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A Memorial to the American Experience
In
Vietnam

REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association



Photo by Life Member Tony Plonski
460 AEMS (Automatic Flight Control Systems)
TSN Sep 1967—Sep 1968

Southern perimeter just beyond the 1200 barracks area. Smoke is from A1-E's counter attack, May 1968.

Thoughts of Our Sky Pilot
Rev. Dr. James M. Warrington
Chaplain, TSNA



Easter

All religions are not the same but all do have certain similarities. They have a single personality who is the focus of the religion. They have one or more books that describe that single personality and related historical events. They have distinctive places of worship. They also have their respective calendars, individual deity worship practices, as well as varieties of community ways of worship.

To best understand the similarities and the distinctiveness of the major religions, you must read their respective sacred scriptures. The primary purpose of such reading is to understand the single personality of the religion such as: Brabma, Guatama Siddhartha, Mohammed, Moses, Jesus the Christ, and the turbulent times in which their came to prominence.

All of the religious personalities who lived during their respective times of clashes between cultures are now dead. One exception! Jesus, the Christ, which term is often translated "anoined one", was raised from the dead. Some claimed that his close followers simply stole his body from the tomb and hid it somewhere or that they were all suffering from mass hallucination. However, the narrative accounts of Jesus life, arrest, trial, execution, and his followers reaction thereto indicate his return from real physical death.



Consider his disciples (followers). During Jesus arrest they fled in fear of what could just as well happen to them. A very few fearfully watched his trial or his torturous execution. They did not believe the first reports that his burial tomb was empty. When they gathered together they were fearfully in hiding behind locked doors.

Jesus appeared to his disciples and later several times appeared to many of his other followers. These people were transformed from despair, seclusion and fear to their own public worship and appearances, and bold speech concerning Jesus rising from the dead and his appearances to them. Hiding a dead body would not bring about such personality changes, but Jesus appearance would.

The annual festival of the Resurrection of Jesus, the Christ, from the dead this year on Sunday, April sixteenth, emphasizes that physical death is prelude to the greater transformation of life to come. The holiday, Easter, named after a mid eastern fertility goddess, often represents money making opportunities and observes a timely season to really study and evaluate the core teachings in the Bible concerning Jesus the anoined one, the Christ.

My hope and prayer is that every person diligently seek answers posed by religion so that each may find and enjoy the life more abundant beyond mere worldly expectations.

Founded 1995

By

President Emeritus Don Parker

and

President Emeritus John Peele

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Transitions - Then and Now

By Dale Bryan ~ Director-At-Large

This is the premier column of *"Transitions—Then and Now"*. The editor of *Revetments* hopes they continue into perpetuity. Fulfillment of that aspiration is beyond the grasp of the editor. Responsibility lies on the shoulders of each individual TSNA member.

Most of us remember the often negative views of Vietnam veterans during the Sixties and Seventies where they were often depicted as unemployed, depraved, drug or alcohol addicted losers barely capable of clinging to the bottom rungs of society. Those myths were perpetuated in some popular fiction and other elements of the entertainment medium. Yes, it's true that a minute number fit the picture, but the true story is that nearly all of us returned to be underpinnings of society – law abiding, hard working, taxpaying, voting citizens. This column is our medium to tell our positive story. A given account in this column may never be seen beyond *Revetments*, and it will never have the notoriety of *"Apocalypse Now"* or other motion pictures. However, your story should be told.

Some of us learned our professions in the military; some of us were able to get an education because we had served; all of us definitely matured because of our service in Vietnam. To begin this new series, I'll tell my story:

First: I'm a very fortunate individual, and I am definitely not a hero. In fact, I worked in an air conditioned building at Tan Son Nhut AB. The building was sealed and had no windows because classified maps were hung on the walls. That's a piece of the fortunate part. My military experiences were actually more exciting during my tour immediately after Vietnam. That is when I went to Guam to fly weather reconnaissance in the WC-130E as a member of the *"Typhoon Chasers"*. Very interesting assignment.

The Air Force must decide how to utilize new, green persons with no useful, existing skills. That is true whether the individual be a seventeen year old Airman Basic or a brand new Second Lieutenant. I fit the later category. Because of Myopia, I could not be trained as a pilot or navigator, so I

requested to be trained as a weather officer where I'd work directly with operations. It was a good choice. During a five and one-half years Air Force stint, I was the Wing Weather Officer of a Minute Man Missile Wing in Wyoming, a forecaster at base weather and the 460th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing at Tan Son Nhut AB, and an Aerial Reconnaissance Weather Officer with the 54th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron at Andersen AFB, Guam. The mold was cast for a career in weather and/or aviation for the remainder of my life. It has been a diverse and rewarding career.

It was in the Air Force that I was first exposed to weather radar (ground and airborne) and weather satellite data. Without satellite data, attempting to assess cloud cover over North Vietnam would have been virtually impossible. Returning RF-4 and RF-101 crews provided valuable weather information, but it was certainly not their primary mission to linger in a hostile area to analyze cloud cover. I have to state that the pilot reports and debriefings were excellent considering the circumstances. I admire those brave men to this day. We had radar at Tan Son Nhut base weather and there was radar on the WC-130E.

During the first twelve years upon return to civilian life, I worked for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the Department of Commerce. I was a public service meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Fresno, California for two years, and part of the job was briefing pilots at the co-located FAA Flight Service Station. Prior Air Force experience in pilot briefing was definitely an asset. I then transferred to the National Environmental Satellite Service of NOAA in Washington, DC to work in the National Meteorological Center. Tropical Cyclone (Hurricane and Typhoon) analysis and preparation of aviation weather charts were a major elements of the duties. In fact, my past Air Force experience helped me get selected for the position. Next stop in NOAA was to be an on-air meteorologist on the PBS television program *"A.M. Weather"*. Presenting weather on television is a lot like an Air Force weather briefing to a commander and staff. Keep it

brief and factual.

Then it became time to leave direct government employment. Because of my visibility on *"A.M. Weather"*, I was offered and I accepted a job as an on camera meteorologist at the Weather Channel. I was there and being "piped" into homes in 1982 when the cable service premiered. From 1985 to 1992, my career was devoted to working with computer graphics systems for display of weather information on television and in aviation and public utilities operations facilities. Also worked with lightning detection systems and continued to work part time as a television meteorologist. How great it would have been to have a lightning detection system at TSN. We in the weather station were continually asked how close lightning flashes were because fueling operations had to cease when it was within three miles. I believe my memory is correct in the three mile figure. Any maintenance persons reading this recall a different distance requirement? We could only estimate distance by resorting to flash-bang timing or looking at radar. Radar is not a perfect tool because all weather echoes do not generate lightning.

In 1992, an opportunity presented itself to allow me to be directly involved with aviation again. I went to work as a contractor supporting the FAA in its wind shear programs. The job was very equipment oriented and more like engineering than meteorology. Also worked with navigation equipment and runway incursion prevention where I'm working today. Have had the unique opportunity to work at FAA's three major facilities: Technical Center, Atlantic City, NJ; Aeronautical Center, Oklahoma City, OK; FAA Headquarters, Washington, DC.

Most of my wind shear work has been with Low Level Wind shear Alert System (LLWAS). LLWAS is a series of anemometers that measure wind on and around an airport. The wind data are computer processed to generate alerts to the air traffic control tower when wind shear occurs. A bulk of my LLWAS work was anemometer network layout and implementation. I can, with modesty, state that I'm one of less than 10 people in the World

who perform this function and have been called upon to help with systems in Korea. I've been there four times since 1998. Saw Korea from the flight deck of the WC-130E in 1968. Finally set foot in the country 30 years later.

I may have removed the "blue suit" many years ago, but I never left aviation. Furthermore, frequent moves and TDY's, even overseas, continued. But, I love my work and owe much of my success to superb training received in the armed forces when a young man.

That is my story. I hope it was of interest to you. Now we want your story. Certainly, TSNA members are interested in your story. Send it soon.

Recollection of My Experiences In Vietnam Over 40 Years Ago

**By New Life Member
Archie A. Blackmon, MSgt. (Ret)**

I was initially assigned as one of the sector SAT leaders in Foxtrot sector the first part of my tour in Vietnam. Foxtrot Sector had at least two probes during my tour of duty. One occurred while I was still assigned to the sector when a small group of enemy forces were reported to be in the village adjacent to the defense position. The two sector SAT's assigned set up a blocking position within the perimeter but did not make contact with the enemy. The Vietnamese paratroopers moved into the village and the enemy force reportedly withdrew from the village.

The second occurred sometimes after the major assault on the 051 Bunker on the west perimeter when a small force of enemy combatants attempted to penetrate Foxtrot sector by advancing through the graveyard along the perimeter. A force was placed in a blocking position inside the fence and the enemy was reported to have dispersed. A small enemy force also tried to attack the main gate under the cover of small children, but had to retreat back into the city of Saigon when a Vietnamese security police fired rounds over the children's head,

My memories of the TET offense are that an airplane was taking off on the runway

from my right to left facing the flight line from my position on the base and I heard the report of enemy activity on the west perimeter as reported by security personnel on the west perimeter. I saw a cluster of red tracer rounds being fired in the direction of the departing aircraft. The enemy uses red tracers and the American forces had white tracers and this allows defense forces to distinguish between friendly and enemy firepower. I was assigned to a fifteen member SAT team and responded to gate two in response to a report of enemy activity in the area. The responding forces to gate two did not encounter enemy forces, but numerous rounds could be heard flying overhead. The weapons used probability was from long-range weapons that were engaging other enemy forces.

I must take a moment to thank the men who were in position of leadership for having the courage to place the squadron on Condition Red when all the intelligence did not foresee the extent of the assault on the base. We were placed on Condition Red and all leaves and passes were cancelled.

I had scheduled my in country R&R for that weekend in the Chinese District of Saigon at the request of a Vietnam citizen of Chinese descent that I befriended at the local Bank of America branch on base. I was upset when my plans were interrupted and thought that our leaders were over reacting and had not used sound judgment in canceling vacation time for the troops. Later rumors abound that enemy forces were living in the sector of the city where I planned to spend my in country vacation. There were also rumors indicating that enemy forces actively recruited combatants to join in the fight for control of the base. The recruitment of locals could not have been very successful or the attacking forces should have been much larger. My personal beliefs are that recruitment of combatants in the Saigon area was not successful due to the economic ties the city had with the base.

During the days that followed the initial assault on the base I returned to my duties in law enforcement but no longer worked as joint patrolman. I was assigned as a leader of a two-man machine gun team and given the responsibility to check on individuals assigned positions along the base that adjoined the city of Saigon and also in the American Compound on the joint air

force base. I also escorted prisoners to the Long Binh Jail (LBJ), and escorted military and civilians into Saigon because the city still had sectors where enemy combatants were active.

The city was under Martial law, and people could not travel in the city during curfew without a military police escort. I also worked part of the time at the military police headquarters in Saigon as the base liaison person to report areas of the city that was engaged in enemy activity.

My duties as a machine gun team leader consisted of post check of stationary bunker guards on base. Due to many rocket attacks my duties also included checking my bunker workers following a rocket attack to make sure they were safe. I also had to examine the area where the rocket landed and report damages in person because of the possibility that the enemy collected some of our communication devices during the assault. I also had to report the number of people injured during the rocket attack and account for the dead. Driving around immediately following a rocket attack can cause some anxiety because sometimes the enemy would make a series of attacks during the night and getting caught in an open area during an attack could be hazardous.

For a short time after the assault on base the law enforcement two-man teams had to respond to gunshots reported in the compound. I am not aware of anyone being wounded during the incidents and the responding security forces often encountered airmen assigned to the base trying to locate the source of the gunshots. One of the most difficult problems for responding security forces was to make sure that friendly forces were not injured. To my knowledge there was no incident where a friendly force member was injured or killed. I feel that the credit for this is due to the training and discipline of the responding forces.

Thank you for a chance to vent some of my frustrations by writing about my experiences in Vietnam. I have not been able to openly discuss my experiences to anyone and I never thought about writing about them. I am still anxious and will not watch war movies because sometimes it causes me to have periods of anxiety and nightmares.

Beginning May 1999, a series of installments, written by Life Member Taylor McKinnon, began in *Revetments*. The series chronicled his experience as a maintenance officer while stationed at Tan Son Nhut from

May 1965 to May 1966. His story was well received by the readers of *Revetments*. It is a privilege to reprint the installments.
Wayne Salisbury

~ Day One At Tan Son Nhut ~

By Major Taylor McKinnon, USAF (ret)



The big "stretch DC-8" I had boarded eighteen hours earlier touched down at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport on 27 May 1965.

Disembarking from the jet gave me my first lasting experience of Viet Nam, which was being hit in the face with a blast of hot air dripping with humidity such as I had never experienced although I am from Alabama where the humidity is normally high in summer.

Down the portable stairs we went toward the Saigon airport terminal building which was a poured concrete structure with a vaguely French colonial look, and I was reminded that the French presence had departed from French Indo-China only a few years earlier after unsuccessfully attempting to reestablish control over the colony which it had taken in the late 1890s and lost to the Japanese and their "Greater Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere" from 1939 until the end of World War Two in 1945.

They had fought against Viet Nam nationalists under Ho Chi Minh from 1945 until 1954 suffering horrible casualties in the last year at Dien Bien Phu at which time the United Nations partitioned the country between North and South at the 17th parallel, allowing the North Vietnam government the northern portion and the southern portion to the population which did not desire to live under the communist government which Ho Chi Minh had introduced since he was supported by the then Soviet Union.

To return to my story, the inside of the terminal was even more in need of repair than was the outside.

Counters were marked as being serviced by Air France, Air America (an outfit administered by Civil Air Transport out of Taiwan, but financed by the C.I.A.) And Air Viet Nam, the national airline which flew DC-3 airliners (we called these C-47 in the Air Force) as well as the Boeing 307 (which had been the world's first four-engine, pressurized airliner back when first produced by Boeing in 1939. It was in fact a B-17 bomber with a fat fuselage to accommodate passengers and was called the Stratoliner since it could fly in the stratosphere where the air is calm and no weather interferes with navigation.

Getting The Troops Settled

We were directed by an NCO at the MATS counter (military air transport service, the forerunner of MAC, to a string of six-by-six two and a half ton trucks outside the terminal. After loading our duffle bags we were driven off the civilian side of the field and into the old military gate at 100P Alley, where the sad old French Air Force Cemetery was, with hundreds of graves marked by concrete crosses. The French were poor after the Great War (WWII) and did not have the resources to return the bodies to their native land for burial as we did. The entire graduating class at St. Cyr, the French military academy, all second lieutenants, had been killed in Viet Nam for three years in a row.

We traveled on down the pot-holed road to what was known as the "cantonment" area. I had never heard this term before and in research learned that it came from China, where the Chinese, not wanting to be corrupted by the European presence, actually walled off a portion of the city of Canton where the "white devils" were obliged to live, thus "cantonment area."

At the cantonment area we found

one staff sergeant in a tent. This was before the big Johnson commitment to a real French style war, and we were on the heels of the Kennedy advisory effort. Kennedy had given tacit approval for the assassination of President Ngo Dinh Diem the previous year (the only president who ever was able to control and mobilize the South Vietnamese). So we had very little in the way of facilities. The poor sergeant was using a tiny Smith Corona travel typewriter that he had brought with him as there were none available through any supply system. The Navy ran supply and transportation and we had poor access to it.

The poor staff sergeant was sweating like a pig when he finished assigning the troops to the few "open air style barracks" within the cantonment area. Then he turned to me, the officer in the group (previously I was a highly productive airplane mechanic, but had inched my way into the old Officer Candidate School by studying at night and had in reward become a mediocre second lieutenant). When I was a crew chief, colonels would put their arms around me and ask, "How's the ship today, son?" And I would answer, "Fine, sir!" But after I became a second lieutenant, the colonels wouldn't speak to me any more, assuming, of course, that I didn't know crap, which as a matter of fact I didn't. But I learned at Tan Son Nhut that if you listen closely to the sergeants who work for you, you and assimilate knowledge in order to gain time until you understand the officering business. With any luck, this will happen about the time you make first lieutenant. I was lucky ultimately in that I inherited the most "shit hot" of all the newly created chief master sergeants, Chief Master Sergeant Dailey.

To get back to my story, the housing NCO had assigned all the enlisted troops to barracks in the cantonment area, sturdy wooden

buildings with tin roofs, no glass windows, instead having wooden louvers designed to keep out the constant rain and let the air flow easily.

The NCO then turned to me and said, "Sorry, lieutenant, but we have no quarters for officers. You will have to go down to Saigon and find yourself a place to stay."

Since nobody had met me from Maintenance Squadron (CAMRON), I asked, "How do I get to Saigon?" He replied, "Wait out there on the curb and a Navy bus will come along each hour and you can ride to Saigon."

Journey To Saigon

I was apprehensive since assassinations had been reported in the news back "in the world." The Brinks Hotel, a large building which had been leased by the Navy to become an officers' B.O.Q., had been blown up the previous month with considerable loss of life on the part of the United States. The Brinks had a beautiful bar and dance hall on the roof and one could spend off days and nights up there eating steak and drinking beer whilst watching the war actually being fought a mile or so across the Saigon River, which was a branch of the Mekong.

Back to my story again. Sure enough, here comes a gray navy bus, I notice that it has chicken wire or fence wire covering the windows. After lugging my 90 pound duffle bag on to the bus, I asked an older head, along whom I sat, why the wire on the windows? He replied, "The windows must be left open due to the intense heat and the Viet Cong has taken to throwing grenades through the windows on the trips across the city." To which I replied, "Well, I am glad they solved that problem." "Not really," he commented, "now they attack fish hooks to the gre-

Continued on page 6

nades so they stick to the windows in front of your face. So you become pretty proficient at getting off a bus swiftly."

Downtown

After driving out Tran Dung Hau Street for a while we came to downtown Saigon. It was a beautiful old French colonial city with tree lined boulevards and homes exactly like I saw later in France after my Viet Nam tour.

The driver let me off in front of the Continental Palace Hotel which featured an open air veranda on the street floor where one could sit, ogle the local beauties and drink Bier La Lue, a local beer ("beer of the street" in French), which was much preferable to other local French beer. "Ba-Moui-Ba" which was Vietnamese for Bier 33 (ba meaning 3, and moui meaning times ten and ba meaning three again adds up to 33. The following year while enjoying my European tour, which in those days was our reward for a tour in Indochina, I saw Bier 33 advertised in a Paris cafe. I found it to be excellent beer, unlike the Saigon version. I had been told that it had formaldehyde added as a preservative and three bottles was a guaranteed "pop skull" the next day.

The press reporters referred to this drinking, eating and observing place as the "Continental Shelf" since it was level with the street and open air. The waiters wore formal clothes and the service was good and the atmosphere interesting. "Saigon Commandos", like myself later on, would play cards and drink beer with pistols strapped to our sides, a custom which was prohibited after the Johnson escalation,

Directly, I asked the desk clerk for a room and he replied that they had no rooms available and I should inquire across the street at the Caravelle Hotel, which was a modern concrete structure with about ten stories.

I stashed the duffle bag at the Continental after tipping the waiter ten piasters which was enough in those days before the Johnson escalation, when the exchange rate was fifty or so to the dollar. This made it kind of handy since it made for easy mental

calculations even for a guy who had three "Ba-Moui-Ba" in a row. Before I left Viet Nam the unofficial exchange rate was 500 and the U.S. tried to maintain 120 in vain. I heard that the only person in one year who exchanged money at base finance was Colonel Budway, the base commander. Everyone else went to the Indian book store on the Rue Catinat (which was renamed To Do Street) or to La Pagode Bar and Grill. Once I tried to buy a book at the Indian book store and the guy asked, "You trying to put me out of business? I need those books."

Upon entering the lobby of the Caravelle, I felt out of place in my old suntan uniform since it was soaking with sweat. We never wore the rain coat when it rained because we became wet with sweat faster than the rain wet us, and the rain was preferable as it smelled okay.

I walked up to the counter and inquired about a room. The concierge replied, "Sorry, lieutenant, but you can't afford it here since the newsmen from the States have run the tariff for a room up to 200 bucks per night." He told me that there was an unfinished hospital on the Rue Vo Tanh which the army had just leased where spaces were available free for troops on leave in Saigon on R&R, and maybe I could bullshit my way in for the night.

The army was pretty good at this business of being good to the troops when not in combat. They leased an entire whore house down on the Street of Flowers, complete with a medical staff to insure the health of the troops. This brothel thing happened later after the John escalation after they discovered a beautiful teenage Viet Cong girl in a little house boat on the Saigon quay dispensing sexual favors at such a rate that they checked her out and found she had been injected with every known venereal disease they could. She was, in effect, sacrificing her life for the cause (independence from European authority was the cause and our fear of communism was outside their frame of reference).

I think that the Street of Flowers or Rue Des Fleurs was renamed Nguyen Hue at about that time in a nationalistic push to rid Saigon of

French-named streets.

Instead of leaving the Caravelle immediately, I caught the elevator up to the roof and there was a night club there which could have been in Paris. But the prices were Paris prices also, so I left and went back to the Continental "shelf" and retrieved my duffle bag.

I hailed a taxi cab instead of taking one of the so-called cyclo pedal machines (three-wheeled bicycles with a basket-type wicker seat which will accommodate two sober servicemen and almost any number of drunken G.I.'s). I immediately attracted one of the identical Saigon taxi cabs which were blue and white and were all old Renault sedans, which though small, had four doors and they smoked like the fires of hell. If I returned to Saigon today, I would expect to see those same old Renaults puffing away. The shade tree mechanics of Saigon were excellent at keeping old machinery running.

Another common auto there was the Citroen, which looked exactly like a 34 Ford, except that they had front wheel drive. You would not be surprised to see Pretty Boy Floyd, the famous gangster, step out of one. They were favorites of the many expatriots one would meet living in Saigon. One was Ward Reimer who was chief of maintenance for Air America, and before I rotated he offered me his job in Saigon. I turned him down, since it would have meant resigning my commission. Being a former enlisted man, I was intensely proud of that hard-earned commission, even though I was only a lieutenant.

Home Sweet Home

Soon we arrived at the uncompleted hospital building which the army had leased as an over-flow barracks for soldiers on leave. I looked at the meter on the taxi which read 35 piasters. I gave the driver 35 piasters, following which he called me every French curse word in the book, plus "stingy son of a bitch." So I gave him 20 or 30 more piasters, or "dong" as the newly issued coins were called, after which he drove off, still not too happy. I was later to learn that inflation, due to

U.S. presence had lessened the value of the currency to the point where 35 dong was equal to perhaps 35 cents, but the government refused to increase the taxi meter charges in an attempt to resist inflation. In the future I gave the poor guys at least 50 piasters for a short ride and more for the long ones.

I carried my bag to the old hospital and in the foyer (pronounced "foyyay") I found one lone army buck sergeant, who was in charge of the night shift. He assigned me to an unfurnished hospital room and explained that he was sorry, they had beds and springs, but no mattresses or bed clothing. But, he did have a supply of Ba-Moui-Ba in his ice box at the nominal cost of 100 P. These would make the bare springs sleep better and I could empty my clothing on the springs to sleep on.

I bought three bottles of Bier 33. and went upstairs and found that the electricity was not turned on yet. Things were moving fast in Saigon in those days, so I wasn't surprised.

Nervously I proceeded downstairs and out to the street where I found a book kiosk. The books were all in French, except one, which I purchased along with a dozen candles. This was going to be a long night. The book turned out to be the best aviation adventure book ever written. It was "Fate Is The Hunter," by Ernest K. Gann, about his life as a commercial pilot in the airlines and in the old Air Transport Command. The Air Corps used contract commercial pilots in transports in order to free the Air Force pilots. But it is too good an idea, so it probably will not be adopted by the United States Air Force. The use of commercial pilots by Air America for transport duties was extremely successful.

I spent the night sleeping on my uniforms and field gear and read the whole book. This required another trip for candles and beer.

I awoke with a semi-pop skull and prepared to report to Colonel Owens, the Commander, and Chief of Maintenance, of the 33rd Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Tan Son Nhut Air Base.

This was my very long first day.

Early Days At TSN
1961—1962
By New Member
Thomas Justice

When I was at Dong Mung in Bangkok, in 1962 and 63, I made several trips on business to Vietnam, most of them passing through Tan Son Nhut. So, I saw the rapid build up first hand. When I returned to Fort Gordon, GA, (March 1962) our outfit was disbanded and I was assigned to Shaw Field, SC, where I was promptly handed a 179 day set of orders for Bangkok.

I got back to Shaw in Nov 1962 and came back to Bangkok in Nov. 1962 until April 1963. Many of the people at Dong Mung never realized that I had gone. Our outfit, 507th Tac Control Group, installed mobile radars all over Vietnam and Thailand. The usual drill was that we would install a site and man it until relieved by PCS troops. But, when we got back to the States, it would be just in time to go do another one. Most of us were single back then and found it a lot of fun.

I have a lot of pleasant memories of my days at the Majestic Hotel. When they built tent city at TSN, I managed to remain on per diem and rented an apartment on the corner of Cong Le and Yen Do, just up the street (toward TSN) from the Palace. It was from there that I witnessed an attempted coup one early morning. Seeing T-28's with US insignia laying 500 pounders on the Palace and the White Mice that manned the pill box by the front gate shooting at the US planes coupled with a couple of half tracks in the street outside my villa firing fifty caliber machine guns at the White Mice, made me wonder what was going on. When the gunfire died down, I made my way out to TSN and found that a couple of my trainees had been lead away and executed.

I will scan some pictures. I don't have many left. They somehow got lost over the years and many moves that I made with the Air Force. Best Regards to all.

A Bit of My Story
By Tony Tidwell

When I arrived at Tan Son Nhut, February

1971, I waited until all the others departed. I wanted to be the last one off the plane. It wasn't because I was scared. I probably wasn't at that moment, but I wanted to create a mental memory.

As I stepped out of the plane, I stopped at the top of the ramp, looked to my right, along the plane, and out as far as I could see, then slowly panning the horizon around to my left, looking out as far as I could. Then I brought myself to a brace, not quite like the position of "attention", but I stood erect, looking forward. Then I said to myself, "So, this is Vietnam." I kept that moment in mind the entire year.

When I left TSN, February 1972, I was the last one up the ramp. I stopped before entering the plane. I looked to my left, opposite of that first time, looking as far as I could. I didn't notice a lot of change. Then I panned the horizon around to my right, looking out as far as I could see. Again, not many changes, after all, it had only been one year.

Again, I brought myself to a brace. This time I rendered a proper "hand salute". Then I said to my self, "Yep, this is Vietnam". As I turned to enter the plane, one of the ladies standing at the door asked me if I would like another minute. I responded with something like, "No ma'am, a year is long enough."

Throughout our lives, there are moments that we want to keep forever. Times like the birth of our children; I witnessed the birth of two of my three. The last one was so big he had to come with the help of the doctors. My poor wife: that kid weighed in at 10 pounds, 8 1/2 oz. One big kid, and still is, 290 pounds, but doesn't look it, or times like those two days in my life.

I can still remember a lot of things of that year, but my most vivid memories are of those two days. I seem to remember faces more than names. The look on that lady's face is still so vivid.

She had really red hair, and dark eyes. She wasn't smiling when she asked me if I would like another moment. And when I said that a year had been long enough, she just pinched her lips together, looked straight at me, and with an expression that said, "I understand", she just slightly nodded her head. As I stepped by her, she patted me on the shoul-

der. That day will forever be in my heart and mind. That was indeed a day of my life that I would never like to relive.

It was great to be going home, but it was almost like I was leaving home again. I had met and got to know a lot of guys. We shared one of the most important years of our lives. I'm sorry that I can't remember all the names. But I will never forget knowing them. They were, indeed, my family.

God speed to them all, and to all of you.

Thanks for letting me share those moments.

My Time At TSN
By New Member
Raymond J. McKee

I was stationed at Tan Son Nhut AFB September 16, 1970. They housed the troops in a two-story barracks across the road from Photo 600 and adjacent to the Army Helicopter Airport. Behind where we lived was Camp Alpha the R&R facility where the troops came and went. The 12th R.I.T.S. was a large white two story building also next to Photo 600.

I was a sergeant who cross trained from up-country Phu Cat Air Base. In Tulsa, I graduated '68 from a tech school in photography. I felt that was the best way to serve my country doing photography than as a cook. Fitting right in at the 12th, I got working on what needed to be done.

When I arrived at Tan Son Nhut I missed the Tet conflict by more than a year, but heard a lot about what happen. We took turns going out and burning the sensitive material we disposed of from our squadron. The fenced ovens were off base and we always passed by these two large mounds of dirt. My memory says each mound was 70 to 100 feet high. Kind of like a big dirt teepee, but wider at the base. I was told that is where they buried all the VC and NVA that were killed during the Tet attack.

We put in 12 hour days at the 12th R.I.T.S. I enjoyed going off base at times, and on Tan Son Nhut dining at the Tex Mex - La Casa Grande (Great House) as well as the steak restaurant. Cheap beer and the NCO club

Continued on page 8

kept us close to home. I have not found in the States a Mamma Son that would cost only \$20 bucks a month to keep my place neat. The mamma son kept our clothes and



Photo by Dale Baker

shoes in place and clean so we could just do our jobs. It was a convenience that did spoil us. Saigon was a busy and wild place. I enjoyed the movie houses by the BX. Saw Woodstock, "On A Cold Day You Could See Forever" and MASH. From time to time in Saigon the VC would blow up a bus or something. Not near as active as Phu Cat, Da Nang, Pleiku, or Bien Hoa.

During my tour there we helped in printing recon images of the incursions into Laos and Cambodia that were being made trying to cut off the enemy supply lines. We printed images for a General of the 7th AF command from negatives he got from a Time Magazine photographer.

These images inside Laos were of the jungle tunnel canopy that North Vietnam constructed to drive trucks full of weapons to Cambodia. Until the Magic Dragon (C-130 with mini guns and infrared night vision) popped 3 to 4 trucks there was no roads visible, but they were discovered from the heat of the engines.

Until then we didn't know the tricks those buggers were playing. In the photo lab we used resin coated paper, which was a secret paper at the time. Resin coated (RC) photo paper did not come out in the States in the commercial market until 1974. That was state of the art in photography. It provided instant gratification. Fiber even today can last 400 years where RC only 55-75 years.

Even the tour at Tan Son Nhut was no-

where near as bad as the ground pounders had it in the field. Tan Son Nhut was still a war zone. Because of all the media and anti war stuff it was very hard on a lot of the guys there. Many of the fellas fell in with drinking a lot, abuse to drown their worries.

The way I saw it, we had it pretty swell. My thoughts of our situation was that the Air Force base was more of the country club section of the military. I know the pilots got out into the muck of the war, and lives were lost; that is what happens in war.

Our roll was more support with the intel, but my heart and soul was in making the best images I could. The Air Force gave us the best technical ability to do just that. We got back to the states alive. Thank God for the luck and the good training.

After Vietnam we were shipped out to the 544 ARWS on Offutt AFB in Bellevue, Nebraska. Our squadron continued to support the war efforts.

I find it very interesting that years after the war, we found the tunnel complex the NVA and VC had made from Cambodia to just miles from Bien Hoa. I remember reading about the tunnel rats, just not knowing that the tunnels went 4 to 5 stories deep.

One day after coming back from the mess hall I looked at a 20 x 24 photograph asking the Lieutenant, "Well, we are printing photos of the moon." He told me, "No this is the area north of the DMZ, we're trying to cut supply lines." He pointed out the NVA would connect the new bomb craters and make new roads. Only if we knew about the tunnels near Bien Hoa, we could have laid waste to that area like in the photo and maybe we would have won the war.

In looking at the Tan Son Nhut Association member roster, I find some of the people in my squadron there. I am learning a lot of history of what formed the 12th R.I.T.S. I am still in photography working freelance.

Vietnam Fighter
1945—1964
By Taylor McKinnon

I thought you might like this. It is the first American plane we supplied to the French, and they used them in Viet Nam after they went back in and tried to re-establish their former colony. The Bell P-39. Actually the



version they used was called the P-63, but it was the same airplane, but an improved version. The French used them in Indochina from 1945 until their defeat in 1964.

At that time, the US had surplus airplanes clogging every available airport and were giving the old fighters to all friendly nations. Thousands were given to South American Countries, just to get rid of them. Fighters were of no value commercially, the only airplanes the government could sell were the transports, like C-47 and C-54.

Many GIs bought them and started their own airlines. Flying Tigers was one. They ran Air America at Saigon Airport.

My Two Tours At TSN
By Paul L. Fremstad
New Member

During my first tour from Jun 1966 to Jun 1967 I lived in the 800 area near the flight line and later moved to the 1200 area adjacent to Camp Alpha and the army helo recovery area. We were hit numerous times. During this tour I was involved with Combined Intelligence Center, Vietnam (CICV) only unit with "intelligence" in name due to joint manning with Vietnamese personnel.

I lived in the 1200 area during my second tour, March 1969 to November 1970. This tour was highlighted by assisting the photo interpretation for an operation that became known as the Son Tay Raid. I also assisted in the sensor program.



United States Army Mission Statement February 5, 2005

America remains a nation at war, fighting adversaries who threaten our civilization and way of life. The most significant aspect of our current strategic reality is that the Global War on Terror in which we are now engaged will be a protracted one.

The Army's primary mission is to provide necessary forces and capabilities to the Combatant Commanders in support of the National Security and Defense Strategies. We have more than 300,000 Soldiers deployed or forward stationed today to support operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other theaters of war and to deter aggression, while securing the homeland. We are fighting today while simultaneously preparing for tomorrow.

To continue to accomplish our mission, we are aggressively restructuring the Army. We are transforming from a force designed for contingency operations in the post-Cold War era to a force designed for continuous operations in a new era that presents challenges to the Nation ranging from traditional to potentially catastrophic.

The Army is dependent upon the resources requested in the fiscal year 2006 President's Budget, coupled with emergency supplemental appropriations, to support current operations. These funds will also enable the force to recover from the stress placed on equipment and Soldiers during combat and continually "reset" itself for future deployments. Moreover, these resources are required to continue to transform the Army into a larger, more powerful force built on self-sufficient brigade-based modules. This force will be more flexible, more rapidly deployable and better able to sustain the protracted military campaigns and conduct the joint, expeditionary operations required by the 21st century security environment.

We are sustaining our global commitments while making tremendous progress in our transformation. We will need the continued support of the Congress, the President, and the American people to accomplish our mission today and tomorrow, while providing for the well-being of our All-Volunteer Soldiers, their families and our civilian workforce who are serving the Nation in this time of war.



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