



# Mekong Express Mail

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THE THAILAND LAOS CAMBODIA BROTHERHOOD, INC.

www.TLC-Brotherhood.org

## Night vision on the Ho Chi Minh Trail

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

by Bill Tilton

In November of 1966 a Major Morrison visited the 23<sup>rd</sup> Tactical Air Support Squadron (TASS) from 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force Headquarters at Saigon. He proposed to try night vision on the Trail, which a general at headquarters had approved. Like just about everybody else, I knew this was a crazy idea. At the 23<sup>rd</sup> TASS we covered a part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail that ran down through rugged

“karst” mountains and was between 90 and 130 nautical miles away from our base. It was well established policy that we did not fly at night and we did not fly alone—we always had a high wingman for communication and assistance. You couldn’t very well fly a night mission in pairs unless you flew regular formation, which would defeat the purpose.

However, as it happened Morrison was assigned to the other side of my two-man room, because Nick Kormanik had recently gone home and the bed was available. As a result he had ample opportunity to extol the virtues of the Starlight Scope, and to show it to me and let me try it out. Before he left I was won over, along with several others.

Morrison’s proposal was not popular with the squadron leadership but in early December he returned anyway, carrying a metal case that looked like something professional photographers carry their cameras in. He revealed to them that he was there under direction from his general to conduct a night test with the Starlight scope. If he could have, the 23<sup>rd</sup> TASS commander would have refused to let us do it. And he did try to resist.

I was chosen to participate for three reasons. For one thing, I was nearing the end of my tour and had more O-1F time in Southeast Asia than anyone still flying in the outfit, so I really knew the area of Laos covered by the 23<sup>rd</sup> TASS. But perhaps more importantly, I volunteered. Morrison had convinced me it could succeed like nothing we had tried so far in reducing the flow of supplies to the South. But his idea had not gained many other supporters at that point.

The other convert with high time was Hatfield Bruebeck, who had come from Vietnam several months back with lots of experience as a FAC. Hatfield was of medium height and thin, with a sharp chin, and around the base he wore an Aussie hat

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### TLCB history made at the Tomb of the Unknowns

by Bob Wheatley

Precision, perfection, pride, honor, respect, reverence—these are some of the things that come to mind when recalling that Saturday afternoon, July 9, 2005. Of the many events of

the 2005 TLC Brotherhood reunion, the visit to Arlington National Cemetery was among the most rewarding. I had visited the cemetery in past reunions, but today was to be extra special. This time the TLCB would be dedicating a memorial wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns.



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There’s a dues envelope enclosed for your convenience--please pay 2006 dues by the First of January. (Problem?—Pres. Hoppy can help).  
**Pay to: TLCB; annual dues \$25.**

Like just about everybody else, I knew this was a crazy idea.

**Starlight**, continued from front page

with string and slide under his chin. He played guitar well, which really helped our entertainment situation (as at Dick Strong's going-away party the night before), and he was a very competent and aggressive FAC.

We met in the famous "TUOC," the Tactical Units Operations Center. Major Morrison started out by giving a persuasive briefing to the squadron CO and ops officer—he really did want them on his side. He tried hard to convince our very skeptical leaders that we could do the job, and could do it without making their jobs more difficult.

The squadron commander frowned, leaned forward, and began his response. A large and overweight man of what I then considered to be middle-age, he was overwhelming a little metal folding chair in front of the big sliding maps in our Intel briefing room. He gave all his objections: the engine might quit in the dark, you can't see out there anyway, they'll get lost, it wasn't what O-1s were designed for; that sort of thing. We had answers for everything, because we had thought and talked about it a lot since Morrison first stepped into the 23rd TASS, and we had become enthusiastic supporters of the idea. We really wanted to try it. And, of course, Morrison pointed out the command support in Saigon. Finally our CO leaned back and threw up his hands in resignation. Then sounding like the worried parent of a teenager he added a condition: we could fly only when the moon was up. Wrongly assuming that would make no difference, we readily agreed and the test was on. Hatfield and I promptly scheduled planes for evening orientation flights, since neither of us had flown at night for quite a while (in my case not since Hurlburt).

It was clear then and all during the week that followed that our CO disliked the night test. For one thing, he was concerned that it might succeed, leaving the outfit stuck having to fly these night missions as well as the already-displeasing day missions. I was astounded when he openly said this. I promised him I would report honestly on what happened, either way, but I was already sure it *would* succeed.

Morrison had been working with maintenance, and they enthusiastically showed us the preparations they'd made. They had specially prepared an O-1 for the test. The shiny parts on the outside were painted black (like the whole cockpit area already was). They had fashioned little metal cups for the running lights, so that they could be seen only from above. They had picked one of our best-running planes, though maintenance was so good that we had no hangar queens in the 23rd TASS, and I'd gladly have flown any of them.

On the rocket launcher attach points they had hung flares, a standard alternative in Vietnam, and we carried a "log" that was used in South Vietnam for night marking. It had a flare that provided a point of light for quite a while on the ground (or on water—it could float too). In case of engine failure the plan was to arm and drop a parachute flare, and then

try to spiral down and land under it.

On the first night the moon was up early, so we flew in the evening. Morrison chose to watch this get-acquainted night on radar, at the Invert site. Hatfield and I flew two short missions, landing and switching seats to take turns flying and playing with the Starlight scope from the backseat. It was very clear and bright in dim moonlight, and navigation seemed to be an easy matter, even without lights to steer by. In fact I was struck by how dark Laos was. There on the West bank of the Mekong (that we called "the fence") was peaceful Thailand, sparkling with lights in towns and villages, and tracing the roads between them with the lights of cars, trucks, buses and mostly motorbikes. The Mekong might as well have been a beach. Except for the outline of the mountains against the night sky, Laos was absolutely as dark as the night ocean!

We were the talk of the squadron, with half the FACs interested and excited, and the other half scared, skeptical, and (to us) old. Glen Bremenkamp was interested in taking part, but had just gotten back from R & R. Besides, even though I always felt he was our best FAC, he had taken the instructor slot I had refused, and hence most of his recent flying had been close to the base. (He was also anticipating his port call in two weeks.) Also two young majors had volunteered, but they were new and didn't have enough experience in the area. In my report I was to recommend that only volunteers, with at least 2-to-3 months area navigation in daylight, be able to participate if a night FAC mission was initiated.

On the first serious test night, Major Morrison elected to ride backseat with one of us flying. At the plane the crew chiefs who were assigned to the night test proudly showed us the modifications they had made. The main thing was the little metal cups that made the running lights visible only from above (but as we found out later, "above" is very visible from the

**Starlight** continued next page



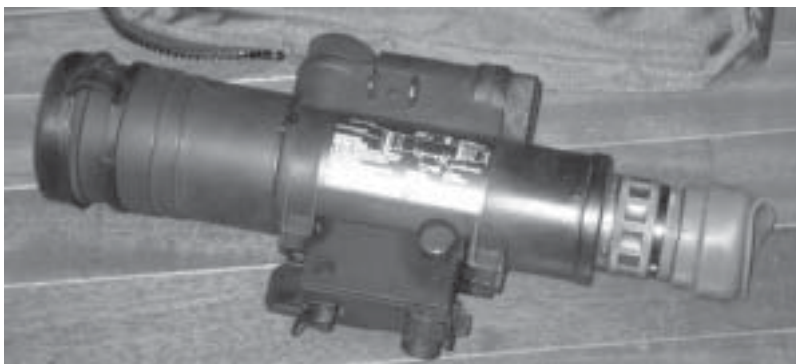
Cessna O-1F Bird Dog on PSP in Vietnam. NKP aircraft were similar, without interesting decorations. Flares were hung on rocket stations, shown here with 2.75 inch rockets with white phosphorus smoke marking warheads. Starlight scope was used by the rear seat crewman during the December, 1966, test.

**Starlight**, continued from page 2

ground when you're in a turn). I won the toss and Hatfield went up to Invert radar site to act as our ground communication link. We took off at 2300, with the moonlight shining. It took an hour and a half to get 90 miles out, with very strong monsoon winds over the mountains. Down in the valleys, however, it was hazy.

Morrison saw the road well that night, the bright moonlight providing ideal illumination for the scope. As we worked

our way along the road he got very excited when he immediately started picking up trucks in the scope. At first I was excited too. I could see them without the scope when he told me where to look. But all the trucks he called out were old derelicts that were all too familiar to me. Sometimes I recognized the wreck and sometimes I knew it by the location we were



PVS-2 serial number 006736 refurbished for sale to hunters. I purchased this night vision device and had it on display in the Nipa Hut at the 2005 TLCB Reunion.

over. We operated in that area for three fourths of an hour without finding a single live truck, then headed back to base.

We landed at 0200 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December, elated and not the least bit tired. Hatfield rolled up in the jeep as we stepped down onto the steel PSP parking ramp. The maintenance troops (who had met us with cold beer) were tying down the plane and listening to our excitement. We had learned a lot about tactics and couldn't wait to tell Hatfield all that had happened. We had learned much about scope-handling, communications, altitudes and navigation. We hadn't seen any live trucks, but we had developed a theory about where and when they moved and how to find them.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> night it was Hatfield's turn to fly Morrison out to the area, with me on the radio and radar scope at Invert. I had a good time talking with the weapons controllers up there, all of whom seemed to be very young lieutenants. I whiled the boring hours away staring at their radar screens and occasionally chatting with Hatfield on VHF, which we used for our squadron radio during the day.

There was one moment of excitement that surprised us all. Hatfield rolled into a turn so steep his wingtop and specially-cupped running lights were exposed to the ground. Ground fire erupted almost instantly! However, it was all small stuff and Hatfield quickly rolled-out and zigzagged in the dark to escape. We may have thought we were unnoticed the night before, but this incident taught us that they knew we were there but couldn't see exactly where until we showed some light. After that we made only shallow turns and kept the cockpit lights very dim. I probably leaned the fuel mixture out just a little tighter than usual, too. From my KB-50 days I knew how much fire a rich mixture could put out the exhaust.

Finally they landed, again full of excitement and new advice, but still having no live truck sightings to report. Again

they saw plenty of derelicts, which Hatfield may not have known as well as me, of course, but which he knew well enough. He was a quick learner and was able to identify every one he saw. The roadway was strewn with them in some areas. There were also bulldozers, smashed trees and bamboo groves, numerous craters, some old gun positions, and little flare parachutes dotting the whole Cricket area.

Morrison did some thinking about how we were doing the test. He felt maybe it was a mistake for him to go out all the time.

The best combination, he decided, was with me flying and Hatfield on scope. So he elected to stay at Invert the next two nights, at least. If his decision was also motivated by the groundfire they had gotten, you never would have guessed it. This was a very aggressive and determined officer, with impressive instincts and intelligence. Actually,

the fact that he didn't insist on going again was affirmation of his confidence in our opinion of him. He had no need to prove himself to us, and clearly made the right decision for the sake of the test.

We did sleep all day, having gotten to bed later that morning. But when Hatfield and I got stirring and encountered other FACs, most were eager to hear what it was like and what we had found. We were pleased to find that enthusiasm was picking up, though for some it was simply curiosity and perhaps for a few there was trepidation that it might be a success.

Morrison was right; Hatfield and I made an ideal team. On the fourth night we took off just before midnight to catch the required moonrise (which occurs later each night). We chatted on intercom and on VHF with Morrison at Invert. Reaching the Trail, I flew around a dark, silent strip of Laos for about an hour, with Hatfield scanning roads and truck parks and anywhere we could think of where there would be live trucks. Once again we did not see one!

The obvious conclusion was that there were no trucks to be found when the moon was up, probably because of Nimrod A-26s flying around and because they knew we were there looking for them. They wouldn't know that we had the Starlight Scope, but they would know that they could be exposed in moonlight, and by now most of the night was moonless.

When we landed, around three-thirty, I got a special treat. There was a FOLLOW ME truck waiting at the taxiway with a big paper sign covering the FOLLOW ME sign, and a sergeant waving, with cold beers ready, as we rolled off the clanking steel runway. It was my two hundredth mission in Southeast Asia. The sign proclaimed that, and had some empty M-16 shells hanging by rubber bands on it. On the side was a drawing of a cricket. It read "Captain Tilton/200 Missions." I had

see **Starlight**, continued on page 6

# Crowd shows respect to TLCB vets at Vietnam Wall

*Impressions of Dan Decker,  
TLCB Communications Committee chairman*

The reunion was an unqualified success! It was well attended. A couple of members who had indicated they would be there didn't show, to their loss. Annell and I met several people we'd never seen before.

The hotel was very nice, three star rated. When we left, I forgot my insulin and the thermos I carry it in, in the room fridge. I called back, talked to very nice staff at the hotel and my insulin was delivered by overnight FedEx, less than 24 hours after I called. That's service.

The room was pleasantly appointed, had free internet access and free printer access, or you could go downstairs and use the free provided computer in the business center. The

years of damage. We saw Dorothy's Ruby Slippers, and the other displays, including an American gunboat from the American Revolution. Then it was off to the piece de resistance, the Museum of Natural History, Jumbo, and the Hope Diamond. Amazing displays in the Natural History Museum. Dinosaurs, fossils, gems, gold, silver, minerals, mammals. Two hours later we called it a day and returned to the hotel, dog tired and beat, and with rebellious feet. You walk a lot in DC!

Next morning, Thursday, we hit the Metro again to the Archive Station. At the National Archives we saw with our own two eyeballs the Beginning of Democracy, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. We also saw the first constitution, the Articles of Confederation. Light levels in the cupola were only two foot candles. By comparison, outdoors on a sunny day is 12000 foot candles.

After the Archives, we went to the Museum of Fine Art, bought some stuff in their book store and returned to the hotel. Finally, we weren't the only ones at the Reunion; there were several TLCB people in the bar and in the restaurant and in the conversation/meeting area in the front lobby. The official Reunion had begun.

The remainder of the Reunion was meeting, greeting, talking, eating Thai, and going to the new Air and Space Museum out at Dulles International Airport. It was all a whirlwind of activity. The best part of the reunion was the meeting of new people, putting faces on email messages.

Friday night was special, even for the TLCB. We all met in the lobby and took three busloads over to the Vietnam War Memorial. About 100 yards from the beginning edge of the Wall, we formed up behind the TLCB wreath. Then we "marched" down the sidewalk to the apex of the two, mirror-finished, black walls. There we placed the wreath and bowed our heads in silent remembrance of those who weren't with us.



Gateway over H Street, N.W., in Washington, a gift to the city from the People's Republic of China. The photo was taken from the front of Toni Cheng's Seafood Restaurant, site of this year's reunion banquet. Photos by Bill Tilton

hotel was located in a very convenient area. It was about 1.25 blocks from the Metro station and a whole slew of very good restaurants. We ate several times at the Sawatdee, their spelling.

We arrived in DC two days early because Annell had never seen our nation's capital. We started Wednesday morning by riding the Metro for the first time to the Smithsonian station, just north of the Washington Monument. From there we walked toward the Lincoln Memorial, visiting the World War II memorial and the Korean War Memorial and the reflecting pool along the way. At the Lincoln Memorial the Last Firebase is still there, just like it was 15 years ago during my last visit. Then we went to the Vietnam War Memorial, the Wall, and the two statues, the Soldiers and the Nurses. But, we weren't through yet. Off to the Smithsonian Museum of American History, about a mile or so east of the Lincoln Memorial, on foot. Next time, we'll use the tourmobile!

We wandered in the delightful air conditioning for about an hour, saw the flag that inspired Francis Scott Key to write the Star Spangled Banner, Old Glory. They're restoring it, hopefully back to it's original glory, but at least repairing almost 200



Left, President Hoppy Hopkins and Secretary Dave MacDonald during registration in the Nipa Hut.

The crowd, and it was pretty crowded, parted as we approached from the east, giving us total access to the Wall. They were silent. Some removed their hats as they saw our people in jungle fatigues, realizing that we were real, actual vets of the war. It was as if they were now in a holy place because of our mission. Tears flowed pretty freely, but not words. You can't talk through a throat that is choked off with emotion. The reaction of the crowd was like they were finally acknowledging our existence and that we had been in SEA doing their bidding with honor and integrity

The annual meeting on Saturday morning had two events of special import; the election and the presentation from Dr. Verrone/Texas Tech.

In the afternoon, in Arlington National Cemetery at the Tomb of the Unknowns, we saw a very impressive ceremony during which the TLCB placed a wreath, followed by a changing of the Guard.

On Sunday morning the TLCB Memorial service was held in an amphitheater area across the street from the hotel. We had the Old Guard Color Guard present the Colors, masterfully done. Chaplain Colonel May performed a good service, remembering those who didn't return and honoring those who did. Afterwards, most of the attendees scattered to the four winds.

We stayed another night, ate with the diehards Sunday evening at the Sawatdee, and enjoyed another evening of fellowship with our old and new friends.

We had a great time at the Reunion; wish you all could have been there!



TLCB president Hoppy Hopkins and Donna Bartholomew, widow of first BX Shopkeeper Jim Bartholomew, prepare to carry our wreath to the panel that bears the names of the Mayaguez losses, at the apex of the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial (see page 8).  
Photos: Bill Tilton

TLCB Assistance Committee Chairman John Sweet reports TLCB Member and Friendship Airborne President, Frank Osanka Ph.D. raised \$1,000 among members of Friendship Airborne while on tour in Thailand recently and donated these funds to our student aid program which made it possible for two Thai 10th grade children, Tusanne Sarawan and Mali Srinaunchai, to attend high school at Nakhon Phanom under the guidance of John Middlewood, TLCB Assistance Representative within Nakhon Phanom Province.

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<p><b>(monument donations)</b> TLCB Monument Fund PO Box 425 Springfield, VA 22150</p>	<p><b>Reunion 2006</b> Fall (date TBA) Las Vegas, Nevada ! [watch TLCB website for early announcements]</p>

**TLCB tax return and board minutes:** On web site, in *members only* section. Password, 10/1/05: **Isabelle**

**Starlight**, continued from page 3

now flown 581 hours in combat, including 8 at night.

We laughed and drank the welcome beers to celebrate my milestone. Then we got serious with Major Morrison: we needed to fly *without* moonlight. He wanted the same thing, but hesitated because of his promise to the CO. We rationalized and urged each other, and finally decided that nobody would know anyhow, since they were all fast asleep. The decision to indulge in this disobedience was pretty easy. As we saw it, our CO and ops officer were against the whole thing anyhow, as being unnecessarily aggressive. The CO's little moonlight rule was preventing success, we believed, and was also founded on excessive caution. As far as having engine failure in pitch dark, it would be only a little worse, and in some ways better, than in broad daylight. And when you thought about it, how many



Charlie Lutz and Bill Tilton at NKP in December, 1966.

engine failures had the squadron had? Fewer than five, in many thousands of hours of all kinds of abusive operation!

Finally Morrison agreed, and said he would take responsibility if the CO found out. At last we could go out there in complete darkness. Hatfield and I were delighted, and pretty sure we would get some prey tomorrow night. We were right.

On night six (December 5<sup>th</sup>) we took off earlier than the night before, but still after most people would have been asleep. In particular we hoped none of the senior officers heard us. On that quiet base they could have, unless there was a generator

near their hooch. Fortunately the CO had moved into an air-conditioned trailer by this time, with solid walls and insulation. But in these chilly nights he might have some windows open. Fortunately for us, he never noticed.

By now even with no moon I found I could tell where I was. Hatfield couldn't always tell, because he hadn't been here in Laos very long. His strength was in using the scope and seeking the trucks. I was amazed to find that I needed only a ridgeline against the skyglow, most of the time, or a little stretch of river below us, reflecting the stars, to pinpoint our location. I knew Khammouane Province of Laos better than my own county in Pennsylvania!

Without moonlight or ground lights it was deeply, densely dark. The little "C-1" instrument lights (really C-4, but Bruce Hoon had said "see one, then see another one") were now proving their worth. They were illuminated by ultra violet light, which caught the special paint on the instruments but did not flood your eyes with visible light. The instruments weren't very easy to read, but the night vision was much more critical. On the other hand Hatfield reported the Starlight Scope was misnamed. Light from stars alone just wasn't enough illumination to make it work, even on a crystal clear December night.

Suddenly a part of Laos lit up brightly about ten miles from us, near the earliest choke points, called Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie. I turned toward the multiplying lights, which were appearing in a bright, gradually descending string behind a slow-flying C-130 transport. They were dumping flares for some night strikes or just to harass the trail. Without this light Hatfield could not use the scope until the moon rose. With it, we found the perfect solution.

When I flew close to the flares it was far too bright for us, causing the scope to shut off (not burning the eyes out of the user, as Hollywood would have it). But as I maneuvered to an area several miles away from the flares, Hatfield suddenly had it right, at last, and the sight was delicious to a target-hungry FAC. There in his green-glowing scope were three full, intact, tarp-covered trucks lumbering south! While those 10,000 candlepower flares hung from tiny parachutes and blazed like little suns with wriggling smoke tails, making jerky shadows on the ground, which right below them was bright as day, the trucks were driving away without headlights in the dim glow and long shadows the flares created from several miles away.

Frantically we called Invert and Major Morrison, but nothing was flying. We called for Nimrods on UHF. None heard us. Try as we might, there just weren't any strike aircraft available, and all we had were flares and our M-16s. Then time was out and fuel was low. And so we flew home happily, certain that we were on the very brink of spectacular success. As we left the Trail we asked the flareship where they would be the next night, and they agreed to meet us over the "Chokes" again. We now knew how to find trucks, and couldn't wait to employ our techniques with some striking power ready to pounce. It wasn't to be quite as easy as we thought.

*To be continued.....*

Blessed with blue skies and ample sunshine, our group departed the hotel at approximately 1315 hours and walked the short distance to the D.C. Metro station. There we would take the train for the trip to Arlington National Cemetery. This was just a few days after the London subway bombings, and I couldn't help but think of them as the escalator descended deep into the darkness below. I and the other neophytes to the

eternal rest. Men and women of all ranks and of many different wars, they are equals, forever sharing the common bond of sacrifice to a cause much greater than their own.

At the end of the outbound leg of the tour, our group disembarked at the Tomb of the Unknowns with time to spare. Located near the crest of the hill, the Tomb overlooks the rest of the cemetery and the District of Columbia beyond the Potomac. The path of the ever-present sentry is evident in the concrete

pad in front of the Tomb, having been darkened and worn down over the years by countless thousands of precise, measured steps.

Rising above the pad are tiers of steps, which serve as bleacher seating for the observers. At the entrance to the observation area a conspicuously posted sign admonishes visitors to maintain absolute respectful silence. The group I was with had arrived in time to watch the changing of the guard, which in itself is a remarkable thing to see.

Once the new guard had been posted, a number of visitors began exiting the bleachers. A low, yet distinctly perceptible murmur arose as those leaving, obviously impressed by what they had witnessed, commenced talking in low tones amongst themselves. Without hesitating, the guard

immediately took command of the situation.

Turning smartly to the crowd, in a loud, firm, clear voice he admonished, "This is the Tomb of the Unknowns, and complete and utter silence is demanded of all who come here!" Appropriately chastened, the world fell silent again, save the chirping of the birds and the distant barking of a dog. Solemn silence having been restored, the guard resumed his post.

It had been made abundantly clear this was not a circus spectacle for public entertainment. This was not about us. These proceedings were to honor the Unknowns and all the



Presenters, from the left, Vice President John Sweet, Board Member Frank Marsh, US Army escort, Secretary Dave MacDonald, President Dick Hoppy Hopkins, after the wreath presentation at the Tomb of the Unknowns on July 9th, 2005, Arlington National Cemetery. Photo: Bill Tilton

DC subway system hustled to keep up with the more experienced riders. We managed to keep our group together though, and all boarded the trains without a hitch.

A short ten or fifteen minutes later, feeling a little like moles, we emerged again into the bright sunlight and walked to the visitor's center inside the cemetery entrance. The presentation of the TLCB wreath was scheduled for 1615 hours, so it allowed ample time to see the visitor's center, browse the gift shop and tour the cemetery grounds.

Behind the visitor's center there were sizable crowds waiting in line to board the tour vehicles, which departed every twenty minutes or so. The park service employees obviously had the drill down, and despite the large numbers, the operation ran quite efficiently. The covered, open-sided tour cars, pulled in strings of three, were packed about eight to ten across in the rows of bench seats. There was no wasted space, and strangers quickly became acquaintances.

As the tour vehicle wended its way through the cemetery, a feeling of awe and reverence grew in me. Though I had been here twice previously, once again I had to marvel at the seemingly endless rows of identical marble headstones, symmetrically laid out with such precision and order – the hallmark of all things military. Thousands of officers and enlisted lie here in this hallowed ground, side-by-side, in

Arlington National Cemetery's Tomb of the Unknowns is guarded 24 hours a day in all weathers by soldiers from the Army's U.S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, "The Old Guard." The sentinels take 21 steps before turning and facing the Tomb for 21 seconds, corresponding to the 21-gun salute that is America's highest military honor. In daytime, the guard is changed every half hour from April 1 to September 30, every hour from October 1 to March 31. At night, the guard is changed every hour.

others whom they represent. We, the public, were privileged to be allowed to witness it. And in particular, we of the TLC Brotherhood, through our representatives, would soon be privileged and given the distinct honor to actually participate.

After a time, the number of onlookers began to swell again,

see **Arlington**, continued next page

eventually overflowing the bleachers and filling the roped-off areas either side of the ceremonial grounds. Then, at last, came the moment we had been anticipating. The Sergeant of the Guard announced the presentation of the memorial wreath by the veterans' organization, the Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood.

I felt the pride rise in me at the mention of the name, and I wondered to myself how many in the audience were pondering, "What is this organization, the Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood?" They would soon get a small glimpse of understanding.

From my position on the bleachers, low and slightly to the right of center, I couldn't make out exactly what was taking place. But it was apparent the Sergeant of the Guard was assembling the TLCB presenters at the entrance to the ceremonial ground and giving last-minute instructions.

Smartly dressed in TLCB blue denim shirts, khaki trousers and TLCB ball caps, President Dick Hopkins, Vice President, John Sweet, Secretary Dave MacDonald, and Board Member Frank Marsh would be representing the TLCB in the ceremony. I am proud to say they represented our organization with great aplomb and dignity.

Led by the Sergeant of the Guard, the TLCB marched in perfect military lockstep to the middle of the ceremonial pad, where the wreath was transferred to the guard. Each movement of the guards was a thing of beauty, the epitome of precision honed to perfection by countless hours of repetition.

The wreath itself was a thing of beauty as well. It was tastefully done in red, white and blue carnations with broad,

flowing white and blue ribbons trailing down. Emblazoned in gold on the ribbons were the words Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood.

With utmost respect and tender loving care, the guard delivered the wreath to its place of honor, carefully placing it on the gleaming white stand before the Tomb. Then the crowd stood in silence with hands over hearts, and the TLCB held a long salute as the bugler sounded Taps.

When the last pristine, soulful note of Taps had died away, I found myself attempting to swallow the lump in my throat. I was proud to be part of the great Brotherhood of Service shared by all veterans, regardless who, or where, or when they served, and I felt a new swelling of pride in this great organization of which I am a part, the Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood.



TLCB wreath at Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, July 2005

## What the chaplain said—about *us*

### Excerpted from Chaplain (Col, USA) James May's memorial service message

Communism's primary leader, Nikita Khrushchev, once promised America - "We will bury you." My dear friends, Nikita Khrushchev is dead, and so is communism. You - your generation - particularly your conduct and participation as members of US Armed Forces have put communism in its grave. Mr. Khrushchev was wrong—America has buried communism. And standing here before me today are some of communism's pallbearers - the men of the Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood.

You did whatever your nation asked you to do. You participated in the struggle with communism over the control of Laos; you fought against the hideouts and sanctuaries of communism in Cambodia; you guarded, and gathered Intel, and fought with the enemy making its way through Laos and into Viet Nam via the Ho Chi Minh Trail. That's what our country needed, and that is what you did.

You went wherever your nation called you to go—for you that was in the backwaters and in the unknown and sometimes secret parts of what has become known as the Viet Nam War - in Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. On the back of your brochure the question is asked: Were you there? Your oath to defend America took you to places such as: Steel Tiger/ Long Thien / Udorn/ The Fence/ Igloo White and many more places still fresh in your own minds. Yes, you were there. And our nation

owes you a profound debt of gratitude for the distinguished and sacrificial service you rendered in her behalf.

Today there are orphanages in SE Asia which are caring for needy children. There are thousands of impoverished people in that part of the world who have received help. Why? Because God's goodness and mercy has followed them through the humanitarian assistance you have provided them. You have brought joy and hope to so many people—first by protecting their homeland, and second by going the extra mile to supply their need.

Today there are many who once stood among you who are now gone from this earth and all of earth's struggles. Some died in the war—many died since. But we honor them. They have been some of the people through whom God's goodness and mercy has touched the lives of you and the people of Southeast Asia.

