bomb debris). This one was about halfway between Chokepoint Alpha and Mugia Pass.

shots. It didn't take long to recognize what was causing the sound. As soon as I looked up, my forward canopy seemed to be filled with tracers going by my O-1, so I immediately started vigorous zigging and zagging, as we called it. We never flew straight and level on a mission.

As I rounded the turn, I could see where the shots were coming from. The gun location looked like large multiple machine guns on the other side of that stream. I could not climb, because that would have slowed me down from my "fast" 85 mph and exposed the bottom of the plane. As I had no place to escape, I just kept going right and left and up and down toward them. Since I was so close, they couldn't get the guns trained on me, so they just kept shooting while I kept turning. As soon as I got to the river, I turned down stream, keeping up the zig/zagging, dodging large boulders on both sides of the stream, until I got far enough away and around a turn where they couldn't see me.



First of the famous "Chokes," Alpha, below the junction of Routes 911 and 912 from Ban Loboy.

After a safe distance, I climbed to altitude. While all this was going on, I had the throttle full forward with my left thumb holding down the mike button. But talking was out of the question. When I finally reached a safe altitude, I called my high man. He had heard all the shooting over the radio and asked me, "What was all the noise?" I filled him in on what had happened. He had lost sight of me and hadn't seen the guns or tracers.

I then called Cricket, the airborne command post C-130, and asked for some fighters. Since I was getting low on fuel and didn't know if I had been hit, we called another pair of FACs in to do the business. Cricket sent in a few flights with Napalm. Needless to say, they took out those guns and the people manning them (AOCP). It was reported that sometimes the North Vietnamese forced Laotians to man the guns by chaining them to the weapons with a "do or die" threat. I was happy to finish that mission in one piece, with no holes in my plane or me!

That night, as usual after events like that, a few of us had a few extra Singha beers. Just another day on the Trail.



2014 Donor Honor Roll

Of the Four Objectives of the TLC Brotherhood, our charitable work gets the most publicity and the most funding. Members support this work in various ways, but the most helpful is financial.

Platinum Donors

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Zola, Anthony

TLC Brotherhood 2015 Reunion and Annual Meeting

Boston, MA, September 10-13, 2015 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Boston - Woburn

Address: 15 Middlesex Canal Park, Woburn, MA 01801

www.hotelbostonwoburn.com

Phone: 781-935-8760 Fax: 781-933-0491

Hotel Description: The Crowne Plaza Boston Woburn, newly renovated, combines exceptional service, extraordinary style, and upscale amenities including ample free parking, indoor pool, and new state-of-the-art fitness and business centers. There are 40" televisions with 60 HD channels and an on-site restaurant, the Scoreboard Sports Bar and Grill, which was voted #1 in Boston three years in a row. Enjoy quality Accommodations such as plush Crowne Plaza Sleep Advantage Bedding, free high-speed Internet, work desks, coffeemakers, and upgraded bathrooms.

Room Rate: \$115.00 per night* plus tax. **Be sure to mention that you are with the TLC Brotherhood group.** *The group rate is honored three days pre and post contracted guestroom room dates, based on rate and space availability.

Banquet: The dinner price of \$35.00 features a salad, rolls, chicken dish, vegetable, potato, and dessert.

POW Guest Speaker: Hugh Buchanan, a retired captain in the United States Air Force is our guest speaker, and will tell us about his six-and-a-half year stay as a prisoner of war of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). He was taken while on his 17th bombing mission as co-pilot of an F4 Phantom jet fighter when his aircraft was shot down over the Red River Delta near Hanoi. Ejecting safely and landing near a small village, he was captured by a farmer and was taken to Hanoi's Hua Lo prison, the Hanoi Hilton, spending six months in solitary confinement. Listen to how his group never forgot that they were on active duty, never gave up hope, kept positive, and retained power. He believes that the experience brought out qualities such as leadership and character that might never have surfaced in different circumstances.



Registration Forms: Will be available on the TLCB Website very soon.

Transportation from Logan Airport to Crowne Plaza Woburn via Coach Line: Take Logan Express Woburn to Anderson Regional Transportation Center.

Distance from hotel--3 Miles South West

Complimentary shuttle service from 7:00am - 10:00pm. Call hotel at 781 935 8760 when you arrive at the station.

At left, Bob Wheatley holds a portion of the "Hunter's Star" pattern quilt for 2015. We are sure Rosie's quilt will be beautiful as ever.

Logan Express stops at all airport terminals. Travel time is approximately 30-45 minutes.

Leaving Logan To Woburn

Weekdays 6:30 am - Midnight every half hour - and 1:15 a.m.

Saturday 7:00 am - 11:00 p.m. every hour - and 12:15 a.m.

Sunday 7:00 am - 1:00 p.m. every hour

1:00 pm - Midnight every half hour - and 1:15 a.m.

Below, it takes a team to crunch the tally after a successful Assistance Auction. 2013, left to right, Nancy Sweet, John and Darice Schillo, and Carolyn Thompson count into the night.



Don't forget the Assistance Auction on Friday— we need to bring great items for this fun event!

Things To Do:

<http://www.hotelbostonwoburn.com/things-to-do/woburn-attractions.aspx>

Boston experiences are within minutes by rail transportation at the Anderson Regional Transportation Center.

Red Sox at Fenway: Enjoy a game at the great Fenway Park:

- Yankees are there from Monday 8/31 to Wednesday 9/2
- Phillies play the Sox from 9/4 to 9/6
- Toronto Blue Jays are there 9/7, 9/8, and 9/9

Take a guided witches tour of Salem; indulge in New England clam chowder; walk the marked Freedom Trail; visit Walden Pond; go on one of the famous Boston area whale watches, and visit hundreds of other unique Boston attractions.

Experience the Freedom Trail, Faneuil Hall Marketplace, Boston Harbor cruises, Boston Aquarium, and many other attractions including the areas of Lexington, Concord, and Salem, MA all nearby. Options include a ferry service from Long Warf Boston direct to downtown Salem on a beautiful, one-hour cruise each way.

Come early and/or stay late: Take this opportunity to visit and experience beautiful New England before the "leaf peepers" invade. Maine seashores and their quaint towns and the lush New Hampshire White Mountains are right next door and worthy of exploration because they offer a special beauty and after Labor Day rate vacation opportunities.

