

# Revetments

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association



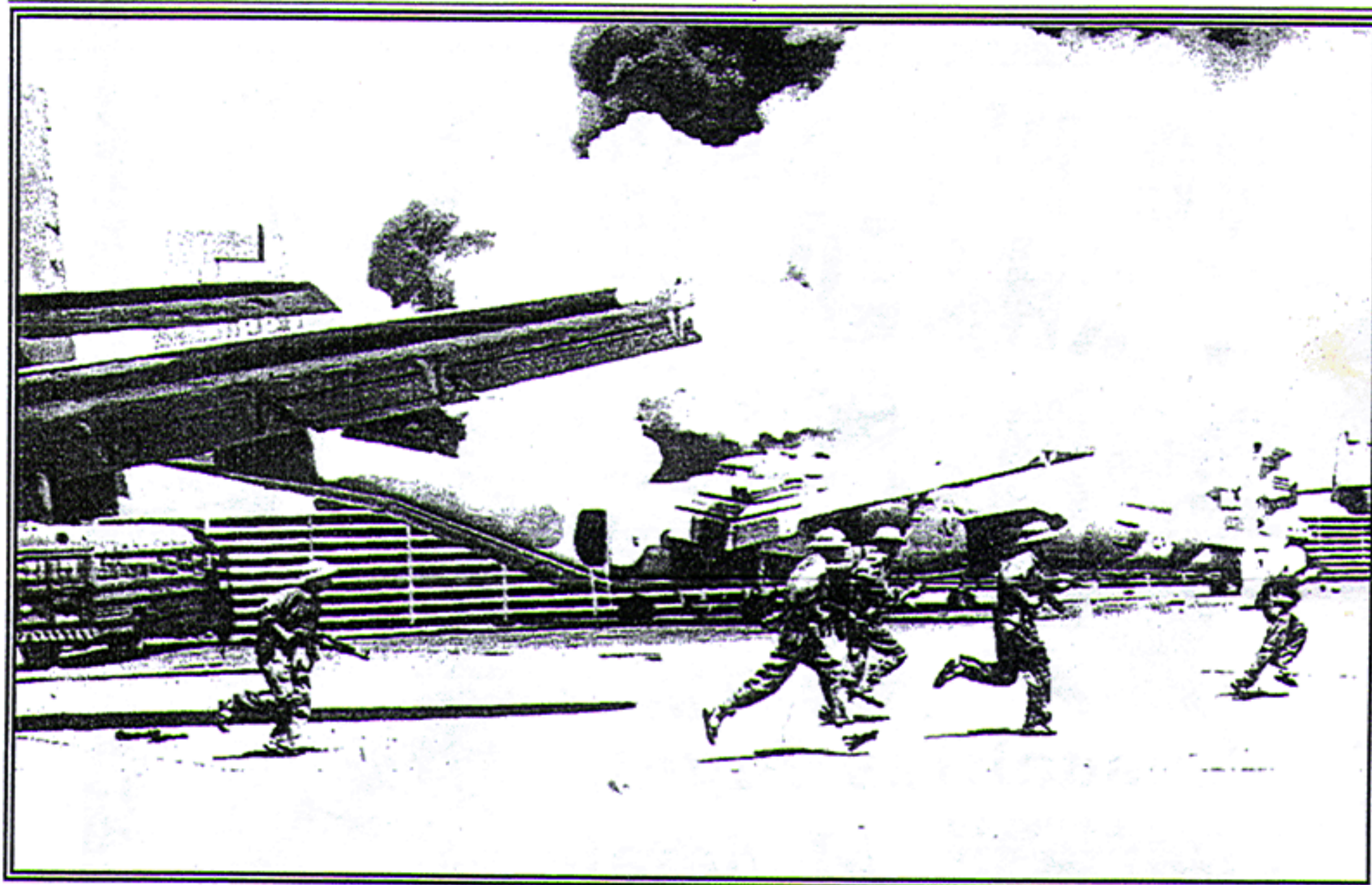
"All Included - No Excluded"

Volume 6, Number 7

The Tan Son Nhut Association, Washington, D. C.

April, 2004

A Memorial to the American Experience in Vietnam



NVA troops race by Tan Son Nhut's revetments, April 30, 1975 (Photo from *The Vietnam War*, Crown Publishing)

## *The Flag at Tan Son Nhut*

From '59 'til '75

From the beginning until the end,  
For those of us who still survive,  
Proud memories still descend,  
Fort McHenry of embattled Saigon,  
Its purpose ever resolute,  
It stayed the course 'til all were gone,  
And the flag flew on at Tan Son Nhut



Some say t'was just a piece of ground,  
Ill-fated duty in a tormented land,  
Those words have such a hollow sound,  
Where the truth is bold and grand,  
Its gateway welcomed the millions strong,  
Bringing hopes of Freedom to the destitute,  
And the promise of Peace e'er long,  
As the flag flew high at Tan Son Nhut.

For sixteen years its walls stood high,  
Even withstanding the rage of Tet,  
Commanding the battles of land and sky,  
Winning the field each day . . . and yet -  
Miles away in foreign palace halls they spoke,  
Bringing a tawdry end to the dispute,  
And as the last day of April '75 broke,  
The flag came down at Tan Son Nhut.

That may be how the history books record,  
But I come now and boldly do refute,  
For in the Field of the Heroes of the Lord,  
The flag forever flies for Tan Son Nhut

Anonymous





# The First Ground Assault on Tan Son Nhut

Richard W. Lindbeck, of West Bend, Wisconsin, sent in copies of the *Stars and Stripes* and the *7th Air Force News* that chronicled the first ground assault against Tan Son Nhut Air Base at 12:30 a.m., April 13, 1966. Lindbeck brought home these publications because he was there, and in fact, part of the defense as a twenty-one year old Air Policeman (later Security Police). In a later article, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, in the *7th Air Force News*, Lindbeck tells how he took refuge in a large steel crate, but he picked the wrong place. "I was on duty at the radio center. When the first rounds came in I dived into an open Conex (a steel crate about eight feet long on each side). I no sooner got into it before a round went into the box above me and exploded. The noise and shock were terrific!" We are deeply grateful to Richard Lindbeck for sending in these priceless copies of contemporary publications. They will materially add to the evolving body of a Tan Son Nhut Association historical library.

## VC HIT SAIGON AB, 7 KILLED, 155 HURT

**STARS AND STRIPES**  
PACIFIC  
AN AUTHORIZED PUBLICATION OF  
THE ARMED FORCES FAR EAST  
Vol. 22, No. 103  
Thursday, April 14, 1966

**Air Force News**  
\* VIET CONG SHELL TAN SON NHUT AIR BASE  
Casualties Light, Damage Moderate

## Casualties Light, Damage Moderate

The Tan Son Nhut air base located about three miles from downtown Saigon underwent a Viet Cong attack beginning at 12:30 a.m. April 13. The attack lasted for about 20 minutes.

Air Force officials at the air base said some 75 rounds of 82mm mortar and 75mm recoilless rifle fire struck the installation — headquarters for the Seventh Air Force and U.S. Army, Vietnam, as well as the Vietnamese Air Force.

It was the first time during the Viet Nam conflict that Tan Son Nhut has been attacked.

No contact with enemy forces was reported.

Col. George Budway of Great Falls, Mont., Air Force base commander, said casualties were light. Damage was moderate.

Part of the Viet Cong barrage landed in a fuel storage area and one tank of fuel burned. Flames soared hundreds of feet into the night sky, joining flares dropped by Air Force flare-ships in lighting the area.

Enemy positions were attacked by armed helicopters and attack planes. The positions were located west and southwest of Tan Son Nhut which is on the north-west edge of Saigon.

Air Force firemen fought to contain the blazing fuel stores  
(Continued page 4)

SAIGON (AP)—The Viet Cong attacked Saigon's Tan Son Nhut AB with mortars early Wednesday, killing 7 Americans and wounding 155 other persons.

The American dead included six soldiers and one sailor.

Among the wounded were 20 Air Force men, 77 other U.S. servicemen, and 58 Vietnamese. It was the first mortar attack on the base, where 10,000 U.S. servicemen are stationed and which houses the residence of Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky. The base is about four miles from the heart of Saigon.

Five U.S. aircraft were damaged. They included F-105 fighters, F-4s, and one T-28. The latter is the craft that provides television relay to Saigon. The television plane was described as badly damaged.

Two Vietnamese C-47 cargo planes also were damaged and a fuel storage installation was set ablaze.

The huge fuel tanks set ablaze are located near the civilian side of the air base. There is a large air cargo depot in the area.

Armed helicopters were in the sky almost immediately after the first mortar rounds began falling shortly before 1 a.m. They reported hitting the mortar fire. It was believed the mortar fire originated, and a second contact was reported about 20 minutes later. There was no estimate of Viet Cong casualties.

Two U.S. Air Force men were on duty at the 8th Aerial Port passenger terminal at the time of the attack.

A1C Jerry R. Housh said, "We were talking to two officers and heard two explosions. The first one hit right behind our building. It was so close that it made my teeth rattle."

A1C David B. Smith said, "We turned out the lights and hit the ground. I heard more than 20 explosions. Shrapnel bounced off the roof of the building and one of our buses got hit."

The two Vietnamese cargo planes that were hit were about 100 yards from the passenger terminal where Housh and Smith were working.

The mortar attack was laid on in an arc, starting at the north end of the base and whirling up in the south end with the fuel dump and the motor pool as the obvious targets.

A1C James D. Ray, who was driving a passenger truck-bus near the fuel dump, said American helicopters went into the air as soon as the attack started and were pouring tracers into the southern area where the mortar attack was detected.

Ray said he was ordered to take shelter in a ditch and his passengers did so, for about 30 minutes.



AP Photo—A1C Smith  
A TANK AT TAN SON NHUT AB.



# Elegies for Phantoms

Foreword by Editor, Robert Need, Photography from Irving E. Rice

You and I have a lot of proud and oftentimes poignant memories of our time at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. But unless you had something to do with the RF-4C, I think we just might have missed out on an experience of near spiritual, if not supernatural import. In the December 2003 issue of *Revetments* we published "The Bite of The Phantom" by Fred Treadway of Cocoa, Florida, expressing pride – and even joy in his assignment with this aircraft. Irving Rice, from Dilliner, Pennsylvania, is no stranger to these pages. His poetry has been recognized and cited by public societies. We published his touching "A Gift to Remember" in the Christmas issue of December 2002. He recently sent us more of his thoughts, and we find that we have to share them with you.

*Hidden away in a revetment – the Phantom – or is it the ghost that haunted the skies of Vietnam – waiting to come out of its resting area. It was inspected for the next mission. It was the eyes for many. Does the man control the machine – or does the machine control the man? The feeling is hard to explain.*

*I remember one morning the fog was so heavy I could hardly see the F4 sitting there. Talk about a ghost ship in the fog – that was it. This thought came to my mind – something you can hardly see can be very harmful to its enemies. The Phantom waited on us while others waited on the Phantom. When we did our best, the Phantom did its best.*

*I spent seven months in the 12<sup>th</sup> Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron from August 1970 to March 1971. The rest of my duty was at Bien Hoa. I guess a lot of those RF-4Cs are at rest someplace now. When this picture was taken it seemed as if this Phantom was posing for it. I spent so much time with it – that I caught myself talking to it. I bet some of the other guys did the same thing. I never forgot Tan Son Nhut and the brave men and women who served there.*



## In Memory of Those Who Gave Their Lives

They left us with a fortune,  
We spend it here and there  
It's a fortune we can't buy,  
But it's something we can share.

They were more than just good soldiers,  
Who answered their last call,  
They were the type of soldiers,  
Who wouldn't let us fall.

Soldiers of this kind,  
How could we replace?  
Deep within our hearts,  
We hold an empty space.

We thought for fame and fortune,  
You had to be a star.  
These soldiers taught us all,  
It's really who we are.



One day they went with angels,  
To their homes above.  
Their fortune wasn't money  
They left us all their love.

*Irving E. Rice*





## Thoughts of Our Sky Pilot



James M. Warrington  
Chaplain, T.S.N.A.

### "I Was Wrong"

There is an inspiring story in the history of polar exploration concerning the meeting of Sir Hubert Wilkins and the great Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen. The latter was a bold, outspoken man who had long been a bitter professional enemy of Wilkins. For years he had criticized Wilkins as an irresponsible glory-hunter who was doing great harm, who endangered himself needlessly and accomplished nothing. Then in 1928, Wilkins and Eielson made the brilliant 2,100 miles exploratory flight from Point Barrow to Spitsbergen which Amundsen later described as the greatest flight ever made anywhere.

On his way home from Spitsbergen Wilkins stopped in Norway and called upon his rival and critic. He told later how he, Wilkins, walked up the long path across Amundsen's front lawn, how the latter's door suddenly burst open, how the aging Norwegian shot out of his house with tears running down his face, ran to Wilkins, embraced him and cried, "Forgive me, Wilkins. Forgive me, I was wrong."

It takes a big man to say, "I was wrong." Again and again life demands this kind of bigness. Families on the verge of break-up can often be united again if only one partner will say, "I was wrong." Broken friendships are often repaired by the same three words. Old feuds that divide and injure community life can be healed if there are those big enough to look back and say, "We were wrong."

Each person to varying degrees is a mistake-making creature. He/she is finite, fallible, sinful. He/she not only injures his neighbor but rebels against God. This is some innate tendency that

### John Burke's Days at Tan Son Nhut

I FIGURED IT WAS  
YOURS, WHEN I CAUGHT  
IT SNEAKING TOWARDS  
TOWN!



has been with humanity from the beginning. It is what Christian theologians mean by the doctrine of original sin. This would be a hopelessly depressing doctrine were it not for the parallel doctrine of God's forgiveness. There is always a way of restoration and renewal, when we are ready to say to Almighty God, "I was wrong. Forgive me!"

Holy scripture sums it up for us: "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us; but if we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The Tan Son Nhut Assc. Chaplains are available for pastoral counseling and services. Call (757) 627-7746 for apmt.

**Founded 1995**  
By  
**Don Parker & John Peele**  
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*Revetments* is published monthly at the Office of Public Affairs, TSNA, Suite 709, 330 West Brambleton Avenue, Norfolk, Virginia 23510. Telephone: (757) 627-7746; FAX: (757) 627-0878; E-Mail: [hercules29@worldnet.att.net](mailto:hercules29@worldnet.att.net)  
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Send to Public Affairs, address above.



# The Communication Center

## Memorial to War Dogs to be Dedicated This Month -



Member, George Kinnaird, Loveland, Ohio, announces that on Sunday, April 17, at 12 noon, the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 649 Clermont County, Ohio, will be dedicating a memorial to the War Dogs. The ceremonies will be held at the union Township Veterans Memorial Park, one half mile south of State Route 32, Clogh Pike at Glen Este Withamsville Road, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Commemorative bricks are being offered at \$30 a piece and may bear up to 3 lines, 14 characters per line. To order a brick contact the chapter at [www.vva649.org](http://www.vva649.org) for additional information and a download order form.

One Vietnam doghandler paid for 30 bricks for his former platoon.

George reports that the chapter is considering the idea of honoring K9s serving in blue and would like input from doghandlers as to their feelings. George suggests that they be in the same area but apart from the others.

Comments from the membership will be appreciated. Contact him at [gkinnaird@cinci.rr.com](mailto:gkinnaird@cinci.rr.com)

\* \* \*

This Page is Going to the Dogs - Member Paul Smith from Sterling Heights, Michigan, was a EC-47 copilot in the 360<sup>th</sup> TEWS. He has invited our attention to the squadron dog, Sux.



The picture is from a squadron party sometime in August or September of 1972, just before the squadron split up and went to Da Nang and Nakhon Phanom (Thailand). Sux ended up in Thailand where she finished out the war.

She was a veteran of the 1968 Tet Offensive, in which she was wounded. Here she is hungrily eyeing the squadron birds. She was always shampooed and dressed in her flight suit before parties.

\* \* \*

Article Bring Reflexion to Member - In the February issue of *Revetments*, The Communication Center, Thomas J. Cralley shared with us the bitter memories he has of Vietnam. He asked if he alone entertained those sentiments.

As I read his comments I remembered how I felt on Tan Son Nhut thirty-six years ago when I read *Stars and Stripes* about the protesters back home. I felt unappreciated,

betrayed, and ashamed for my fellow Americans. How could they be so blind to the sacrifice their fellow Americans were making for them in Vietnam?

Then I realized that they weren't thinking of my sacrifice but of the sacrifice they might have to make themselves. I realized that their protests had more to do with cowardice than conviction and I just felt sorry for them. I also felt sorry for our country because it might have to depend on them in the future.

Americans today, like the Americans of 1968, only seem concerned about war when they might have to fight it. As long as a war is fought by "volunteers" nothing much is said. But draft someone, or deploy the reserves and watch how fast the protesters show up. That's a sad situation for us all. Respectfully yours,

David E. Koopman

Little Canada, Minnesota

\* \* \*

Another Article Touches A Member - Here's some \$ to add to your maintenance "slush fund," and thank you! I appreciate your efforts to keep the Tan Son Nhut Association afloat.

As Tan Son Nhut alumni, we all have stories and memories to share, which help us all to heal.

I want to thank ms. Kathleen Fennell for her memories shared in the February issue of *Revetments* ("Tan Son Nhut - A Very Special Place to Me"). And thank you Kathleen for what

you did for your country and for what you still do for humanity!

My oldest son is a security policeman and doghandler for the U.S. Air Force. He is high on the list awaiting orders for the desert. He has been there twice since 2000. He is very proud to serve and he loves what he does - as was I.

Thanks again to the officers and members for your continued hard work and efforts.

Fred Stein

Albert Lea, Minnesota

\* \* \*

New Nolan Book Hilites May "Mini Tet" - Highly respected as one of the most authoritative writers of the Vietnam era, especially battle action around Saigon, Keith William Nolan is bringing out a new volume, tentatively entitled *Playing the Enemy's Game*. It will be published by Ballantine later this year.

It joins his very well received *Battle for Saigon, Tet 1968*, and covers the May 1968 fighting in and around Saigon. There are Tan Son Nhut incidents, but the bulk of the book will be devoted to the men of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division (USA) who were sent into southern Saigon to root out several VC battalions that had seized a number of residential neighborhoods. They were bogged down in a house-to-house fight that lasted from May 7 to May 13, 1968 and left much of the southern edge of Saigon a shambles.

When this volume becomes available, *Revetments* will announce it.



## Cross Currents

by David Lewis Bolton  
Chief, USN (Ret.) "River Rat" '67 -'70



### Heros, Presidents – and Others

There has been a great deal of talk about the relative merits of various types of military service of late. Some would have you believe that this controversy is unique and is some type of indicator of leadership ability. After some research I have come to some personal conclusions. Let me share the facts with you as I see them.

By my calculations there have been twenty-three presidents who have had active or militia/national guard service. If you count Andrew Johnson, who as military governor of Tennessee wore an officer's uniform (at least Van Heflin did in *Tennessee Johnson*) you could make that twenty-four.

Of the nine who wore the stars of general officer, the service in the field ran the gamut – Washington and Eisenhower were often derided as figureheads. Taylor was considered by many to be of shallow intellect. Jackson was famous for fits of temper and spite. Pierce was chided for cowardice (most unjustly, by the way).

The many problems of Ulysses S. Grant have been well chronicled. It would appear that his main failing was an excessive devotion to undeserving family members. His personal bravery and rectitude were never in question.

The other Civil War generals, Hayes, Garfield and Harrison all served with honor, and, I believe with an eye to the political future.

Of these nine I would rate Pierce as a failure both as a president and as an officer. "Ike" and "Old Hickory" rate at the top. It has been said that great generals (and politicians) get to the top by taking credit for everyone's success and none of the blame for any failures. A simplification that anyone who has ever

worked in a large organization will understand.

The service of the other fourteen is harder to evaluate. Is there any way to put value on Lincoln's service in the Black Hawk War? Certainly not in any meaningful military sense. Was his service any less important than Theodore Roosevelt's charge up San Juan Hill? I think not.

Gerald Ford's naval service was by all accounts valorous. Lyndon Johnson's was full of photo op and hype. And, we all know about PT 109. There has been controversy ever since about the skill of the skipper and

whether his father prevented a courts-martial for incompetence. Was JFK any less brave because his bravery may have been caused by his own mistake?

Nixon spent World War II in a rear area playing cards. Carter was either in class at Annapolis for on a midshipman's cruise in the North Atlantic. Both were doing what they were ordered to do. With the fluidity of warfare both could have been placed in what is harm's way at short (or no) notice.

There is no objective way to predict performance as a president based on military service. Was there a connection between Zachary Taylor's forty year military career and the decisiveness he displayed toward would-be secessionists? Did Truman's command of an artillery battery give him any insight into the need to drop the atomic bomb?

Did "Raider Johnson" learn how to micro-manage during his truncated tour in the South Pacific? And does that add or detract from his very real leadership in the fields of civil rights?

Anyone who wore any one of the uniforms of this country honorably deserves our thanks – without second guessing and mud slinging.

\* \* \*

### Thank you all, again and again!

Few associations, organizations or clubs can match the members of the Tan Son Nhut Association for generosity and sheer kindness. The maintenance fund gets healthier every day.





## Getting Serious About -

## Mementos



Director Wayne Salisbury

A lot of members are coming up with ideas and plans that will hopefully expand the Tan Son Nhut Association's membership and its programs during 2004. It may seem like a minor point, but an interesting phrase has been added to the Association's letterheads and you can read it on the front page of *Revetments* - "A Memorial to The American Experience in Vietnam." We're not exactly starting at square one, this is the sixty-seventh issue of *Revetments*, which for nearly six years has chronicled hundreds of our members' stories and experiences, some inspiring, some sad, some hysterically funny, and some tragic. Each one of these stories is a "memento" along with the priceless pictures that often accompany them. Director Wayne

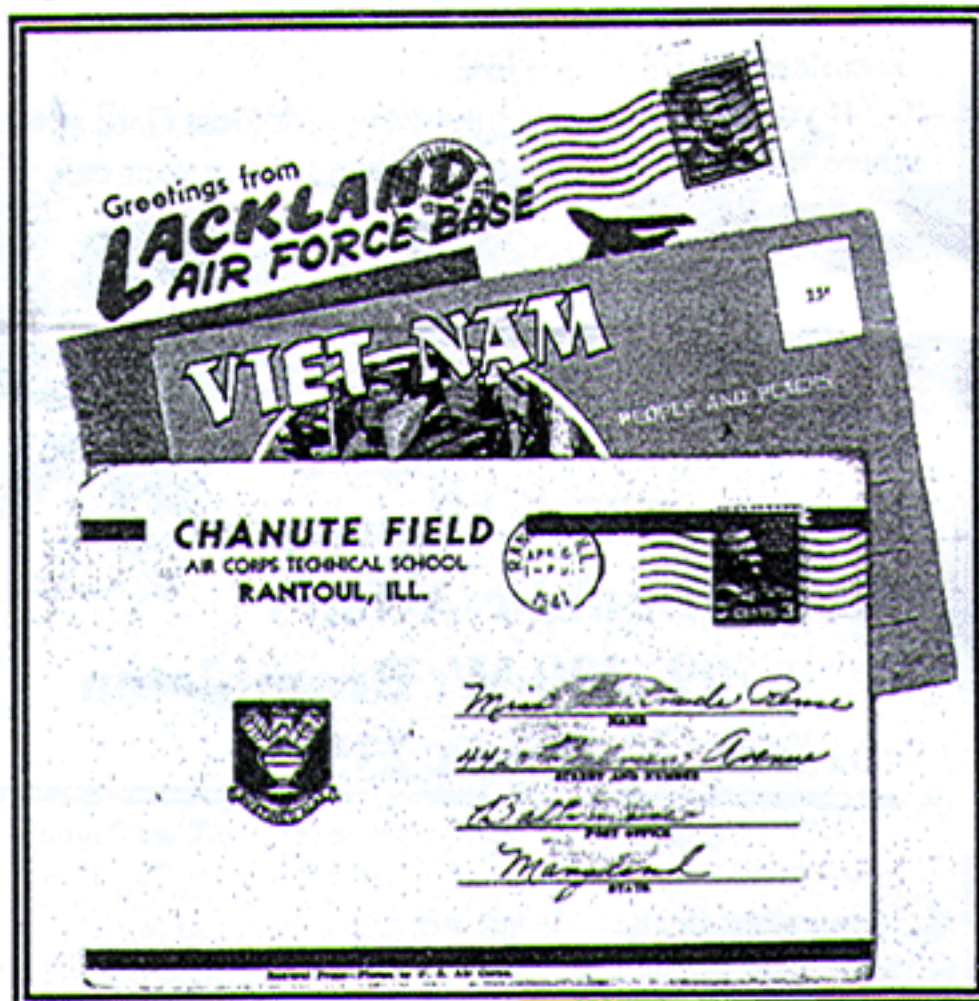
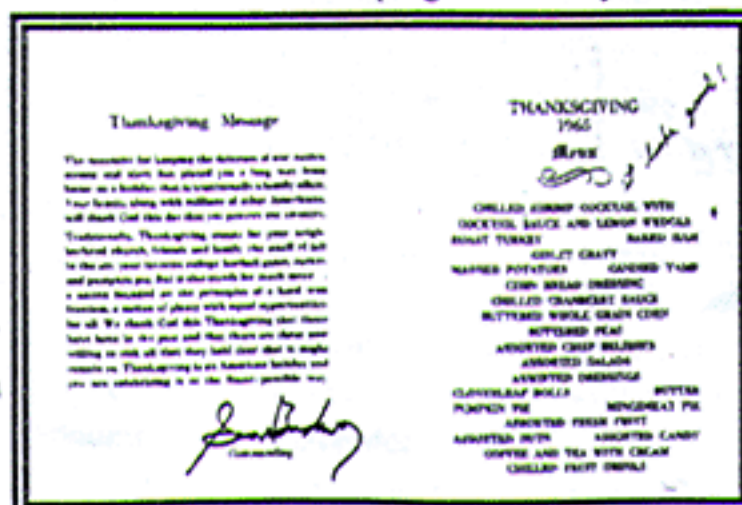
Salisbury, Roanoke, Virginia, has opened another avenue for the preservation of your graphic mementos. He is currently processing hundreds of photos onto digital disks that eventually will cover all facets of Tan Son Nhut Air Base life. This is a solid step forward towards our goal to memorialize the American experience in Vietnam. Some day *Revetments* and all the other written accounts, historical, factual and fiction, will evolve into the Tan Son Nhut Memorial Library. And, as sound organization is established, your artifacts, your pictures, your mementos will be the initial building blocks for the Tan Son Nhut Memorial Museum. Hundreds of you have already shared your stories with your comrades and their families through the pages of *Revetments* - let's get to work with Wayne and the photo program. Write him at: Wayne Salisbury, 2413 Brambleton Avenue, Roanoke, Virginia 24015; call (540) 772-1025 or E-Mail: [WS7245@aol.com](mailto:WS7245@aol.com)

If you don't know what a "memento" is, perhaps a couple of examples will help you. No, this isn't the *Mona Lisa* but it means a lot more to Jim Stewart of Montrose, Michigan. His brother, Joe



was a Navy Pilot of P3 Orion submarine chasers for 16 years. Jim had this painting done in the 'Nam of the two of them and included their military duties. Rather priceless, I'd say.

Nobody's calling Jeff Price, from Newberry South Carolina, a "chow hound," but he couldn't resist keeping all these years the Thanksgiving menu from the 6250<sup>th</sup> Combat Support Group mess. Someone might say that's not much of a memento. But if you were there in 1965, no meal in Paris could compare!



And leave it to our star TSNA supporter, Rick Fulton, of Pittsburg, Kansas, to hit us with the most poignant "memento." The Lackland (1962) and the Chanute card sets are for the Chanute archives. He's sending the Vietnam set as a "door prize" for TSNA Reunion 2004. But thereby hangs a tale - the addressee, on the Chanute set, Miss Gertrude Pence, is Rick's mother. PFC. Charles L. Ward, Flight C, Class 21, Hangar 12, Chanute Field, Rantoul, Illinois, was her boy friend. He sent her the card set while he was in training in the U. S. Army Air Corps. The postmark reads, "April 8, 1941." He eventually was assigned as a tail gunner in a B-17 - he never made it home. Think you got an idea what a "memento" is now?





# Reunion 2004 Notes!

We're happy to report that the March issue of *Revetments*, TSNA Reunion 2004, was well received by many members and its starting to look like we may have a great midsummer's get-together in Bourbonnais, Illinois, July 21 - July 25. Our reunion Host, Dean Gard, has furnished additional information of interest to those planning on attending. RV (Recreational Vehicles) and Campers can be accommodated at the Kankakee River State Park, just off Route 102, full hook-ups. For full information and reservations call the Ranger Station, (815) 933-1383.

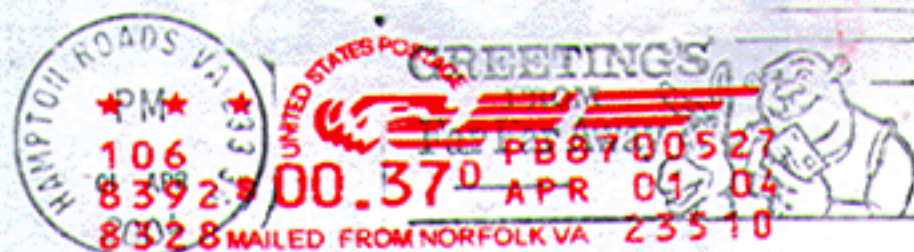
For those flying into either O'Hare or Midway airports look for the Tri-State Coach desk. For \$20 bus service will be provided to a point south of Chicago where Dean has scheduled a bus pick-up service to complete the trip to Bourbonnais and the Holiday Inn Express.

Speaking of hotels, **YOUR RESERVATION MUST BE MADE NOT LATER THAN JUNE 1** if you are planning on staying at the Holiday Inn Express. Address: 62 Ken Hayes Drive, Bourbonnais, Illinois 60914. Phone: (815) 932-4411. FAX: (815) 932-4439. **BE SURE AND TELL THEM YOU ARE ASKING FOR ONE OF THE ROOMS RESERVED FOR MEMBERS OF THE TAN SON NHUT ASSOCIATION!**

Also, get your Reunion Registration Form to Host Dean Gard as soon as possible. Mail to Dean Gard, TSNA, 139 Meadows Road South, Bourbonnais, Illinois 60914, Phone: (815) 932-0238 FAX: (815) 937-3655. If you have lost the registration form that was in last month's *Revetments*, no sweat. Just provide: Name, Mailing Address, City, State, ZIP, Phone, E-Mail, Name of those accompanying you, whether you are going to participate in South Shore Golf Outing, and what you and your companions want at the banquet, Prime Rib, Stuffed Pork Loin or Fried Chicken. The steak dinner at the golf outing will be \$15 per person, and the banquet (including tip) will be \$25. But do not send any funds with your registration, all charges will be collected at the reunion.

If you still have questions either call Host Gard at the number shown above, or the Public Affairs Office, at (757) 627-7746 where friendly operators are waiting to take your call.

**Tan Son Nhut Association  
Office of Public Affairs  
Suite 709, 330 W. Brambleton  
Norfolk, Virginia 23510**



**Membership  
Renewal Date**

