



Mekong Express Mail

Volume 6, Issue 2

THE THAILAND LAOS CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC.

www.TLC-Brotherhood.org

Sitting ducks and sappers at Udorn in '68

By Bob Wheatley

One hot July evening in '68 some of my fellow airmen were killed and wounded in an attack on the Udorn Air Base, just up the road from us. This was officially called a mere harassment raid though I'm sure it was just a little more than harassment to those wounded and to the families of those who were killed. In that raid, I understand two Thai perimeter guards were killed, and four Americans were wounded, one of them fatally, by an exploding satchel charge detonated by one of the sappers.

Their target was a C-141 Starlifter transport. In this case, it was one being used as a medical evacuation plane. I remember having seen it sitting parked on the base a day or two before the attack. I took particular note of it, only because it was so unusual to see one there. It was reported to the press that the raiders must have mistaken it for a B-52 bomber.

That story may have satisfied the press corps, but I found it absurd, as the two aircraft look nothing alike. Besides, there were no B-52's stationed at Udorn. B-52s were considered especially "high value assets" and they were invariably stationed in places that were least vulnerable to attack. There were none at all stationed in Vietnam, and in Thailand they were stationed only at U-Tapao Royal Thai Navy Air Base, well to the south of Bangkok.

Did the Starlifter just happen to be the biggest, easiest target available at Udorn at the time? Was it simply a target of opportunity, or did the raiders know exactly what its mission was and specifically target it for that reason? After all, this was a war—one they were fighting to win. For them, there were no boundaries and no "rules of engagement." Any target was fair game.

The raid began at about 10:20 PM. A member of the flight line crew there related the happenings on the scene that night to me. He had seen the whole thing, watching from a ditch where he'd taken cover when the shooting started. Unarmed and defenseless, he had no choice but to hide and hope to survive it.

The C-141 had been sitting on the taxiway, awaiting arrival of a flight from Vientiane, which was carrying two just-recovered American POWs. They were Major Fred N. Thompson, an F-100 pilot shot down on March 20 that year, and Major James F. Low, an F-4D pilot, who had been shot down December 16

the previous year. The North Vietnamese, in some kind of propaganda move, had released the men. Their return was shrouded in secrecy.

As part of the requirement for their release, the North Vietnamese had apparently insisted they be immediately airlifted out without further stops in-country. Instead, the US plan called for them to be routed through Udorn. Upon landing at Udorn, they would then be immediately airlifted out to a hospital in the Philippines by the Starlifter's medevac crew. One theory prevalent at the time was that the Udorn attack was a retaliation for the U.S. decision to make the stop at Udorn.

If true, it raises a question. How did the North Vietnamese know far enough in advance to move troops across the Mekong, into Thailand and into position for the attack? Presumably, intelligence was being passed to them by the Soviets and Chicom. We knew for a fact they listened in on our communications, just as we were listening in on theirs. We depended heavily upon our encryption technology to protect our most sensitive communications.

But our encryption methodology had been compromised by that time, by virtue of the capture of the equipment on the Pueblo intelligence ship in January. Unfortunately, we had mistakenly assumed the code was still secure, because in addition to having the equipment, one needed the vital encryption key, which was constantly being changed. Hindsight is always 20-20, but we know now that was a wrong assumption.

Only years later was it learned a spy in the Pentagon had been regularly passing the code key to the Soviets. Naval Chief Petty Officer John Walker, a cryptographic technician, supplied the encryption key lists to the Soviets from early 1968 until the time he was finally arrested in 1985. Unknown to us at the time, those key lists, together with capture of the equipment on

see **Sappers**, continued on page 2

Also In this issue:

Reunion 2005—in DC (the schedule on page 4)

Rose Garden—Tour at Nam Phong

Ban Nahom Assisted Again—Jeff in Laos

Night Vision in SEA—the Starlight Scope



Quilt raffle continues a great TLCB tradition

By Bob Wheatley

The TLC Sisterhood will again conduct a fundraiser to help the children of Thailand through the TLCB Assistance Fund, by raffling off a quilt at the reunion banquet. Quilt styles have varied from year to year, but all have followed a patriotic theme, with emphasis on Brotherhood of Service to our nation.

This year's raffle quilt will be a "memory quilt." For those unfamiliar with the memory quilt, each block allows space for signatures, verses, dedications, unit patches, photographs of people living or deceased, planes and places, and other "memories" that are of special significance to the purchaser of the block. Almost anything you want that is in keeping with the spirit of the quilt can be applied, within the space limitations of the 5" x 5" blocks. The end result is a one-of-a-kind collection of memories that holds special meaning for all of us in the TLCB and TLCS. These precious memories bind us all in the spirit of brotherhood. The lucky winner of the raffle drawing will be the owner of the quilt and caretaker of its special memories.

This year's raffle quilt will have a large TLCB patch commanding the center blocks of the quilt. Memory blocks will spread outward from there, separated by strips of red, white and blue fabric. The wide borders will also be comprised of strips of red, white and blue. Dimensions will be approximately 80" wide by 92" in length, suitable for covering a double or queen-size bed.

There are 164 total memory blocks available for purchase. A number have already been bought. The charge for each memory block ordered will be \$5. All raffle tickets are \$2 each, no matter how many you purchase and there is no limit on how many you buy. Members are welcome and encouraged to sell tickets to friends and family. Every dollar raised will go to the TLCB Assistance Fund to help the needy children of Southeast Asia.

This issue of the MEM includes a sheet of raffle tickets. Copy it if you need more tickets. Print name and phone number on the tickets so you can be contacted when you win. Send the

tickets with your payment of \$2 each to:

TLCS Raffle Quilt Project
Rosie Wheatley
8018 W 900 N,
Carthage, Indiana, 46115

Make ALL checks payable to TLCB ASSISTANCE FUND.

To order memory blocks, contact Rosie or Bob Wheatley at email address, rewheatl@cnz.com, or call 765-565-6595.

Sappers, continued from page 1

Pueblo, had made our Top Secret transmissions easily readable by the enemy.

In the words of former KGB chief, Oleg Kalugin, "I was John Walker's supervisor. When he came into the Soviet embassy [in late 1967] he produced immediately very convincing proof of his great value. His access to cryptographic material [the code key lists] allowed us to read all US secret communications."

Based upon Kalugin's statements, the Soviets were almost certainly aware of every detail of the released POW's planned itinerary well in advance. After his arrest in 1985, Walker still called himself a patriot. He rationalized his betrayal, saying he "knew" the Soviets would not risk passing that intelligence to the North Vietnamese, and therefore, with respect to the Vietnam War, his espionage was, in his words, "doing no real harm."

Still, I have often wondered about the timing of that raid on Udorn. Certainly, armed with the right intelligence from the Soviets, the North Vietnamese would be able to have their sappers in place and ready for the attack when the time came. In spite of the Soviet denials, I have to wonder whether the timing of that particular attack with respect to the POW's return was something more than mere coincidence. Was this more fallout from the Pueblo Incident?

The North Vietnamese had their sappers in place and ready for the attack when the time came. The precise moment the Vientiane flight touched down on the runway, the attack commenced. The main assault was concentrated primarily on the C-

141, though I also learned from another source that at least one unexploded satchel charge was later recovered from the intake of one of the parked F-4 Phantoms.

When it became apparent they were under attack, the commander of the C-141, Captain Robert Shultz, and his flight engineer, Tech Sgt. Paul Yonkie dove for cover—too late to escape injury. In a blinding flash that lit up the night, white-hot shrapnel from an exploding grenade or satchel charge invaded Sgt. Yonkie's chest and abdomen, and Captain Shultz's hands and wrists were slashed to the bone by the cruel shards of flying metal.

Newspaper reports put the number of attackers at about 10. I suspect there may have been considerably more than that, as the battle went on for thirty minutes or more on base, before they could be driven back. The fighting continued throughout the night in the glare of the flares illuminating the paddies in the surrounding area.

It was rumored arming of the flight line personnel at the air base was initially delayed, because the First Sergeant, who had possession of the key to the weapons lockers was off base when the attack occurred. Fortunately, several minutes into the assault, someone else was finally found to open the lockers and distribute the weapons and ammo clips. Under the circumstances, it was fortunate we didn't suffer more casualties than we did.

When word of the attack on the nearby air base reached us at Ramasun Station, we were put on full alert. To put it mildly, it was a somewhat disconcerting sight—two armed MP's *inside* the operations building, stationed facing the only door, with

weapons at the ready, locked and loaded. Under ordinary circumstances, even MPs were never allowed inside the inner-sanctum of the Top-Secret operations center where we worked. The significance of their presence there was immediately apparent to me. It could only mean we were under imminent threat of attack. My blood ran cold.

To this day, it's difficult for me to reconcile why the rest of us were not immediately issued weapons with an attack under way just a few miles up the road, and at least the threat of attack at our own station. I would have felt at least a little better about the situation that night had I and my men been allowed to carry our own M-16s and not have to entrust our security entirely to armed guards, however well trained and dedicated.

True enough, we were technicians and linguists, not trained as combat troops. But in other wars, even technicians and linguists had been provided means of self-defense. We each had been trained in the use of the M-16, and we had been required to qualify with live ammo, before being shipped overseas. Furthermore, we had all been officially assigned a weapon and were required to sign for it upon arrival at our duty stations in country. Yet, while I was there at least, we were never drilled on what to do, nor told where to retrieve those weapons in case of attack. I never touched an M-16 while I was there. We were simply informed, "They're in the armory." They probably were, but I had serious doubts we would be allowed to actually use them when the time came.

Today I have to ask myself, "Was it all just for show—something with which "powers that be" could cover themselves in case of a major loss of life due to hostile action in Thailand? Was it a measure of deniability for those who were calling the shots in this war, and a means of silencing angry bereaved families back home?"

As shift supervisor, I should have at least been made aware where the weapons lockers were located and given the means to quickly open them if we did indeed come under attack. But I was not. Unarmed as we were, if the enemy were to breach our perimeter defenses and overrun the post, we would have been "sitting ducks," much the same as the poor hapless men of LS-85 had been. Some loss of life is inevitable and expected in war. We all knew and accepted that. But some of it is unnecessary and is preventable. I kept thinking it was another tragedy waiting to happen, and had it happened, it would have been swept under the rug, just as the LS-85 incident apparently had been.

The operations compound at Ramasun Station was situated very near the perimeter of the post. Once inside the wire, it would take the enemy raiders only seconds to cover the distance to the ops building. If the building was stormed, the two guards at the entrance might take out a lot of enemy troops, but in the face of a concerted rush by an enemy suicide unit, they almost certainly would have been overwhelmed. Still, we inside the building were supposed to remain unarmed at our radio receivers, carry on with the mission, and pretend nothing unusual was going on outside—just as the men of LS-85 had continued to man their RADAR and communications equipment to the last.

Indeed, in the event the post was overrun, in the last moments we would likely have been preoccupied, feverishly de-

stroying equipment and classified documents and too busy to participate in our own defense. In our Security Service training we'd had it drummed into our heads that we were to take care of classified information *first* at any cost! Our personal safety was a last concern.

This very policy is consistent with another possible, much more sinister reason we in the ops compound were not allowed to carry arms. I did not know it at the time, but I have since learned some disturbing facts from one in a position to know. An MP who had been stationed there at Ramasun, he states there were always contingency plans—standing orders among the MP force—that no one in the compound was to be taken alive if the post were in danger of being overrun by the enemy.

On condition of anonymity in a letter to me he writes, "The MP's were told no one at Ops was to be taken alive if we were overrun. Ops would be the final point of defense. We were told before Ops would be overrun the Air Force would be sent in to destroy it and the remaining personnel!"

Back at the air base, after the flight line was finally secured, both Yonkie and Shultz were stabilized and immediately evacuated to the hospital at Clark Air Base in Manila. There, Captain Shultz would recover from his wounds. But after putting up a valiant struggle to live, Sgt. Yonkie finally succumbed to his injuries weeks later. He was but 34 years old, and I understand he left behind a grieving wife and three young daughters.

The morning after the attack, I heard that Yonkie and Schultz had been seriously wounded and were air evac'ed out, but I didn't learn the particulars of their eventual fates until many years later, after I'd returned Stateside. In the days following the attack there was of course much talk amongst us about it in the ops center, and I learned from the analyst, at least one of the raiders killed in that fatal raid had been confirmed Captain in the North Vietnamese Army. At least one other raider, who had been captured alive, was also NVA.

His live capture was a stroke of good luck for our side, and a very unfortunate one for him. Our agents exhaustively interrogated him, before finally handing him over to the Thai authorities for further questioning. Newspaper reports stated the sapper had died in the hospital from wounds suffered during the attack on the air base.



See Ban Nahom photos, pages 5 and 6.

Jeff Hudgens, lower right, and his party before departing for continued work at Ban Nahom, in Laos, visit the site of Nakhon Phanom RTAFB. Shown here on the foundation of one of the old buildings. Photo: Jeff Hudgens.



2005 Annual Meeting and TLCB Reunion In Washington, D.C. July 8—9—10

The program plans are pretty well set at this time, and it looks like we are going to have just about the right size of group for the plans we have. You should watch for changes and final plans on the TLCB website, www.tlc-brotherhood.org. In the envelope with this issue of MEM you will find a registration form, with full hotel information and registration fee. Reunion shirts may be ordered in advance (form enclosed with MEM) if you wish to have them to wear in DC. Orders must be received by Dave MacDonald, reunion registrar, **no later than June 3rd**. Orders will continue to be taken until July 10th, for delivery after the annual meeting/reunion, and then the 2005 shirts will no longer be available unless you can talk somebody into giving one up!

Day 1, Friday.

- Informal breakfast meeting & tour options
 - orientation to using the Metrorail subway system, which is a new feature of this year's reunion.
 - the Smithsonian Institution museums on the National Mall,
 - the Udvar-Hazy Air and Space Museum annex at Dulles airport, and
 - a historical tour of nearby Ft. Myer,
- Afternoon: seminars and presentations by VA HQ officials
 - VA benefits,
 - Agent Orange exposure information,
 - one-on-one interviews with oral history collectors
- Dinner: on your own at dozens of assorted restaurants within walking distance of hotel.
 - After dinner: travel to Henry Bacon Drive and Constitution Avenue for a spectacular night visit to the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial and the TLCB wreath presentation there. Short walks to: Vietnam War Women's Memorial, and the Korean War, World War II, and Abraham Lincoln Memorials.

Day 2, Saturday.

- TLCB, Inc., Annual Meeting and corporation elections, in the morning at the hotel,
- Noon: barbecue cookout on the hotel terrace
- travel by Metro to Arlington National Cemetery for an afternoon tour
 - time to look up special gravesites,
 - Tomb of the Unknowns, with its 24/365 military guards
 - narrated Tourmobile you may get on and off as you please all day,
- time to freshen up and rest your "dogs"
- President's Banquet at Tony Cheng's restaurant in DC's Chinatown, near the MCI Center
 - one of the earliest POWs of the Vietnam War as our speaker: RADM Robert H. Shumaker, USN

Ret. Shumaker was captured in February of '65 and coined the term "Hanoi Hilton."

- the famous "Assistance Auction (you never know what will turn up there—it's way better than eBay).

Day 3, Sunday.

- memorial service right after breakfast;
 - weather permitting, in an open-air park across the street. Army chaplain from Fort Myer.
- Sad farewells in the lobby, or,
- Lunch with new and old friends at a local restaurant

Location: Hilton Garden Inn; Arlington, Virginia, located at 1333 North Courthouse Road. Desk: (703) 528-4444

Access: Courthouse Road exit off Route 50 near Rosslyn and Ft. Myer; on Metro: Courthouse Station on the Orange Line (Blue Line from National Airport to Rosslyn and then one stop on Orange Line in direction of Vienna). Limo access from BWI and Dulles airports.

Registration: at the Nipa Hut suite. Ask at desk.



Supporting Marine Air Wing, Nam Phong '72-'73

by John Binfield

I served in the USMC from 1971-75 and I put in for Pacific Duty out of Engineer School at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. I was a Private First Class assigned to Headquarters and Service Company, Supply Battalion, 3rd Force Service Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, Camp Foster, Okinawa. 3rd FSR was a Logistical Support Unit that supported the Division. I was stationed at Camp Foster. A Marine came into our unit one day in his tropicals with Vietnam ribbons. I asked where he had been and he said Thailand. He spoke of the hard work but said he loved it there. I said to myself, "I'd like to go there." I went to my company office and asked if I could go to Thailand.

The next thing I knew, I had TAD [temporary additional duty] orders that took me to U-Tapao. We landed and stayed overnight in transit tents away from everything. We were kept awake by B-52s and U-2s taking off all night.

We left the next day aboard a C-130, landed at Bangkok and then at Takhli. We then flew on to Nam Phong, landed on December 7th 1972, and I reported to Logistic Support Group 15.

LSG-15 was a support group that was a part of Task Force Delta, Marine Air Group 15, 1st Marine Air Wing, based at RTAFB Nam Phong. It was affectionately called the Rose Garden after the song sung by Lynn Anderson and was also used in Marine Corps recruiting commercials.

The LSG-15 living area was segregated from the Air Wing element. We in LSG-15 were mostly personnel from Division on Okinawa. We were at the north end of the runway and to the west, close to the entrance to the combination Royal Thai Air Force base and Thai Army training base. We would often see truckloads of Thai Army soldiers heading to the flight line fully

equipped in war gear heading for parts unknown to this Marine.

In our living area, our hooches consisted of wooden frames with screened sides and a canvas tent as a roof. We slept six or eight to a hooch. We slept on cots with mosquito netting and a "rubber lady" air mattress for a little added comfort. During the hot months we would bring our rubber ladies out to the "water buffalo" [fresh water trailer] and partially fill them with water. This made them very heavy but they felt so good after a long day's work in the sun.

Our bathroom facility was a water buffalo for shaving, brushing teeth and drinking. We had a barrel in the ground with gravel for a urinal and a 6-hole outhouse that had the cut off drums with diesel in them. We had a mess tent where we ate our meals and we had a shower unit at the rear of our living area. The shower unit was a field unit with probably 30 showerheads. The showerheads were surrounded by black rubber for ¾ privacy. There were usually 30 or more Marines in various stages of undress outside and occasionally some of the local women would emerge from the bush for a peek. We also had an out-

see **Rose Garden**, continued on page 7

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(charitable donations)

TLC Brotherhood Assistance
P.O. Box 2371
Seabrook, NH 03874

(membership applications, changes of address)

TLCB-Membership
4448 E. Main St. #3-214
Mesa, AZ 85205

(purchase shirts, coins, hats, and other TLCB merchandise)

Brotherhood BX
4029 Scotfield Drive
Chesapeake, VA 23321-1922
email:army.guy.01@earthlink.net

(monument donations)

TLCB Monument Fund
PO Box 425
Springfield, VA 22150

Reunion 2005

July 8-10
Arlington, Virginia
Hilton Garden Inn, Courthouse
(703) 528-4444

TLCB tax return and board minutes: On Assistance page, in members only section. Password, 7/1/05: **Gabrielle**

Back to Ban Nahom, near MuGia Pass

Jeff Hudgens was supported this year, in mid-January, in a return trip to the little village where his father's A-1 Skyraider crashed after being hit by groundfire, very close to the southern entry to notorious MuGia Pass. The following items were funded by your TLCB Assistance Committee and furnished to two schools in the area of Ban Nahom, which is still about 40 miles beyond electrification.

- \$200 worth of text and library books
- \$48 worth of school notebooks (the dollar still goes a long way in Laos)
- 30 School Desks

The text and library books are being used by two schools in the region; Ban Nahom (Grades 1-3) and Ban Thongkham (Grades 1-5). The desks went to the Nahom village. There are approximately 80 students in the Nahom school and the A1-Skyraiders Association has donated enough for 40 desks. Jeff's trip, from January 10th to the 22nd, was supported by his church, "WestGate." He reports that he has another donor who had purchased 10 desks, so TLCB's donation made it possible to purchase enough for each child.



Above, left, loading new school desks for delivery at Ban Nahom.



Left, playing "Duck, Duck, Pig." Says Jeff: one person is "it" and walks around the circle. As they walk around, they tap people's heads and say whether they are a "duck" or a "goose." Once someone is the "goose" they get up and try to chase "it" around the circle. The goal is to tap that person before they are able sit down in the goose's spot. If the goose is not able to do this, they become "it" for the next round and play continues. If they do tap the "it" person, the person tagged has to sit in the center of the circle. Then the goose become "it" for the next round. The person in the middle can't leave until another person is tagged and they are replaced.

Bottom left, primary grade children at Ban Nahom School with a sign of gratitude just like their counterparts in Thailand. These kids really appreciate what is being done for them, and so do their parents and teachers.

Below, right, before travelling into Laos to visit Ban Nahom the team saw these picnic tables purchased for schools in Nakhon Phanom Province by John Middlewood with your Assistance donations.

Photos furnished by Jeff Hudgens



door theater just across the dirt road from the shower where we could see a movie once a week.

There were 3 Semi-tractor trailers set in a U shape that was our PX at Nam Phong. It was located in the Air Wing section and it was the only time, other than the Bob Hope Show, that we mingled with the Air Wing Marines. At the PX trailers a person could order a new car or Harley Davidson and have it waiting back home when they arrived.

I reported for duty at the Bulk Fuel Farm. We stored 280,000 gallons of JP-4 in 10,000-gallon rubber bladders. We had 28 JP bladders and one each of diesel and MoGas for a total of 30 bladders. Each bladder was surrounded by earthen berms and was guarded by Thai Army soldiers

On my first day there, a Thai soldier saw that I was new to Thailand. He came down off the berm and opened his shirt. He brought out a large charm necklace with Buddhist medals on it. He took one off and gave it to me. He said that as long as I wore this charm around my neck that no harm would come to me. I thanked him very much and hung it on my Dog Tag chain. I still have that charm.

I was the Bulk Fuel pump mechanic. My MOS was 1341, Engineer Equipment Mechanic. The pumps at Bulk Fuel were for the most part very reliable, so I worked alongside the Bulk Fuelmen, pumping fuel to TAFDS, which was the Tactical Airfield Fuel Dispensing System. They were located close to the flight line. For safety reasons we were located away from most everything due to the explosive nature of fuel. I would unload trucks, fill bladders, pump the fuel and man the meter house be-

tween us and TAFDS. We had to walk the hose line every morning to check for leaks or damage due to sabotage. The line was probably ¼ mile or so. Our work uniform was a cover, no shirt, rolled up fatigue legs and boots.

One person would stand night duty at the fuel farm. My chance came and it was an adventure. As nightfall came, I sat in a jeep looking at the stars, listening to AFRS from Udorn. I could see the moon; it was a beautiful night. The announcer stated that we had men on the moon that evening. A chill went through me as I wondered about that.

The radio station then played "Major Tom" by David Bowie. It was very fitting for the moment. It is a song that has special meaning to me these days.

Later on when I fell asleep on a picnic table bench in the duty tent, I suddenly felt something furry moving up between my arm and my torso. I must have jumped a couple of feet in the air. We had very large rats at Nam Phong and I had a close encounter with one that night. I can still feel that fur as I type this.

In early December 1972, we had the extreme pleasure of having Bob Hope stop by and present to us one of his Christmas Shows. He had a great troupe, which included Redd Foxx, Lola Falana, Miss World and a bevy of Beautiful American Girls who sang and danced for us. It was a day that I shall never forget.

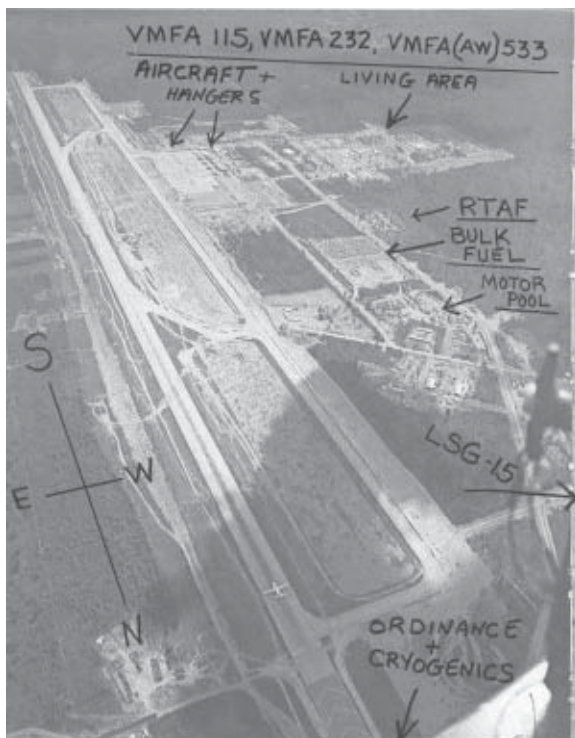
Operation Linebacker II, the Christmas Bombings, which eventually brought the North Vietnamese to sign the peace agreement, occurred in December 1972 and we were very busy during that time. A B-52 from Guam made an emergency landing at the "Rose Garden." I was able to snap a couple of photos with my Kodak Instamatic but security was tight and I was only able to see it from a distance.

I had heard that it had SAM damage. I had also heard that Marines had hurriedly painted Marine slogans and Eagle, Globe and Anchors on the side. I could vaguely see them in my photos. It was not until I joined the TLC Brotherhood in 2004 that I was able to see a close up of the nose of the aircraft. It was beautiful but embarrassing I'm sure for the crew who had to fly back to Guam.

After the February 1973 Peace treaty went into effect we had little down time. We turned our attention to Cambodia trying to save that country from the NVA and the Khmer Rouge as they tried to topple the government.

My experience at Nam Phong was a once in a lifetime experience that I will fondly remember for the rest of my life. The almost constant aircraft traffic, hard work and the wonderful people that I met made my tour one of the highlights of my life. I learned customs, some language and ate lots of local Thai food, Kao Paht was my favorite, but I also enjoyed Monkey Balls and Water Buffalo Shish Kabobs that were sold by street vendors

My trips to Udorn were full of pleasure, meeting people and enjoying the local customs and food. That all came to an end on May 15th 1973 when I received orders back to Okinawa and back to "The World." I was very sad the day when I left Thailand. I had fallen in love with its people and its land and did not want to leave.



Nam Phong airfield. Right, Icpl Binfield. Photos from the author.



Night Vision in Southeast Asia

The U.S. Army established the Research and Photometric Section of the Corps of Engineers Engineer Research & Development Laboratory (ERDL) in February, 1954, an ancestor to what is today the Night Vision and Electronic Sensors Directorate (Night Vision). The basic objective of Night Vision was “the conquest of darkness so that the individual can observe, move, fight, and work at night by using an image that he can interpret without specialist training and to which he can immediately respond.” On November 2, 1965, the Night Vision Laboratory (NVL), the precursor of the Night Vision and Electronic Sensors Directorate, was established. The directorate is still located where it was founded, at Fort Belvoir, which is on US Route 1 about ten miles from the site of the 2005 TLCB Annual Meeting and Reunion.

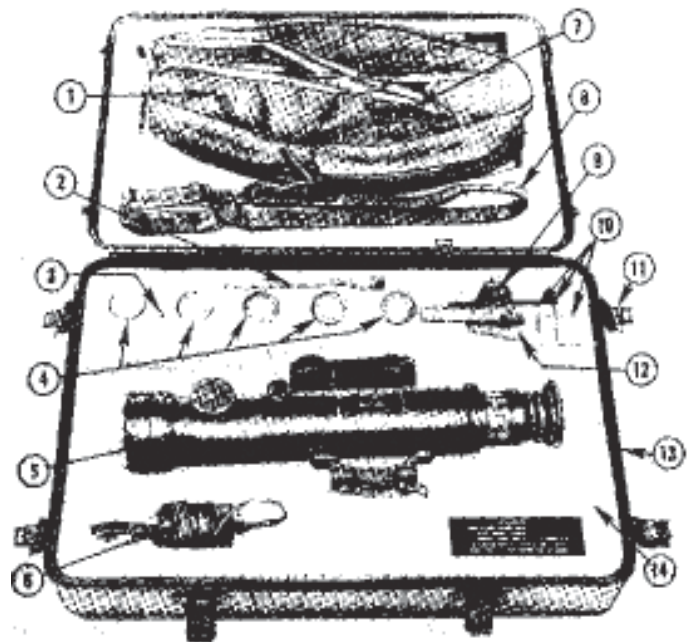
The Army first issued practical passive night vision scopes in Vietnam in 1964, the famous “Starlight Scope.” The technology used in the AN/PVS-2 Starlight Scope was developed by RCA Corporation in the 1950s, building on German cathode tube developments during World War II. RCA developed a “multi-alkali photocathode” cascade system that became practical, with an upright image, when the third cascade stage was added. This device performed beyond everyone’s expectations. This new system was known as Image Intensification (I2), and because the developers realized that they had a vast opportunity for improvement, it was soon dubbed “Generation 1.” (Today’s field-deployed night vision devices are known as “Generation 3”).

The scope was referred to in the Army’s training manual as: “Starlight Scope, Small Hand-Held or Individual Weapons Mounted, Model No. 6060.” It was designed to be mounted on the M14, M14A2, and XM16E1 rifles, M60 machinegun, 40-mm grenade launcher M79, 90-mm recoilless rifle M67, and the 66-mm high explosive antitank rocket M72. It came in a 16 pound, foam-lined metal case with eight latches (right). Besides the scope it contained two mounting adapters and four spare batteries. Soldiers were also provided a zippered canvas carry bag that was fitted with a keeper so that it could be carried on an ammunition belt.

For power the scope used a single, non-rechargeable, 6.75-volt mercury battery cell that would run the scope for about 100 hours. (Modern adaptations used by hunters have been fitted with battery holders using four common AA cells to supply the 6 volts needed. Today’s commercial batteries will power the scope for about 20 hours of continuous operation).



Weight: 5 pounds, 14 3/4 ounces.
 Length: 18.50 inches.
 Width: 3.35 inches.
 Height: 5.2 inches.
 Range: Dependent on ambient light level.
 Operating temperature: -65° to + 125° F. at humidity ranging from 0 to 100 percent.



- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. CANVAS CARRY CASE | 8. NYLON CARRYING STRAP |
| 2. LENS BRUSH | 9. WEAPON ADAPTER BRACKET FOR XM16E1 |
| 3. NIGHT RIFLE LAMP (S) | 10. ALIGN RIFLE |
| 4. BATTERY (S) | 11. LATCH (S) |
| 5. STARLIGHT SCOPE | 12. WEAPON ADAPTER BRACKET FOR M14 OR M14A2 RIFLE |
| 6. LOW TEMPERATURE ADAPTER ASSEMBLY | 13. WEAPON ADAPTER |
| 7. KEYPIN AND SLIDE ASSEMBLY | 14. FOAM CONTROL LAMP |

Figure 1. Shipping container, Starlight Scope and accessories.



Note: technical details were found in the original Army training manual. The Washington, DC, Reunion Committee expects to have a working AN/PVS-2 Starlight Scope on display at the TLCB 2005 Annual Meeting and Reunion (see page 2).

MEM will carry a serialized first-person account of the first test of the Starlight Scope on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in future issues, space permitting.