

MARCH 2009



A Memorial to the American Experience
In Vietnam

"All included, none excluded"

REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

"Task Force 35"

They came like thieves in the middle of the night
Even fired on an unarmed Free bird as it was taking flight
Westward down the runway we hurried that day
Perfectly aware we were about to enter the fray

"Task force 35" was our call name
Cooks, Clerks, and Truck Drivers were now in the game
We exited our transport with 14's at the ready
With the 377th guidance to keep us steady

A line of defense was accomplished in a hurry
We awaited the order to move forward, don't worry
We listened to our leaders and did what we were told
It was our best chance of making it to 19 years old

We surged forward, pulled back, then surged forward again
Then came the Huey's to help us with "Might and Main"
With the way cleared we pushed on through the dark
And as the dawn broke it was clear that they hit their mark

Enemy combatants all strewn on the ground
We approached and made eye contact not uttering a sound
Bodies maimed and bloodied were a horrible sight
So far we were thankful it was not our turn that night

As the battle raged on that fateful day
We knew not what happened at 051, we had no way
Westward we moved to help save your lives
Regrettably we did not make it, for this we apologize

At the end of the day the battle was won
The enemy was defeated and on the run
Cooks, Clerks, and Truck Drivers were happy to be alive
So ends the story of "Task force 35"

By Gary Monahan 58th/110th Trans. Co. MACV USA TSN Jul 67-Jul 68



Gary Monahan
58th/110th Transportation Co.
U. S. Army
TSN Jul 67—Jul 68
(Author of Page 1 Poem)

MY THOUGHTS ON VIETNAM

By Ted Dodge
377th Supply Squadron

As a new member of the Tan Son Nhut Association I would like to extend a sincere "welcome home" to all TSNA brothers and sisters. I have read a lot on the TSNA web site and indeed, on other Vietnam web sites and I finally got around to joining TSNA. The more I read, the more I remembered, and the more memories, the more I wanted to read. I now have four of the TSNA CDs and I have only finished looking at two. These CDs are great.

I found many interesting pictures and stories on the TSNA CDs. I drove a truck while at Tan Son Nhut and with a boring job like that, I don't have any interesting or amusing stories. I sent some pictures from my days at Tan Son Nhut to Charles Penley, but many of the pictures were of me thirty nine years ago, even more boring. The more I read, the more I wanted to contribute. As I browsed the web and read of the welcomes we received, and how we were shunned, I think of the draft dodgers that went to Canada while we were willing to give up our lives in Vietnam. So I decided

to give my short account of the welcome I received when I returned from Vietnam. It set the mood for a bad attitude that stayed with me for a number of years, but I have finally gotten over it.

The day I returned from Vietnam was a bittersweet experience. The reception at the San Francisco Airport although mild, was no picnic. I was not cursed or spit on, but I was stared at as if I had two heads, and I heard the comments and wise cracks. It was not a pleasant experience. I was met in the Indianapolis Airport by my parents, my wife of less than two years, and my step daughter. When I returned home from the airport I saw my five month old son for the first time. I had mixed emotions with the contrast between San Francisco and Indianapolis.

Today is an altogether different picture. Some interesting observations based on information released from the 2000 census. A large majority (87%) of Americans hold Vietnam Veterans in high esteem. In the Vietnam era, (1964 to 1975), 9 million Americans served in the military. Approximately 2.7 million of those 9 million, served in Vietnam, and there are 1.1 million of those (2.7 million) veterans still alive. Of the 2.7 million who served in Vietnam, 91% were glad they served and 74% said they would serve again, even knowing the outcome. 97% of Vietnam Veterans were honorably Discharged.

With over 304,000 wounded in action and over 58,000 killed in action of the 2.7 million, that means nearly 1 of 8 who served became casualties. I knew some of those casualties. Before I went to Vietnam I knew five men that had died there. This leads me to a very alarming statistic, there are 13.8 million Vietnam wannabes. We all knew men that died in Vietnam, and each of us served there honorably, yet there are those who are trying to steal our valor as well as the valor of those who died there. That really

irritates me, as I am sure, it disturbs all Vietnam Veterans.

The 9 million that served in the military during the Vietnam era represents less than two thirds of the 13.8 million Vietnam "been there, done that, wannabes". The 2.7 million Vietnam Veterans represent less than 20% of those claiming to be Vietnam Veterans and the 1.1 million surviving Vietnam Veterans represent less than 8% of the wannabes. Some of these phonies are Military Veterans of the ERA that never went to Vietnam. Most Americans are oblivious to the scope of these wrongdoings, and they are completely unaware of this offense. It is indeed an outrage.

Not surprising, many of the wannabes claim to have been Navy Seals or Green Berets. It seems every time a new "Rambo" type movie comes out the number of wannabes increases. Many of these pretenders, of course, claim to have been Prisoners of War. No doubt ALL of them claimed to have earned a Purple Heart. Although there were only 240 Vietnam Veterans awarded the Medal of Honor, there are now probably 13.8 million wannabe Medal of Honor recipients. This has become an insult of epidemic proportions, to we who were there. If we do not censure these transgressions, we would then seem to condone them. But, you may ask, what can we do?

One of the goals of the Tan Son Nhut Association is to enhance the public recognition of service of Vietnam Veterans. A good way to start that public recognition would be for us to proclaim our status. Wear our ribbons. Wear shirts and jackets that declare that we are Vietnam Veterans and proudly display our ribbons. More on showing our colors later. If you don't have your medals and would like to get replacement medals, go to <http://www.archives.gov/veterans/evetrecs/> to request your military records.

Another byproduct of wearing the ribbons and the clothes that announce who we are, would be to engage some of the wannabes. Once we have their attention, they will expose themselves. Ask them what unit they were assigned to, you will have them stuttering and mumbling. Ask them when they served, if they look like they are under 50 years old they can't say 1970 or you may then ask their age. If they say they served in 1978 they are exposed too. That is about all I have on discovering and exposing the wannabes, for more information go to <http://www.stolenvvalor.com>. The Stolen Valor Act of 2005, public law 109-437, says in part; it is a criminal offense to: fraudulently and knowingly wear, manufacture, or sell any decoration or medal authorized by congress for the armed forces, or any service medal or badge, decoration, or medal, or any imitation thereof. Call their hand and report them.

More now on showing our colors. The By Laws of the Tan Son Nhut Association states the purpose of the Association in part, "to recognize and honor those who served or were affiliated with Tan Son Nhut," it is further stated, "to conduct cultural, educational, and social programs to benefit members and others." If we wear our medals and ribbons and our shirts that proclaim that we are Vietnam Veterans we are indeed recognizing and honoring and educating Veterans and others.

I have the ribbons I earned, and the mini version of those ribbons. I occasionally wear the mini ribbons. I also have 4 shirts that tell the world that I am a Vietnam Veteran and I wear those shirts quite often. I have had many comments, and one sincere "thank you", when I wore one of the shirts. I have shook the hands of some Vietnam Veterans because of the shirts. I shook one Vietnam Veteran's hand and told him, "welcome home", and he told me I was the first person ever to welcome him home from Vietnam.

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All Vietnam Veterans are entitled to The National Defense Ribbon, The Vietnam Campaign Ribbon, The Republic of Vietnam Service Ribbon, and The Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross. Many of us have more Vietnam related Ribbons, such as the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award or the Air Force Commendation Medal, or the Presidential Unit Citation, and the list goes on. I have 6 Vietnam associated ribbons of the 8 total ribbons I earned. Whether we have only 4 Vietnam related ribbons, or 8, or what ever, the Vietnam Awards represent over half of the ribbon total for most of us. Many Veterans who didn't go to Vietnam have no more than 2 or 3 total ribbons. So most of us can truly say we are "Highly Decorated" Vietnam Veterans.

I once wrote a letter to the local School Superintendent and told her that I am a Highly Decorated Vietnam Veteran and she called me and invited me to her office to discuss what I had written her about. I like to think that my being a Veteran helped me earn her trust. She agreed to spend her valuable time with me. Last year I wrote a "Guest" Editorial for the local newspaper on (locally) a very controversial subject. In that editorial I told the readers that I am a Highly Decorated Vietnam Veteran, and I believe that instilled confidence to what I was saying. The point I am making is 87% of the American Public hold us in high esteem and we are all Highly Decorated Vietnam Veterans, and those facts make a good tool, and we should use that tool.

Stand tall, walk proud, display that sense of brotherhood. If you have the Tan Son Nhut Association Revetments Archive CD read the August/September 2006 Vietnam in Perspective article on page 8 by George "Sonny" Hoffman. He said, and I will paraphrase, our military presence in Southeast Asia delayed communism as other countries resisted it until communism was no longer on the offensive. That helped us win the Cold War and was the turning point of com-

munist. I totally agree, and I would add to that, maybe communism succeeded in Vietnam and Cambodia but we stopped the advance before Thailand, Malaysia, Burma (Myanmar), Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia, or The Philippines. We stopped communism in Southeast Asia, we take the fall of communism for granted, yet we participated.

I have rambled on about Vietnam statistics, ribbons and shirts, wannabes, and the outcome of the Vietnam War. I hope I have given many of you some food for thought. On the Tan Son Nhut view message web page at <http://www.tsna.org/view/index.html> there is a picture of a sign on the April 10, 2008 section. It is a sign that was near the Civilian Gate, if memory serves me correctly near the south east area of Tan Son Nhut. The picture was from around 1968, I arrived in 1969, but I think I can vaguely remember the sign, but then again I may never have seen it. It was a big Billboard that said, "THE NOBLE SACRIFICE OF ALLIED SOLDIERS WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN". Think about it, I am PROUD to be a Vietnam Veteran. Memorial Day is less than three months away and I will be wearing my Vietnam Veteran clothes and I will display my ribbons, I hope many of you will be doing the same.



NOTATIONS FROM APPLICATIONS

Was there in December '66—mortar attack—went to flight line and saw the barber who gave me a haircut the previous morning along with 20 or so of his fellow VC. Worked nights so didn't see much during daylight hours. Barracks was somewhere near helipad—I remember the VNAF totally afraid of the Korean Whitehorse Division.

Jeffrey P. Bardsley
13rh RTS
May 66—May 67

TAN SON NHUT ASSOCIATION 2009 REUNION UPDATE!!

Fellow Members:

The only thing constant is change. I graduated first in my Radio Operator's Class at Keesler AFB, a minor whiz at sending and receiving Morse Code, proceeded to my first duty station and promptly found out that the Air Force had been using HF SSB voice communications for several years.

Fast forward to February, 2009. I thought that we had planning for our 2009 Reunion pretty well finalized and the following happened. Our 2009 guests of honor, Tom Norris and Darrel Whitcomb, have asked us to permit them to reschedule their appearances until the 2010 reunion due to unforeseen scheduling conflicts. Before selecting a date and venue for the 2010 reunion, we will verify with Tom and Darrel that they are available.

Retired Navy Lt. Mike Thornton, who was awarded the MOH for rescuing Tom Norris, has graciously offered to be our honored guest speaker this year. Mike is the first MOH recipient in more than 100 years to be awarded the MOH for rescuing another MOH recipient. Fellow Director Bob Laymon, Life Member #62, was instrumental in facilitating this change of honored guest speakers.

We are eagerly looking forward to meeting this real American hero.

George Plunkett TSN 1962-63-64-66-67 1st Mobile and 1961st Comm. Groups

PO Michael E. Thornton, U.S. Navy

Rank and organization: Petty Officer, U.S. Navy, Navy Advisory Group.

Place and date: Republic of Vietnam, 31 October 1972.

Entered service at: Spartanburg, S.C. Born: 23 March 1949, Greenville, S.C.

Citation:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while participating in a daring operation against enemy forces. PO Thornton, as Assistant U.S. Navy Advisor, along with a U.S. Navy lieutenant serving as Senior Advisor, accompanied a 3-man Vietnamese Navy SEAL patrol on an intelligence gathering and prisoner capture operation against an enemy-occupied naval river base. Launched from a Vietnamese Navy junk in a rubber boat, the patrol reached land and was continuing on foot toward its objective when it suddenly came under heavy fire from a numerically superior force. The patrol called in naval gunfire support and then engaged the enemy in a fierce fire-fight, accounting for many enemy casualties before moving back to the waterline to prevent encirclement. Upon learning that the Senior Advisor had been hit by enemy fire and was believed to be dead, PO Thornton returned through a hail of fire to the lieutenant's last position; quickly disposed of 2 enemy soldiers about to overrun the position, and succeeded in removing the seriously wounded and unconscious Senior Naval Advisor to the water's edge. He then inflated the lieutenant's lifejacket and towed him seaward for approximately 2 hours until picked up by support craft. By his extraordinary courage and perseverance, PO Thornton was directly responsible for saving the life of his superior officer and enabling the safe extraction of all patrol members, thereby upholding the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.



A MESSAGE FROM MIKE

Michael W. Sirrine, Spec. 5
3rd Region District Traffic Office
Air Traffic Control Office/Airlift Clearance Authority
Traffic Management Agency/Military Assistance Command
507th Transportation Group
TSN 67-68

The 3rd Region DTO/ATCO/ACA office was on the Rebel Ramp right beside shed 952, and I also worked at the C-130 PAX terminal. The Air Force liaison guy that worked out of our office was a Sergeant Rice. I missed the excitement at TSN on TET, because I lived off base and was trapped in the Capitol BEQ in Cholon for the first three days. I have been working on my memoirs for some time now, and may have some stories to tell later, but right now I wanted to make sure everyone knew about something I just learned about.

I had never pursued any benefits from the VA because I was not retired military, I was not wounded in action, and I did not have any service connected disability that I knew of. I did have a 10% disability for jungle rot for a couple of years after discharge, but they took that away as it improved to just residual levels.

In an accidental discussion with an acquaintance who is also a Vietnam veteran, I learned that prostate cancer and diabetes are both conditions that are guaranteed to get Vietnam vets a disability. After years of dispute and court action, the VA now agrees that if you were boots-on-the-ground in Vietnam, you had exposure to Agent Orange (or its other colorful cousins), and diabetes and prostate cancer are both accepted as service connected. Depending upon severity, both together can generate a 50% disability or more, which also means you can get full medical care, too. As I have both, I was very interested.

I immediately went to see my county Veteran Service Officer, and he con-

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firmed this. We submitted an application that day based on both diabetes and prostate cancer, and about five other health problems. Hearing and tinnitus were one of the problems, and they have already given me state of the art hearing aids! I am still working through the paperwork and medical reviews to see if and how much of a disability I will get. I'll let you know how it turns out.

In the meantime I want to encourage everyone who was in Vietnam who isn't already in the system to go talk to your local Veteran Service Officer (who will be your advocate, not an adversary), especially if you have diabetes or prostate cancer. (If you haven't been tested for either, you should, and it is easy.) You may be eligible for some benefits and not even know it.

Any friends or acquaintances who knew me or the ATCO/ACA can drop me a line @ msirrine@verizon.net.

Thanks, Mike



SP5 Mike Sirrine

MORE ON THE TSN MORTUARY

By: Dave Gallaher
16th Tac Recon Sq/photo interpreter
September 67-July 68

Reading the stories regarding the mortuary at TSN has brought back an experience that I had there. While serving at TSN, I played in a soul music band during off duty hours (the Rotations) and one of the members

was Army Sgt Moseley, assigned to the mortuary. On one occasion, I was sent there to pick him up. I went into the office, and they said he was in the records section. At the records section they told me to look for him in the embalming area. This was a bit hard to take, but the bodies being processed looked peaceful, at least.

However, the guys working in embalming told me to look for Sgt. Moseley in receiving. So I did, and that's where I witnessed body bags being opened that were fresh off the helicopters and trucks. This was really hard to view without becoming very emotional, so I yelled at whoever was working to tell Sgt. Moseley that Dave is out front to pick him up and I left the building.

About fifteen years later, the experience came back to me while I was having dinner with friends in Florida. Nothing triggered it as far as conversations or references, but it was strong enough to make me leave the room for a while and pull it back together.

Off the subject: a friend with whom I worked at the 16th PPIF has returned once, and will be going back to Ho Chi Minh City, to teach English.

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TSNA
2009
REUNION

PIGEON FORGE, TN

OCTOBER 15—18

SEE YOU THERE!

(Our speaker has changed, but the fact that you will meet a lot of wonderful people and enjoy a wonderful area has NOT changed)

<<<<<< TSNA >>>>>>

FACT: On March 29, 1973, the last combat soldiers left South Vietnam.

MARCH 2009

GEORGE CROFT HIGHLIGHTS

By George Croft
AAFES Exchange Manager

I teach as a Guest Speaker at the Staff NCO Academy on the USMC Base here. Unlike the other 3 services the USAF history only goes back to 1910 period, and at that time it was jointly with the Army. But, within the last 100 years the USAF has accomplished more than any other single branch in actual deeds on the battlefields. I don't push that fact to the students, I merely display articles with written evidence to show certain pilots, certain crews have completely changed the directions of war in many cases. Those pilots and crews couldn't have accomplished anything without the support of the airmen who lived on the ground level with the enemy.

I have so many books concerning different aspects of the military, and a countless number of the books are signed by the members who are portrayed in the book. I have traveled to meet them, talked with them on the telephone and written back and forth.

In 1950 at the little town of Red Jacket, WV where I went to Jr. HS, the USMC came and presented the Navy Cross to a family for their son, Dallas Cooke, who had been on the first raid in the South Pacific by our military. The Island of Makin was attacked exactly 4 months to the day from the Doolittle Raid, and the Marines had been put ashore from submarines.

The first MOH for a Marine enlisted was given during that battle and it was to Sgt Clyde Thompson from Georgia. During the battle there were casualties for the Marines, and some even died trying to get back to the submarines but the seas were against them. Anyway, 9 USMC POW's were captured and killed by the Japanese rather quickly. The Marines managed to scratch their names on the wall

prior to death.

I have a friend who was in a life raft for 47 days in 1943, Louis Zamperini, even though he and his one crew mate survived that 47 days at sea then became POW's. Both survived the war and returned to the US, and Louis related to the military that he knew of the 9 Marines who were killed, but no one paid any attention to him at that time. Louis also ran track in the 1936 Olympics in Germany and in 1996 the Japanese government invited him to be a Guest at the Winter Olympics held in northern Japan. He accepted because the town where the Olympics were being held also was the town he served the POW time in mainland Japan.

During an interview while in Japan he recounted his time in the cell where the Marines scratched their last messages and names. This time during the public broadcast someone in the US government heard his message and took action to recover the remains of those Marines. Louis went back to the island in 1998 with military personnel and they did recover bone shards and material enough to identify those Marines, who were then interred back on US soil. 5 of them I believe were returned to their families for burial and the other 4 were buried in one grave in Arlington. I went to school with the brother and sister of Dallas Cooke, didn't know him, but I do know the man who was responsible for his remains, regardless to how few or small the fragments were, to be brought home.

I get the opportunity almost every two months to have Louis be the Guest Speaker to classes, and he never leaves the Marines with the same cocky attitude they normally have with other speakers.

They used to really bust my rear because of my AF background, but I have found many ways to put them in check over the years. Guess I am the only AF person that I know of that has a small garden and bronze plaque

erected on a USMC Base in their honor. They certainly didn't need to do it, but I appreciated the fact they accepted me as part of their family.

Hopefully somewhere along the way I will be able to share with you all the many items I have collected over the years. Recently I got a railroad spike from the original Bridge over the River Kwai along with a picture of the aircraft that bombed it. Since over 20,000 men died in the construction of that railroad for the Japanese, it is a very good chance one of those unfortunate soldiers drove that spike before his death.

Anyway, I will dig up the two items on Doolittle and get them out to you, you will enjoy them much more than me just having them packed away for no one to see or enjoy.

God Bless and I will make every effort to be in St. Louis, bring my wife of 40 years who worked for Caribe Diamonds in the PX, and married me just outside the Main Gate, May 28, 1968. Doesn't seem that long.

(George also wrote this to Larry Fry, as a continuation to the above):

I have been connected to Staff NCO Academy located here on the USMC Base for many years, and have always felt as a veteran there is so much you can contribute to the young men and women who currently make up the services. Was a strange transition for me at first, but it continually got better and much easier to relate to them as time went by.

I had the honor, really an honor, to be the Guest Speaker at a Marine Corps Ball held up in Nevada, with about 1200 in attendance, with me, a MSgt from the United States Air Force. I maintain that the NCO's are the backbone of the military, every branch, and without that leadership group, then the military would be nothing. I speak on this, I teach from heart on this subject, and it is always well received.

I'm going to be at the Reunion this year in St. Louis. I have collected military articles for years, all the way back to the 1700's, and have enough aircraft art, 98% signed by the subject of the painting, to start a museum myself. Just sent one article out last week to the last American living WW1 survivor, 107 year old, and have hopes he will sign the artist drawing of a WW1 scene. Have two or three WW1 articles signed by WW1 pilots, and newspapers going all the way back to 1798, many civil war newspapers.

I never forget one second I was an NCO in the finest branch of the military, but I know what I take into the class room benefits the Marines, and past students look me up years later to speak with me and tell me something I said still hangs with them, or made a change in their lives.

I retired too early in life, but God provided me with the opportunity to continue on in support of the military. It has been a pleasure and joy to share over the years.

God Bless and thanks for the E-Mail.

George

(Editor's note: Due to business commitments, George could not make the Reunion)



June 30, 1968

By Maj. Richard Starke
12th Tac Recon Squadron
Jul 67—Jul 68

The day 30 June 1968 is a long way into the past but still important for that was the day an explosive shell slammed into my new MD RF-4C Phantom II as I searched for an active SAM complex at 540 knots and 500 feet.

The explosion blew a 12 inch hole in my left wing causing the pressurized fuel to drain away, then the left engine quit. In a badly injured plane I re-entered the target area 4 more times until the area was covered by my searching cameras. I slowed to 400 knots, the AA fire was even closer with each pass.

Only after the target had been covered did I turn south towards home, and report my LOW fuel state to the controller in a C-130 orbiting in the Gulf of Tonkin, who directed me to

DaNang base just south of the DMZ

After completing a climb to 20,000 ft. (the optimum altitude for my depleted fuel supply), I started a slow descent to DaNang hoping the fuel would last.

Now on fumes, I was given a straight-in approach and landed without further problems. The enclosed pictures show the damaged plane in the DaNang bone yard. Parts were removed to fly in another RF-4 on another day.

For gallantry in action against heavy AA fire with an unarmed aircraft I was awarded the Silver Star, the 3rd highest award in the Air Force.

The Sam complex was quickly found by the 460th TRW photo-interpreters and destroyed by 2 F-4 flights the next day.

Following my return to the USA I flew KC-135 tankers and flying command post aircraft at Minot AFB, ND until I retired July 31, 1972



The hole in the wing of Major Richard Starke's RF-4C.



Major Starke's RF-4C in the bone-yard at DaNang, June 1968

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Graphic courtesy of TSNA Webmaster Charles Penley



"Reprinted with permission from Army Times."

When I came across this cartoon in the Army Times while stationed at Tan Son Nhut in 1970, I knew that I wanted to keep it.

Like the two bummed-out NCOs, I wasn't laughing at the time, but just trying to get through a very long year, hoping that I would be able to return home in one piece and with my sanity still intact.

I was in fact able to come back with no bullet holes or other wartime souvenirs on my person, but the sanity part has been somewhat of a question ever since.

The original of this cartoon, yellowed with time, is in a picture frame and hanging on my bedroom wall as a reminder of a long-ago time in a faraway place that is, even after all these years, never too far from my thoughts and memories.

Ron Boydston, U.S. Army, 1968-1970
Radio-teletype Operator and Team Chief, 504th
Signal Detachment, 525th Combat Evaluation
(Military Intelligence) Group, TSN 9/69-9/70