Revetments

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association



Volume 3, Number 4

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

January, 2001

33 Years Ago - Tet '68



The 377th Security Squadron retakes Bunker 051, January 31, 1968

The night perimeter defense forces were posted early that evening of January 30, 1968, at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. The installation had been placed on Red Alert.

Although there were no overt signs of hostile activity, Saigon and its environs were roaring with the firecrackers and fireworks of the Tet Holiday, the Vietnamese New Year. The continual explosions made people nervous.

Then across the communication nets came the ominous reports of massive attacks on first. Da Nang, then Hue, then Dalat, Ban Me Thout, Pleiku, Kontum and into the communities of the Mekong Delta.

At 3 a.m., January 31st, Bien Hoa was the first of our neighbors to be hit, massive columns of fire reaching up into the black night sky: then, at 3:11, the Army Headquarters at Long Binh was next. And, at 3:29, the first tracers and mortars plunged into Tan Son Nhut.

With few else to support them, the 377th Security Police Squadron held the enemy at bay with unparalleled bravery and incredible stamina. After more than two hours, reinforcements arrived. But already the 377th had saved the base and its personnel from

surrender and certain annihilation.

Had Tan Son Nhut fallen, the enemy would have had Saigon at its mercy. Many call the Battle of Tan Son Nhut the greatest, most unique and pivotal battle of the Viet Nam War.

This is just one of the events that brought lasting honor and deep respect to the thousands of people who served for eight long years at this base. It was the courage of these people that gave the 377th the strength to victoriously defend it. Let us all give a silent prayer of gratitude and thanksgiving on January 31st.

Robert Stanley Need, Editor

Fourteenth Tet Reunion Next Month

David W. Schill, historian and the editor of the Seabee News, the official publication of the Vietnam Era Seabees Association, and a friend and supporter of The Tan Son Nhut Association, sent us "a reminder that the Annual Tet '68 Vietnam Veterans' reunion will be in Hampton, Virginia, February 2-4. It will be held at the Radisson Hotel, 700 Steelers Landing Road, Hampton."

Schill comments that "the Air Force turns out for this event in the largest grouping I've yet seen at any Vietnam event, including Veterans' Day at 'The Wall.' So I invite all Tan Son Nhuters to come over to Hampton and join the rest of us who have already found out about this great weekend event."

The theme for this year's reunion is "Virginia Remembers All Veterans."

Proposed Program

Friday, February 2:

10 a.m. Registration opens/vendors

5 p.m. Dinner (on own)

7 p.m. POW/MIA Memorial Ceremony, with The Reverend Don Denton.

8 p.m. - Midnight DJ/Karaoke Saturday, February 3:

8 a.m. Registration reopens

9 a.m.- Noon Speakers

12 Noon Luncheon buffet

1 - 2 p.m. Proposed high school drama production:

Carved In Stone

2 -8 p.m. Free time, socialize, sight-seeing, and dinner (on own).

8 p.m. - 1 a.m. Live music, Spectrum (band) Sunday, February 4:

9-10 a.m. Closing, camaraderie, check out.

Respond now for advanced registration

There is a weekend registration fee of \$35.00 for adults, in advance, before the weekend starts. Registration fee at the door will be \$40.00 for adults. The fee for children under 18 is \$10, either in advance or at the door. Checks and money orders should be made payable to TET '68, Inc. Send advance registration requests, including names, address, city, state and ZIP code to:

TET '68, Inc. c/o William Kirkland, President P.O. Box 31885 Richmond, Virginia 23294 The phone number for the association is (804) 550-3692. Also you can visit their website at:

http://www.tet68.org

Hotel accommodations available

Special room rates, \$69.96, plus tax, includes two breakfasts. Call or contact the hotel directly before January 14th for these special rates. Register under your name and TET'68, and ask for the special room rate.

Radisson Hotel 700 Settlers Landing Road Hampton, Virginia 23669 Phone: (757) 727-9700

Editor' comment:

Let's Be There!

We're very grateful to David Schill for reminding us of this annual event.

Tet '68 played a large and tremendous role in many of our lives, and nowhere was its impact more serious, dramatic and heroically met than at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. The people who will attend this reunion may be from the TET'68 Association, the Seabee Association, the Vietnam Doghandlers, and any other "group," but they are brothers and sisters to us all.

We will not be outsiders barging in on someone else's event, we will be joining our teammates, who with in Vietnam we worked for and served in common cause.

In November, on Veterans' Day, fifteen Tan Son Nhut Association members met for breakfast in Alexandria, with a wreath-laying ceremony later at the Vietnam Memorial (The Wall). It was a proud, warmly affectionate, and yes, a day of happy respect for each other.

We hope meetings and events including our members will accelerate during 2001. We have long overdue business to conduct, programs to initiate, chapters to build and goals that should be set and achieved.

For better or for worse, only the historians will come to any conclusion; the Tet 1968 Offensive affected all those, before, during and after, who served anywhere in Vietnam. One of its most powerful chapters was written during the defense of Tan Son Nhut.

A Salute to TSNA Life Members

A very Happy New Year to all of our Association members, and as the poem Abdul The Bulbul Amir says, "And may our numbers ever increase ..."

And a little special salute to those members who have chosen to be our support for their full lifetime.

SMSqt. Lance S. Coar



This was Lance at his promotion party at TSN, 1968. He was with the 460th FMS/AGE, 16th PPIF, and 1st MIBAR-Army. His home is in Penllyn, Pennsylvania and is working with the 913th MXS, at the Willow Grove ARS.

Scott Davis

Scott was with 7th Air Force/903rd Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron. He lives in Duncanville, Texas with his wife, Deborah.

The Late Joseph English

Joe was with the 1966th Special Joint Chiefs of Staff Operation Project "Big Eye." 1967-1968, 460th FMS. His family resides in Grandbury, Texas. Joe left us a year ago, January 2000. Our prayers are with you and your family.

Keith A. Hallauer

Keith was a sergeant and a jet engine mechanic from September 1968 until 1969. He lives with his wife Linda in Yakima, Washington.

Richard B. Hartley

Richard served several tours and was an OV-10 pilot, and also worked in MCSOG at USAFTOC. He and his wife Anne life in Toledo, Ohio.

Nancy D. Joynes

Nancy was a USO representative at Ton Son Nhut. She and her family live in Annandale, Virginia.

William G. Katsones, Jr.

William was in Air Traffic Control, November 1968-November 1969, with the 1876 Communications Squadron. He and his wife reside in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Harold D. Kinsler

From August 1970 through August 1971, Harold was in the 19th TAS, and was a mechanic for C-123, and with AFAT5 Training, Vietnamese on C-123s. He lives in Frankfort, Indiana

Lt. Colonel Richard L. Masters

Richard was in the 460th TRW from September 1970 until July 1971. Was Chief of Life Support, flying as navigator with the 260th TEWS. Flew with the 362th TEWS at Danang before coming to TSN. He lives in Austin, Texas.

Msgt. Robert S. Need



Bob, currently editor of Revetments, was in 7th AF DXI, and a combat newsman from March 1967 -March 1968 He and his wife, Lois, live in Norfolk, Virginia.

no S. Oreber



Don, our TSNA President, and co-founder of the Association, was with the 360th Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron during 1967-1968. He and his wife, Sue Ellen, reside in Princeton, Indiana.

John Peck



John, TSNA Executive Vice President, and co-founder, was with the 460th Field Maintenance Squadron from November 1969 until November 1970. He was in the Survival Equipment Shop. He and his wife, Michelle, reside in Riverdale, Maryland.

Richard Pineau

Richard was assigned to the 16th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, from December 1967 until December 1968. He was a Crew Chief, RF-4C. He and his wife, Carol, live in Santa Cruz, California.

CMSqt. Walter S. Suksta

Walter was with the 6994th Security Squadron, 1971 - 1972. He and his wife, Shelly, live in San Angelo, Texas.

Norman Whitlow



Norman, the TSNA Regional Director for Texas, was with the 360th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing. He and his family reside in Lancaster, Texas.

Harry J. Wilgis

Harry may be the last on our list because of his last name, but he is welcomed as our newest Life Member. He was assigned to Detachment 1, 45th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, 460th TRW, from August 1969 until August 1970. He resides in Baltimore, Maryland.

You'd like a membership list?

It's too expensive for Public Affairs to print a directory, but "no problem."

Our webmaster, Charles Penley has them all on his online directory.

Just go to:

http://www.tsna.org



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President, Don Parker Vice President/Treasurer John Peele Vice President/Secretary John Evans

Chaplain James M. Warrington Public Affairs Robert Need

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Thoughts of Our Sky Pilot

Chaplain James M. Warrington

Make Big Plans

Lark," the author pictures a young girl struggling hard to hold on to high something of the full life suggested goals in the midst of dull, sordid by the term "the great society." surroundings. At one point Miss We need great plans for the nation, Cather makes the girl say, "But it's that we may think not only of the silly to live at all for little things. welfare of our own people, but of Living's too much trouble, unless one our leadership of the world through can get something big out of it."

Someplace I picked up a few freedom and justice. words that embody the same basic truths: Make no little plans; little ones plans because they seem to reach have no magic to stir men's blood and so far off and to take so long for will not be realized. Make big plans; their realization. It is true that big aim high in hope and work. plans require big patience. The joy



Intermission

plan will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living creation.

Isn't this our great need in every area of life? We need great plans for our children, plans for their development in spirit, body and soul. We need plans so great that we shall constantly be thrown back on God for guidance and strength. We need great plans for our community. We need plans In Willa Cather's "Song of the that will include every area and every group, that all may have moral commitment to standards of

Some people are afraid of big Remember that a noble and logical of big plans is that they put meaning into each small step taken day by day toward their fulfillment.

Most of us like to be "sidewalk superintendents" as we watch some large and imposing structure being slowly brought into being. For me, it is a special delight to notice a foreman slip from the scene of construction to a workroom where the plans for the building are spread out. Carefully he checks to see that the small day by day operations fit into the master plan.

So we, having made our big plans, need that daily check-up before God to be sure that we are moving toward our goal.

Editor's Note: Chaplain Warrington is available for counseling and other pastoral functions members might require. Send your requests to the Public Affairs Office, TSNA. Suite 709, 330 West Brambleton Avenue, Norfolk, Virginia 23510; or call: (757) 627-





Information Needed ...

I am a veteran service officer.
I am trying to find documentation that the veteran, John Litzen, was at the Tan Son Nhut Air Base on January 31, 1968. He had missed his ride back to "Monkey Mountain" and had to stay the night.

He was a Marine at the time, working at the air tower at "Monkey Mountain."

He states he was involved in hand to hand combat, assisted with getting the wounded to safety and the next day, assisted with the recovery of the dead.

Is there any way that documentation could exist that he was there. Right now we are trying to get a VA pension for him based on PTSD. Any information or leads would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Mary Ann Domenico Chautaugua County Veterans Service Agency 110 East 4th Street Jamestown, NY 14701 (716) 661-8255

Revetments Makes An Unforgivable Mistake ...

I just received my December Revetments and saw my pictures I sent you. I am glad you were able to use them.

In the article with them you said I was a T39 section supervisor. This is incorrect. In fact I was just a first term three striper assistant crew chief. I do not know where this information came from, but it was not from me.

I had some great supervisors at Tan Son Nhut, such as Msgt. Mills, Tsgt. Alatari, Ssgt. Sharon, Ssgt Monopoli, and Tsgt. Sturggis. 4 Keep up the great work I really enjoy the newsletter.

P.S. Would you please print this letter in next month's communications center. I certainly do not want other members to think I was something that I was not.

Dale M. Baker Davenport, Iowa

Editor's Note: We are appalled that such a horrific mistake appeared in this publication. Two copy editors have been fired, and three proofreaders have been sent to Vietnam.)

On The Subject of TSNA Goodies ... Regarding the last issue of Revetments, I would be interested in purchasing the following items: One coffee mug with logo; one lapel/hat pin; one tie clasp; and one belt buckle.

Additionally, could you put out a message in *Revetments* and on the TSNA web page indicating that I am trying to obtain/locate a patch (cloth or e-mail image) for the old 34th Air Base Squadron, 33rd Tactical Group Air Police which operated at Tan Son Nhut from late December 1962 through June 1963?

Thanks in advance. Have a great holiday season.

Bob Anisko Bethel Park, Pennsylvania

More About Patches ...

I was in the army in 'Nam, 1964-1965. I was a medic with the 16th Medical Dispensary at Tan Son Nhut Air Base.

I am looking for a patch we had. It was worn on our left chest pocket.

If anyone you know has one, or maybe print this in your magazine for me. It would mean a lot to me. Everything I brought back got thrown away. Enjoy your magazine.

The Communications Center

James L. Taylor Indianapolis, Indiana

(Editor's Note: The following letter contains a sense of humor that may not be universal a mong our readers. Revetments publishes it as a courtesy to the member and is not responsible for other readers' reactions.)

Speaking Of Revetments, and other issues ...

Received December 2000 issue. Thanks, photos great, I have many, many of "revetments" including those blown apart, along with half of a C-130 during TET '68. Will forward at later time, in the meantime ... anything you can blow up, we can rebuild.

Humor in uniform from your member in California. 377th Civil Engineers, Tan Son Nhut, RVN, 1967-1968.

Does this sound like some "old" pilot you might have known?

Passengers on a small commuter plane are waiting for the flight to leave. They're getting a little impatient, but the airport staff had assured them that the pilots will be there and the flight can take off immediately after that.

The entrance opens, and two men walk up the aisle, dressed in pilots' uniforms – both are wearing dark glasses, one is using a seeing-eye dog, and the other is tapping his way up the aisle with a cane.

Nervous laugher spreads through the cabin; but the men enter the cockpit, the door closes, and the engines start up. The passengers begin glancing nervously around, searching for some sign that this is just a little practical joke. None is forthcoming. The plane moves faster and faster down the runway, and people at the windows realize that they're headed straight for the water at the edge of the airport territory.

As it begins to look as though the plane will never take off, that it will plow into the water, panicked screams fill the cabin – but at that moment, the plane lifts smoothly into the air. The passengers relax and laugh a little sheepishly, and soon they have all retreated into their magazines, secure in the knowledge that the plane is in good hands.

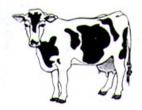
Up in the cockpit, the copilot turns to the pilot and says, "You know, one of these days, they're going to scream too late, and we're all gonna die."

Dave Sanders San Jose, California (Who assumes all the blame.)



\$ TSNA does not own a cash cow \$

Please check your membership card for renewal date – we could use the funds.



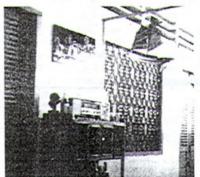
Life In A Saigon Villa

Major McKinnon (Days At Tan Son Nhut), and other writers to Revetments like to refer to the "villas" they lived in off base. Let's take a brief look at what they are talking about.

Tan Son Nhut Air Base, by 1966 had outgrown its capacity to house the vast numbers of personnel arriving to augment the escalating combat programs.

Higher grade NCOs and many officers were being encouraged to seek accommodations in and among the suburbs of Saigon

Saigon wasn't the safest place on earth at that time, and many were apprehensive about living among the indigenous population. But once settled,



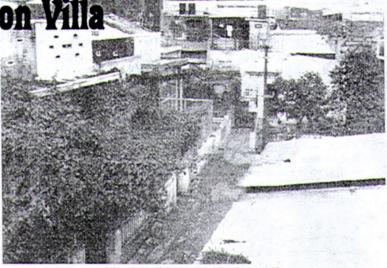
L/entrance de salon

it often became a unique, often humorous., sometimes poignant, learning experience. When you returned home, you often had a broader understanding of the lives of the people we were committed to support in their fight for freedom.

This particular villa was about a mile or so from the main gate of TSN, in the community of Bui Phat. The owner was a television producer on President Thieu's



Vue d'un boudoir



View down into the alley, Bui Phat, 1967

staff, Monsieur Quang. He, and his lovely wife made the second floor available to four members of the Directorate of Information, 7th Air Force.

The American residents came to know the intimate little markets of the community, go to mass at the newly built Catholic church, participate in native celebrations like Boys' Day, when the villas would be decked with flamboyant cellophane, candlelit figures and kites.

There were no objections to holding



Vue sur le toit de ville de Saigon

civilized parties, to which the hosts invited buddies from the base to share the rare comforts of a life quite different from being confined to the base.

Being combat newsmen, the residents often were away, sometimes for weeks in actions up-country, and really appreciated being able to return to the peace and cleanliness of the House of Quang.

Laying on the roof, sunbathing,

allowed one to look out across the still beautiful city of Saigon, smell the cool air washing in from Vung Tau and the South China sea, and revel in the beauty of the bougainvillaea and palms waving in the

When Tet '68 came, it all ended and everybody went back to the base. But this oasis of peace will never be forgotten.



Madame Quang, the mistress of the villa



Day Nine

In Chapter Eight, I talked about the heroic 4thAir Commando Squadron and my good friend Verne who perished over the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Growing pains ...

I had returned from from my Bankok sojourn, and had to look for a new place to live in Saigon. I also learned that while I was gone, I had been replaced as O.I.C. of Field Maintenance by a major. The unit had gotten huge after absorbing all the specialists from our tenant units, and deserved a field grade officer.

On the plus side of the ledger, I had been promoted to first lieutenant and was pleased to no longer be an untouchable. People even began to ask my opinion on issues. I was assigned as O.I.C. of the Quality Control Section of the Chief of Maintenance Staff. In other words, I became a staff weenie.

I had a wonderful crew of enlisted men, mostly non-commissioned officers. They were, SMSgt. Bordon as NCOIC, and Msgt. Lang, Msgt. McDavid, Msgt. Ridgeway, Msgt. Mumford, Tsgt. Owens, Tsgt. Garner, Tsgt. Clark, Tsgt. Kelly, Tsgt. Martin, Tsgt. Frazier, Tsgt. Roth, Ssgt. Clifton, A/2C. Bliech (the clerk-typist), Msgt. VanNostrand, Tsgt. Irving, Msgt. Milson, Msgt. Bradley, Msgt. Stout, and last, but not least, good old Msgt. Sandoval running the Tech Order Distribbution Office, (TODO).

As new units continued to arrive we had to institute a night shift (we worked twelve hour shifts), and eventually I got a lieutenant to run the TODO. He was a swell gent named Lt. Penas, with a Spanish squiggle over the "n" to change the pronunciations to "pen-yas." Unfortunately our typewriters couldn't accomplish the squiggle and I will let you guess what he was being called.

We even got a pilot assigned to QC to perform flight tests on the C-123 aircrafter, a delightful handsome major with whom I became fast friends. His name was George Juhasz, a Serbo-Croat name I was told. His claim to fame was that he had never flown a jet. In primary, he had flown T-6 Texans, in advanced he had flown TB-25s, and after cadets, had flown C-47, C-119, and finally C-123s in Vietnam.

The mystery of runaway engines ...

Once we were having a rash of engines overspeeding when the prop lever was pulled into reverse for landing after touchdown. We eventually discovered that our maintenance troops were mispositioning a micro switch behind the control quadrant during routine inspections, causing the auxiliary pump not to come in on time.

We had a deuce of a time finding the problem, because the Propellor Shop NCO claimed that his men were doing everything according to Hoyle, the Hydraulic Shop NCO claimed the same, and the OMS people in the inspection docks claimed it wasn't their problem.

Something had to be done since these engines were reaching 3,300 rpms, while the prop was passing through neutral as it went from forward pitch to reverse pitch, and this called for a special inspection of the engine. We were short of engines, since although the R-2800, two thousand horsepower Prat & Whitney was supposed to run at least 2000 hours between overhauls, we were routinely changing engines at 1200 hours operating time and less because of the horrible dirt and dust of the runways we operated off of, and the high power settings we had to use.

George and I spent about one week on the flight line with scribbling tools and steel rulers, measuring every airplane for the correct setting of the auxiliary pump micro switches, even my NCOs in QC had been unable to detect the problem. We found that they were all okay prior to going into the OMS inspection docks, but maladjusted when they came out of inspection. As it turned out, it was OMS troops who had denied even having anything to do with the props who were causing the problem.

More great comrades ...

As I have previously mentioned, I found an apartment down at 145 Rue Vo Tanh, which was occupied by a splendid major who was a pilot and aeronautical engineer, who had advertised in the G.I. newsletter for a person to share his apartment. His name was Ramond Berrier (or "ber-i-yay" as pronounced in French).

He worked in the Air Attache Office. Major Berrier was the inventor of the side firing C-47, we later called "spooky" although the press had taken to call it "Poof, the Magic Dragon," after a popular song of the early sixties.

He had proved the concept using a regular C-47 which had been damaged in a flash fire at Bien Hoa, and as field maintenance officer I had given him a small amount of assistance in installing a single 30 calibre air-cooled machine gun in the side of it. I had also assisted him in installing a zeon spotlight along with a gas powered generator to power it. But the concept was never adapted in the C-47 as far as I know. But, I later heard that some, were installed in the later C-119 gun ships which proved to be successful.

Later we got a third roommate. Captain John Kimmerly, a fighter pilot in the 319th F.I.S. (F-103 Starfighters) and he was the most unhappy person I ever met while in Viet Nam. The reason he was so unhappy was that he was a highly qualified fighter pilot, and had been assigned to the 7th Air Force as a staff weenie and I think he did his job from behind a radar scope.

One of our earlier fighter pilots from the 319th was named Captain Oliver Chase, and Ollie had been assigned to A-I Skyraiders earlier in Viet Nam, but had gotten target fixation, or been hit by ground fire, and flown directly into a Viet Cong eamp site killing him. Captain Chase was one of my greatest heroes while I was in the 319th, and he had taken me on a Mach one plus ride in a two seat version of the F-I04. I have the certificate with his name on it as pilot, on my den wall above me as I write.

In an earlier issue of Revetments I spied a notice by his parents wanting to know if anyone knew him in Viet Nam. But, since I was not with him in Viet Nam I did not write to them. They simply wanted to know more about their son and how he was doing when he was killed, and I wouldn't have been able to tell them anything. God, after all these years, I feel so sorry for them!

A brother's eventful arrival ...

In December, we had a huge Viet Cong attack on the base near Christmas time. A great number of our aircraft were destroyed, and our fuel storage tanks were burning all night. An ancient C-124 Globemaster, piston engined transport, landed at the airport towards the end of the attack. Among the crew was my younger brother, Major John W. McKinnon. They were told to get off the ground immediately, but he was able to visit with me at my apartment while the airplane was serviced and loaded. He said, "Jesus, I hope this isn't a typical day here at Tan Son Nhut." He later went through pilot training and served a tour in Viet Nam as a FAC pilot flying the 0-2 Cessna "mixmasters."

Well, guys, it's time for the sandman again. Take care of yourselves.

Where's Your Stories?

All we hear is McKinnon's field maintenance stories. Didn't anybody else do anything at TSN?

Where's the 460th, 7th AF, the 377th and all the rest of you guys? *Revetments* belongs to everybody, and we'd like more of you to tell us what was going on in your part of the one of the greatest airdromes

in history ...

Tan Son Nhut Air Base!





We were glad to receive a good number of responses from members who wanted items listed for sale in last month's issue of *Revetments*. And, one member wants three items we failed to present; t-shirts, golf shirts and sweat shirts. (They should be a big item.)

But in order to go into business and produce these items, we have to have an indication of how big the orders are to be placed. To keep the prices within any realm of reason we are looking at minimum orders of fifty to a hundred for any particular item. Outlets and factories are not going to produce just a couple of items (unless you want to pay fifty to a hundred dollars for them).

So, if this program is going to "take off" please let us hear from you as soon as you can.

Public Affairs Office, TSNA
Suite 709, 330 West Brambleton Avenue
Norfolk, Virginia 23510
Phone: (757_627-7746 FAX: (757) 627-0878
E-Mail: hercules29@worldnet.att.net

Or, post your order with Charles Penley, on our website, http://www.tsna.org

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