



# Mekong Express Mail

Volume 6, Issue 4

THE THAILAND LAOS CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC.

www.TLC-Brotherhood.org

## Night vision on the Ho Chi Minh Trail~Part 2

First test of the Starlight Scope in Steel Tiger, December, 1966

by Bill Tilton

On December 6, 1966, we slept late and went to the club for lunch. There I ran into an old friend from my KB-50 days who was flying in the T-28 Commando outfit. They were supposed to be limited to civic action in Thailand and were not allowed to arm their guns. Like everybody else, my friend had heard about our night test. He had assumed we would be writing an end-of-test report and wondered what I thought we would say. I told him we already knew we would recommend night operations of some sort, and that they would need strike capability at precise times and locations to be successful. I was still disappointed over our frustration earlier that day. He pleaded for me to recommend the T-28s for that job, and I agreed it was a great idea. I assured him I would do it.

### Early days of the TLCSB and of Assistance

John Sweet's name has been associated with the Brotherhood from the earliest days, and many charter members were found by him. But he is best known for his connection to our Assistance program; so what better time to have a MEM chat with John than the December issue, which has always emphasized Assistance.

#### MEM talks with John Sweet (JS)

[MEM] We are eager to learn about Assistance and how you got started with it, John, but first, tell us about your service at Nakhon Phanom, or "NKP." What were you doing before you went over there?

[JS] Before I went to Nakhon Phanom I was assigned to HQ Western GEEIA [Ground Electronics Engineering Installation Agency] stationed at McClellan AFB, in Sacramento, California. I was a 70250 (70250 is administration) having cross-trained from a 23430 (Precision Photographic Processing Specialist) and had the top-secret clearance required for that field.

[MEM] Tell us what your first impressions were on arrival in Thailand.

[JS] When we were on the C-130 heading up country we overflew the base and I could see it out one of the few round windows as a brown patch in what otherwise looked like a sea of green. I distinctly remember the smell when standing in the door of the Continental Airlines (contract) plane upon arrival at Don Muang and it smelled real bad.

[MEM] Do you remember your first trip to town in Nakhon Phanom?

[JS] My first trip into town was on the Baht bus, which had

see **Sweet**, continued on page 4

Nobody had detected our naughty moonless flying, and everything was on for tonight. Morrison decided it would be Hatfield and me again—what had proven the night before to be the ideal team for this job. But this time we would be better prepared. The flareship was already arranged for; and now we needed an assured strike capability. There was no reason the frustration of last night should be allowed to happen again.

We went to Intel in early evening, while a Nimrod crew was getting briefed for their sortie. They planned to carry plenty of lethal ordnance and a lot of flares, and would be carrying on classified operations that we did not have a need to know, with a passenger in the jumpseat. We knew the passenger would be one of the Lao officers—we had carried them many times—and would be working on the radio. We wanted to know two things: 1) would they be operating near us, and 2) could they come promptly when called? The answers from the pilot were, 1) near enough, and 2) yes, they needed only to be called. They wanted to help in any way they could, he assured us.

We carefully explained to the pilot and navigator, whom we didn't know as well as some in their squadron, just how it was going to happen. We expected to find some prey and to keep it in sight without revealing our presence while Nimrod got "on a perch" near us; that is, orbiting in position to strike. Then we would flare the trucks and pull off low and to the side while they drove in for the kill. They indicated that they understood com-

see **Starlight**, continued on page 6

There's an Assistance donation envelope enclosed for your convenience

**Remember: donations to TLC Brotherhood Assistance are tax exempt.**

2006 Reunion news, date and place: see Page 5!

# How we bring hope to poor Thai kids

by John Middlewood



A good example of how the contributions of TLCB members to Assistance work wonders in Thailand is the effect they have had on Nong Bua Ratchakwai Elementary School, about four kilometers, as the crow flies, from the old Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base.

The village is about eight km back off the NKP Sakon Road and is a kindergarten-to-6<sup>th</sup> grade school. It has about 250 students, with about 20 students in a variety of special education programs.

The village is one of the poorest we have worked with over the last five years and that is one of the reasons we are still with them. We provide food assistance for six students every month. Comments from the students, parents and teachers indicate that this program has been one of the best things ever to happen to the school. It has turned around more than one student from feeling hopeless to having hope.

The teachers and the principal select the six students each month on a rotating basis. The test for selection is, first, need, second, attitude, third, effort, fourth, assistance to teacher and school, fifth, drastic improvement from poor behavior, attendance or any other negative attitude on the part of the student. High grades are not important, but effort to do the best is required.

During the period we have been working with the school, we have provided sleeping mats for kindergarten classes, incentives for Christmas and Kids Day, clothing shoes, socks, cement tables for the dining area and recently poured a slab under one of the buildings (all labor was done by villagers). Through village help, they were able to raise funds to construct a library building that will also house computers that they obtain, little by little. A future project in early 2006 will be to provide materials to rehabilitate their bathroom facilities – the labor to be done by the villagers.

Over the past four years, this school has gone from a school with no hope, to one that is willing to try; one that parents are now taking an interest in, and whose school staff now takes an interest in the local village. The new principal will continue to direct the programs.

We have withdrawn from two schools over the past few years because it was felt that the attitude of the leadership was not one of cooperation. We have pulled out of four schools because we worked ourselves out of business - the schools now have the know-how and expertise to obtain things, and the villagers are interested and cooperative with the schools. We check back on these schools periodically, to see if there are any one-time projects they need help with and we attempt to provide such assistance.

Plans are in the discussion stage now about discontinuing regular support to two or three more schools as of the first of the year and moving further out into the backwoods. We are currently talking with these schools, making them aware of the requirements for participation and negotiating the kinds of projects needed. Several schools have indicated a need for restroom rehab work, kitchen rehab work and requests for the cement tables for dining areas. They are sturdy, cannot be stolen, and are easy to clean and maintain. My guess is that we have probably provided close to 200-300 tables already, and I have requests in hand for about 50 more.

Before we will go into a school, I require a meeting with the principal, school staff and village leaders to determine needs. I will be working up a 2006 tentative budget sometime in January. This allows me to establish waiting lists



Photos by Ed Miller and John Middlewood



Local radio personality and future politician, Khun Phumphan, visits his own village with John Middlewood, above, left and right. Phumphan is a strong TLCB booster in Thailand. Right: we have donated many fans to make the conditions more conducive to learning--and the results show. Left, heart patient Mo Mae with John prior to her successful operation. She won Hoppy's heart in 2004. Below, left and right, TLCB provided the materials needed for the people of this village to put a concrete slab under their school.



and also to spread the money around a bit so some schools do not get everything.

The one continuing program is the monthly food program. This provides students with a case of "MAMA" (dried noodles) and a variety of sauces and condiments mom can use in the kitchen to improve the rice fare of most of our folks here.

We have a couple of schools asking for fans for the classrooms. We have provided over 150 in the past to various schools. As funds are available, student desks and chairs are provided. Several schools have asked for water coolers, but in the past, I felt the cost was prohibitive. I am negotiating now for a mass purchase and will see what kind of discount I can get. Many of the schools have problems with not having drinking water, so we are investigating the possibility of helping in this area.



Sweet, continued from front page

metal mesh over the windows, which I understand was to prevent hand grenades being lobbed through them, but I never heard of any serious incidents on the bus. One guy in my hooch was killed in a taxi crash on his first trip to town a week after his arrival when the taxi plunged into a ditch crossing a small bridge.

When I arrived at NKP I was given the job of handling the classified message traffic focused on the Arc Light Strike Frags. ["Frag" refers to a unit's portion, or fragment, of the daily strike orders issued by Headquarters 7th Air Force, in Saigon. Arc Light refers to the B-52 bombing mission in Southeast Asia.] They suspected the frag orders were being compromised and locations provided to the enemy in advance, so I was told, which is why two of us with top secret clearances were assigned eighteen hour shifts back to back with the computer generated frag orders and the other mission traffic. Over the course of the year thousands of classified messages passed through my hands.

[MEM] John, many of us first learned about the TLC Brotherhood when you called us out of the blue and asked if we wanted to get emails from a group of guys who served in Thailand. Apparently you found quite a few charter members that way. Why were you doing that?

[JS] In 1997 just prior to my initial return visit to Nakhon Phanom I located Father Khai who ran the orphanage at Thare, (pronounced Tie Ray) which we had assisted in a big way at Christmas time in 1969; a day I will always vividly remember fondly. I knew the children still needed help and wanted to do something in memory of our departed brothers. I raised and donated a thousand dollars while the children planted a large bag of American Wild Flower seeds I brought in the field where Santa arrived so many years ago. While standing on the runway at NKP and thinking of those who did not return from their missions over Laos and how they had helped organize that special Christmas, I told Father Khai I would try to do more for the children. Then it dawned on me. Why not find all the guys who served? We could have a great outfit, help the kids and remember our Brothers in the best way possible by helping the kids the same as we all did before. So I started hunting all over the Internet, using search engines and finding ways to contact those who had

served in Thailand and Laos. For example it was another charter member of the TLC Brotherhood, Bob Arnau, who brought Santa in a 21st SOS helicopter that day in 1969. Bob and I were reunited last year at the California reunion after 34 years!

[MEM] So how did this tie in with the Brotherhood? We know there was a group of four veterans who had met with Jimmie Butler after he wrote the book, "A Certain Brotherhood." How did you come to work with them?

[JS] I left a posting on PACAF 50th Anniversary web site that I was returning to Nakhon Phanom, had found Father Khai and was raising a donation to leave at the orphanage. Dick Anderson contacted me after reading the posting and said it was something that some guys from the 23rd TASS would like to participate in. I was then invited to meet with them in June at the Wall in Washington, D.C. but had

to decline because my vacation time was allocated for the trip to Thailand a few weeks later.

[MEM] We know you were responsible for much of the early expansion of the Brotherhood, before it was even formally organized. How did that come about?

[JS] I brought back stones from the runway at NKP for the guys who had contacted me, and we maintained contact via e-mail and I started searching the internet for other guys. The list became cumbersome once we had 30 or so, within a couple of months, as guys were constantly changing their e-mail addresses. I then contacted my ISP provider at NetWorx to obtain a list server. The owner had never set one up for private use—only for business and college use—but set one up at his cost because he supported our efforts.

Due to the input and hands-on work of Joe Wilson, we were able to put up a web site and list ourselves on search engines. Joe wrote the story and placed it on the TLCB Web Site: [http://www.tlc-brotherhood.org/website\\_history.htm](http://www.tlc-brotherhood.org/website_history.htm). After that we had new contacts every week until finally it was decided to have a group meeting at Dayton AFB. It was there the TLC Brotherhood was born as an organization and Rodney Bell and I asked Bill Tilton if he would be interested in being our first president. After that, candidates were nominated and a board was elected. I was elected treasurer on the first board, but because of the amount of money handling involved in Assistance Bill appointed me to vice president when that office became vacant.

[MEM] You have knowledge about that time that nobody else has, so it is good for us to nail it down. Tell us about what the TLCB is doing now, for the kids in Thailand.

John and Assistance Program being honored at a special dinner held for TLCB visitors to Isan in 2004. Photo by Bill Tilton



### **Big sale at TLCB Exchange**

Check the website for great bargains!

[http://www.tlc-brotherhood.org/brotherhood\\_exchange.htm](http://www.tlc-brotherhood.org/brotherhood_exchange.htm)

[JS] Every child and school we assist brings opportunities none of us will ever know. It's not simply the new desks, chairs, or other improvements we physically provide but we erase impoverishment of spirit, and provide hope to those in need that they can achieve a better future.

John Middlewood maintains contact with approximately ten schools in the Nakhon Phanom area. The number and location of the schools aided varies depending on the needs at each location. At each visit monthly discussions with the principal and teachers establish which items the TLC Brotherhood could provide to benefit students most for each dollar expended. These requests are sent to the Assistance Committee Chairman who assigns a motion number (1-06 will be the first motion made in 2006 for example) and forwarded immediately to the entire Assistance Committee via a list server maintained explicitly for this purpose, for consideration and funding approval. Once the motion has been approved, funds are made available for withdrawal, purchase and delivery by John Middlewood. All approved motions are posted on the TLC Brotherhood Assistance Web Page quarterly to provide members with details of all TLCB Assistance projects. John does not give the funds to the schools—he purchases approved items and provides them directly to the schools, and sometimes directly to particular children.

Schools the TLC Brotherhood has assisted have changed radically from the perspective of the entire community they service becoming directly involved by providing labor for projects to replace mud floors with cement, electricity and better health conditions. Other direct enhancements have included discounted prices from merchants and other community leaders who become actively involved. All

over Isan (Isan refers to Northeast Thailand and adjacent parts of Laos) the TLC Brotherhood is held in high esteem in gratitude for the assistance our members have provided through their donations and support. There is no other organization I know of where so few have made such wonderful accomplishments. Truly the TLCB stands alone as ambassadors of good will everywhere that we have provided projects, both in Thailand and Laos.

[MEM] John, after Thare you got started helping some schools around Udorn. How did that come about?

[JS] We needed someone local to purchase and deliver items to Thare. Tommy Thompson, who lived in Udorn, took on the task and drove 300 miles round trip to make several large deliveries to Thare. In 1999 Tommy commenced aid in Udorn and later to khon Kaen, and NongKhai. Tommy suffered a tragic stroke and his assistant Vichit Mingrachata, employed for many years at the American Embassy in Thailand, was appointed TLCB Udorn Assistance Representative in 2000 and conducts our program in the Udorn area. There is a complete listing of our activities by year on the TLC-Brotherhood Web Site Assistance Pages.

[MEM] Tell us some of the things TLCB Assistance has done in Laos?

[JS] Fortunately, MEM articles have covered these pretty well. Jim Michener, our Assistance Representative in Laos, had 70 tons of rice delivered to flooded villages North of Vientiane, and Assistance Committee member Jeff Hudgens has taken TLCB support to a village his church helps near Mugia Pass. John Middlewood has also provided aid in Laos to the school at Thakhek across the Mekong from Nakhon Phanom.



**Mekong Express Mail** ...is an official publication of The TLC Brotherhood, Inc. This newsletter is furnished to all active member households in support of the Brotherhood's objectives. The views expressed in articles published in this newsletter are those of the authors, and do not reflect official TLC Brotherhood policy unless explicitly stated, nor is the TLC Brotherhood, Inc., responsible for the veracity of information furnished by our authors. All rights reserved by The TLC Brotherhood, Inc., in 2005.

The TLC Brotherhood, Inc. is a tax exempt, non-profit charitable organization under IRC Section 501(c)3. The registered address is 1550 Hwy 138 SE, Suite A; Conyers, GA 30013. TLCB was incorporated in the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1999.

*Editor:* Dave MacDonald    *Distribution:* Ray Hayes  
*Asia Editor:* Jim Michener    *Composition:* Bill Tilton

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

**Board of Directors and Committee Chairmen (2005)**

- President: Hoppy Hopkins (viking28@jdickhopkinsassoc.com)
- Vice President: John Loftus (Reunion Committee)
- Secretary: Dave MacDonald
- Treasurer: Jim Henthorn
- Chaplain: Ted Ulrich (Memorial Committee)
- Board Members at Large (showing term-ends year)
  - Frank Marsh (2007)
  - Bob Santo (2006)
  - Bob Wheatley (2006)
  - Hap Wyman (2007)
- Non-board Committee Chairmen
  - Assistance Committee: John Sweet
  - BX Shopkeeper: Frank Marsh
  - Communications Committee: Dan Decker
  - History Committee: Jim Roth
  - Membership Committee: Mac Macdonald
  - Monument Committee: Bill Tilton
  - Public Relations: John Avery

**TLC Brotherhood Contacts**

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

**TLCB Official Addresses**

<p><b>DUES 2006: \$25</b>          TLC Brotherhood, c/o Tilton          7813 New London Drive          Springfield, VA 22153</p>	<p><b>(charitable donations)</b>          TLC Brotherhood Assistance          P.O. Box 2371          Seabrook, NH 03874</p>
<p><b>(membership applications, changes of address)</b>          TLCB-Membership          4448 E. Main St. #3-214          Mesa, AZ 85205</p>	<p><b>(purchase shirts, coins, hats, and other TLCB merchandise)</b>          Brotherhood BX          4029 Scotfield Drive          Chesapeake, VA 23321-1922          email:army.guy.01@earthlink.net</p>
<p><b>(monument donations)</b>          TLCB Monument Fund          PO Box 425          Springfield, VA 22150</p>	<p><b>Reunion 2006</b>          August 14, 15, 16          Gold Cost Hotel &amp; Casino          Las Vegas, Nevada          Room rate \$50: 13—17 August</p>

**TLCB tax return and board minutes:** On web site, in *members only* section. Password, 1/1/06: **Beatrice**

pletely and gave us their operating communication frequencies. They would be taking off before us, but with lots more endurance. We guaranteed them some live trucks if they followed our tactics, and we all left full of confidence and excitement, or at least it seemed that way to us. This would surely be the night.

Hatfield chatted with a crewchief while I did a quick but thorough preflight. Then we climbed in, stowed maps, ammunition, and M-16s, fastened our lap and shoulder harnesses, shut the door, and started up. At the run-up pad we had our flare arming pins pulled, checked mags and prop, and in a short while we broke ground and climbed into the night sky, turning immediately toward the East. Laos was darker than a witch's heart! If someone had lit a candle fifty miles out in that expanse of jungle and ragged karsts, I think we would have spotted it. I aimed right for the chokes and Hatfield set up his scope. The trip out seemed too long, and we spent most of it in silence, thinking our own thoughts in the monotony created by the engine, prop and slipstream. I remember thinking how Lee Harley would have loved this. He had been the most vigorous advocate of using the choke points and selected Alpha and Bravo almost by himself. He would have savored every moment of stalking supply trucks at night. But he had been shot down in "Harley's Valley" on May 18<sup>th</sup> (and to this day his remains, and those of his passenger, Airman Andre' Guillet, have not been found).

Soon I contacted the flareship on our UHF radio, and learned he was approaching the intersection of the main trail and Route 912, just above chokepoint Alpha. As Hatfield and I had planned, I asked the flareship to illuminate the chokes intensely for about half an hour. He said he would just orbit there and dump out a big parachute flare every so often. Using the tactic we had developed the night before, I aimed for a stretch of road about five miles south of Chokepoint Bravo. The trees were not thick here, and there were big areas of dry, abandoned paddies, between stretches of forest. Anyhow it was nearly open, and the distant glow of flare light was perfect. I throttled -back to a patrol speed. We joked about how it would have been "high cruise" for one of the FACs who liked to fly notoriously slow. It was one of those delightful moments in life when all the pieces of something complex seem to fall into place at once. Except for our controlled light, the night was utterly dark. With the flareship we were creating a perfect diversion that would make drivers think the danger was at the Chokes. We had a scope that let us see the road and whatever was on it as bright as (green) day in just a little residual glow from the flares. And we had a powerful, heavily armed weapon delivery machine, a Nimrod A-26, sitting on a perch and ready to pounce as soon as the prey was found. Our anticipation was hard to bear and impossible to describe; life was perfect.

Almost immediately Hatfield cried out that he saw two small trucks. I called Nimrod to alert him that we had a live, moving target. He assured me he was not far away. I followed the trucks in very wide circles for about ten minutes, as they moved south down the road, waiting for them to reach an open area. Hatfield kept coaching me on where to fly and how far they had left to

go before they were exposed. He said they looked like 3/4 ton trucks with tarps over fairly high loads.

Suddenly Hatfield muttered "Holy Crap!" on our intercomm. Five much larger trucks were driving slowly through the trees below us in a small convoy. He handed the scope over my seat back so I could see them. I can still remember what I saw like it was last night. In the green glow of the TV amplifier the road wiggled a little through the wooded area, and five trucks of 8-to-10 ton size, with tarps on high frames over the beds, moved with a steady, rolling motion—you could tell because one rocked left when another rocked right. The road must have been awful, and they looked heavy and full. The front truck had tiny lights shining on the road, so dim only the scope detected their beams.

Maybe a single candle wouldn't have shown at fifty miles after all, but we knew a single *flare* would. Hatfield saw that the trucks would be approaching an open area ahead of them. He told me to get Nimrod ready and he would give me the signal to flare when the trucks were well out in the open area, exposed and well away from the trees. Then we could simply tell Nimrod his target was under the flare. The A-26 couldn't need better target identification than that, as we imagined it. I called the A-26 crew, and they answered right away. I told them we had seven loaded trucks and asked if they could get on a perch just to our west. He said he was close to us and would be right down; that we should go ahead.

Soon the trucks began to enter the open area. Knowing where to look, I thought I could see the dark shapes in the dim flare light even without the scope, but I couldn't be sure. Hatfield was still giving me steering directions, to keep our distance but never lose sight of the trucks. As the last truck entered the open, which was two or three miles across, I called Nimrod to confirm his position. "Are you on the perch yet?" He said he was "all set" and to "carry on." Then Hatfield steered me right up the road toward the rear of the trucks, ready to reveal ourselves because we were ready to attack with mass and had the enemy in a position where he could not escape to cover quickly enough to avoid destruction. I felt excitement I hadn't experienced in months.

I reached up to the O-1 ceiling and opened the cover of a flare-arming switch, then flipped the toggle to "arm." I rested my index finger on the stick trigger and flew in over the road at five or six hundred feet. We didn't want the flare to drift down too quickly, but we also wanted to be low and hard to hit, and in position to escape ground fire when night turned to day. I waited and waited. Finally Hatfield said, "Drop [the flare] and TURN HARD!" Immediately I squeezed the trigger and with one movement opened my gloved left hand and shoved the throttle, mixture, and prop against the forward stop, turning a steep right for 90 degrees and leveling out. As I keyed the microphone for Nimrod I looked back, my heart pounding as the flare ignited and lit the world next to us brighter than any daylight. Almost whispering on the intercom, Hatfield said it again: "Holy Crap!" Later that's what we imagined was happening in the truck cabs. The parachute flare was hanging right over their heads and they looked exposed and totally vulnerable. There wasn't even any ground fire—we had achieved complete surprise. The trucks

Continued next page

immediately began to move faster and to rock hard, their big flat windows occasionally reflecting light from the flare. You could almost see men sitting in the cabs!

I was already calling Nimrod as the flare first lit up. "Okay, Nimrod, the trucks are *right under my flare!* You are cleared in hot, and we are going well off to the west side." He came back with a laconic question that made our hearts sink in unison: "Which flare?" My response was quick and profane: "The *only ...flare in Laos*, except for that bunch up at Alpha," I shouted back. It may have been clear I was displeased. We had pictured the A-26 orbiting about ten thousand feet and just to our west, as planned. If he had been, the flareship activity would have been a bright, contained circus well off to the North, and we would have been flying around the only other point of light between him and the Gulf of Tonkin.

We waited and watched helplessly while our flare flickered to a diminishing orange glow and went out. Five or ten minutes went by, an eternity, before Nimrod declared he was south of the cluster of C-130 flares; in other words, in our general area. I flew over the now-empty open area and Nimrod orbited while Hatfield looked for trucks. They were gone without a trace, probably parked under triple canopy jungle by this time. Now anxious to make up for his error, Nimrod started dropping his own flares and looking for moving trucks down the road, and we flew to darker areas with our sensitive scope.

After a little while Nimrod reported he had found three of the trucks and was rolling in to strike. We headed toward his flares, and saw his guns firing tracers into a point on the road. He reported the trucks probably killed and invited us in to look. "Go on in and confirm those trucks, Nail," he urged. Hatfield thought it was a real bad idea to fly in under the flares, which he had been taught in Vietnam never to do. You really become an easy target in an O-1. I demurred, and Nimrod made some remarks about our lack of courage. I said it was well known to be stupid, but we would go in close, not under. I didn't have to get too close, as it turned out. As soon as I could make the trucks out I recognized them to be months-old derelicts Nimrod had just re-destroyed. He headed south and we said goodnight; fuel was just about bingo, and our game was up anyhow.

This search had drawn us far down the road in the direction of Tchepone, and it was a long drive home. At 4500 or 5000 feet it was downright chilly, and there was nothing to see but the dim glow of those "see one" instruments. As ever, no lights showed in Laos, anywhere. Finally the twinkling lights of Thailand appeared, lining the west side of the Mekong; the "Fence" was in sight.

Though disappointed we were also elated and excited, and Major Morrison was extremely pleased with our mission. We sat down and typed our report drafts immediately, working feverishly until 6:15 that morning. My report was carefully written, describing the learning steps we went through, and detailing the tactics we had developed in this short test. Of course I strongly recommended night operations for the 23rd TASS. I also recommended the missions be flown only by volunteers, who would wear special patches and become an elite group, flying black airplanes. And my final recommendation was for my frustrated Commando buddies: strike support should come

from dedicated T-28s, since Nimrods had their own mission (and of course the Air Commando T-28s had none at that point, in their view).

Morrison told us there would be medals in this for us, and suggested the Distinguished Flying Cross. I told him that we all got DFCs at the end of our tours, virtually just for being here. But hardly anybody in the Air Force could get the lesser Bronze Star medal, which the Army awarded like we did Air Medals. He said he could guarantee it, in his position at 7th Air Force.

The final day was twenty-five years since Pearl Harbor. Even then Pearl Harbor seemed like distant history from another era. In contrast, Vietnam seems so much more recent, almost like it isn't over yet.

That afternoon at Intel we were approached by the Nimrod squadron commander, a real friend, with the pilot who had let us down during the night. He apologized, both for being out of position and for questioning our courage under flares. He had an excuse about the importance of the other work he was doing, but acknowledged that he should not have mislead us. We could have tracked those trucks for a long time, until he really *was* ready, had we known. The CO told us they had found five or six trucks stuck at Foxtrot toward dawn and destroyed them. He hoped they were our trucks, and we did too.

This was to be our last night, and we were assured the Nimrods were really ready this time. Major Morrison just had to see this for himself, and it was way past my turn to sit at Invert, so Hatfield took front seat and I took the radar site. As it turned out it was pretty much anticlimactic, however. They found some men working on the road, but no trucks. Some kind of weather closed in, and they came home without much new to tell. That ended the first test of the Starlight Scope on the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

There's no doubt my report was not written to please the leadership of my own squadron. In a letter I wrote that it had "... given me a chance to get in some real licks about some things that have been frustrating me for months." Major Morrison took our reports down at the hooch, carefully typed in our rooms. I do regret this; it was not the proper way for an officer to render a report. I made sure the squadron CO did not get to see it until General Bond, the "Seventh Slash Thirteenth" commander at Udorn, sent it back, and in a few days I learned how angry this made him.

On December 8th I flew Morrison to Udorn for him to brief Major General Bond. He included me in the briefing, and I was asked a few questions by the general, which was a new and exhilarating experience at the time.

The next day the CO pulled me aside in our squadron operations building. He was livid that I had turned my report over to Morrison. He was also angry that he didn't even get to read it beforehand. I knew he was right—and wrong. Of course I had done the inexcusable, and felt guilty about it already. And looking in his eyes I could see that he would not forgive or forget. But I also knew that the operation would not have been recommended if the squadron had delivered an official report, regardless of what I wrote. And at the time I believed his anger was based most on discomfort about our enthusiasm. He and his

see **Starlight**, continued on page 8

staff had virtually no enthusiasm when it came to any Cricket combat operations, either night *or* day. Their mission for us was to go home in one piece. We preferred to think we were there for a higher purpose. The debate is still not over.

I suffered some negative consequences. My requested consecutive overseas assignment turned out to be Alaska instead of Germany, and the DFC I had been submitted for had been downgraded to an Air Medal. This was not something that really made a lot of difference to me, then, though later I regretted it. (At least Morrison did come through with that rare Bronze Star medal he promised.) A little more worrisome was the difficulty I had in getting a combat efficiency report, and the lukewarm endorsement from the ops officer. This I could live down in time. Overriding all that was everlasting satisfaction that Hatfield and I, with Morrison, had helped initiate a whole new means of taking the war to the enemy. From accounts I have heard of the resulting night ops, it proved both dangerous and very effective.



## Monument logjam break up?

The support for this project is strong and durable, and some very recent developments give us renewed hope for construction of the *only* monument in SEA dedicated to *all* the Americans and allies who were lost during the Vietnam War.

The hope is based on the results of a recent visit to NKP by Phongsee Penn, who may have cut the Gordian Knot for us.

However, this past year has been very frustrating for the Monument Committee over a crucial element for this project—communication with our Thai counterparts. This monument is to be erected in a new park in the city of Nakhon Phanom, in Northeast Thailand. In 2003, Gerry Frazier formally presented Jim Henthorn's monument design as rendered in the late Chris Jeppeson's extremely detailed engineering plans (already scaled in Metric), and a slide presentation of the project to the mayor, the former chief engineer, and numerous other local officials and important citizens. Gerry was given a cost estimate.

In October of 2004 a group of TLCB leaders visited NKP, and the new city chief engineer told us, through interpretation by John Middlewood, that they expected to have a park construction budget by January of 2005. He said the CAD monument construction package that Gerry Frazier had left there, and his predecessor's detailed cost estimate, could not be found.

Generous donations (mostly in honor of the late Jim Bartholomew, who strongly supported this project), now give us a starting budget of more than \$15,000. Our target of \$150,000 allows for unexpected inflation of costs, design changes, and a contribution to perpetual maintenance of the park. The fact is, right now we could fund construction of a lesser but still very suitable and appropriate monument in Nakhon Phanom (or here in the USA if all else fails). But we *must* have a place to put it and a commitment to construction at a given price.

Tom Penn's wife, Phongsee, visited her village near NKP last month. All other communication efforts have failed. Phongsee is a personal friend of Kuhn Phomphan, a renowned

## Return to Southeast Asia, 2006

There will be a reunion at the Twin Towers Hotel in Bangkok September 21-24, 2006 hosted by the Association of Expatriates in Southeast Asia (AESEA) to which TLCB members are invited, along with all who served in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, military, civilian and Thai.

The web address for continuing information is <http://aesae.bangkok1.net>, where hotel and reunion registration forms will be posted. The association staging the reunion includes former Thai employees of Air America, CASI, USAID, the U.S. Embassy, USIS, IVS, the U.S. Air Force, Army and Navy, SKY, SKY FAG, Thai SGU and others. Mac Thompson, Les Strouse and Phil Dreith will be working on the Thai section of the reunion organization.

Mac asks that anybody who might attend, will attend, or cannot attend, send an email to [AESEA2006@yahoo.com](mailto:AESEA2006@yahoo.com) to help the organizers with their planning.

The Public Relations Committee would like to thank Eric Helfers, TLCB member, for donating \$200 to put an ad in the Special Forces Magazine. This ad will run in four quarterly issues. John Avery; Chairman, Public Relations Committee

radio personality in Isan (Northeast Thailand) who was a founder of the monument project and a great supporter of TLCB.

Khun Promphan had arranged for Phongsee to meet with the city's chief engineer, Mr. Surachai Phongcham-Nong. But when they met he did not seem enthusiastic, he clearly was not aware of the purpose for the monument, and he had no appreciation for its importance to American and Thai veterans. Wisely Phongsee immediately asked to meet with the mayor of Nakhon Phanom City, Khun Pisit Pitiphatn.

Mayor Pitiphatn seemed much more aware of the monument and clearly supports it. Phongsee reports that he asked her, "What's the hold-up? Let's get started with it." To which she replied, "That's the way we feel. We are all getting older, some have passed away, and we want to see this monument to our brothers and sisters completed." She explained to him that we have been waiting for a new cost estimate and had not received any reply from his office. The mayor then directed the chief engineer to get started, to cut all unnecessary cost, and to make the total one-third lower than the previous estimate. Khun Pitiphatn also suggested that we form a committee to keep an eye on how much is spent on what at Nakhon Phanom, and he told Chief Engineer Phongcham-Nong that progress should be documented in pictures as proof of what has been done. At their request, Phongsee agreed to be the city's point of contact with us. She then presented Engineer Phongcham-Nong with a complete copy of the design and cost estimate package to replace the documents they reported lost when we visited in 2004. In January we will start email inquiries through Phongsee.

The park is still little more than a rubble dumping ground, but when city funds are available this will change rapidly. You will find design information in previous MEM issues and our donation address on page 5 of any MEM. More in March!

Do you owe dues for 2006? Check your MEM address label to see the year you are paid for. See address Page 5.