



# REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

A Memorial to the American Experience in Vietnam

NOVEMBER 2017



## CHAPLAIN BOB CHAFFEE



Chaplain Bob Alan Chaffee, Lieutenant Colonel, USAF (retired) died October 3, 2017 following a long battle with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Born November 20, 1929 in Leonardville, Kansas.

He went to Westmar College in Iowa where he met Bobbi. He followed his life's calling attending seminary, graduating from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 1956 with a Masters Degree. He served in pastorates in Pennsylvania; Texas; and Iowa before joining the Air Force as a chaplain in 1965.

He served at McClellan AFB in Sacramento, California before reassignment to Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base in Saigon in 1968. He was stationed in New York, New Jersey, Spain, Colorado, and England before his final assignment at MacDill AFB. In 1986 he retired from the Air Force and remained in Tampa where he served several area churches in different capacities to include Kirk of the Lake, Covenant and First Presbyterian Church of Tampa.

Bob's numerous military decorations and awards include: the Bronze Star; Air Force Meritorious Service Medal; AF Commendation Medal; Air Force Outstanding Unit Award; National Defense Service Medal; Vietnam Service Medal; Air Force Overseas Long Tour Ribbon; Air Force Longevity Service Award Ribbon; Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross; Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal; and Republic of Vietnam Medal of Honor.

Since retiring from the pastorate, Bob enjoyed traveling in his RV (until the kids said "no more") and serving on the board of his beloved Tan Son Nhut Association as the advisor/chaplain and wrote a monthly column for the association's newsletter, *Revetments*.

Bob is survived by his wife of 67 years, Roberta (Bobbi); son, Nathan of Tampa; daughter, Faith Kanno (Neil) of Alexandria, Virginia; grandsons Michael Kanno (Sophia) of

Chicago and Jason Kanno (Elizabeth) of Alexandria; cousin, Jack Stout (Jodele) of Stillwater, Oklahoma.

## His Memory Will Not Fade Away

Chaplain Bob Chaffee has passed away to report to and reside with his ultimate commander, and we continue to mourn and reflect. Under usual circumstances, the result back here would be his name disappearing from the masthead of *Revetments* and the TSNA Website. The TSNA Board of Directors could not abide such an aftermath. At our disposal was an alternative.

The board exercised its power to declare any past officer, board member, or member assigned to special duties as emeritus for that position. Up to this time, only past presidents of our association have been honored with emeritus status. That is no longer true, because on October 29, Bob Chaffee was declared Chaplain Emeritus by action of the TSNA Board of Directors.

Now, Bob Chaffee's name will appear on the masthead of *Revetments* and the listing of chaplains on the TSNA Website so long as those entities exist.

How Bob came to be our chaplain in 2009 is reflective of his humility and overreaching devotion to his calling and God. He was present at the reunion in Pigeon Forge and sat through the invocation by our then president at the banquet. It seems virtually no one at that moment was aware of his status as a retired USAF Lt Col and Chaplain. In his mind, he was there as just another vet at a gathering of those who had served at Tan Son Nhut AB to reminisce and remember. During later conversations in the hospitality suite it came to light that Bob was a retired USAF Chaplain. That stimulated some of us on the board to approach him to be an active chaplain of the association. He never personally sought to be one of our chaplains. The next eight years is steeped in association history. Was his being present at a time this association needed a chaplain that could devote lots of his time to us a coincidence? My view is no. This is an example of divine intervention to those of us with faith. I cannot and will not attempt to change the minds of those who think otherwise.

Rest in peace and remain in our thoughts perpetually, Chaplain Bob Chaffee. You are sorely missed.

Dale Bryan, Secretary

## Aircraft Poster – South Vietnam 1972-73

My husband, John M. Alvestad of Gig Harbor, Washington (USAF, deceased), was stationed at Tan Son Nhut Air Base in 1972-73. John was an aircraft mechanic working primarily on propeller planes. During his time at TSN another Airman, David R. Thompson, presented John with an illustration board filled with artwork depicting aircraft from the base. We brought this photo of the work to share at the 2017 TSNA Reunion.

The actual size is 30 x 40 inches. It appears to have been drawn with both pen and pencil and is unframed. John always told us the artwork was representative of every aircraft on base at the time. There is some wear and tear evident but for the most part the work remains in decent condition.

Our family would very much like to return this original artwork to Mr. Thompson (or his family) if we can locate them. My husband and our entire family have cherished it for many years and it has been quite a conversation piece for others who have also enjoyed viewing it. It seems fitting to us now that John is gone to offer it back to the original artist. We'd like to think he and his family might also cherish the memories it holds as much as we did for so many years.

Gordon C. Wagner (who is currently a member of the TSNA) served with both my husband and David Thompson at Tan Son Nhut. He told us Mr. Thompson was known to always have a sketch pad in his hands. Mr. Wagner provided this physical description of Mr. Thompson: *"David was a light-skinned African American man who was tall and slender."* We do not have any photos of Mr. Thompson, only the picture he sketched of himself within his artwork. The last known address for Mr. Thompson (found in some of John's mementos) was in Forestville, Maryland. Though we've only recently begun this effort, attempts to locate Mr. Thompson or any family have been unsuccessful thus far.

If you happened to know either my husband or David Thompson we'd be so grateful to talk to you. John passed away September 17, 2015 at the age of 65. While we heard many humorous stories of his experiences overseas, we have learned much since his death that has both surprised us and made us even more proud.

Last, if you have suggestions you'd be willing to share in our quest to locate Mr. Thompson we'd be very grateful for your help. We are new to such efforts but determined!

Thank you so much for allowing us to share this with you.

Kathy Alvestad (widow of John M. Alvestad)  
[kalv06@yahoo.com](mailto:kalv06@yahoo.com)

Heidi (Alvestad) Bever (daughter of John M. Alvestad)  
[heidi.bever@gmail.com](mailto:heidi.bever@gmail.com)



(Photo by Dennis Allyn)

## Heroes Among Us, #2

Just in time for Veterans Day, I've once again had the privilege of interviewing a local WWII veteran. My husband arranged for me to sit down with Cecil Hannaford, a local VFW member. Born in Reid, Mississippi, Cecil was the youngest child of a cotton farmer.

After high school as his friends were being drafted, Cecil enlisted in the Army Reserve. He explains that he fell for the tale the recruiter spun: Enlist in the Army Reserve, finish college, tell us what you want to do, and we'll work it out. He felt pretty smart until, four months later, when he was called up to Camp Shelby, MS in the infantry. From there, he headed to Fort McClellan, AL before shipping off to England in August 1944. He jokes that at least he got his payday sooner than his fellow soldiers because he'd enlisted earlier.

You're probably figuring out that Cecil has quite the sense of humor. Perhaps that's what sustained him during his service. He crossed the English Channel after D-Day, got sick like most everyone else, and quickly realized the seriousness of his situation when he saw a French hillside covered with crosses. Just as Cecil thought, things soon got serious.

In the Battle of the Bulge, his regiment had been sheltering in buildings in Heinerscheid before his platoon was ordered to set up a roadblock at a nearby crossroads. They dug foxholes in the snow and ice, where for two days, they watched German tanks go by on the main highway. Cecil's theory is that after the war, the Germans used parts of those same tanks to build Volkswagens to sell to Americans. Again, that sense of humor comes through.

The troops left in the village were all but wiped out when the Germans came through, but Cecil's group escaped unscathed. Eventually, his platoon joined the 116<sup>th</sup> Infantry division. Just before Christmas, walking up a hillside, they were ordered to dig foxholes in the frozen ground. With only a six inch deep foxhole hacked out of the ice, both he and his fox-hole buddy somehow dove in and escaped fire as German tanks rumbled through.

With a smile, Cecil described opening his one can of beans for dinner: "If you've never eaten beans frozen with ice, you're missing something." When he painted the picture of how he got frostbite, though, there was no hint of a smile. Ordered to take the highest hill overlooking the Rhine, the men removed their shoes and donned white capes and white rubber boots. Walking through two feet of snow in rubber boots that didn't breathe led to frostbitten feet.

Most of the casualties on that hillside came from shelling. Cecil and many others were untouched by shells or bullets, but instead suffered from frostbite; and many, like Cecil, were evacuated to England for treatment. Cecil received his Purple Heart for his frostbite, an injury which bothers him to this day.

His unit was preparing to deploy to Japan when the war ended. After the war, Cecil spent 23 years in the Air Force Reserve and enjoyed a long career in the life insurance and pension industry.

What did Cecil take away from his WWII and Air Force Reserve experience? What's his message? "Service; everyone needs to get out there and serve. Our country needs us, and service is how we stay strong."

To hear Cecil and other veterans tell their stories, visit Witness to War, <http://www.witnesstowar.org/home>, whose mission is to preserve the oral histories of combat veterans.

Kathy Manos Penn is a columnist for the Dunwoody Crier and has written two books, "The Ink Penn: Celebrating the Magic in the Everyday" and "Lord Banjo the Royal Pooch." Both are available on her website [kathymanospenn.com](http://kathymanospenn.com) and Amazon.

## NOTATIONS FROM APPLICATIONS

Lived in Barracks 830. Worked in Ammo Dump in Alpha Sector. Was there during Tet. Stuck in barracks when attacked. 6 of us took a pickup and 1 M-16 and made it to the Bomb Dump. Remember one rocket attack when they hit the beer Conexes. Devastating. Have photos I'd like to share.

Frederick (Rick) C. Soth  
377th Supply  
Sep 67 - Mar 69  
Orland Place, IL



## Looking Back to the Year 1967

By: Harold Boone  
460th TRW, HQ Section  
Sep 67 - Aug 68

More and more troops were being sent to Vietnam in 1967 and I was one of them. With the additional troops, the buildup is nearing its peak as the level is now at 485,600. General Westmoreland addressed a joint session of Congress giving an update on the progress being made in Vietnam. One Vietnam War statistic stands out from 1967 and that is 11,363 died that year.

Defense Secretary Robert McNamara resigns to become head of the World Bank. A fire on the aircraft carrier USS Forrestal in the Gulf of Tonkin results in 134 deaths. Amana markets first compact Microwave oven. Quartz watches are on the market. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting is established. San Francisco's Haight-Asbury section sees a lot of hippies. Were you there?

In medicine, the first human heart transplant was done in South Africa.

On the lighter side of life, we had movies, sports, and listened to the best music of all time. Naturally, I did not know this back then.

At the movies in 1967, we watched Bonnie and Clyde, Doctor Doolittle, The Graduate, Guess Who is Coming to Dinner, In the Heat of the Night, Cool Hand Luke. On TV, we were watching The Andy Griffith Show, The Beverly Hillbillies, Batman, The Lucy Show, Bonanza, The Jackie Gleason Show, Green Acres.

Here are the top 10 songs of 1967 as listed by Billboard. How many of these classic sounds do you remember? Somehow the sound of older music rekindles some memories of mine. Hopefully these songs will cause you to look back to a special time and place in your life.

To Sir With Love by Lulu; The Letter by The Box Tops; Ode To Billie Joe by Bobby Gentry; Windy by The Association; I'm A Believer by The Monkees; Light My Fire by The Doors; Somethin' Stupid by Nancy and Frank Sinatra; Happy Together by The Turtles; Groovin' by the Young Rascals; Can't Take My Eyes Off You by Frankie Valli.

In the world of sports, the Saint Louis Cardinals defeated Boston Red Sox in the World Series. Southern California was named college football champions. Green Bay Packers were the National Football League champions. UCLA was College Basketball Champions.

## The Real Meaning of Veterans Day (Written 11/11/2016)

By: Ira Cooperman  
7th Air Force Intel  
65-66

Today I visited the Newtown, PA cemetery gravesite of Vincent Chiarello, my friend and Air Force partner during the Vietnam War, who "won" the flip of a coin toss in 1966 (instead of me!), and "returned" home after being M.I.A. for 22 years.



## **The Big Dinner**

On our day off some of us from the PMEL would go down town to eat and do some window shopping. Those days off at first rotated through the week then settled down to be Saturday.

We would usually eat at the Victory Restaurant located about a block from the old Embassy building. They had great food and atmosphere.

One of T/Sgt Rose's friends was a Sgt in the Vietnamese Air Force at Bien Hoa. One day he took some of us down town to a small Vietnamese restaurant across the street from the Victory, which was located on the second floor.

Since Sgt Wah was Vietnamese he knew the good places and also was able to negotiate a very good price for our meal. Needless to say that was probably one of the best meals I had there in that year.

After lunch Sgt Wah treated us to a trip to the Saigon Zoo. That was an amazing place next to the Saigon River. There were not too many animals but lots of great sights to take in though. I was fascinated by the river traffic - some boats almost sinking they were so over loaded. There was a very nice museum located at the Zoo which had displays covering hundreds of years of history, very educational.

**Harlan N. Hatfield 460th AEMS PMEL class of 1967**



Sgt Wah and SSgt T. C. Brown TSgt. Celsi and Harlan Hatfield



Saigon Zoo Cactus Garden

## **FROM THE PREZ**

I am about 99% recouped from my Oral Surgery. Teeth all gone, lump gone also.

Ready for new teeth and Dr to say everything fine.

I go to Heart Surgeon to see whether they can repair leak or put in Pacemaker.

Getting energy back more each day.

My thoughts and prayers have been with the Chaffee family.

Now looking towards November 11th. Will be participating in some events.

Looking forward to Dayton Reunion and the 50th Anniversary of TET.

Hoping for all of you a blessed Holiday Season ahead.

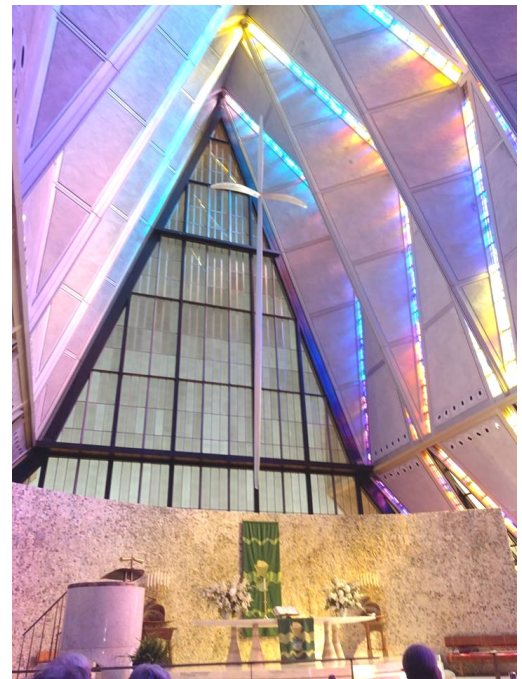
**Randall W Brown**

**TSNA PRESIDENT**





New Member Kathy Alvestad and her daughter, Heidi Bever, check into the Reunion



Air Force Academy Cadet Chapel



The USAF Academy Cadet Chapel

ALL PHOTOS ON THIS PAGE  
BY HARLAN HATFIELD



TSNA member Susie Ahrens welcomes our Honor Guard for the 2017 TSNA Banquet



Gary Redlinski talks with Johnnie & Sharon Jernigan At the 2017 Reunion BX/PX sales area



Dinner Time for the Fry's at the 2017 Reunion Registration Table

## Sermons Not Ending

I'm sure that most of the membership is aware that our beloved Chaplain, Bob Chaffee, passed away on October 3. We all fondly remember how he ended his chaplain column each month with, "End of Sermon." He and his inspiring columns will be sorely missed by all.

The "sermons" will not end, because the TSNA Board of Directors has appointed TSNA Life Member Paul Subbie to be an Associate Chaplain, and in that capacity, he will be submitting a column or "sermon", if you prefer that term, each month. His first is below. Paul has expressed to me that he hopes and prays that he proves himself worthy of filling the enormous shoes of Chaplain Chaffee. He is at the same time humbled by being appointed to complete every month this very important task.

Paul comes to us as one who ministers to other members of his church and those suffering in the hospital. He must have a great rapport with patients since he is himself a heart transplant recipient that undergoes routine dialysis.

Paul knows what it means to serve to defend our nation. He was an RF-101 pilot with the 45<sup>th</sup> Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron during his USAF tenure at TSN in 1970 flying missions over South Vietnam, southern North Vietnam, and Laos while piloting alone an unarmed aircraft that could draw enemy fire. He was awarded the Air Medal, the AF Commendation Medal, the AF Outstanding Unit Award with cluster, the Vietnam Service Medal, and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with palm.

Please welcome Paul as our newest Associate Chaplain and keep him in your prayers.

Dale Bryan, Secretary.

## CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

First I want to thank the Board for allowing me this position as an Associate Chaplain for the Association. I was saddened at Bob Chaffee's passing, and I know you all share my feelings. Bob was an excellent Chaplain, and had many really excellent sermons for you all.

I only wish I had filled this position under better circumstances. My condolences to Bob's friends, family, and his associates in the Tan Son Nhut Association. Bob will be sorely missed by all.

This is my favorite time of the year with fall's dropping leaves, and bright colors of red, orange, yellow and brown. A feast for the eyes for certain. It is also a time of family reunions, and visits with relatives near and far, and our best friends. At this time, we share stories, and good food with all who are close to us. Our homes become warm, loving, and filled with wonderful smells, sights, and tastes.

It is also a time of giving thanks for the year's blessings from God, and His good Graces He has provided to us. Let's all give thanks for His beautiful gifts, so freely given to us who enjoy, and live in His Word.

Please join me in remembering our associations over the years, with members both near and far, who were dear to our hearts, and those fallen in the defense of our great nation's security, and freedoms. This Thanksgiving, please ask all your friends, and relatives to partake in a moment of silence, and prayer for all those in the military service, who are at home, or overseas, who are unable to share these times.

May they find comfort and peace if possible through the USO, and may they be able to call home to chat with their loved ones this Thanksgiving Season.

In closing, I would like to express my feelings of joy at being able to serve you as an Associate Chaplain, and wish you a Very Happy Thanksgiving.

God bless.

Paul A. Subbie  
By His Grace.





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Photo from Bob Sirrine, Nov 66 - Jun 68,  
Army 507th Transportation Grp.

### **FROM CHAPLAIN BOB'S WIFE, BOBBI**

I thank all the TSNA friends for the lovely cards, prayers and their remembrance of Bob. He truly loved this organization and hated to miss the reunions. He was there in spirit.

The beautiful Peace Lily sent from the TSNA for Bob's Celebration of Life (It is so beautiful and enormous!), was/is a constant reminder of what all the TSNA members fought for years ago.

Thank you, I will treasure it for years remembering the wonderful friends we made during our reunions.

### **IN MEMORIAM**

Mr. Bob A. Chaffee Tampa FL 68-69 Base Chaplain

### **VETERANS DAY 2017 AT THE WALL** **TSNA Wreath-Laying at the Wall 11 November**

As in years past, TSNA is participating in the wreath-laying ceremonies at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC on Veterans Day, Saturday 11 November. Anyone who would like to participate is heartily invited to join us. If you can come, please email us at [jcbessette@aol.com](mailto:jcbessette@aol.com), or call us at 703-303-6723. Then, when we get more info on the ceremony, we'll contact you with specific location & times.

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