

I asked Larry Zacker if I could publish his daily diary of his trip back to Thailand in 2002 on our 635th Website. He agreed, but asked me to review this first-hand account and whittle the story down in size, first. In my attempt to do so, I realized that I kept feeling as though I was there, in Thailand, with Larry, the entire time. While only the very first few days pertained to the 635th at U-Tapao, every one of us that served in Thailand can probably relate to many of the situations within this daily diary. I know from personal experience that nothing is as valuable as a daily diary and the information contained therein when information is entered daily while it's fresh in the mind. For that reason, I have eliminated very little and spent the major portion of my time, reformatting and highlighting the text for easier and more enjoyable reading by all. What a wonderful trip down memory lane, Larry!

Thanks for sharing this with us!
Dave Broeker – TDH Webmaster

Larry Zacker's Account of his Return Visit to U-Tapao RTNA – May 19, 2002

Sgt Larry Zacker was assigned to the 635th SPS K-9 Section from 1971 – 1972

U-Tapao Cemetery

Sunday, May 19, 2002

Had a very busy and productive day. My friend, Wanchai, took me from Bangkok to Pattaya enroute to U-Tapao. I took video of Pattaya Beach from the North end to the South end, along the beach road. Wanchai then took me up to the Royal Cliffs on the South of Pattaya City and I took a panorama of Pattaya, from the Royal Thai Navy Radio Station. There was an annual celebration in progress at the statue of the Father of the Royal Thai Navy.

We then headed toward Sattahip enroute to U-Tapao. Wanchai telephoned Cdr. Satit from a phone booth and told him we were close to U-Tapao and Cdr. Satit told Wanchai he would call ahead for us. When we arrived at the main gate, we were instructed to follow a Royal Thai Navy Officer (he was saluted at every checkpoint) to the residence of Captain Thammawat Marlai, Commander, Security Battalion of U-Tapao. Now remember, this is Sunday at approximately noon, on his day off.

After visiting with Captain Thammawat and his wife, Captain Thammawat telephoned for a large map of U-Tapao to be brought to us. A Royal Thai Naval military vehicle arrived driven by a RTN Officer with what the USAF calls captain bars, but I do not know what navy rank that is. After locating the canine kennels on the map, Captain Thammawat and the other officer led us to the old kennels. I did not remember how big U-Tapao was until seeing it again and on my return journey from near the beach to the kennels.

I started to recognize some of the areas hidden away in my old brain and as we drove around the north end of the runway, I was surprised how close it was to the Sattahip-Ban Chang Highway. We were parallel on the inside of the fence of U-Tapao at an equal distance from the fence as the outside highway. I had no trouble recognizing the Hilltop Diner, which was occupied with activity around it, making me think it was a living quarters now.

Now, it gets interesting...we arrive at the old kennel area where the road ends in the familiar circle...and I feel lost. I thought we were told that the area was now a Thai area occupied by Thai families, but it is a long abandoned building, in disrepair. I see the cement wall where the posting truck used to back up to for loading and a different building where the main kennels used to be. Nobody has occupied this building for at least ten years...and the surrounding area is a jungle with no view of Buddha Mountain or the runway.

When I get behind the building, I found the old kennels...all the chain link fencing is long removed, but the cement partitions are still in place with the "water bucket" ring still attached to the wall. In case you forgot, the water bucket ring is what the pails fit into to prevent the bucket from being overturned. There is sunlight coming through what is left of the roof and the building has not seen activity in many, many years...but that is not why I'm here...I have a mission, Mr. Phelps, not unlike Mission Impossible...

It didn't take me long to figure out that the photo of the alleged K-9 Cemetery was not taken in the waist high jungle area. It is impossible for that much growth to occur in less than one year from the clean-cut area in the photo. Yes, I brought the K-9 Cemetery 2002 photo and the Grooming Area 1969 photo with me for comparison. On later reflection, I believe the photo was taken by the Hilltop Diner, and not the kennels...which is why we were told the kennel is now a living quarters, he was in the wrong location.

Captain Thammawat Marlai, Commander, Security Battalion of U-Tapao and his assistant with the "captain bars" led the way through the jungle (by stomping a path) trying to locate the cemetery area.

We searched for any landmark to help identify the grooming area, then the tree next to the cemetery without success. Most times we were unable to see the kennels and I would have to move ten feet in various directions to get my bearings...and continue the search. Now it is Sunday afternoon at approximately 1:30PM, which if you forgot, is the heat of the day. Did I forget to mention the mosquitoes and bull ants that found us on our trek???

Captain Thammawat finally matched the location of the power poles in the grooming photo and the mountains in the distant background to get a perspective where the grooming photo was taken. From where we were, we could not see the runway, only the top of a Thai Airways hanger, nor was Buddha mountain visible...I cannot express too much on how grown up the area is now!!! Not to fret, I did take panorama shots from several areas that were in the vicinity of the cemetery, only I didn't know when I got the shot...it was impossible to locate. Captain Thammawat said he was sure we were in the correct spot, and I agreed with him from lining up the photo and landmarks. I have video of the area, but no way of knowing exactly where the area is now located.

I found the kennels, but not the cemetery, per se', but found the vicinity. The photo we were told was the cemetery is incorrect and I could not find a tree similar to that one anywhere around the kennel area. There is jungle and jungle and no view of landmarks from the grooming area.

There is comfort in knowing that our dogs are resting in a place that is quiet and serene and far away from any activity. They are surrounded by only nature and are not being disturbed by anybody. The jungle now proved to be a blessing more than the curse that first faced me. You will be able to see this when you view a copy of the video.

It was a long journey back in time, but worth the time and energy from my point of view.

Now for the kudos...Captain Thammawat was a very gracious host, even more so since it was his day off and a Sunday. Captain Thammawat sincerely worked very hard to help me find the location of the

cemetery, and there is no way I could have found the area without his assistance. We spent the better part of an hour tromping back and forth through jungle growth, without 100% proof we found the exact spot. We had four sets of eyes going from photo to current landmarks in the heat of the day, and all I got was helpful encouragement and told not to worry about their comfort, that they were glad to help. Their sincerity was very noticeable and it made me remember why we fell in love with the country and the people so long ago...The Land of Smiles...was there for me to see and appreciate and still unwavering.

I cannot go on enough about how much I appreciated the warm and friendly help from Captain Thammawat and his assistant. My friend, Wanchai, spoke very highly of Cdr. Satit and how helpful he was. Captain Thammawat and Cdr. Satit are old friends and Captain Thammawat said he knew something special was coming when he received a call from Cdr. Satit, since it had been a while since they had spoken to each other. I will call Cdr. Satit later today and thank him for his assistance in granting me access to U-Tapao.

It is now 5:05 AM and I am just now finishing...a lot of information that I didn't want to forget to pass along...

Live from Bangkok,
Larry

Visit to Ayutthaya

Tuesday, May 21, 2002 (Day 4)

My wife, Nit, and I went to the local market place to see what was there and if we would find anything to attract our attention. Since we are staying with a friend outside of the city limit of Bangkok, there is no tourist type items for sell, only normal everyday items.

Nit purchased items to cover our household needs such as towels, light blankets and extra pillows, plus food items for daily consumption. There is no need to store food in the house and do cooking since there are many food vendors available. The only choices you need to make are what you want to eat, and who makes it the best.

At approximately 12:40 PM we are called to meet the friend of our host to take us to visit Ayutthaya, the ancient capital of Thailand. We also pick up our host on the way, who took half a day off work to join us. The part I didn't realize was that Ayutthaya was about a two hour drive from Bangkok, or it would have been if we didn't stop at various places...I was out numbered three women to just me.

We stop at an area where the different cultures of Thailand are displayed in life size models of homes, boat and normal day life from the various parts of Thailand. There is a woman on a loom weaving Thai silk the old fashion way, with the silk balls on display to show what it looks like in raw form. Although this is interesting, it is not what I want to see and film; we are still about an hour away from the ancient ruins of Ayutthaya.

I finally convince everyone (as in whining) that I want to see Ayutthaya before the sun sets and I cannot get any video. We are now on the way to Ayutthaya and I can read the signs as it gets closer. Then when the sign says go right, we go left! Now I can almost smell Ayutthaya, but we are going in the wrong direction. I asked, "Did I read the sign wrong or is Ayutthaya in the other direction?".

I am told that they (host and her friend) want to show me a place nearby on Chinese culture. I tried in vain to tell them that I did not come to Thailand to see Chinese culture and wanted to see Ayutthaya, but I was talking to women...and no matter what language you speak, they are still women. As we come to an intersection, I see a sign showing Ayutthaya straight and we go left. Now I speak up again more forcefully (whining louder) and tell them I will not be able to video the Chinese location and Ayutthaya both so I would rather stop on the return trip to see Chinese culture. I finally get through (tired of hearing me whine) and we make a U-turn and head toward Ayutthaya.

As we get close to Ayutthaya, I see a dome of what looks like the top of the ruins of Ayutthaya I have only seen in photographs and I get more excited. All of a sudden we turn in the opposite direction and head to a well-known Thai Temple in Ayutthaya with a very large Buddha taking up most of the inside of the temple. I took some video, but the image was so large that I could not zoom wide enough to get the entire image in one shot. I thank our host for showing me this beautiful temple, but explain we are losing daylight and we are near the ruins that I came to see. We leave without any whining from me and I think, 'Ah-ha, I finally wore them down, but still leery since I don't know the way'.

Finally we arrive at the ruins and it is a very large complex of old and new buildings, elephant rides for tourist, and wall-to-wall vendors selling wares. We go to the ticket booth and the sign reads (in Thai) "Thai People 10 Baht". In English, the sign reads "ADMISSION 30 BAHT". Now I know most people would be upset about having to pay the extra 20 Baht (about 50 cents), but I have learned to accept it. My logic is that we do the same thing by offering discounts to locals, which is a easier way to hide the differences.

It is now about 4:30PM local time and very hot. We have drank several bottles of water, but it never seems to be enough. The heat bothers Nit, so she sits under a shady tree and uses our drinking water to splash on herself to cool down. My hosts and I visit the ruins and I video tape what is left of a once large and beautiful place. I learned it was destroyed when Burma ransacked the Ayutthaya in 1767 A.D. for the gold that covered the Buddha images and other decorations. There is a sign asking that no photos be taken of the Buddha images that had the heads severed by the Burmese invaders, which I honored. There is not enough time left to visit everything, but I got the video I had come for.

We then visit the shops on the grounds and found many tourist type items for sell at what locals call "high prices", but with 42.5 Baht to a dollar, even the inflated prices are cheap. I bought a couple of t-shirts with Ayutthaya on one and a tiger on the other. We then headed back to Bangkok and toward the evening rush hour.

When we get close to Bangkok, it is around 7:00PM. We stop at a local "steak house", because the Thai's believe I came all the way to Thailand to eat American food. Nit and I ordered steaks (from U.S. according to menu) and Nit ordered a pork steak for our host and her friend a tuna salad. This was the first time I have eaten American food in Thailand that actually tasted like it was supposed to. Nit and I ate all our steak (rare for Nit...normal for me) and laughed as our host was unfamiliar with western utensils.

When we arrived back home, we were all tired from the long day and turned in so we could get an early start for tomorrow...

Visit to Floating Market

Wednesday, May 22, 2002 (Day 5)

We started the day off early, leaving at 6:30AM enroute to The Floating Market. It had been thirty years since my last visit from Ban Chang when I was stationed at U-Tapao Royal Thai Naval Airfield. I thought it was in Bangkok, but missed it by about 80 kilometers (50 miles). We drove approximately 90 minutes over Bangkok, on the expressway, heading south toward Chon Buri. With the expressway now in full operation, you can travel through Bangkok quickly for 40 Baht (about one dollar).

We arrived at The Floating Market around 8:00AM and it was not crowded since it was the week day. The Floating Market is now a tourist stop instead of the trade from passing boats that it is famous for. We started off by paying 20 Baht for parking and was next to the entrance. We then ordered Thai noodle soup off a boat tied to the pier since we had not stopped for breakfast. The prices are marked up by local standard prices, but are still cheap with the dollar worth about 42.5 baht. The days of commerce from the boats are pretty much over and most all the action is for the tourist.

We hired a boat and oar person for 250 Baht (\$5.95). Our boat was powered by a little old lady, which kept our speed to a minimum. We started off down the canal and rounded the first corner of the route and saw shops at the water's edge on both sides. The canal is about thirty feet wide with boats going in both directions, some with tourist and others with sellers. Traffic jams in the canal are common, which adds to the authenticity of the old days. They have trenched an additional canal for more waterside shops, and they make sure to paddle past each and every shop.

Nit saw a reed instrument I have been wanting, even though I cannot play it, and she bought several of them for gifts when we get home. She also found two Thai dresses that were a "must have" and at a reasonable price. When we finished our boat ride and was heading toward the vehicle, we were approached by vendors with two small display plates about the size of a coffee cup saucer. One plate had Nit and White's photo on it and the other one had mine. The photos were taken when we rounded the first turn of our canoe trip. The posted price was 150 Baht (\$3.53) each, but they immediately offered them to us for 100 Baht (\$2.36) each, when they saw we were not the normal tourist. Of course, we bought them both to keep them from falling into enemy hands...then headed back toward Bangkok.

When we arrived near The Temple of the Emerald Buddha around 11:30AM and White (our host) parked on the grounds of Thammaset University using her student identification card. She took us to the campus cafeteria which is set up much like a "food court" in the malls back home. I had chicken over white rice and fried rice, both, since the servings were small (for me, but not Thai students).

Thammaset University is located on the Chao Phraya River across from the hospital where Wanchai and White both work. I was able to video some of the activity on the Chao Phraya River, including the hospital in the background. The Chao Phraya River is the major waterway running through Bangkok, and a source for much activity from commerce to tourism.

We then took a Tuk-Tuk (three wheeled motored Taxi) to The Temple of the Emerald Buddha, located in the compound of the Grand Palace. Of course, there are two entry gates, one for foreigners at 200 Baht (\$4.72) each and the other "free" gate for Thais. The 200 Baht included a Guide to the Grand Palace (in English) and admission to the Royal Thai Decorations and Coins Pavilion (which Thais have to pay 10 Baht to enter), and one other ticket to the Vimanmek Mansion Museum (which went unused).

The temperature was very hot and we enjoyed the air conditioned coin pavilion as much, if not more, than the displays of beautiful ornate jewelry of gold and precious stones. After going through the exhibits, we headed back out into the heat of the day to view and video the Grand Palace.

There are no photos or video allowed in The Temple of the Emerald Buddha, but I was able to zoom from the exterior to get a photo of the display. There are three costumes for the Emerald Buddha's with two of the costumes on display in the coin pavilion and the current costume worn by the Emerald Buddha in the Temple. The three seasons are the Rainy Season, the Summer Season, and the Winter Season. The Emerald Buddha dates back to 1434 AD where it was discovered in a "chedi", which is a solid monument built to enshrine the relics the Buddha, his disciples and the ashes of the dead.

I then took video of the temples and displays on the grounds of The Grand Palace and a couple of photos of Nit and me, as evidence that I really was there. We lucked out when we were leaving and caught the changing of the guards. I videotaped as much as I could with them marching to a flute and drum, in their white jacketed uniforms.

We then made our way out of the Grand Palace compound. We viewed a few shops and then caught a air conditioned "Taxi - Meter" back to Thammasat University to get our vehicle. It was a 35 Baht ride, which is the basic metered fare. It wasn't a long distance to travel, but the heat of the day made it too far to walk.

We make it back home and fought for the shower to cool off...as usual, I lost...

Shopping In Bangkok

Thursday, May 23, 2002 (Day 6)

We are left to fend for ourselves today since White ran out of excuses to take off from work. We walk to the local market to get food for breakfast and stop by the salon where Nit had gotten her hair and nails done. It is owned by a woman from Nit's hometown and her husband owns and drives a taxi. Nit arranges for him to take us for currency exchange and then shopping at the Bprathoo Nam Market. Even though he has a "Taxi Meter", Nit tells them we will pay a flat rate to be determined later. This is normal practice if they know who you are. We exchange our currency first, then head to the market. We tell the taxi to come back in two hours to pick us up and head inside.

Nit goes in ahead of me and I stop at the first shop with T-shirts on display. I buy several before going on the look for Nit, who tends to disappear figuring I can track her down. I catch up to her in the midst of buying some Thai style clothing and get to carry her purchases. As usual, when I go with Nit, I become the pack buffalo and she thinks I can carry the world. We finish the first row of vendors and move to the next row, which appears to be the "female" row. Nit is elated and continues to buy all "I" can carry, and then some. We move to the next row, which appears to be the "male" row and she heads to the next row. I tell her we missed a row and head down the row before she can protest. I find some shops and buy several items of clothing, mostly shorts for 190 Baht (about \$4.50) per pair.

On our way back to the street to wait for our taxi, we pass a luggage store and buy two pieces for 650 Baht (\$15.30) each. Both have wheels and a pull handle, with the smaller one also with straps as a backpack. We put all our purchases in the two suitcases and head on out of the market. We are forty minutes ahead of our meeting time, but have the driver's cellular phone number to call him for early pick up. We then discover a new problem...there are no pay telephones in sight. Nit walks to one of over 1,000 7-Eleven stores in Bangkok, but only finds a "Card Phone". That type of telephone uses credit card style pre-paid cards, but will not take any Baht coins. She walks back to the pick-up point, hot and cranky, and complains that she can't find a telephone booth. I tell her we only have about 25 more minutes and we can just wait for our ride.

I pick up a couple of "around the house" shorts for 150 Baht (\$3.55) total. She wanted 80 Baht each, but I told her 150 for two, and she agreed. Don't want to spend all my Baht in one place...

We continue to wait and wave off every empty taxi in Bangkok, while enjoying the heat and exhaust fumes of passing vehicles. That combination always makes the wait so much more enjoyable, especially with Nit adding to my enjoyment with her descriptive definitions of the wait. Finally, our taxi arrives and he has a big smile on his face, to match the one Nit is displaying at seeing air conditioning arriving. We enjoy an uneventful ride home and when we arrive, Nit tells the driver to figure the price and she will go pay his wife. Yes, we men suffer the world over...

Nit felt better after a shower and started trying on her new clothes while I ate some fried rice and had my last Singha out of the refrigerator. Nit headed to clear our debt with the taxi and I stay home to take a shower to cool off. I then head for 7-Eleven to pick up some Singha Gold, which you have to wait until after 11:00AM to buy. Singha Gold is their version of light beer (4.8%) compared to Singha (6.0%), and it does taste as strong. I usually drink it when available, but have gotten use to the flavor of both.

I stopped by the salon and Nit was eating with the group there. She raved at how good everything was and I was offered to join them. I declined since I had eaten fried rice before leaving the house and they tested my Thai speaking ability. As I mentioned, the Thais enjoy it when I butcher their language, and I was quizzed so they could learn my viewpoint on things. They enjoyed my version of

our shopping excursion for the day when I explained that Nit shopped and I carried everything like a buffalo...then when she was too hot and tired, it was time to leave...I also told them that Melanie (our daughter) understood my situation, since she had emailed Mom and told her to "relax, you're on vacation" and they all howled with laughter.

I headed back home and passed the laundry where we dropped our clothes off in the morning and I told him Nit would be by to pick the items up on her way home. I arrived home, turned on T.V. to watch some boxing and opened my Singha Gold. It was now 5:30PM and I had been up since 3:30AM, more due to jet lag still trying to catch up. I finished my Singha Gold, or maybe it finished me, but when the six o'clock news came on, I dozed off...

Nit woke me up at 6:30PM thinking I might be dead since I didn't hear her knock on the door (three times according to her). I stayed awake a few minutes and dozed until White came home from work and I said hello through the fog still in my head. Next thing I know it's 3:30AM and I'm awake...time to document another day in The Land of Smiles, before I forget...

Prepare for flight to Khorat

Friday, May 24, 2002 (Day 7)

I hung around the house and tried to pack for our flight to Khorat tomorrow. We have already bought too many items for our return trip and will leave our main suitcase here and take the new small suitcase and the large drop off suitcase which has been unopened since arriving in Thailand. Nit goes to the local beauty salon and I walk around the area getting a feel of where things are located. Nit sets up a taxi to take us to Bangkok Airport tomorrow and we head to the house. Later in the evening, Wanchai calls to tell us to enjoy our trip and then asks to speak to White. As normal, our plans get changed when Wanchai tells White to cancel the taxi and take us to the airport. I told White that from now on, I will not let her sister or brother talk to her after talking to me, since they always change my plans...oh well...this is Thailand.

Khorat

Saturday, May 25, 2002 (Day 8)

We wake up early and get ready to catch our flight. White gets up with us and then gets her vehicle to take us to Bangkok Airport. There are two flights a day from Bangkok to Khorat and we prefer the morning flight since we will arrive in the daylight hours...it has been five years since we have been in Huay Taleang. Our flight is delayed due to reported bad weather in Khorat, but Nit saw the pilot running to the crew shuttle bus and over heard that the pilot had overslept. Our plane is a small commuter propjet that holds about 25 people maximum and it was full. I sat by the window to video an aerial view of Thailand since this plane would not reach the heights that the larger jets fly at.

We arrive at Nakorn Ratchsima Airport about an hour after we take off and I wonder how it is cost effective since there are only two flights a day with fares at 2,140 Baht (about \$51.00) round trip per person. The airport is mostly deserted, except for airport workers and new arriving passengers. We find a telephone and cannot call our friend who flew with us from Tampa to Bangkok and said would pick us up. Later learned that you have to dial a zero first since everything is treated like long distance with the proliferation of cellular telephones.

We catch a ride with a taxi driver who is also a Thai Policeman. Told Nit that we would not have to worry since he was in uniform. The ride took us about an hour since we were about 44 kilometers (28 miles) and he drove slow for a Thai. When we arrive, there is nobody home, but the house is unlocked, so we go in. A couple of minutes later, Jack (nephew) came running home and excited to see us, since nobody knew we were in Thailand. The neighbors called Nit's older sister, Booie, on her cell phone and she was home about ten minutes later from the fields on her motorcycle. We sat around and caught up on the latest, and then the rains came...with lots of water, lightning and thunder...and it lasted about an hour.

Booie's son, Gai, and his wife Mai, arrived from Khorat after learning we had arrived. Yo (nephew) brought his Video CD player from his house so we could watch the Video CD I had made covering our 1979 trip and laughed at how young everybody looked. Booie also liked the Sweden VCD so she could show everybody what Sweden looked like. We were in Sweden visiting their sister, Lamduan and her husband Bosse. The video showed all three sisters at Bosse' mother's house in the country. We later found an infamous "F--- You" lizard that came into the house looking for insects and Gob (Booie's husband) put it outside...

Party and Rocket Launch

Sunday, May 26, 2002 (Day 9)

Woke up around 3:30AM as usual and took a shower and had a cup of coffee. Nit and I later walked to the market about a mile away. Booie and Mai met us there with motorcycles to carry the food home. Since I needed the exercise, I walked back home and Nit rode with her sister on the back of the motorcycle. Gai met me about halfway home and said he was sent to pick me up. Thanked him, but told him I wanted to walk.

At around 8:20AM, the party started with Nit's cousin Awn. Before long there was quite of few people sitting around and singing Thai songs. Took some video of the event and snacked on some food...

Boo, Goong and Blah (nieces) came in by train and Boo was first to be picked up and dropped off. I sat and talked with them for a while and enjoy the visit. One of the guys from the party told me there were more people that I could talk to, but I told him I couldn't see anybody, since my nieces were now there...

Awn went and got a 6-Pack truck and took us to the local temple where they were having a "rocket launch" contest to see who's homemade rocket could go higher and further from the launch pad. Videotaped the event, but left before it was over due to the heat...it was around 1:00 PM with very little shade available.

Goong called her father, Tooy, on his cell phone and told him we were there. He said he would come see us tomorrow and I sat and talked with Boo and Goong some more. They both showed me the dollar bill I gave them on my last visit (1997) and I showed them the 50 Baht note Boo gave me on the last visit and the school pictures I still had of them in my wallet. They protested at the school pictures and Goong gaive me some "sticker" photos of her and Blah. Boo wasn't in the photos, but they promised to make some more of all three of them when they got back to Khorat.

Lazy Day

Monday, May 27, 2002 (Day 10)

Got up at 4:15AM and the first one up as usual. Stayed home all day and watched while everybody played a Thai game, which included betting. The amounts were normally 10 Baht (\$.25) to 20 Baht (\$.50). Everybody took the evening bus back to Khorat.

Off to College

Tuesday, May 28, 2002 (Day 11)

Left early to take Yo to Khorat for signing into his Dorm at C-Tech. We went to buy some furniture to keep his stuff locked up since there were three students to a room. We stopped and picked up a cellular phone for Yo and a Video CD player for Booie. We then went to visit Goong, Boo and Blah's at their home.

Boo took me to the new bowling alley on the top floor of Klang Plaza to see Tooy at his work. Tooy went back to the girl's place with us and we sat around and talked. We all later went gold shopping and Nit bought some earrings to take back home and I got a new setting for my Buddha. Since it is a good one, we waited while it was put together. They offered us about \$17.00 for the old gold setting, so I told them no and kept it.

We rented a truck and everybody headed to Huay Taleang with us. Drank some beer while the Thai game was being played again. Yoong (brother-in-law) came back today and stopped in and played too. I sat up late and talked with Goong until about a hour and half before the truck was due to pick them up to go back to Khorat. They woke me up and I saw them off..

Nagging Cough

Wednesday, May 29, 2002 (Day 12)

After everybody left at 5:15AM, I slept for a couple of more hours then got up and took a shower. Nit went to make a new Thai ID card and I stayed home with Yo. Continued to have a nagging cough I brought from home and now had a runny nose to go with it. Nit came home and brings me some Thai noodle soup at 11:30AM by my watch, but it was really 2:55PM because my watch had stopped at 11:30AM. Awn came by with the whiskey Nit bought him for taking us around and her to get her Thai ID. Awn's friends came in and out throughout the day, but I was still feeling bad from my cough. After I ate fried rice for supper, had one beer with Awn and his friends, then took some Dimetapp and went to bed. Nit checked on me several times up to 1:00AM when she woke me up. Now she was sick from eating some food that didn't agree with her stomach. I sat up with her and then made her some coffee after everything had finished coming up. She finally dropped off to sleep, but by this time I was fully awake and stayed up a few more hours before turning in.

Sick Cow

Thursday, May 30, 2002 (Day 13)

Boo, Blah, Joe, King and Gop came from Khorat with some medicine for Gob's cow's leg. After giving the cow the shot of medicine, we hired a truck to take us to Surin Province to get Yoong's son Wood. Boo wanted to go but had to work at 6:00PM. I told her I would pay her salary for the day, so she called in and took the night off. We got back late since it was a 3 hour drive both ways and we were within 20 km (12.5 miles) of Cambodia during the trip. Everybody stayed the night in Huay Talaeng.

Back to Khorat

Friday, May 31, 2002 (Day 14)

Everybody caught the morning bus to Khorat and we stayed home the rest of the day. Gob took me to use the internet for 20 Baht (\$.50) per hour. I used it for 35 minutes and the guy tried to charge me 25 baht until I told him in Thai that the sign in the window said 20 Baht. He immediately backed off the price hike when he found out I could read and speak Thai.

Shopping in Khorat

Saturday, June 1, 2002 (Day 15)

Took Yo to school early in the morning. The dorm was emptying out when we got there and nobody was there to give Yo a key to his room. We then took him to the school (about 8 km from the dorm). We left him there and then spent the day in Khorat. Boo and Joke took me shopping, but Boo had not slept enough, so I sent them home and shopped by myself. Bought two language dictionaries and a pair of "no back" dress shoes for 760 Baht (\$18.05) and headed back to the girl's place. We stayed late so we could spend time with Goong when she got off work. We all headed to Huay Taleang, except Joke and Boo, who had to work at 6:00 PM.

Kicking Back, Staying Home

Sunday, June 2, 2002 (Day 16)

Everybody went back to Khorat on the bus. Stayed home and drank with Awn and some Thai friends. Nit's dad got out of the hospital and we had to pay 640 Baht (\$15.25) to get him released. They brought him to Booie's to recuperate. Awn took Booie, Nit and me to the town of Hin Dat to treat us to dinner. When we got home, it was getting late, so we went to bed.

Standing on the Bus

Monday, June 3, 2002 (Day 17)

Headed to Khorat to get some Thai currency since we are getting low and the banks were closed on Saturday and Sunday. Boo took me shopping and I bought 4 Thai Map Wallets, sandals, two shorts and seven Carabao VCDs. I bought Boo two pair of pants for work for 380 Baht (\$9.00) for taking me around. We stopped to get some sticker photos of Boo, but she made me take two with her too. Nit and I caught the bus back to Huay Taleang and had to stand up for the first 30 minutes until people got off and emptied seats for us.

Shopping in Khorat

Tuesday, June 3, 2002 (Day 18)

Took the bus back to Khorat to meet Yo during his three hour break at 1:00PM. Went to Klang Plaza with Boo, Mai and Blah and bought some rubber flip flops for around the house. Joke, King, and Gop took Yo to a field to practice riding his new motorcycle. Yoong drove the motorcycle to Huay Taleang while we took the bus. It rained most of the way and Yoong was cold and soaked from his ride.

Heard on the news that some school kids were shot on a small baht bus on the way to school in Lop Buri by three men firing M-16s on full auto.

Stayed Home-Took Videos

Wednesday, June 4, 2002 (Day 19)

Gob drove me around Huay Taleang to take some video of the town from the back of his motorcycle. Stayed home all day.

Hooking Up with Tom Ozuna

Thursday, June 5, 2002 (Day 20)

Got up at 5:00AM to wait for our 5:30AM taxi to Khorat Airport on the way to meet with Tom Ozuna. Since we had plenty of time, we stopped to buy some of Thailand's most popular grilled chicken, only found in Khorat. We bought some for the taxi driver for his lunch, some for us to eat while waiting for the plane and two more for Wanchai and White. We took a meter taxi from Bangkok Airport to White's house and it was 65 Baht plus a 50 Baht surcharge for the airport, so I gave the driver 200 Baht (about \$4.77). I called and left a message at Tom's hotel and then hung out around the house.

Tom and I were in Basic Training, Security Police School, K-9 School and AZR (Combat Training) together prior to be assigned to U-Tapao RTNA. This last time I had seen Tom was in October 1972.

Tom called me around 11:00AM saying he was just getting on a Chao Praya River tour boat and we agreed to meet at his hotel at 7:00PM for dinner. Nit went to the beauty salon for mud pack, make up, nails and shampoo. After she left the salon, we went to pick up two Thai dresses she had made and she wore one to Tom's hotel. It was a 20 plus kilometer ride through Bangkok traffic and the meter said 130 Baht. I gave him 200 Baht and he thanked us and drove off. I called up to Tom's room and he came down to meet us and take us back to his room.

Tom looked pretty much the same except for the goatee and longer hair, and maybe a few more pounds. We went to his room and met his wife Kathy and their daughter Kimberly. On the way to the restaurant, we met their two sons, Eric and Kyle. It didn't seem like it had been almost 30 years since I last saw Tom and we had a good time. It was around 12:30 AM before we left the restaurant and Nit said we needed to go home since Tom, Kathy and the kids were going to the King's Palace early in the morning.

When we got back home, it was about 1:30AM and White was sound asleep. We were tired so we went to sleep while watching TV.

Fried Rice and 7 Eleven

Friday, June 6, 2002 (Day 21)

Stayed around the house most of the day, except for the market trip. Didn't find anything I really wanted, so told Nit to pick me up some fried rice close to the house and went to 7 Eleven to get some drinks and ice. When Nit got back home, we ate and I laid down and fell asleep until 3:30 PM. Started packing our bags for our return trip and to see if we needed to buy any more suitcases. When all was done, we needed one more, which we would pick up in Khorat.

Sweltering Hot Day-Drank Some Beer

Saturday, June 8, 2002 (Day 22)

Flew back to Khorat and bought grilled chicken after we left the airport by the same taxi. Had Yo call Boo and tell her we were back in Huay Taleang, and we talked to Nit's youngest sister, Lamyuang, who was at the girl's house visiting. She said she would come visit us on Sunday.

Stayed home all day and it was sweltering...the hottest day since we have been in Thailand. Drank some beer with Yoong for a while and then went to bed at 8:30PM.

Death in Family

Sunday, June 9, 2002 (Day 23)

Lamyuang, Boo, Blah and girl friend came in by train. Took some video and it rained really hard. Boo, Yo and their friend took the 1:45PM bus to Khorat. We got a call that Uncle Lek died, so will probably head to Non Thai tomorrow. Boo took the throw away camera to Khorat to process the film and I gave her money to buy another throw away camera. Told her to take pictures of everybody for me before giving me the new camera back.

Nothing going on and everybody was watching a Thai Classical VCD that Nit had bought, so I went to bed at 7:30PM due to boredom.

Need Money and Suitcases

Monday, June 10, 2002 (Day 24)

Woke up around 2:00AM and took a shower and shaved. Don't know what time we are going to Non Thai, but need to stop in Khorat on the way to get more currency and buy another suitcase. We left around 10:30AM enroute to Khorat and arrived around 11:30AM. Went to Klang Plaza and Nit bought two for one suitcases. All waited in vehicle while I walked to the bank for currency. Joke, Boo and their friend hollered at me from their motorcycle while I was walking and then went to bank with me. We then went to the film shop and picked up the photos. After returning to Klang Plaza where we were parked, we headed to Non Thai.

We stopped to visit with Nit's cousin, Sunan and then went to Uncle Lek's home, where the body was laying in state. The Monks were schedule to arrive at 7:00PM and then have a one hour service. Since we arrived around 2:00PM, we have a long wait where Nit could visit with family members she has not seen in years. At 7:00PM, a thunderstorm moved in and stayed until 9:00PM, and the power went out during the storm.

The Monks arrived around 9:00PM and I headed to vehicle since I was tired from sitting for two hours waiting the storm out. Dozed a little while waiting with the car air on. When the driver got in, he couldn't get out due to mud and had to be pushed by four men to get to the road. Left for Huay Taleang around 10:15PM. Lamyuang and Blah was with us and Blah took some video for me.

Visiting

Tuesday, June 11, 2002 (Day 25)

Most went back to Non Thai for the cremation of the body, but I stayed home. Boo and Joke arrived by train to spend the day with us. Went to the weekly market with Boo and bought some VCDs and an outfit for her neighbor's grandson, Tiger. Got food and called Yoong to come get us on the motorcycle. Hung out the rest of the day with Boo and Joke. Boo said she would not be back and she and Joke left at 3:45PM. Lamyuang and Blah left about an hour later.

Nit arrived from Non Thai about 9:00PM and Goong was with them. Talked with Goong until about 10:30PM and then went to bed.

Video Rice Field Plowing

Wednesday, June 12, 2002 (Day 26)

First up and took shower on our last full day in Huay Taleang. Around 9:00AM Boo and Joke got off the bus from Khorat. Boo brought gifts for us and Joke didn't want her to come by herself since she only had three hours sleep. Goong, Joke and Boo left for Khorat on the 10:30AM bus and I went with Gob to video the rice field being plowed. When we got back home, Yo, Boo and Joke were there.

Yo had gotten off the bus after Gob took me to the fields and Boo and Joke got off the bus in the market and came back. They stayed until 3:15PM when Boo and Joke caught the bus back to Khorat.

All nieces and nephews (eight total) came by train to send us off. Boo laughed when I complained at her and said she swapped days off to come and Joke paid 100 Baht to get off. Goong already had the day off, but would have to work tomorrow.

Flight Cancelled

Thursday, June 13, 2002 (Day 27)

Heard the kids get up at 4:00AM to catch the bus to Khorat. I told them I thought the bus started running at 5:00AM and waited with them until 5:15AM. Boo, Joke, Goong, Blah and their friend left for good this time...Nit got up before they left, but was in the shower when the bus came. We said our goodbyes to everybody while waiting for our ride that arrived at 6:30AM, and we headed for Khorat Airport. We arrived around 7:30AM and checked in. We were told at 8:00AM the flight was cancelled and a car would take us to Bangkok Airport, where we could get a refund for our tickets.

We left by a 9 passenger van at 8:20AM and arrived at Bangkok Airport right before noon. We made one pit stop on the way where we bought some food at a mini mart. Was surprised when Nit got a full refund and found out the ride to Bangkok was free, except for the extra time it took, which made us really tired. Caught a taxi to White's house for 100 Baht (w/tip) and waited for White to get back from her lunch.

Noi Nah and White took me back to Pantip Plaza to buy replacement CDs. Got back home and told Nit to meet White and Noi Nah downstairs to eat and I stayed home and ate the fried rice Nit bought me earlier. Watch the world soccer playoffs until they came in and then fell asleep on the floor with the fan blowing...

Last Full Day in Thailand

Friday, June 14, 2002 (Day 28)

Last full day in Thailand. I woke up at 2:00AM and checked my CDs and the internet. Fell back asleep and the phone rang at 4:30AM, and it was Wanpen (White's sister and our friend back home). I asked if she wanted to talk to Nit or White and she said no. Talked with her a little and then hung up and I went back to sleep.

Trip Home

Saturday, June 15, 2002 (Day 29)

Wanchai came early to White's house to take us to the airport. I thought the plane left at 7:00AM, but when we checked in, I found out it was scheduled to leave at 6:00AM, so we just had enough time to head to the gate. Took one last look out the window as we lifted off and then settled back in my seat for the long flight home...