

MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



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WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.com

The Future of the TLC Brotherhood

The Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of the TLCB

At the 2016 Annual Reunion, newly elected TLCB President Gary Beatty announced that he had asked me to chair an Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of the TLCB. Later, he wrote on our website *FORUM*:

We all know that for the TLCB to outlive those of us who are veterans of the conflict in Southeast Asia, we must begin the process of planning for the future without us. I believe the best way to do so is to begin the transition from a veteran's organization that does charity work, to a charity that was founded by veterans.

At President Beatty's request, I put together an informal group of members featuring several founders and several more recent joiners. The Committee members, in addition to me, are (alphabetically): Gerald Frazier, Randall Jenness, John Lorenzen, Harold Mead, John Sweet, MacAlan Thompson, and William Tilton.

This past winter and spring, we exchanged emails on the subject. Needless to say, there was no absolute resolution, but what was clear is that the subject is extremely important to TLCB members. The accompanying article, on page 3, is admittedly a rambling summary of those exchanges. I purposely did not identify the comment contributors.

The more important point here is that on September 23, at our Annual Reunion in Dayton, we have scheduled a workshop on this subject for all TLCB members. Please be there on Saturday.

John Harrington
Editor, *MEM*
Chairman, Future of TLCB Ad Hoc Committee

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Early
Reunion
Issue!



Editor's Notebook:

The September 2017 issue of *The Mekong Express Mail* (MEM) focuses on several of the issues most important to the members of the Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood (TLCB). The Assistance Program and TLCB's future. We have two articles from familiar contributors. Mac Thompson, our man in SEA, in his inimitable style, takes us along on his May visit to some of the sites of our Assistance Program in Laos, with some great photos as well. And, from our archives, we are reprinting an article by Jeff Hudgens that, particularly for some of our newer members, describes his humanitarian work, also in Laos.

I have also put together, drawing on the impressions of a representative sample of our members, a discussion about the future of the TLCB. Our president, Gary Beatty, asked me nearly a year ago to form an Ad Hoc Committee on the subject, and last spring and early this summer we exchanged our thoughts. This topic will be the focus of a workshop at

the September Reunion in Dayton, Ohio. I particularly hope that those who will be attending can read through this and be prepared to join in the discussion.

We also feature a new member profile. It is notable that the TLCB continues to add new members at a brisk pace; however it is ironic that nearly all of them are veterans who served somewhere in SEA back in the 1960s and 1970s. While that demonstrates there are many potential new members out there who we need to find, it does not enhance the hope for TLCB existing far into the future, which is the subject mentioned only a paragraph ago.

Lastly, we have a timeless piece about Memorial Day by long-time contributor and member Bob Wheatley. And, of course I'd be remiss if I didn't note that he is the husband of an even greater contributor, Rosie Wheatley, whose 2017 quilt will be raffled off at the Dayton Reunion. You don't have to there to win, but it would be better if you are.

John Harrington
MEM Editor

The Air Force museum, now FOUR buildings crammed with living history. Of *course* a visit is on the schedule! See page 16 for the entire program at Dayton. Photo from the National Museum of the Air Force.



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Reunion 2017: Dayton, Ohio

The Future of the Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood (TLCB)

by John Harrington, Ad Hoc Committee Chairman

The overwhelming bulk of the current TLCB membership is made up of veterans who served during the 1960s and 1970s in South East Asia, primarily in Thailand and Laos. Most were Air Force, some were Army, Navy, Marines, or Coast Guard, and a smaller number were non-military—State Department, Peace Corps, or in some other capacity. (At least one was a Peace Corps volunteer, who later became a USAF pilot). There is an overriding and indisputable demographic, other than their SEA experience, that unites them; they are senior citizens, in their late 60s, early to mid-70s, and a few in their 80s. They are not going to be around for too much longer, let alone forever, which raises a related question — how long will the TLCB be around?

It is hardly a stretch to state that most of the members of the TLCB “enlisted” because it offered them a forum to bond with veterans who shared a common experience, namely serving somewhere in Southeast Asia, other than Vietnam, during the war. In the late 1990s the group began holding some informal gatherings, which evolved into our annual reunions, and as the organization matured it began providing additional means of connecting its expanding membership: a newsletter—*The Mekong Express Mail (MEM)*, a website, electronic communications (first e-mail, then a forum on the website), and most importantly, a charity—the TLCB Assistance Program, supporting education and health services in Thailand and Laos. For individual members, all, some, or perhaps just one of these TLCB activities is the reason for their participation. Yet, one clear fact looms over the operations of the group. Unless actions are taken to change the core of the membership, the TLCB shall, like the old soldier, fade away.

One irony of the TLCB’s current condition is that while the membership continues to grow, most new members served in the same period — the 1960s and 1970s — as the longer-term members and are therefore not likely to extend the organization’s life span.

All of which brings us to a big question: Is there a reason to keep the TLCB alive past the active participation of its Vietnam-era members?

To which there are two answers, yes and no. For those who answer yes, it would appear that they would like to see the TLCB Assistance Program continue on a long-term basis. The logical next question in that scenario is “How?” All alternatives deserve some exploration.

TLCB as a “Sunset” Society

Among many of the TLCB founders, there is a distinct opinion that they expect the organization to fade away as its core membership of Vietnam-era veterans (with an emphasis on Thailand and Laos postings), most of whom are in their late 60s and mid-to-late 70s, pass away. This is certainly a legitimate view. There is also a broad view that a primary *raison d’être* of TLCB members is to provide a place, both literally and figuratively, where those veterans can meet and share their memories and their values with each other. For these members, there is

not a compelling argument to continue the TLCB beyond the current generation of members.

One of the founding members offered this vision: “Let’s recognize it, respect it, enjoy each other’s company while we may, and like the Doolittle Raiders of World War II, invest in a good bottle of spirits to be opened only by the last two survivors, to toast the friends who have gone before and remember our collective accomplishments.”

Just a light observation, but maybe that group of survivors should be somewhat larger than the “last two,” or that bottle may gather a lot of dust in the meantime. I should be quick to acknowledge that this attitude of many of the founders and many more of those who have joined in the ensuing years does not denigrate the on-going work of the TLCB, most notably the Assistance Program, otherwise known as the “collective accomplishments.”

One of those subsequent members summed up a common and perhaps prevalent feeling about the TLCB: “I had been developing an interest in learning more about the activities in SEA back then, and began searching the internet. When I ran across the TLCB’s website it looked like a great place to obtain more information, establish contact with others who had been there back then, and to attend what promised to be, and have been, great reunions.” [Emphasis added].

TLCB as An On-Going Institution

The work of the Assistance Program drives the idea that TLCB should survive beyond the life spans of its core membership, Vietnam-era veterans who primarily served in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. While most members acknowledge that they would be pleased to see the organization exist beyond the “sunset,” the possible means of doing so are limited and involve increasing levels of complications.

Yet, it cannot be over emphasized how central the Assistance Program is to TLCB’s existence. The March 2017 *MEM* lists more than 350 members, out of nearly 600, who made additional, voluntary contributions to the program, more than a few of them \$1,000 or more.

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Newest Exchange Products Featured at the 2017 TLCB Reunion

NEW!

Secret War travel mug and TLC Vet hats, plus plasticized map of Laos. **Special Reunion pricing—buy a pair!**

This new map is based on the latest 2016 GPS data for Laos and is perfect for trail bikers and folks following our Assistance workers' travels on our behalf.

- 18 oz capacity, fits all auto cup holders.
- Double wall / BPA free, great for hot or cold!
- Open / close slide with secure screw-on lid!
- Vacuum-sealed, double-wall stainless steel insulation



Thailand & Laos Vet camos have proven very popular.



Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The 8 members listed below joined between the last issue of the MEM and the 10th of August. You can find more information on our website database. The Mekong Express Mail wishes you all a hearty "Welcome Home."

No	Branch	Last Name	First Name	City	State
01800	USAF	Hammond	Curtis	Leavenworth	KS
01801	USAF	Dias	Owen	Warsaw	IN
01802	USAF	Oubre	Carroll Michael	Dallas	GA
01803	USAF	Iglesias	Anthony	Asbury	NJ
01804	Other	Tilton	Christopher	Westlake	OH
01805	USA	Burton	Richard	Fort Wayne	IN
01806	USAF	Shytle	Thomas	Blacksburg	SC
01807	USAF	LaBella	Vincent	East Hartford	CT

On the Road Again: TLCB's Man in SEA Visits Assistance Program Sites

by MacAlan Thompson

2016 had three school support trips, with some really good projects, as reported in the December 2016 "Mekong Express Mail," photos in color here: <http://tlc-brotherhood.com/Forum/index.php?topic=8235.0>

Might be a busier year, this 2017, for TLCB travels to the PDJ in northeast Laos, two trips so far with another trip planned for September.

A real highlight for this year has been reconnecting with several of my former colleagues from the Indochinese Refugee Program here in Thailand, with whom I worked back in 1975-'83. They worked for our State Department contract entity, the Joint Voluntary Agency (JVA). Two are former Peace Corps Thailand and the third, a Kiwi, was head of our computer section.

Three of us motored up from the Bangkok area to Nong Khai for an RON—me, Paul Carter, and Kiwi Vaughan Smith. Next morning, I went across to the Lao side to meet up with Dutchman Auke Koopmans who'd driven over from his home in Chiang Mai for the trip, along with Glenn Black.

When we arrived at Phonsavan (aka PSV), we were joined by two more who took a boat ride down from Ban Houei Sai

What's left of the administration building at the "Russian Farm." "Borrowed" jars were supposed to have been returned to their historic sites but so far they still sit here.



The Russians had moved two of the Jars from Site 2 to the farm. These were supposed to have been sent back long ago, but hasn't happened.



Lao kids and teachers with Vaughan Smith, Tim Sawyer, Mac, Auke Koopmans, and Soudeuane. Larry Crider and Glenn Black were along also, but didn't get into this photo. Article photos supplied by Mac Thompson.

opposite Chiang Rai, RONed at Pak Beng, then on to Luang Prabang, via the bus to Phonsavan, a long run they say, but quite interesting.

On the way into PSV, we made a brief stop at the "Russian Farm," which I'd heard about. Seems like it was a Soviet aid project in the early 1980s to demonstrate better practices for raising cattle, which didn't work and the project was abandoned.

Next morning, Mr Soudeuane, our "main man" at the Xieng Khouang Provincial Education Service, had a meeting so we took the opportunity to hit Jar Site 1 for a looksee, the first time for our three JVA colleagues, Tim, Larry, and Vaughan. This Jar site is quite close to PSV, makes for an easy visit.

Back to town and on to the first school visit at the Ban Boua Thong Primary School where the TLCB had funded a new roof. We arrived early and they weren't quite ready for us, still preparing the welcome. As a diversion, the headmaster and some of the teachers took us to Jar Site 17, one I'd not been to, as it's bit off the main roads. This site has not yet been fully prepared for tourist visits, recently semi cleared of underbrush but no pathways. It has, however, been swept for leftover UXO, the "bombies," (CBUs) from back in The Day. One item from this side trip was the headmaster mentioning a plane crash from 45-50 years past; he didn't know if it had been investigated by the U.S. POW/MIA teams or not, something for a follow-up on a subsequent trip.

Back to the school, then, for speeches, a baci, eats, and of course, some BeerLao. As far as speeches go, I came up with a great idea. Since the three former JVAers all speak quite good

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Mac, Vaughan Smith, Tim Sawyer, and Larry Crider visit one of the jar sites in the mysterious Plain of Jars, site of archeological speculation and heavy fighting during the struggle for control of Laos in The Secret War. Driver Somphou took this photo.

Thai, why not have them each give a short presentation? Note, most Lao understand Thai as Thai TV sitcoms are more popular in Laos than what's on Lao TV. One of the teachers requested funding for the



Above, new furniture has just been delivered to Vieng Xay school, and labeled by Soundeuane, at right above. At Vieng Xay, right, kids were benefitted by roofing tin and cement for a floor. These were paid for by our donations to the TLC Brotherhood Assistance Fund.

future, a library, a waterline for the waterless school toilet, and wintertime clothing for the kids. We might be able to help out with the first two items.

Returned to the hotel, dinner, and suds that evening at the very nice but often crowded Bamboozle Restaurant. The place is owned and run by a Scot and his Lao wife, pleasant folks, good food. Do a Google for: Bamboozle Restaurant laos

Next morning we're off to the east an hour plus, past the Kham (Ban Ban) District town to the Vieng Xay Primary School. The TLCB had previously assist-

ed with tin roofing, some wood, and cement for a floor for this village self-help building. The current project was for school furniture which had just been delivered the previous day. Soundeuane busily started slapping on TLCB stickers to the furniture.

Then the normal speeches, baci, eats, and suds... lots of fun with the local Lao school staff and villagers., then it was back to the hotel, and dinner again at the Bamboozle. By the way, walking down the street there's a tour agent with a large copy of a painting illustrating an Air America H-34 picking up a downed USAF pilot, his A1 nearby, and another A1 flying cover. There were many such rescues by Air America over the years.

Laos continues next page





Above, here's what it's all about. Will one of these boys lead Laos to prosperity one day?

Laos Assistance Report

Paul Carter and Vaughan Smith met up with me at Klong 7 (35 km NE of Don Muang Airport) a bit after 0700 hrs for the eight hour drive up to Nong Khai in Sunee's Toyota van [Ed note: Sunee is Mac Thompson's wife]. We arrived at 1530 hrs and were met by Glenn Black and Larry Crider who'd flown

Mac Thompson briefly addressing staff and villagers, mostly parents, at one of the schools where the TLCB has left our visible mark. Villagers express appreciation.



down to Udorn from Chiang Mai. Next morning, parked the van at a secure site near the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge and headed on over to Lao Immigration.

OOPs, sez I, forgot two important bags in the van! Back on the Nong Khai van, didn't stamp In or Out of Laos, off at Thai Immigration, Departures, explained my CRS problem to the Immigration guy. I offered to leave my passport while I retrieved the bags; he's cooperative, no need, just come back through soon. Walked to the van, got the bags, paid another baht 250 for van back to Lao side. I arrived about five minutes



TLCB members can be proud of the shiny new roof on the Ban Boua Thong primary school,

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Laos continued from page 7

after Vaughan and Larry had finished with their visas. No queue, turned in my paperwork, then 20 minutes before my passport with Lao chops popped out, slow.

Here we were joined by Auke Koopmans, who'd driven down from Chiang Mai, and Somphou, our valiant long-term driver with his nice, spacious Hyundai van. Rather than heading downstream along the Mekong River as we usually do to Paksan, there turning north up to Phonsavan on the PDJ, we decided to head straight up Rt 13N via Vang Vieng up to the junction of Rts 13N and 7 at Phou Khoun. I'd not been this way for several years and a couple of the guys, never. Unfortunately, it rained most of the way, we missed the good views, plus it took almost 10 hours for the run vs 7-8 hours via the Paksan route. Reckon I'll give this way a miss in the future. Maps for this route, upper left at www.hobomaps.com

First school visit was to the Ban Boua Primary School east of Muang Kham (Ban Ban) where they'd requested funding for replacement tin roofing for three buildings, plus some wood for walls for two of them in order to keep out the elements. After looking over the completed projects, we adjourned to one of the classrooms for the "official" parts of the visit, the speeches, certificate signings, baci ceremony, BeerLao, etc. All good fun with nice folks, school staff, and local village leadership. The



Above, a teacher expresses her appreciation for the new roof TLCB funded for their school.

Left, Tim Sawyer and a villager cementing their friendship at a *baci* ceremony. Strings are to make you return. You're supposed to leave them alone until they fall off.

Bombed out Wat Phia, Moung Khoun (old Xieng Khouang Ville, L-03). Vaughan Smith, Larry Crider, Tim Sawyer, and Mac.



primary school needs an additional building, plus the co-located secondary school needs completed walls and cement flooring.

Dinner that evening at the Bamboozle, spaghetti is usually good, fish and chips, or meat lover's pizza. Other options also on the menu. Next morning turned out that Soundeuan, our contact and Main Man at the Provincial Education Service, scheduled two schools on the single day. First off was the Nhot Ngeum Primary School, east of Phonsavan in Nong Pet town. They'd requested funding for tin roofing and cement for floors. The school has almost 90% Hmong students from the larger village area. They did a nice job with the cement for a floor in one building, had enough extra to do plastering on the walls—does make the room much nicer looking. Note, quite a bit of effort goes into a school's reception of a TLCB follow-up visit, preparation for the baci ceremony, and a lunch for perhaps 20 or so people.

Next stop after lunch was the Ko Sy Primary school where they'd requested roofing tin for one village self-help constructed building where they'd run out of funds for the roof, and a second building that needed a replacement roof. Smaller turnout for this visit as a large wedding in the village skimmed off some of the people. Raining, too, so not much of a walk-around through the mud. Still, they were appreciative of the TLCB assistance and had some kind words for us. I took a short break from the BeerLao to hit the head, and lo and behold, it's a sitter! First one I've seen in a school, will keep this in mind if I have a semi emergency when in the neighborhood. Time to head back to Phonsavan, but had a hard time prying Paul and Larry away. They were playing a variation on Spin the Bottle with a really vivacious teacher. Rules are shake the covered plate, which hid a chicken head left over from lunch, when uncovered with the not-smiling head pointed your way, chug a glass of beer.

Next morning, time to start the trip back home. Monks doing their morning rounds, then a good breakfast at the Craters Restaurant. Next stop, Soundeuan's house for some last-minute admin business, then on the road back to the Thai-Lao border crossing. RONed in Udorn, had dinner with TLCB member Mike Cosenza who'd pointed out a new restaurant close to our digs, will go there again.

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Return to Ban Nahom

by Jeff Hudgens

Editor's Note: this is a reprint of Jeff's Assistance article that first appeared in the Mekong Express Mail issue for September, 2004. Newer members will enjoy the spirit and excitement Jeff expressed, and we all will appreciate this reminder.

"Where is the rest of the bone jarring road?" I wondered. It had only been 14 months since my last visit and now the road to Ban Nahom was paved halfway to the village. Progress—and so quickly!

My "Impact Laos" team members and I were returning to Ban Nahom village to fulfill our vision. The vision was spawned 14 months before when I searched for my father's crash site.

You may recall, my dad, Maj. Edward M. Hudgens was an A-1 pilot on a search and rescue mission for two downed F4 pilots in the Mu Gia region. As he was returning to Nakhom Phanom, his tail section blew off. His plane crashed into the side of a karst, a 45-minute hike from Ban Nahom village.

When I returned home from Ban Nahom in Oct 2002, I formed a team of friends from my church. Team members included fellow TLCB member Bill Brown (stationed, ironically, at NKP the same time as my Dad), his brother Bob, dentist Greg Armi, Jeff Meyer, Ken Macon, Jeff von Richter and me. Supporting us from North by Northeast Tours was Montri, Sak and John Learned.

We finalized the vision and formulated a plan. We wanted to make an impact on poverty-stricken Ban Nahom and surrounding villages. We decided to call it "Impact Laos." Our overall objectives were to focus on dental/medical needs and to help the kids and villagers in Ban Nahom and surrounding area.

The goals of this particular trip were to evaluate the dental needs of the kids, build a concrete school floor, procure and deliver helpful items like blankets, shoes, soap, shampoo, toothbrushes, toothpaste, school books, school and medical supplies.



Upon completion of the visit, each patient received a toy (in left hand), a new toothbrush and a Polaroid picture with the dentist. Photos from Jeff Hudgens.

Dr Greg Armi performing a night time wisdom tooth extraction with nothing but a headlamp for illumination.



I also felt it was important to involve those who fought in the war. I approached both the A-1 Skyraiders Association and the TLCB during the October reunions about participating in the project. Both enthusiastically agreed and donated funds towards the project.

Day 1

After a night in Bangkok and an early flight to NKP we visited the old base. Bill was looking for the old putting green he had built in 1969. We didn't find it (how do you lose a putting green?). I had learned the exact location of my Dad's hooch at the A-1 reunion. We found it but there was not much left but the foundation.

We met TLCB member John Middlewood and his wife at dinner near the night market. After dinner, a few of the guys headed off to check out the night market where they dined on a few beetles, silkworms and grubs! Sadly, I was in heavy discussion with John and was unable to partake.

Day 2: Heading out

The next day we crossed the Mekong River, entered Laos and drove a not-so-bumpy four hours to Ban Nahom. Everywhere we went, we were the center of attention. We started taking pictures of the kids then flipped the digital camera around to show them the photo. The joy it gave the kids and adults was addicting and this practice continued for our entire stay.

After a wonderful dinner cooked by Montri and a meeting with the local and District leaders, it was off to bed.

Day 3

The next morning we began our first day of activities in **Ban Nahom continues on page 12**

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Last day, the seven-hour drive back home. Got a traffic ticket on the way, a Thai police checkpoint handing out tickets to many vehicles for driving in what's supposed to be the passing



Above, village moms prepare a Lao feast in the school kitchen for the baci ceremony. At right, Tim Sawyer, Mac, and Soundeuan having traditional string pieces tied to their wrists at the ceremony.

lane, baht 200, with a receipt so that's OK. I don't like paying with no receipt.

Total trip was: 1,248 km, 974 miles, in Thailand, home to Nong Khai and back; 968 km, 600 miles, on the road in Laos with Somphou.



Letters to the Editor

Re: Dave Hagan's descriptions of all his moves

Thank you and the TLCB for the latest issue of the *MEM*, which is always so interesting! Reading Dave Hagen's description of all his moves, I was touched and reminded of the wives' and families' involvement and efforts for each one.

There is a maxim that military wives live by, called "Pay, pack, and follow"—the husband goes on to the next posting, and the wife does that. Other many-moving families of journalists, missionaries, business people, etc. also live and know this. Dave Hagen's moves were mostly business/career moves, and he mentions how his dear wife, Som, followed him, uncomplaining. We recently met a young military family that has had 11 moves in 11 years! They are getting ready for their next one.

During my David's job as a journalist, we had five moves to three countries. After his stroke in 2013, I was surprised at how some friends were amazed at how I bought an apartment, downsized from our house, and moved within weeks while he was in rehab. I replied that I was only doing naturally what I had done before — pay, pack, and follow!

BTW — there is a group for children, like Dave Hagen's — children who are raised outside of their "passport" countries and become multicultural, exactly as he described. It is called "Global nomads," not for the parents, but for the children who become "third-culture kids"— part home country, part second and third, somewhere in-between, with "homes" in many places or nowhere! International companies love these "kids" with such international knowledge.

When one, a rather aggrieved adult, once said to me that the wives participated in the decisions about the moves, while the children were powerless, I told him that, with each move, the wife's decision was whether to stay in the marriage or not! I suggested that he talk to his mother! I know some journalists' wives who chose not! Thanks again for all of you!

Sally MacDonald [*wife of Editor Emeritus David MacDonald*]

Re: "The Wall Talked to Me"

I read with interest the article "The Wall Talked to Me" by Patrick Minoughan.

I was stationed with Detachment 1 56th Special Operations Wing at Udorn RTAFB from September 1969 to 1970 as an aircraft flight line maintenance officer. During my year, I, as others, lost friends and acquaintances in the war.

My first trip to the wall in D.C. was in the mid-70s. I approached as an emotional wreck, fully supported by my wife. It was shattering to see the names on the wall, especially those I recognized. I shared the same feeling as Mr. Minoughan did when he visited. I read with interest, the story about the nine individuals from the AFTN station who were killed when the damaged jet crashed into their station. Distinctly, I remember coming out of our maintenance control room on the second level of our hangar onto an outside landing with stairs going down to ground level. As I looked in the sky, I saw a parachute on the other side of the airfield and also a cloud of smoke rising from the crash scene. I did not know until later in the day what damage had occurred and needless to say, I was shocked and saddened by the news.

Marty Mozzo

New Member Profile

Michael “Zeke” Wimert

I graduated West Point (USMA) on 7 June 1967, volunteered to go the Vietnam (VN) and after a month of leave, went to Airborne school, Officer Basic and Ranger School. First duty assignment was Fort Carson, Colorado, along with three other classmates who had also volunteered to go to VN after 5 months troop duty. They were all killed within a month in country.

For two reasons, I ended up not going after the initial 5 months: 1) Broke my left leg skiing, and 2) as a 2nd Lt Company Commander, I did not go as there were no officers to run the companies in the 5th Mech. Finally, I called Officer Personnel and asked for an airborne assignment in a combat zone (another \$220/month, which was important because my base salary was less than \$320 a month and I had a wife and son). I was sent to Ft. Bragg for Special Forces “Q” course and took Lao language courses in the evenings.

Got to Vientiane, Laos in March 1969 as a 1st Lt with 6 months in grade. I was initially assigned as an intelligence officer posting intelligence, and was there for less than a month when a Captain and Sergeant were killed, and I was assigned to take over their duties in Vang Vieng, advising two Laotian Neutralists Battalions.

At that time, the Laos had two armed forces in the field: The Neutralists who supported the Prince and second, the Pathet Lao who supported his brother who was aligned with the North Viet-



Zeke then: “I spent almost 4 months living with the Lao and I am back at the Attache house in Vientiane because I just missed seeing round-eye persons. This was in late ‘69. I am holding a cut off .30 Cal fully automatic carbine that I mostly kept in a metal holder on my jeep.” Photos from Zeke Wimert.

nam Army (NVA). (There is a lot of history associated with this, but this short history of 16 months in northern Laos will not be able to address it). While I was there, there were never more than 30 Special Forces (SF) officers and enlisted in the field, plus approximately 20 U.S. Air Force Ravens (FACs). I called my time there a “Terry and Pirates” type of war. As an example, my first trip up country was to Moung Soui where I met a major. Bob Moberg, who had come up through the ranks and had been SF forever. He was dressed in old jungle boots, fatigue pants, and a very dirty tee shirt, and carried a 1911 [.45 calibre automatic pistol] in a chest holster. First thing he said to me was that my career as an Army officer was screwed, and he was pretty much correct.

He then asked me if I wanted to go with him to see some

NVA tanks that were outside of the 155 mm gun grid and had been harassing local units. These were batteries operated by several Thai regiments that were stationed at Moung Soui. Not knowing any better, I said “Yes sir.” He was also a pilot, so we got into an O-1 Birdog. He handed me an AK with 2 magazines and said, “Do not fire outside of the left window.” (I was behind him). We flew about 25 minutes and saw a Russian T-34 and 2 PT-76 tanks on the ground sitting just off the Plain of Jars, with personnel mulling around them. The major yelled “Get ready,” dived the plane and fired off two 3.5 WP rockets at the T-34 (It had a gun on the turret). I got so excited, and not quite believing what we were doing, fired out the left window, spraying hot brass on Maj. Moberg’s back and neck. Don’t think I hit anybody, but with the plane turning for another run, I did see that one of the rockets had hit the front side of the T-34 and the tank was beginning to move. Meanwhile, Maj Moberg is yelling at me at what a stupid asshole I was. He shot the last two rockets and I only fired out the right side this time. We left and flew back to Moung Soui.

Just about all my air transportation was Air America, mostly in CH-34s and Helio Couriers where I amassed almost 200 hours of flying time—although I was never a pilot—occasionally, in Pilatus Porters.

The Air Force Ravens were a wild bunch of 1st Lts and Captains, most somewhat crazy. All wore mostly civilian clothes, some even with white silk scarves around their necks. They were headquartered in Long Tieng, Gen Vang Pao’s base for the Meo. I only got there twice as Assistant Attaches (our official title) like me were not allowed there, although both Maj Bob Moberg and Maj Skip Werbiski were there often. Skip was a super warrior and was killed outside Long Tieng. He, more than anybody, was my mentor.

I spent almost six months in the Vang Vieng area sometimes fighting Pathet Lao, but more often than not, company-sized NVA units, as they were finally penetrating Laos by early 1970. After a live fire altercation with one of my Lao Battalion commanders, I quickly left Vang Vieng and worked in Moung Soui and sometimes in Sam Thong, as well as a month-long tour from Paksane to the border of North Vietnam with a really good Lao Colonel, who would actually fight.

My last job, for the local CAS (CIA) contingent, was training a mixed group of Lao, mostly Meo and some Chinese Nungs, for an attack on a five-meter-wide road the Chinese were building down thru Burma into Thailand. Other than keeping them from killing one another, I trained them on infantry tactics, the

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Ban Nahom *continued from page 9*

Ban Nahom. Brothers Bill and Bob Brown entertained the kids with a homemade box hockey game and by making bamboo hula-hoops. Seventy-one year old Bob even rode a bicycle backwards!

Then it was on to building a cement schoolroom floor funded by TLCB. To get water to the school for the cement, women and girls four years or older carried water from the riverbed to the school, up a 40-foot embankment and 200 yards to barrels outside of the school. Inside, Bill and Bob taught the locals and us “Farangs” (westerners) how to lay concrete. We were amazed at the tenacity of the Brown brothers.



Above, new concrete floor for the Ban Nahom school. Villagers soon picked up the technique and supplied most of the vigorous hand labor. Below, Gome and Jeff pour first bucket of TLCB-donated concrete for the floor.



John Learned was a welcome surprise member to our group. John is part of North by Northeast tours and set up a small medical center for minor medical issues.

During floor construction, we set up a dental clinic. Dentist Greg and his assistant Jeff Meyer performed dental assessments and cleanings on the village children. They showed the kids proper brushing techniques and introduced flossing—an unheard of practice. Following their dental exam, patients received a new toothbrush, bracelet or toy, and a Polaroid picture with the dentist. The prized pictures were a big hit as this would be their first ever.

Dr Greg also treated several dental conditions in some adults. These included one nighttime wisdom tooth extractions using only a headlamp for illumination. In all, Greg and Jeff saw over 70 kids and 20 adults. What an accomplishment!

Day 4

The next day’s objective was to complete the school floor.

John Learned administers medical aid to a girl with an infected lip. Many such infections prove fatal if untreated.



The first day it took almost the entire day to complete a little more than 1/3 the floor. By the second day, we had the system down and completed the floor after lunch. The first day, we were very hands-on but by the second day, the last few sections of concrete were being laid entirely by the villagers.

The final day’s agenda included distribution of supplies and a trip to my father’s crash site.

The team distributed supplies to each head of family. Each

family received sleeping mats, blankets, shoes, soap, shampoo, toothbrushes and toothpaste. The recipient’s appreciation is almost too hard to articulate.

Ban Nahom kids receiving basic hygiene and school supplies from “Impact Laos.”

Each student received notebooks, pens, pencils, erasers, pencil sharpeners and a prized school uniform. The youngest were so precious. Their little

“praying hands” and “Khop Jai” “thank you” were too cute.

We also purchased schoolbooks for grades 1—5 and distributed them to the Ban Nahom School (Grades 1—3) and the Ban Thongkham school (Grades 3—5). In addition, we shared some of the supplies and medicines with the two neighboring villages of Ban Thongkham and Ban Nachat.

A group of thirty or so villagers and team members made the 45-minute hike to my dad’s crash site. We mounted a memorial plaque onto a prominent rock. This rock prevented many of my father’s remains from being washed down the side of the



Ban Nahom *continues on page 12*

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mountain. It was here that the JTFA found most of my dad's remains, including his identifying tooth.

While the plaque was being mounted, I stole a few moments by myself. I thought of my Dad, I thought of what we had just accomplished in the village, I thought of all the people who made it possible. From North by Northeast Tours to the A-1 Skyraiders Association and the Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood, our co-workers, family, friends and wives, the Impact Laos team received a tremendous amount of support. Without all of them, this trip would never have been possible.

A vision that was spawned 14 months ago was complete for this trip. We will be back. We made a difference.

We will continue to Impact Laos.

I knew my Dad would be proud of us all.



Above, Jeff Hudgens at his father's crash site, just south of MuGia Pass, near the village of Ban Nahom. Read the plaque wording below.

**IN MEMORY OF
MAJ. EDWARD M. HUDGENS, USAF**

6 SEPTEMBER 1931 - 21 MARCH 1970

**PILOT OF AN A-1 SKYRAIDER,
CALLSIGN SANDY 06**

**DIED WHEN HIS PLANE CRASHED AT THIS
LOCATION DURING THE SUCCESSFUL RESCUE
OF ANOTHER PILOT**

DEDICATED 13 JANUARY 2004

**LIKE us on FACEBOOK—
The Official Thailand, Laos, Cambodia
Brotherhood**

Wimert continued from page 11

M-60 machine gun, and the WWII 2.36 mm rocket launcher. I was only able to participate the final attack in a Pilatus Porter overseeing, but we did take several hits.

I got back to Bragg in late July 70, until I was assigned to the Ranger School in Ft. Benning as an instructor waiting for a slot at the Advance Officers Course. From there I had another infantry company command in Ft. Ord, California, then a one year-plus stint as an aid to a terrific general in Washington, D.C. Although on the five percent list for major, my next assignment was to go to Vietnam on the Blue Storm Teams to act as an advisor to the Vietnamese. In mid-1973, that assignment was another guaranteed purple heart, so I declined and left the Army.

After I left active duty I moved to New York, and as I was nearly broke, joined the Reserves. As there was no SF unit nearby, I joined the 318 Military Police Battalion in Hempstead, New York, as the executive officer. I was actually the Battalion CO as we had no CO for almost a year and a half, with almost 700 NYC, Nassau, and Suffolk County police working in the unit. It was a very active Reserve unit, with at least one company performing duties somewhere almost every month.

I stayed in New York for three years as a co-founder of a small semiconductor sales rep company, and in 1977 moved to Brazil as the Vice President of Sales for a Ford/National Semiconductor joint venture. I stayed with National Semiconductor for 11 years and then started Motorola in South America and later still, Oracle Corporation in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. My last business in Latin America, was my own company, which I sold in 2000. I moved back to the U.S. and was the Chief Operating Office of a large IP Networking firm in San Jose, CA until I started another business buying distressed telecom assets, which I did until 2006. Since 2007, I have been a very active consultant working almost exclusively setting up U.S. businesses outside of the United States, and have done this extensively and still do, in the Middle East, Latin America, Asia, South Pacific, and in one case, Africa.

Divorced since 1990, with two very successful and happy children, I now live in Houston, Texas and have a most wonderful long-term girl friend who lives in Baton Rouge, LA.



Recent picture is of Zeke with his girlfriend in Europe on vacation.



Memorial Day, 2017

By Bob Wheatley

Editor's Note: Bob Wheatley, a long-time TLCB member, posted this article on the TLCB website Forum on Memorial Day 2017. I certainly thought it should be published in the Mekong Express Mail, but also thought, considering the ages of many of our members, that it should not wait till Memorial Day 2018, but should be in print as soon as possible.

Some rambling thoughts here for Memorial Day, 2017—adapted from my own wartime memoir...

At risk of sounding trite, war surely is as close to Hell as one can get in this lifetime, and no one hates war more than those who experience it first hand and witness for themselves the carnage it brings. No one hates it more than those who lose their friends, their own bodies and minds, their very lives to it.

We make heroes of those who die in war—perhaps in part to console ourselves and somehow reassure ourselves that their sacrifice was indeed necessary. A posthumous medal or a folded flag may be some small consolation to bereaved family members, but how much consolation is it for the departed? I know from experience that the reality is that many die in war needlessly and in vain. Furthermore, there is absolutely nothing romantic or noble in dying. The act of dying is not itself heroic. Nor is there glory in suffering horrible disfigurement in the service of one's country. There is honor in serving in spite of the danger involved.

Most who have died in war never thought themselves to be heroes. On the contrary, they probably considered themselves quite ordinary men who simply felt compelled to step up and do what they believed to be their duty. It was their acts that were extraordinary—heroic in nature. Furthermore, I will resist the temptation to describe their ultimate sacrifice with the romantic notion, "They gave their lives for their country." In reality, what they gave was no more, and no less than anyone else who has served or is serving—their sworn allegiance and service to country. Their lives were not given, but taken from them, wrested from their grasp against their wills. In that light, to say they "gave" their lives for their country is absurd.

In 1970, Army Major Alexander Hottel III was killed in a helicopter crash over Laos. A year before his death, he had penned his own epitaph and sealed and sent it to his wife with instructions that it be opened only in the event of his death. It

read simply, "I deny that I died for anything — not my country, not my Army, not my fellow man. I lived for these things, and the manner in which I chose to do it involved the very real chance that I would die."

I am certain that Major Hottell never thought of himself as a hero, though he certainly lived heroically, and he died serving a cause higher than himself in a very dangerous environment — living for his fellow man. These are the kinds of things we can ascribe to true heroes — ordinary men and women doing extraordinary things in a selfless way.

Most assuredly, no one ever went off to war actually planning to come back maimed or in a body bag; however, every soldier, sailor, airman, and marine knows going in, that very real possibility exists. Those who obediently leave home and family to go to far flung tropic jungles, suffer blistering desert heat, spend months at sea far from land, or languish in frigid wastelands to serve in war are willing to take the risk, for reasons more than the fact their nation has asked it of them. They do it for their families and loved ones who remain behind, safe in stateside factories and universities and cities

and towns and suburbs. They do it for each other, as brothers in arms. They do it because of a debt to and a kinship shared with the brave, dutiful men who have gone before to fight for our nation in prior wars—former generations of ordinary men, doing extraordinary things.

They who make the ultimate sacrifice while in service to our nation and our people, to their fellow man, do indeed deserve to be called heroes, not because they died, but because of the way they lived. Every one of us owes them a debt of eternal gratitude. Though it's a debt that can never be fully repaid, please take a moment to remember and honor them and their ultimate sacrifice this Memorial Day—ordinary men and women who died while living for a higher cause, doing extraordinary things in a selfless way.



Future continued from page 3

The simplest means of keeping the TLCB going and extending its work may be to encourage the families of the current membership to join. The suggestion that current members try to recruit family members, children, and grandchildren, is reasonable; however, the anecdotal response of the committee's members has not been encouraging. Interest in the Vietnam War among millennials is limited at best, and while our members have generally strong family ties, there is only moderate, if that, interest in their grandparents' wars. The comments of several founders reflect that conundrum.

"My own children have no particular interest in the TLCB... other than their Dad likes it and spends a lot of time supporting this veteran's group. They would join if I said I need them to, but not really because of any motivation on their part." There is a distinct irony in this lack of curiosity. Predictably, you can be assured that today's grandchildren, and probably our great-grandchildren, will one day seek to find out more about their forbearers' early lives and will probably be turning to the by then yellowing pages of the *MEM* to learn about those times.

Further, even if discussion of the Vietnam War does not provoke the angry divisions it once did, it is now distant history for many. "To most Americans, Southeast Asia is history, and has an unpleasant aura because in that second paragraph in their history books, it says we lost." This member added, "I doubt if the current generation of military vets will be inclined to join a vets organization like the TLCB."

The Public Relations Option

Although the TLCB does have a Public Relations committee, the function has been limited for the most part to keeping similar organizations, generally military in nature, informed of our activities. Yet there may be some possibilities to take the message to a broader audience and maybe even find additional funding. An expanded degree of outreach might result in some favorable coverage.

Over the last few years, there was a 60 Minutes report and a New York Times feature article on the efforts of Vietnam veterans working on reconciliation programs in Vietnam. Frankly, neither of them was as extensive or as measurably successful as our Assistance Program. There may be some potential for success in renewing our public relations efforts with the media.

At the same time, a sustained public relations program is quite likely beyond the resources that the TLCB's volunteer membership can muster. As one correspondent wrote, "Reaching out in new ways and seeking opportunities for publicity made me think that it could be beneficial to engage a public relations firm...of course this would cost money." Even if we are successful in raising our recognition and perhaps generating some contributions, beyond that is the bigger question: would it bring in a new type of member, without SEA experience, willing to devote energies to continuing the TLCB's operations?

Interest among millennials in the Vietnam War is limited at best, and while our members have generally strong family ties, there is only moderate, if that, interest in their grandparents' wars.

I investigated this once several years ago and discovered that once we declare ourselves an NGO, we will come under lots of legal scrutiny both in the recipient countries, and in the U.S. We will need lawyers."

Also, if the TLCB were to move in this direction, there is the question of how would the bulk of the current membership react? That point was raised by several contributors:

"[Would a shift in focus] cause a loss of membership in TLCB?"

"[As others] argued, the present membership is not likely to agree to such a fundamental shift."

These are not necessarily roadblocks to pursuing new directions for the TLCB, but they are questions warranting consideration.

Finding Sponsorships

One suggestion, or perhaps just a floated idea, is to find corporate sponsors willing to make substantial contributions. "Some sort of business or organization with a greater presence, a public view... Surely, there are major corporations with CEOs, CFOs, and Members of The Board who once were standing on the red dirt of SEA." The fact is that those executives are probably of the same age today as our membership. Still the idea of finding organizations with an interest in SEA is not outrageous. Anyone who has been involved in local charities knows that among the most attractive source of support are corporations doing business in the area.

Clearly, the sponsorship route is a possibility. Of course, probably even more so than some of the previously discussed options, it would entail substantial changes in the TLCB's organizational structure.

Maintaining the Assistance Program

Soliciting the contributions to the TLCB Assistance Program is easy as most of the funds are sent in monthly or accompany the response to the annual dues notice. Overseeing the operation of the program in the field is an entirely different matter. Right now, the heavy lifting relies overwhelmingly on the shoulders of one person, TLCB's man in Southeast Asia, MacAlan "Mac" Thompson, and a shifting cast of SEA residents and occasional visitors. One correspondent put it succinctly. "The [issue] is... legal/administrative. We

do well with relatively small finances because we have nearly no overhead. We cannot become a recognized charity without lots of legal filings and approvals, and ultimately, a full-time paid staff. The same can be said of becoming a Non-Governmental Organization authorized to operate in Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, or wherever. **I investigated this once several years ago and discovered that once we declare ourselves an NGO, we will come under lots of legal scrutiny both in the recipient countries, and in the U.S. We will need lawyers."**

Not Summing Up

It would be presumptuous beyond my usual nature to reach conclusions here. The discussion to date has been limited to a small ad hoc committee, which is why we have scheduled a workshop for all members at the September 21-23 Reunion in Dayton, Ohio.

At this point, the best I can say is, IT'S COMPLI-



CATED!

TLC Brotherhood Reunion Schedule

September 21 to 23, Dayton, Ohio

Thursday 21 September 2017

Noon—7:00pm Hotel Check in, Holiday Inn, 2800 Presidential Dr., Fairborn, Ohio
Check in at the Nipa Hut (Challenger Room).
Afternoon, Evening Social Time in the Nipa Hut, dinner and local sightseeing on your own.

Friday 22 September 2017

6:00am—10:00am FREE BUFFET BREAKFAST
8:45am Load buses for the Air Force Museum and Memorial Park; depart hotel by 9:10am.
After a brief Memorial Service at the TLCB Plaque outside the museum, you will be on your own to tour the museum, IMAX theater, and interactive exhibits. There is a restaurant available for a light snack or drink.
4:00pm Load bus for return trip to hotel; bus departs museum by 4:15pm.
4:45pm Assorted Subway sandwiches and snacks provided in the Challenger Room.
7:00pm—? Annual TLCB Assistance Auction in the Challenger Room

Saturday 23 September 2017

7:00am—10:00am FREE BUFFET BREAKFAST
8:00am—9:00am Closed Board Meeting in the Columbia room.
9:15am—10:30am All membership TLCB Annual Meeting in the Challenger Room.
10:45am—11:15am Special Workshop: The Future of TLCB. Moderated by John Harrington, MEM Editor.
All members urged to participate.

Optional Presentations (Challenger Room)

1:00pm—2:00pm Bill Peterson LS-85 update presentation.
2:30pm—3:30pm Presentation by Jack Mecham: “The Black Mariah Story”
6:00pm—7:00pm Banquet Cocktail Hour (CASH BAR) Challenger Room.
The uniform of the day for the Saturday night banquet is business casual, or coat and tie at your discretion.
7:00pm—? 2017 TLCB Banquet. Quilt raffle drawing, etc. Speaker Ray Robb (see below).

Sunday 24 September 2017

7:00am—10:00am FREE BUFFET BREAKFAST
No events scheduled. Reunion officially ends.

Raymond L. Robb

Special guest speaker

Ray is a native of Savannah, Georgia, and is currently a Security Specialist in the Air Force Research Laboratory, a devoted aviation enthusiast, photographer, and military historian. His presentation will provide a historical overview of the 1942 American bombing raid on Japan led by Lt Col Jimmy Doolittle, including a firsthand account of the Doolittle Raiders’ final reunion and toast held in 2013 at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force.

Airport Transportation

Kimberly Peterson, Holiday Inn sales coordinator, will coordinate guest transportation from the airport to the Holiday Inn, using Charter Vans. We negotiated a special rate with them, \$30 round trip, which is about half the regular cost. The \$30 goes directly on your hotel bill.

If you need this service, reach Kimberly during the day at 937-426-7800.

Ray Boas, Reunion Chairman

