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THE THAILAND LAOS CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC.

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The Beginning and End of USAF Aerial Refueling in the Vietnam War

by Bill Tilton

In previous articles of this series we covered the stumbling and tragic beginning of SAC support for Arclight B-52 bombing sorties, the confused early basing situation, and the establishment of routine high-volume aerial refueling around the clock in Southeast Asia. In this final article we start with a review of the history of aerial refueling in the Vietnam War. This review includes new material on the other Air Force refueling resource, TAC's KB-50s, and their brief but tragic contribution. Finally we will relate the closing out of SAC refueling in Southeast Asia as the United States pulled its forces out of the on-going war.

Short Review of SEA Refueling History

Aerial refueling has a long history in military aviation, but according to the authors of the unpublished SAC report that was the main source for this series of articles, the first *combat* use of aerial refueling tankers in the U.S. Air Force did not occur until the 9th of June 1964, when four KC-135 tankers refueled eight F-100s for a retaliatory mission against Pathet Lao in the Plain of Jars. From that day, SAC Southeast Asia combat refueling continued almost constantly for nine years and two months, accumulating nearly a million refueling hookups and passing 1.4 *billion* gallons of fuel from tankers to receivers.

While we don't have the information at hand to dispute SAC's claim to being first, TAC's obsolete KB-50 tankers were sent bravely into the war in 1964. They had a very short and tragic exposure to the gestating conflict and were actually grounded after a KB-50 crashed while climbing out of Tahkli. All Pacific-based KB-50s were cleared for one flight for disposal at the "Bone Yard," at Davis Monthan AFB, near Tucson. At that point PACAF had to call on SAC. According to Gary Parker, reminiscing in the newsletter of the TAC Tanker Association, KB-50 tankers were refueling F-100s inside South Vietnam at least until the Fall of 1964.

What was a KB-50?

KB-50s were based on the Boeing B-50 bomber, which was designed late in World War II as an upgrade of the B-29, using much more powerful engines, stronger aluminum alloys for the wings, a taller tail, and some other improvements. Boeing built 371 of these nuclear-capable "Stratofortresses." Then they double-lobed the fuselage and created the C-97, the KC-97, and the civilian "Stratocruiser" double-decked luxury airliner. As B-47s took over the bomber deterrent role, the B-50s were converted to many uses, including weather and photo reconnaissance, air-sea rescue (with a huge droppable boat), and aerial refueling. The tanker modification was done to 136 of the B-50s by Hayes Aircraft, in Birmingham, Alabama, and completed in 1957. Hayes installed three hose reels that could let out sev-

See **Refueling**, continued on next page



KB-50J wingman as seen from the co-pilot's window. Note auxiliary J-47 engines and wingtip refueling reel pods; also a pod in the tail. The propeller disc was 18 feet in diameter (do you have an 18 foot room in your house?)

Photos by the author

Dues, 2004

For most members, dues of \$25 are payable as of January 1st. To see what year we have you as "paid," look on your mailing label. If it is 2003, your dues are payable and may be sent in the envelope provided. If you disagree with the year shown, contact a board member (see page 5).

Reunion, 2004

See page 4 for dates and place.

Refueling, continued from page one

enty feet of rubber fuel hose and a drogue, called a “basket” by the crews. Receivers had to plug a fuel system probe into this receptacle and then maintain a formation position while the KB-50 panel engineer ran the offload pumps.

In 1958 the “J” variant solved performance problems of the “D” models: two J-47 jet pods taken from B-47s were added for faster climb and cruise, and ability to maintain 240 knots indicated airspeed when refueling F-105 fighters. These tankers carried JP-4 fuel in two rubberized canvas bomb bay tanks holding 15,000 pounds of fuel (about 2500 gallons) each. This fuel could also be burned in the auxiliary jets, as could the 115/145 AVGAS carried for the R-4360 Wasp Major main engines. But if a cupful of jet fuel got in the fuel stream of one of those reciprocating engines it would quit immediately, possibly through spectacular internal failure. One hazard turned out to be a small centerwing bladder tank that tended to develop leaks and fill the area with volatile fuel fumes. The powerful electric wing flap motors were in this area, and tended to arc some pretty good sparks when they were turned on. Several KB-50 losses were found to be explosions right at the point where the wing flaps would have first started down for approach to landing. After that was discovered, crews always sniffed inside the bomb bays before moving the flaps.

Needless to say, the KB-50 was a very complicated aircraft, and so many critical systems were prone to failure that the squadrons typically scheduled two airborne spares and two ground spares to ensure getting four good tankers into the air for an exercise or critical refueling. In 1964 one of these tankers suffered internal failure of a main engine on climbout from Yakota AFB, in Japan, enroute to Southeast Asia. Only one of the 12 crewmembers aboard was able to bail out before the fiercely burning plane crashed. Then another '50 caught fire on climbout for a combat refueling out of Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base. In that case the entire crew escaped the plane successfully, but for a time they thought the Thai farmers who found them were going to treat them roughly. Somehow sign language and cooler heads managed to salvage the situation and the friendly Thais provided the crew transportation back to their base.

Not so friendly were PACAF and TAC. All Pacific-based KB-50s were grounded except for one-time ferry flights to Davis-Monahan AFB for “flyable storage,” meaning no maintenance was to be performed and no preservation steps were to be

taken. Meanwhile Guam-based WB-50 weather recon planes were found to have extensive corrosion under the paint of the main wing spars. These, too, were permitted one flight to Tucson. The era of the B-29/B-50 was shoved to a hasty close.



The author watching from KB-50J's left blower, or refueling operator station, as wingman refuels an RB-66 over Louisiana in 1963.



F-105 hooked up and taking fuel from the left reel of a KB-50J over the Mississippi River, 1963.

SAC in Southeast Asia

The first KC-135s stationed in SEA were called the *Yankee Team Tanker Task Force*, stationed at Clark AFB.

In 1964 the B-47s SAC had had on Guam for ten years had been replaced by B-52s. These strategic bombers were included in the little known tactical warfare bombing plan code-named “Arc Light.” (The chaotic and disastrous first days of Arc Light refuelings, including a mid-air B-52 collision in the refueling tracks, were described in the March 2002 MEM.)

Young Tiger

The beginning of SAC aerial refueling in Southeast Asia was uncertain and somewhat chaotic. In September of 1964 “Yankee Team” became “Foreign Legion,” which then opened

See **Refueling**, continued on page 5

Pearl S. Buck and a Table for 13

by Jim Michener

“I threw his letters away, all of them, when I knew he wasn't coming back. I even tossed his picture into the dustbin.” So said Chuanpis Nammar, now 55, sitting across the table from me while Lucky, 29, her Amerasian daughter-in-law, sat on her right, Alsis, 30, her Amerasian son, sat on her left, and Jeanie, 3, her Amerasian granddaughter, sat on her lap. In a peculiar way, it was peculiarly American, the kind of picture, and story, Norman Rockwell would have so very much liked to paint. However, the table around which 13 people were seated was not in the United States—the table was in Thailand.

“At school, if we looked different, we had to fight to prove we weren't weak. Going to school could be a nightmare for some,” said Tothsapol Siphumat, aka Jody Swain, 36. In agreement, heads nodded around the table. “But we eventually got through that stage,” Pongsak “Terry” Pratumchai, 31, added. “And we could always count on Kanjana. She would come to

Continued next page

our rescue. She was our guardian angel. She even gave us money for ice cream when our pockets were empty—which was always!”

Kanjana Suwunnakaseam is the assistant international manager at Aek Udon International Hospital in Udon Thani, a sprawling city surrounded by rice paddies, the provincial seat of a province that touches the Mekong. Its often vacant airport, which only services domestic flights, was built upon the former Royal Thai Udon Air Force Base, once the home of legions of US airmen, soldiers and just about everything else, CIA personnel included. But the base became vacant when the squadrons returned to the U.S. in 1975.

“With the Americans gone,” Kanjana said, “we started inspecting schools in 1977, looking for Amerasian children. Without outside support, we intuitively knew many of them were suffering despite the fact they were living with their Thai mothers and grandparents.” She carried the banner of the Pearl S. Buck Foundation, whose headquarters was a frame house in a residential area of Bangkok, the Thai capital. Six branch offices were opened in the outlying provinces. Due to the gargantuan size of the former airbase, the Foundation’s Udon branch became the largest. Throughout Thailand, as the years ticked by, files for over 2,000 Amerasian children had to be opened. Remarkably, every child was assisted.

Remarkable, of course, was Pearl S. Buck (1892-1973), who, except for college, spent the first 40 years of her life living in China, spoke Mandarin before English, and was the first woman in America to win the Pulitzer Prize for Literature (*The Good Earth*, 1931). Many Asians credit her with writing about Asians

and Asian life best of any non-Asian. So it was natural for her to recognize *khao nok na* (rice not in the field), in other words, half-caste children. After the Korean War, she went big time welcoming Korean-American kids to the United States with the founding of Welcome House (1949) in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Those who were raised on the farm next to hers were my playmates.

A survey of the Amerasians at the table established the fact that none of them knew where their father was. But Pearl S. Buck would not have been surprised. She would have exalted in their mixed race, their ability, as it were, to be in two places at once. Sadly, however, Kheaowan, 8, at the end of the table, will probably never know his African-American grandfather. What a pity for the grandfather, whose grandson can flash the roundest, brownest, sparkliest eyes I have ever seen: they go straight to your heart.

Two blocks away, with just two weeks to go until Christmas Eve, 100-percent Thai children tugged at adult hands, beseeching their parents for toys packaged in colorful gift-wrap as Jingle Bells trumpeted over the department store’s sound system. If ever there was a contradiction, I had stumbled into it. “For the Amerasian children’s sake, you were supposed to,” whispered Pearl S. Buck’s all-seeing spirit in my ear. “For me, please finish the story of these children with *song jai* (two hearts), one American, one Thai. I say to those of you who served behind the Cold War’s bamboo curtain, write the final chapter before you, too, are invisible. After all, those children are more your legacy than they are mine.”

[The author lives in Vientiane, Laos. Ed.]



FROM THE SECRETARY’S DESK

Sawadee Pee Mai Brothers and Sisters! That translates into “Happy New Year.” It may be a little late to be wishing you a Happy New Year but it is my only opportunity to greet you all after the holiday season. Christmas for the most part is not celebrated in Thailand but New Year’s is very much a part of the Thai tradition.

In this issue of the MEM we get you all up to date with approved Board motions, including Motions 93 through 110. Motions 105 through 109 covers our most recent extended Board meeting, which finished August 23rd and 110 was passed during a special meeting the last week of December. There were a couple of significant motions passed, which I will share with you. Motion 108 was for the Board to accept the slate of nominations from the nominating committee. The nominations were unanimously approved by your votes at the Annual Business meeting (Reunion 2003) and mailed ballots. There were no other nominations from our membership. All ballots have been held by myself and destroyed after 30 days from the close of our Annual Business meeting (November 5). I wish to thank you for your votes and for participation in the election process. Motion 106 concerned next year’s Reunion. The local west coast reunion chairman requested approval of hosting the 2004 Reunion in non-summer months. Our past approved policy was for even years to be held in the summer months (June-August) and odd years would be non-summer months (normally meaning Fall or Spring months). Since we were excited to see some West coasters come forward to host a Reunion, it made it easy to approve this request. Speaking from experience the local people in the area hosting the reunion know what is best for you and atten-

dance. So I do not want to steal the thunder from the West coast Reunion Committee, but start making your vacation plans.

Ok, back to the beginning of this article I greeted you with a Happy New Year and that also translates into, “It is time to pay my TLCB dues.” First, I hope and encourage you to continue your membership in our organization. Let me remind you about the dues renewal date. That date is March 31st, meaning after this date if you have not renewed, you will lose your privilege of being on the Brotherhood and Mission Internet servers and will get no more issues of our MEM. You will then be considered as a “lapsed” member. At this year’s reunion three local lapsed members paid their dues and returned to member status. Also, this upcoming year will be the first year that I will not send you a new membership card. Let me explain.

See **Secretary**, continued on page 4

Those members that received their laminated cards during this year 2003, will receive an email or post card acknowledging their continued membership (after receiving payment). Those new members from 2003 will receive their new laminated cards upon renewal. Anyone joining after October 1st (new members) this year should receive a membership card indicating 2004. Individuals with permanent laminated cards have a card different from all others, It carries the date that you joined.

Reunion 2003: I first want to thank my Fort Walton Reunion 2003 committee for their hard work and time dedicated in hosting this year's reunion. It was a great success and one that will be remembered. Things planned this year went very smoothly, other than noise complaints during our auction and having no online video of the auction or banquet as planned. Paul and Norma Cummings did a great job at the Hooch bar and manned it all by themselves; Joyce Harrington put out a fire when our Shirt Vendor did not come through with our Reunion Memorabilia gift. She quickly found another vendor and got our Reunion Mouse Pad prepared. David Fredrickson worked hard trying to get video out of our Electronic/Media Hooch. Tours and lunch with our local military bases were great. Those attending our Roll-Call service or our Memorial service, I know had to shed some tears. Woody Freeman assisted me so much and helped in keeping me calmed down. But it was a great teamwork and I want to tell you the other names that I have not already mentioned: Arnie Foltz, Bobby Barry, Chuck Jennings, David Harrington, Eric Fredrickson, and Don Dorwart.

From Thailand: Well, the day after the reunion I was leaving on a jet plane for Thailand. It was supposed to be a vacation only and getting settled into my new home (recently built) in Nakhon Phanom. It turned out to be a Wedding celebration (niece), Wake (brother-in-law), and some TLCB business. My

California, Here We Come! TLCB Reunion 2004

At the 2003 TLCB Reunion and Annual Meeting at Fort Walton Beach, Florida, the board of directors announced that the 2004 reunion is to be held in the Ontario/Riverside area of Southern California. Finally we shall see what the West Coasters can do!

Hap Wyman has led this crusade and has been duly appointed as local chairman by the vice president (John Sweet), who is the permanent reunion committee chairman. Hap has raised an army of eager volunteers and they have selected the dates **September 23 through 26. Block these dates!**

There are many special attractions in the Los Angeles area and we know Hap and his committee will work out a great program for us. Meanwhile they are negotiating favorable room rates and finding suitable meeting spaces for us. Watch the March MEM for initial details.

schedule was full, and that was good. I reentered the official business of the TLCB by getting involved again with our Monument planning. Gerry Frazier, Monument Chairman, was on his way to Thailand when I had contact with our local Thai friend, Khun Phumphan, who is our primary Thai contact working on building a Monument. John Middlewood and Nick Ascot got the meeting organized over lunch at Nick's wife's new restaurant (across the street from the old Civilized Bar). You will be hearing more about the Monument planning from Gerry and Bill Tilton. Fund raising will become very important soon, we may not ask you directly to give but we may need your help and support in other ways. MacAlan Thompson and Les Strouse flew up to NKP to do some coordinating on the Monument also, but it became a great Mini-Reunion and it continued upon my departure from NKP to Bangkok for my final flight. Mac met me at Don Muang Airport Domestic Terminal and picked my wife and I up to transport us to Les Strouse's wife's restaurant for some lunch and beer. Got to meet Jim Traywick (Jungle Jim) and a couple of other friends of Mac and Les. Bangkok continues to be a terrible place to drive, but who cares, at night it is a different and exciting place. Stayed at the Ambassador Hotel in the Nana district and my wife did not want me walking alone at night away from the hotel area. Hum...??

Board Motions in 2003

Motion	Description
93	To accept the minutes of board meetings.
94	To accept the date, slogan, and logo for Reunion 2003 as presented by Ed Miller.
95	That the budget be accepted for 2003
96	To adopt revisions to the bylaws as drafted by President Bill Tilton, and submit them to the membership for vote.
97	To adopt the proposed History Committee Mission Statement, as presented by Chairman Gerry Frazier.
98	That Brotherhood server policy be changed to make it exclusive to TLCB members except that a 60 day trial period shall be authorized on the Brotherhood server.
99	Limited authority granted to Monument Committee to contact other vet groups in the name of the Brotherhood and to formally solicit donations from outside TLCB
100	To hold the 2004 TLCB Annual Meeting and Reunion in the Ontario, California area.
101	Approve Assistance expenditure up to \$5000 for purchase of school computers as proposed.
102	The monument to be built at NKP to memorialize All Who Served during the period of US involvement in the period of the so-called Vietnam War.
103	Authorizes BX to purchase 1000 advertising brochures within cash available.
104	Authorizes Communications Committee to establish a 3 rd server, with restrictive access to board and and chairmen only.
105	Accept Minutes for November 02 and March 03 meetings
106	Waive policy to alternate between summer and non-summer dates for 2004 reunion (so 2004 meeting can be in Fall)
107	Sets 3 rd quarter budget for Thailand grants
108	Accept slate from Nominating Committee
109	Donate \$3000 from treasury to Assistance
110	Adopt 2004 budget as proposed by Budget Committee

In Brotherhood,



Ed Miller, TLCB Secretary

as "Tiger Cub" Tanker Task Force at Don Muang 12 hours after it was dropped at Clark, in March of 1965. Operations at Kadena commenced in January 1965. Before the end of the second week they acquired the nickname that was to stick with the operation to the end: "Young Tiger," known simply as "YT" to all SAC tanker personnel.

The first Arc Light bombing mission, launched June 18, 1965, was deemed a great success.

Basing for jet tankers in SEA was a chronic problem until U'Tapao was opened. By September of 1965 planning had commenced for creating a first-class SAC base at the port of Sattahip, about 60 miles south of Bangkok. Ten tankers based close to the action, in Thailand, would be able to do the work of 22 tankers out of Kadena (on the island of Okinawa, near Japan). No Vietnam base was secure enough to risk providing such attractive targets for sappers and mortars. But in Thailand, only Tahkli, Korat, and Don Muang had runways long enough for high temperature tanker operations, even at reduced takeoff weights. These bases were saturated with fighters and had deteriorating runways. And Tahkli could not handle the daily fuel supply needs.

Ban U-Tapao Royal Thai Navy Air Base

On June 2nd, 1966, SAC activated the 4258th Strategic Wing at Sattahip, and on August 10th Field Marshall Thanom Kittikachorn and Ambassador Graham Martin dedicated the airfield, allowing the first tanker sortie to launch from the still-unfinished base on August 11th. The growing U-T tanker task force was named "Giant Cobra."

In February of 1967 U'Tapao's 4258th Strategic Wing became the tanker manager for all of Southeast Asia. By then, 29 KC-135s were at U-T (2 of which were for radio relay), 8 still at

Tahkli FOB (forward operating base), and 40 at Kadena AFB, in Okinawa (2 of which were on strip alert at Guam).

Tanker operations all over Asia were changed greatly in 1968, along with many big events of that dismal year, which included North Korea's capture of the ELINT (electronic intelligence) ship "Pueblo," the politically disastrous "Tet Offensive," partial and then total pauses of bombing North Vietnam, and the siege of Khe Sanh.

In response to these events both bomber and tanker sortie rates rose and fell, and the number of tankers TDY to Asia was adjusted to match. In September of 1969 the wing at Kadena became the manager of all tankers in SEA. Then on April first of 1970 SAC replaced the air division (3rd) on Guam with a numbered air force: the famous Eighth, most recently sited at Westover AFB, in Massachusetts. Simultaneously the wing at U'Tapao was renumbered from 4258th to 307th. In August the B-52 Arc Light operation was moved to U'Tapao, from Kadena (Okinawa) and Andersen (Guam).

Tanker sortie rates had gradually declined through 1970 and early 1971, with some exceptions; but in July of 1971 there was a sudden drop to just 27 per day. This decline was partially reversed by the truck killing push known as "Commando Hunt," that started that fall. Everything would change in the momentous events of 1972.

The End

The disengagement process known as "Vietnamization" was in full swing, and the US reverted to an air war as our ground troops were withdrawn. In fact as Tet 1972 approached intelligence detected signs of a major buildup of enemy activity. Airpower was used heavily to support friendly ARVN ground forces in resisting a major push across the DMZ, followed by

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Gallery of TLC Brother



This photo depicts the old desks at Phonpisai School. Working closely with VFW Post 10249, in Udorn, Thailand, the TLC Brotherhood furnished donations sufficient to assist two schools, one in Khonkaen and another in Phonpisai. Many Brotherhood members join the Post, which has been our agent in Udorn-area assistance projects since the beginning.
Below: Computers for Law Nua School.



ABOVE: "Santa" Vichit Mingrachata with VFW Post 10249 commander Bob Wilson deliver 65 desks, 4 fans, and a wall locker to Phonpisai School, compliments of the TLCB's generosity and the help of post members in purchasing and delivering the materials.



The TLCB brought smiles to the faces of the students, teachers and parents of Law Nua School near Chonabot, about 200 km south of Udorn in northeast Thailand, recently when the TLCB and members of VFW Post 10249 delivered, and *more*, on a wish list provided by the school's director, Mr. Prasopsook Piewkhom. Vichit Mingrachata, our Udorn area representative, and the Udorn Advisory Committee, with the help of our Assistance Committee and donations from TLCB members, delivered computers, printers, computer desks, tables and chairs. In addition, they brought soccer balls, volleyballs, a volleyball net and takaw balls. Even better, they came in under budget for their project. Thanks to Delbert Marohl for this information.

send donations to:
TLC Brotherhood Assistance
P.O. Box 2371
Seabrook, NH 03874

Below: VFW Post 10249 former commander, Forest Williams, and Law Nua School student hold up sign showing appreciation for the help TLC Brotherhood has extended to them. Forest presented the TLC Brotherhood a VFW plaque of appreciation at the 2001 reunion, in Manassas, Virginia.



Assistance Has Many Opportunities Ahead

Where are we headed? This year will bring new challenges and opportunities. Several additional groups of American doctors of OmniMed are scheduled for teaching, training and surgery at Nakhon Phanom hospital and surrounding villages in 2004. Doctors Mike and Kathy Morley who commenced the initial OmniMed assessmental development at Nakhon Phanom in October 2002 were there once again in December. As he did last year, Mike was able to procure donations of thousands of dollars worth of cataract lenses for restoring sight to those who otherwise would become blind. Seven large containers of these lenses were shipped in advance at the end of November and conveyed by Mac Thompson from Bangkok to Don Muang Airport for safe delivery to John Middlewood at NKP.

Our Assistance Program at Udorn under the direction of Vichit, with the assistance of the VFW Post 10249 Advisory Committee, continues to both buy and deliver needed items to many smaller remote schools. John Middlewood, our one-man army at NKP now conducts monthly programs at about twenty schools as well as administrative affairs and scheduling for OmniMed visits. The assistance budget for the final quarter of 2003 allocated \$3,000.00 in expenditures at each location.

Brotherhood Assistance, 2003



Above: TLCB's representative in Nakhon Phanom Province, John Middlewood, poses with students he taught at English Camp.

Below: Students in the very popular English Camp at rural Sribuabuan School. TLCB donations paid for 200 meals for Sribuaban High School students to attend a special 16-hour English Camp to improve their English skills. John Middlewood, our man in NKP, spent 12 of those 16 hours at the camp.



Right: teacher introduces winner of "Miss English Camp, which was held at Sribuaban School in Nakhon Phanom Province, in Northeast Thailand. Below, right: Mr. English Camp is recognized. Note that the school uses a modern language laboratory system that was purchased and delivered by the TLC Brotherhood (visible in background).



Above: Students in English Camp are challenged with questions in English, which they must attempt to answer in English.

Jeff Hudgens has joined the Assistance Committee and returns in January to Ban Nahom Village in Laos. Jeff has developed an extensive project of assistance within the village, which he will oversee, including the construction of a school funded by the TLC Brotherhood. I am certain Jeff will have an exciting article for the MEM following his second journey into Laos.

Planning is under way for members to bring along a brochure to their favorite Thai restaurants. This would include a TLCB sticker for the front door containing the web address and a statement that the restaurant supports the TLC Brotherhood. Fellow vets who enter the establishments will be intrigued which should increase our membership. Once they view our web site and see how our assistance work is conducted by direct purchases and deliveries within Thailand many of the restaurants may come forward to sustain our effort. It becomes a winner for all involved.

There is advanced planning to develop joint grant funding

proposals with OmniMed during the forthcoming year but that will be a long drawn out process. The rest of our assistance efforts ultimately, for the short term continue to rely on our members' generosity at all times or including something extra in their membership renewals. Where are we headed in 2004? Only you can make the difference

John Sweet
Assistance Committee Chairman
TLC Brotherhood Vice President

Did You Know?

The TLC Brotherhood Assistance Program has granted nearly \$71,000 worth of useful items and materials to needy children and adults in Thailand and Laos since the Brotherhood was founded. See the Assistance Page at www.tlc-brotherhood.org for details.

Creating Nakhon Phanom RTAFB in 1962

Excerpted from a firsthand account written by then Lt JG George Fowler, USN

In the late summer of 1962, a major portion of U. S. Naval Mobile Construction Battalion Three (MCB 3) deployed from Okinawa to Nakhon Phanom (NKP), Thailand to construct a logistic support airfield.

The airfield was to be built adjacent to the West side of the town of Nakhon Phanom, but was subsequently moved ten miles farther west in order to place the airfield out of mortar range of Tha Khek, Laos, just across the Mekong River. It was designed to be 100 feet wide, 5,000 feet long, would have 500-foot overruns on each end of the runway, a parking area, a marshaling area and a taxiway/warm-up pad.

An advance party went to NKP to build a camp area on the west side of Nakhon Phanom where everyone could live while building the airfield. The main body of MCB 3 was deployed to NKP, including part of Headquarters Company, Alpha (heavy equipment) Company and Delta (construction) Company, approximately 325 personnel covering all necessary trades and skills.

The necessary equipment, accompanied by some Seabees, went by sea from the port of Naha in Okinawa to Bangkok. In Bangkok everything that could travel by rail was sent by train to Udorn, then driven to NKP. Most of the Seabees arrived in

convoy to cover the 550 miles.

The site had to be cleared, then all organic matter had to be grubbed out of the soil, then borrow pits had to be opened so we could get good fill dirt that could be properly compacted, after which we started bringing the airfield up to grade. To do this we worked two shifts (0600-1600 and 1600-0200) followed by a fuel and lube crew from 0200-0600, six days a week.

Shortly after arriving at NKP and starting work, MCB 3 decided that it needed more prime movers and scrapers to move the laterite fill from borrow pits to the runway site. We also decided that the 5 ton sheep foot rollers that we had were not heavy enough to properly compact the laterite. Six additional prime movers, four more scrapers and two ten-ton sheep foot rollers were ordered and shipped from the Seabee Center in Port Hueneme, California to Bangkok. The equipment had to be driven over the road 550 miles to NKP. During this convoy from Bangkok to NKP the extremely poor roads caused a major accident. A Seabee was killed when the steering apparatus on one of the prime movers failed, the tractor hit a tree, and the tractor turned over on him.

Back in NKP, the work went on at an accelerated pace. The goal was to have everything completed by the end of June 1963. The drainage ditches across the center of the runway were put in and the conduits for future runway lighting were installed. After final grade was achieved, it was time to "shoot" the airfield with emulsified asphalt and then cover it with PSP. Once the PSP was laid it was staked along the edges to keep it from rolling up in front of landing aircraft. We were three weeks



After the June 1963 opening ceremony, several C-130s landed and all but 35 Seabees boarded them to return to the states. Lt JG Fowler was OIC, stay-behind team. In November, the rains stopped and Seabees returned to NKP to finish the airfield.

Udorn by air from Okinawa on November 4, 1962. In Udorn we saw Buddhist monks in saffron robes and water buffalo next to the runway. We split into three groups. One group flew to Bangkok to drive the large equipment to NKP, one group flew into the small dirt landing strip in NKP next to the base camp, and the other group stayed in Udorn to drive to NKP the equipment that had arrived by train. It was 150 unpaved and rutted miles from Udorn to NKP. Throughout the deployment, MCB 3 continued to haul equipment and supplies, such as Pierced Steel Planking (PSP), over this road.

Approximately 55 personnel went to Bangkok to drive the large equipment (too large to be carried on the train to Udorn) to NKP. It was 550 miles from Bangkok to NKP, including 150 miles of paved road from Bangkok to Korat. The remaining 400 miles were unpaved and rutted, with bamboo bridges that could not support the weight of the heavy trucks and construction equipment. All rivers had to be forded. It took 16 days for the



The hot emulsified asphalt attracted snakes and other animals in the early evening because it was warm and felt good as the temperature started to fall towards nightfall. The asphalt set up as it cooled and the snakes and other animals were caught in it like this cobra. The longest snake caught at NKP was an eight foot spitting cobra. (May 1963)



A second plane lands carrying dignitaries for the NKP Opening Ceremony. (June 1963)
 Even though the Warm-up pad, Taxiway, Parking Area, and Marshaling Areas were not totally completed, an Opening Ceremony was held in mid-June 1963. An Air Force C-123 was the first plane to land on the airfield and it was followed by planes carrying members of the US Embassy, the Commander of the US Military Advisory Command, Thailand, and the Thai Prime Minister. The US Ambassador to Thailand, Ambassador Young, was a speaker. The runway was officially opened.

from finishing the entire job when the monsoon rains started, several weeks early that year, making it impossible to finish the job.

During the monsoon, everyone returned to homeport in Port Hueneme, California, except for a detachment of 35 Seabees, led by Lt jg George E. Fowler, who stayed in NKP to maintain drainage at the airfield site, maintain the construction equipment and make sure it would be ready to go back to work when the rains stopped.



George Fowler on the Thai bank of the Mekong River, with the karst mountains of Laos in the background.

Even though the warm-up pad, taxiway, parking area, and marshaling areas were not totally completed, an opening ceremony was held in mid-June 1963. Finally, in November the rains stopped and the Seabees finished the airfield.

On the morning of December 24, 1963 at about 0600, the airfield to be known as NKP was turned over to 13 Thai Air Force security personnel and the final convoy of equipment left NKP for Bangkok. The equipment went by ship to California and the Seabees by air to Okinawa. For its hard and skilful work, MCB got a "well done" message from CINCPAC.



For information and pictures of Nakhon Phanom then and now, see John Sweet's NKP website: <http://aircommandoman.tripod.com>

Refueling, continued from page 5

the aircraft deployments known as "Constant Guard." These started in April, with deployment of F-4Es and F-105Gs to Korat. At the same time there was a buildup of B-52s and tankers in deployments known as "Bullet Shot." Up and up went the sortie rates. More bases were opened and resources were strained. At Andersen AFB one of the two runways was closed to be used for aircraft parking. Even Bangkok's Don Muang was put back into service as the State Department reluctantly persuaded the hesitant Thai government to approve 120 days of temporary use for tankers.

On May 3rd Takhli was reopened, though it had fallen into a state of disrepair and lacked electricity and plumbing (according to some crew accounts). This tanker force came largely out of Altus AFB, in Oklahoma.

By the end of June the Young Tiger Tanker Task Force reached its zenith, with 114 tankers, capable of delivering 130 refueling sorties daily. There were 46 at U'Tapao, 28 at Clark, 13 at Don Muang, 20 at Takhli, and 7 at Korat. Counting tankers based on Taiwan, Okinawa, and Guam, SAC had over one fourth of its entire aerial refueling capacity in Asia, averaging 170 KC-135s.

In mid-1972 Clark AFB became unusable owing to record rainfall (more than 90 inches in July and August). The base commander reported being "thirty days behind in the construc-

tion of an ark." Tanker evacuation was precipitated by a serious break in the POL (fuel) pipeline while the roads had become unusable for trucks. With only a one-day interruption of Young Tiger operations, that unit transferred to Taiwan so it could continue to operate.

The peak of the entire nine years and two months of tanker combat support operations in SEA was reached in September of 1972, when SAC crews put up 3,902 refueling sorties! In this one month the crews accomplished 12,509 aerial refuelings and transferred nearly 160,000,000 pounds of fuel.

Except for an interruption for *Linebacker II* in December, there was a steady decline to the end from that September peak. Initially this trend was created by an exchange of tactical aircraft. The F-111As and A-7Ds coming in could perform the mission with fewer aircraft that needed less airborne refueling. But the decline snowballed after the extreme pounding of *Linebacker II* was followed by the cease-fire signed by North Vietnam in January of 1973.

By June only 104 of the peak 170 tankers remained TDY in Asia. That was the fateful month when the US Congress expressed the will of the American public and set August 15th as the date that Communist forces in SEA need no longer fear military opposition from us. With a Middle East crisis that began in October, 1973 finally saw SAC assets return to peace-

see **Refueling**, concluded next page

Refueling, continued from page 9

time levels in Asia—but this was not yet the end.

The final tanker combat support of the war came just after the chaotic fall of Saigon, when the cargo ship *Mayaguez* was boarded by Khmer Rouge forces, in May of 1975 (see MEM June 02 issue). After that very intense 24-hour episode Young Tiger missions were for routine crew training only. Finally on December 21st, 1975, 17 KC-135s took off to escort 36 A-7Ds back from Korat RTAFB, via Guam and Hawaii, to Hill AFB, Utah. Officially this was the last Young Tiger mission.

During the 9 years we have described, SAC tankers flew nearly 1 million hours, and transferred about 1.4 billion gallons of jet fuel. Only five tankers were lost, all in fatal accidents during landing, takeoff, or, in one case, climb out. The first was actually bound for Alaska and crashed on takeoff at Kadena in May of 1966. Three were in 1968 (what a wonderful year), at Wake Island, U'Tapao, and Taiwan's "CCK." The last was in December of 1969, climbing out of CCK.

As the YT force prepared to leave U'Tapao the remaining personnel painted the revetments red, white, and blue and made a huge sign that read "SAC Bicentennial Country." PACAF

and the Royal Thai Navy may not have been too impressed, but it was nearly 1976, and spirits were running high at last. Master Sergeant Tom White wrote this poem in memory of YT. It was printed inside the red Bicentennial cover of the final flying schedule:



Sawadee

A billowing cloud, a bevy of Thuds...
Rolling Thunder, Phantoms appear...
An Arc'd Light, thirsty Buffs waiting...
Alleycat, Hillsboro, Moonbeam and Cricket...

A glorious Tiger with boom as a tail...
Meeting and saving them all without fail...
Phnom Penh, Saigon, the Tiger was there...
Mayaguez, again we paid our fare...

Red, Hickory, Peach, Saffron their names...
With cunning and skill playing the deadliest games...
The Tiger came first and proved his skill...
Departing last with Peace and Goodwill..

At Christmastime U'Tapao Post Office Drew A Crowd

MEM OK, for the record, we are asking Jim Avery some questions about his service in Thailand as a military postal service clerk in 1968.

MEM You say you wanted a change after you had been at Lackland (AFB) for a while. Why was that?

JA I wanted the change as I been there through basic training and then permanent party, and wanted to travel and see something more of the Air Force than just Lackland.

MEM Did you get the change you dreamed of?

JA Well, I was thinking back to my feelings when I got orders to Thailand. I remember having a beer at the Lackland NCO club one night with my old TI. I told him I was going to Thailand and that I was a little scared. He told a little about his time in Vietnam and told me not to worry, I would have a lot of support over there and people would show me the ropes. Did I get the change I dreamed of? Well, I got off Lackland. I guess I was expecting something maybe more in the European area, but after looking back, I think my time in Thailand, at the age I was, really had a profound

affect on the person I am today.

MEM Did you have any occasions that were really special because of something that came or did not come in the mail?

JA Not really, but I do remember one Christmas we had 40 to 50 50-pound bags of Christmas mail come in on Christmas Eve. We all stayed at the Post Office all night and into Christmas Day posting the mail so everyone could get their mail and packages.

MEM Did you feel as though you were important doing that job?

JA I remember many times we were posting the day's mail and people would be outside of the Post Office yelling curses at us for not doing it fast enough, or why hadn't they got the package they were waiting for from back home. This caused a little frustration because we were doing the best job we could. During the time we were posting all of the Christmas mail I think we just looked at it as a job that had to get done. When it was over, I know I had a sense of pride in what we had accomplished, and that everyone would be getting their Christmas mail on Christmas Day. Looking back now on what we were doing at U-Tapao I think I have a bigger appreciation for what we did. I just had an e-mail from a TLC Brother whose son is in Iraq. He said he had not had a phone call from him in ten days. I was thinking, back at U-Tapao, we were the lifeline for the GIs there to back home. We were not able to make phone calls home unless it was an emergency that I remember, and we did not have e-mail.

MEM What did you do in your free time? Did you take any

In Memory

Two courageous Brothers succumbed to cancer during the latter half of 2003. We mourn the loss of Joe Gagnon and Chris Jeppeson, and offer our condolences to their families, who are suffering from their sudden loss.

A salute from the Brotherhood for our gallant departed Brothers!

Bill Tilton, President

trips around Thailand or out of Thailand? if so, where did you go and what did you do, and were you satisfied in relation to what you expected?

JA Most of the guys in the Post Office hung out together. We would hit the clubs down in Newland, or the NCO club. We also had an outdoor theater at U-Tapao that was a lot of fun. We would also have clambakes on the beach sometimes. We would get clams from the local fisherman and bake them right on the beach. I did have two trips to Bangkok while I was there. I remember on one trip I took in a movie in Bangkok. I remember the beautiful movie theaters they have there. At one movie all of the patrons got down on their hands and knees. I did not know what was going on and if I should do the same. I did. It was lucky that I did, because it turned out one of the King's daughters had decided to take in a movie there.



TLCB Brotherhood's "Third" Server

At the 2003 Annual Meeting at Fort Walton Beach the TLCB Communications Committee announced the long-awaited inauguration of a new internet server. A number of members who have email do not wish to have to deal with the number of messages we sometimes get on Mission and Brotherhood servers when interesting topics gets going. This puts us out of touch with a fairly large group of members, except through this quarterly newsletter.

The solution was to create the *official business* server, which only board members and committee chairmen can post to, but all members with internet addresses receive. Posts on this server are rare and always contain official news that all members should be willing to receive. So far we have had no problems or complaints, and we think it has worked out just as we had hoped. If you have anything you think should be posted, send it to a board member or committee chairman.

TLCB Monument Project Now Rolling, Needs Funds

by Gerry Frazier, Monument Committee Chairman

For those who are new to the Brotherhood, or who just didn't happen to notice before, TLCB is engaged in a project to build a memorial monument in the city of Nakhon Phanom (NKP), Thailand. The monument will commemorate all those who served in the cause of freedom during American involvement in the Vietnam War.

The monument will support the objectives of the TLCB in several important ways. This is true particularly for our objectives to provide humanitarian assistance, particularly in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia (TLC), to honor those veterans who did not return from TLC, to preserve TLC history and to promote public understanding of TLC service.

As many of you are aware, the Brotherhood has worked hard to provide humanitarian assistance in northeast Thailand, and has provided both direct and indirect small-scale assistance in Laos as well.

The monument project came under active discussion about two years ago. A suggestion by TLCB member Nick Hoffman, while visiting Thailand, came to the attention of the then Governor of Nakhon Phanom Province. In due time he formally approached TLCB with the offer of some 400 square meters of land in a new city park in NKP as the site for a monument. He asked TLCB to take responsibility for design and construction costs for a monument on that site which would be "non-political" in character, but recognize the Americans (and foreign forces) who served in Thailand, as well as the Thai contribution to the effort. The board agreed to commit the Brotherhood to design and fund such a monument.

The Monument Committee has developed a monument design, received approval of the Thai authorities in NKP, and coordinated a plan for construction of the monument, in conjunction with on-going development of a new park located in the general vicinity of the old Shindig nightclub, which once was on the outskirts of town. NKP city has grown, and changed significantly over the past 30 years. Many of the old landmarks are long gone. The new park location, however, offers good prospects for development, and is in a section of the city that now needs a recreational area. The planned monument will occupy a place of honor in the park, and will be the major attraction for future visitors from outside the city.

City officials view the park and monument as a potential magnet to lure former American servicemen back to the Northeast on a sentimental journey. Nakhon Phanom Province is still considered "remote" to most Thais, and as a result, NKP ranks last among all Provinces of Thailand on "quality of life," as reported by a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) ranking*. American and other foreign tourism in the province will bring in foreign capital, and stimulate local businesses. Province officials are already planning a major initiative to invite foreign guests to visit "the River City" (NKP) during the

see **Monument**, continued on page 12



Ed Miller and Gerry Frazier, standing, prepare formal presentation to Thai officials. John Middlewood is to Ed's left and Khun Phumphan is to Gerry's right.
Photos by Gerry and Sue Frazier

* See http://www.boi.go.th/english/focus/focus_measuring_quality_life.html



Above: Nakhon Phanom civil engineer explains the late Chris Jeppessen's engineering drawings to city and provincial officials while Gerry Frazier looks on, during formal presentation meeting. Thai authorities were impressed to find all dimensions already converted to the Metric system, which is used in Thailand.

year 2547 (Buddhist Era), or as we know it, 2004.

Development of the new park and the monument are at an early stage. Brig. Gen. (Ret) Heinie Aderholt officiated during NKP Days in 2002 in dedicating the future location of the monument, but after that event, the project was slowed by questions about design issues, the park development schedule, costing, and a general difficulty in communication between the US and Thailand. As TLCB Monument Committee Chairman, I was able to visit NKP in October 2003, and with the help of NKP veteran, TLCB member, and NKP resident John Middlewood, revived the project. TLCB is also fortunate to have an advocate for the monument in a prominent position in the Thai com-

Tax-deductible contributions may be sent to: SEA Monument, c/o TLCB, P. O. Box 425, Springfield, Virginia 22150. All contributions received will be acknowledged.



The sala shown is in an existing NKP park located on the approximate site of the old prison grounds (now demolished). The park grounds are large enough to accommodate several such shelters. This attractive, well-maintained and publicly respected park gave the TLCB delegation great confidence that our Thai counterparts can deliver their part of this arrangement. Now it is time for the Brotherhood to raise the funds so that construction contracts can be let when the park grading is completed.



The lagoon today. To the right is the copse of trees that will shade the site of the TLC Brotherhood's monument. Thai landscapers have demonstrated an impressive skill in using these features to produce first-rate park areas (see existing park photo).

munity. Mr. Phrompan Kulapah, a local radio broadcast personality, and former member of Thai security forces at the NKP base, is actively promoting the project in the local community.

The undeveloped land for the new park was donated to NKP City by a prominent citizen who once worked at the base nearby. It is still in an early stage of construction. The park flanks a small lake which drains to the Mekong River. The lake forms a part of continuing efforts by the city to manage the high waters that accompany the rainy season. Accordingly, the park site is receiving fill material intended to raise the monument site and the average height of the whole park 1-2 meters.

The monument site will be visible from a street that passes about 100 meters away. Some large and attractive shade trees will be retained on the site, but construction of walkways, picnic shelters (locally known "salas") and probably a paved area to accommodate group aerobics are planned.

The monument design is mainly the product of a cooperative effort between TLCB treasurer Jim Henthorn and the late Chris Jeppeson, who contributed many many hours of work on the practical aspects of the design, and put it in CAD (computer aided design) format.

The design is a simple, elevated hexagon at the center of four intersecting walkways oriented on the cardinal directions. The principal construction material will be Thai granite. The hexagon is topped by a brass finial in a unique design intended to symbolize an eternal flame. The faces of the hexagon will be used to mount plaques commemorating the purpose of the monument, as well as organizations, units, companies or individuals who make significant financial contributions to the project.

We are now collecting funds for construction of the monument, salas, and potentially other attractive additions to the park, with a goal of raising \$150,000. Any funds over and above requirements for construction or continuing maintenance of the monument and park will be directed to support continuing TLCB humanitarian assistance projects in northeast Thailand.

