

May 2006



A Memorial to the American Experience
In Vietnam

“All included, none excluded”

REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

Mini-Tet Tan Son Nhut Air Base May 6, 1968



Barrack buddies finding shelter behind a Vietnamese monument, defending the south part of the air base, very close to the perimeter road. David Koopman is shown on the extreme right. David has been a Life Member of the TSNA since June 2002.

They were never officially ordered to place themselves in harms way. They did what warriors have done in times of war: protect the base and their buddies.

The Loss of A National Hero *The Loss of a TSNA Life Member* *The Loss of A Friend*

It is with deep regret and sadness to announce that CWO Michael J. Novosel has passed away. Michael was a Life Member of the TSNA since 1999.



Novosel was featured in the Apr/May 2005 Revetments. In preparation for the article I called him at his home in Alabama. When he answered the phone I asked if he was Chief Warrant Officer Novosel. He replied: "No, this is General Douglas McArthur." He was well known for his wonderful sense of humor.

The Medal of Honor could not have been bestowed upon a more deserving individual. He never considered himself a hero. He told me that he never understood why the Army picked that particular mission to present him with the Medal of Honor. He told me he flew many similar missions while stationed at TSN.

We had a very nice phone conversation and over the following months we talked on the phone on a regular basis. He always made positive statements about receiving Revetments. At the end of each phone conversation he always told me how much he appreciated being a member of the Tan Son Nhut Association.

It is with heavy heart that I remove his name from the active Membership Roll Call. Charles Penley has entered his name in the Memorial Section on our web site.

Michael was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery on April 13, 2006 with full military honors.

May he Rest In Peace.

(Please see his obituary on page 3)

Wayne Salisbury
President
Tan Son Nhut Association

Founded 1995

By
President Emeritus Don Parker
and
President Emeritus John Peele

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From A Soldier To An Angel

When we go to basic,
We practice with a gun.
The weight that we must carry,
Seems to weigh a ton.
We face another war,
We face another test.
The clock will tick away the time,
The guns will do the rest.
If a stranger out there,
Comes to talk to you.
You never know just who it is,
Angels are there too!
The taps are played again,
Flags lowered everywhere.
Now a soldiers little girl,
Just holds her teddy bear.
I know your dad, this voice told her,
It will be all right.
When she turned her little head,
No one was in sight.

Irving E. Rice
TSNA Member

From Bomber Pilot To Savior

When Michael J. Novosel died of cancer at Walter Reed Army Medical Center on April 2, the nation lost a great hero.

Novosel was a master Army aviator and an Air Force command pilot. He believed he was the only holder of the top pilot ratings of both services. If things had turned out differently, Novosel's might have been an Air Force story. But he was the hero the Air Force rejected.

Novosel was officially too short to be a pilot in World War II and unofficially considered too old to be one in Vietnam, as he was 43 in 1965. Although he was just below the height requirement, a flight surgeon listed him at the required 5-foot-5-inch height. In Vietnam, people kept telling him he was too old, but no one stopped him from flying.

Before his career was over, he was awarded the Medal of Honor, and he had set an example of courage and sacrifice for all airmen.

Novosel joined the Army Air Forces, predecessor of today's Air Force, before Pearl Harbor. He became so valuable as a heavy-bomber instructor that the brass initially did not want to risk him overseas. He trained pilots in the AT-18 Hudson and B-24 Liberator in Texas. Novosel told me he'd needed a pair of 4-inch cushions at his back to comfortably operate the B-24's yoke and rudder pedals.

In July 1945, when he was sent to Tinian to join the 462nd Bombardment Group, the Hellbirds, Novosel was by then an experienced B-29 Superfortress pilot. He flew Superfortress missions for a short time prior to Aug. 15, 1945, when fighting in the Pacific ended.

After several stints in and out of uniform, he left the Air Force in 1955 as a lieutenant colonel. He became an airline pilot and Air Force Reserve officer.

Novosel wanted to return to the military for

combat duty in Vietnam. But the Air Force was overstaffed and had no slot for him. So he became an Army warrant officer and pilot of the UH-1 Huey helicopter. His son Michael followed in his footsteps. For a period, both Michael Novosels flew Hueys in combat with the same unit.

Novosel was a medical-evacuation pilot from January 1966 to January 1967. He later wrote of his experiences in "Dustoff: The Memoir of an Army Aviator" (Presidio Press, 1999).

In 1968, he was scheduled to be discharged, but a medical examination discovered glaucoma. His hopes for an airline career dashed, he obtained a medical waiver to continue flying with the Army and returned to Vietnam.

On Oct. 2, 1969, he had been in combat for nearly eight hours when he was directed to a pickup on the Cambodian border. South Vietnamese troops were surrounded and outgunned in a field of high elephant grass. A circling spotter plane told Novosel and his crew that the situation was hopeless. Automatic weapons fire swirled around the Huey. Novosel went into this firestorm searching for a lone soldier hidden in the grass. Novosel made three attempts to locate and rescue the man, taking hits each time.

Crew members Herbert Heinold and Joe Horvath rescued the soldier. Then, more South Vietnamese materialized amid the swaying grass. Novosel had to climb above enemy gunfire several times and then descend again to search for and pluck friendly troops to safety. Over agonizing minutes, he filled his Huey with 10 South Vietnamese soldiers who had no other way out of the trap.

Novosel dropped off the troops at a Special Forces camp, refueled and returned to the scene of the battle. On his third journey into the "hot zone," he received help from Army AH-1 Cobra gunships and Air Force fighter bombers. Under heavy fire, he picked up nine more friendly troops. Then a 10th stood up amid the grass.

Novosel hovered at low level and Horvath hauled the man aboard. At that moment, a Viet Cong soldier stood about 30 feet in

front of the helicopter and emptied his AK-47 rifle at the pilot in the right seat. The helicopter went out of control momentarily until co-pilot Tyrone Chamberlain could gain control. The spray of 7.62mm rounds missed the pilots, but shrapnel sprayed Novosel's legs.

President Nixon presented Novosel with the Medal of Honor for his actions that day in a June 1971 White House ceremony.

When Novosel retired as a chief warrant officer 4 in 1985, he was the last active-duty aviator on flight status who had flown in World War II. He was on military flight status for 42 years, logging 12,400 hours of flight time, including 2,038 flight hours in combat. In two Vietnam tours, Novosel helped rescue 5,589 wounded soldiers.

In postwar years, he led efforts to win legislation that would award a combat medic badge to the flight medics who flew on Hueys. That recognition is still pending. What can airmen learn from the life of Mike Novosel?

"He was the quintessential selfless citizen," said retired Maj. Thomas Galvin, who was one of the wounded men evacuated by Novosel's Huey. Later, they became friends. "When you look at his record, it's almost unimaginable. Yet he was a regular, honest, funny guy."

Novosel's message of courage and sacrifice should resonate with every young American in the military today.

He understood duty. In a war that was not popular with many Americans, he understood that the first job of military members is to fight for each other.

He was the kind of man you'd want as a friend and the kind you'd want at your side in a fight.

The writer, an Air Force veteran, lives in Oakton, Va. He is the author of books on military topics, including "Chopper," a history of helicopter pilots.



377th Combat Support Group After Action Report

Attack On Tan Son Nhut Air Base

Unit Commanders engaged in operations:

Colonel Luu Kim Cuong Comdr, 33rd
VNAF Wing (Comdr, TSN Sensitive Area)

Lt Col Phung Van Chieu Comdr, TSN Sensitive Point Dep Comdr, TSN Sensitive Area

Colonel Farley E. Peebles Comdr, 377th
Combat Support Group

Colonel Luther J. Miller Senior Advisor
AFAT #1, 33rd Wing

Lt Colonel Thomas A. McLoughlin Senior
Advisor TSN Sensitive Area

On 5 May the VC attacked numerous targets throughout South Viet Nam, within III CTZ, with the focal point being Saigon. There were major approaches used during the assaults. The early attacks from the east were apparently diversionary in nature to permit forces in the west to position themselves for an assault on the 6th precinct. However, the major forces were pinned down. The first attacks on Saigon took place in the area of the New-Port Dock facilities and bridge. Harassment continued on to the THU DUC power plants and then into Saigon. At this same time contact was made with the Dong Nai Regt at the Binh Loi bridge. Their mission appeared to be to provide cover for the infiltration of a #LF Bn and a sapper recon platoon into the THI NGE area of Saigon. The later unit was to stay in the area, organize a local government and, with this as a base, press for a coalition between themselves and the GVN. The above mentioned forces failed in their mission due to the presence of allied forces.

The major attack and most significant threat came from the west, it was conducted by elements of the 271 and 272 VC Regiment. Their mission was to enter and hold the 6th precinct along with the Phu Tho Hoa area. Elements of the 272 Regiment attempted to attack TSN by infiltrating from the French Cemetery with an alternate mission to attack CMD Hq's. The total enemy KIA in the area of the Phu Tho

Race Track to the French Cemetery adjacent to TSN was 588.

At 0616 hours, 6 May 1968, one of the air base perimeter observation towers (Tango I a 142' tower) reported incoming rockets (Ten Rockets hit Tan Son Nhut. There were no casualties). Two minutes later Tango I reported heavy movement behind the Catholic school, adjacent to the south perimeter. At this time all reserve QRT's were dispatched to their pre-designated deployment locations.

At 0620 hours, two units of task force 35 (Army II and III) were notified and deployed within Delta sector, which at the time was receiving sporadic small arms and automatic weapons fire. Tango I reported razorbacks making heavy contact with an unknown size enemy unit behind the Catholic School.

At 0722 hours, Delta Bunkers 7 and 8 (two of the outer perimeter bunkers) reported approximately 40 individuals in black clothing moving outside the south perimeter heading in an easterly direction.

At 0726 hours, Delta Bunker 6 reported it had made heavy contact with approximately 40 Viet Cong in the French Cemetery adjacent to his post. At this point a tank accompanied by a platoon of ground troops from the 33rd VNAF Wing, Defense Group arrived at the French Cemetery and engaged the enemy.

At 0739 hours, two companies of RVN Airborne instituted a sweep of the southwest perimeter of the base. They encountered heavy fire from various Viet Cong positions within the buildings in that area. The Viet Cong heavily employed RG-P-2 rockets and automatic weapons on the assaulting airborne company.

At 0900 hours, the commanding officer of the RVN Airborne companies in the southwest perimeter area, requested the assistance of the heavy weapons utilized by the Security Police.

At 0913 hours, BG-5 (.50 Cal. Machine Gun) and B-9-3 (90mm recoilless rifle)

engaged the Viet Cong in the village adjacent to the south perimeter. B-9-3 fired 3 rounds of 90mm destroying enemy RPG-2 rocket firing positions which were blocking the Vietnamese Airborne companies sweep of the area. BG-5, destroyed an enemy machine gun position which was protecting the before mentioned RPG-2 site. At this time BG-5 and B-9-3 disengaged the enemy and returned to Delta Sector. The ARVN Airborne had taken the full impact and were routing the enemy.

At 1205 hours, our liaison NCO deployed with Army II of Task Force 35 and reported that 60mm mortars were hitting his defensive positions adjacent to Tango 21 along our southern perimeter. 20 friendly personnel were WIA as a result of this mortar barrage. Delta Sector supervisor (T/Sgt. McNitt) reported observing an individual on a roof top adjacent to Delta Sector holding an aiming stick. Permission to fire was granted and the individual was eliminated. Subsequent to this action, the mortar barrage ceased. From this point continuous sniper fire was directed towards the south perimeter, while the RVN Airborne were clearing this area.

My Story of Mini-Tet By David Koopman Life Member

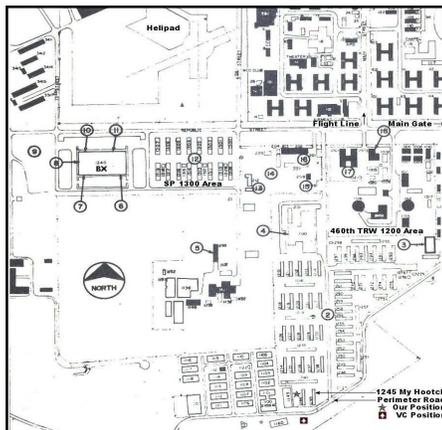
This is what I remember of May the 6th 1968, when a group of us from the 460th TRW - FMS helped stop the VC from over running Tan Son Nhut. This standoff attack remains among my strongest memories of Vietnam. I don't remember ever feeling more alive, but at the same time feeling closer to death. This battle changed my perception of life and caused me to mature beyond my 21 years.

I had been working the night shift in the S.O.A.P. Lab, which was located inside the Engine shop. SOAP was an acronym for Spectrometric Oil Analysis Program; engine oil was burned in the S.O.A.P. machine to create a spectrum of colors, which corresponded to different varieties and amounts of metal content. The purpose of this was to predict engine wear.

After my shift that morning; I rode my bicycle back to my hootch and arrived there shortly after dawn. I lived in hootch number 1245, which was located south west of the main gate in the 1200 area next to the Tan Son Nhut South perimeter fence, and across from the old French cemetery from the road to Cholon.

I 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 uniform, boots, helmet, and flak vest. Then I ran for the bunker outside, where I got dressed while I waited for the all clear. Obviously something was going on, because I could hear occasional small arms fire.

When I stepped out of the bunker I noticed a group of airmen standing in front of the arms locker that was between my hootch 1245 and 1244. They were arguing loudly with the airman who had the key. They



Map compliments of Charles Penley

wanted him to pass out the M-16's, but he said he wouldn't release them with out a direct order from the base commander. Someone said to him, "We can worry about the base commander later, we're drawing fire, hand them out now before we all get killed, and make it quick or we'll kick the crap out of you and take them." This statement facilitated the quick release of the weapons.

Please that most airmen are not trained solders. Some of them were lucky if they know which end of an M-16 the bullet comes out of. But more about that later. Having succeeded in becoming a mob we all scattered to various positions around

the hootches seeking cover and a good field of fire.

A number of us took cover west of hootch 1244 in a small clearing with a broken down old Vietnamese monument on it. The monument was made of concrete in the shape of a temple that was divided in half with a walk-way through the middle. It seemed to offer better cover than a hootch and it had a good field of fire to the perimeter fence.



I wanted a shot at the enemy. But because of the airmen crowded around me I needed a better place to fire from. A low wall on the monument in front of us seemed like a good bet for a barricade. I turned to Sgt. Jerry Fish beside me and asked him why don't we pile some of this broken down concrete on top of that low wall in front of us for better cover. We can lie down in back of it as we return fire. Jerry said it sounded like a good idea to him, so



quicker than it takes to tell about it, we piled up a couple of large pieces and got down behind them.

I think it became apparent to me almost

immediately that there wasn't enough cover and our position was too exposed. I turned to Jerry and said we better get out of here before we got shot.

Jumping up I turned into the walkway through the middle of the monument. I didn't know it but Jerry standing up from the barricade behind me had just been wounded. Suddenly I heard him yell "I'm hit". I turned around just as he fell to the ground. Hitting the ground beside him I tried to see what I could do. Another airman and I checked him over and found that he had been hit low on his right shoulder at the edge of his flak jacket. There was one entrance wound. We couldn't find an exit. He wasn't bleeding much from the location of the wound so stopping the bleeding seemed unnecessary.

We didn't know what to do for him, but we tried to make him comfortable as we 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. Later I found out he had been severely wounded. The bullet hit him just below his right shoulder blade, went through his right lung, and later was removed by a doctor from his lower back.

Soon after the corpsmen took Jerry away 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 being wounded and realizing how close I had come to being shot or killed myself, I became so frightened that my abdomen felt like there were a bunch of snakes crawling around inside it. I was convinced we were all going to die. At the same time my mind felt sharp and clear as I planned what I was going to do next.

We didn't have any combat training and had no idea what the rules of engagement were. We also had no idea where friendly forces were situated. I didn't want to shoot a civilian, or one of our own, so I decided the best thing to do was hold my fire until I saw someone in black pajamas carrying an AK-47.

Suddenly one of the airmen in front of me opened up with his M-16 on full automatic, at God knows what since the VC weren't visible. He must have wasted at least half the ammunition in his magazine and we had none to spare. I knew the VC would over run us if we didn't stop them at the outer fence, so since I out ranked him, I ordered him to stop firing until they were visible. He turned to me with tears in his eyes and said, "but they're shooting at me." I knew how he felt. I was also scared and angry. I wanted to kill as many VC as I could before they killed me. But I was more afraid of not having enough ammunition to stop the VC than the VC themselves. I thought, if we can only hold on long enough, maybe some one with combat training will come and help us.

After the battle we were told some ARVN (Army of the Republic of Viet Nam) had been hit by friendly fire. I don't know if it was true or just a story told to us because of the way we acquired our weapons. I do know that when I arrived at my hootch that morning none of the ARVN that usually guarded the perimeter were there. There was some question in our minds as to what side the ARVN were on. But I won't try to guess where they were as they may all have been dead.

The hail of fire seemed to last forever but a A-1E flew over and dropped a couple of bombs on the VC position. I watched it as it dove and 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 firing its guns. Soon some Security Police with an M-60 machine gun arrived and for us the battle was over. I was never so glad to see the Security Police in my life. Their job was just beginning though because the VC continued to probe the 1200 area for the rest of the month.

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. Now this is the part I told you I'd come to later.

This airman knew very little about firearms. He removed the magazine then pulled the trigger before clearing the cham-

ber and sent 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 yelled something unprintable at him and he yelled back that he was sorry. I thought he was sorry too - a sorry excuse for an airman.

I went back to my hootch to try and get some sleep. When I got to my bunk there was a hole in the roof, a bomb fragment lying on my mattress and a spent 5.56mm bullet on the floor next to my locker.

It was obvious I wasn't going to get any sleep there so I got my camera out of my locker and snapped some pictures of the battle aftermath. Then I thumbed a ride back to the S.O.A.P. Lab where a guy could get a few hours sleep. 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'm absolutely convinced if we hadn't been there the VC would have stormed across the fence with no opposition. 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.

Here is a letter I mailed home on the day of this attack.

6 May 1968.

Dear Mom, Dad, and Sis,

I'm writing this letter at work. The VC attacked today about 6:15 A.M. A friend of mine was wounded and I came close to getting killed. It's been a long day and I have a lot on my mind so forgive me if this letter rambles a little.

The attack happened this way. I heard a loud explosion near me at about 6:15 A.M. A few seconds latter the base siren sounded. I grabbed my uniform, flak vest, and helmet and went outside to the bunker where I got dressed. When we heard the all clear announced on a portable radio we had we went back to our hootch. I was about to go inside when fighting broke out between the South Vietnamese Army and the VC.

You see my hootch is along the edge of the base and the VC were trying to get through there. We were issued M16's and told to

find cover. There is a big cement Vietnamese monument near my hootch. My friend and I took cover there. I made my way along side the monument to find a forward position to fire from and my friend followed. We found a position but there wasn't much cover so we tried to put some big slabs of concrete in front of us. There still wasn't enough cover so we started to fall back to our previous positions.

I had just gotten behind the monument when my friend was hit right where I had been seconds before. He was wounded in the right shoulder. I'm glad to say the medics got to him in time. I learned one thing today. I'm no hero. I was half scared to death. I didn't even get a shot off. There is heavy cover just off base. Every time I'd look up to find a target, bullets would fly by my head and I couldn't find one.

About that time an A1E started dropping bombs on the VC. That was really some thing to see. The A1E dived on the VC positions, released it's bombs, and then pulled up. The VC were around 100 yards from us so you can imagine the show we saw. We pretty well wiped them out. The South Vietnamese Army rounded up the rest of the VC later and took care of them. I have some pictures of the monument I took cover behind and of the damaged houses the VC were hiding in when the A1E dropped it's bombs on them. I'll send them when I get them developed. I'm totally fed up with Viet Nam. I can't wait to leave. I'll be glad when I can take my R&R and soon after that my leave for home. I only have 136 more days to go now.

Just as a little added comment on the war, a piece of shrapnel from the bombs the A1E dropped on the VC blew a hole in my roof over my bunk. You should have seen the plaster lying all over the place. I guess I'll end here. Don't worry too much about me. I'm feeling well but I'm just a little war weary.

Love
Dave





Sergeant Jerry Fish before the action of May 6, 1968. In this picture he was standing close to his barracks in the 1200 area that was adjacent to the Vietnamese monument and the perimeter road. When the battle began he grabbed an M-16, and without any combat military training, took cover in and around the monument with other airmen to help defend TSN. In close proximity of the monument, and standing along side David Koopman, he sustained a serious shoulder wound requiring him to be airlifted out of South Vietnam.

I arrived at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, November 1967. I was assigned to the 460th Field Maintenance Squadron as a Jet Engine Mechanic. I arrived Thanksgiving day in the afternoon after all the chow halls had closed. No turkey for us that day.

I was assigned to work on the C-123K and the T-39 Saberliner. The C-123K had two reciprocating engines and two J-85 jet engines that could be used when taking off on short runways.

I was assigned to barracks #1245. The barracks and one other were on the base perimeter at Tan Son Nhut. To one side of the barracks was a monument, and to the right of the monument was a three foot fence and then the U.S. Navy mail center.

Behind the barracks there was a three foot fence, a blacktop road, a dirt area and two tall fences. I was told there were mines in between the fences. There was an on-the-ground shooting pit and a watch tower that were sometimes manned by the South Vietnamese Army. They had an M-60 in the pit. This site was not always manned in the daytime. The Security Police patrolled the road once and awhile in a jeep that had a mounted M-60. There was an Army or Air Force watch tower. One day we watched someone in the tower shooting at a couple of Viet Cong in the field behind the Base Exchange.

On the morning of May 6, 1968 I had gotten ready for work. We had a shop near the flight line. We maintained the C-123K, T-39, RF-4, and RB-57. As I went to get

my bike and to peddle my tail to the flight line I noticed some GI's over by the Conex container that held one M-16 and two 20 round clips for everyone in the 2 or 3 barracks in the area.



M-16

I figure if I got on my bike and headed to work I would be a sitting duck if the Viet Cong got onto the base. All I had was a switch blade knife in a pocket sewed into my boot. Several of us were milling around waiting for the man with the Conex key and radio waiting for permission to open the Conex. We all had our helmets and flak vests on.

We heard the battle moving in our direction. While standing around the barracks and monument area I saw someone in black pajama's hurrying behind a row of houses that ran along the fence. I do not remember the space between the fence and the houses, but the guy was carrying a large reed hat as if he was hiding something. AK-47?



AK-47

After we were issued the weapons, we moved to what we thought was a good de-

fensive position. I was with someone else, but could not remember his name. We were going to use the monument for cover. I can remember going down behind a low wall around the monument. Years later I found that Dave Koopman was with me. Dave has since said that we were getting up to move again when I was nailed by a AK-47.



**Location where Jerry Fish was when he sustained his wound
(Photo by David Koopman)**

The next thing I recall I was screaming, "I'm hit, medic, medic", and so on. Then I realized I had to shut up before I made another airman panic, jump up and get nailed too. I lay on my back looking up. I had first aid training somewhere before going to SEA and they used actual film of wounds. I remember holes in the chest and a guy with a large open wound in his upper leg. The guy with the leg wound was in severe pain, and when he sat up he vomited in his open wound. I tried to tell one of the

airmen to cover the hole in my right shoulder to prevent air from getting into my chest. He laid some gauze over the hole in my shirt and I just laid there.

I was bent over when I was shot, and the slug entered my right shoulder in front of the bones and on through two ribs, in and out of my right lung, stopping in the small of my back beside my spine. Luck or what? I did not know this until days later.

The medics came and wanted to know where I hurt. I told them I felt a slight burning sensation in the small of my back. They asked if I had heard an explosion. I told them no. They wrote "Fragment Wounds" on a tag and cared my sorry tail to the 377th Dispensary. They did what they could for me. All the while the doctors and nurses stood by my bed.

The Viet Cong had the road between the base and the 3rd Field Hospital which was just outside the main gate. When I asked they gave me something for the pain, but it didn't seem to help. I talked with the people around me and after it became difficult to breath they took an X-Ray and inserted a chest tube. When the blood came out it sounded like someone dumping a 10 quart pail of fluid into another pail three or four feet away.

When I finally got to the 3rd Field Hospital I was laid out on a stretcher with other wounded. A priest came by to see if I wanted someone notified, and I didn't. Trying to be funny I asked him, "Am I so far gone they sent you over?" He said, "No, and you are going to be okay."

I do not know how long I laid there before a couple corpsman put me on a gurney and wheeled me into X-Ray. I remember getting half way through the double swinging doors. The next thing I recall is coming to and telling them I was going to throw up. I heard them tell me to wait a minute, but I couldn't, and vomited right on my right shoulder. Next time I came to I told them I had to take a leak. Someone said I already did. I don't know how many hours or days I was "out to lunch." After a few days the tubes came out. The last to come out was my feeding tube. The doctors who removed the bullet, taped it to my chest for a memento.

I did not know what happened at the base until a staff sergeant from the engine shop came to visit me. He told me about the fight and the damage. He told me that he had stayed on base. While he was there the First Sergeant and Squadron Commander came to visit me. He said his goodbyes and left.

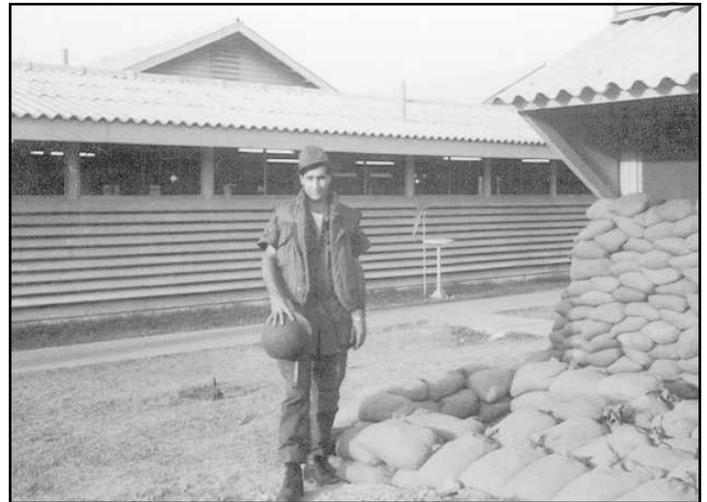
On or about May 12, 1968, the 21st Casualty Staging Flight flew me to the USAF Hospital in Tachikawa, Japan. I was delayed a few days until my lungs cleared up. A doctor at the hospital asked me if I wanted to go the states or back to Vietnam. I told him, "Doc, I feel like I am running out on the guys, but right now I hurt too much to go back. Since then I've wished I had gone back.

Several GI's and I spent a night at the 377th Dispensary before being loaded onto a C-141 for the trip to Japan. Several friends of mine came to visit that evening and the next morning.

After a few days at Tachikawa I was flown to Hanscom Field via

Andrews AFB. From there I was flown to the 1083rd Medical Service Sq., Navy Hospital, Chelsea, Massachusetts. After a few weeks I was transferred to the 99th Bomb Wing (SAC), Westover AFB, Massachusetts.

I would like to hear from Gilchrist, Gibbons, Holenborg, Mac and Ski. I knew several other people that I worked with, but have long since forgotten their names. You know what time does. I did hear that one of the men died in a plane crash.



Jerry Fish next to his barracks



**A current photo of Jerry Fish
A TSNA member since 2001**

Editor's Note: Thanks to David Koopman for allowing me to publish his story and photos from his web site.

To see David Koopman's web page, go to www.tsna.org and click on "Links." His web page is well worth seeing.

Thanks to Jerry Fish for his great story and photos.



**Purple Heart awarded to
Jerry Fish**

United States Army
120th Assault Helicopter Company
Tan Son Nhut Air Base

Razorback Action
Mini-Tet
May 1968
By Member
Bill Stribling (Army)
UH-1 Huey Door Gunner

Here is a fracas we got into the night of a big 122MM rocket attack on Tan Son Nhut. I believe this happened in May of 1968 during some of the "TET 2" action.

Our gunship platoon, *the Razorbacks*, kept a light fire team on 24 hour alert between the active and the taxiway runways. We had a shack to sleep in, with one of the enlisted gunners or crew chiefs standing radio watch at all times. There were four pilots, and four enlisted crew chief / gunners. There was a standby light fire team on duty at Hotel Three in case the 24 hour team or "Starcom" as we called it, had more than they could handle.

In the wee hours of the morning, we were rudely awakened by the first rockets impacting on the flight line. I joined the stampede out of the door, and ran to my ship and untied the rotor blade. Much to my dismay, I realized I was all alone just as a 122 MM dead centered a C-130 in a revetment just across the taxiway from my gunship. The C-130 exploded in a huge fireball, and shrapnel and airplane parts buzzed overhead. I dove into a conex container beside the building, and wondered why I hadn't gone into our bunker with the other rational people. I curled into a fetal position, as another wave of rockets impacted, and shrapnel pelted the conex. I promised GOD all sorts of things if he would just get me out of this fix one more time. There was another lull, and here came the other crews, running for the ships.

We cranked in record time, and lifted off flying west right down the taxiway about 50 feet off the ground, just as another wave of 122MM's came OVER our ships. I looked out the left door just as a rocket impacted the TSN tower about half way

up. That really got my attention along with everyone else. I was in the wing ship, piloted by WO Ron Davis, with WO Ed Stringer in the left seat, with Sp4 Mike Klinker as the crew chief.

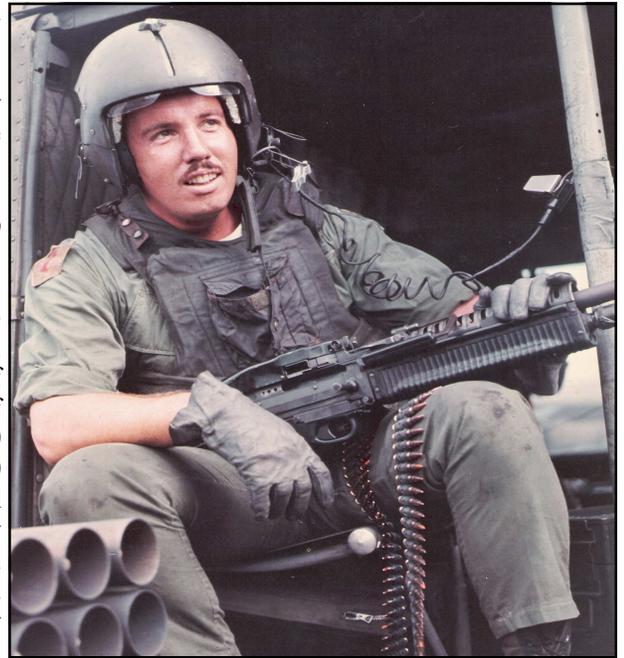
The armaments on a wing ship were two seven shot rocket pods armed with 2.75 inch HE rockets with a nine pound warhead, two M-60 flexguns on each side, armed with 2000 rounds of ammo each, plus the Crew chief and door gunner with an M-60 machinegun, armed with 2000 rounds of ammo each. The lead ship was to the best of my knowledge piloted by Maj. Jim Hunt, with WO Early Watkins in the left seat. A lead ship, or "Rocket Ship" as we called them had two 24 shot rocket pods armed with 2.75 inch rockets for a total of 48, along with the crew chief and door gunner with an M-60 machine gun each armed with 2000 rounds of ammo. I can't remember the names of the enlisted crew in the lead ship.

We climbed out to about 1200 feet flying north, and Maj. Hunt spotted rockets leaving the launchers in the vicinity of the "Keyhole" area of the Saigon River. This was one night that we had a turkey shoot, as we called it.

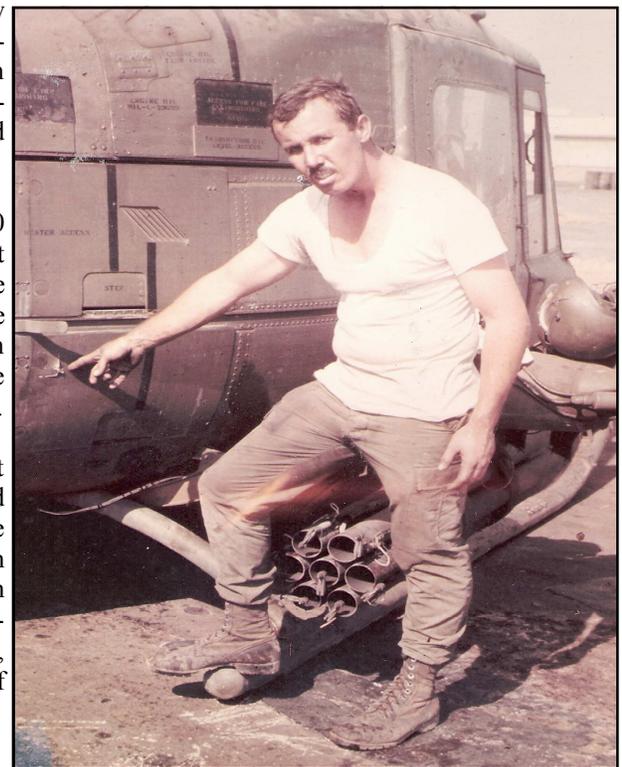
We were on the NVA rocket crews before they could run, and we took them all out in about five passes. There was an RFPF unit in the vicinity with the call sign "Half Canteen", led by a US advisor team that policed up the area, and confirmed the destruction of the launchers and crews.

We returned to Hotel Three to rearm and refuel, and then returned to the Starcom shack to get some sleep.

(Maybe)

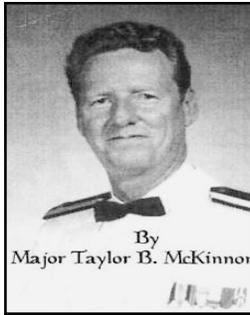


Bill in position



Bill pointing out a bullet hole his Huey sustained





Day Two ~ Plus

This installment documents what I call "Day Two at Tan Son Nhut." but I have added the "plus" since, like most troops of whom I've talked, the events between the first day and the last day sort of blend into a patchwork of events. I believe this phenomenon results from working 12 hour shifts and 6 or 7 day weeks, as is common in a combat zone.

Documenting these events chronologically is no problem for an Aircraft Maintenance Officer or M/O since we all carried small personal note books in which we would record the events of the day, partly to protect us in the event something happens to an airplane to whose forms we have added our reputations by inscribing our name and grade, plus the abbreviation "M/O,"

Most maintenance officers in the old days were called engineering officers and were required to have an engineering degree or Federal Aircraft and Powerplant Mechanics rating. Since we never disposed of these books it is not difficult to recall a tour of duty after years of retirement and having left the service. So. "here we go!"

After awakening on my first morning in country. I washed up and packed my duffle bag for my first trip to my new unit, the 33rd CAMRON, of the 33rd TAC Group. A CAMRON is a Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron which contains all the elements of a maintenance group in one squadron. The Chief of Maintenance is also the commander. We reported to the 2nd Air Division, prior to the establishment of 7th Air Force. After that we became the 377th CAMRON.

"Go To Hell" hats and mammoth colonels

Upon arriving from downtown on the gray navy bus. I entered the orderly room of the

33rd. It was a Quonset hut of the type manufactured in Quonset, Rhode Island, during World War II. I asked to see the commander. Almost immediately a huge (he looked at the time) lieutenant colonel walked out of his office and grabbed me by the hand, introducing himself as Lieutenant Colonel Owens. (I learned later that he did not care for the formal reporting routine, so he would come outside his office to meet new officers and NCOs so as to establish a close and almost informal working relationship.

I found it difficult to be informal with him since he looked so damned imposing, with his mustache, "go to hell" hat and combat boots. He had the first sergeant present me with a "go to hell" hat.

Colonel Owens (a rated four-engine pilot from the WWII and Korean wars) gave me the 100P Alley admonitions (stay out of there, you will meet high class whores later and they rarely have venereal diseases). He informed me that due to my prior service as an enlisted man he would entrust me with the Field Maintenance Branch of the squadron, replacing Captain Bruce Brouard.

A hard act to follow

Captain Brouard turned out to be one hell of a man to replace and I wondered immediately if it would not have been better to have replaced some ROTC lieutenant in one of the staff jobs.

Brouard was a handsome, dashing Cajun (Acadian, for those who would criticize me for using a pejorative term) from Abbeville or Lafayette or Maurice, Louisiana he mentioned all three and spoke fluent French. This ability provided a capability which solved any communications problems with the Vietnamese, all of whom could speak French.

Captain Brouard (Whitney J., it says here in the old maintenance officer's book I inherited from him) gave me a branch briefing and introduced me to Chief Master Sergeant Dailey, a man of such imposing stature and intelligence that I could not for the life of me see him needing any direction from me. I also met Staff Sergeant Gillespie, our chief clerk, a top NCO who I know is out there retired somewhere, if he has not yet gone to that Grand Air Force in the sky. (C.F., I still have that set of silver

Flight engineer's wings which you left in your desk. Let me know if you want them.)

Captain Brouard, now a retired colonel living in Troy, Alabama, commented about my "go to hell" hat. I learned that although the Americans thought they were wearing some style of Aussie hat, that these particular hats were the ones worn by the French Foreign Legion during the colonial days. The Viets either thought we had lost our minds, or the farmers and peasants thought we white men in the French hats were Legionnaires come to stay forever this time.

I was introduced to the Non Commissioned Officers in their various sections, a fine lot all. They were Sergeants Holms of engines, Celatka of the machine shop, Salter of structural repair, pneudraulics was Davis, electric was McClelland, mechanical accessories Cooper, TSgt McCarroll in fuel systems, good old MSgt Van was in charge of repair and reclamation (aero repair). TSgt Woods in propellers, three stripe buck sergeant in charge of the fabric shop, sheet metal shop SMSgt Salter, parachutes TSgt Rose, and paint shop buck sergeant Fridmore. I must not forget SMSgt Duke who ran the fabrication section office, and not the least, Airman Second Class M.F. Calston.

The age of innocence

Calston. weren't you the new one who came up to my desk and said. "Lieutenant, I just learned some Vietnamese." And I said, "Go ahead and speak it. You said. "Defense defumer." So I asked. "Where did you learn that Vietnamese?" You replied. "It's written on the hanger wall."

You didn't know that the French Armee le Air had occupied that hanger before us and that writing was French for "No smoking."

When we went out to recover the remains of the Air America C-45 that went down off the end of the runway, killing the crew, and you (Calston) brought along the big old BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle), and as we got into Viet Cong country you wanted to be sure that the damned thing was loaded. You kept working the breech lock back and forth until I finally said. "Put that confounded thing away until you need it."

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"We're in enough trouble as it is!"

It was growing dark, and had started raining and we got stuck in the mud alone in V.C. land. The old Dodge Power Wagon had a front wheel drive that had to be activated from the outside, and the mud was over the axles.

I'd better close this chapter now, as like in the Power Wagon episode. "It's getting dark."

To be continued.

My Visit To Korea **By Chaplain Billy T. Lowe**

Recently I visited with my family who are stationed at Osan AB, ROK. While there I visited with the vice-commander of the 7th Air Force. The 7th Air Force HQ is now at Osan.

Brig. Gen. Dana Atkins welcomed me into his office and we spent nearly an hour talking about the USAF of thirty years ago and today. He has a very inspiring story of how he rose through the ranks from Airman Basic to Brig. General. (Yes, he started out enlisted). I presented him with a Tan Son Nhut Association challenge coin. He stated he would treasure it in honor of 7th Air Force Vietnam airmen.



Chaplain Billy Lowe presenting a Tan Son Nhut Association Challenge Coin to 7th AF Vice Commander, Brigadier General Dana Atkins

Fire and Crash Rescue **By Vince Mazza** **TSN May 1968 – February 1969**

I volunteered to be transferred from Nha Trang Air Base where I began my Vietnam experience because of the shortage of firefighter at Tan Son Nhut.

I must admit it was no picnic responding during and after a rocket attack not knowing when the next one was coming in. Most of the time you would see our red trucks dispersed all around the flight line and perimeter every night manned by a crew. Charlie had a habit of trying to knock out important sites (like the fire station) so we couldn't respond to an aircraft fire.

I didn't sleep much in those days. For some odd reason I was awarded the Air Force Commendation Medal. I am still trying to figure out why!

It's good to be home.

(Editor's Note: Vince, you were awarded the AF Commendation Medal because you did an outstanding job while stationed at TSN. If for no other reason, you deserved a pocket of medals for sitting in a red fire truck on the flight line or perimeter. Your vehicle had to be a good target!)

WOMEN IN MILITARY SERVICE MEMORIAL

The Women in Military Service for America Memorial is located in Washington DC at the entrance to Arlington Cemetery. With the exception of federal grants to restore the existing structure and to complete the Memorial, it has been financed solely through private donations to its governing Foundation. Proceeds from the sale of a commemorative coin are a continuing resource as well as donations needed to operate and maintain the Memorial Education Center. The Memorial officially opened to the public on 20 OCT 97. It reflects the history of women in the armed forces which began more than 220 years ago with the women who served during the American Revolution and continues through the present day.

The Memorial site is the 4.2-acre Ceremonial Entrance to Arlington National Cemetery. A 30-foot high curved neoclassical retaining wall stands at the entrance. Its design places the 33,000 square-foot Education Center in the Arlington cemetery hillside behind the existing retaining wall. The Memorial incorporates a reflecting pool on the plaza in front of the curved gateway, or hemicycle, with an arc of glass tablets on the upper terrace. The roof is an arc of glass tablets, 250 feet in diameter, inscribed with quotations by and about women who have served in defense of their country. Sunlight passing over these quotes creates changing shadows of the texts on the walls of the gallery below and brings natural light into the interior of the Education Center. The glass tablets illuminate the cemetery hillside at night and during the day, serve as skylights to the interior of the Education Center, which houses the Hall of Honor, exhibits and artifacts of women's military service, a 196-seat theater, a gift shop and the Memorial's computerized Register. Four staircases pass through the hemicycle wall, allowing visitors access to a panoramic view of Washington, DC, from the terrace. A floor plan can be viewed at www.womensmemorial.org/Visit/floorplan.html.

(Editor's Note: Thanks to Harley Hatfield for sending in this article.)



Memorial Entrance



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