



# Mekong Express Mail

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THE THAILAND LAOS CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC.

www.TLC-Brotherhood.org

## Mayday, Mayday Muong Soui is under attack

By Jim Stanitz

As an airborne intelligence officer on the Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center flown by the 7<sup>th</sup> Airborne Command and Control Squadron based at Udorn, Thailand, I had a unique vantage point for the war in our area of responsibility. I flew on Alleycat, the northern night orbit.

After the bombing halt of 1 November 1968, we became primarily responsible for the Barrel Roll, northern Laos. With the shift in our mission, we were heavily involved in providing support to the Hmong military units under General Vang Pao. The war in the Barrel was a seesaw affair, with the battle lines ebbing and flowing across the map, depending on the season of the year and the prevailing monsoon.

In December 1968, General Vang Pao began Operation Pig Fat to retake the strategic karst mountain of LS-85, Phou Pha Thi, where early in 1968 the Peoples Army of Vietnam had overrun the critical radar site that had been airlifted in to help direct the bombing of North Vietnam. By early January 1969, the Hmong had stalled halfway up the mountain and, despite massive use of airpower, could advance no farther. The Hmong had to pull back from Phou Pha Thi.

Because of the attempt to retake the mountain, or perhaps because it was already planned, the North Vietnamese began investing many of the Hmong outposts, primarily located at Lima Sites that had minimal runways for aerial resupply and the movement of troops.

On 9 February 1969, Muong Soui (L-108) was attacked and an Assistant Military Attache, Captain Joseph Bush, was killed. I happened to be flying that night and was the first to hear the "Mayday" calls from Muong Soui at 0145 local time. An emergency beeper began on guard channel, followed by voice, "Mayday, mayday, mayday! This is Muong Soui on guard. Muong Soui is under attack!" My memory is that the man on the radio was an American, and that he was sitting in a radio jeep in the middle of the bomb dump. Alleycat was able to redirect assets already over northern Laos, and within 20

minutes a forward air control (FAC) flareship was overhead with armed aircraft in tow.

As this was going on, I was tasked by my Senior Controller to contact "Geneva", the Air Attache's office in Vientiane and keep them apprised of the situation at Muong Soui and to act as a communications relay between the two. Geneva decided to send two helicopters to remove eight USAF technicians from the site, which appears to have happened during the hours of darkness. By daylight, the situation stabilized and friendly forces reoccupied Muong Soui. Christopher Robbins' book *The Ravens* gives a good description of what happened on the ground.

In the March 2002, issue of *Mekong Express Mail*, Ed Ulrich presented some photographs of the site after the attack and Air Force bombing of the airstrip. Ed flew into Muong Soui in a Pilatus Porter and was able to have the airstrip serviceable for C-123K and C-130 aircraft in three days.

At the time, I was flying every other night, so two days later, I reported into Alleycat about 2:30 in the afternoon. I was told to get down to 7/13<sup>th</sup> Air Force Intel as soon as possible. When I arrived, I was escorted into a small room with two Americans I did not know. One was a colonel or brigadier general in uniform, and the other was in civilian attire. The officer did all the questioning, wanting



"See you at Dayton next year!" Tom Burford, at Las Vegas (see page 11 for 2007 reunion announcement)

see **Soui**, continued on page 2

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to know what had happened from my perspective and how we had assisted. After I provided all the information I could, both gentlemen thanked me very much and the interview was over. I believe the officer was the Air Attache from Vientiane; I do not remember, if I ever knew, who the civilian was.

February continued, with increasing pressure against friendly forces all across the region. Intense pressure built against the key site of LS-36, Na Khang. The Alleycat history records that “On the night of 28 February, LS-36 came under heavy attack shortly before Alleycat left station, and subsequently was lost on the following night.” Again, I was going to have a front row seat at a critical event in the Barrel Roll.

The official Alleycat history reports that on the night of 1 March 1969, LS-36 was lost to the enemy despite support from ABCCC Cricket (day orbit) and Alleycat. Further, it reports that the FAG (forward air guide) “Watts” suddenly went off the air at 1850 local time while talking to Alleycat intel. After coordination with other FAGs, an AC-130 Spectre 01 began attacking building and storage areas at the site. Watts then came on freq and reported that LS-36 was in enemy hands. “With the loss of LS-36, the enemy gained almost total control of Northeast Barrel Roll.”

Not only do I remember the loss of LS-36, I still have audio recordings of the radio traffic from that night. There are no time hacks, and the tape has been edited several times over the years to remove dead spots or garble. It is still relatively understandable and I used it to help reconstruct the following.

In our pre-mission briefings at 7/13<sup>th</sup> Air Force Intel, we were told that LS-36, Watts Station, was under considerable pressure and a major push by the enemy was expected that night. My Senior Controller directed me to contact Watts as soon as we were airborne and to maintain communication with the site. After brief contact with Watts, who requested flares and ordnance, I lost contact with him, as stated above, at 1850 local time. (Our on-station times were 1800 to 0600.) Other FAGs in the area were Blue Boy, Hunter and possibly Kneecap and Lulu. When I was unable to reconnect with Watts, Hunter became the main contact. He confirmed the need for flares and ordnance. The Senior Controller contacted 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force to reallocate assets to the Barrel Roll to support the site.

Two aircraft were shortly in the area, Blind Bat 04, a FAC/flare C-130, and Spectre 01, an AC-130 gunship. Onboard Spectre was someone called “Bags”, who obviously knew the site and knew the FAGs. I believe “Bags” to be William L. Bagwell, an A1E pilot from the 611 Special Ops Squadron at NKP. Bags was calling for Blue Boy, one of the FAGs. He never was able to contact him. (Other sources report that Blue Boy was captured by the enemy, tortured and executed – I cannot confirm that from personal knowledge.)

Bags was seeking information on whether or not the friendlies had left LS-36 and if ordnance could be expended. Hunter replied that the enemy was on the site and the good guys were southeast of the site and wanted flares. Blind Bat 04 called and said he was 15 minutes out.

Bags continued to seek clarification as to the exact position of the friendlies and clear information that LS-36 could be at-

tacked. Hunter said there were only enemy on site. Bags continued to ask Hunter questions to confirm that Hunter was in fact whom he claimed. When Hunter could not follow authentication procedures, Bags asked him personal questions and received good answers.

To add to the fog of war, while this was in progress, another FAG Lulu called Bags to ask him to order something for him. Bags politely indicated to Lulu that he would talk to him tomorrow.

Spectre 01 then asked Alleycat for clearance to fire on the airfield. The Senior Controller told him that was his option.

Concurrently, Fox-23, an unknown American, called Alleycat to report that Hunter said all friendlies had left Watts Station and asked if Alleycat had contact with Watts or Blue Boy. I answered in the negative.

Spectre 01 began firing on the airstrip and Blind Bat 04 began directing Lizard, a flight of four, on their bombing runs. Alleycat Senior Controller notified 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force (“Blue Chip”) that strikes were in progress. The Senior Controller then called Camelot (station unknown to me at this time, but possibly the American Embassy in Vientiane—the American Ambassador was in charge of all American efforts in Laos) to inform them of the strikes.

About that time, Watts came up on freq and talked to Bags. Watts reported he was 5 miles south of Na Khang and that the strikes were good. When asked where the enemy was, Watts reported that he couldn’t tell because he and seven of his troops were in the middle of a river, and that he did not know where Blue Boy was. (In the middle of this conversation, another aircraft can be heard saying, “There goes the ammo”). Watts also said he did not know how many enemy there were.

Spectre 01 then reported to Alleycat that he needed to RTB (return to base). He passed bomb damage assessment (BDA). For himself, he was on target at 21:42 and off at 22:35; he had 18 secondary explosions and 16 secondary fires. Lizard 1 (this was a flight of four aircraft) had one secondary explosion; Lizard 2 had three secondary explosions and two secondary fires; Lizard 3 and 4 had no BDA. Spectre also reported there was no need for more ordnance and no need for flares on LS-36 – it was gone.

Alleycat Senior Controller called Ali Baba (Tan Son Nhut radio) for a connection to Blue Chip to report Spectre’s departure, the loss of LS-36, and that no more ordnance or flares were needed. Blind Bat 04 remained overhead Hunter’s position to provide flare support if needed. This was the first time that LS-36 had been overrun. It had been a bad night!

The action up north continued. Two weeks later, on the night of 13 March 1969, the first USAF AC-47 Spooky gunship mission went north. (Four AC-47s had arrived at Udorn just that day to support sites in Barrel Roll.)

As at LS-36, I was the one to receive the emergency call from Kneecap. He reported a bad troops in contact (TIC) situation requiring flares and bombs. Specifically, I recall that he was asking for the standard “flash bang” package of bombs and napalm. He reported a battalion of enemy investing his position. When I passed word that Candlestick 40, a C-123

Soui continued next page

FAC/flaeship, was enroute, Kneecap reported that he was quickly losing his position. He gave his position as UG 037065, which I read back to him and he confirmed.

Shortly thereafter, I was able to tell Kneecap that he was getting Spooky 01, and to talk to him on frequency 119.1. Kneecap reported that he was now at UG 037067, but when I read it back to him, he changed it to VG 037067 – a difference of 100 kilometers! (The corrected coordinates placed Kneecap several miles southeast of LS-01 – Muong Ngai.) After satisfied the coordinates were now correct, I passed them to Spooky. Once in communication with Kneecap, Spooky 01 was cleared to fire.

The audiotape is extremely garbled and hard to understand, but I do remember that Kneecap did not see the “flash bangs” he expected and was not happy. I had to instruct him to work Spooky because he wasn’t getting any other assistance.

Spooky completed his work and called “winchester,” out of ammo, and received clearance from Alleycat to RTB. The site had been saved.

The official history says that the FAGs were very happy to have Spooky and asked for them by name. This only happened after Kneecap went out in the morning and saw what devastation the AC-47 had wrought on the enemy. The next night, Kneecap came up on freq, and instead of asking for the standard FAG “bombs and nape”, he asked for “SPOOKY”! Spooky definitely became the weapon of choice for the FAGs as soon as word spread around the net—and it only took a matter of

hours.

There were certainly other exciting events during my tour on Alleycat, such as Operation Thor in July, 1968, when we coordinated a major operation in the demilitarized zone (DMZ) and adjoining areas to destroy supply caches and troop bivouacs and prevent another Khe Sanh situation; or working with the USS New Jersey in providing naval gunfire support as far as 22 miles inland; or assisting with search and rescue (SAR) operations. But, for intense action supporting friendly forces in peril, I believe the first quarter of 1969 was as hot as it could get.

\* \* \* \* \*

A note on sources: I still have audiotapes of the loss of LS-36 and the AC-47 mission to support Kneecap near LS-01. The tapes are over 37 years old and have deteriorated, exacerbating the already poor quality of the reel-to-reel recordings made in the ABCCC capsule as events were happening. I have used my memory to fill in what the tapes don’t provide. Also, Ray Roddy, who is writing a book about 7ACCS in SEA, was kind enough to share with me some of the official Alleycat history that he has from the Air Force Historical Research Agency. My sincerest thanks to him for his assistance. The identity of “Bags” was provided by the Laos List on the Internet. The death of Blue Boy was provided on the ChanceFAC website. Ed Ulrich’s article on Muong Soui in MEM and Christopher Robbins’ *The Ravens* also provided information.



## MEM Interviews Skip Chervak

*MEM interviewed TLCB member Bill “Skip” Chervak in October, 2004 in Bangkok, at the end of a trip taken by a group of members and spouses to Bangkok and Northeast Thailand.*

MEM Skip, you didn’t travel with the rest of us all the time. We’re really curious to hear about the special trip that you and Karen took.

SC We split off from the group for a couple of days to go to Laos. It was probably the highlight of the trip. We left the group at NKP and went by local bus down to Mukdahan. It’s interesting when you get away from the group and you interact with the Thais more, and you see how friendly they are—they helped us the whole way. When we got to the bus stop all the people there were milling around getting ready to leave and going about their business, and they saw us and they came running over. They want to

know where you’re going. It’s hard to get through that bus station and they all showed us right where to go to get to the right bus. The bus driver took over from there, and gave us tickets and when we got on it seemed like everyone on the bus knew where we were going and were watching out for us. A couple of times we thought we were at the right place to get off, and they said, “not here, not here.” So they took care of us the whole way, and it’s very easy to travel that way.

We stayed in Mukdahan for the night, and the next morning we crossed the river.

MEM We understand that the Japanese are building a bridge over the Mekong at Mukdahan to connect Route 9 to Mukdahan. Did you see that?

SC We saw some of the construction; it’s a little bit north of the city—we saw the cranes but it’s far enough north of the city center that we didn’t actually see the site itself. [See box on page 5].

see Chervak, continued next page



Chervak, continued from page 3

MEM Well what was Route 9 like then; with the bridge coming up it must be better than it was when we saw it last!

SC Very much so. It's a brand new road that was just finished within a year or two, but it is only a two-lane road, and the Lao seem to drive slower than the Thai; they follow the speed limit. It's hard to believe, but there are even more animals in Laos than there are in Thailand, and they're all over the road. There are a lot of goats; you don't see many goats in Thailand, but they're all over the place and that keeps you slowed down. I think we averaged about 70 kilometers per hour, maybe.

MEM How were you traveling?

SC We traveled in a small minivan. We had a guide with us. When you go out of the city in Laos you need a guide, theoretically, according to the regulations. You can't travel by yourself the way you do in Thailand; so we had a guide and he was very friendly and spoke a little bit of English. He was a schoolteacher by profession, and tour guide was his part time job. I asked him if there are many tourists coming through this part of Laos, and he said no, that we were the only ones he had seen in a long time.

MEM Did you feel as though the government was looking over your shoulder all the time?



Intrepid travellers; Skip and Karen by lake north of Bangkok.

SC I really don't think they were. We had another driver—there was a guide and a driver—so I wondered if he was a party official watching us, but I didn't feel watched at all. But we got stopped one time by a uniformed person, and he didn't question us at all. He just questioned the two Laos and looked at their stack of paperwork and sent us on our way. I even mentioned to Karen, my wife, that you had to remind yourself that you were in a communist country—it didn't have that feeling. The people were just moving around at will; people weren't afraid to talk to you; they were very friendly, very kind, and whatever we wanted to see, no problem. I said I wanted to stop and take pictures of a bridge—no problem, and whenever I wanted to stop, very much open.

MEM Where did you go?

SC We went straight across Route 9; we left Savannakhet—we looked around Savannakhet for a little bit. We went to the dinosaur museum. And we left there and went to Muong Phine, I think the name is, and we saw a war cemetery there. There were the remains of a Jolly Green [HH-3 helicopter] that had been shot down—they told us it had been shot down by two women soldiers. I'm not sure, but I would guess that's mostly what they had in defensive positions, because the men were mostly conscripted to one side or the other side. We had lunch there, very good. When we left there we went right up to Tchepone, where we spent the night at a private guest house.

MEM Many of our readers are aware that Tchepone was a very dangerous place in the Vietnam War, so we would be very curious to know what it was like. What did it look like today?

SC We saw bomb craters everywhere you looked, bomb craters and bombs. When you drive through the village you see a lot of bombs, 500-pound bombs. They're sitting right in the yards, just lying around. Our driver told us that at one time they were using them for stilts for the houses, but the government made them pull those out and use wooden posts, and now you don't see any stilts made out of bombs. When you look at the marketplace you see lots of minesweepers for sale—it's a common item there.

MEM Metal detectors?

SC Yeah; they're starting to clear the land, little by little. They showed us this book in English titled, "Living With Unexploded Ordnance." They had a color-coded map that shows you where all the unexploded ordnance is.

MEM MEM ran an article about UXO—unexploded ordnance. [MEM, volume 1, issue 3, December 2000].

SC Yes. Anyway, the whole Route 9 area was covered with red ink, and the Tchepone area was *really* covered. The article said a couple of provinces in Laos are almost completely cleared. But they mentioned the drawback is they were cleared because the villagers started doing it themselves. While the provinces may be cleared, they've had the biggest death rate and casualty rate from villagers trying to do it themselves. They brought us to one site where a person had bought a piece of land where he was going to build his house. The first thing you have to do is clear the land and he was in the process of it. They walked us around it, and it was all jungle, still. We saw a couple of holes where they had dug up bombs; one was fresh and looked like they had dug it within a day or two. You could see a round circle the diameter of the bomb and if you looked down into the ground about two feet down you could see a smaller circle where the actual fuse had stuck down into the ground. When our driver saw that he got a little frightened, and realized he was in a live area at the time. We were probably about 300 yards or so into the jungle at that time, so he thought we had better back out, and we did.

MEM Now with this kind of a situation, with the unexploded ordnance and the heritage of the war, one would expect the

see Chervak, continued on page 8

# Southeast Asia 120 years ago; MEM Guide compared to 1886 atlas map

MEM has come across an old atlas map of what we now call Southeast Asia, dated 1886. We find this particularly interesting when compared to the MEM Guide to Southeast Asia, which appears here from time to time (next two pages).

On this ancient map you may be surprised to find where Laos is. You have to look carefully at the large letters—the “L” is found just below the 20<sup>th</sup> parallel, on the right bank of the river that is labeled “Mekon or Cambodi,” and the “A” is on what is now the Thai side of the same river, just west of the bend where you find “Nong-cai.” (Notice that Luang Prabang is on the map, but there is no Vientiane.) There is a dotted line that descends from that word “Mekon,” follows the west side of a mountain range passing “Kon-khene” and reaches Cambodia

almost directly below Ubon. According to this map, that was the border between Laos and Thailand at that time. Note that what we call Vietnam is in three parts: Tonkin in the north, Cochin China from about Vigne (Vinh?) nearly all the way to Bien Hoa, and then around the “Mouths of the Mekong,” French Cochin China. And the panhandle of Laos: “Anam.”

## Savannakhet-Mukdahan bridge over Mekong completed

Construction of the bridge being built to link Mukdahan with Savannakhet and Route 9 has been completed and it will officially open in December.

The Japanese government supported the project financially through the Japanese Bank for International Cooperation.

The bridge will have an international checkpoint building, an automatic money-collecting machine and a truck-weighting machine. The original plan for an asphalt road from Mukdahan over the bridge to Savannakhet was changed to make it a reinforced concrete road, according to Lao officials.

While MEM has cropped this map to show the part most interesting to our members, you can see that what is today Northern Thailand was then labeled “Independent Han States,” the Han being the most populous Chinese ethnic group by far.

You will enjoy “exploring” this map. Right away you will find familiar places called Bangkok, Ayuthia, Korat, Ubon, Bang Muk (Mukdahan), Pakse, Saravane, and Pnom (Nakhon Phanom). In Vietnam and Cambodia there are Hue, Touron (Tourane, or Danang), and many others you may recognize or be able to figure out.

On the MEM guide we hope you can locate the places of interest to you. If not, please tell us (see box below for contact information). If you know where your base was located it will help us add it to the guide for future editions.

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*Editor:* Dave MacDonald (Dav16Mac@AOL.com)  
*Distribution:* Ray Hayes *Composition:* Bill Tilton

**TLC Brotherhood, Inc. Tax ID #54-1932649**

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### TLC Brotherhood Contacts

Ed Heyliger, Listmaster  
[AmazingDrH@webtv.net or Listmaster@tlc-Brotherhood.com]  
Bob Norway, Webmaster [examiner@cfl.rr.com]

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## Mekong Express Mail Guide to Southeast Asia



# BURMAH SIAM AND ANAM, 1886

Chervak, continued from page 4

people there to be very bitter. What did you find in the people—I understand there are people living *in* Tchepone—what were they like?

SC Life is going on normally in Tchepone. They mentioned that during the war there were very few people here. They were all off in the caves, hiding. But life is back to normal. No bitterness at all. People were very, very friendly to us. They almost enjoyed seeing us, and they were proud of the people of Tchepone, saying how strong they were. That's the word they used, "strong," to stand up to the Americans. But there was no gloating there, just, that's a fact, they were very proud of these people and they just left it at that. To them the war is over, it's gone. They're just worried about the unexploded ordnance.

MEM You stayed in Tchepone. What were your accommodations like?

SC We had a guest house, which was acceptable. It wasn't up to Thai standards, but it did have an air conditioner; it had a western toilet, which means a sit-down toilet. A lot of people who haven't been to Thailand don't know what the other type is, but it's "squat" toilet, which the women seem to hate. It was comfortable, and we had power and hot water all night long. The people were friendly but they weren't like Thai people who can kind of annoy you, you know; they're sort of more polite than the Thai people are sometimes.

MEM That sounds like the Lao people.

SC In fact, some of them were complaining that it was too violent in Thailand. We think it's really easy going here [in Thailand] but they say no, "Lao is easier."

MEM Did you see a lot of jungle?

SC We went out east of Tchepone about seven miles or so; I'm guessing, but it was a pretty good distance. They brought us to the area where "Lam Song 719" ended, and there was a lot of jungle around there. There was military equipment all around—we saw a couple of tanks that were just shot up and left to rust right where they were.

MEM Of course that was the Vietnamese Army's incursion, the attempted cutting off of southern Laos.

SC Yes, yes. In fact, it's kind of obvious but I didn't realize it until the Lao told me, but "719" means "Route 9 in '71," the year that it happened. But about the jungle, there are areas they are leaving undeveloped to promote tourist trekking, because they want that to be big in the future. However, nobody's come yet.

MEM Nobody's come yet? Did you learn anything about ecotourism? I know the Lao are talking about that quite a bit.

SC Yes, they showed us a couple of forests where it's going to happen. A few people had talked about it. There are camp sites where you can stay in tents with all the animals around, or you can stay in villagers' huts in there, but it's kind of strict; they give you a list of do's and don'ts.

MEM Tchepone is significant to people who were over there in the sixties because it was a juncture of the [Ho Chi Minh] Trail system in Laos coming south

and then joining Route 9. Did you get to go up the Trail at all?

SC That we didn't do; we ran out of time. But the tour companies do offer that as a five day trip; mostly because they make it a loop-around, up through Mugia Pass and then they come back to NKP [Nakhon Phanom]. And those parts we rode are not quite as nice as Route 9. It's a long trip from NKP to Mugia over pretty poor roads, and then down through—I think it's Route 23.

MEM Yes, it is Route 23, and then 12. Is it safe?

SC It is. I talked to Col Jimmie Butler, who did that trip a couple of years ago, and he said he felt secure the whole way. I know I felt so safe in Tchepone that I can't imagine it not being safe other than unexploded ordnance. With a proper guide that's not a problem either.

MEM OK; let's talk a little bit about your experience when you were here the first time. What kind of duty did you have.

SC I was a 461, munitions specialist, and worked in the bomb dump on the rocket crew. I spent probably 90 percent of my time building rockets. Occasionally we'd get farmed out to napalm or bomb crew, or whoever needed help. This was in 1969, January to January.

MEM Do you remember the day you got your orders, and what you thought; what you expected?

SC I do. I had been in Korea for six months. I was stationed at Eglin Air Force Base out of training, and I was waiting for orders to Vietnam—everybody who was there went to Southeast Asia. And then one day the Pueblo crisis happened [capture of Navy intelligence-gathering ship "Pueblo" off coast of Korea] and they said they needed guys to go to Korea, and I got in line pretty quick, and spent six months over there. It was very cold over there, and a big difference coming back to the States. Within a month or two I had my orders to NKP, Nakhon Phanom—I'd never heard of it. I asked around a couple of people, and nobody knew about it. I did find one E-4 who was at Ubon, and he said, "Yeah I remember that place. The Air Commandos at a postage stamp in the jungle."

MEM What was your grade at the time?

SC When I got to NKP I was an E-3, and I think I became

In Bangkok. Photos by Mac Macdonald (AZ)



an E-4 while I was there.

MEM What was your impression when you arrived?

SC We were in Bangkok for three days waiting for a trip up country. I was all alone, like most of us going over there, but while I was in Bangkok I met a guy named Fritz and we became good friends, and he was going to NKP too, so we went up there together. When we landed I looked out the window and it looked like landing in World War 2, all these prop jobs. As a bomb guy I'm not familiar with the airplanes, but I knew they were kind of old. Then we hit that field and the taxiway, bouncing all around, and then you get out of the plane and there's that little wooden shed and "Welcome to NKP!" I *knew* I was somewhere then!

MEM During this trip, did you get out to the base?

SC Yes I did.

MEM What did you see out there?

SC Not a lot left. We drove down the main road, and you could see roads off to the sides which led to the hooch area, but they're overgrown and we didn't go down those. We saw the old tower and next to the tower we saw a wooden framework shed that I think was the arrival hall.

MEM Did you go down to the bomb dump?

SC We went through the area. My building was just to the left; as I remember the bomb dump was just at the end of the main road—you went straight in—and the rocket area was off to the left of the end of the main road.

MEM Do you remember the day you left? Was it something special for you?

SC Well, I was going to Danang for a year so I don't have a recollection of happiness that day like some of the guys. I do remember that I got rid off all my stuff. I gave away my

Air Commando hat, thinking, "Why would I ever want this again?" Now I wish I had kept it.

MEM Getting back to this trip we've been on, you saw some of the Assistance activities. What impressed you about that?

SC The gratitude of the Thai people and the respect they show us for helping them. I saw the two parties and saw the work the kids had done. I spoke with the English teacher for a while—and I saw the two little girls with heart problems we're going to help. Helping the kids in the schools is so important.

MEM Did you get to see the site of the proposed monument?

SC Yes I did! It's a beautiful piece of land and the possibilities are great. It looks like a great park, a great spot, and I hope we go through with that rather than the alternative, the tower idea.

MEM What do you think the monument should represent?

SC I think it should represent the sacrifice that the allied side made, the Thais as well as the Americans, and the Lao that fought on our side, to protect this area. The area was in danger, Northeast Thailand was. I think a lot of people don't realize but Northeast Thailand was; we did a lot to save that.

MEM Do you think the monument will be well cared for and undamaged?

SC That I don't know. I saw war cemeteries in Laos for their own people, and they were just left, nothing's done and then they're forgotten about. On the other hand, you go to a war cemetery in [Thailand] and they're beautiful! From one extreme to the other. I don't think there would be damage, I mean vandalism, but some of their sites they just ignore. But we have some people here who would keep an eye on it.



## TLC Sisterhood 2006 Quilt Raffle Sets New Record

by Bob and Rosie Wheatley

Here it is September, and another TLCB summer reunion is in the books. One of the major activities of every reunion is the TLC Brotherhood's fundraiser to aid the needy children of SEA in honor and memory of our departed brothers, who did not return with us. Almost from its inception, the TLC Sisterhood has been a major contributor to the success of the TLCB Assistance Fund Raiser, primarily through raffle or auction of various hand crafted items. Funds raised through the annual raffle of the TLC Sisterhood Quilt in particular have grown with each passing year. This year the Quilt Raffle once again shattered the old record, bringing in \$3277 for the SEA Assistance Fund.

The design of each year's raffle quilt has been unique, but all have been based on a military theme. All quilts have been crafted by TLC Sister, Rosie Wheatley, with other sisters providing financial support for purchase of raw materials, creative input, assistance in ticket sales and in running the drawing itself at the reunion. The theme of this year's raffle quilt was "War Birds" commemorating a century of advances in U.S. military aviation. The "War Birds" theme became an unqualified success with the membership and generated tremendous ticket sales.

The center of the War Birds quilt is dominated by the symbol of American military might, the Bald Eagle, with talons

extended, ready to strike. Surrounding the Eagle are 56 framed and captioned photos of various types of military aircraft, including prop driven and jet, fixed and rotary wing types. These date from the 1916 "Jenny" observation biplane through the cutting edge 1993 C-17 "Globemaster" cargo and transport plane. The final photo on the lower right corner is of the Missing Man Formation, snapped by our departed TLC brother, Jim Bartholomew. This final block dedicates the quilt to the memory of all who have laid down their lives in service of our nation.

The drawing for the quilt was held after the Reunion Banquet. Following tradition, just prior to the drawing, the poem, "The Sisterhood" by Maty Pierre-Benoist was read by Sister Donna Bartholomew. This year's winner of the drawing was Phyllis Pruiksma, who was in attendance. Congratulations go

see **Quilt** continued on page 12



Jimmie Butler, Ray Hayes, and Jim Kidd



"Hatman" Bob Pruikmsa, our new BX Shopkeeper

## Seen at the Annual Meeting and Reunion of the TLC Brotherhood, Inc., in Las Vegas, Nevada. August, 2006.

Las Vegas reunion photos by John Duffin



Above, BOD members Bob Santo, Dave MacDonald, Hap Wyman, Hoppy Hopkins, Dusty Henthorn and John Loftus at TLCB Annual Meeting

Honor guard salutes Memorial Table at banquet



Peg Loftus, Donna Bartholomew and Larry Hughes register Dave MacDonald as Bill Tilton watches.

Hap Wyman auctions rare truck-tire sandals taken off a dead NVA by a US Marine, that brought in \$110 for the kids



Nancy Sweet, Madeleine Santo and Peg Loftus collect the funds on auction night



Modeling Rosie's hand-made blanket during the auction



Madeleine Santo and Phyllis Pruiksmas show the Warbirds Quilt

## Did you know?

### Annual Meeting & Reunion, 2007

Vice President John Loftus announced that the 10th annual gathering of the Brotherhood will be held at *Dayton, Ohio* next year. That's where our first full-scale meeting convened, before the Brotherhood was organized.

Agenda and dates have yet to be determined, but there are many wonderful things to see and do in the Dayton area, starting with the incredible Air Force Museum and the legacy of the Wright Brothers. More news in the December issue.

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# Surviving the collision of two B-52s

By Bill Tilton

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## Editor's Corner

Our successful 9<sup>th</sup> reunion in Las Vegas attracted several new members, including our outstanding speaker, pilot Don Harten, who told us his harrowing tale of surviving the head-on crash of two B-52s. We also had a very enlightening talk by Arizona Social Security Administration official Ronnie Singh about benefits and eligibility.

Another new member, Jim Stanitz, who joined the TLCB this year, wrote our lead story on Page One of this issue.

Jim mentioned the March 2002 MEM story and photos by Ed Ulrich, who flew into Muong Suoi after the attack and got the airstrip repaired. Ed, who died in July 2003, was an extraordinary man. After WW2 service in the Army Air Corps, he did risky flying as a missionary pilot in New Guinea. In the early 1960s he was hired by Air America and became its chief pilot and base manager in Vientiane, Laos. I met this remarkable flyer and grand storyteller at the July 2002 reunion in Manassas, VA, when he was our history committee chairman. His book, "Out There Beyond Beyond," sketches his life with his wife, Elaine, and his children, Ted and Lynne. Ted continues the family TLCB tradition as our Chaplain.

A well-attended highlight of the reunion was Jimmie Butler's presentation on his March 2003 return to the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

All of you new members are invited to tell your own stories in this, your publication. Whatever you did in SEA, we all want to hear about it. Get in touch with me at my email address in the Page 5 box and we'll talk about it.

**Dave MacDonald**

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**Quilt** continued from page 9

to Phyllis and to her husband, Bob, who, unknown to Phyllis, had purchased the winning ticket in Phyllis' name. Bob, having tried to win the quilt without success in previous years, decided to change strategies. Apparently it worked for him. We're certain the quilt is in good and loving hands with the Pruiksmas.

Unfortunately, there can be but one winner each year. Thanks and appreciation are extended to all our members who participated so generously and enthusiastically in this year's effort. You of the TLCB / TLCS family are the ones who have made the TLCS Quilt Raffle such a resounding success year after year. The needy children of SEA are the ultimate winners, beneficiaries of your generosity. We all have much to be proud of, brothers and sisters.

The old SAC aircrews could do many things with precision. They could drop their bombs directly on designated targets, they nearly always took off exactly on the minute scheduled, and they could launch a strike force of bombers and tankers and rendezvous for refueling precisely over some planned point, even over open oceans or Arctic wasteland with no use of LORAN or other external navigational aids except the stars. Closing head-on at a combined speed of a thousand miles per hour, the tankers would turn a graceful 180 degrees and roll out no more than a half-mile in front of the bombers. However, on one famous occasion the rendezvous was terribly mistimed and the attempted adjustment resulted in a fiery collision of two B-52s, at night, in the seas north of the Philippines, above a raging typhoon. Featured reunion speaker Don Harten, right, then a lieutenant, was co-pilot of one of the B-52s, and one of the few survivors of the crash.



In a gripping, epic account that was told in an entertaining style, Harten related the tragic events that marred the very first B-52 bombing raid of the Vietnam War, which was launched from Andersen AFB, in Guam. He described how time slowed down as he actually saw the other bomber sweep past them, seem to have missed, and then light the sky with a fireball of burning JP-4 jet fuel. The excitement was far from over when Harten managed to escape the plunging bomber, as he descended into the low-lying typhoon. Nor were his travails over when he stabilized in the water, because the rescue seaplane (an SA-16 Albatross) that arrived to pull him out of the raging ocean soon crashed as well! Fortunately this happened near an island or we might never have heard from Lt Harten again.

After many years, as related in Don Harten's book, *Arc Light One*, he came to realize that he had been driven by what is known as *survivor's guilt* after this accident. The result was four more tours in SEA, a total of 156 combat missions in the F-105 (a full tour only required 100 missions; like Karl Richter before him, Harten had to get a waiver so he could continue his tour), and even 30 combat sorties in the F-111, which had a very troubled introduction into the war.

Harten, who joined TLCB at the reunion, stayed after the banquet and the two drawings to chat with anyone who wanted to. Fascinated brothers clustered around him, and some purchased his book, of which he had a few copies (a portion of every sale goes into our Assistance fund). Once again we had an outstanding reunion speaker, of whom the highest compliment is to say, "you had to be there to appreciate it." We hope to see Don at Dayton next year.