

Revetments

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association



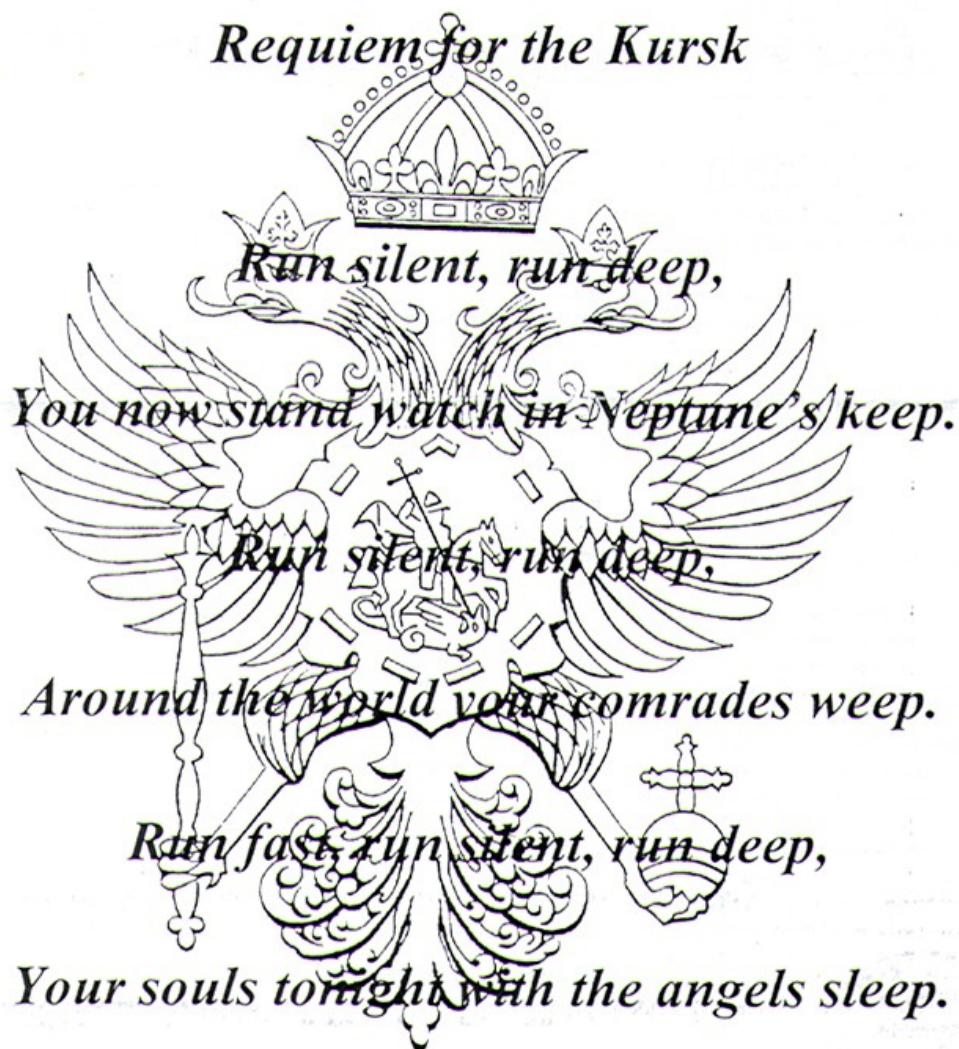
"All Included - Non Excluded"

Volume 2, Number 12

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

September, 2000

Requiem for the Kursk



On behalf of the men and women of The Tan Son Nhut Association

Combat Warriors of the 460th FMS



Observation tower, usually manned by the ARVN ... empty that day

I was stationed at Tan Son Nhut Air Base from September 1967 to September 1968, and was assigned to the 460th Field Maintenance Squadron as a jet engine mechanic.

I'm going to tell you about May 5, 1968 when a group of us from the 460th helped stop the Viet Cong from over-running our position. In this attack (TSNA member) Jerry Fish was wounded (*Revetments*, Oct. 1999, *Another Texan Arrives*).

At that time I was working the night shift in the Spectrometric Oil Analysis Program laboratory and had just ended my shift early that morning. SOAP analyzed oil by vaporizing it in a machine to create a spectrum of colors that corresponded to different kinds of metal content. The purpose was to predict engine wear.

The 460th arms for battle

My hooch was located south of the main gate on the east side of Tan Son Nhut across the cemetery from the road to Cholon, right next to the perimeter fence. I arrived just as it was getting light out and had just dropped into my bunk when I heard a couple of loud explosions followed by the base attack siren going off.

I grabbed my clothes, boots, helmet, and flack vest and ran for the bunker outside where I got dressed as I waited for the all clear. About this time we could hear occasional small arms fire. Obviously something was going on because the airman with the key to the arms locker was arguing with a group of airmen that had gathered around him in

by
David E. Koopman

between the hooches. They wanted him to pass out the M16s, and he said he wouldn't release them without a direct order from the base commander. Some one told him, "We're drawing fire, hand them out before we all get killed. We can worry about the base commander later. Make it quick, or we'll kick the crap out of you and take them."

This statement facilitated the quick release of the weapons.

Remember, folks, jet engine mechanics are not trained soldiers. Some of them are lucky if they know which end of an M16 the bullet comes out of (more on this later). Having succeeded in becoming a mob, we all scattered to various positions around the hooches seeking cover and a good field of fire.

I ended up with a number of other airmen a couple of hooches south of my own in a small clearing with a broken down old Vietnamese monument on it. It was made of concrete in the shape of a temple, divided in half with a walkway down the middle. It seemed to offer cover and a good field of fire to the perimeter fence.

Withdrawal from Fort 460

I wanted a shot at the enemy but I needed a place to fire from and the broken concrete seemed like a good bet for a barricade. I turned to Jerry Fish beside me and said, "Why don't we pile some of this concrete up on the right for a barricade to fire behind?" He said it sounded like a good idea to him.

So quicker than it takes to tell about it, we piled up a few large pieces and got down behind them. I think it became apparent to both of us immediately that we were too exposed. I turned to him and said we'd better get out of there before we got shot.

We both jumped up and turned and quickly moved forward a step. He was just behind me as I made the turn onto the walkway in the middle of the monument, when I heard a thump and Jerry yelled,



Koopman in the S.O.A.P. laboratory

"I'm hit," as he fell. I hit the ground and crawled over to him to see what I could do. A couple of us checked him over and found he had been hit in the right shoulder at the edge of his flak jacket. He didn't seem to be bleeding much so we all yelled for a medic. A few minutes later two corpsmen arrived with a stretcher and carried Jerry off. That's the last time I saw him.

Almost immediately, we started to draw heavy fire. So many bullets were hitting around us that it sounded like hail on a tin roof. Somehow, I hadn't taken the situation very seriously. It had kind of seemed like playing cowboys and indians when I was a child.

Now, feeling responsible for Jerry getting shot, and realizing how close I had come to being shot or killed myself, I was scared to death. Physically, I was a wreck. It felt like my intestines were a bunch of snakes crawling around inside me. But at the same time, I knew we had to stop the VC at the fence. I thought if we can only hold on long enough, maybe someone who knows what they are doing will help us.

One of the airmen in front of me cut loose with his M16 on full auto, at god knows what, since the VC weren't visible, and he must have wasted at least half a magazine. That's fine if you have the ammunition to spare, but we had very little. Since I out-ranked him, I ordered him to stop firing until he saw them near the outer fence. I was more afraid of not having enough ammunition than the VC (Continued, See Koopman, Page 7)

Airman Works the String Shift

by

Ruben Salazar, Staff Writer, The Los Angeles Times, March 18, 1966

(Editor's Note: Member Ira Cooperman is one of the founding, and an active member of the Tan Son Nhut Association. He is now on the staff of the University of Rochester. VP, John Peele recently brought the back files of the TSNA to the Public Affairs Office. Look what we found.)

SAIGON— The young Air Force Lieutenant carefully placed his large cello in the front seat of a midget taxi cab in front of the Caravelle Hotel. In the back seat he put down some sheet music and purchases from the P.X.

Then 1st Lt. Ira Barry Cooperman, 26, of Hollywood, got into another tiny taxi and motioned to the first cab to follow him.

"The National Conservatory of Music," he told the driver.

It was Cooperman's day off from his job at Tan Son Nhut air base and he was off to "fight the war in a more constructive way."

Saigon can be a cynical city full of corruption and vice. Fighting men can often be seen staggering drunkenly in the choked streets of what used to be known as "the pearl of the Orient."

Saigon can be a city of terrorism. And war has made it a city in which most people think of death sometime during the day.

But there is another Saigon. It is also a city desperately trying to regain its culture and ideas after years of war and colonialism. And there are fighting men, Vietnamese and American, who want to fight this battle, too.

Cooperman is such a man.

The director of the conservatory, Do The Phiet, is trying to build an orchestra for Saigon sponsored by the Vietnamese government and support by the American and French cultural centers.

Hearing this, Cooperman — who has been playing the cello since he was 9 — volunteered to help.

Conductor Phiet was so impressed with the lean, intense and enthusiastic young American airman that he asked Cooperman to play one of Phiet's own compositions at the orchestra's first concert. Cooperman did.

The orchestra is composed, at the

present time, solely of string players. Woodwind and horn players are lacking in Saigon, mostly because there are not enough qualified Vietnamese to teach these instruments.

"The cooperation among the Vietnamese, Americans and French interested in music was so great in preparation for our first concert that I'm sure this deficiency will be licked soon," says Cooperman with characteristic optimism.

"Another thing that we lack, though, is sheet music. Do you realize that very, very little sheet music is available in Vietnam? Some of the Vietnamese musicians must copy by hand from sheet music borrowed from other musicians.

"When I think of all the surplus sheet music available in the United States and France I immediately start calling all my American and French friends to ask them to write their friends at home and send sheet music to the conservatory. And I know this problem will be licked, too.

The concert was played in an old French building with characteristic shuttered windows, fans suspended from the ceiling and peeling wall paint. It was a success in layman's terms.

Cooperman played Conductor Phiet's composition, "Elegy" — which critics said later showed a combination of traditional Vietnamese and Western musical influences — with great warmth.

Another American, Miss Frances Buxton, a Florida music teacher, another featured soloist, played Bach's Violin Concerto in A Minor. Mrs. Marie Therese Robin, wife of a French official here, sang a selection by Mozart, and two teen-age Vietnamese girls played Bach's Piano Concerto in D Minor.

Among the audience, besides Vietnamese dignitaries, were a motley group of helicopter pilots, non-commissioned airmen, newsmen and American civilians. Most of them had come at Cooperman's enthusiastic urging.

"While I find my work at the air base challenging, playing in the Vietnamese orchestra (in which Cooperman also plays



bass) is the most rewarding experience that I have yet had in the two years and nine months that I have been in the Air Force," Cooperman said after the concert.

"But the really wonderful thing about it is the feeling of being accepted by the Vietnamese people themselves ... we must continued to seek such rewarding experience, even in war."

Son of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Cooperman of Hollywood, Cooperman was graduated from Fairfax High School, received his Associate in Arts degree from Los Angeles City College and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from San Francisco State College.

He has also done graduate work at San Francisco State, UCLA, Harvard and Boston Universities towards a Ph.D. in international relations and political science. No one who knows Lt. Cooperman snickers any more when they see him struggling to get his cello in the back seat of a tiny taxi in the busy and cynical downtown of Saigon.

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Revetments is an official publication of the Tan Son Nhut Association, Inc. 6203 57th Avenue, Riverdale, Maryland 20737. The Association is a non-profit fraternal organization chartered under appropriate statute and law.

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Thoughts of Our Sky Pilot

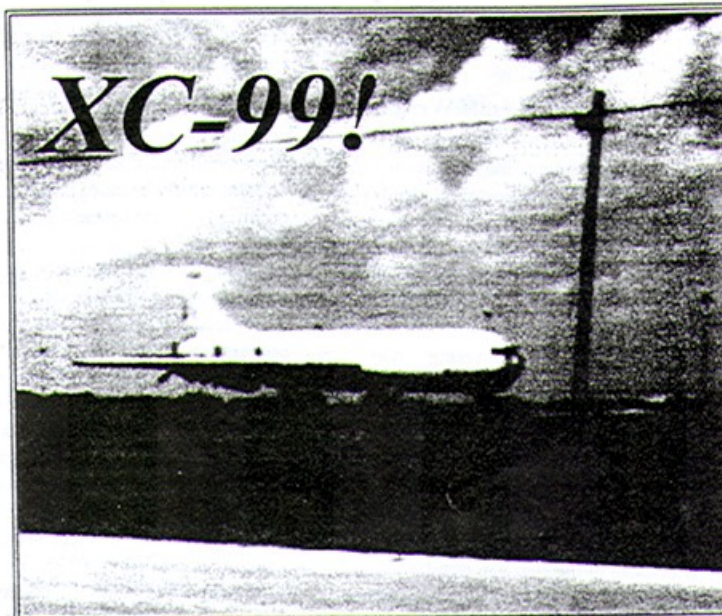
by
Chaplain
James M. Warrington

Life As Offering

In the famous Ely Cathedral of England there are some old carved stone pillars which are so close to a wall that they can be seen only from one side. But if you reach your hand around to the back side, you will find that these pillars are as perfectly carved on the side which cannot be seen as on the side which is visible.

It would have been quite possible for the workman who carved the stone to have "got by" as we say, with much less care, effort and plain hard work if he had paid less attention to the side which would seldom be noticed. But this pillar was something to be offered to God, and it had to be pleasing in God's sight!

One passage of holy scripture urges that all of our life be lived as an offering to God. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, that you present your bodies a living



This photograph, taken at Kelly during Reunion 2000, by Major Taylor McKinnon, was supposed to go with the layout on Page 7, but the Editor went bonkers! He was a corporal, yes corporal, in 1949 when this great six turbo-prop behemoth would land at Kelly AFB. The corporal would stand on the ridge of the plateau at Lackland and watch her come in. Because of the Doppler Effect, she would look like she was hardly moving while making an absolutely majestic landing. She never became operational and the apocryphal story is that they took General Curtis LeMay for a ride. When they were landing at Tinker AFB, Oklahoma, they over-shot the runway and came to rest in a shallow lake. LeMay and his aides had to wade ashore in waist deep water. No wonder it never came on line. What a plane! Taylor tells us that it may soon be turned back to an aircraft company, he thinks Lockheed-Martin.

sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

In life, as in a cathedral, there are necessary forms of work that will never be given much notice or recognition. Indeed, in even the most famous men and women there are many long hours of unknown drudgery and monotony behind their achievement. When life is lived as a daily offering to God, it is unimportant what other people see or what they say. The important thing is that the work, be it large or small, is pleasing to God.

Another reminder the cathedral builders can give us is that we cannot offer to God anything less than our best. In every age it has been clearly recognized that only the finest work of artists and artisans should be used in the building set aside for holy worship. God does not expect of any us more than He has made us capable of doing. But on the other hand, God is never satisfied with any work which He knows is less than our full potential.

We sometimes think that only prayer and worship, and other so-called religious activities, are the offering God asks us to make. But the passage from scripture, quoted above, makes it clear that all of life is involved in our worship.

Holy offerings can be made by the student in the classroom, by the mother in the daily round of housework, by the business man in his office, by the workman in his shop, or by the politician in the halls of Congress.

The mark is not made by what is done, rather the distinguishing mark is unto Whom it is done.



**Revetments
begins
its 3rd Year
with the next issue!**

Thanks members for your support



The Communication Center

In Memoriam ... Friends, I ask all to pray for the souls of the Russian submarine *Kursk*. As all of us who followed the sea, for a long or a short time, know the sea is a hard mistress, and is unforgiving of all who trifle with it, regardless of politics or nation. Those who went down to sea, or beneath it, will join me in the prayer that begins, "Eternal Father, strong to save ..."

David L. Bolton, USN (Ret.)
Norfolk, Virginia

Seeks our assistance ... I am with the 2nd Bomb Wing Inspector Generals Office and am assisting Bruce F. Liehti, a retiree, trying to prove he was notified he had been promoted to master sergeant. The individual claims while he was in Vietnam in 1967, with the 460th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing, he was told by a colonel, he can't recall the name, that he had been promoted to master sergeant.

Unfortunately, he never received the promotion or paperwork verifying the colonel's statement because he was reassigned to CONUS shortly after he was told about his promotion. During the reassignment, he claims the promotion documentation must have gotten lost in "the system."

He is trying to appeal his non-selection to master sergeant through the Air Force Board for Correcting Military Records. He is trying to locate anyone who may have been around during the conversation he and colonel had or who may have

Member W.C. Grayson Addresses The Rededication of the POW/MIA Memorial at Chicksands, England July 12th, 2000

(Editor's Note: Member William C. Grayson, Det. 5, 6922nd Security Wing, Tan Son Nhut AB, 1966-1977 was a principal speaker in July at the POW/MIA Memorial at Chicksands, Bedfordshire, England. He kindly sent us the text of his remarks, and annotated the picture with, "Thanks to the members of the Tan Son Nhut Association who took the POW/MIA flag to 'The Wall' on Memorial Day. That flag is now flying perpetually at a British base in England.")

Brigadier Holton, Reverend Clergy, Distinguished Guests, Fellow Veterans and Family: With a great sense of humility, I accept this memorial bell on behalf of Chicksands veterans from 1940 to the present day.

otherwise known about his promotion.

I am hoping you would be able to direct me in finding out if this individual's name ever appeared in any base publication and where he might be able to get the documents.

Thank you, for you help.

Tsgt. Robert K. Shifflett
NCOIC, Inspector General
2nd Bomb Wing
E-mail:

Robert.Shifflett@barksdale.af.mil



Brigadier Holton, we very much appreciate the special gesture of restoring this monument, which means so much to both of our nations. I should like to mention that the black POW/MIA flag flying on the Monument's left, has been presented by U.S. Veterans of Chicksands. Before it came over last week, it had been to the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington and the Moving Vietnam Memorial Wall in Cleveland, Ohio. It has been to the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington Nation Cemetery, the United States Capitol and the Cryptologic Memorial Park at the National Security Agency, Fort Meade, Maryland.

Safe and Secure

Chicksands: This beautiful and very special spot was chosen as a place of quiet and contemplative refuge in the 12th Century. It remained so through

almost 400 years as a religious cloister and almost 400 years more as a family estate. Even as a military base during the last 64 years, its peaceful seclusion was interrupted by the Luftwaffe on only two noisy nights in 1940.

For the military troops who have been stationed here since World War II, a Chicksands assignment has always been valued as a safe and secure alternative to any number of posts and units around the world, which were distinct opposites. It was in the aftermath of a faraway war, started after I left here the first time and before I returned for the second, that the awareness of the Chicksands community was stirred to confront a deeply troubling incongruity: while duty was peaceful and comfortable here, some of our

(Continued. See POW, Page 6)



(POW continued from Page 5) comrades were still Missing in Action or presumed still to be held as Prisoners of War. This monument that we rededicate here today was originally intended by Royal Air Force Chicksands people, from this pleasant place of safety, as a solemn display of solidarity with brothers and sisters still in harm's way.

A Reminder

This monument is also a reminder.

The single most defining difference separating military duty from civilian life is obedience to orders in an environment characterized by austerity, unpredictability, and possible danger. Troops ordered to troubled areas go.

This monument commemorates those who followed orders and made a sacrifice by putting aside preference, comfort and safety. We must remember that no one plans beforehand to be taken prisoner; no one wants to become missing or an unknown casualty. No one hopes to be killed.

With the unpredictability of military service, no one can ever count on always being safe. But uniformed service people swear an oath to follow orders and some are then sent to Chicksands while others go to combat or dangerous operations.

But while Chicksands has always been a favored assignment, many of its veterans also served in or were always on-call for service in dangerous places and operations and retain a strong bond with those still at risk.

And so, while rededicating this memorial, we also remember today

★
8,100 still MIA and unaccounted for after the Korean War, began 50 years ago last month, and 2,021 still unaccounted for in Southeast Asia after 25 years.

★
We remember 35 USAF Security Service aircrew members, lost after being shot down on various collection operations over the Sea of Japan, Soviet Armenia and Southeast Asia.

★
We remember Sergeant Frederick Sebers of the USAF Security Service, killed in a ground attack at Tan Son Nhut Air Base in 1967, and Airman Paul Anthony, also of the USAF Security Service, killed during a mortar attack at Da Nang Air Base in 1970.

★
We remember the crew of the BOSTON CASPER, an R-47 based at RAF Brize Norton, shot down over the Barents Sea in July 1960.

★
We remember Eleven Members of an Army Reserve Water Purification Unit, impossibly called to active service from their hometown in Pennsylvania, and killed in their billet in Saudi Arabia by an Iraqi SCUD missile in 1991.

Over Five Years of TSNA Publications *Revetments* Begins Its Third Year

Ever since Don Parker, John Peele and a number of other Tan Son Nhut alumni started the Association in 1995, its members have sought to build a strong and effective communication with the membership.

They've worked hard to keep in touch with you by putting out newsletters and other material that they hope will interest you and let you know that your days at Tan Son Nhut will not be forgotten.

By October 1998, the Association was able to initiate a monthly publication, *Revetments*, that is designed to make this communication even more intense and meaningful.

The Association, after reorganizing its membership rolls by January 1999 had barely over two hundred paid

★
We remember Navy Lieutenant Michael Speicher, the first U.S. casualty of the Gulf War, shot down over Iraq in January 1991. His status as a POW or Killed in Action is still unresolved.

★
And, we remember my neighbor, Staff Sergeant Glover Peeler III, killed in 1967 on a Saigon street corner, waiting for a ride to work. He would have celebrated his 60th birthday next week.

Revetments, September, 2000



members.

As of this date, the rolls are now over a three hundred and sixty, heading for the four hundred mark and over by New Years.

This growth is directly attributed to both the Association's publications and to Member Charles Penley's superb efforts on the internet. It is also the support given by our growing number of both written and graphic materials, contributed by members like Warrington, Fulton, McKinnon, Coar, Reveaux, Cooperman, Strauss, and too many others to name here.

In the coming period, in Volume Three, we want *Revetments* to be professionally expanded, its graphics upgraded to a professional level, with more departments of interest, and produced in a larger format.

And most of all, we want to know if its really worth while. What do you think about *Revetments*? What do you like or dislike, or what would you like to see added?

Let us know, and we will work our butts off to see you get it!

Write us at Suite 709, 330 W. Brambleton Avenue, Norfolk, Virginia 23510, or call (757) 627-7746.

*Please give
us your change
of addresses!*

Revelments, August, 2000
(Koopman, from Page 2)
themselves.

When I arrived at my hootch that morning, none of the ARVN (Army of Republic of Vietnam) who usually guarded the perimeter were there. I won't try to guess where they were, as they may all have been dead, but I've always wondered.

Hostilities come to an end

Just about then, an A1E flew over and dropped a couple of bombs on the VC position. I watched it as it dove and only covered my head as the bombs were about to hit. The ground seemed to rise up and hit me in the face, as seconds later, dirt fell from the sky. Shortly after that a Huey flew over launching rockets and firings its guns. I was never so glad to see the Army



Koopman's view to the west across the old French cemetery and the direction of the VC attack.

in my life.

Soon, some MPs with an M60 machine gun arrived and the battle was over except for the mopping up. We were ordered to clear our weapons and turn them in, so I did, then headed to the latrine for some badly needed relief.

I was standing there relieving myself, when I saw through the window an airman walking toward me clearing his weapon.

This is what I told you would come later. The airman knew very little about firearms. He removed the magazine, then pulled the trigger before clearing the chamber and send a round right between my feet. That was too much! I had just barely avoided being killed by the enemy and now one of our own was trying to kill me!

I went back to my hootch to try and get some sleep. When I got to my bunk there was a hole in my roof, a bomb fragment laying on my mattress and a spent bullet on the floor by my locker. I thumbed a ride back to the S.O.A.P. lab where a guy could get a few hours sleep.

A Last Look At Reunion 2000



A visit to the Alamo

Thanks to our regular columnist and ardent supporter, Major Taylor B. McKinnon, of San Bernadino, California, gives our "last shots" of the small, but successful TSNA Reunion 2000, held in June in San Antonio, Texas.



A brave Taylor McKinnon can still smile. The day he left California his son's radiator blew up in his face. But "Hell!" he said, "I've got to go."

After all, even I knew when enough was enough.

Now it may seem to you that we did very little to defend the base that day. But I am absolutely convinced if we hadn't been there, the VC would have stormed across that fence with no opposition, and god only knows how many would have been killed.

None of us ran.

We held our position and we all can be proud of that.

(Editor's Note: We are certain the membership sincerely joins us in saluting Koopman for contributing this account and his priceless pictures. His last two sentences remind us all of the kind of people who were our comrades at Tan Son Nhut, and the reason it never fell.)



TSNA Executive Vice President and Co-Founder (with Don Parker), John Peele, shares memories with long ago comrades from Tan Son Nhut.



Joe Montag, Secretary/Treasurer of the TSNA Lone Star Region, and Reunion 2000 Coordinator finally gets a chance to relax after months of reunion planning hassles..



... and Texas TSNA Regional Director, Norman Whitlow just looks downright satisfied.



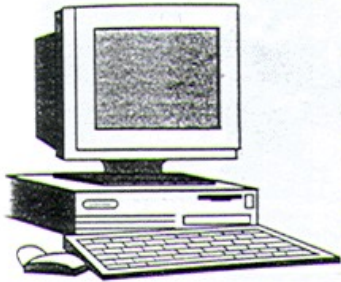
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377th Security Police Website Now on New ISP



We have many Security Police members in the Tan Son Nhut Association. Charles Penley, of Kingsport, Tennessee, is not only the Communications Officer and Webmaster for the Association's website on the internet:

<http://www/tsna.org> he also maintains and services a number of other sites. He would like all interested members to be aware of the following changes.

The 6220th Air Police Squadron, the 6250th Air Police Squadron, the 377th Air Police and the 377th Security Police Squadrons were previously at URL: <http://users.intermediatn.net/cepenlev/index.html>

The building and equipment is all the same, but the name change has taken place. The 377th Security Police Squadron is now at URL: <http://users.chartertn.net/cepenlev/index.html>

Penley advises members to delete the old book-mark pertaining to the intermediatn.net and replace it with the chartertn.net internet service provider. Also Penley's own E-Mail address is no longer at cepenlev@intermediatn.net and is now located at cepenlev@chartertn.net

All of Penley's websites are professionally maintained and of considerable interest to all of our members. They all include priceless graphics and very interesting commentary, by both Penley and the many site visitors, about both themselves and those long ago days at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. He does not allow these sites to become static and services changes and redesign on a daily basis.

They are all worth visiting often.

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