



REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

A Memorial to the American Experience in Vietnam



FEBRUARY 2016

TET FROM MY VIEWPOINT

By: Sgt. Rich Busillo
120th Assault Helicopter Co.
TSN Heliport
Jun 67 - Jun 68

It was with mixed feelings that I read Bill Stribling's story of the '68 Tet Offensive. It was nice to hear from Bill since most of the personnel at Tan Son Nut were Air Force. As members of the 120th Assault Helicopter Company, we were one of the few U.S. Army Units stationed at the Heliport in TSN.

In the fall of 1967 we were moved out of TSN and built a new airfield in Long Binh. When we moved, we left our Gunship Platoon, the "RAZORBACKS", at TSN Heliport since they were responsible for the immediate security of the Saigon Perimeter.

Bill's story brought back a lot of memories of my own experiences at TSN. I was assigned to the 120th AHC at TSN in June of 1967 as a mechanic on a Huey Maintenance Team. We had already moved our Unit to Long Binh when the Ammo Dump at Long Binh got hit on the first night of the Tet Offensive.

The explosion blew most of us out of our bunks and immediately put us on alert. Our Platoon Sergeant got M-14's issued to us and sent us to the perimeter of the airfield to guard the airfield and the fuel dump. Needless to say, we were scared to death and didn't know what to expect.

I wasn't there long when I was "volunteered" to be a Door Gunner on a Huey flying rockets and ammo down to TSN because the NVA had cut off all the supply routes into Saigon. Now I was really scared! We flew back and forth all night and took fire almost every time going in and coming out of TSN Heliport. Fortunately, the enemy didn't know how to lead targets very well. At first light, me and two other guys were asked to stay in TSN to work on the Razorback's Hueys since there was no maintenance crew there and they were all getting pretty well shot up. We spent three days there working around the clock just trying to keep their aircraft flying. Those guys flew their butts off! After the first three days of the battle, they were credited with killing 1100 NVA Troops coming over the fence and near the perimeter.

As shot up as the Helicopters were, I only saw one crew-member seriously wounded and a few others with minor wounds. After the third day, things seemed to calm down and we were relieved at TSN and sent back to Long Binh for some much needed rest. Shortly after that I joined a Flight Platoon as a Crew Chief/Door Gunner and flew sorties on a "Slick" every day until I was asked to return to TSN to be the Crew Chief/Door Gunner on General Westmoreland's Huey. I spent my last three months there Crewing Westmoreland's ship and helping the Razorbacks "break down rockets" and loading ammo on their Gunships when they were busy. As Bill mentioned, there are many other stories within this story, but they would take a book to tell. My best regards to all the "Razorback" Crewmembers!

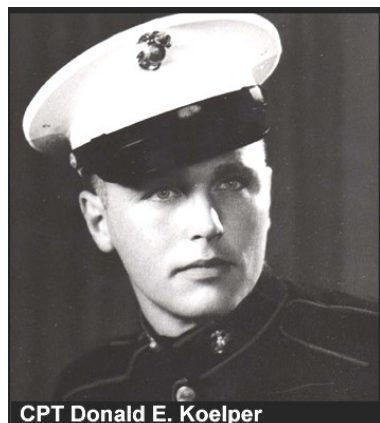


Aerial view of TSN Heliport. The Razorbacks had the revetments all the way on the left. Obviously, almost all were out flying that day.



General Westmoreland's Huey sitting at MACV Helipad

CAPITOL KINH DO MOVIE THEATER BOMBING FEBRUARY 16, 1964



CPT Donald E. Koelper



Capitol Kinh Do movie theater, bombed Feb 16, 1964

Our thanks to
TSNA Webmaster
Charles Penley,
who submitted the
info that makes
up this article.

The below information was originally written by a Viet Cong, involved in the Capitol Kinh Do movie theater bombing.

You can read it in English below.

WE BOMB THE CAPITOL KINH DO THEATER

This is a report on the bombing, Capitol Kinh Do Theater, Saigon, Feb 16, 1964.

Le Van Duyet street runs past the Theater.

The Kinh Do Theater, is known to the Americans as the Capitol American Theater. This theater is reserved strictly for the American community.

Two policemen were stationed in front of the Kinh Do Theater. Two guards inside.

Most of the people gathered there were VIPs and high ranking advisor officers and a great number of Americans would be killed if the target were attacked.

The time for penetration and accomplishing the mission should be completed in one minute and attackers should withdraw from the area within three minutes.

The police were at their usual posts; a plain clothes agent was standing at the entrance of the outer fence talking to a US MP who was standing at the entrance of the inner fence. The other US MP was standing at the left side of the entrance of the inner fence.

The VC vehicle drove up to the theater. It stopped quickly. VC's jumped out of the vehicle. One VC, took the bomb and dashed into the Theater.

The VC in the theater lobby, approached the staircase leading to the balcony. An American came down the staircase. The American moved to seize the VC. The VC, put down the bomb and pulled the cord to detonate the bomb.

There was a snapping sound. The American Captain, ran into the theater shouting something. (He shouted "Bomb, hit the deck, " according to eye witnesses.)

Killed in the attack were:

1. The U. S. Army military policeman, Corporal Peter M. Feiersbend.
2. Marine Corps Captain Donald E. Koepler, whom the VC met in the lobby and who had run into the theater with the warning (Capt Koepler, was buried alive under debris when part of the balcony collapsed.)
3. SP/5 William Reed, sitting in the last row of the auditorium.

Injured and requiring treatment were: 23 American servicemen, six American male civilians, three American women, two American children and one British civilian. All recovered.

(Editor's Note: A copy of a newspaper article attached to this story talks about the ceremonies where Captain (promoted to Major posthumously) Koepler was awarded a Republic of Vietnam Honor Medal, First Class.)

By: Paul Allard
460th AEMS
Sep 67 - May 69

You can't go back home to your family, back home to your childhood, ... back home to a young man's dreams of glory and of fame ... back home to places in the country, back home to the old forms and systems of things which once seemed everlasting but which are changing all the time -- back home to the escapes of Time and Memory.

Thomas Clayton Wolfe, "You Can't Go Home Again"

1,556 and a Wake Up

The countdown. You remember it, don't you? It started the moment you set foot on the steaming hot Tan Son Nhut Airport tarmac and typically ended when your Freedom Bird's wheels left the TSN runway one year later. One year, 365 days of God only knew what. Just about all of us had a countdown calendar, either in his head or pinned to the barracks' wall, and each successive day was checked off. For some it represented time remaining until return to the "world" and the comforts of clean sheets and flush toilets. To me, it was meaningless.

Gazing through the fog of time, I can still remember my last day assigned to Tan Son Nhut, 30 May 1969. I turned in my military issue gear, signed a few documents, said my good-byes to friends that I had proudly served alongside, then headed home - by cyclo. "Home" for me at that time was an apartment just a couple of miles away on Nguyễn Huỳnh Đức, just off Công Lý street.

It was not by chance that my USAF active duty ended on the same day as my tour of duty in Vietnam. It took careful planning to get an in-country release. First, I had to extend my tour by about six months to coincide with my USAF separation date. Then I had to find employment with an "invited contractor" in order to justify remaining in a war zone as a civilian. Next came a US passport and a Visa before obtaining final approval from PACAF for discharge in the Republic of Vietnam.

Although now a civilian, I was still a part of the U.S. military effort in Vietnam. For the next three years I remained in Vietnam, working in Saigon, Da Nang and Phu Loi for private military contractors. Altogether, I spent 1,556 days in Vietnam before returning to the U.S. in January of 1972. More than 1,000 of these days were spent in Saigon; I knew that town like the back of my hand. It was my second home and I loved it.

Flash forward to November, 2015. I have just returned from my tenth visit to Vietnam. At only one month, this was my shortest visit ever. My wife, Thuy, and I returned primarily to attend her thirty-year high school class reunion, the high point of which, in my not so humble opinion, was my flawless rendition of the song, Sài Gòn (Đẹp

Lắm). God forgive me, I still love that town.

Tough Love

Yes, I still love Saigon, but not without reservations. The old city in District 1, with the Saigon Opera House, the Notre-Dame Basilica, the Rex Hotel and other familiar sights, still attracts new visitors and erstwhile Saigon aficionados, but changes made during the last twenty years or so have altered the Saigon environment almost beyond recognition. One of the changes that I noticed on my first return visit in 1991 was that many of the streets had new names. Cong Ly, the street running from Tan Son Nhut Airport and past my former apartment, is now named, "Nguyen Van Troi." Tu Do street, once a favorite destination for TSN airmen, is now "Dong Khoi." And, like it or not, the city of Sai Gon has been re-named "Ho Chi Minh City." At least that's what is written on current maps and official publications. In actual practice though, in casual conversation most people (outside of officialdom) still call the city "Saigon."

Saigon is located on what was once a swamp, hence the relatively low-lying buildings built by the French during their occupation. However, the Saigon skyline of today features tall skyscrapers like the 861 foot high (68 story) Bitexco Financial Tower completed in 2010. Giant tower cranes dominate the Saigon skyline, each adding, floor-by-floor, another skyscraper to the city's already overburdened topography. (see note below)

In addition to business and residential skyscrapers, much of the ongoing construction centers on new infrastructure being built to house scores of new and expanding foreign investment ventures. Global companies like Nike, Adidas, Procter & Gamble, Coca-Cola, and Intel, which has recently expanded its \$1 billion facility in District nine's Saigon Hi-Tech Park, are financing the stampede to convert rice paddies into huge industrial parks.

While the buildings themselves may not present much of a problem, access to them does. The population of Saigon in 1968 was about 2 million people; today Saigon's population is approaching 10 million. These people need transportation to and from the new residences, schools, markets, job sites and business centers.

You might say that Saigon is a casualty of its own evolution. Traffic is getting more chaotic every day, especially during rush hours. Due to the insufficient accessibility of public transportation, motorbikes are still the preferred method of travel. Presently, there are about 4 million motorbikes registered in Saigon. Adding to the daily traffic melee, the nascent middle class, along with the privileged elite, parade their new-found affluence in an assortment of cars ranging from brand new BMWs to less showy, but still prized Fords and Toyotas. This proliferation of motorbikes, taxis, private cars, trucks, motorized carts and jay-walking pedestrians creates huge traffic jams and contributes to the growing problem of air pollution. I used to scoff at Saigonese motorists and pedestrians wearing face masks.

However, on this latest trip, the air quality was so bad that I also found it necessary to wear a mask.

Recently, some actions have been taken to address the growing traffic problem. Running under the Saigon River, the Thu Thiem Tunnel, the longest cross-river tunnel in South East Asia, now helps ease traffic flow between Districts one and two. I've driven through this tunnel a couple of times, shaving about 15 minutes off the trip from Long Xuyen to Saigon. Hydrofoils now whoosh passengers between Saigon and Vung Tau, helping to ease traffic along busy highway one. Construction is underway for a subway system under Saigon's crowded streets which will help to lighten traffic a bit...if they can get enough people off of their beloved motorbikes.

Tan Son Nhut Airport has also undergone change over the years. Before 1975 it was one of the world's busiest airports due to the huge amount of military flights. Today the airport is still busy, serving about 25 million international and domestic passengers a year, with this number expected to rise considerably in the coming years. A new international terminal now handles the lion's share of these passengers.

The rapid growth of Saigon in recent years has encroached on the confines of Tan Son Nhut, making it impossible for the airport to expand. Consequently, Long Thanh International Airport, a new 20 square mile facility, will soon be constructed about 30 miles northeast of Saigon to handle international passengers, leaving Tan Son Nhut to deal with domestic flights only. Economists in Vietnam have suggested that the new airport be financed by the closing of Tan Son Nhut. The sale of the old airport grounds would raise the billions of dollars needed for the new airport, and free up much needed land for commercial development. Tan Son Nhut Airport's days may be numbered. I noticed on a visit about three years ago that nearly all of its most iconic structures, the oh-so-familiar revetments, have already been torn down, leaving little more than a square U shaped scratch on the ground to mark their passing.

The Bottom Line

One morning during this most recent visit to Vietnam, as I sat drinking delicious Trung Nguyen coffee with some of my friends, I brought up the subject of changes in Saigon, and in Vietnam in general, since 1975. These are people that I've known since my first return visit in 1991, most of whom served in the South Vietnam military in some capacity. Although they might have wished for a different outcome, they all agreed on one thing: peace is good, war is bad. The advances in infrastructure, standard of living and economic progress would not have been possible during the years of war. All things considered, the population in general is better off than before 1975. Some of us may suggest that they might be much better off had the South prevailed, but, as one of the Buddhist precepts advise, we should "accept what is." That does not necessarily mean

passive submission, but rather a recognition that this is the way it is now, and it serves as a point of departure to begin changing the status quo, slowly and peacefully.

Note: For some interesting photos of the Saigon skyline, go to this website and scroll down to photo series #70, Evolution from Saigon (before 1975) to Ho Chi Minh City: <http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=322176&page=4>.



Phú Mỹ Bridge over the Saigon River. View from my brother-in-law's house in District 7.



Little house on the Long Xuyen River. This is where I go to escape the chaos of Saigon.

Note the TSNA cap that I always wear over there. BTW, that's a cold Tiger beer in my hand, brewed fresh and bottled in Vietnam.

The website url that I provided at the bottom of the article shows some great before 1975 and after 1975 photos of Saigon.



Coup d'état

By: David Karmes

Jun 64 - May 65

405th Fighter Wing, Det. 1, 33rd CAMRON

During the year that I was in Vietnam I went through two coup's that I was right in the middle of and I thought maybe our members would enjoy an excerpt from my book, The Patricia Lynn project. The first was on September 13, 1964 when a battalion of South Vietnamese troops moved into Saigon to overthrow Premier General Nguyen Khanh. This one was put down quickly by South Vietnamese Air Force commander General Nguyen Cao Ky. The second one occurred on February 16, 1965 and I was right in the middle of that one. Here is the excerpt from my book.

Friday, February 16, 1965, oh boy here we go again another coup.

We had been hearing rumors all morning that something was happening in Saigon I was working when it all started and I had just climbed up on the wing of my airplane to check the fuel during the preflight inspection. It was 4 PM and my aircraft had a 5 PM takeoff, and the pilots had not shown up yet at the operations building. I looked up and there was a South Vietnamese tank coming down the parking ramp and weaving between the RF-101s parked in the middle of the ramp, going like hell. My aircraft was parked in the first sandbagged revetment next to the turnoff to the taxiway and when the tank passed, it was so close to the front of my aircraft it hit the end of the sand bags then it turned to go onto the taxiway. I could also see there were several tanks going out onto the main runway.

Then, all of a sudden, here came an A-1 H Sky Raider coming down the taxiway going wide open on takeoff. The tank that had been coming down the ramp went out onto the taxiway just as the A-1 H left the ground and went right over the top of the tank and then banked to the right and came right

over the top of me and just cleared the Air Vietnam hangers as he took off. Then about 200 South Vietnamese Army troops came in and completely surrounded the jet parking area. I jumped down off of my aircraft just as a South Vietnamese officer came over and told us to take cover it looks like there was going to be some shooting pretty soon. It seems that the Army was trying to take control of the government and the Army took over the whole Tan Son Nhut Air Base and most of Saigon.

They would not let anything land or take off so they put their tanks out on the runway and the taxiway's. We all gathered at the maintenance trailer to try to figure out what we were going to do. About 15 or 20 min. later 15 A-1 H Sky Raiders flew over the base in formation. They have come down from Bien Hoa airbase loaded with bombs, rockets and guns and was buzzing the Army troops trying to make them leave the base. The South Vietnamese Air Force led by our hero General Ky was not going to let the rebel troops take over the base or the government as he was the one that took off and it is his A-1H on the taxiway. We got a call in the trailer from the US Air Force command post, and they said they wanted someone to get on our truck radio and let them know everything that was happening in our area, the Vietnamese Army would not let anyone get to the jet parking area and would not let us out.

It seems I am working with a bunch of chickens. None of them would get out in the truck on the radio and so I volunteered. I went out on the flight line with the truck and parked between two sandbag revetments next to my aircraft. There were 200 Vietnamese Army troops about 100 yards away and eight A-1H Sky Raiders flying around ordering the Army rebels to leave. I parked the truck so I could see down the flight line parking ramp in both directions. Both sides looked like they were ready to fire back just as soon as one side fired on the other. I had to call the command post every

time a tank or a bunch of troops moved. Joe and I had to tell them which way they were headed and how many. It got kind of hairy there for a while, those A-1 H's would come in low and I mean real low, so low that when they would go over me I could feel the wind that it made. A South Vietnamese Army Jeep pulled up next to my truck and a major got out. He came over to the truck and asked me why I wasn't with the other guys hiding in a sand bag revetment. I told him the truth that I was reporting on the truck radio to our command post on what he and his troops were doing. It really made me mad, so I asked him what the hell he and his troops were doing. I told him, you see my aircraft here; it should be in the air right now gathering intelligence to protect your troops but you won't let my pilots in here to fly. I pointed over toward the F-102s and said, you see those aircraft. If this base is attacked by the North Vietnamese they will not be able to take off to protect us because you have the runway blocked by your tanks. He backed off, looked at me and got back in his Jeep and drove away. This went on for three hours; those tanks going up and down the flight line and the A-1 H's flying low right over my head. Just as it was getting dark that South Vietnamese Major showed up again and this time he had two troops with him. I figured I was in big trouble now. They got out of the Jeep and one of the troops had a bucket and handed it to me. In it was some still warm fried rice and chicken. Then the major said they figured I would be hungry so they brought me some food. It was really good, probably the best I've ever had. Then he told me to let Air Force command know that he would protect the American troops and our aircraft in this area and he did not agree with his Commanders. I then wrote down his name because I could not pronounce it and reported his name and what he said to Air Force command. Not one shot was fired though in the two day's we stayed there on the flight line even though I thought all hell was going to break loose. Those Army troops had their guns pointed at the A-1 H aircraft

every time they would fly over and followed them until they were out of range. The South Vietnamese Air Force prevailed and they locked up the Army general that started the whole thing and all the troops went back to fighting the Viet Cong instead of each other.

The attempt by rebel Army troops and Marines to overthrow the government of South Vietnam's president General Nguyen Khanh collapsed in less than 24 hours. Saigon radio, which had been in rebel hands, announced early Saturday it was returning to normal control and it ceased broadcasting rebel communiqués.

The radio station reported the collapse of the coup came without bloodshed. The rebels apparently surrendered the radio station after 2000 loyalist troops began marching into the city. The collapse of the rebellion came only hours before Vietnam's Air Force Commander Vice Air Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky threatened to bomb rebel positions in the city. The Air Force chief warned the rebel leader, to evacuate Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airbase or face bombing by loyal airman.

We later learned the rebel leader was apparently backed also by a Regiment of the 25th infantry division stationed near Saigon. Some Marines and Air Force units also were on the rebel side. The South Vietnam Navy stayed neutral, its ships pulled out of Saigon and dropped anchor 7 miles down the River. General Khanh escaped early in the coup and reached Cape St. Jacques, on the coast from where he telephoned American Generals that he had three paratroop battalions ready to march on Saigon. General Khanh apparently slipped away just as the rebel tanks rumbled up to his Saigon residence. General Ky also managed to escape from Tan Son Nhut air base in an A-1 H fighter bomber (the one that went over me) and he rallied his men at the Bien Hoa airbase outside Saigon for action against the rebels in the capital.

I sure do wish these people would make up their minds who they want to rule this place. I worry more about these coups than I do the Viet Cong.

General Moore, the base Commander, came down to the flight line and thanked us for the great job we did reporting what was going on to Air Force command. I was not there when he came down but the guys told him I was the one in the truck. I wonder what he thought of the lowest ranking man that was in the truck reporting, I am sure they did not tell him what chickens they were.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

I have been talking with Kerry Nivens on the Huntsville Reunion. The guest speaker is lined up.

The Memorial Committee is working on putting together a legacy from us to Huntsville.

Kerry has some tours lined up and is putting our transportation together.

Now is time to start thinking about items for our auction?

September will be here before we know it. Keep those calendars marked.

Have you signed up a new member?

Have you asked a member to attend our reunions?

Randall W Brown
President TSNA



CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

As we jump into the shortest month of the year it is a reminder that 2016 gives us an extra day for the thoughts and actions of the many potentials of the month of LOVE. One of the writers tests us by reminding us that LOVE makes your soul crawl out of its hiding place.

Yes, it has been said before this is the month of Valentines and LOVING thought.

Let us start this month and the entire season with a scriptural passage, John 13:34. The words of Jesus "A new commandment I give you, that you LOVE one another as I have LOVED you". Then to a Browning comment "take away LOVE and our earth is a tomb".

Two leaders of Faith need to be quoted as we begin our "month of LOVE". First Mother Teresa tells us: "I have found the paradox that if you LOVE until it hurts, then there can be no more hurt, just more LOVE".

Let's just go a bit deeper with the words of M.L. King, Jr. "Hatred paralyzes life; LOVE releases it; hatred confuses life; LOVE harmonizes it; hatred darkens life; LOVE illuminates it.

Now this is the month of LOVE. We need to realize that this from another source says "A LOVING heart is the truest wisdom".

OK: To prove this read the New Testament passage Matthew 5:44.

End of sermon (OK: I LOVE you all.)
Chaplain Bob Chaffee

(Editor's Note: See page 8 for a great Valentine's graphic.)



PROUD TO HAVE SERVED

By: Tom Rosinski
CMSgt. USAF Retired

After reading the article "Military Nostalgia", in the January 2016 Revetments, which I enjoyed so much, I told myself I can relate to that.

I first became aware of the TSNA in 2007 and have been a member ever since. Have attended only 2 of the reunions but hope to get to this years. In 2007 the Revetments published an article I wrote about my experience in Vietnam .

I was station at Hq 7AF from Jan – Dec 1968 and went through the Tet Offensive of 68.

The military was good to me and my family. All of you who served in Vietnam recall all the negatives there were toward the military. However now there seems to be more recognition for us who served then. I know now when I wear my Vietnam or TSNA hat I get a lot more "thanks for serving". It is a real good feeling to hear those words for I am proud to say "I served in Vietnam".

I retired near Shaw AFB because I wanted to be near a military installation so that I could use some of the

benefits I had earned. When I go through the main gate the Security personnel on duty always have a warm welcome for me. The sound of the F16s remind me that our freedom is being protected 24 – 365.

Currently I am a Red Cross volunteer at Shaw AFB and work at the pharmacy dispensing prescriptions to both the active duty and retired in the area. Whenever an individual comes to my window with a Vietnam hat on I always ask when and where they served. By the replies I get back tells me they too were glad to have served. Approximately 70% of our customers are retired military enjoying one of the most important benefits (free medical care) they earned by serving.

The young airmen and civilians who I work with are of the highest caliber and do a terrific job of insuring that the best service is given to all customers. It is an atmosphere that I enjoy working in and takes me back to my years on active duty. I am asked questions by the airmen how things were back then and they are surprised at some of my answers. The Air Force was a BIG part of my family for almost 29 years and I did have a very rewarding career. My family fully supported me and enjoyed the travel. My two sons still talk

about their experiences in Japan. They are proud of their dad serving and remind me often of that.

One of the benefits I enjoy by volunteering is getting to see a great many of the people I served with during my assignment at Shaw AFB (1976-1980) and elsewhere. Sometimes we reminisce about the good old days.

I retired in July 1984 after serving with the Joint Special Operations Command at Ft Bragg NC. Working with the "Special Operators" was the best assignment of my career. The news these days are filled with articles about how they are now performing against ISIS.

I hope all of you who served are proud as I am of service to the **Greatest Nation in the world.** Thanks for serving!



IMPORTANT DAYS THIS MONTH

**FEBRUARY
2016**

FEBRUARY 1 NATIONAL FREEDOM DAY

FEBRUARY 4, 1941 THE USO IS INCORPORATED

FEBRUARY 12 LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY

FEBRUARY 19, 1945 BATTLE OF IWO JIMA BEGINS

FEBRUARY 15 PRESIDENTS DAY (THIRD MONDAY IN FEBRUARY)

FEBRUARY 20, 1962 FIRST US ORBITING OF EARTH BY JOHN GLENN

FEBRUARY 22 WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY

FEBRUARY 23 FLAG RAISED AT IWO JIMA

FEBRUARY 23, 1991 DESERT STORM GROUND WAR BEGINS

FEBRUARY 27, 1991 DESERT STORM GROUND WAR ENDS AFTER 100 HOURS

FEBRUARY 27 BATTLE OF JAVA SEA BEGINS

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Five Year Membership: \$80.00
Life Membership: \$180.00



Graphic designed by Scott Jones

Membership Statistics

Total Paid Members: 540

Renewals this month: 8

NEW MEMBERS

Mr. Donald S. Wisner Belleville IL 62221 dwiskid@sbcglobal.net Oct 65 - Sep 66 16th TRS/460th TRS

IN MEMORIAM

Mr. J. Les Love Hartford City IN Oct 67 - Oct 68 25th Infantry

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