

MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



The newsletter of the Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood, Inc. Volume 27, issue 1
WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.com

The Nakhon Phanom Navy

The Inspiring but Tragic Story of U.S. Navy Squadron VO-67

by L.R. Gire, VO-67 pilot

Editor’s Note: In the December 2025 issue, we published member John Schillo’s account of “Igloo White” operations at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB. John mentioned that the data they processed at Igloo White came from sensors placed in the Ho Chi Minh Trail areas by a U.S. Navy P2V Neptune squadron. The following article describes that operation and the tragic challenges they faced. The article was adapted from the “Observation Squadron 67 Website.”

At the height of the Vietnam War, a secret Navy twelve-plane squadron arrived at the Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base in northeast Thailand. The squadron aircraft were old P2V-5F anti-submarine patrol planes that had been considerably modified into armed, jungle-green gunships. Of course, every would-be comic who saw them at Nakhon Phanom asked, “What’s the Navy going to do, hunt for subs in the Mekong?”

North Vietnam was moving undetected, massive amounts of supplies and munitions by truck, as well as troops, down the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the panhandle of Laos in mid 1966. The Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, was opposed to attacking North Vietnam military targets and infrastructure and to stopping the movement of war materials into North Vietnam by mining their harbors, as advocated by the military. In the fall of 1966, he ordered the military to submit a proposed plan for an anti-infiltration system designed to stop, or greatly reduce, the flow of men and war material from North

VO-67 continues on page 3

What’s Inside:

From the Editor.....	2
TLC Brotherhood Information	2
Nakhon Phanom Flashbacks.....	7
Bill Webster, 1943—2025.....	8
Reflections on Memorial Day 2025.....	9
Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood	9
Donors to TLC Brotherhood Assistance 2025	10
A Note From Your Chaplain	11
Bill “Willie Pete” Peterson, 1943—2026	12
Routine ER Shift	13
Return to Southeast Asia, 2002 & 2006.....	14
TLCB Reunion 2026	16
Exchange News: 2 New Products.....	16



OP-2E, a modified P2V Lockheed “Neptune,” number MR 4, on the ramp of Davis Monthan AFB in Arizona, soon after delivery for mothball storage after duty at NKP. All photos from the VO-67 Webpage.

From the Editor

We do get some comments from our readers from time to time, and here are a few that were received since the last issue of the *Mekong Express Mail*. I'll keep them anonymous.

Note with a donation: *So I had started writing out a check to the TLC Brotherhood for my 2026 dues. Then I read the blue card that I am paid until 2027. Might as well not let the check be wasted! Warm regards*

On the backs of dues cards:

I am proud to be a member of the TLC Brotherhood. I am 81 years old. I was going to write you a short history of my involvement in South East Asia operations but I won't. I don't brag or lie, just the facts. Besides, it is on a "need to know" basis. I am looking forward to the next reunion. This is written at 0200 hrs. See you!!

If I have already paid the 2026 dues, please apply the entire \$130 to the Assistance Fund. My memory seems somewhat sporadic these days. NKP—always remember! Hard work as a loader. Would do it again today.

Please put a note in the next Mekong Express Mail. If any Veterans desire service connection for disabilities with the VA, have them contact us at Asknod.com. We're helping out a lot of Air America pilots now.

Sad News

While we generally post news about *current* members, like the page devoted to Bill Peterson in this issue, we have received word that two once-prominent members died recently. Through a former TLCB president, we got word that Herb

"Ghostman" Neeland, one-time member 00428 who joined in 2000, died on January 18th at the age of 73. Herb was a very interesting person who suffered from the memories of some pretty tough experiences in mortuary affairs, wrote haunting poetry, and was very active in the old days when we just had an email server. Like many others who did not like the arguments that sometimes got bitter on that comm medium, he did not stay with the Brotherhood.

Also, many will remember former member John Avery, who helped put on the wonderful Ontario California reunion in 2004, and was also very active on our internet messaging network. John died on January 11th.

A little TLCB history

Of the original 151 charter members who joined before April 15, 1999, 26 are still active members of the Brotherhood. The board chose the cutoff for charter membership arbitrarily as April 15, 1999, and the last charter member to join was Ken Griswold, 00275. Numbering of members began with the late Richard Anderson as 00108. That number was chosen because we preferred not to choose anyone to be member "tee nung" (number one). Unfortunately, Anderson resented that he was not honored with number 00001, but others could claim being founders also. When I set up the original database, I entered the first 66 members alphabetically, and "Anderson" happened to be the first one.

Bill Tilton
Editor



The Mekong Express Mail is an official publication of The TLC Brotherhood, Inc. This newsletter is furnished to all active member households in support of the Brotherhood's objectives. The views expressed in articles published in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not reflect official TLC Brotherhood policy unless explicitly stated, nor is the TLC Brotherhood, Inc. responsible for the veracity of information furnished by our authors. All rights reserved by The TLC Brotherhood, Inc. in 2026. The TLC Brotherhood, Inc. is a tax exempt, non-profit charitable organization under IRC Section 501(c)(3), and was incorporated in the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1999.

TLC Brotherhood, Inc.

Tax ID #54-1932649

Board of Directors and Committee Chairmen

2025-2026, showing year of term end

President: John Sweet, 2026 (currently second term)
Vice President: Barry Rowland, (Reunion Committee) 2027 (first term)
Secretary: Bob Vettel, 2027 (currently first term)
Treasurer: Bill Tilton, 2026 (currently second term)
Chaplain: Dan Pierce (Memorial Committee) (term unlimited)

Board Members

Al Dozal, 2026 (currently second term)
Ken Schmidt, 2027 (currently second term)
Les Thompson, 2027 (currently first term)
Dave Weeks, 2026 (currently first term)

Appointed Committee Chairmen

Assistance Committee: Paul Carter
Communications Committee: Ray Boas
Exchange Shopkeeper: Thelma Tilton
History Committee: John Lorenzen
Membership Committee: John Duffin & John Bollwerk
Public Relations Committee: Vacant

The Mekong Express Mail

David MacDonald (1939-2019), Founding Editor
John Harrington, Editor Emeritus

Editor/Composition: Bill Tilton (billtilton@gmail.com)
Assistant Editor: Thelma Tilton (thelmatilton@gmail.com)
Distribution: John Duffin (jduffin29@gmail.com)

TLCB Facebook Page

Ray Boas, Monitor
(raymar711@gmail.com)

TLC Brotherhood Website

Jerry Karnes, Webmaster
(JKarnes@tlc-brotherhood.com)

Payments to the TLCB

Via website—uses PayPal system to accept credit card payments.
By check—make checks payable to TLC Brotherhood; **write member number and purpose on the check**, and mail to:

TLC Brotherhood
P.O. Box 60
Aspers, PA 17304

DUES: \$30

Reunion 2026: San Antonio

VO-67 continued from page 1

Vietnam into South Vietnam. The quickest solution available was to modify and employ the Navy's "sonobuoys," listening devices used to detect submarines underwater, and to implant them in the jungle canopy to detect the movement of NVA trucks and troops.

The converted sonobuoys, dubbed "acoubuoys," were camouflaged in jungle green, and parachuted into the jungle, snagged in the top jungle canopy, and hung unseen high off the ground. Sensitive microphones that replaced the sonobuoys' hydrophones could pick up the sound of truck and troop movement below.

The Navy had a number of anti-submarine aircraft in its inventory, with sonobuoy racks installed, capable of delivering the modified listening devices. The Navy determined that available P2V-5Fs would be the quickest and best delivery platform to modify for implanting the acoubuoys along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

By this stage of the war, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) had heavily fortified the trail with highly mobile ZPU-23mm, 37mm, and some radar-controlled 57mm guns. Survivability of the slow, lumbering P2V-5F in this environment was questionable, but the need was urgent because our troops in South Vietnam were taking heavy casualties. The Defense Department decided to deploy the P2V-5Fs to provide an interim capability until Air Force F-4 jets could be modified to take over the task.

The initial overhaul was done in three phases at the Martin Aircraft Company in Baltimore, Maryland. This overhaul and replacement of electronics included installing new self-sealing bladder fuel tanks, capable of holding 2800 gallons of fuel and sustaining small arms and shrapnel hits, and painting the aircraft a flat, jungle green. After this modification, the aircraft were redesignated as the "OP-2E." Modifications to the aircraft continued well into the deployment and operational phase of the squadron.

Much of the modification work was done by the VO-67th maintenance organization. The APS-20E submarine search radar, with its large radar dome and the magnetic anomaly detector (MAD) gear and boom, used to detect the magnetic sig-



OP-2E (foreground) on the NKP ramp next to a row of A-1H "Sandys," which were also powered by the Curtiss-Wright R-3350 engine, originally designed for the Boeing B-29. Note the klong and the pierced steel plank (PSP) ramp paving. One of the most successful designs originating during WWII, there were about two dozen variants of the Neptune, which even took off from an aircraft carrier but had to *land* ashore.

nature of submerged submarines, were removed. To protect the crews, wingtip tanks were removed and extensive armor plating was added, primarily in the bombardier's nose station, cockpit, flight deck, and the aft gunner's stations. Two underwing SUU-11 six-barreled mini guns were installed, and a radar-confusing "chaff" dispenser was added aft where the MAD boom had protruded.

LORAN-C, a new version of the Long-Range Aide to Navigation, replaced the old LORAN system used by the Navy at that time and was used for guidance when dropping sensors during the monsoon season. Internal mounts for the M-60 machine guns were installed at both hatches in the after station of the OP-2E aircraft. These hand-directed 7.62mm guns fired 550 rounds per minute and were manned by two crew members. To facilitate egress for the crew forward of the wing spar to bail out, the deck hatch to the nose gear tunnel was enlarged. Threat-detection electronics and terrain-clearance radar were added, and bomb bay racks were fabricated to carry

The Author

Author Lt. Larold "L. W." Gire was a pilot in Navy Observation Squadron 67 (VO-67). He was the squadron historian and authored the account "NKP's Navy," on which this article is based. He also wrote "VO-67: Wings of Gold Over the Ho Chi Minh Trail," helping to bring the unit's story to light after decades of classified status. Ed.

VO-67 continues on page 4

VO-67 continued from page 3

additional acoubuoys. A Norden bombsight was installed in the plexiglass nose of the OP-2E. This was the result of the added mission of implanting the Air-delivered Seismic Detection Sensor (ADSIDS) that presented a problem that the old P2V aircraft was not equipped to handle. The addition of J-34 jet engines to the P2V-5Fs had reduced the under-wing launch stubs from 16 to 8 stations. VO-67 overcame this shortage of stations by using Multi Ejection Rack (MER) weapon racks that could hold three ADSIDS on each of these eight stations; however, the real problem was the lack of an accurate delivery system for the ADSIDS. Navy patrol plane pilots dropped sonobuoys and torpedoes at low altitude by sight or timing. An accurate means of dropping the ADSID from 2500 feet or higher was needed.

The Norden bombsight had been used extensively in WW-II and had been installed in the Navy's PB4Y-2 aircraft. VO-67 requested Norden bombsights, and after demonstrating their accuracy at Eglin AFB, Pentagon officials agreed that the Norden bombsight was what was needed and had the Rock Island Arsenal overhaul twelve bombsights. For this change, they had to locate and recall retired WWII Norden bombsight technicians. An Air Force Norden bombsight instructor, Lt Col Conrad Brown, was found and sent to Alameda to help train the bombardiers. Lt Col Brown located a battered copy of a WWII training film on the Norden bombsight in the Smith-

Neptunes on the PSP ramp at NKP, a familiar sight in 1967, along with the Thai jungle not that far away in the background.. Note the auxiliary J-34 jet engines, outboard, which were used on takeoff and for backup thrust in case of need.



VO-67 aircraft number MR 3 at an extremely vulnerable altitude over the jungle in Laos. Altitude and route of flight were predictable because of the sensor-dropping mission, which was very helpful to enemy anti-aircraft gunners. Pilots learned to use rugged karst outcroppings to screen themselves when possible.

sonian Institution. He had it shipped, PRIORITY ONE, to VO-67 and used it to train the squadron bombardiers. Lt Col Brown deployed with the squadron to continue training the VO-67 third pilots who developed into qualified bombardiers.

Deployment at Last

The first flight of three OP-2Es departed Alameda on 6 November 1967 for Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base (NKP) in Thailand, led by Captain Wallace "Wally" Sharp. The last flight of three OP-2Es arrived at Nakhon Phanom on 15 November 1967. Much credit for the smooth deployment

VO-67 continues next page.



must be given to the Air Force Military Air Transport Service for the professional job they did in moving the rest of the squadron. Eighteen C-141s arrived at Alameda right on schedule. Because of the runway landing-weight limitations at Nakhon Phanom, each C-141 was limited to 45,000 pounds of cargo. One after another, they were efficiently loaded and departed with loads ranging from large electronic vans to administrative files. In all, they airlifted 629,021 pounds of VO-67 personnel and cargo to NKP! The Naval personnel complement of VO-67 when they arrived at NKP was: 1 Captain, 8 Commanders, 3 Commander Selectees, 5 Lieutenant Commanders, 40 junior officers, 23 Chief Petty Officers, 220 rated enlisted personnel, and 14 Airmen. They also had 5 civilian representatives attached to the squadron: 1 from Lockheed, 1 from Hazeltine, 1 from Martin Marietta, and 2 from Sandia Lab.

Navy Pilots & FACs

On arrival at Nakhon Phanom, the VO-67 pilots immediately began flying combat missions with the Air Force 23rd TASS (callsign "Nail") Forward Air Controllers (FACs) in the small Cessna O-2A aircraft to familiarize themselves with the Ho Chi Minh Trail and enemy gun emplacements. The Air Force FAC pilots helped the newly arrived Navy pilots tremendously. The FAC pilots became a valuable intelligence asset to the VO-67. Capt Sharp initiated a close working relationship shortly after VO-67's arrival at NKP by inviting the FAC pilots to a party with the VO-67 pilots at the NKP Officers Club.

The FACs flew every day and night and kept track, and for their own survival and that of the strike aircraft, they marked the targets. The FACs that had flown the night before provided the latest NVA triple-A firing positions for the following day's VO-67 combat missions.

Close friendships developed among the Air Force FAC and Navy pilots, and two of them were highly instrumental in the later rescue of seven VO-67 crew members after their plane was hit by AAA fire and they bailed out over hostile territory. The Air Force O-2A FAC, A1E, and Navy VO-67 pilots at NKP quickly bonded into a mutual-respect support group.

Each VO-67 crew was responsible for planning their own



The Cessna O-2A flown by FACs of the 23rd TASS at Nakhon Phanom in 1967. This military adaptation of the "Skymaster" had two engines and could carry more rockets and had better radios than the O-1 Birddog used in 1966.



Final crew briefing before launching on one of the arguably most dangerous missions ever flown out of a Thai base. Note the waist gun port just behind the insignia. This briefing would include emergency procedures for the crewmembers.

assigned missions. They studied the NVA triple-A gun positions and terrain to determine the safest flight path and altitude profile in and out of the target area. Some missions were as simple as diving from 12,000 feet on the sensor implant heading, leveling off at drop altitude, slowing to drop air speed, laying the sensor string, climbing back to 12,000 feet, and heading home. Drop altitude for the acoubuoys was always 500 feet. The ADSIDS were dropped from 2,500 feet and later 5,000 feet. Missions in areas of heavy enemy AAA concentrations required the crews to use terrain masking wherever possible. The high limestone karst outcroppings in some target areas were ideal for this tactic. Some called for jinking dives to sensor implant altitude and numerous heading changes to the target to avoid the anti-aircraft gun emplacements. Acoubuoy drops in heavily defended areas were made by running into the area at tree top-level, popping up to 500 feet, laying the sensors, dropping back to the deck, and flying the safest route out.

Crew Two—Brothers Forever

On 11 January 1968, the VO-67 Executive Officer (XO), CDR Dell Olson, was on an acoubuoy drop mission over the Ho Chi Minh Trail. At 9:57 AM radio contact with his aircraft was lost and the FAC working the mission had also lost visual contact with the OP-2E. Two other OP-2Es were working the trail that morning. They tried to reestablish radio contact with Crew 2. One OP-2E went under the overcast and spent three hours searching the area. There were some karst outcroppings in the area but it was mostly dense jungle. The base of the overcast was above the highest terrain in the area, so they were able to search the whole area. The jungle was so dense in most places that a plane crashing into it would not leave a discernible entry point, and the crash could not be seen from the air. No trace of the Crew 2 aircraft was found by the searching VO-67 aircraft. On 23 January an Air Force A-1 located a suspected crash site. On 25 January an O-2 from NKP photographed the site. Photo interpretation determined that

OP-67 continues on page 6

the wreckage was that of BUNO 131436, Crew 2's aircraft. It was located on the north side of a cliff, 150 feet below the 4,583-foot ridge line. Due to the hostile environment in the crash site area, it was decided not to insert an investigation and recovery team.

The remains of Crew 2 were finally recovered in the summer of 2001 and returned to the States. The *Parade* Sunday newspaper supplement, with over 40,000,000 readers, carried the story in their 22 July 2001 edition.

“We’re beat up pretty bad.”

On February 17, 1968, Commander Glenn Hayden and his Crew 5 were dropping acoubuoys over the trail in Laos. He had two F-4 escorts out of DaNang and an O-2A FAC as spotter. After coming off his first target run, CDR Hayden reported that they had been hit by small arms fire in the starboard wing but were continuing on with their second assigned target run. During the second run, the fighter escort radioed to the OP-2E that its starboard engine was on fire, and CDR Hayden acknowledged and reported that he was aborting the mission and returning to base. The F-4s climbed through the overcast with the intention of joining the OP-2E on top and escorting him back to base. The last radio transmission they heard from the OP-2E was, “We’re beat up pretty bad.” The F-4s dropped back down below the overcast and found the burning wreckage of the OP-2E; no parachutes were seen. Ten days later, VO-67 suffered its third combat loss on 27 February. CDR Paul Milius’ OP-2E was shot down while implanting sensors in Laos. The aircraft was flying at 5,000 feet above the jungle top. There weren’t any 57mm radar-controlled guns reported to be in the area of his drop, but if it wasn’t those, it had to be the best 37mm gun crew in the world. No flack was spotted before the aircraft was hit, so it almost had to be a direct hit on the first salvo.

Fatal Damage

The aircraft was hit in the radar well area where the old APS -20E radar had been removed. One crewman, PO2 John F. Hartzheim, was killed instantly. The hydraulic and electrical systems were severely damaged, and the aircraft immediately filled with acrid smoke and fumes. Commander Milius ordered his crew to bail out. He remained at the controls of the stricken aircraft until the remaining seven crewmen had successfully bailed out. One Nail FAC pilot, Major Sam Weaver, flew alongside MR-7 as the crew bailed out and kept a plot where each crewman had landed. Another FAC pilot, Major Phil Maywald, also came to assist in the rescue. The “Sandys,” A-1H aircraft that provided rescue cover for downed airmen, and the rescue helicopters, better known as the “Jolly Greens” and “Buffs,” were soon on the scene. Sandys from the 602nd Fighter Commando Squadron, and helicopters from the 37th Air Rescue Squadron at Nakhon Phanom participated in the rescue along with other Air Rescue Recovery Squadrons from DaNang and Udorn. The FACs vectored the helos to each of the downed crewmen. Since they were in a very hostile area, the helos wasted no time in picking up the crew and getting out of there.

Milius was seen to bail out but was never located and was listed as MIA. He was promoted to the rank of Navy Captain on 1 July 1972. On 26 April 1978, he was officially pronounced “presumed killed in action” and was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross. On 23 November 1996, the Aegis Guided Missile Destroyer Milius (DDG 69) was commissioned in his honor at the Ingalls Shipbuilding Yard at Pascagoula, Mississippi.

On 29 February 1968, two days after MR-7 was shot down, the last one of the 12 fully modified OP-2Es arrived at NKP. With the three losses, VO-67 was now a nine-plane squadron. MR-11 was repainted to MR-7 and the rescued members of Crew 7 continued to fly as a crew.

The TET Offensive and Khe Sanh

The North Vietnamese Tet offensive of 1968 was an all-out effort to take the U. S. Marine Base at Khe Sanh. On 22 January 1968, VO-67 commenced implanting extensive acoubuoy sensor fields around the combat base and its approaches to assist in lifting the siege of the Marine stronghold. The special bomb bay racks to hold additional acoubuoys in the OP-2E were used for the first time in the close-in support of Khe Sanh. These acoubuoy flights were classic mission profiles of squadron-developed tactics and what they had trained for in California and Florida. The OP-2Es came into the area skimming above the jungle treetops or rivers, popped up to 500 feet, laid their string of sensors, dropped back down on the deck, and got the hell out of there as fast as the old, lumbering patrol planes would take them!

Estimates of the number of North Vietnamese that took part in the siege of Khe Sanh vary, but most agree that there were upwards of 20,000 NVA troops supported by tanks and anti-aircraft weapons. The latter accounted for eight U.S. aircraft during January and February. VO-67 flight crews that participated in implanting acoubuoys in defense of Khe Sanh were awarded the Navy Commendation Medal with Combat ‘V’ for missions that were, “...of the very highest priority” and for achieving their goals, “...despite poor weather, rugged terrain, and enemy defenses which included surface-to-air missiles and anti-aircraft guns.”

On May 25, 1968, the Chief of Naval Operations set the date for the disestablishment of VO-67 as 1 July 1968. At that time the mission was to be taken over by the Air Force’s 25th Tactical Fighter Squadron. In June of 1968, the squadron received a message from the Navy disestablishing VO-67. As of 1 July 1968, the squadron no longer existed and the personnel were ordered to return to the States for further assignment. The last squadron combat mission implanting sensors was on 25 June 1968. VO-67 lost 25% of its aircraft in combat and 20 crewmen, less than half of what the planners had expected and predicted. This was due to the outstanding airmanship of one of the finest multi-engine squadrons ever assembled; however, a large part of the credit must be given to the Air Force FAC pilots at NKP and the training and intelligence they provided the VO-67 pilots. They taught the VO-67 pilots the Ho Chi Minh Trail and how to survive in the airspace above it. The FAC pilots returning from night missions would mark the

OP-67 continues next page

maps in NKP Intelligence with the location of the AAA guns they saw firing. This knowledge was an invaluable contribution to the survival of the OP-2E missions the next day.

Capt Sharp became fast friends with LtCol Leonard Kaster, the commander of the 0-2 FAC Squadron, as did many of the V0-67 pilots. He was so respected that when he was promoted to full colonel while at Nakhon Phanom, the officers of V0-67 threw him a traditional Navy “wetting down” party and made him an Honorary Naval Aviator. The FAC pilots flying the little 02 aircraft came from Air Force fighter, attack, and even SAC and MAC commands, and their daring and courage was respected by all the Air Force, Navy, and Marine pilots in the Vietnam War. The Navy and V0-67 owe a deep debt of

gratitude to these brave pilots and good friends.

Summary

How many American and South Vietnamese lives were saved by the courage and sacrifices of V0-67 in successfully planting sensors along the Ho Chi Minh Trail and around Khe Sanh will never be known. The Air Force reported that truck kills tripled, for a like period after the sensors were implanted and used to detect and pinpoint targets. Senior Marine officers estimated that casualties at the siege of Khe Sanh would have been double that were experienced if it had not been for the sensors implanted by the V0-67 Navy crews.



Nakhon Phanom Flashbacks

by John Sweet

John's Vacation Spots—New England to NKP

My Uncle Sam gave me a tropical spot that few could visit, and I had to promise not to tell anyone, including my family, where I was located for a little over a year. Sam even provided meals and clothes to wear and daily, exciting activities! It was at a place known to us as “The end of the line at the edge of the world.” It lies directly on the banks of the Mekong River overlooking the karsts of Laos. Today our old runway has been repaired, and locals hope more tourists will consider Nakhon Phanom for their adventure vacations, but for us with the 56th Air Commando Wing, it was to fight in the Secret War in Laos.

Normal Days at NKP

Everybody knows it. The year you spent at NKP will stay fresh in your head for the rest of your life. Its name is Nakhon Phanom, meaning the city of hills, even though the hills are karsts and are directly across the Mekong River, not in town.

Assignment there during the Vietnam War was something forbidden to write home about or tell anyone you were there. GIs easily adapt to almost anything. I was with one of the few tenant outfits, the 1987th Comm Sq assigned where the 56th Special Operations Wing was fighting the war in Laos. We couldn't tell anyone about it, but it was normal ops for those of us there.

Our squadron's military dwellings, known as hooches, were directly on the main drag in the front row of Sunnyvale across from the Life Support building, next to the parking ramp for the CH-53s and an occasional Skyraider. I still hear them coughing to life in my head more than fifty years later.

A Newbie

One day while walking to the Tactical Unit Operations Center (TUOC) to start my shift at 1400, which lasted until 0700 the following morning, I passed a new 1st lieutenant assigned to the base. It was obvious as he had starched, shiny, new fatigues. I was surprised as hell when he saluted me as he approached. This being funny as hell, I saluted back left-handed and laughing!

The lieutenant yelled out to me after I had passed him and I stopped. He said loudly, “The sun was in my eyes, and I thought you were a captain with those black marks on your hat. I am ordering you to take those black marks off!” I replied, “No Sir!” — the only time in my service that I ever did that. Then he yelled at me, enraged, “Sargent, I'm giving you a direct order to take those marks off your hat!”

I started to say, “No sir, you don't understand,” but before I could get past “no” the lieutenant snapped to a salute as he noticed Col Kovack walking up behind me. I turned around and the colonel looked a little bewildered, staring at him, and then said to me, “What's going on here Sargent Sweet?” I replied, “Nothing Sir, the FNG just doesn't know what's going on.”

Gotcha! Newbie — SNAFU!

At this point, Col Kovack turned his attention to the lieutenant who was still holding his salute. “I see you're new here, aren't you?” The lieutenant replied, “Yes Sir!” Col Kovack pressed him further and I could see that he was having a bit of fun as well. Col Kovack said, “I see from those shiny wings that you're a pilot, aren't you?” The lieutenant still held his salute and again said, “Yes Sir!” to which the colonel replied, “We don't salute here lieutenant because when you return the salute you become a target.” It was then that I saw the look of horror in the lieutenant's face as he dropped his salute and his gaze lifted from the colonel's huge handlebar mustache up to his hat, which had lots of 1 inch high black strips on either side of his winged eagle, one for every month at NKP, and the lieutenant realized his own SNAFU.

Then the colonel said “Do you know what Sgt Sweet does? The lieutenant replied, “No Sir.” “Well, it's Sgt Sweet's job to pick you up when you get your hot shot ass shot down in the jungle. Do you think he's going to want to pick you up if you piss him off?”

Of course, Col Kovack knew perfectly well what my job was, having purposely lied through his teeth so the lieutenant would get the message that here at NKP we were all one team,

Flashbacks continues on page 8

Flashbacks *continues from page 7*

but as far as I know, the lieutenant never did find out what position I played.

Sob Stories

To alleviate the daily grind, I used to play blackjack with another buddy on a regular basis, usually against the Thai soldiers. He came from PA and had worked at Hershey's before enlisting, adding contents to vats of chocolate, claiming that he used to spit hawkers into the vat, so we nicknamed him "Hawk."

So, one of these normal-type days, out in the morning sun going at it playing blackjack, a kid who looked to be about nineteen, lived in one of the four other rooms of our hooch, was lying in the hammock on the deck whining, sobbing, drinking a bottle of vodka, and smoking butts. I didn't know his name since I worked long shifts alone sorting all the classified and unclassified message traffic at the Message Distribution Center in the TUOC Compound. The kid kept whining about the girl he loved whom he had lived with and paid for an apartment downtown. He had caught her cheating on him, then she left him. A lot more sobbing and crying and a lot more drinking to comfort himself. We kept yelling at him to shut the hell up and finally he fell asleep, or so we thought.

Then we noticed that the bottle was lying on its side, emp-

ty. He was cold and clammy to the touch, and we could not revive him. We carried him to the dispensary as fast as we could, but they couldn't save him and he died. It weighed heavy on the rest of us for days; we hoped that his family was told that he died accidentally, not that he took his own life by accident, heartbroken by a false love.

That day had seemed so normal until it wasn't. A couple of days later, another FNG had taken his place in the room. I only met him once, a tall kid with blonde hair and a crew cut, probably from somewhere in the Midwest by his accent. He told me that he was heading into town for the first time. We found out a few days later that he died in a crash on the way to town, after he had taken the beat-up Datsun with bald tires and virtually no brakes, which was always parked outside the front gate, looking for fares from guys who had missed the bus to town. He died when the car swerved and crashed off the small bridge, about halfway to town, and ended upside down in the ditch.

Our Legacy

Death for soldiers comes in so many unforeseen ways, this was a tale of just two of the many we remember. I hope all names are on the memorial, until the last of us step to the other side, and they, like most black carved names on The Wall, are those whom we never met yet will never forget.



Bill Webster, May 1943—December 2025

TLCB member Bill Webster, 82, died suddenly and unexpectedly on Wednesday, December 10, 2025, at his home in Cammack Village, Arkansas. Bill was the oldest child of General William H. Webster, Sr. (USAF), and Betty Alice Baldwin Webster. Bill was born in Muskogee, Oklahoma, and grew up as an Air Force dependent in places like Hawaii and San Antonio.

Bill's father flew medium bombers in the South Pacific theater in World War II, where he survived being shot down twice, and contracted malaria. As a reservist, Bill's father flew transports in the Berlin Airlift for two summers and flew transports in the Korean War, retiring to inactive military status as a Brigadier General in 1966. He died in 2019 at the age of 98. It's easy to see why Bill chose the Air Force!

Young Bill's first assignment after commissioning was Tyndall Air Force Base, in Panama City, Florida. From November 1967 to September 1969, Bill was deployed to air bases in Southeast Asia. He spent the first two months at Udorn,

and was transferred to Nakhon Phanom (NKP) for 20 months as Information Officer for the 56th Special Operations Wing (SOW), Task Force Alpha (TFA). He flew 20 combat missions as combat photographer.

Bill left active duty as a captain, and after working at VA

for a year, he became an Air Traffic Control Specialist with FAA at Eureka / Arcata Airport, CA, then transferred to the FAA's training academy in Oklahoma City, OK as an instructor. In 1989, he transferred to FAA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. to oversee Information System upgrades. On retiring from the FAA in 1995, Bill became a CPA and did tax preparation and consulting in Northern Virginia for several years. In 2017 Bill and Barbara permanently relocated to Arkansas.

Webster's interests and passions ran a wide gamut, from filmmaking and history, through aviation, literature, sports, drama, poetry, etc. He was a civilian pilot with multiple ratings, including instructor, and had an extensive knowledge of meteorology.



Reflections on Memorial Day 2025

By Russell Bixby

Like so many men from the Vietnam Era, I was aware of the likelihood of being drafted into the military shortly after leaving high school or other deferred status. With this knowledge, my choice was to join the United States Air Force before the Springfield draft board was sure to dispatch their conscription notice.

I served for five years (1964-1969), deciding to extend for one year with a promotion to Staff Sergeant. The Air Force sent me to Thailand during 1966-1967, assigned to a combat support base, Don Muang RTAFB, outside Bangkok. This proved to be a most enlightening deployment for an individual who really had no grasp on the reality of war. Although separated from ground and air combat operations, I learned that the massive U.S. military machine was being brought-to-bear in a five-country war in Southeast Asia —South Vietnam, North Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. During the early years of the Vietnam War, 1961–1966, Don Muang was used as a major command and logistics hub of the USAF under the command of the United States Pacific Air Forces (PACAF), Thirteenth Air Force.

When serving in the armed forces of the United States, you quickly learn that following orders is an imperative, enforced under a separate system of justice until your discharge. Being a compliant sort, I found this environment to be a necessary military requirement until my honorable discharge in 1969. Having acknowledged the above, a member can be given duty assignments which will impact on their physical and mental wellbeing, frequently for the rest of their lives. In order to truly appreciate this, a person must have been performing in a military occupation which could routinely place them in jeopardy.

Even today, some fifty years after the final U.S. personnel lifted off the roof of the embassy in Saigon, there are veterans left with a “Survivor’s Guilt” if their work in Southeast Asia

did not entail direct combat. Possession of an Air Force Commendation Medal and Vietnam Service Medal for my Don Muang tour seem inconsequential to the sacrifice evidenced by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in D.C.

Since leaving the military and completing my business degree, my perspectives on five years

of military service have evolved to understand the many positive impacts on my life which resulted. This includes my membership in the Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood which performs humanitarian work on the Thailand border to heal the wounds of the American War in Southeast Asia.

(It should be noted that while women served in various roles, including nursing, they were not subject to the draft. The draft primarily targeted men, and the Selective Service Act at the time only included males for conscription. Approximately 10,000 women served in Vietnam.)



Russell included this note: “May, 2025: Attached is a reflection I wrote for inclusion in Sunday’s worship bulletin at our church ... I borrowed from Vaughan Smith’s newsletter article in preparing the piece, which supplemented two Vietnam veterans’ spoken reflections on the war. The reflection was well received by our congregation.

Russell joined in 2018. He was at Don Muang in 66-67.



Russell Bixby



Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The seven members listed below joined between the December 2025 issue of the *Mekong Express Mail* and this printing. You can find more information on our website database.

The MEM wishes you all a sincere “Welcome Home.” We are delighted that you have joined us.

No.	Branch	First Name	Last Name	City	State
02106	USAF	John	Smith	Bellevue	NE
02107	USAF	Dennis	Wasiczko	Briarcliff Manor	NY
02108	USAF	Robert	Guggenberger	Cold Springs	MN
02109	USAF	Richard	Kellogg	Ft. Collins	CO
02110	Other	Donna	Rowland	Sherrills Ford	NC
02111	USN	Jeffrey	Carson	N. Las Vegas	NV
02112	Other	Pam	Cain	Jacksonville	FL

Donors to TLC Brotherhood Assistance, 2025

The following list includes all donors to TLCB Assistance during the period February 1st, 2025 through January 31st, 2026, which is the end of the 2026 dues season. This is the time period under the new policy, which was introduced in March of 2025, to more fairly cover the period when most donations are received. Categories are: PLATINUM \$1000 and up, GOLD \$500 to \$999, SILVER \$100 to \$499, DONOR, \$10 to \$99. We thank all donors, including those who donated less than \$10.

PLATINUM

Bollwerk, John Jr
Bremenkamp, Glenn
Durant, Roger
Jenness, Randall
Miller, Edward
Potaski, Michael
Sills, Steven
Tilton, William

GOLD

Ake, James
Bixby, Russell
Boas, Raymond
Duehring, Craig
Grimes, James
Gurley, David
Melton, Alan
Pierce, Daniel
Schillo, John
Stockamp, Michael
Streeter, Terry
Sweet, John
Tilton, Christopher
Ungleich, Thomas
Vettel, Robert
Webb, Shelly

SILVER

Avery, James
Babcock, Charles
Barr, John
Bowen, Gary
Brink, John
Brown, Clarence
Burth, Dana
Burton, Richard
Carter, James
Chandler, Barry
Colvin, Terry
Comer, Richard
Cressy, Nick
Crisfield, Arthur
Czerny, James
D'elia, Vincent
Duffin, John

Dugger, Glenn
Dunlap, James
Falbo, John
Flowers, Alan
French, Phil
Gaultney, Eli
Graham, Gordon
Hager, David
Hamner, Gene
Harmor, Gary
Harrington, John
Henderson, Richard
Hodge, Stanley
Hodges, Mark
Hotujec, Leigh
Howe, Donald
Hughes, Gilles
Jackson, Donald
Jirsa, William
Kellogg, Richard
Kulig, Ronald
LaViollette, Ned
Lee, Paul
Lewin, Howard
Lockhart, Walter
Lopez, Michael
Lorenzen, John
Lowe, Glen
McConaghy, Lee
Melton, John
Mignon, Gerald G
Murray, Brian
Parrott, Paul
Paul, Robert
Payne, Robert
Peterson, Bill
Phillips, John
Rogers, Timothy
Rowland, Barry
Rosenblatt, Lionel
Russell, Foster
Santo, Robert
Saunders, Richard
Saxton, Ronald

Schmidt, Kenneth
Schwartz, Joseph
Shenberger, George
Smith, Larry
Stewart, Robert
Thompson, Everett
Tilton, Thelma
Trout, Charles
Wagner, Vernon
Weathers, John
Weeks, David
Wethington, Ronald
Wheatley, Robert
Whiting, Russell
Wolf, Richard

DONOR

Albrecht, Paul
Alvey, Steven
Andersen, John
Anderson, Keith
Bartella, John
Barton, David
Bell, Rodney
Berkley, John
Bissell, Anthony
Blemberg, Paul
Boatright, Roger
Boehm, Al
Bogota, Ron
Brayton, Robert
Breaw, Richard
Brown, Ray
Brown, Terry
Bulriss, Leon
Burton, Michael
Caldwell, Harry
Campbell, Ronald
Candito, James
Cardosi, Donald
Cargle, David
Christianson, Carl
Covington, James
Cowen, Keith
Crider, Larry

Crowe, Hoyt
Deignan, Robert
Delameter, Harold
Demmel, Ross
Downey, Michael
Dubcak, Arnold
Ellis, David
Enockson, James
Fantigrossi, Michael
Fender, David
Ferranto, Michael
Fields, Daniel
Finn, John
Fisher, Harry
Fluck, Robert
Foltz, Arnold
Franklin, Keith
Frazier, Michael
Gadzinski, Leonard
Gilardi, Leonardo
Gill, Hugh
Goldenbaum, Jon
Green, Kenneth
Gress, Tim
Groleau, Thomas
Hajduk, Casimir
Harrington, David
Hebert, James
Henthorn, James
Hill, James
Holmlund, Marilyn
Howey, Linda
Jaroslav, Jay
Jennings, Charles
Jones, Eddie
Jones, Ray
Kemp, Charles
Korandanis, Stephen
Kosh, Ronald
LaBella, Vincent
Lamica, Stephen
Land, Michael
Landucci, Robert

Donors continues on next page

Lawrence, Alfred	Norberg, Stephen	Ropski, Richard	Taylor, Samuel
Lawrence, Stuart	Norway, Robert	Ruland, Tim	Thompson, Anne
Lee, Thomas	O'Connor, Brian	Rutherford, Lowell	Towers, Gary
Linsley, Edward	Omps, Danny	Ryman, Randolph	Trinchero, Paul
Littlefield, Stephen	Oubre, Carroll	Sauer, William	van Sickler, Court
Lundquist, Sven	Pack, Thomas	Schmidt, Rodney	Veazey, Michael
Mackey, Tony	Parr, Jack	Schreder, George	Vincent, Douglas
Macleod, Harley	Pilato, Angelica	Shane, Ronald	Waller, Reuben
Mango, Angelo	Pisano, Frank	Silva, Raymond	Weatherford, Lesley
Mastro, John	Pocchiari, Joseph	Sleep, Gordon	Weaver, David
McDaniels, Chris	Pollard, John	Smialek, Peter	Weber, John
Mead, Harold	Porter, James	Smith, Richard	Wells, Paul
Middleton, Richard	Pratt, Michael	Squires, Everett	Williams, Luther
Miller, Thomas	Pruikma, Robert	Stein, Debora	Womack, Ralph
Monteith, Roy	Repar, Robert Jr	Stein, Edward	Wright, Gary
Moody, Dennis	Resseguie, Robert	Strickland, Theodore	Yoakum, Michael
Mussolino, Paul	Rewt, Edward	Swedberg, Chad	Yova, Timothy
Nagy, Randolph	Riffe, James	Sysko, David	Zola, Anthony
Nicolosi, Roy			

A note from your chaplain

Greetings brothers and sisters,

We are well into our New Year, and I hope that it is treating you well. It has been extremely cold here in southeast Pennsylvania and we still have snow on the ground, which is unusual for this area!

Since my last writing, we have sadly said “Goodbye” to several of our brothers who have taken their “final flight.” Bill Webster left us suddenly and unexpectedly on December 10th. Bill “Willie Pete” Peterson left us on January 2nd. And most recently a former member, John R. Avery, passed on January 11th. These families have received condolence letters, and I received a kind response from Bill Webster’s wife, Barbara, and remain in contact with her. Grieving is a hard process, and it has been said that “Grief is just love with no place to go.” I encourage you to please remember these families who have lost loved ones.

I am thankful for those who have notified the TLCB of their losses, and I encourage you to reach out to me with these notifications. It’s always a time of sadness when we lose a “Brother in Arms” or a spouse, and it would be sad for them to go unnoticed.

As always, I pray weekly for our brotherhood in general, and specifically for those of you of whom I am aware, who are dealing with various health issues. Please feel free to reach out to me with death notices, illnesses, upcoming surgeries, etc., as I consider it a privilege to pray for you.

I remain in your service,
 Chaplain Dan Pierce – Numbers 6:24-26
 dan.nkp.pierce@gmail.com
 717-492-6297

Official Notice

The 2026 Annual Meeting of the Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood, Inc., will be held at the Holiday Inn Riverwalk Hotel in San Antonio, Texas on September 26 at 9:30 AM.

LIKE us on FACEBOOK

The Official Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood page



Sunantha Smith, with her husband, Vaughan, last year in the Plain of Jars in Laos. As we went to press we were saddened to learn that Sunantha had died in February after a long and difficult illness. Our prayers and condolences go out to Vaughan, who has been a key member of our Assistance program’s Southeast Asia team.

Bill “Willie Pete” Peterson, 1943—2026

Fishing Pole, Pen, and Bible

As the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War approached, the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) established a Vietnam War 50th Anniversary Commemorative Partners committee to plan and execute commemoration events. Bill Peterson, at that time Public Relations Committee Chairman of the TLCB, discovered that the Commemorative Partners committee, which had few actual veterans on it, *had no intention of including war veterans outside of Vietnam in the celebrations!*

The 50th Committee was headed by Army Lt General Claude M. Kicklighter who had two tours in Vietnam, but little knowledge of units and service members who had participated in the war “out-country,” and like many other “in-country” vets, did not consider those who served outside South Vietnam to be “real” Vietnam veterans.

The “Fifteen Minute Briefing”

Hoping to gain appropriate recognition, Bill Peterson requested fifteen minutes of their attention, and asked Gerry Frazier, then TLCB Vice President, to help deliver briefings to them. He assembled a detailed briefing on the composition of typical Rolling Thunder or Linebacker strike missions into North Vietnam. He described the mission aircraft and all the support elements for a strike and possible rescue, and their audience was genuinely surprised by the size of this effort and the risks to aircrews. Gerry Frazier built a separate briefing describing military units from all five U.S. military Services of that time—forces virtually unknown to most elements based in Vietnam—including SAC bombers, MAC transports, and some reconnaissance elements that were not even subordinate to Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV).

At the requested “15-minute briefing,” General Kicklighter



Bill Peterson, in wheelchair, touring Boston Harbor at the 2015 TLCB Reunion. Standing, from left, Bonnie Encinas, Potjane Dubs, Ruben Encinas, John Schillo, Darice Schillo. Willie Pete gave a special presentation on LS-85.

stayed beyond the 15 minutes but had to depart, and told his staff to hear them out, saying he would return later in the afternoon. Bill and Gerry were still discussing the briefings with the fascinated staff when

he returned. The General stayed with them until after 5PM. As he was thanking them for the eye-opening presentations, he commented that he had received what he considered “...a master’s degree education in Vietnam War history outside South Vietnam.” He said that they had convinced him that those serving outside Vietnam deserved to be, and would be, officially recognized as Veterans of the Vietnam War. This recognition extended to all who fought the war from outside Vietnam!

The following is adapted from the published obituary.

Denton, Maryland — Lt Colonel William R. Peterson, Jr. passed away Friday January 2, 2026 after a long illness. Bill was born October 15, 1943, in Altoona, PA to William (Pete) and Hazel (Bonnie) Peterson. After high school in Louisville, KY, he earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Miami University, Oxford Ohio, and a master’s degree in Russian studies from Georgetown University. He Married Jean Elaine Read in September of 1965 and they recently celebrated their 60th anniversary.



Bill served in Vietnam and Laos in 1967-68, and held various civilian posts in Dept. of Defense agencies. His duties included being a Weapons Controller, Weapons Director Staff Officer, Signals Intelligence Officer, Intelligence Staff Officer, and an Intelligence Systems Staff Officer. He spent his retirement years chronicling events during his years of service and authored many articles, as well as a book draft on the raid at Lima Site 85. During his time at the National Security Agency (NSA), Bill was a team member in the negotiations resulting in the Camp David Accords, and he was instrumental in developing techniques for locating remains of servicemen deemed missing in action. He was Public Relations Chairman of the TLCB.

Bill was an active member of church life in Wye Parish and attended services at Saint Lukes Chapel in Queenstown, MD. He was known to be a biblical scholar, and he especially enjoyed Wye Parish Kerygma studies. He was also an accomplished artist who enjoyed painting Eastern Shore scenes and was happiest with a fishing pole in his hands—in any weather.

He was fiercely proud of his children and grandchildren, and he delighted in their many accomplishments. Bill is survived by his loving wife, Jean Peterson, a daughter, a son, nine grandchildren, and two great grandchildren.

Bill, known by us as Willie Pete, is also survived by the brothers and sisters of the TLCB. Until a couple of years ago, he attended our reunions and was sometimes an expert contributor of his knowledge to our programs. He was a quiet man with a fishing pole, a pen, and a Bible. He was well-liked by those who knew him.



Routine ER Shift

by Gary Beatty

It was just another routine, 24-hour, 0830-0830, Sunday, 2-man shift in the ER of the 56th USAF Hospital at Nakhon Phanom (NKP) — two medics and the medical officer of the day (MOD). During the week, our night shift was 1700 to 0830 — one night on, followed by two off. If our turn fell on the weekend, or a holiday, our shift was 0830 — 0830, then two days off.

The Incident

This incident occurred near midnight. The phone call came from the Security Police (SP) requesting that we respond to a “casualty” at the north perimeter. An SP jeep would lead us to the location. Curiously missing was what had caused the “casualty.” As we loaded up the ambulance in front of the hospital, the SP jeep pulled up. The driver, a major, more about him later, said, “follow me” and sped off.

For those of you not familiar with NKP, the north 100 yards inside the perimeter was vacant during my tour there, July ‘73 - July ‘74. So, when we arrived at the perimeter, the only other people at the scene were SP clustered around the “casualty” lying on the ground — a SP second lieutenant bleeding from his right ankle.

Powder Burns and Quick Draw

While applying a field dressing, I noticed what appeared to be a powder burn up his right pant leg, from the wound to a hole in the bottom of his pistol holster on his right hip. I asked what seemed to me the obvious question, “lieutenant, did you shoot yourself?” — which elicited a harsh rebuke from the SP major who told me, “All you need to know is that he’s injured!”

When I told the major that an essential part of assessing the status of the patient is to know what happened, he again told me not to ask any questions and, “just do your job!” As we loaded the “casualty” into the ambulance, an SP who saw the incident whispered to me that the lieutenant “was trying to show off his quick draw and the weapon discharged!”

Definitions and Protocol

Here is a brief terminology lesson so you’ll understand what happened next:

lateral maleolus — The bone that protrudes on the outside of your ankle

autogenic — Self-produced

GSW — Gunshot wound

RedTop — Our ambulance callsign when communicating with the hospital

Now back to the tale. While enroute to the hospital with the “casualty,” as was protocol, I made radio contact with the MOD to advise that we were on our way, and the status of our patient. I still recall that communication verbatim:

Me: “This is RedTop One, inbound. One patient with an autogenic GSW to the right lateral maleolus. Patient is conscious and stable!”

MOD at the hospital: “Say again RedTop One.”

Me: “We’re inbound with an autogenic GSW to the right lateral maleolus. Patient is conscious and stable!”

He shot himself in the foot?

MOD: “Gary, are you saying he shot himself in the foot?”

Me: “That’s affirmative, Doc.”

We got the “casualty” into the hospital, where he would be air evac-ed the next day to receive surgical repair that we couldn’t provide. He admitted that his weapon “accidentally discharged,” but left out the quick draw part.

A couple of days later, the hospital commander spoke with me about the incident. I’ve written here before, in the *MEM* of June, 2021, about my working relationship with the hospital commander, Col (Dr) Thomas Santacroce, the finest officer I ever served under.

Focus Shift or Matching Stories

The colonel asked me about the incident, and I related what happened. He told me that he’d already spoken to the MOD, and that our “stories matched,” which struck me as strange, so I asked what he meant. He said that radio transmissions between ambulances and the hospital were monitored by the base comm center. Someone there overheard that an SP had shot himself in the foot, and that it was now the talk around base — particularly among the SPs.

That SP major was really pissed. He had called Col Santacroce and demanded that I be given an Article 15 because of the radio dialogue I’d had with the MOD. The colonel told me everything that I did was correct, and not to worry about it — that he would deal with the SP major, who had apparently not been appropriately polite to the colonel when he called to complain.

That was the last I heard of the incident, officially, at least. I later learned that my radio transmission prevented the incident from being covered up. The major was trying to shift the focus of the investigation away from the actions of the lieutenant, and on to me.

Col Santacroce was having none of that. He made it clear that everything about my handling of the situation, including that radio transmission, was correct.



Airman Gary Beatty doing community outreach in Thailand. Not all his duty was tending to lieutenants who were playing John Wayne.

Return to SEA 2002 and 2006

From articles by the late MacAlan Thompson

Editor's note: Some time in 2001, TLCB members and expat residents of Bangkok, Mac Thompson and Les Strouse, got the idea to hold a reunion for all who served in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. The following is adapted from Mac's two reports, the first of which was published in an early issue of the MEM.

An even number of 200 people signed in for the reunion in Bangkok, which was hosted by the Air America alumni there. An additional 232 people signed in for the banquet, including many Thais. Besides a number of TLCB brothers and sisters, led by Vice President John Sweet, there were participants from Air America, American Legion China Post 1, Air Commando Association (ACA), Ravens, Continental Air Services, U.S. Embassy to Thailand, U.S. Agency for International Development, and others. Prominent among the guests were China Post 1 Commander and Adjutant, Fred Platt, and ACA Founder and President BG (ret) "Heinie" Aderholt, who was also a member of the TLCB.

When the organizers arrived to make final arrangements at Bangkok's Ambassador Hotel on Tuesday, September 24th, they found that quite a few people had already arrived. It appears that impromptu partying and greeting of early arrivals continued pretty much through Wednesday. Official partying started at noon on Thursday in a lovely hospitality suite that was stocked by Mac Thompson. The suite was in a bright, glass-enclosed room with a round bar in the center. Just outside was an aviary with large, tree-trunk furniture that added to the atmosphere—and gave the non-smokers an escape from the cigar smoke until they finally got the exhaust fans running on Saturday. Mayuree Strouse opened the registration desk and Sunee Thompson and Bob Vaughn opened the bar. It did not take long for the reunion to get into full swing, with meetings and greetings running through Friday and all day Saturday.

On Saturday, the Thai participants started showing up in numbers before the banquet. Many of them had not seen each other for nearly thirty years. There was great emotion with these reunions between old friends and co-workers, both Thai and American.

The organizers had planned on having 320 people attend the banquet, but they ran out of name tags, tickets, and patience after 432. We really don't know how many attended, but those after #432 got their dinner free! And by the way, the comments about the "hotel" food indicated that it was really top-notch fare. The hotel kitchen managed to have enough food for all, even with the tremendous unexpected overage.

Before and after the official part of the banquet, Thai classical dancers entertained the guests. Bill Lair, founder of

"Waterpump" in Laos, was the featured speaker, followed by General Pichit Kulavanich, a member of the Thai Privy Council. Heinie Aderholt also made a few comments. Jack Knotts was presented with a photograph of LS20A taken in October 2001. Tom Claytor, who took the picture, made the presentation. Tom was flying his Cessna 180 round the world. At 0030 on Sunday morning, Les Strouse gave the "30 Minute Notice." At 0100 he went around the hospitality suite giving everyone "last call." One of the hangers-on turned out to be Thai Royalty, HRH Prince Yugula. Mac said, "If Les can throw out a real Prince, he can throw out anyone!" But apparently the visiting resumed a little later that morning. At the end of the day, the suite was dismantled and the organizers agreed to "host another such reunion in 25 years." The youngest attendant was 4 years old and the oldest was rapidly approaching 90. One attendant is reputed to be the youngest China Marine. He is a double amputee but only wears one artificial leg. According to Mac, his reason for this was...."if you wear two artificial legs and fall down everyone thinks you are drunk and will make no effort to help you get up. If you only wear one, they quickly come to your aid." At one point, he removed the artificial leg and asked Sunee Thompson to take it for a massage. "Just tell the girls that I will pick it up in half an hour!"

AESEA and Return to SEA II

Another "Return to SEA" reunion has come and gone, 21-24 Sept 2006. I think that all those who attended will agree that it was a great success. It was a bit of a scare when we became aware of a coup in progress on Tuesday evening and the normal sound of airplanes at Don Muang airport was missing on Wednesday morning! No, the airport was not closed, it was just that the low overcast and heavy humidity muffled the normal sounds that we were used to hearing. WHEW!!

The registration was opened a bit prematurely on Thursday but was soon organized by our capable Thai colleagues when the anxious early arrivals started to file into the hospitality suite, which was still getting the beer chilled. By noon everything was moving smoothly and there were many who said: "When was the last time we saw one another" or the "Hey didn't I see you at the last xxxxx reunion?" The normal early morning bloody marys, the mix concocted by Lek Dreith, were in evidence

as soon as the bar opened a bit before noon. Two reunion-experienced bar tenders, Sunee Thompson and Bob Vaughn, helped get things started off. Some new "trainee" barkeeps assisted as well: Tamara Britton from the UK; Khun Saritporn's



L/R., Lionel Rosenblatt, Mac Thompson, and Gen Heinie Aderholt at the 2006 Return to SEA II. Photos from Les Thompson.

Return to SEA continues next page.



John and Nancy Sweet in 2006. John is current TLCB president.

grandson, Khun Pop; and Phil & Lek Dreith's daughter, Kat.

Air America was the most prominent group in attendance. Fred Platt made sure that

China Post 1 had their banners prominently displayed. The TLCB was well represented and had their banner displayed as well. John Sweet, the TLCB Assistance Chairman, was doing his best to get some donations for the assistance fund. The Coast Guard may have been the only military organization that did NOT have representation among the 150+ attending the reunion. Other organizations represented included: SKY, State, IVS, USAID, Embassy, Army, USAF, Marines, Navy (was there actually a Squid there?), Thai SGU, CASI, SKY FAG, ACA, TLCB, Ravens, AmLeg CP1, a couple of Hmong from the U.S., Les Strouse's former AirAm secretary from Saigon, and several SEA associated civilian folks who we know. We were also honored to have many of our Thai friends join both the reunion party room and the banquet.

The banquet on Saturday night attracted somewhat over 250 folks. The centerpiece was an ice sculpture of an airplane, which was prominently placed on the stage. There was no featured speaker. MG Larry Taylor, USMC Ret., gave a briefing on the medical condition of former ambassador to Laos, William Sullivan. Thai Major General Chaleurn, Ret., and former SGU Lt in Laos, gave a short talk; BG Heinie Aderholt, Air Commando One, attracted many guests to his table, and we were truly honored to have him here with us.

The buffet went well and there were a lot of mini reunions taking place throughout the banquet room. Some of the Thai VIPs who were scheduled to attend were noticeably absent due to the political situation, but that did not put a damper on the festivities. Entertainment was furnished by a professional



Thai Army tank along the road during the government coup was a bit unsettling.

singer as well as some attending amateurs doing the karaoke thing—made Sunee's day! There were even some couples taking advantage of the dance floor in front of the stage. As the evening progressed, most moved back to the hospitality suite and carried on until sometime after midnight. Prince Yugala, a real Thai Prince and former Air America pilot, was one of the last to leave, emulating his performance at the 2002 reunion. Les Strouse had the honor, for the second time, to tell him that the bar was closed and he would have to leave.

One of our wheelchair fellows (photo below) tried to outdo the escalator slide of the 2002 reunion by doing a wheelie with his chair. A bit of negative center of gravity put the chair and occupant on their backs—right there at the table!



Son of a gun never even spilled his drink!

Sunday morning there were more bloody marys and the goodbyes started. People continued to arrive even as things were closing down in anticipation of the noon official shut down of the reunion. It appeared that the last to leave had also been the first to arrive. All good things must come to an end, and this was no exception. No one knows when or if another Return to SEA reunion will occur, but the internet will surely let you know if another is planned.

The Association of Expatriates South East Asia (AESEA) thanks all of those who attended for their support, and we do hope to see all of you again soon.

Okay, now just who or what is AESEA?

Mac sent the Return to SEA II report to Les Thompson, former Assistance Committee chair, who wrote:

After the first "Return to SEA" in 2002, Mac & Les decided to do a second event, even though the first was demanding in both time and money. One story Mac heard was that the AirAm group wanted to make the second event more AirAm centric. Another story was that the cost of the hotel would be less if done by an organization, not individuals. Using their wives and imagination, they came up with the Association of Expatriates South East Asia, with an appropriate logo. Shirts and memorabilia with the logo were designed and procured. All very official looking, but deceiving, very much like how things were done during the "festivities" as Mac would say.

As Mac noted, the Thais put on a coup mid-week to make things more exciting. He got a 2am call from the daughter about that one. At the banquet, Gen. Aderholt asked to sit at the TLCB table, which immediately became the general's table, and no one minded a bit. Heading out of Bangkok, there were some tanks along the highway, and in the paper in Surin there was an article that the Army had given an order that "...soldiers should not let tourists hold their rifles for photo ops."—can't get more "Thai" than that!



TLCB Reunion 2026

San Antonio!



Scan this QR code and enter your arrival and departure dates to register, or you may also call the 24-hour reservation line at 210-224-2500, option 2. If calling, please reference your group's block code: T26.



USAF Basic Military Training (BMT) at Lackland AFB.

**September 23—26 at the
Holiday Inn Riverwalk**

Registration forms and raffle tickets will be in the June issue.

Program to include a cruise on the San Antonio River, a BMT graduation at Lackland AFB, and *more!*
BE THERE!



Exchange News—2 New Products

While sales of our traditional logo goods, like shirts and hats, have slowed to the lowest rate ever, the BX has added two new products. The colorful, reversible, Space Coast Legacy Pendant is a special item—for the last few anywhere of these *beautiful* challenge coins.

The TLCB whiskey glass, shown below, is stocked by request. It is nice and hefty and the design cannot wear off because it is *etched into the glass!* You probably need a set of at least four of these quality items!



HOW TO BUY:

At www.TLC-Brotherhood.Com, choose "SHOP" on the top menu and scroll all the way down to find these products.

At right:
TLCB/Space Coast reversible Pendant: \$225
Postpaid

At left:
Pair: \$30
Set of four: \$55
Postpaid



Introduced in the December, 2025 *MEM*, the last of the spectacular Space Coast coins encased in a sterling silver bezel with a stainless steel chain for just a little over our cost, including shipping! **Only a few left!**