

Revetments

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association



"All Included - Non Excluded"

Volume 3, Number 6

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

March, 2001

Vietnam

A Vanished Victory . . .

A Decade of Deceit . . .

A Legacy of Lies

and

*what the Tan Son Nhut Association
can do about it!*

(See Page 2, A Call to Arms!)

A Call to Arms!

by Robert Stanley Need, Editor

From two totally unrelated sources we received two seemingly unrelated accounts that suddenly clashed in the middle of our editorial desk. They transformed the office into a whirlwind of emotions – pride, anger, sadness, and a determination to do something, to act, to attempt to turn back the sluggish tide of apathy and deceit that has been awash over our nation and all of us for over forty years.

For two and a half years *Revetments* has been a communication channel for the members of The Tan Son Nhut Association. Both poignancy and humor, history and commentary have brought consistently favorable comment from the membership. This issue is hoped to be much more, a catalyst for the establishment of a firm direction and purpose for the Tan Son Nhut Association.

The first report

A friend sent us an Associated Press release announcing that Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, a Vietnam veteran, had introduced a bill in the Senate calling for the establishment of an "interpretive center proposed for the Vietnam Memorial." It would be erected at the west end of the memorial where the current National Park Service kiosk presently stands.

Senator Hagel commented that the education center will "enhance what is a rather special monument for this country." The Vietnam Memorial is the most visited national monument in Washington, D. C. with over 4 million people a year reverently coming to "The Wall."

Representative J. C. Watts of Oklahoma, one of the sponsors, is reported to have said, "The education center will serve as an important resource to teach America's youth about the war and those who sacrificed so much."

The account goes on to say that Secretary of State Powell, former Senator Bob Dole of Kansas, and veterans groups have all expressed enthusiasm for the project.

The Public Affairs Office, TSNA, immediately responded by e-mail to Senator Hagel's office that we would be very interested in having more details on the program and would in all likelihood be

proud and eager to contribute efforts to support it. Here, we thought, is a marvelous opportunity for the Tan Son Nhut Association to come forward with its members vast body of knowledge and experience.

Tan Son Nhut Air Base was the focal point and the master of all combat and support operations of the American efforts in Vietnam. Our membership is not yet comprised of the sons and daughters of those who served in Vietnam and Tan Son Nhut, it is composed of us, the blood and backbone, the brains and guts who performed in our skills proudly, on the ground and in the skies, operating and often defending Tan Son Nhut.

This Association must not only take its rightful place, but its necessary and vital place in the forefront of this program proposed for the Vietnam Memorial. We are among those remaining alive who can tell and teach the experiences, lessons and actions that embody the **TRUTH** of the Vietnam War.

Why did you capitalize "truth?"

Because "truth" about this war has been in short supply for over forty years. Our involvement in Indochina evolved in clandestine machinations by a government that had just declared "no strategic interests" in the area at the collapse of the French occupation.

The now unsupportable claims of an incident in Tonkin Bay gave a president an excuse to upgrade the in-country "advisory" contingents to actual combat war status and open the flood gates for the introduction of millions of Americans to fight a full scale war.

Micro mismanaged by the McNamara Pentagon and the oval office, field commanders found themselves bound in restraints totally inimical to the proper conduct of battle. No clear and concise tactical or strategic objectives could ever be, or were ever established. Captured positions were abandoned only to be retaken often again and again.

Monumental battles were fought, but their accounts were suppressed, denied or considered the figment of some lower officer or NCO's imagination.

One of the greatest battles and

victories in American history, arguably comparable to the Battle of the Bulge in World War II, the Tet Offensive of 1968 was effectively and egregiously labeled "a stunning defeat" by a patriarch of the press, Walter Cronkite, echoed in roaring condemnation by the socialist public media. McNamara still dines out on the proceeds of his book that decades later proclaims that "it was all a mistake."

The second report

It is the second report that brought us into this fury of emotion and determination. A few weeks ago, Master Sergeant (USAF, Ret.) Olbert H. Hiatt, from Alabama, called Public Affairs for information about the 377th Security Police Squadron and the Tan Son Nhut Association. A TSNA package was sent to him. A few days later a large package arrived with his account of the attack on Tan Son Nhut by the 14th VC/NVA Battalion on December 4, 1966.

Reading it became painful. We are reprinting a portion of it, beginning on Insert Page 1.

Hiatt's experience brought painfully to mind the incongruity of the circumstances of the Vietnam War. Hiatt, you, and all the rest of us, with minuscule exception, performed effectively, admirably and often heroically to uphold the, then high and rigid standards of the United States Armed Forces.

But many came home to be spit at on the streets, denied employment and called by many, including the media "baby killers."

We know full well this was and is not true. We know that we never lost a major engagement, we know that we won the Tet Offensive, and reduced the VC forces to near extinction with the NVA seriously disabled for years to come. And if this victory had been truthfully acknowledged, it would have been the kingpin for permanent pacification of the region and South Vietnam would still be free and democratic today.

The Association must be prepared to come forth and contribute at last with the truth and banish the tales of a vanished victory, a decade of deceit and a hideous legacy of lies.

Terry Love's

Camp Gaylor



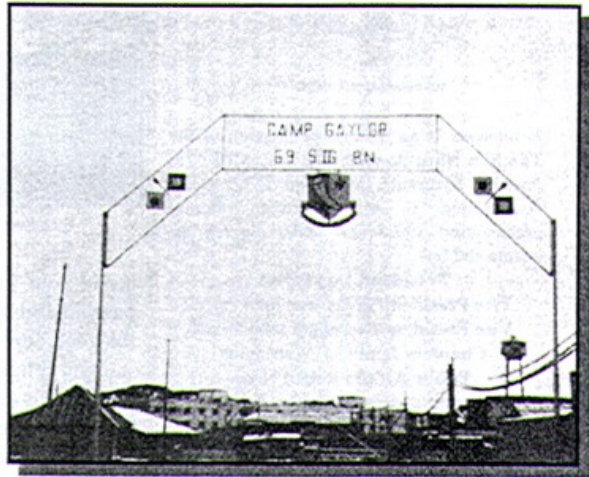
Camp Gaylor Compound, Tan Son Nhut AB, 1967

In last month's issue of *Revetments* we had a small feature on Camp Alpha, from **Jim Dugan** of Lindenwold, New Jersey. This month, thanks to **Terry Love** of Lakeville, Minnesota, we can get a brief look back at Camp Gaylor.

Terry is a professional Aviation Photographer and Historian. (that's his logo in the upper right). He was in the 1st Signal Brigade U.S. Army, and was at Camp Gaylor from June 1966 until March of 1968.

"I was there during the Tet Offensive. Very interesting!!! I flew out of the heliport and also was at the "fixed wing" section, next to the MACV flight line, and access ramp from Air America. I flew with the 1st Signal Brigade," he told us.

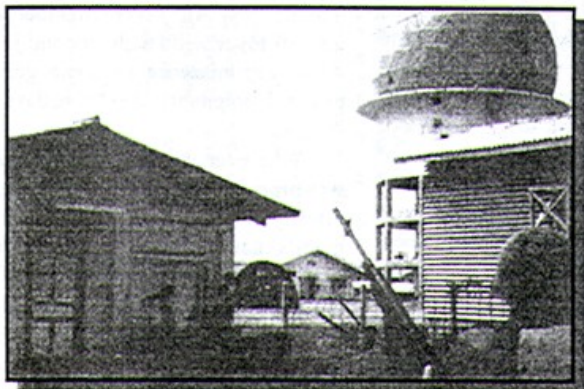
He has hundred of photographs of Tan Son Nhut and the Saigon area. Members who would like to get in touch with Terry can do so by writing 9415 West 178th Street, Lakeville, Minnesota 55044-9605. Thanks for sharing these with us!



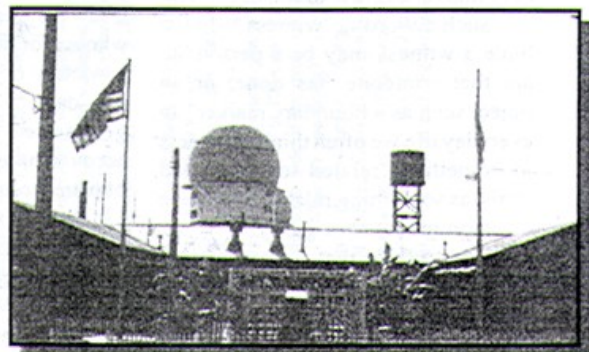
Camp Gaylor Gate, Tan Son Nhut AB, November 1966



EM Club, 69th Signal Battalion, Camp Gaylor



January 31, 1968, Tet Offensive
Sniper in radar tower, Camp Gaylor



Camp Gaylor, October 1966



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Thoughts of Our Sky Pilot

by
Chaplain
James M. Warrington

What is "Witness?"

There are certain religious words we hear so often they cease to have meaning for us. Until they are re-interpreted, they not only fail to excite us, they may actually cause us to close our minds and refuse to consider them.

Such a word is "witness." In the bible a witness may be a person, an act that someone has done, or an object such as a boundary marker. In everyday life we often think of witness as something related to courts and trials, as something related to proving a person innocent or guilty.

The truth is that we are witness every day of our lives. We read an article we enjoy and we tell our friends. We see and hear a motion picture, or a television show, and we



Patrol Squadron Two's aircraft on Marsons Mat, Tan Son Nhut
Taken and contributed by Bob Bailey

report our impressions. We find a bargain and we cannot wait to share the good news.

Our religious witness is as simple as that. It is letting people know about the discoveries, the experiences, the convictions that have enriched our lives at the deepest levels. It is daring to admit - even looking for chances in daily conversations to admit - that we find joy in prayer, and worship, and studying holy scripture, and participating in a congregation, and living before the Lord.

Sometimes we witness by word of mouth. Usually this is most effective when we do not try to force a conversation or to coerce agreement. We can witness by merely explaining: "In my own life I have found the greatest help in this way . . ."

Other times we witness by the way we live, and by the way we meet what comes to us. Every experience of life is raw material for witness. There is a witness for the Lord in joy or sorrow, in victory or defeat, in good days or bad days. There is a witness of gratitude and humility and accountability. There is also a witness of patience, and trust, and confidence.

Why do we constantly witness so freely about life's trivialities, and so seldom about life's profundities?

Chaplain Warrington is available for pastoral counseling.
Call TSNA Paf (757) 627-7746

Book Review:

This is a "must" read!

VIP Pilot, by Albert T. Keeler, Lt. Colonel, USAF, Retired, 195 pp.

Members of the Tan Son Nhut Association probably don't know that we have more than our share of very capable and gifted writers. Al Keeler is among one of the best.

VP Pilot is, to begin with, a beautifully produced book with its magnificently reproduced color photography.

Al's story begins before World War II and takes us all over the world, including Korea and Vietnam, at Tan Son Nhut, and ends with his retirement at Langley Air Force Base.

He tells his story in an easy-to-read conversational style, and what a story it is! Pilots, co-pilots, navigators, aircraft maintenance . . . and for that matter, any Air Force member or aircraft lover will laugh, cry and join Al in reminiscence of some great, prideful, poignant and exciting days in the air.

Wherever you were assigned, Al was probably there just before or right after you and knows intimate unit details that might surprise you. This book would make a tremendous gift.

To Order: \$29.95 per copy, plus \$1.60 book rate, or \$3.20 first class. Send check or money order to Al Keeler, 20 Industry Lane, Prince Frederick, Maryland 20678.

The Communication Center



Member asks a good question . . . Thank you for the great job you are doing, keep up the good work.

I have some photos and news clippings I would like to share for publication in *Revetments*. Please tell me the best way to do this, that is, e-mail or regular mail. I have scanning capabilities and could scan and attach to e-mail if this is the best way for you to receive information. If so, I will go to work to send some things ASAP after I hear from you. Best regards,

Peter F. Beyette
 Springville, New York
 (Editor's Note: Peter, thanks a million for the offer. We have been remiss in not providing this information clearly in the past. We would prefer "hard copy" of both text and graphics, sent to us via snail mail. And, unlike many other publications we will be glad to return items if you wish. Although we must add the caveat that sending originals can pose a risk. And, if at all possible, please send only black and white material because that is our only current method of reproduction. Color material can be done here, but results are not good.. Send to: TSNA Public Affairs Office Suite 709, 330 W. Brambleton, Norfolk, VA 23510.)

Member recalls a poignant last day at Tan Son Nhut ...

I was a member of the 8th Aerial Port Squadron, arriving in September 1972, and staying until the last day, March 29, 1973, leaving on the last scheduled C-141 to Yokota Air Base, Japan.

(After arriving at Yokota, I was informed that additional aircraft were being scheduled due to troops coming from out of the woodwork knowing they were left.)

I was a staff sergeant at the time, in charge of Passenger Processing for the Military Airlift Command. I had in three days, over 16,000 DD Forms 1482 Military Transport Authorizations in boxes to take to Yokota for billing.

After loading the last scheduled commercial contract flight, I came back to Camp Alpha to find the gate locked by the VNAF. We had to threaten them to get back in, where we found everything ransacked, the MTs were all over the terminal or processing area. All lost luggage was being taken, little people were in the chow hall taking even the ceiling fans. All bedding and furniture were being carried away. The International Control Commission members who were there to monitor the withdrawal could do nothing.

SMSgt. John Knee, my supervisor, who had left earlier, had given me the jeep he drove. I took the jeep to the flight line and left it in the hands of a VNAF sergeant.

I placed by luggage on the ramp of the C-141, tied it down and departed, cheering as we left the ground.

MSgt. Joseph T. Allison
 Kernersville, N.C.

* * *

Goodies in Renewal Notes

We deeply appreciate the kind little notes that members include in their renewal envelopes. Such as ...

"Sir, I do really enjoy some parts of *Revetments* for there are places I know about having served four tours and I loved it. Don't forget I was an Air Force First Sergeant, not a "first shirt" in the Army or Marines. I was at Tan Son Nhut during the Tet Offensive, very scary."

Buck Zehringer
 Schertz, Texas

"All the best to you, John Peele, Don Parker, and all my heroes. Cheers."

General John Shaud
 Springfield, Virginia

"The Victors!"
 Get your copy of this great CD Dedicated to the heroes of The 377th Security Sqdn. Only \$19.95 Order from Taylormax Productions P.O. Box 381, Patton, CA 92369 or call: (909) 862-3666

In Memoriam
 To Whom It Concerns,

I hope I'm writing the right place. I would like to inform your organization of Joseph Lawrence Herrman's death on January 28, 2001.

I know he was very proud to be a member, and loved spending time with you all at the reunions. I hope he makes it into the memoriam of your newsletter. Thank you, his son,

Michael Herrmann
 Coon Rapids, Minnesota

* * *

Michael,

We want you to know that we all extend to you, your mother, and all of your family our deep condolences, and the deep respect we hold for our brother who led an exemplary life in service to his God and country. We shall remember him in our prayers, and render to him a final proud salute.

The President & Members of the Tan Son Nhut Association

* * *

Please put us on your checklist when you move ... we've broken our crystal ball and it's hard to track you down!
 Just call Public Affairs (757) 627-7746

Who Was at Tan Son Nhut Air Base?

Responding to numerous inquiries, we are reprinting the principal units at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, from the original TSNA newsletter, July 1996, edited by Executive Vice President John Peele.

Principal Units Served By The Tan Son Nhut Air Base

Headquarters 7th Air Force	58th Transportation Battalion
Headquarters United States Army Vietnam	69th Signal Battalion
Headquarters Republic of Vietnam Air Force & Subordinate Units on Tan Son Nhut	69th Signal Battalion, A Company
Air America	69th Signal Detachment
Airborne Division Advisory Detachment	97th Artillery Group
Air Force Advisory Group	98th Transportation Detachment
Air Force Advisory Team #1	101st Radio Research Company
Air Force Resident Civil Engineer	110th Transportation Company
Air Procurement Region Far East, Detachment 4	120th Aviation Company
American Red Cross, TSN	175th Radio Research Company
Capitol Aviation Battalion	202d Medical Detachment
Combined Intelligence Center, Vietnam	224th Aviation Battalion
Combined RVNAF/US Material Exploitation Center	225th Signal Detachment
Commander Fleet Air Western Pacific, Detachment C	255th Signal Detachment
Defense Communication Agency/Southeast Asia Mainland	266th Army Band
Directorate of Civil Aviation, RVN	309th Air Commando Squadron
Oceanographic Air Survey Unit, Det Western Pacific	315th Air Commando Squadron
OSI District 50	315th Air Commando Wing
OSI District 5002	315th Consolidated Maintenance Squadron
Pacific GEEIA Region, Detachment 5	315th Air Division, Detachment 5
Pacific Architects & Engineers	360th Reconnaissance Squadron
Radio Research Comm Unit, Vietnam	362d Signal CO., Detachment 6
Saigon/Cholon Telephone Management Agency	377th Combat Support Group
Special Security Detachment, ACSI, DA	377th Air Police Squadron
Strategic Air Command Advanced Echelon	377th Civil Engineering Squadron
Tactical Air Support Element, J-2 Air	377th Services Squadron
Tactical Air Support Element, J-3 Air	377th Supply Squadron
USAF Resident Auditor	377th Transportation Squadron
USARV Flight Detachment	377th USAF Dispensary
Vietnam District Office, Pac Postal & Courier Rgn	455th Signal Detachment
1st Aviation Brigade	458th Signal Detachment
1st Civil Engineering Group	460th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing
1st Weather Group	460th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing, Detachment 1
1st Weather Group, Detachment 33	460th Armament & Electronics Maintenance Squadron
1st Weather Group, Detachment 34	460th Field Maintenance Squadron
2d Aerial Port Group	505th Tactical Control Group
3rd Aerospace Rescue & Recovery Group	509th Radio Research Group
5th Communication Squadron, Detachment 2	509th Radio Research Group, Hqs & Services Co
5th Weather Squadron	544th Signal Detachment
8th Aerial Port Squadron	545th Signal Detachment
8th Signal Detachment	550th Ordnance Detachment
9th Reconnaissance Technical Squadron, Detachment 1	552d Transportation Company
12th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron	580th Signal Company 2d Platoon
13th Reconnaissance Technical Squadron	600th Photographic Squadron
16th Medical Dispensary	616th Military Airlift Support Squadron
16th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron	619th Tactical Control Squadron
19th Air Commando Squadron	702d Military Intelligence Detachment
20th Helicopter Squadron, Flight A	834th Air Division
21st Casualty Staging Flight	903rd Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron
30th Weather Squadron	1131st Special Activities Squadron
30th Weather Squadron, Detachment 2	1137th Special Activities Squadron
34th General Support Group	1876th Communications Squadron]
34th General Support Group, Hq Company	1964th Communications Group
38th Aerospace Rescue & Recovery Squad	2650 Air Base Wing, Detachment 34
39th Security Detachment	6003rd Support Squadron, Detachment 11
45th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, Det 1	6004th Support Squadron Detachment 4
54th Aviation Company, 2d Platoon	6250th Support Squadron
56th Transportation Company	6252d Operations Squadron
57th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, Detachment 1	6922d Security Wing, Detachment 5
	6994th Security Squadron

SOS: The American Military's Comfort Food

By MSCS Steve Karoly, USNR, Retired

(Editor's Note: The following fascinating article was posted on the internet recently and we just had to pass it along to our readers. It is copyrighted 1999, by Steve C. Karoly, all rights reserved. We are most grateful for his kind permission to reprint it. And, we don't see the necessity for defining "SOS." We'll leave that to the reader to inform the uninitiated.)

Like most veterans, letters and packages kept me going during the early weeks of my naval career. Care packages, stuffed with candy and cookies, played an important role in keeping me connected to home. Sweets sent to me by my sisters, liberated me from the drill and constant work details of boot camp - if only for a moment.

It only took two dozen chocolate chip cookies and a few minutes of solitude to comfort me. The cookies reminded me growing up with four brothers and sisters. As I ate my sisters' cookies I saw mom cooking hamburger stroganoff for dinner. Dad would be sitting at the dining room table helping Anne struggle through her math homework, while David, off in the back yard, played soldiers with his medals proudly displayed over his heart.

Just as a few dozen chocolate cookies reminded me of home, one unique culinary concoction of beef and cream gravy reminds veterans of the camaraderie they had with each other - even though their military service ended decades ago.

Veteran's groups touring the Army Quartermaster Museum in Fort Lee, Virginia, often ask for the recipe by name, according to Luther Hanson, curator of the Museum. Many tell Hanson that SOS was one of their most favored meals.

SOS is so closely connected with Army service that almost every veteran has memories of it - some fond, some not so fond," said Major Kevin Born, an Army Quartermaster officer and volunteer at the museum. "It has been in every dining facility since I entered the Army in 1981."

Born's father introduced SOS to him at an early age. Born said his father fell in love with creamed beef on toast while serving as an artillery mechanic in

Germany in the 1950s. SOS graced their family table whenever the senior Born could talk his wife into cooking it.

SOS is so popular with many veterans that they continue to seek the dish wherever they can find it. After taking an informal poll of veterans, many told me that they still enjoy a good dish of SOS. Some servicemen, like a retired Air Force chief master sergeant who lives near Sacramento, California, still has it made with ground beef, although he occasionally likes it made with thin slices of ham in a cream sauce.

SOS is so popular that many soldiers would eat it every morning. As military menus evolved in the 1960s and 1970s, many mess halls started serving it every day, along with other popular breakfast foods like bacon, sausage, French toast and pancakes. Breakfast became a smorgasbord where one could focus on the same comfort foods every day, if desired.

"Most soldiers thought they had not had breakfast without SOS," said Fred Kennedy, a retired chief warrant officer. "All like it regardless of age." Kennedy, a former Army food advisor to several generals, including the Army chief of staff, said that veterans who visit Fort Lee's dining facilities always ask for SOS.

It's so popular at Fort Lee that SOS often takes top billing over culinary delights like lobster tail, according to Hanson. He said that veteran's groups who tour the base are taken to a mess hall and served creamed beef on toast made using the recipe in the 1944 Army recipe book, TM 10-412. Again, many veterans tell Hanson it was their favorite meal while in the Army.

And SOS remains popular among soldiers today. While deployed to Haiti during Operation Restore Democracy, Born said the cooks of his unit served creamed beef on toast. Later, when he deployed to Bosnia, the cooks again served creamed beef.

It's so popular that the Army Center for Excellence, Subsistence, located on the Fort Lee post, recently said that creamed beef will be offered every day to soldiers in Army dining halls. The new menu standards are designed to promote



uniformity among the Army's dining facilities, according to a July 1999 article in Government Food Service.

Although a soldier does not have to take it, creamed beef will be on the serving line each morning along side other daily requirements such as bacon, potatoes, doughnut and muffins, orange juice and bananas, whole-grain cereals, low-fat yogurt, and a hot fruit topping for pancakes and French toast.

To soldiers like Born and the veterans who visit Fort Lee, SOS is that one food that constantly reminds them of Army life. To Born, SOS is an inseparable part of Army life.

"It's an institution as closely linked with the Army as parades, pressed uniforms or highly shined boots," said Born.



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The Tan Son Nhut Assc.

<http://www.tsna.org>



Thank You, Guys & Gals!

This is an actual portrayal of what went on in the Public Affairs Office during the month of February! Your response to the membership renewal drive was terrific and gives us a new lease on life. There were a couple of more Life Memberships, a surprising number of Five Year renewals, and scads of annual. We've just got to tell you how grateful we are to have such a fine membership. And we received a number of new members also!

So let's keep it up. Check your renewal date on your address sticker and help the Association by keeping current. Annual Renewal is \$20; Five Year Renewal is \$80, and Life Membership (with certificate) is \$180. Send all membership renewals (check or money order only) to:

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(For Record Inquiries Call: (757) 627-7746 or FAX: (757) 627-0878

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Revetments, March, 2001

Account of Attack on Tan Son Nhut, December 4, 1966 by Master Sergeant Olbert H. Hiett, 377th Security Police Squadron

At approximately 1:00am on 4 December 1966 I was sleeping in the 377th Air Police Squadron barracks when the base came under attack by the 14th Viet Cong/NVA Battalion. A/2C George M. Bevich, Jr. K-9 Handler called the 377th APS Central Security Control (CSC) and voiced the alarm before he was killed. I was told later that his last words were: "They have killed my dog, and are now overrunning my post". I immediately grabbed by steel helmet, M-16 rifle and 360 rounds of ammunition, revolver and 50 rounds that I always carried with me and reported to CSC for duty.

At CSC I was assigned as Team Leader of a Quick Reaction Team (15 Air Police QRT). I was assigned a one and a half ton truck and dispatched to a location on the Air Base south perimeter; south of the hangers, flight line, and revetments that were under attack by the Viet Cong (VC).

We reached our assigned location at 1:15 am. I looked at my watch. We stopped the truck on the road; unloaded and lined up on the south side of the road where there was some cover. The road was a little higher than the level ground on our south side. The road was slanted towards the ditch on the south side of the road. There was a small bank on the east side and west side of the road. Between the small banks the ground was flat with waste high elephant grass that covered the ground in front of us. It also covered the ground on our flanks and all the ground approximately 100 yards to the south perimeter fence. There were two Staff Sergeants on my team. I had not had an opportunity to get the names of my team members. We could hear shots and explosions in the flight line area.

Every team member was armed with an M-16 rifle and we had no other weapons except my revolver and we had no communications with CSC or anyone. On the north side of the road the elephant grass was about ankle high to waste high and there was a ditch approximately 20 yards north of the road that ran east to west.

I sat down on the bank of the road at the west side of our position and was facing north. All of the men were on my right but one airman. I was wearing green fatigues and my five stripes were very visible. I took off my jacket and turned the sleeves inside out. As I was sitting with my back to the south and wearing a white T-shirt as I changed—unknown to me at that time a reinforced VC/NVA platoon of an estimated 90 to 100 men were hiding within 15 to 17 yards of our position on the south side of the road. One of the Air Policemen on my right side asked me. "What are you doing?" I replied, what does it look like I'm doing? I'm putting these stripes out of sight. At that moment a mortar round (82mm) exploded approximately 100 yards on the north side of our position. I thought for just a second and I yelled, take cover!! Simultaneously the VC started to drop mortar rounds on the road west to east. They fired an RPG-2 rocket that hit our truck. It exploded in a big fireball. The VC then opened up on our south side

from about 15 yards with SKS-rifles (7.62mm), AK-47 Assault rifles (7.62mm), Light machine guns with tripods (7.62mm), and hand grenades.

I immediately lost 11 of my 15 QRT. Two killed and nine were wounded. Just 4 of us were left to defend our position. A/2C John M. Cole, of Philadelphia, PA who arrived in Vietnam just the day before was killed beside me on my left. The last words he said was when he asked me what I was doing when I was turning my fatigue jacket sleeves in side out. A/2C Oliver J. Riddle, of Coraopolis, PA was killed about 10 yards on my left near the middle of the road according to one of the other Air Policemen that survived his wounds. Two Air Policemen on my left who were behind the small bank immediately opened fire and silenced the machine gun directly in front of their position killing the gunners who were only about 15 yards away. Hand grenades were landing on the road behind me. There were rifle and automatic weapons fire coming from our left flank to our right flank. There was a solid row of muzzle flashes across our front. I could hear the actions on their weapons closing on empty chambers, giving us a chance to return fire. The VC poured their fire on our position. Bullets cracked by both sides of my head like slapping your hands together, they cut the grass on the small knoll that protected me and the Air Policeman on my right side. I told him to watch our right flank and I would watch our left. Bullets knocked dirt and debris down my collar as I maneuvered behind the knoll trying to locate the VC positions. I needed to make my shots count—I was afraid of running out of ammo. At one point I thought they were going to over-run our position—I flipped on my back with my M-16 in my left hand and my revolver in my right hand. I thought that we might not survive and I wanted to get as many of them as I could as they overran us. The VC didn't come.

There was a lull in the fighting and two Master Sergeants drove up in a jeep from the west side. The windshield was down on the jeep and they were wearing combat gear and helmets. The four of us was as low as we could get behind our slight cover. They stopped approx. 6 to 10 feet from my position and asked, "Where is the enemy?" I responded in a low voice, right there in front of us. They asked again, "Where?" I yelled, right there 15 yards in front of you!! The driver immediately rolled out of the jeep on the left side and the other Sergeant rolled out on the right side just before the VC opened fire on their jeep. They shot out the tires, headlights, windshield off the hood and just about everything on the jeep. Bullets sounded like hail hitting on a tin roof. The two Sergeants crawled away on the road west the way they had approached our position uninjured.

In a short while two ambulances escorted by Major Roger P. Fox, Commander of the 377th Air Police Squadron and several Air Policemen arrived from the east side to pick up my wounded and the VC/NVA stopped firing while this was accomplished. As the wounded were being loaded I stayed in my position and asked for their ammunition. Several of them threw me their M-16 rifle magazines. Major Fox crawled over to my position and asked me if I was all right. I told him that I was ok. They left with the wounded and the four of us

stayed to hold the position. We were totally committed. When the ambulances had departed, the shooting started again.

Shortly after this event two AC-47 (Spooky) aircraft with three 7.62-mm Gatling guns (mini-guns) mounted on their left side made passes strafing the area between our position and the perimeter fence. This action drove the VC almost on top of us. Again the firing was heavy and I was worried that we would run out of ammunition. I was also concerned that the AC-47 firing was going to get on top of our position. Then 25 to 30 Air Police arrived. We formed a line and advanced through the tall grass towards the perimeter fence. Numbers of dead VC and weapons were on the ground. In about 10 to 15 minutes the other Air Police left and the original four of us remained to hold the position assigned to us. It was thought they (the other Air Police) thought the area was secure. The VC returned and the fight continued. We didn't know until investigation revealed that we had unloaded at the VC/NVA Battalion entry/exit point. They had cut two holes in the perimeter fence and set up their rear guard just a few yards from the road to cover their attacking force's withdrawal. They set up in the tall grass on the south side of the road where we unloaded directly in front of their reinforced (90 to 100) man platoon. I discovered after the battle was over that day that they had claymore mines set up that covered the area where we unloaded. The wiring of the mines had not been completed. They had not connected the wires to the detonators on the mines. The wires were laying on the ground unattached.

At approximately 3:00am a South Vietnamese Army 6X6 two and one half ton truck with twin 20mm guns mounted on a steel-bed with gunner, driver and a third man pulled up beside me and stopped on the road. The passenger side of the truck cab was no more than 8 or 10 feet from my position. The guns on the truck were almost above me. The VC opened fire on the truck. They raked it from the headlights, motor, and cab to the 20mm guns with automatic weapons fire from approx. 20 yards away. All three of the RVN soldiers jumped off the truck and ran for cover without firing a shot. The VC riddled the truck with bullets and hand-grenades bounced off the truck and exploded in the road beside us. In just minutes a second truck equipped the same as the other truck. It had twin 20mm guns, driver, second man and a gunner approached our position. When the VC opened fire the RVN soldiers jumped off the truck and ran without firing a shot before the truck stopped rolling. The truck was riddled with bullets the same as the other truck. I was not familiar with the operation of the 20mm guns. I wanted to get behind those guns because of their tremendous firepower. But I would have been exposed from groin to below my knees. I didn't think that I could get the guns operating (firing) before the VC shot my legs from under me. I would have been exposed at very close range. About 15 yards and I had no hand grenades.

There was a lull in the firing and one of the RVN soldiers crawled from the north side of the road to my position. He could speak English. I told him that I couldn't operate the 20mm guns. He then told me that they had a .30 caliber A-4

machine gun with plenty of ammunition under the 20mm guns. I had a lot of experience with the A-4 when I was in the Infantry in WW II. We crawled around the left rear wheels of the 6X6 truck nearest to my position and up over the wheels to the bed of the truck. There must have been more than a 1,000 round of ammunition for the A-4 machine gun. I loaded the gun and opened fire on the VC position. Firing from right to left, and left to right. I shot every thing that moved while the RVN soldier beat on my back with both hands and shouted, "Number one G !!! Number one G !!!" and pointing out targets. I shot every thing he pointed at. While we received some fire it appeared that the VC were trying to make it to the holes in the wire, their entry/exit point with their dead and wounded. The A-4 jammed several time from rounds in the belt that had been hit. I would pull the action back, throw out the fouled round and the gun continued to fire. We don't know how many dead and wounded the VC took with them through the holes in the fence. It appears that they were safe when they got out side the wire, but they just kept coming back to cover the withdrawal of their assault force on base.

It was almost daylight now and we were getting no resistance from the south side of the road. We got off the truck and were fired on from the north side of the road. We were also being reinforced by other Air Police when another Air Policeman was wounded in the chest beside me; he dropped to his knees and didn't say anything. The shot came from very close; the ditch on the north side of the road. Two men rushed up to help the wounded SP. The 2 Air Policemen on my QRT that was on my east side and I opened fire on the VC position where the shot came from. Three VC emerged; two were crouched with their hands up, one was crawling with one hand up. He had a foot that was almost shot off at the ankle. Only skin held his foot on. I told every one to hold their fire; that we needed prisoners. They came on in; then an RVN soldier ran up and killed one of the prisoners with a pistol, shot him in the head. I jumped in between them and told the other Air Police to take charge of the two remaining prisoners and protect them, and take them to safety immediately. These were the only VC prisoners taken in the fighting.

The VC attacking forces on base were trying to make their way through our position to their entry/exit point.

At approximately 9:30am hostilities had ceased and my original three members of my QRT that were not wounded were being relieved along with all other 377th APS personnel that had to be fed and posted on their regular Flight shifts. I was asked to stay in the area with the dead VC and point them out to the graves detail. Also, locate all unexploded ordnance left in the area and point them out to the Explosive Ordnance Detail (EOD) and all VC weapons left in the area. We know now that a lot of the VC assault force was trapped on base and hiding in the area trying to get out at the entry/exit point. I didn't know at that time how vulnerable I was being in that area alone.

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At 11:00am I was relieved and asked to attend the after action briefing. When I arrived at CSC on one of the trucks and was getting off, I held up my steel helmet that had several bullet holes and fragment damage. All the Air Police that were waiting to be posted gave me a big cheer that I have never forgot. Fortunately for me I was not wearing the helmet when it received all the damage. I had lost it during the fighting. It may have saved my head. If it was shot off my head, I was too busy to remember. One of the things that I stressed at the briefing. We were Air Police fighting with M-16 rifles against ground soldiers armed with rifles, automatic assault weapons, machine guns, hand grenades, mines, mortars, and RPG-2 rockets. We were out gunned to say the least. We were in a perfect position to use fragmentation hand grenades. We could have bombarded the VC/NVA reinforced platoon and ended our situation quickly and inflicted greater casualties on the enemy. Secondly, we needed an M-60 machine gun and communications.

On the evening of 4 December, 1966 at just about dark the 377th Air Police again made contact with the VC trapped on base and in the entry/exit area. I rushed to the area where contact was made armed with sixteen M-26 hand grenades, M-16 rifle and revolver to assist Air Police and a K-9 dog handler already engaging the VC. I rushed from one area to another where contact was made with the VC as backup. One dog was killed when he jumped in some bushes on two VC. They killed him with a knife before they were shot dead by Air Police.

I believe the final Air Police casualty report was three (3) Air policemen killed in action and twenty-seven (27) wounded in action. Two (2) K-9 dogs were killed and one (1) was wounded in the fighting. I also remember that this wounded K-9 was the famous Nemo that lost his sight in one eye and was later returned to the Sentry Dog Training Center at Lackland AFB, Texas. The third and last K-9 killed in the Vietnam War was killed on 26 January 1969 in my Sector (Juliatt) at Phan Rang Air Base, RVN during an NVA sapper attack. At that time I was NCOIC of Combat Section B-1, 821st Combat Security Police Squadron, 82nd Combat Security Police Wing. My Section defended all of the Juliatt Sector. I took one NVA prisoner during that attack. He was NG VAN THANG, a member of the North Vietnamese Army Unit H-13 NVA Sapper Company. That's another battle. Mean while back at Tan Son Nhut on 4 December 1966. The VC/NVA left thirty-seven (37) of their dead behind. I have no estimate of how many dead and wounded they took with them through the south perimeter fence.

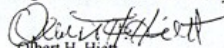
Airman Bevich's early warning alerted the base--triggering an immediate counter offensive by the 377th Air Police Squadron that resulted in the attacking VC/NVA force being repulsed, and staved off major damage to air base facilities and wiped out most of the enemy raiding party. Air Policeman Bevich was awarded The Silver Star and The Purple Heart Medals posthumously.

On 5 December 1966 I returned to the 633rd Air Police Squadron, Pleiku Air Base, RVN and immediately went to our church on the hill to thank God for my safe return. If I live to be 200 years old I don't believe I will ever again come as

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close to death as I did from 1:15am to 11:00am on 4 December 1966 at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, RVN. No event in my life remains so vividly. I went through several stages during that period. From being frightened; being concerned about disappointing my wife Mary Frances and four children Cheryl Jean, Olbert Jr. "Skip", Sara Jane, and Raye Genay if I didn't survive, to being very angry and determined to prevail. Airman Cole, Airman Riddle, and Airman Bevich, gave everything, their lives.

In October 1997 I was in Pensacola, Florida attending the Vietnam Security Police Association reunion. This was my first VSPA reunion. I had the pleasure of meeting previous A/2C Thaddeus M. "Ted" Janiak 377th Air Police Squadron, Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN. Ted was a member of my 15 man QRT on 4 December 1966 and one of the 9 wounded. He is now our deceased VSPA President. Ted is the only member of the QRT that I have met. All nine (9) of the wounded were awarded The Purple Heart decoration. The decoration was awarded to Airman Cole and Airman Riddle posthumously. On two occasions I have visited Airman Cole, Airman Riddle and Airman Bevich at The Wall in Washington, DC. It was not easy for me. All 15 members of this QRT received one or more decorations for their courage, determination, bravery and sacrifice in this battle against elements of the 14th Viet Cong /NVA Battalion on 4/12/1966. To the two Staff Sergeants and Airman that stayed with me on that small piece of ground for more than eight life threatening hours. You have my gratitude, and I hold you in the highest esteem. I salute all of you.


Olbert H. Hiatt
MSgt. First Sergeant Security Police
USAF Retired (1944 - 1974)

* * *

(Editor's Note: And how was MSgt. Hiatt rewarded for his valiant and heroic conduct under fire, and for demonstrating leadership that should have at least earned him the Silver Star? He was "given" the Air Force Commendation ... period. Bronze Star? No way. This is another example, that would be followed at Tet '68, of stifling the true story of an important encounter. The policy being that it would be impossible, under any circumstances for the enemy to attack the headquarters base of the U. S. forces, and so it didn't happen. So no notoriety of these actions must be released.)