



Mekong Express Mail

Volume 4, Issue 3

THE THAILAND LAOS CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC.

www.TLC-Brotherhood.org

Listening to the Red Chinese pilots at Ramasun Station

by Bob Wheatley

When I arrived at Ramasun Station in December, 1967, based on the images in the news footage I'd seen coming out of Nam, I was expecting to see tin roof hooches and dirt streets and outdoor latrines. Instead, Ramasun Station was way beyond anything I might have envisioned in my wildest dreams. It looked almost like some apartment complex back in the States, and it really seemed out of place here in this remote site. Stepping off the shuttle bus from Udorn in the blazing late morning sun, I just stared in amazement for a moment. "So this would be my home for the next twelve months.....Not bad! Not bad at all!" I thought. "How had I managed to get so damned lucky?!"

The site, located at the fringes of the small town Nong Soong, was situated a dozen clicks or so south of the city of Udorn Thani, just off the Friendship Highway. The 7th Radio Research Field Station, as it was otherwise known, was an Army post, run by the Army Security Agency. I and the other airmen who were stationed there were part of an Air Force detachment of the 6922nd Security Wing. We were given separate living quarters from the Army troops. I was pleasantly surprised to find that all of the barracks were really quite nice concrete block air-conditioned buildings, a far cry from the hooches I'd seen when I landed at the Udorn Air Base! In fact, all of the buildings on post were air-conditioned. "What luxury!" I thought. Air conditioning was something we would have killed for on my previous tour on Okinawa! I'm almost ashamed to mention the tennis courts, swimming pool, bowling alley and the indoor theater. I understand a few months before my arrival, Ramasun Station had been just a tent city. As they say, "Timing is everything!"

The barracks, like the native homes I'd seen on the bus trip from Udorn, were built on pylons a several feet off the ground. And aside from keeping the bottom floor dry during Monsoon, I'm sure it helped to keep out the snakes as well. All the streets on post were paved in concrete and had streetlights to make for safe walking at night. It was important to be able to see where you were stepping, as it was not uncommon for the Cobras and "Two Steppers" to crawl out onto the pavement to warm themselves in the cool of the night. In fact, I understand Ramasun's call sign, "Cobra 7" derived from the hundreds of cobras which the construction crews had uncovered when clearing the site for construction of the new facilities. In keeping with the Cobra 7 image, in the headquarters building stood a huge seven or eight foot tall carved wood King Cobra, hood flared, reared up and ready to strike. It presented quite an imposing figure, and it certainly commanded one's attention upon entering the HQ

building.

Most of the area of the post was occupied by huge antenna arrays. Their presence, I thought, surely must have given away the purpose of the post, even though our mission was supposed to be Top Secret. The outside perimeter was bounded by a tall chain-link fence, topped with barbed wire, to keep out whatever and whomever lurked beyond. We were issued M-16s (on paper), but I was somewhat disappointed to find they were to be kept in the armory and distributed only in the event of an attack. Of course, the MPs on post were constantly armed, as were the Thai Army perimeter guards. But I couldn't help but wonder if, in case of a concerted attack, "Would it be too late by the time we were able to get to our weapons?" Things would happen later in my tour there to reinforce those concerns, but that is a whole "nother story."

Security was very tight though. The Thai guards at the gate closely eyed everyone who entered the post and checked IDs. The radio compound where we worked was inside a chain

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It's Only Days Away Now!

Registrations for Fort Walton Beach this October have been like a Sandy Mission; low and slow.

The local reunion committee has an outstanding program but activities require participation.

Come down to the reunion and enjoy the camaraderie this year and support our fine organization. TLC Brotherhood reunions are the life-blood of our organization. The officers and committees work hard to produce a top-notch outfit but your participation is what makes it live!

John Sweet
National Reunion Chairman

Assistance Program News

The Successful Joel Brown Computer Project

John Middlewood reports the computer program undertaken at Nakhon Phanom funded by the Northern Virginia Community Association's five thousand dollar grant has been so successful that village schools around the province are hoping for future aid. Twenty-eight computers have been provided to fourteen schools in the area. At several of these schools students had never seen a computer before.

In only two weeks the computers were up and running at all fourteen schools. Students from Northeastern Thailand are at a disadvantage when competing for further education and test results within the province are routinely low due to lack of materials and equipment to teach advanced courses. Village schools within Nakhon Phanom Province receive little funding and it remain one of the poorest provinces economically.

Already some of the schools promote sixth grade students to accomplish much of the typing for classroom teachers. Students practice keyboarding and teachers spend more time teaching. It is also fun, to see the students in some cases, sharing new computer skills by teaching their own teachers. At first many teachers were uncomfortable but now learning together has become fun.

For those schools with phone lines the next step will be access to the Internet. Some day in the not too distant future a link will be possible to the TLC Brotherhood Web Site. Web access will allow a great many advantages to the students. Our hats are off to all who contributed to this project with special heartfelt thanks to Joel Brown, through the Northern Virginia Community Association, who made this possible.

John Sweet

Assistance Committee Chairman

TLC Brotherhood Vice President

Students at 14 rural schools in Nakhon Phanom Province can now learn to live and compete in today's computer-dependent world.

Photos by John Middlewood.



In spite of the continued economic downturn our assistance program has continued to flourish. Although the majority of members do not participate on a regular basis further requests for aid have been increasing within Northeastern Thailand.

In order to prevent depleting our resources a budget was established for disbursements during the third quarter of the year. Long term planning regarding funding has commenced with OmniMed who hired a Harvard graduate to research and write joint grant proposals. Our grass roots hands-on operation is exactly the type of work foundations seek to fund. Details of the grant proposals when completed will be brought before the TLC Board of Directors for authorization and approval. It is hoped an appeal to the membership along with raffle tickets and the Assistance Auction will enhance donations sufficiently to fund the remainder of this year.

John Sweet

Assistance Committee Chairman

TLC Brotherhood Vice President

link fence enclosure, nested inside a second chain link fence, both topped by barbed wire. Guard towers were positioned all around the place, and it looked like a maximum-security prison. There was only one way in or out. To get inside and to leave, we had to pass through a chain link “tunnel” to the guard station. There we would stop and show both our badges and our faces to the guard on duty. Then and only then, would we be allowed in or out of the gates. The rooms inside the operations building were somewhat small and were crammed to the gills with state-of-the-art radio gear and encryption equipment. For obvious security reasons, there were no windows at all in the building, and I wondered if the post were attacked, would we inside even know it in time to react to save ourselves? Fortunately, we never had to find that out, although we were put on full “alert” at least once during my stay, when the Udorn Air Base up the road was attacked by NVA sappers.

Inside ops, there were facilities for monitoring radio transmissions, both voice and Morse, of all the direct or indirect participants in the war. In the Mandarin Voice Intercept Section our primary target was Chi-Com civilian and military air transport. I spent most of my time at the console of my R-390A Collins receiver, listening for transmissions from the IL-18 Coots, daily making their way from Beijing down to Hanoi, carrying diplomats, advisors, troops and arms to aid the North. We continually searched the HF band for enemy traffic. Upon recognizing a target, a reel to reel tape was started to record the intercept, and a hand written translation was generated “on the fly.” A more complete typewritten transcript was generated from the tapes, after the fact, which the intel analysts used to compile a “big picture” view of enemy capability and intent.

The mission was carried out 24 hours a day, seven days a week. To provide constant coverage, each flight worked rotating shifts, three day shifts on, then one day off, then three swings and a day off, then three midnight shifts, followed by four whole days off. Then the cycle would repeat. The four consecutive days off gave us the opportunity to play tourist and see more of Thailand than we otherwise would have. We took full advantage of it, visiting many attractions in the region. The down side was, the ever changing shifts kept our bodies off balance, and we never really had a chance to get used to any one schedule. But rotating the shifts was a way of spreading the misery around evenly. Day shifts were the most active, followed by swings. But mid shifts seemed excruciatingly long.

After about 8:00 or 9:00 PM, the Chinese went off the air. The day’s flights had all landed well before that time, as the Chinese were loath to fly at night. Communications after that were extremely rare. Mid shift ran from 2300 to 0700 hours. On mids, we were left to endlessly scan the HF band listening to mostly static, guzzling cup after cup of the bitter black brew that we kept cooking on the hotplate. We passed time by making entries in the shift logbook, with frequent references to our

“bleeding” eyeballs. The intended purpose of the shift log was to pass along any important happenings to the next shift, but on mids it was treated more as a “dear diary”, a place to “publish” our poetry and prose. Finally, about 0600 the Chi-coms would come back on air and begin establishing contact with one another again. Then we’d be pretty busy the remainder of the shift.

In their position reports, the Chi-Com aircraft we monitored referred to their navigational beacons and ground stations by encoded “trinomes” presumably so we wouldn’t know their positions when they made their navigational reports to their ground controllers. On a monthly basis, all of the trinomes were changed in an attempt to throw us off track. It was all quite a futile effort



Camp Ramasun, Thailand

Photo by the author.

for them. After listening to their transmissions for a time, we became familiar with the operator’s voices, and we could easily identify each one when we heard them. Combining the voice ID with our knowledge of their navigational routes, which never changed, we were able to break out all of the new trinomes within a couple of hours of the changeover. Similarly, I’m told that the “diddy boppers” in the Morse intercept section could ID the enemy Morse operators by the unique quirks in the way each one sent code.

As a shift supervisor, I was responsible for about fifteen men on my shift in the voice intercept section. Most things we listened in on were pretty routine—aircraft position reports, high altitude weather conditions, ETAs, and so-on. But occasionally something more significant was intercepted, and it fell to me to determine what was routine and what merited reporting immediately to the intelligence analyst. If important enough, a “FLASH PRIORITY” message could be generated that would be in the hands of the President within three minutes from anywhere in the world.

At least one such FLASH report had been generated from one of our stations in Taiwan. It detailed the shutdown of one of our airborne reconnaissance platforms by a Chinese MIG-21 over the China mainland. The “ACRP” (Airborne Communi-

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cations Reconnaissance Platform) had two flights daily originating out Taiwan, one out of Taipei at the north end of the island, and one out of Tainan, further south. They'd make a course for the mainland and fly the length of Eastern China, gathering intelligence as they proceeded up and down the coast. Then they'd return to base at the end of the day.

Along the way, our various ground stations within VHF range would listen in on the Chi-com fighter squadrons as they'd scramble and rise up to meet the recon planes. It was a game of "cat and mouse" to the pilots involved. When our recon planes would come over a given fighter squadron's sphere of coverage, the MIGs would scramble and follow along below until the next squadron up the coast would take over the chase. But the practical ceiling of the MIG 21 was below that of our reconnaissance planes, and generally speaking, the MIGs were no real threat to them, simply escorting and keeping close watch on the ACRP.

This occasion was the fatal exception to that rule. The MIG pilot had made a "zoom climb" to the highest altitude he could make. At the moment he topped out, he released his air to air rockets. The linguist in Taiwan listening in on the fighter pilot reported that he'd heard him say, "P'a gao er shih ch'ien.....Fa she le!" (wait.....), then excitedly, "Wo ding-le ta-de pigu! Wo ding-le ta-de pigu!" Translation: "Climbing to twenty-thousand (meters)..... Rockets fired!" (wait.....) "I fixed his ass! I fixed his ass!" The meaning of that transmission was dismayingly clear. The "game" had become deadly serious! The account of what had happened was instantly passed to us via encrypted teletype transmission. All of our listening posts were instructed to listen for reference to the shoot down by any of the Chinese ground stations we monitored.

As word of the shoot down passed around, the mood in the radio ops room took on the air of a funeral. I would liken it to the moment America learned of the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster. Some of those on board that plane were guys with whom we'd attended language school. And all were fellow airmen—brothers, whether we knew them or not. Were it not for the "luck of the draw," any one of us could have been aboard that flight. Everyone in the room was stunned. We never learned if there were any survivors among the crew of the aircraft. I suspect not—but we never heard any more on the matter, for we did not have "the need to know."

But not everything was so serious at Ramasun. Off duty time was pretty laid back. Even if it was rear echelon, to the best

of my recollection, we never had to fall out for reveille and roll call, nor did we have the parade drills and inspections we'd had in other places I'd been stationed prior to my arrival in SEA. Aside from monthly "Commander's Calls," as long as we showed up for our scheduled duty shift on time, our time was pretty much our own. At Commander's Call, we were given updates on the status of the war, the latest developments in air weaponry (to remind us we were, after all, still in the Air Force), and any items of interest regarding day to day operations of the Detachment. And of course, there were the obligatory scare films they showed us to educate and hopefully make us aware and wary of the dangers of VD.

To sum it up, quite in contrast to my early misgivings, my tour at Ramasun Station turned out to be a "piece of cake" compared to that of many others—especially with regard to the living conditions. It all seemed so incongruous with wartime! Not that I wanted to trade places, but I actually felt somewhat guilty, knowing there were others who were eating out of cans and



"What antennas?"

Photo by the author.

sleeping in snake and leech infested swamps, while so many of us were living the "easy life."

Indeed, my feelings regarding my service at Ramasun had always been somewhat ambivalent. For many years after returning Stateside, I felt almost as if I had no right to grieve the war - at least not as much right as my brothers in arms, who had returned with missing or paralyzed limbs or blinded eyes, or those who had tasted that singular moment of pure, distilled, mutual terror, when you look into the eyes of the enemy, and take his life, before he can take yours..... "Why not me?" I asked myself. "Why was I so fortunate, when so many others were not?" I've learned these are questions almost universally asked among survivors of war, especially by those who escaped physically unscathed. But like all wars, that war touched every one of its participants, whether front line or rear echelon, in the most profound ways. The wounds that I and many others like me brought home are simply the ones unseen, the ones for which no Purple Heart is ever awarded.

My association with the TLCB has helped to change those ambivalent feelings. I've come to appreciate, regardless of where we were stationed or what our AFSC or MOS, all of our efforts were of vital importance to the war effort. Were it not so, we would never have been there. I am proud of my service and thankful for the opportunity to have served at "Cobra 7."



7/24 Tanker Operations out of U'Tapao in 1971

By Bill Tilton

SAC Aerial Refueling From Thailand—# 3. In this instalment we'll cover routine tanker operations at U'Tapao and what it was like for a typical crew, including descriptions of aerial refueling and operations of a KC-135A.

I had the good fortune to be TDY to Project Young Tiger in the Spring of 1971, at a time when SAC tanker operations in SEA were operating in a stable and very routine mode. My crew, R-121, was from the 2nd Bomb Wing, at Barksdale AFB, which is just across the Red River from Shreveport, Louisiana. Our experience was typical of many hundreds of crews, even though numerous aspects of the mission changed from time to time. Refueling orbits changed, mission loads changed, and no day was just like the last. But this operation was both highly organized and yet extremely flexible. And it probably was as good an example of optimal exploitation of airpower's strengths as you will find.

The map on page 8 shows the most typical arrangement of refueling orbits, or anchors. But planes don't run on tracks, and these anchors could be and were altered to meet operational needs all the time.

When a crew arrived at Operations they received their call sign for the day, which told them their mission. If you were "Cherry 23" you would launch as the 23rd tanker of that 24-hour period and you would be assigned to Cherry Anchor (see that map). To plan your takeoff you also needed aircraft empty weight, fuel load, and weather data. While the two pilots were consulting performance charts the navigator was setting the day's codes in the secure communication gear and the boom operator was calculating weight and balance information with a special slide rule. Mission planning was very abbreviated for these routine sorties.

Airpower's inherent flexibility was exploited heavily—it was not unusual to receive your first change while taxiing out from the parking ramp. The command post might call and say: "Cherry 23 you are now White 24," and such a message told you that you would take a different route and fill a slot in a different

anchor, and also that another tanker had been dropped. Usually this was because of a maintenance abort, but it could also result from changing demand. As always in SAC, takeoff times were sacred. On some sorties we had people still working on things inside as we taxied to the end of the runway, with a blue pickup tagging along to carry them back just before we left. But we nearly always made that takeoff time.

Around the clock we rolled tankers out of U'Tapao at 15-minute intervals. Most routes started with a climb out to an intersection near Korat, then a turn toward the Anchor you were to join. The weapons controllers were at radar sites with callsigns like *Dressy Lady*, *Lion*, *Viking*, *Invert*, *Brigham*, *Panama*, and *Peacock* (Vietnam). They directed all the tankers to their destinations. They assigned an altitude as you approached the anchor, depending on who had departed and left slots open. The orbits were stacked up every four thousand feet, sometimes starting as low as 12,000. Sometimes tankers went even lower, which must have been quite a sight on the ground. But most refueling was at the altitudes between 16 and

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24 thousand feet.

We were not to operate above 28 thousand feet because that's where the B-52s were. Once in the anchor it was refueling airspeed and left turns, around and around. I believe we used two-minute legs on the orbits, and twenty-degree banked turns.

The Tanker and Refueling

The KC-135 is a Boeing 707 airframe, with extra fuel tanks in the spaces the airliner uses for baggage and cargo, beneath the cargo/passenger floor. That is plenty of space to hold all the fuel the plane could safely lift. In fact there were practically no fully-loaded missions, mostly because at higher temperatures jet engine performance drops off and would be too marginal on such a heavy takeoff in the event of an engine failure after the decision point on takeoff. My recollection is that all fuel loads were the same at U'Tapao, giving us a takeoff gross weight of about 265,000 pounds. The max gross for the KC-135A was 301,000, and max gross at lift off was 298,000 (you burned off the 3,000 pound difference from engine start to lift-off, some of the loss being water that was injected for added thrust).

In a typical peacetime rolling takeoff you advanced throttles while rolling onto the active runway, and continued without stopping. But at U'Tapao we used a static takeoff. We pulled into position at the beginning of the runway, held brakes, turned on the water injection pumps, and advanced the throttles, watching each engine for the thrust-leap that would indicate the flow of water injection had begun. At that point the pilot making the takeoff (I always took turns with my co-pilot) released brakes and concerned himself with alignment and airspeed while the other made final throttle adjustments to the charted EPR. EPR stands for "engine pressure ratio," which is intake pressure compared to outlet pressure, giving an efficient measure of engine thrust. Twenty seconds after brake release on the navigator's stopwatch he called out "*vee one*," and the pilots checked airspeed to see if it was no more than five knots below planned. This is the critical measure of aircraft performance and is known as the decision point. Usually airspeed was right on the money. As planned using performance charts, if you don't abort within ten seconds, any problems that occur after that point must be considered "airborne emergencies" because you know the aircraft cannot be stopped on the remaining runway. After that you are mainly on instruments and just keep centered using the rudder, watching the airspeed increase. When planned "V-2" airspeed is reached, the other pilot calls out, "*rotate*," meaning raise the nose *now*.

Liftoff occurs when the pilot smoothly but deliberately raises the nose to an eight-degree angle using an attitude-indicator gyro instrument. At heavy weights this is critical, because if it is too little the wings will not generate enough lift to leave the runway, while if it is too much the wings will generate too much *drag* and the aircraft cannot accelerate enough to climb. Being interested in survival, we always did rotation right!

As soon as a positive rate of climb shows on the vertical velocity instrument the pilot flying calls for "gear up," and the landing gear are retracted by raising a large lever with a minia-

ture plastic wheel on the end (ergonomics at work). The angle of attack is held to keep the airspeed constant until 1000 feet above the runway. When that is reached the nose is lowered to stop the climb and the flaps are brought up before their limiting airspeed is reached. Two minutes after water injection starts the water is gone and suddenly the cockpit gets much quieter, engine thrust dropping by as much as half. By then the pumps have sent three tons of water overboard through the engines, and if all is well the plane should be reaching planned initial climb speed, whereupon climb thrust is called for and the departure activities commence.

Aerial Refueling

Rendezvous with receivers on training missions back in the USA was a very tricky exercise in timing and execution, but with receivers in Thailand (mostly fighters enroute to North Vietnam) we just went round and round in orbit while the radar operators on the ground directed them to our location, like gas stations in the sky. As each flight of fighters arrived we would first hear them check in with each other, often acknowledging with just the "click click" of the microphone button that pilots often use to save talk. Then lead would call the tanker, and whoever was handling communications would respond and clear them to join in formation. There was little radio communication from this point and for routine refueling, none was needed.

One at a time fighters, usually in flights of four, would move down under the tail in a carefully-learned formation position. There are guide lights on the belly of the tanker by which the boom operator, lying on a couch in the tail, can direct the receiver to move forward, aft, or stay in place. When all is stable the boom operator flies the boom (which telescopes from 20 to 40 feet) until it is nearly in the receiver's receptacle. Then he telescopes the boom out until it enters the receptacle and latches on the receiver engage it to keep it there while fuel is passed.

At this point the tanker is being flown on autopilot, which is usually smoother than most pilots hand-fly, and the receiver just flies in formation. Refueling airspeed varies with each type of receiver, but the KC-135 can fly fast enough to make control easy for all receivers, even when the fuel load makes them quite heavy. If a B-52 is taking on a large offload (say, 60 or 70 thousand pounds), the flying characteristics of the two planes changes quite a bit during the course of the refueling. The best technique, which was not SAC doctrine at the time I flew tankers but was done by everyone (even with inspectors aboard), was for the tanker to leave throttles set the same throughout the process. As fuel weight transferred, the tanker inevitably accelerated. It's been a long time, but it seems to me for B-52s we started at 255 knots ("indicated" air speed—*true* airspeed would have been closer to 400-500 knots, most likely). By the end you would be romping along at 280 or 300 knots indicated, the nose would be down, and the elevator trim run way nose-down just to hold your altitude. The increasingly heavy bomber would be pushing to keep up, but flying the heavy beast would be made much easier with the added airspeed, which was the whole purpose.

Keep in mind, for those only familiar with today's powerfully see **Tankers**, continued on page 9

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK

Sawadee Krup!

Brothers and Sisters let me first apologize to you for not having anything to share with you in our last issue. Due to our Editor's need for space and my lack of input, they withheld posting of our official Board approved motions summary for Motions 93-100 that were approved in the BOD minutes of November 2002. We also had a Special BOD meeting in March 2003, covered motions 101-104 which would bring you up to date. Our current meeting has just ended. I mentioned to you in my first article there would be some long delays between the meetings and the posting of the information to the membership. With the Board spread across the country and the individuals having their own agenda (involving work and family) there are many variables in our operation. Let me assure you that we are working in your best interests and you would be notified of anything of immediate importance. If you do have a question about anything concerning the TLC Brotherhood operation, please correspond directly to a Board member back channel.

OFFICIAL Announcements:

The Board has approved the Communications Committee's request to establish an OFFICIAL 3rd server. Currently, we are still staffing procedures and email etiquette for this server. The intent is to be able to contact every member of our organization with an email address. This server would be strictly monitored to respect members' desires of not being online with the other two lists but all members would receive Official announcements through this 3rd server.

OUTLOOK Express E-Mail Tip:

Have you noticed those email subject lines at the beginning with three letters capitalized and then a slash like this "OFF/". That is a short abbreviation that tells the Mail Box to place or copy that email into a separate folder. It makes sure that we do not miss or accidentally delete that important "Official" email. Some of the other abbreviations we use: SEC – Secretary; FWB – Current 2003 Reunion; BOD – Board members; ASSIST – As-

sistance (the 3 letters didn't work here, haha!). Here are the steps: On the main window, click TOOLS, click Message Rules, click Mail, click TAB New Rules, click NEW, Block #1, Check Mark the block concerning Subject line containing specific words, Block #2 – Rules Action - Check Mark block either "Move to Folder" or "Copy to Folder", Block #3 – Rules Description click on "contains specific words" and enter word/letters on your next window and click Add and then OK. Follow the same procedure clicking on the "specified folder", where you will designate a folder you added and titled for placing of this type of email. Remember to click each Ok as you exit backwards. I hope this will help you in the future and get you ready for those important emails.

From the Grapevine:

I hear the Brotherhood server continues to have debates over political news from our government. I understand that "all goes" on the Brotherhood list, but actions of this nature keep me off that list. I am sure many other members feel the same. It also discourages others from posting an email to the Brotherhood for fear of being slammed. This really has a negative effect also on new members that try to join the list. There are many web sites and CHAT rooms that you can join to express your political views and opinions.

USPS Mail Tip:

Do not use HASP type mailing envelopes. Putting scotch tape over the bent hasp does not always ensure that the envelope does not get torn or hung-up (miss sorted) in the mail processing machines.

In Brotherhood,



Ed Miller, TLCB Secretary



Great Books Made Rare For FWB Raffle!

While Assistance Committee Chairman John Sweet was attending the Bangkok SEA 2002 Reunion last year, he bought in a nearby bookstore two books written by Christopher Robbins that are classic accounts of the U.S. secret involvement in Laos during the Vietnam War. The books are "The Ravens" and "Air America."

What he did with them greatly enhanced their value to TLCB members. He painstakingly went around that unique reunion gathering and picked up 20 rare autographs from those attending, including "Magnet Ass" Fred Platt and other notables. Then he gathered 36 autographs for "Air America," including Don Knotts and Bill Lair. The legendary figures who signed these books seldom get together in such numbers.

Now, John has decided to offer these two books in a special raffle, for which you can find tickets, at \$2 for one or \$5 for three, in this edition of the MEM. The draw for the raffle will be held at the Fort Walton Beach TLCB Reunion in early October. All funds raised in the raffle will go to the Assistance Fund to help the kids in Southeast Asia.

"The Ravens" has 476 pages. "Air America" has 369 pages. Both are published by Asia Books, measure 8X5 inches and are paperbacks. This is a truly rare opportunity to own these fine books with the signatures of some of the most famous names from that era.

Photocopy the ticket sheet and buy as many tickets as you like. Note: make checks to TLCB Assistance Fund, and mail to Ed Miller, 139 Fulmar Circle N.E., Fort Walton Beach, FL 32548. Good luck and remember, the kids will benefit from your generosity.



re-engined KC-135s, much of this performance description is now merely historical curiosity.

Two pumps driven by hydraulic motors pump fuel from a KC-135's aft body tank. Max rate of flow, which was only reached during dumping or refueling the largest aircraft, was 9000 pounds per minute (about 1500 gallons of jet fuel). Fighter fuel systems had much smaller plumbing and accepted fuel at much lower rates, down to about 1000 pounds per minute for the F-100. Typical fighter offloads in Southeast Asia were about 4000 pounds for F-100s and 6 to 10 thousand pounds for F-4s and F-105s. We never refueled B-52s out of U'Tapao, but they could take much, much more. We did have some RF-101s and some RB-66s. The latter probably would take about 20 thousand pounds.

During offloads the co-pilot had the critical job of managing the fuel panel, situated at knee level between the pilots. Fuel from wing tanks and the center wing tank (largest of all) was drained into the aft body tank. Fuel in any body tank could be pumped to the engines. But only fuel in the aft body tank could be pumped out the boom or to the engines, and it could *not* be pumped back to other tanks. Thus it was critical to make sure drain valves to the aft body tank were not left

open too long, and the rule was that the co-pilot held onto the rim of the fuel panel at any time a drain valve was open, as a reminder. The pilot normally took care of radio communications at this time, but if multiple things were going on the co-pilot had to stop draining to turn to another task. (My crew violated this rule once, as we were leaving the orbit "anchor" to RTB—return to base—and we just caught it in time to avoid having to dump fuel from the aft body tank so I could safely slow down enough to land. You *could* be so tail-heavy that the elevators would not overcome it as you slowed down. On the ground the nose-wheel strut stayed fully-extended, raising unanswered questions from the post-flight crew that met us).

Refueling disconnect was called by the boom operator, and the receiver's latches released the boom probe, which was immediately retracted to keep from interfering with the receiver. About a pint of fuel came from the receptacle at disconnect, but it sprayed and looked like gallons! The receiver would then roll left or right and close his receptacle doors. For fighters, the full one would move to a wingtip to fly formation while the next one moved in for fuel from the other wingtip. When the fighters were all refueled they would depart together, usually radio traffic limited to lead calling for change to a different radio channel. If people were feeling relaxed that day you might say something like "Happy hunting," and lead might respond with something short and friendly. As the next flight arrived for fuel the co-pilot called a strike report to the SAC command post.

After parking back at U'Tapao the crew would debrief maintenance so items needing attention could be taken care of, and then go off to relax. If it was between midnight and dawn my crew liked to go to the MARS amateur radio affiliate office and

make calls home. Otherwise we might go to Sattahip or the clubs. Once I went to the Special Services sailing club to learn sailing, at the U'Tapao beach. The little Sunfish boats were lots of fun, but my Thai instructor was not at all impressed with my slow comprehension of rudder and sail coordination. He looked at me with contempt and asked, "You fly airplane?" "Yes," I replied. He said, "Rudder on boat same-same rudder on airplane!" "Not quite," I told him; but he was sure he knew better.

As I gradually got a feel for how best to move across the wind, the instructor got impatient because I was going too slow, and had me hold it closer to the wind till we were clipping right along. I actually felt great at this point, holding the painter tight against the brisk sea breeze and hearing the bow clipping through the small waves. Because of its noise, I couldn't help notice a B-52 lumbering off with a load of bombs. The Special Services beach was almost directly under the departure path at the northern end of the runway. Now, heavy planes put out an enormous vortex of rolling wind from their wingtips—it can turn a light plane upside-down in a moment up to three or four miles behind them—and it is the greatest at low speed and heavy weight,

when lift generation is greatest. When that B-52's vortex blast hit the water all the captains of all the little Sunfish knew to let go of the sail for a moment—all but two,

"You fly airplane?" "Yes," I replied. He said, "Rudder on boat same-same..."

that is. Me, and the new sailor my instructor had recently soloed. Both of us turned over, and then learned how to right a Sunfish. I still have my U'Tapao Sailing Club "license," but I never went back.

After a few weeks on a given flying schedule U'Tapao tanker crews slipped four hours to the next shift time. This made the time change easy to adjust to, and it made no difference to us whether it was night or day, except of course aircraft performance was generally better in the cool of the night. The big concern in all flying is weather. We were tdy to Young Tiger as the rainy season was getting started (spring and summer of 1971) and so the daytime air was hot, humid and unstable, and little thunderbumpers could spring up night or day. We avoided these as much as possible, because you got tossed around somewhat if you sliced through them. As they grew, some would become thunderstorms, which no sane pilot will fly through. Air Force regulations demanded that we avoid them by twenty miles, since heavy vertical winds and ruinous hail can occur in clear air outside such storms. We relied on the navigator and his airborne radar to keep us out of these dangerous cells.

One night the little bumpers were popping up all around us, and our nav was having more and more trouble keeping us out of trouble (at such times we had quite a bit of latitude to wander out of our orbit pattern, but ground radar could not help much with the avoidance problem because they had to set their systems to screen out rain returns so they could see the aircraft). We had an F-105 hooked up when the nav told us we had become surrounded by developing cells and would have to pick the lightest area and plunge through in order to get away from the storms. The rain became extremely heavy as we did so, and the boom operator described a scene that I can only imagine. St.

Tankers, continued from page 9

Elmo's Fire is a static discharge that looks like colored miniature lightning (color depends on electrical charge). He said the boom looked like a burning cross, and the fighter was covered with St. Elmo's Fire from wingtip to wingtip, on the canopy, and on the tail. From his couch under the tail he said, "It's kind of spooky back here!" By then the turbulence was rough and I said, "Drop him off, Boom." as both planes started bumping up and down pretty violently. Back in clear air we completed the refueling and as they left, lead said: "You guys put on quite a show!"

Descent into U'Tapao was nearly always under radar control and there was nothing challenging about it. But landings, particularly in daytime across the hot white beach, were a real challenge! What made it worse was the bets and taunts, because the harder you try for a smooth landing, the more likely you are to goof it up. A light tanker feels, relatively, like an autumn leaf when you are bouncing around in thermal air currents, greatly increasing the risk that you will plunk it down hard—even bounce a little—and hear the raucous laughter of the rest of your bad-bad crew! You have to force yourself to hold that nose down and make the plane think you don't really care, and that's a hard thing to do.

One sizzling afternoon while we were lined up at the "hammer-head" waiting to roll on to the runway, we watched a B-52 coming in from a mission, and obviously very light. First he hit on the front wheels, then bobbed off the back, and then did the whole routine again. It was hilarious! The SAC operations controller, who probably was an older colonel, cracked "*damage control—damage control*" on the command post frequency.

During pre-flight inspection the boom operator put four chalk numbers on random nosewheel ribs, and we each gave him a buck. He was always first down the ladder after chocks were in at the end of the mission, and immediately checked the nosewheel ribs to see whose number was nearest the ground. Then we headed off to postflight de-briefing and a round on whoever had won the kitty.



Most of the details in this part are from my increasingly unreliable memory, so please pardon me if there were some inaccuracies. The final instalment of this South East Asia tanker series will cover support of the major strikes in the latter days of the war and the closing out of tanker operations at the end.

TLC Sisterhood Raffle

This is a reminder to everybody to buy their tickets for the TLC Sisterhood Quilt Raffle, a TLCB tradition. The Sisterhood's memorial quilt, being made by Rosie Wheatley, will be raffled at the FWB reunion in October. Your sheet of tickets was enclosed with the June Mekong Express Mail. If you have used them up, you can download more ticket sheets from the TLCB website. Click on *Reunion* on the Home Page then click on *raffle* and download. Photocopy the sheet as many times as you like. One ticket is \$2. Three are \$5. You can buy a memory block for \$5. Make your check out to *TLCB Assistance Fund* and mail to **Rosie Wheatley, 8018 W. 900 N., Carthage, Indiana 46115.**

Thoughts on Attending...

Still thinking about coming to Fort Walton Beach, but can't quite persuade your nearest and dearest partner in life that this would be a *really good way* to spend a few precious days and a few hundred bucks? Peter Reynolds ("Big Buddah") gave us permission to print this part of a letter he sent us last year. Maybe it will help you make up your mind. Said Peter:

"I'm trying to convince my wife, of 32 years, that we should try to attend the TLC convention this year. She didn't even know me until after 1966, so she has problems wondering why, after being what ever part of the war we each were, each in his/her way, and that same war causes [so many problems], then why would anyone want to relive it by sharing what are often extremely painful experiences. She never understands why I [join and renew so many veteran's groups] when she feels anything about the Vietnam era is *history*-know about it, but let it go.' She's a good American, in general—perhaps I'm a poor convincer...She, like many people, can't realize that fellowship breeds relief of tensions, makes new or renews old friendships and allows me, like many others, to present and blend their experiences—perhaps allowing me to see mine, however horrible they seemed to me, in a modified light, with a different conclusion, or may joyfully just fill in the blanks when the mind just can't piece it together. That's why I hope we will get to Florida, and to the convention."

An A-26 Crew Chief Saved My Life!

by Michael Carden

An A26 crew chief literally saved my life sometime between February and October 1967 (why can't I remember dates anymore?). It was about 0400 that morning and I was cleared onto the runway to pin the gear on an A-26 which had just landed and stopped on the runway after a landing in which the gear had indicated unsafe. I approached the airplane from the front, pinned the nose gear, backed out of the nose wheelwell, and started to walk down the side of the fuselage to go pin the left main (note: engines were still ticking over). I *knew* that I was supposed to go clear out to the wingtip and then come up *behind* the engines to get to the main landing gear. I had done it many times before. That morning, whether it was from being

very tired or just stupid, I forgot my training. Just as I took the first step alongside the fuselage toward a certain violent death, the airplane's crew chief grabbed me by the back of my belt and shirt and yanked me back. He had come out to see what was wrong with "his" airplane. I hadn't even seen him approach.

I do remember buying this saviour a quart of Jack Daniels Black Label and thanking him many times over, but now I can't remember his name. He was a SSgt. Does anyone know who it was?

Mike Carden was a firefighter at Nakhon Phanom in 1966/67 and an air traffic controller at Takhli in 1972. This item appeared on the TLCB "Mission" server; we are publishing it for our off-line members.

First shirt still waits for me to do KP

By Bob Baer

My first permanent duty station was Richards-Gebaur AFB, located just outside Kansas City, Missouri. I was stationed there from July 1964 until December 15, 1965 and worked at the 328th USAF Hospital Dental Clinic. Our squadron had ranks E-1 through E-4 pull KP at the Hospital Mess Hall, a two-man affair with one person the early man 0600-1430 and the other lucky soul working 1000-1830 (or later).

I was lucky to always get the early shift, and we had enough personnel that KP detail came around roughly three times a year — unless the 1st Sgt developed a dislike for you. Then, as it was in any military outfit, every bad detail had your name penned in at the very top of the list.

I worked my way up to being a 5-level A3C in minimum time, then sat and waited along with everyone else for the promotion allotments that came down three times a year. Since Richards-Gebaur was an Air Defense Command base, those stripes took a long time coming as a general rule. In one cycle our regular allotment of A2C stripes was half the normal amount.

I finally made A2C with close to 18 months time-in-grade during the Fall 1965 cycle. ADC bases constantly filled medical and dental slots for the sizeable number of radar sites throughout the US at that time. My time came and I was to transfer in December of 1965.

Lucky old me had a “choice” of radar site circuits: Chandler AFS, MN; Pickstown AFS, SD and Gettysburg AFS, SD or Opheim AFS, MT and Fortuna AFS, SD. Both assignments were labeled Isolated Duty, which limited the tour to 18 months even though they were stateside locations.

Great places for hermits and unsocial creatures—but definitely NOT my cup of tea. Especially since I rotated through the three-site circuit of Chandler, Pickstown and Gettysburg 30 days at a time. Arriving there permanent party within days of Christmas added to my joy.

At the Richards-Gebaur clinic I worked under a SMSgt unlike any creature I had ever seen before. Not seen one like him since. He was about 5-11 with a 36-inch chest and a 46-inch waist. To say he was pear-shaped was to compliment him. He and I did not see eye-to-eye.

Anyhoo... Upon getting my orders and preparing to clear base I was told by the SMSgt to wait until the following day to start out-processing. First stop was *always* Finance, where I got the standard “takes 3 days for us to get your records ready, you can pick them up Monday.”

That was followed by a call from the 1st Sergeant that informed me that I was “scheduled for KP” that Saturday AM and that I should “consider it my going away present to you” from himself and my SMSgt.

It started the gears spinning in my cranium. A call to a fellow A2C at the Finance Office got my pay records squared away and in my hands the same afternoon.

But it was a fortunate chat I had with a major from the Staff Judge Advocate and Inspector General offices that made up my mind for me. He was a friendly sort and I had cleaned his teeth several times earlier and he appreciated my workmanship. So when I hypothesized about an airman being relieved of duty to outprocess for reassignment he told me that “relieved of duty”

meant just that. He added that if an airman came to the IG to complain about being treated the way it was set up for me to experience, that heat would certainly come down on whoever scheduled a relieved person for fatigue detail.

I did all my out-processing and the final Friday there the only fella I needed to clear me was the good old First Shirt. He growled at me to remember that I had KP scheduled the next morning, but signed me off as I told him I wanted to head off to Minnesota *immediately* following my KP shift. All I did after that was sign out PCS at 10 pm that Friday night and I took off and made it to Iowa before I stopped at a buddy’s home before continuing my trip the next morning.

I got to Chandler AFS late Saturday night and reported to the orderly room at 0730 Monday morning. I was *not* assigned to the squadron, but belonged to a Support Squadron still at Richards-Gebaur that handled all administrative concerns pertaining to me.

It must have been 0731 when that 1st Sgt got a call from me from the Richards-Gebaur dental clinic. My dear friend the MSgt. immediately asked, “Just what the hell do you think you are doing there?” I simply replied that I was processing in, and reiterated that when he told me “You know what I’m talking about!” Since there was nothing else he could do he slammed the phone down on me and I finished in-processing.

Later calls to buddies still at Richards-Gebaur, including one who worked in the Orderly Room, told me of great hilarity among the troops as the two senior sergeants ranted and raved to and about each other about the missing KPer. It turned out that the 1st Sgt. got the 0630 phone call that Saturday reporting my non-attendance at my “going away party.”

His quick call to to the front desk at the hospital verified that I had faithfully signed out PCS and left the requisite copies of orders, etc that were required. I crossed all the “t’s” and dotted all the “i’s” and was gone, gone, gone! He promptly called the SMGT at home and screamed into the phone, “He’s gone! He’s gone! He flew the coop!”

The guys I left behind subsequently told me that in order to save face the 1st Sgt. started spreading a story that he called my new duty station and got me “three solid weeks of nothing but KP.” That was a bald-faced lie, as everyone knew. But they acted properly shocked to let the two sergeants nurse their wounded pride.

I hated the radar sites—but I was resigned to the fact that I would spend two years on them as in all likelihood I would just be extended the remaining six months on my enlistment once the 18-month requirement was met. But a funny thing happened after five months of radar site duty. Somehow, some way, ADC was levied to send a 5-level dental tech to APO 96310 in SEA. And with plenty of guys to choose from, guess who was chosen? [96310= Nakhon Phanom]



Please read these names of our brothers who died in Cambodia during the era of the Vietnam War.

GARY WILLIAM BRITTON*PERCY GUY BROCK, JR.*EVERETT LEWIS BROCKS*MARK LARRY BROWN*TIMOTHY JOHN BROWN*ROBERT WADE BRUNSON*WILLIAM JOSEPH BUNTING*MARK WAYNE BURCHARD*DARRELL EDWARD BURNS*HOWELL WAYNE BURNS* HAROLD RAY BURTON*DONALD GENE BUSSE*DAVID AUSTIN BUTCHER*EATTERSON BYRD, JR.*HOWARD EUGENE CAFFERY*RONALD EDWARD CAMPBELL*DENNIE LYNN CARNETT*FRED EMERY CARRINGTON*JERRY DEWAYNE CARVER*RICHARD WILLIAM CASEY*PHILLIP CASTILLO*PATRICK FRANCIS CAWLEY*JOSEPH ANTHONY CERIO* MICHAEL JOHN CHAMBERLAIN*JAMES W CHARLESWORTH, JR.

Absentee Voting, Ed Ulrich, Monument, Server, Growth, and Other Thoughts

Bill Tilton, President

Absentee Voting

A few of our Brothers may not make it to the annual meeting this year. The bylaws of the Brotherhood do provide for absentee voting, however, and you will find a sheet with a proxy form and a ballot. You may use either method to exercise your vote for board members. The ballot was printed before the close of the nominations period (which ended 30 days before the meeting, as you know), so you will have to look on our website, www.tlc-Brotherhood.org, for any nominations "from the floor" that were received. I won't repeat the instructions (see the forms), but remember: use only *one* method, and don't leave any hanging chad!

Ed Ulrich

We deeply regret the passing-on of a very special Brother, and former History Committee chairman, Ed Ulrich, from cancer, this past July. I hope MEM will feature a article on Ed's remarkable career in a future issue. In his last message, telling us that he would have to donate his reunion fees, Ed said: "I am into advanced stages of terminal cancer. I have been honored to be a member of the Brotherhood and its program... sorry, no more articles, this latest adventure will be "Out There Beyond Beyond". (Ed authored a book about his adventures as a missionary in Borneo long before the Vietnam War, titled "Out There Beyond Beyond.")

The TLC/NKP Monument

We have no article about the monument project in this issue, but I can't wait to see what we get in the December issue. Much is under way at this time. We are still getting opinions and modifications on the design, but the raising of funds has simply not yet started, except for some members who have given us some seed money. What we probably need is someone with the time and the energy to do the work—we have an expert fund raiser (Ira Cooperman) to tell us what to do and how to do it. If you think you might be that person, or would be willing to help that person, please contact Gerry Frazier, committee chairman.

Meanwhile Gerry and his wife Sue are visiting Nakhon Phanom and he will be meeting with officials, walking the future park land, and gathering engineering and contracting knowledge that is essential to our design and also to setting our fund-raising goal.

Official Server

After months of preparation and testing the Communications Committee has implemented our new server for official news and notices (only). We hope every member with an e-mail address will let us contact them by this means. Access is limited to posting by board members and committee chairmen.

Brotherhood Growth

I like to review where we are and where we are going in this column, but soon we will be hearing it all at the annual meeting, so I'll save that. This year, as in the past, I intend to focus the meeting reports on the four objectives of the Brotherhood and to examine our energy levels in pursuing these objectives. Membership continues to grow at an average of about ten per month. While a number of last year's members did not renew in 2003, we are surpassing the highest number we have had so far, and we are still climbing. Given that we have nearly a third of the year to go, I would not be surprised to hit 500 members by January 1st. And this year we will send you a dues envelope to make renewal easier and more *fun*! So be sure to look for that envelope in your December MEM.

We Helped

A few weeks ago a VA psychiatrist in Chicago asked us about duty at NKP, to help a confused patient. John Sweet and I sent descriptive messages. The grateful doctor told us we had been very helpful in channeling his program of treatment. He also said he is always impressed at how ready veterans are to help other veterans when they have problems in their lives. As you may know, VA's 206 Vet Centers have all received our brochures and posters.

