

# AMCHAM Thailand - Tales From Its Unrecorded History

Written by: David Lyman

*The following is an abbreviated version of the speech on AMCHAM's unrecorded history delivered by David Lyman at the Monthly Luncheon on March 24 at the Dusit Thani Hotel.*

## THE ASSIGNMENT

Being the old timer that I am and having been active in AMCHAM for the past 47 years, I was presented an assignment to give a talk today entitled "60 Years of AMCHAM History – in 30 Minutes". 30 minutes? I can do things in 30 seconds or in an hour, but 30 minutes? Now how to get off the hook? I remembered an old U.S. Army slogan which goes like this: "The difficult we do immediately. The impossible takes a little longer. Miracles on demand." So I conjured up a miracle - focus on the unrecorded old events and anecdotes – and if my facts are off, well, who else is around who remembers enough to correct me?

## THE START

Back in the days after the end of World War II, there was a small group of adventurous American folks who found their way to the "Land of Smiles". Some came to do business on payrolls as representatives of American corporates, some were ex-OSS (forerunner of the CIA) and soldiers of fortune, some were missionaries, some were geologists, miners, foresters, doctors, educators, journalists, bankers, traders, intrepid entrepreneurs, a family of lawyers, and some have found their enchantress in this tropical paradise. It was "Old Siam" as my father would say. All were committed and fascinating characters, unique, steadfast and sturdy, dedicated to seeking their fortunes and futures in this corner of Southeast Asia.

About 60 of these Yankees decided that they should organize their small community. After a couple of iterations starting in about 1947, first as the American Association of Thailand, in September 1955 the idea of an AMCHAM was tabled.

MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN THAILAND

Name of Firm	Name of Individual	Address	Telephone No.
✓ American International Assurance Co. Ltd.	Mr. Adam W. Aitken	Thoresen Bldg.	31744
✓ American International Underwriters, Ltd.	Mr. Reeve Hankins	Thoresen Bldg.	32033
✓ Anarco Enterprises (Thailand) Ltd.	Mr. Lewis Cykman	1171 New Road	32805
✓ Bank of America NT. & SA.	Mr. Lewis E. Davis	1169 New Road	30931-2
Borneo Co. Ltd. The - Kodak Div.	Mr. Norman William Tucker	1041 Silom Rd.	33651
✓ Caltex Oil (Thailand) Ltd.	Mr. J. G. Schaberg	76/78 Patpong Rd.	32907-9
Civil Air Transport	Mr. Walter B. McCarthy	46/48 Patpong Rd.	33741
Diethelm & Co. Ltd.	Mr. W. Salzmann	280 New Road	22411-5
The East Asiatic Co. Ltd.	Mr. Erik J. Jensen	53/55 Oriental Ave.	31020
✓ Gerson & Sons, Ltd.	Mr. H. Gerson	267 Silom Road	32924
✓ Getz Bros. & Co.	Mr. C. E. MacArthur	42 Oriental Ave.	30290
IBM Thailand Co. Ltd.	Mr. Josh-N. Meunier	155 Dinsoh Rd.	23783
The International Engineering Co.	Mr. John D. Westor	30-32 Chartered Bank Lane	30974-6

*First of the three pages listing AMCHAM's founding members*

In 1956 the application to form an association was submitted to the Ministry of Interior. Under the stewardship of my father, Albert Lyman, AMCHAM Thailand was founded by 8 American and 24 other companies. And we have been hectically busy ever since. The rest, as they say, now 60 years later, is history.

## CONSTITUTION

Interesting to me is my observation that the objectives of AMCHAM, as stated

in its successive Constitutions to date, have not changed significantly since first espoused six decades ago. Basically AMCHAM is dedicated to promoting the development of commerce between the U.S. and Thailand, to look after the interests of its members and non-member American citizens, plus 8 other complimentary purposes, and be friends with everybody. The Constitution has not been amended very often, the last time being in 2013 to allow a non-American to be President. Hence Darren Buckley,

a Brit who thinks like an American, so served from 2013 through 2015.

Back in 1973 the Constitution was amended following a quiet revolt lead by some young Turk members, in the likes of Al Eberhardt, Jim Rooney, Bill Zantgraf, Hugh Richardson and me, and a couple of others. The then 11 members of the Board of Governors (increased to 15 in 1983) had developed into an "old boys' club" circulating the chairs among themselves with no term limits, in which few outsiders were ever elected to sit. So with zero fanfare we quietly collected voting proxies from the membership which in total allowed us to elect who we wanted as the new Board members including the President and Vice President (then directly elected by the general membership) at the next annual meeting. The old boys club was shocked. The stunned look on their faces was worth all the effort. Since that time all members of the Board had to be elected annually. We knew better than to throw out all of the old guys. Continuity and historical experience were necessary to the transition. What we did do was reelect only five of the outgoing Board members, plus six of us new fresh-faced guys, including those I listed above. The voting ratio on the new Board was six to five in our favor. That meant that the new young members controlled the Board. As you can imagine, the first meeting of the new Board was a rather tense affair. The old members sat on one side of the table glaring at the new ones who sat opposite on the other side, smiling.

Us all being reasonable men, peace prevailed and the new Board got to work amending the Constitution to prevent a repeat of our coup. A two-year term for governors was set, renewable only once for a second term and then a stand down for one year was adopted. Fresh faces were now required. And to ensure continuity, only one half of the Board was to be elected each year. Those 1973 amendments prevail to this day.

**GEODESIC DOME**

One of AMCHAM's projects of which I am especially proud is the Geodesic Dome Botanical Pavilion in the Suan Luang Rama 9 Park which houses a vast display of Ameri-



Geodesic Dome

**CONTRIBUTORS**

(Each contribution donated or pledged one dollar to the project raised at \$10.00 or less only. Total: \$1000.00)

American International Group  
 KROK Thailand Ltd.  
 Mr. Maurice Forbes  
 General, Thailand  
 Quester (Thailand) Ltd.  
 Guyton Co. Company  
 H. J. Stone Company  
 DM Thailand Ltd.  
 National Semiconductor (Thailand) Ltd.  
 Paper City Inc.  
 Phrasa Group Thailand Ltd. Group  
 Mr. David Workman  
 Drexel-Thornhill Inc.  
 In addition to the above contributions, KROK Thailand has also pledged \$1000.00 to provide funds toward the cost of interior construction, fixtures, and decoration.

**ORGANIZING COMMITTEE**

**Honorary Advisors:**  
 Ambassador William A. Stever  
 Mr. Maurice Forbes  
 Mr. Howard Tracy

**Executive Members:**  
 Mr. David Lyman, Treasurer and Chairman  
 Mr. Don Wheland, KROK  
 General, Thailand (Vice Chairman)  
 Mr. George Anagnostakis, DM Thailand (President)  
 Dr. Paul Boudreau, KROK, U.S. Embassy (Secretary)  
 Mr. Robert Switzer, Commercial Section, U.S. Embassy  
 Mr. George Ogle, American Manufacturer (Thailand)  
 Mr. William Riebeck, Thailand International  
 Mr. Thomas Stein, American Chamber of Commerce  
 Mr. Thomas White, Phrasa City (Thailand)

**Project Architects:**  
 Dr. Robert James, Stuart James Associates

**Consulting Architect:**  
 Derek Lee Cheong Kiat

F.A.S. Mar-Apr. 1988

cans cacti along with other desert flora. Someone remarked: "And now the Americans have brought the desert to Thailand." The Dome, together with other gardens from other national chambers and groups, were created in 1988 in honor of the 60th birthday of His Majesty the King. I was asked by then Ambassador Brown to take charge of raising the funds to create this pavilion. The dome was designed by Thailand's most revered architect, Sumet Jumsai, utilizing the triangle design of Buckminster Fuller.

**STATE DEPARTMENT**

Remember that to this day we Americans overseas have no representation in Congress, the Administration or even

in the States themselves. There is no one in any government agency to look after our interests. In days gone by, AmChams in Thailand and across Asia and the U.S. Government did not always see eye-to-eye. There was a lot of mutual antagonism, mistrust, suspicion, miscommunications and misunderstanding. The basic cause was that the State Department, then our only point of contact with the U.S. Government, though it did have commercial responsibilities, was not charged in its mandate to be interested in the American private sector abroad. In the 1950s, 60s and 70s the Foreign Service Officers in overseas posts did not understand, and were not trained in, the concepts and motivations and impediments of trade, commerce, investments and doing business abroad. More importantly, they didn't want to. President Carter confirmed this non-mission as late as 1977 when he issued his policy of neutrality on American overseas investment.

The American Foreign Service and the Department of Defense were too busy fighting the Cold War to stop the spread of Communism. They focused primarily on political-military matters and macro-economic aid projects.

We did have friends in the USAID and USIS units because they dealt with everyday people. And yes, there were Economic Officers (Counselors for Economic Af-

fairs) in the Embassy but in those days nobody listened to them as that job was considered a career dead-end. The Foreign Agricultural Service had a long and productive history but their job was really only to promote the export of American food products. The Foreign Commercial Service has not yet been invented, though the Department of Commerce did host trade missions.

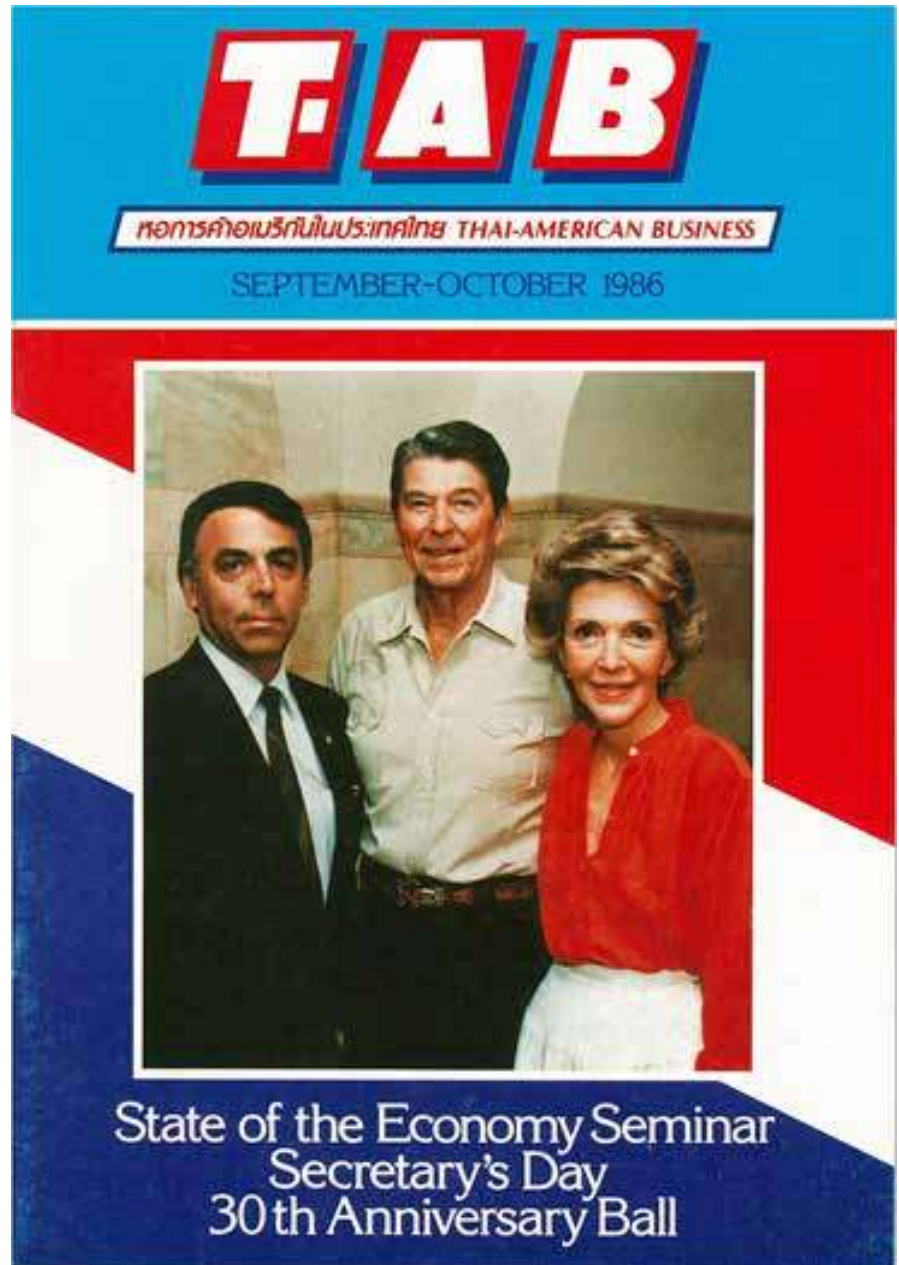
Outspoken throughout its history, the Asia-Pacific Council of American Chambers of Commerce (APCAC) had more than once been deemed obstreperous by the U.S. government agencies. The APCAC – State Department detente saw many low points. I will illustrate one by relating the following incident:

APCAC was finally invited to attend the Asia-Pacific Chiefs of Mission meetings – no longer the case for many years. At one early meeting in the mid-1970s, which Jim Rooney and I attended, the then Assistant Secretary of State Phillip Habib's opening words to the assembled Chiefs of Mission – i.e. U.S. Ambassadors from all over the Pacific – and the dozen or so APCAC attendees at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel in Honolulu were, "I hope you gentlemen from APCAC didn't come here just for this meeting!" We all had and the meeting was our only reason for being there. To him at that time, business was irrelevant.

As a result of that unwelcome reception, APCAC considered ceasing issuance of invitations to U.S. government personnel to attend APCAC meetings. I was dubbed an "APCAC rabble-rouser" in some State Department communications, and was considered "a threat." Those are quotes!

Finally, in 1983, Secretary of State George Shultz, from the private sector himself, heard the plaintive calls from APCAC and incorporated into State Department policy the concept of "Economic and Commercial Diplomacy" relative to overseas investments.

In 1989 Assistant Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger issued the "Bill of Rights for American Business". That policy still stands today. Since then the American public and private sectors overseas have co-existed pretty much harmoniously. Remember, it was AmChams that made it happen.



David Lyman at the White House with President Reagan and Mrs. Reagan on the cover of T-AB Magazine

#### DOORKNOCKS

APCAC's annual "doorknocks" introduced our AMCHAM Governors to the world of lobbying in Washington to get our messages on our needs across to the Administration, members of the Senate and the House of Representatives and the Chamber of Commerce of the United States of America (COCUSA). The purpose of the visits is to inform them of the areas of our concern from our perspective as America's front line business troops in the trenches of competing in the world's markets for our country's fair share of business – trade in goods and services and investment overseas. If you will, it is participatory democracy at work. And they listened.

#### U.S. & FCS

While the Department of Commerce had a domestic Commercial Service for many years, its Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) is only of recent origin, being formed in 1980 when the commercial responsibilities of the State Department were transferred to the Department of Commerce (DOC). The impetus for the creation of the FCS was APCAC's push for a "Department of International Trade and Investment" to take up where the State Department was lacking. It had its growing pains and hiccups before things settled down under the International Trade Administration of the DOC. It did not start out as well organized as the State Department and was shy of qualified staffers. So

their first officers were from the private sector, including several former AMCHAM Thailand members – Bob Bodden, Bill Dawkins, and Herb Cockran, among others.

At last we had friends in Washington and in the Embassies overseas who were on our side, as part of their mandates. This was all thanks to Erland Higginbotham who left the State Department's East Asia Bureau to take up the position of Director General of the U.S. & FCS.

### **JENKINS BILL**

In early 1985 during the Reagan administration, Congressman Edgar Jenkins (D) of Georgia sponsored a bill to limit the amount of textiles imported from 12 Asian countries, including Thailand, into the U.S. to 1980 levels. These amounts were much lower than the number of 1985 imports. It was co-sponsored by 290 congressmen and 53 Senators. Its official title was the "Textile and Apparel Trade Enforcement Act of 1985," known colloquially as "The Jenkins Bill." It was the forerunner of what eventually became almost 200 similar bills coming down the pike dealing with trade expansion which focused on offsetting American's massive trade deficit. This was pure bipartisan protectionist reaction and retaliation at a time when protectionism was infecting Americans. They felt their government did not understand or care about the benefits and sacrifices, i.e. the realities, of international free trade. But it was not all the fault of America's open markets or the government.

Concurrently, many of America's trading partners, including Thailand, which America had helped and supported for three decades to rebuild in the aftermath of WWII, the Vietnam War and other confrontations, now imposed unfair tariff and non-tariff barriers on the import of American goods and services and investments.

As I said earlier, America was not really exporting. So foreign trade, i.e. imports, was blamed for literally millions of jobs which were lost, especially among American garment workers.

Thailand saw the Jenkins Bill as an immediate threat to its textile industry which was dependent, in large part, on

the American market. Though warned repeatedly by AMCHAM leadership and members, Thailand was caught unprepared to recognize that trade, and no longer political/military issues, ruled the new day. In effect, America was on a trade war path for several years to come. AMCHAM Thailand went to bat for fairness and trying to protect Thai-American relations in bilateral trade matters. Peace, harmony and win-win solutions were espoused.

AMCHAM Thailand and other APCAC members invaded Congress and lobbied the Administration to use their powers to balance out a trade embargo with the opening of their markets by our trading partners, but with the caveat not to jeopardize or destroy the harmonious bilateral relations at the same time. The White House, State Department, Commerce Department, Treasury Department, National Security Council, the Exim Bank and the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), as well as our host governments were APCAC's targets. During the 1984, '85 and '86 Doorknocks we from AMCHAM Thailand met with the leaders, including President Reagan, and several Thai Prime Ministers, lobbying them all to be rational.

The bottom line – in 1986 the Jenkins Bill was adopted by both the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate but was vetoed by President Reagan. Congress failed to override the veto.

One down, more to come. Trade issues were to dominate the next decade of Thai-American relations.

### **THE FARM ACT**

Just a couple more insights into historical happenings involving AMCHAM Thailand, Thailand and the U.S. Congress and the White House.

Come Doorknock 1986 and Tom White, Harold Vickery, Jerry Loupee, Kitty Koenig, Tom Seale, Jack Scott and I descended on Washington, DC to pursue two country-specific issues: the impacts of The Jenkins Bill and the new Farm Act. The Jenkins Bill you know about. The Farm Act, specifically the "Rice Export Provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985", dealt with the U.S., with its 11,000 subsidized rice farming families, weekly setting the world price of rice. At the time, Thailand was the lead-

ing exporter of rice in the world with its 35,000,000 then not subsidized farmers, of which 3,300,000 were Thai farms families engaged in rice farming. As the Farm Act was already law, our message was to ameliorate the impact of the law on Thai farmers, longtime friends of America. Secretary of State George Schultz, Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldrige, Secretary of Agriculture Richard Lyng and U.S. Trade Representative Clayton Yeutter all told our delegation that in that election year, 1986, amending the Farm Act was not feasible. They heard us, were sympathetic, but were not encouraging. A 458 page Omnibus Trade bill was sailing through the Congress raising trade barriers to force the Administration to do something to reduce the massive trade deficit. So no changes in the Food Security Act would be expected that year.

I won't dwell further on the Farm Act except to relate that we did not get very far. The Trade Enforcement Act passed.

During our 9 day stay in Washington for the Doorknock, the Thai Ambassador in Washington, later confirmed by the Thai government in Bangkok, requested that I, as AMCHAM President at the time, return to Washington, DC the following month to testify before the U.S. Senate Agricultural Sub-Committee on Foreign Agricultural Policy about the impact of the Farm Act on world agriculture trade and on Thailand in particular. I went and testified armed with a detailed and comprehensive back-up report prepared by AMCHAM members Leonard Chinitz, Davis Pike, Peter Fedderson, Anthony Zola and Jon Harger, which became the Bible on the subject for the next 5 years. I won't go into details here as they were well covered by the local press in Thailand and AMCHAM's historical books and records. But, not reported elsewhere was my opening line to the Committee Chairman. I apologized for appearing disheveled in clothes I borrowed from the friend I was staying with, saying that "I arrived at Dulles yesterday but that my bags went to Dallas".

In the end, no change of the law was forthcoming until 1990, but in the interim the USDA and Thailand quietly worked together to avoid causing damage to the Thai rice farmers and keeping the world rice price up. Our pleas were heard and



*Pouring Mekhong whiskey into the khlung to invite the water spirits*

another looming disaster got headed off at the pass.

### MEET THE PRESIDENT

The day before I testified at the Senate, I met with a lobbyist friend in Washington who I knew had contacts in high places. As an off-hand comment, a throwaway line really, he asked: "David, do you want to meet the President?" I thought he was kidding so my response was equally off the cuff: "Yeh, what the hell, why not?" Whereupon he picked up the phone, made a quick call, and then said: "Be at the Pennsylvania Avenue entrance to the White House tomorrow at 4:30 pm and you will be met by my friend who will escort you to the meeting." Meet the President - as simple as that!

So the following morning I made my pitch before the Senate Sub-Committee, had lunch in the Senate Dining Room enjoying some of the famous Senate bean soup; then with Tom Seale, our AMCHAM Thailand Executive Director, had an extended meeting with the Secretary of Agriculture in his personal office; then showed up, on time, at the White House where I was taken inside the White House to meet the President and Mrs. Reagan as they were about to depart for Camp David in his Marine helicopter. His aides were insistent that I not give the President any papers so when he asked why I was in Washing-

ton, DC I told him it was about the Farm Act and rice. He replied that he remembered our meeting in Tokyo so that he knew about the issue, but that the only people who could solve the problem were "up there" – pointing to Capitol Hill. And then we posed for the once-in-a-lifetime photo-op.

### INDEPENDENCE DAY BLUNDERS

American Independence Day celebrations are held in July which is in the middle of the rainy season in Thailand. So there was always the concern of it being rained out. We learned a local tradition which has proven effective to keep our picnics dry – well, most of the time.

The tradition involved pouring a cup of Thai Mekhong Whiskey into a body of water. The purpose of this ritual was to invite the "water spirits" to the party. This is an ancient tradition taught to me by my mother from years ago when garden parties were a common form of entertainment in Bangkok and the hosts would not want the all too common rains to spoil the party. So one invites the "water spirits" to attend the party with you. Historically I performed this little ceremony every year and it never rained on an AMCHAM Independence Day Picnic.

But I started getting such a razing from the non-believers that one year I did not perform the ceremony before the event.

And I so informed the non-believers. Having been rebuffed and ignored, the water spirits expressed their displeasure by dumping a deluge of rain on the ISB/ NIST field that afternoon. It was akin to Noah's flood.

The next year, just to be on the safe side, the event's management made a special effort to ask me to once again invite the water spirits to the party in the appropriate manner. And as expected, it did not rain. For confirmation of my story just ask Tom Whitcraft and Doug de Weese, now true believers, who continue to perform the ceremony annually.

Then there was my most embarrassing AMCHAM moment – it was the Independence Day picnic in 2000 or 2001 at the then-ISB on Sukhumvit Soi 15 and I was the MC. The time was nigh for the reading to the assembled 4,000 or so celebrants by the American Ambassador of the U.S. President's message to all Americans. I guess I was kind of excited because I had to ask the Embassy's Marine Gunny to remind me of the name of the Ambassador, which he did. The time came for me to introduce the Ambassador to the 4,000 eager faces in the audience. "And so everyone, it is my pleasure and honor to introduce the American Ambassador who will read the President's Proclamation – Ladies and Gentlemen, Ambassador ....." followed by a very pregnant pause for it quickly became evident to everyone that my mind had gone blank and I had forgotten his name. After a short but poignant delay, the Ambassador leaned over and in a stage whisper said into the microphone I was holding, "HECK-LIN-GER" to the uproarious amusement of those present. I passed the microphone to him and he looked at me and said, "Thank you... George?"

Thank you for your attention to this aging guy's ramblings over the history of our 6-decade old AMCHAM. I apologize if it appeared to be an ego trip. ■

*David Lyman is Chairman and Chief Values Officer of Tilleke & Gibbins and one of the longest-standing and most active members of AMCHAM. He can be contacted at DavidL@tilleke.com.*