



# Mekong Express Mail

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THE THAILAND LAOS CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC.

www.TLC-Brotherhood.org

## How 703's sensor missions helped the Marines at Khe Sanh

by Jim Henthorn

Photos furnished by the author

In the spring of 1967 a helicopter was built in Bridgeport Connecticut. Inanimate metal, rubber, and cloth came into being and it was assigned a tail number from the current block of production numbers assigned to Sikorsky: 67-14703. After being accepted into the US Air Force inventory, she, along with her sister helicopter, went south to Shaw Air Force Base to join 10 other helicopters. They formed a fledgling unit, reactivated with new equipment, new personnel and a new, untested and untried mission. Her designation was CH-3E, meaning the cargo version of the H-3 family, model E. She came equipped with an ICE/FOD shield, a permanently mounted rescue hoist, sponsons with fuel tank capabilities, a ramp and a few other modifications that others of her line would not have. With weapons modifications, she could carry an Emerson Electric-built TAT-102B Armament Turret mounting a 7.62mm Gatling Gun, in a pod capable of carrying 8,000 rounds of ammunition.



Completely equipped with armor plating to protect her vital parts and her crew, she was a modern marvel of engineering, aircraft design and craftsmanship.

She was destined to serve with distinction through not one war but two. But in 1967, the first war loomed on her horizon. Becoming a part of the 21st Helicopter Squadron, under the leadership of Lt Col Harry Hauser, she was readied for her first combat assignments by the officers and men recently assigned to the unit. Shaw Air Force Base was but a starting point where training of her aircrews began. Mechanics worked on her, while armament troops fitted weapons and learned the ins and outs of arming an Air Force helicopter. When they completed the training they became only the second armed helicopter squadron in the Air Force at that time. The first was the 20th Helicopter Squadron, previously assigned to Southeast Asia.

In November 1967 things started happening at Shaw. The unit was packed up, crews were sent to Jungle Survival School

see 703, continued on page 6

**Jim "Mule" Parker Has TLC Brotherhood Speaking Engagement!**

**See Page 3 For Details.**

## Bringing Viking into existence at Mukdahan in 1966

*MEM is grateful to Dick "Hoppy" Hopkins for discovering this account of the creation of the base at which he served*

On the morning of April 7, 1966 months of planning and preparation suddenly ended when a single C-130 departed Clark AB, P.I. destination Nakon Phanom Air Base, Thailand. The 5<sup>th</sup> Tactical Control Operations deployment had begun. Its mission was to transform a green field outside the city of Mukdahan that had been a playground for children and dogs, a grazing area for water buffalo, a town dump and a home for numerous snakes, into a USAF radar unit to be known as *Viking*. The radar unit was to be part of a group of similar units like *Invert* (NKP) *Lion* (Ubon) and *Brigham* (Udorn).

The radar units were deployed from Clark as what was called a "Package." Part of the advance party was aboard the first aircraft, including the Package Commander, Major James W. Brenner and several key personnel. As they touched down on Thai soil, plans were made for a truck convoy to leave the following day for the final destination, Mukdahan. A convoy of Thai trucks has been organized and was standing by to handle the daily cargo of the deployment. They were loaded with the equipment from the first aircraft and from a second C-130 which arrived at Nakon Phanom during the afternoon of April 7<sup>th</sup>.

Early on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup>, the first convoy rolled out of Nakon Phanom for Mukdahan. A Thai bus had been char-

see VIKING, continued next page

# Farangs in Thai Prisons Collected Tattoos

by Scott Stucky  
Photos contributed by the author

## Part 2 of 2

*"I arrived at U-Tapao on 19 June 1975," said Scott Stucky in the first half of this article. We continue with Scott's experiences as the U.S. presence ended in Southeast Asia.*

I had an unpleasant surprise on my first duty day in country. My predecessor and I only overlapped about one week. That day, there was a trial scheduled in Rayong and a bail hearing in a heroin case in Chonburi. He had to go to the trial, so I was thrust into the bail hearing with no experience and no knowledge except what my predecessor had told me that morning. He assured me that bail would be granted without any trouble, and I foolishly stated this to the accused. What I did not know was that (1) Chonburi was further from the base than Rayong, closer to Bangkok, and tended to take a harsher attitude toward Americans in trouble; and (2) 13th Air Force had complained that we were giving too much business to a few lawyers, so the counsel representing the accused was a Bangkok corporate type with no experience in these cases and, more pertinently, no connections in Chonburi. The upshot was that bail was denied, and the accused hauled off to the provincial penitentiary. We did eventually get him re-leased on bail, but it took about four months.

Thailand is a civil-law country, with jurisprudence borrowed from continental models in the early 20th century. There are no juries; the judge determines fact and law. A court functionary took down all testimony in longhand.



A criminal trial is a very protracted process. Normally, after the bail hearing there would be several hearings, each from four to six weeks apart. At each hearing one or two witnesses would be heard and then the court would adjourn the case

for another four to six weeks. Even after all the evidence was in, one frequently had to wait another four to six weeks to hear the verdict. If the accused was convicted, he might or might not be granted bail pending appeal. If he was not granted bail, he went to the provincial penitentiary, an awful hole, while his appeal was heard. These were done on briefs only, to a court of appeal in Bangkok. There was also the possibility of a royal pardon, even if appeals were exhausted. This did not occur while I was there, but I was shown some photos of a ceremony earlier where someone got one. It was a very elaborate affair where he bowed to a lotus-shaped vase, which must have symbolized the presence of the King.

Penology was not terrifically advanced in Thailand at that time. The provincial prisons were not pleasant places. Each day at noon the gates were besieged by the relatives of those incarcerated therein, bringing food to them. Thai prisons as a rule did not provide much to eat, and anyone who did not

have relatives on the outside to bring in food was very unfortunate. Because the conditions were so bad, the United States had persuaded Thailand to let it build a prison in which American prisoners whose appeals were exhausted would be confined. This was in Chonburi. It should not be confused with the provincial penitentiary there; it was, in fact, the Cadillac of Thai prisons. It was divided in half. One half was for Thai prisoners who were lucky enough to get in there (or who had paid someone off for the privilege). They raised pigs inside the walls, so the place always smelled. The other half was for the Americans. They were not required to work, and had luxuries like a refrigerator and barbells. Having nothing to do but mull over how mistreated they were, they bombarded their families in the United States, Congressmen, and anyone else they could think of with complaints. These, of course, all had to be investigated, but not by me. Due to a fortunate jurisdictional agreement, the Army had the responsibility for Chonburi, both the penitentiary and the American prison. An Army JAG had the thankless job of looking after the prisoners. Every other week each of them got a case of rations, which was adequate, with the prison food, for a healthy existence.

One important thing to them was that the rations contained American cigarettes, which could be consumed or traded for illicit drugs. They filled their time—when not complaining verbally or in writing—with lifting weights, playing basketball (they had a hoop), consuming drugs, and getting tattoos.

see JAG, continued next page



The JAG office at U-Tapao, center, right next to the CBPO (personnel)

Scott's article was first published in the June 2000 edition of *The Reporter*, a publication of the Air Force JAG School. The first half appeared in the June 2004 issue of *Mekong Express Mail*.

# Reunion Gets ‘Mule’ Parker

The famous Jim ‘Mule’ Parker has agreed to be our banquet speaker at the reunion on Saturday night! Here is a blurb from the dust jacket of *Last Man Out* (Ballantine Books): “James E. Parker was born in North Carolina in 1942. A graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, he served in the U.S. Army from 1964 to 1967. He was recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency in 1970 and spent his entire career working undercover both in domestic assignments and overseas. Now retired to Pinehurst, N.C., he lectures and writes.” His books are *Codename Mule: Fighting the Secret War in Laos for the CIA*, also published as *Covert Ops* and *Last Man Out: A Personal Account of the Vietnam War*.” As you can imagine, we are excited about this and look forward to a very special evening.

In case you haven’t heard, the 2004 reunion and annual meeting of the Brotherhood will be held September 24-26 at the **Doubletree Hotel in Ontario, California. Call 800-222-8733 or 909-937-0900 to reserve.** Officially it will be too late, but you could ask for the TLCB group rate. Airport shuttle is available. The Reunion Registration fee is \$70 per adult, \$35 for children 12 and under. (You pay that to the reunion committee, not the hotel).

Your reunion committee has worked out a great schedule. On Friday, there will be a tour of historic Fort MacArthur, one of the coastal batteries that protected the Pacific coastline during WWII and into the 1950s with Nike missile detachments in the local area. This will be a full half-day tour. Box lunches & water will be provided. Our group will be the only group

touring the facility on this day and we have been promised access to areas not normally open to the public. You can check out Fort MacArthur on the web at: <http://www.ftmac.org/>

On Saturday we visit the Planes of Fame Museum. It will be an afternoon tour of about three hours. Planes of Fame has many rare and unusual aircraft including the prototype Northrop flying wing. Planes of Fame’s website is: <http://www.planesoffame.org/>

The two tours have been priced separately, like the shirts and other memorabilia, and both depend on having a minimum number of participants.

On Sunday, the Memorial service will be held at the March Field Museum and all are welcome to tour the museum after the memorial. Transportation and entry to the museum are included in the registration fee. Visit the March Field Museum at: <http://www.marchfield.org/>

You could generally tell how long a *farang* (a Westerner) had been in Thai prison by how many tattoos he had.

We had two Thai attorneys whom we used in Rayong. Mr. Phot was the senior one. He was a tall, languid man of about 50 who was very good at getting our people off. He drove a wheezing English Ford which always seemed about ready to die, and had a simple office in a one-story wooden building on a *klong* (canal) near the courthouse. He was a Roman Catholic, a rarity in Thailand. The other one was Mr. Supat, who was a hard-charging and skilful young attorney. He was a very snappy dresser, drove a new Japanese sedan, and had an office in a modern building. He once invited his wife, who worked in a bank, to join us for lunch—something no other Thai I knew ever did. Business lunches were exclusively male affairs.

Most of the cases I had there have faded from memory, but a few remain, even after almost 25 years. There was the pair of airmen who managed three heroin busts between them, once in Rayong Province and twice in Chonburi. They were a remarkable duo. One, who accounted for two of the busts, was quite intelligent; if he is alive today, he is probably either a wealthy corporate type or a Napoleon of crime. The other was not very bright. When they were scheduled for a court appearance, the intelligent one would show up at the legal office sniffing as if he had the worst cold in the world. He would then disappear into the men’s room and reemerge without the sniffing, jaunty and ready to go. I avoided going in there while he did his self-

medication. Mr. Supat managed to get the intelligent guy off in Rayong, but his luck ran out when the two were tried together in Chonburi. He got one year, while his confederate was acquitted. One would think that he would keep his head down while his appeal was pending, but not so. He heard that some other airman had told the SPs about some on-base crime he had committed, and threw a trip flare into that airman’s dorm room at night. The airman survived, and our hero escaped court-martial because the only witness was a mamasan

see JAG, continued next page



Dedication of new courthouse, Rayong, in January or February of 1976. L to R: Mr. Phot Kayasut, Lt Col C. Douglas Ward (Staff Judge Advocate), police chief, Mr. Supat Intarasayan, Capt Scott W. Stucky.

JAG, continued from page 2

working there who was cowed and refused to testify. I was the legal advisor on this guy's discharge board stemming out of this Chonburi conviction. This being the 1970s, he got off with a general discharge.

Another memorable case involved two U.S. Navy petty officers. We had a small Navy outfit at U-Tapao, called Fleet Aircraft Support Unit (FASU) U-Tapao. Its mission was to service Navy aircraft which were traveling from the Philippines to Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean and vice versa. There were about 35 personnel, including two officers. Duty there was highly prized, because as a remote assignment it counted as sea duty, although it was on land. The opportunity to amass sea time and pay while drinking beer and living with local women was irresistible to a number of the chief petty officers, some of whom had been there for four or five years. This was the only litigated case I had which did not involve drugs. The two accused (an E-6 and an E-4) were in a bar with a third sailor. They found themselves out of money, while still thirsty. Being inventive, they decided to pawn a watch the third sailor had for a few more drinks. The bartender assured them that they could redeem it later. Upon returning a day or two later, they asked to redeem the watch, whereupon the bartender said "What watch?" or words to that effect. Curiously, the owner of the watch seems to have dropped out of the picture at this point. Our two sailors went to the Thai police and reported the bartender for larceny. The police went out and picked him up, whereupon he bought or talked his way out of custody. He then brought charges of making a false statement to a public official against the two sailors. The penalty for this was the same as for heroin—one year in prison. We litigated the case, which, because of its unusual nature, dragged on for most of the year I was there. The two sailors were very different. The E-6 was intelligent but trouble personified; he probably had more captain's masts than any other sailor in the Pacific. He knew that the Navy had to keep him there indefinitely, so he decided to do whatever he pleased. The E-4, on the other hand, was just a kid who was terrified at the prospect of going to jail. We finally got an acquittal for both of them, and the Navy did as fast a discharge as they could on the E-6 and got him out of there.

One day I was walking in front of the courthouse in Rayong when I heard a female voice calling "Captain! Captain!" I



U-Tapao Legal Office—the court room.

A TLC memory for many—an air conditioned crew trailer. Scott Stucky and his quarters at U-Tapao.



turned and saw a Western female in her twenties in the little cage under the courthouse where they held people prior to bail hearings and the like. She was filthy, disheveled, and very hungry. She asked if I would mail a letter to her parents in the U.S. for her. I got her some food from the noodle stand, which she ate ravenously, and told her I would mail the letter in the APO and let the Embassy know of her situation. She had gone over to Thailand on vacation in search of cheap drugs, and had been busted somewhere in the north. Her parents had gotten a lawyer and gotten her off, but instead of leaving the country she had come down to Rayong and gotten busted again. When I returned to base, I mailed the letter with a covering note and called the Embassy. They were not eager to see her again and basically told me that someone would get down there sooner or later. It impressed on me how much better it is to be in the armed forces when one is in trouble in a foreign land—one's bail and counsel fees will be paid and one will be looked after. If this woman had not seen me, anything could have happened to her. I saw her once or twice thereafter, and then she disappeared; I do not know what became of her.

Another constant of JAG life in Thailand was legal assistance. We all wore out our notary stamps doing paperwork for visas and other immigration documents. Once it became apparent that all or most of the Americans were leaving, there was a big rush to find an American husband and get married so one could get a green card to enter the U.S. We had to give marriage briefings weekly in the office (the chaplains also did it, but ours were mandatory). The thrust of the marriage briefing was twofold: a heavy dose of "Think twice before you do this—most of these marriages don't work," followed by an exposition of U.S. Immigration law, with an emphasis on the categories of persons who were inadmissible to the U.S. One of the Thai attorneys would interpret for the women. When we got to the parts about prostitutes and drug users and traffickers not being admissible, the women would frequently giggle. The airmen sat there with vacant expressions.

The negotiations between the U.S. and Thailand ended in March 1976, when the new Thai government (they had just had an election) said no to the U.S. proposal to keep a limited force there. Thereafter, things started closing down in a hurry. People were sent home wholesale. The clubs closed and everyone ate in the mess hall. The Class VI store had a big sale and practically gave the stuff away. There was nothing in the



in the Philippine Islands, and the unit moved, lock, stock, and barrel to Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base in northeast Thailand. NKP as it was known, was a secret base recently expanded for the units that continued to arrive. The 21st was assigned a piece of territory on the ramp just down from Air America and next to the T-28D's where hangar space and time were at a premium. Reassembling the helicopters, checking out all the equipment, integrating into Task Force Alpha and the 56<sup>th</sup> Air Commando Wing, all took time. But by January 1968, the first operational missions were flown.

Initially, the 21st Helicopter Squadron was tasked with flying sensor drop missions to deploy electronic listening devices along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Early success with the sensors came at Khe Sanh when the besieged Marines used the sensor data to accurately fire their artillery on NVA troop concentrations. These sensor missions continued throughout the long year finally ending early in 1969 when the mission simply became too hazardous for the slower moving and lower flying helicopters to handle. Other missions included recovery of aircraft, night perimeter patrol around the base, civic action programs in Thailand and supply missions to local camps occupied by the US Army's 46th Special Forces Company. In August 1968, the 21<sup>st</sup> Helicopter Squadron became the 21<sup>st</sup> Special Operations Squadron.

Jumping from the frying pan into the fire seems to be the way things worked out. When the sensor mission ended the 21st picked up a program called Heavy Hook. Now, instead of dropping sensors over the Ho Chi Minh Trail, '703' would be inserting teams of Special Forces soldiers to watch the trail while also providing airlift for Lao Hmong soldiers fighting the NVA in Laos. By the time she was sent home, '703' had accumulated over 2,000 flying hours. First assigned to the 1st SOW at Hurlburt Field, she later moved to the 302nd at Luke.

Other assignments followed—Homestead, Pensacola, and Portland, Oregon. Along the way she had accumulated more hours, and participated in additional historic activities. The Air Force decided to try firing 2.75" FFAR [folding fin rockets] from H-3's. The helicopter they modified? "703" of course. When the MGM Grand burned in Las Vegas, she was one of three H-3's to participate in the rescue effort. Then in 1988 she was sent to Davis Monthan and the 71<sup>st</sup> SOS.

A second war loomed on her horizon. Iraq invaded Kuwait. Desert Shield, the buildup in Saudi Arabia, was followed by Desert Storm and '703' was there. Flying as part of Special Operations once again,

she and her crews were the only water landing capable helicopter that also trained for landing in the water at night on night vision goggles to support the Navy SEALs. Also performing CSAR during Desert Storm she served her crews well. During Desert Storm, 703 was the first H-3 to cross enemy lines since Southeast Asia. She also became a legend when she was able to crank up from a cold start and pull pitch in 90 seconds during an attack on her base. Upon her return to the States she continued to serve with the 71<sup>st</sup> until she was sent to AMARC [the Davis-Monthan "bone yard"] in 1992. By that time she had logged over 6,900 hours of flight time.

When helicopters assigned to the 41st Rescue Squadron at Patrick AFB in Florida needed to be replaced due to corrosion, she was pulled out of AMARC and flown across the country to rejoin an active unit. There she flew as an integral member of the Shuttle rescue crew. In August of 1994 she participated in an air show at Langley AFB near DC and then was flown into retirement at Robins Air Force Base, Warner Robins Georgia. She was welcomed into the family of aircraft owned by the Museum of Aviation at

Robins. Although a veteran of two wars and the last flying H-3 assigned to the Air Force, she was left to sit quietly in the back row of aircraft on outside display, still dressed in her Desert Storm colors, stripped of four out of her five main rotor blades. She was scarcely noticed by visitors.

"Good things come to those who wait," so they say and they did finally come true for '703' late in 2001. Plans moved forward for her restoration. Thanks to Mr. Wayne Schmidt, Director of the Museum of Aviation, Mr. Darwin Edwards,

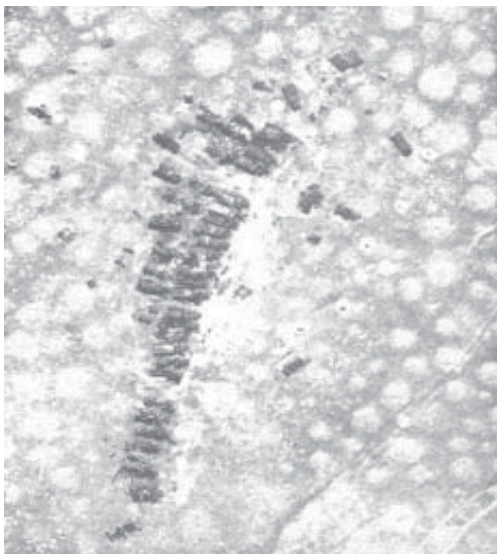


703 on the ground at LS98 in Laos, March, 1970. Bill Crawford in foreground.

## Partial Log of Sikorsky CH-3E Helicopter Number 703

Location	Year(s)
56thACW, APO 96310	12/15/67
56th SPOPS Wg, APO 96310	70—72
355th TFW, DM AFB, AZ	72—03/06/73
1st SOWg, Hurlburt Field, FL	03/06/73—04/22/74
302nd SOS, Luke AFB, AZ	04/22/74—11/01/86
301st ARRS, Homestead AFB, FL	11/01/86—03/09/87
NADEP, Pensacola, FL	03/09/87—10/08/87
939th CAMS, Portland IAP, OR	10/08/87—08/23/88
71st SOS, DM AFB, AZ	08/23/88—11/09/92
AMARC, DM AFB, AZ	11/09/92—02/26/93
71st SOS, DM AFB, AZ	02/26/93—03/06/93
41st RQS, Patrick AFB, FL	03-06-93—08/08/94
On display at Warner Robbins AFB, GA Museum of Aviation 08/08/94-Present	

Curator, and Col. Ken Emery of the 653<sup>rd</sup> Combat Logistic Support Squadron (CLSS) work began on her interior. Completed early this year (2002) Upon completion, her cockpit looked ready to fly. The cabin had been completely cleaned and repainted (they even cleaned up the hydraulic fluid), and seats installed. The 653<sup>rd</sup> brought her back to an excellent condition. Exterior painting followed next on the agenda. This portion was in the able hands of Mr. Dennis Oliver. The refueling probe that was added after '703' came back from Southeast Asia was removed, and she returned to her original colors and markings that she wore as a part of the 21st Special Operations Squadron. She was moved inside, under cover, and given a place of prominence at the Museum of Aviation: a gallant warrior and a lasting tribute to the men that flew her for almost three decades.



Mekong Express Mail mystery photo. Can you identify the objects and the location? FACs and photo interpreters: this one's for you.

### VIKING, continued from page 1

tered as a personnel carrier, which preceded the main convoy. Eight Thai Air Police guards were furnished to escort the convoy and to provide initial site security. The first convoy consisted of two U.S. M-35 series trucks, front and rear with 6 multicolored Thai contracted trucks in between. Few among that initial party knew exactly what to expect at the end of the long rough road.

They arrived and were met by an empty field with lush short grass. The general initial impression was astonishment at the amount of work that had to be done. Basics had to be taken care of—cover for the night, both for the party on hand and for those who were scheduled to arrive later in the afternoon from aircraft that left Clark that morning. Fabricating a waste disposal area—a hole in the ground covered by a packing crate in which a new white toilet seat had been installed, was the first luxury to be implemented at Mukdahan and one of the most appreciated. Next priority was the mess tent from which the C-Rations would be issued. These were some of the small problems that faced the advanced party the first day. Other major problems from a personnel standpoint were the non-availability of cold water or drinks, the swarming bugs which do not bite but just seemed to pour out of the ground, and the lack of a single tree to provide shade from the heat of the 110F+ Thai noon sun.

Then takes went up to designate areas for personnel tents, for outside storage, and for the mess tents. Men off-loaded trucks and began opening crates. The mess tent went up and the latrine was dug. Accident! The forklift lost a wheel. Off-load by hand. Darkness approaching—no more ridge poles for tents—some men will have to sleep on the ground. Suddenly the day was over but work continued through the evening hours under floodlights after a C-Ration supper. And then it

see **VIKING**, continued next page

was time to sleep. More men arrived that evening with the supplies of the second day's airlift. Filthy with dust and sweat, fifty men fell into deep sleep, some under tents on cots and others under trucks or under a tarp spread between two trucks. Hordes of bugs appeared, some familiar, like mosquitoes, others strange like those that poured out of holes in the ground to swarm around lights and die in heaps like snowdrifts. An odor similar to rotting fish permeated the camp for days due to those dead bugs. Later they were burned, but the odor remained.

From April 7<sup>th</sup> to April 27<sup>th</sup> the airlift continued and trucks poured into camp by day and by night loaded with cargo and bringing more men. The rate of change in the camp was tremendous. Every day the face of the camp would change—more tents, more facilities, more supplies. The men had to rise early and work late. 4:45 A.M. reveille—after 10 P.M. or 12 P.M. hit the sack for the short, needed sleep. Work ceased for three hours during the hot middle part of the day.

A Civil Engineering team arrived from Ubon at the end of the first week. Their job was to survey the property, build a wall and lay down flooring for the tents. The first major problem of the deployment arose. The wood needed by the engineers to do their work did not arrive. For a week this highly trained team was unable to accomplish their job because the lumber they had ordered and needed had not arrived. They bulldozed a road and laid the concertina perimeter of the camp and put down their survey stakes. Then they waited. Suddenly the bottleneck was broken and wood poured into camp spurring feverish activity. Day and night hammers rang and saws whined - the first floor was completed and then another. Every available tool was put to work as 5<sup>th</sup> Tac men worked side by side with the engineers as carpenters. The atmosphere of the camp was changing. No longer was the ground the floor for men and for equipment. First supply and mess tents were up and then living and work areas - a site had been constructed. By the time the radar arrived, 28 April 66, Mukdahan was essentially ready for it.

150 TDY personnel were shipped from Clark to Mukdahan. About 700,000 tons of equipment and supplies in 28 aircraft loads went in 85 truck runs from Nakon Phanom to Mukdahan. Local materials used were 400 cubic meters of wood, 600 cubic meters of gravel and 300 cubic meters of fill. Five trailerloads of water were hauled daily, 50 cases of C-rations and 4,000 pounds of Class A rations were consumed each week.

An example of the effort put out by all was that the mess hall put out a class "A" dinner on Easter Sunday 10 April 66, two days after site construction began. On the first Sunday at Mukdahan, Easter Sunday, the first church service was held in a tent.

To solve supply problems during daylight hours, every day there were trucks from Mukdahan on the road to Nakon Phanom or Ubon and in one case to Bangkok. Helicopter resupply was provided in many cases, but the backbone of the supply effort was the GI who left Mukdahan at 0700 for Nakon Phanom, over pitted and bone jarring roads, and returned with the lifeblood of the site, supplies of all kinds, at 1730.

At the end of long work days, Mukdahan became a place

where song, guitar music, and laughter rang out through warm nights. Despite their hard work, the deployment team also found time to show their interest in the Mukdahan community, inviting groups of local school children to the base for a tour, highlighted by a snack of milk and cake.



## EDITOR'S CORNER

The pages of the Mekong Express Mail are open to all TLCB members with a story to tell about their service in South-east Asia, their mission specialty, or some incident that made a major impression. If you have something to offer, let me know. Deliver it in Word and do not embed photos in the text. Send photos separately. Length can be what it takes to tell the story without padding. All articles are subject to editing, re-writing and reduction in size, where necessary. The main requirement is that stories be about the SEA experience. We are trying to create a record in the MEM of events and campaigns that our members are uniquely qualified to explain. We have already recorded SEA history that is unavailable elsewhere, for which I thank our many contributors. If you have something to say but are unsure exactly how to say it, we can and do help to put articles together.

An important duty of this publication is to inform members about official information they need to have. That is why we carry reports from officers of the Board of Directors and chairmen of committees about their activities. We carry information about our important Assistance Program, so that members know how their generous contributions are being used to help children and others in SEA. The President reports to members on current plans and issues. We carry information about our annual reunions, our annual quilt raffle and our elections.

A central role in getting the MEM to you is played by our Distribution volunteers. They give their time and effort to make delivery work smoothly. This role was played, from the early days of MEM in 2000, to the end of 2003, by Hank Maifeld. Bob Comey stepped in when Hank had to concentrate on family matters. Now, Ray Hayes has taken over from Bob. I am grateful to all three.

**Dave MacDonald**

The 2004 Quilt  
(see opposite)



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# Final Greeting to Members As President

by Bill Tilton

## **Greetings Brothers and Sisters,**

This is now time for me to say something profound about being TLCB's first president. By the time you read this my final term will be very close to its mandatory end, which will occur at the 2004 annual meeting on September 25<sup>th</sup>. If you are among the fortunate members who are able to be there this year you will get to vote on my successor directly. Otherwise you should be sure to mail in the absentee ballot or proxy (same sheet of paper) that is included with this issue.

I admit that I have looked forward to this occasion, particularly after the bitterness that developed during the board meeting last winter, during which two of the most prominent Brotherhood members resigned from the board. Before it was over the board also expelled the first member ever. This was not fun, folks, but it reminds me of an old cartoon I saw posted in base operations at Eielson AFB years ago. There was a very angry Roman soldier standing in front of an officer, with a fortification in the distance. The centurion in the picture says, "You knew about the boiling oil when you signed up, sarge." (The "sarge" part was added with a ballpoint, and names were written above the two soldiers).

Yes, I knew about the boiling oil—every human organization will have its friction, and sometimes emailed messages make it seem all the more sinister. But I also knew we were starting something new that would fill a real need for a special group of veterans. I felt it, and everybody who joined seemed to know what we meant right away: after all these years we had found somebody who understood what we were talking about! And guess what, we *were* important, and we found out from each other that we *had* been, in fact, a vital part of the war. This was the germ of an idea that started the TLC Brotherhood and it excited me and many others. By the time of the first impromptu reunion at Dayton in 1998 the idea was growing out of the hands of the little group of founders and attracting so many more people that we had to get an internet server to handle the traffic and the long, growing, list of addresses.

Assistance had started informally, and I sensed that most of us felt we had important things to do, and that to do them

we really needed a formal organization. I agreed with this, but the idea of leading it was a surprise that came from John Sweet and Rodney Bell. I was honored and still am, and regardless of the boiling oil I am deeply grateful for the opportunity. I remember the emotional months when I first found these guys, and I love to watch new members as they discover, in the words of Ghostman, "Wow; I've got a brotherhood!"

Of course while it's great to look back and see how far we have come, we all need to stay focused on the future. We are getting "new blood" onto the board of directors and probably shuffling around those who have been with us for a while. That's good, and it's the reason we put term limits in the by-laws. It is both for the good of the individual and of the organization. And while I have been performing all the usual presidential functions this year, I confess that I feel as though we have come to a dreadful pause. We, or at least I, have leveled off. We have many thousands of potential members out there who clearly need to know they have some brothers who understand, and yet we are not reaching them. This, to me, is our biggest challenge, and I hope that new leadership will get a fresh start and *find them*.

What will I be doing for the Brotherhood? Well, that remains to be seen, but I suspect I'll be employed somewhere. Dave has not fired me from my composition duties here at the Mekong Express Mail, so I do have a place to hang my hat—I would really miss that smell of printers ink and the roaring of the presses! And Gerry Frazier and I have discussed more direct involvement in getting our monument project moving at a faster pace, too. As to something more official, that will depend on what vacancies there are, if any, but I will be around to help any way I can. Meanwhile, let's have a great time in California.

After the reunion a small group is heading off on a long-awaited trip to Thailand and Laos. While this isn't an officially organized function and I will not be representing the Brotherhood as president, there are important meetings planned at NKP, Udorn, and Vientiane, among others. Look for news and pictures in a future MEM. And remember, we knew about the boiling oil when we started this thing—and we can't let it divert us from those four precious objectives we *all* signed up to when we joined. In case you forgot, they are right on the back of your membership card.



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## **TLC Sisterhood 2004 Quilt Raffle**

**By Bob and Rosie Wheatley**

Since the 2000 reunion in Colorado Springs, one of the highlights has been the drawing for the TLC Sisterhood's raffle quilt at the reunion banquet. Last year's quilt was a huge success, bringing in more than \$2,100 for the Assistance Fund.

Make your check or money order payable to **TLCB Assistance Fund. Tickets and payment must be received by September 10.** It's late—just send us your name and your donation and we will fill in your raffle tickets for you (promise). Send donations to:

TLCS Quilt Project  
8018 W. 900N  
Carthage, IN 46115

# From the Secretary's Desk

*Sawadee Pee Nawng*, It is a pleasure for me to write to my Brothers and Sisters, but sadly I have to report to the membership that I will resign from this position effective the date of this year's board election (September 25, 2004). My new job in the U.S. Postal Service was a great opportunity to continue my service with the hope of reaching full retirement age and was compatible with my limiting medical conditions. Now I work in the Computer Forwarding Section, which is basically sit-down work at a computer attached to a mechanical mail-processing machine. Since December 2<sup>nd</sup> I have worked 6 days a week and 75% of the days were 12-hour workdays. This has prevented me from giving the TLC Brotherhood the proper attention as needed for my position.

## **Board Motions Passed During This Period**

#111/ Jan 31, 2004

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting.

#112/ Feb 3, 2004

Excludes discussion of current politics from the Brotherhood server.

#113/ Feb 4, 2004

To donate \$100 to the Monument Fund in memory of the late Jim Bartholomew, board member, and encourage board members to send flowers individually.

#114/Feb 10, 2004

Approval of proposed memorandum of understanding with Texas Tech University for the History Committee.

#115/Mar 1, 2004

Approval of server policy change proposed by the Communications Committee chairman.

#116/Mar 10, 2004

To terminate the membership of Mr. Dennis Browne [unanimous vote required]

#117/Mar 15, 2004

Approve six-month trial of Assistance campaigns in Thai restaurants.

#118/Mar 18, 2004

Establish police that board members will not be appointed as committee chairmen, excluding bylaw-stipulated positions and currently existing positions.

#120/June 18, 2004 (special meeting)

Disallow broader general military topics on Mission server [rescinds motion #90, part 1, June 30, 2002].  
Give Communications Committee chairman discretion to reveal names of server rules violators.

#121/June 22, 2004

Prescribe penalties for 1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> offenses for violations of Mission and Brotherhood server rules.

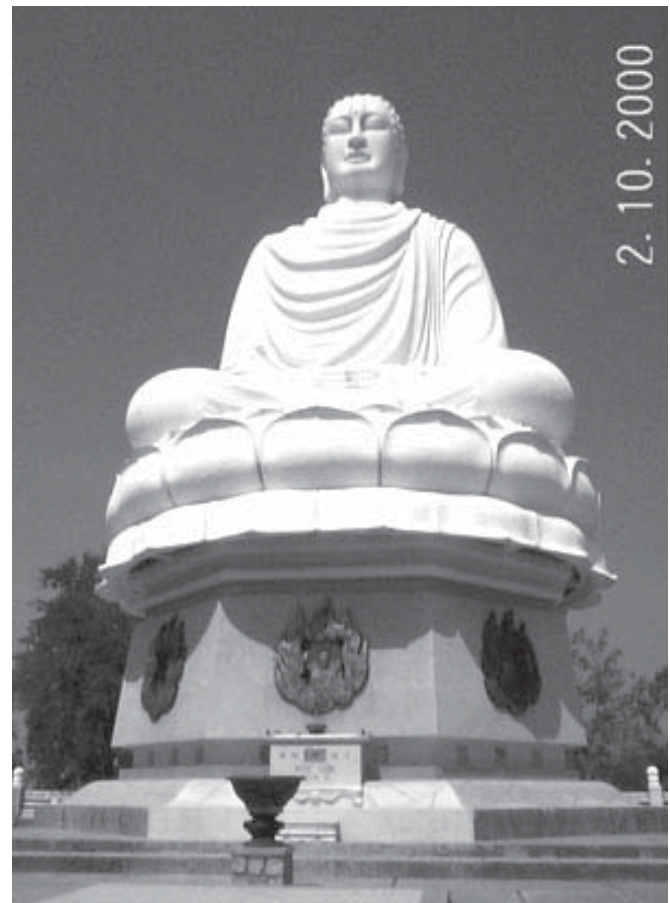
Many of you just don't realize the amount of time given to the TLCB of my own time, and that goes additionally for a few more of our officers and committee chairmen. These positions are the cogs of the TLCB, but I became an irregular size cog and caused a skipping/jerking. Earlier in the year a member suggested that I should step down if I couldn't serve properly. I had hoped that my civilian USPS workload would become more like a normal workday, but so far that has not happened.

I hope to continue to be able to serve the TLCB in some other ways of being involved with Committees if possible and maybe at a later date, again on the Board. I am proud of my service to the Brotherhood and grateful for your support. Wish you all the best and please stay in contact.

*Chok Dee!*

Ed Miller, Secretary

Nha Trang's White Buddha (photo furnished by Jim Michener)



# Lost in the Present; Mekong Jim Disillusioned in Nha Trang

by Jim Michener

It was hot—somewhere above 90—so I found myself looking around for a pedicab. I was wanting to climb the hill to the white Buddha and had been walking towards my target for half an hour. A woebegone hotel, from which rusty Soviet air conditioners dripped like drops from a leaking faucet, came into view. “Nha Trang Railroad Hotel,” proclaimed a sign. I was closing in.

Lounging in a shadow on the opposite side of the indecorous street, a pedicab driver—the Vietnamese still take two hours for lunch—noticed my crooked glance and sprang to life. As politely as I could, I waved a 20,000 dong note in the air, said Buddha as if it were two words, and was soon off in the tranquility of Nha Trang’s lunch break cum siesta. I had forgotten how noiseless pedicabs are compared to tuk-tuks; I promised myself to do this more often.

My crooked glance had been a reflection of a crooked remembrance; “crooked” because the memory had been sitting on a shelf for 38 years—a gas station at an intersection near the entrance to the temple at the foot of Buddha hill. I had been in a jeep, and we had topped off there: for a Huey driver, a gas station was a novelty because you drove up to it—delivered to remote coordinates by “hooks,” no bladders there. For that matter, the whole of Nha Trang was a novelty.

The pedicab’s big wheels meant a soft ride. Quietly, lightly, the raggedy driver pedaled past the railroad station. It looked exactly like a picture I had seen on a website. Why travel beyond your house or office, I said to myself, when everything can be found on the Web. I had intentionally left my digital camera in my hotel room, and there wasn’t so much as an ounce of regret—let somebody else take the frigging pictures on this tour: I’m not chasing rainbows but memories, which only neurons can see.

Bingo—we were abeam the Caltex station at the intersection. “After all these years, how could it still be there?” I later asked the wife of a local antique dealer. “Less has changed than you think, and the thinking hasn’t changed at all,” she said. “How hasn’t the thinking changed?” I asked. “I’m President Thieu’s cousin. I’ve been waiting to leave since 1975, am slated to leave, in fact, by the end of the year. The communists have ruined everything. The aristocracy fled, so the young people—they think like peasants because that’s what their parents are—have atrocious role models. Not that fingers can’t be pointed at the former aristocracy, the corruption in this country is horrific. You can ask my husband.”

Her husband, a lawyer in former times, had worked for USAID. Now the owner of a successful antique shop, he later explained how the director of Hanoi’s fine arts museum had wanted to buy the tip-top landscape that hung on the rear wall—it had once been loaned to the museum for a special exhibition, the painter’s father having been a renowned Chinese artist two centuries ago. The selling price? US\$20,000. The museum director had been willing to pay such a sum on the condition that a US\$30,000 invoice be produced. “The director,” said the former lawyer, “wanted to put US\$10,000 of the museum’s procurement budget in his pocket. I refused, of course. To be fair,” he added, “the problem isn’t that he’s a member of the Party. The problem is that he’s Vietnamese. Too many Vietnamese think like that. In the end, he, being an opportunist, could have extorted money from me on some trumped up charge.” (With a digital camera, just try photo-

graphing a scheming, deviant, double-crossing Oriental thought process!)

The white Buddha soon came into view; as I had been years ago, I was immediately charmed. I climbed out of the pedicab and was quickly approached by two boys, both of whom spoke first-rate English. With them pointing out all-important temple features—they sounded so natural and genuine that it was hard to tell that their spiel had been rehearsed—we mounted the steps together.

“I’m an orphan,” soon said the taller one. “And so am I,” said the other. “Our mothers brought us here when they couldn’t afford to feed us. Oh, and by the way, just ignore the peddlers at the top—they overcharge for everything. It’s a complete ripoff. They’re genuine con artists.”

I was disappointed when I reached the top. I hadn’t really climbed the hill to see the Buddha; I had climbed the hill to see the view, which, 38 years ago, had been breathtaking. Now, however, practically every square inch of the 40-meter-high hill was overgrown, making the South China Sea largely invisible.

“Can we go inside the Buddha base?” I asked. “Sure,” they said. I knew from book learning that it had previously housed a library and, during the revolution, occasionally served as a Viet Cong hideout. Now it was all joss sticks, incense and mumbo jumbo; I was not impressed.

The sales pitch began as soon as we exited the base: US\$10 for a set of postcards. “Better pictures are on the world wide web,” I said, “and I can download them for free.” “Well, you know,” the taller one said, “the head monk won’t be happy with us if you don’t buy any postcards. After all, the temple provides our food, clothing and shelter.”

Straightaway, it dawned on me that they couldn’t pass a polygraph, not even one that wasn’t plugged in. “I’ll tell you what I’m going to do for two *orphans*,” I said, exaggerating the word orphan as I pulled out two 50,000 dong notes (about US\$3.25 each) and placed them in their hands. Guess what? That wouldn’t do, they wouldn’t share, they wouldn’t hear of splitting the take: each insisted on his own 100,000 dong. Needless to say, I had no interest in forking out US\$13 for nothing, so I didn’t.

They succeeded in overwriting a fine memory with something inferior. The longer I remained in Nha Trang, the more easily the 1960s neurons, like misdirected whales, beached themselves on Vietnam’s shoals, and I felt lost in the present.



# Udorn Assistance And VFW Get Lucky Break on Sleep Mats

by Sal Arcado, VFW Post 10249  
Assistance Advisory Committee

The Udorn TLC Committee brought smiles to the faces of principals, teachers, staff and children at the Lou Donthang Elementary School in Ban Na Kha village recently when they arrived at 0900 to hand over a number of much-needed items paid for by donations from TLCB members.

Committee members Bill Brown, Khun Vichit, Ron Sell, Bob Wilson and Sal Arcado were there. Bob's wife came, and my wife and 11-year-old daughter. One of the sponsors of this school and his wife also attended.

Bob carried some of the items in his pickup truck, including most of the wall fans, electrical wire and tape, and I brought several of the fans and the water cooler in my vehicle. The rest of the items were delivered, at no charge, in two truckloads by the furniture store from which we had purchased them. These included: all 60 desks, the metal wall lockers, the bookcases, linoleum and 15 four foot by four foot foam rubber mats for the kindergarten children to sleep on. The owner of the furniture store had donated the mats for the school children when Vichit explained how the TLCB helps the needy schools we are told about. The mats are approximately 2 inches thick and are well made. They, along with the linoleum we purchased, should make it a lot more comfortable for the kids to sleep on than on the hard, cold, concrete floor they have been sleeping on. We were very fortunate to have gotten the mats for free, and we owe much gratitude to the storeowner for donating them, and to Vichit, for explaining to her what TLCB does.

Bob Wilson and his wife donated, at their own expense, a wheel chair made of PVC piping, with a special axle and wheels. They had the wheel chair made for one of the students who could not walk well, and gets around in a tricycle-like device that is pushed by other students. You can imagine how happy this child was when he realized the wheel chair was for him.

Snacks consisting of milk and cookies for 150 children were also donated. These cost B1500 (\$37.50), which put us over the \$1000 donated amount, so the excess was donated by some of our Udorn TLCB committee members.

The school staff presented us with Orchid flower leis, and Esan cloth sashes that are traditionally tied around the waist. Also, they presented us with a letter of appreciation in Thai that Vichit is going to have translated into English for you to see.

## Lou Donthang Elementary School Spending

Exchange rate was 40 baht per U.S. dollar for a total of B40,000 for \$1,000.00

Items Purchased	Baht Price	Dollar Price
10 Wall fans	B5850	146.25
30 ABC desks	B2550	63.75
30 Wood desks	B15000	375.00
1 Roll Electrical wire	B295	7.38
1 Water cooler	B2499	62.48
4 Wood book cases	B2400	60.00
4 Wall Lockers	B8662	216.55
1 Roll Linoleum 54 sq. Meters	B2200	55.00
1 roll of electrical tape	B18	.45
Milk and snacks for children	B426	10.64
3 cans spray paint	B100	2.50
<b>Total</b>	<b>B40,000</b>	<b>\$1,000.00</b>

### Hot Job at U-Tapao

Right: SAC armament specialists load bombs on wing-station racks on B-52D at U-Tapao Royal Thai Naval Air Base; Sattahip, Thailand.

**To see TLCB tax returns—**  
go to the Brotherhood info box  
on page 5

