

DECEMBER 2007



A Memorial to the American Experience  
In Vietnam

"All included, none excluded"

# REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association



Wreaths awaiting Placement Ceremony



Don Parker and Bob Gales in Procession



Dale Bryan, John Peele, Don Parker, Bob Gales

## Veterans Day 2007

by  
Dale Bryan  
TSNA Secretary

It was November 11 and Veterans Day at "The Wall" again, but this time it was different. The ceremonies were the culmination of the parade awaited for many decades by all who served in Vietnam. It also marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the dedication of our memorial. The emotion was nearly overwhelming. Nearly 33 years passed from the last time American troops had operated in Vietnam until we finally had our parade in the Nation's Capital.

Your Association honored the day and participated in the ceremonies. We placed a wreath before the polished walls of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

TSNA Co-Founder Don Parker and TSNA President Bob Gales marched in the procession that initiated the ceremonies. They also placed the wreath during the concluding ceremony. Co-Founder John Peele and I were also there.

Pictures show Don and Bob marching in, all the wreaths awaiting placement, and Don, Bob, John, and I with our wreath at "The Wall".

Having Don Parker participate in the ceremony was nearly the equivalent of having a Founding Father present on Independence Day. It was his first visit to Washington, DC and "The Wall". Needless to say, he was moved.

The ceremonies between the march in and the laying of wreaths were generally customary fare,

but one of the welcome speeches stood out. It was by Mary "Edie" Meeks, Board Member, Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation. She'd been an Army nurse in Vietnam. Her descriptions of being with and talking with soldiers who'd made the ultimate sacrifice during their last moments of life left the crowd of thousands hushed and without dry eyes. She was at 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Hospital just outside the main gate of Tan Son Nhut, so her accounts placed a personality inside each of the aluminum coffins I saw move to the flight line every day during my tenure.

The Keynote Address was by General Colin L. Powell, and he was introduced by Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska. Both are known and respected Vietnam veterans.

(More) →

General Powell is, of course, retired, and Senator Hagel is going to retire in January 2008.

This is significant. Vietnam veterans holding high positions in government are diminishing by attrition. General Peter Pace, a Vietnam veteran, just retired, and his successor is likely the last Vietnam veteran to be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. There's a message here. As Vietnam veterans vacate the "Halls of Power", those who replace them must be kept informed of the truth of the Vietnam War. They were not there. We were.

Each of us as individual citizens and as members of organizations like Tan Son Nhut Association must become, be, and stay proactive in keeping government officials, the media, and all citizens informed about Vietnam. Let not any other generation of veterans ever have to wait nearly a third of a century for their parade.

(Photographs on Page 1, Courtesy of Sue Ellen Parker)

## LOOKING AHEAD



### IN THE NEXT REVETMENTS:

- » A weather related story by TSNA Secretary Dale Bryan.
- » A RITS article by Richard Carvell
- » TSN Memories '65-'66 by Joe Davenport
- » An Army Replacement in Vietnam by Jim Dugan

Tan Son Nhut Association



## CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

If I was asked to give my understanding about the meaning of the Holy Bible in just one word that word would be "relationship". Both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures, i.e. The Old and the New Testaments, gives a clear message to support my understanding.

God, in the very beginning, decided to create a family. God didn't need a family but in the essence of love God created a family and the support system for that family, namely the earth. When we read of the Ten Commandments we see the first four addressing a relationship with God and the remaining six commandments on how we humans are to relate to each other. Time after time the Old Testament emphasizes this theme of relationship between God and humanity and the relationship between human beings themselves. Psalm 23 is probably the best known Psalm in the world. It gives us the promise of God that "even thou I walk through the valley of death... Thou art with me" 23:4. Even Jesus quoted two Old Testament verses when asked which is the greatest commandment. He replied with Deuteronomy 6:29-30, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your god with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind, and all your strength" and Leviticus 19:31, "You shall love your

neighbor as yourself".

Throughout the New Testament we discover the promises of Jesus to his followers which illustrate the call to relationships. In the Gospel of John He says, "In my Father's house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" 14:2-3. And so, we come to the Christian season of Christmas. The promise of the greatest gift is even there as the angel spoke these words: "...and they shall call him Immanuel—which means, 'God with us'" Matthew 1:23.

A very blessed Christmas season to all of you. May you live in the joy that regardless of how tough life may become at times, you are never alone. God is with you. God wants a relationship with each of us and invites us to be in God's family.

Rev. Dr. Billy T. Lowe  
Chaplain  
Tan Son Nhut Association

## NEW MEMBERS

Please say "Welcome Home" to:

**Gaynor**, Michael J., Illinois, Det. 11, 1131st Special Activities Sqdn., Aug. '72—Feb. '73

**Cartafalsa**, Joseph J., Florida, 7th AF/5th VNAF Air Div., Jan '72—Nov. '72, and Jan '75—Mar '75.

**Moore**, Terry G., 460th AE, Aircraft radio repair, Dec. '67—Dec. '68.



REVETMENTS

DECEMBER 2007

THE MAY 1968 MINI-TET  
EPISODE©  
By Robert Robinson Gales  
377th Combat Support Grp.

Thirty-nine years ago I experienced my first real sense of combat during the May 1968 Mini-Tet attacks. I had been at Tan Son Nhut Air Base during the mop-up of the actual 1968 Tet Offensive, but those activities were largely conducted by my combat brothers of the 377<sup>th</sup> Air Police Squadron, and other warriors, not Judge Advocates such as me. In May 1968, all that changed, and I won my "spurs" in combat. What follows below is an adaptation of the diary I maintained during that episode of my life.

Sunday, May 5, 1968: Saigon City was mortared this morning between 4 a.m. and 6 a.m. The AFVN radio claims 10 rounds were fired, but I guess the other several dozen rounds were ours or flares. . . . The security color is white! However, they closed the Saigon-Long Binh-Bien Hoa Road and extended the curfew from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Nothing to worry about according to Radio Lonestar, the situation is well in hand.

I worked today in place of Captain Williams so he can stay in bed with Saturday evening's date – I'll take tomorrow off. I ate dinner with Major Rothhaus (the Base Staff Judge Advocate) and OSI Special Agent Cox, and it looks like a little something is expected tonight because Cox is remaining on base. I took the 6:30 p.m. bus home to Horne Hall, the BOQ on Plantation Road, a short distance north of the Phu To racetrack and about one mile south of the Tan Son Nhut Air Base's main gate. I watched some night action in

the distance and saw a disabled aircraft come in for an emergency, but it exploded! Flames billowed and lit up the sky, and kept going for some time. Because of the impending situation, our CO decided to have a guard mount – an extra guard on the roof just steps from my penthouse apartment, the only room on the roof of the six story building – in addition to our Chinese Nung guards and an extra duty officer. It pays to be careful. My cold was worse so I'm glad I wasn't picked as a guard because I just wanted some shuteye.

Monday, May 6, 1968: The hostilities are no longer a distant issue reminiscent of July 4<sup>th</sup> fireworks. Things are now up close and personal. The Nung guards have brought their respective families from wherever they reside near Tan Son Nhut Air Base into Horne Hall and everyone has been alert and super cautious. Plantation Road to the base is closed and there is an uncertainty about the situation. The phones to the base are not functional. While many of the Horne Hall residents remained on their respective levels of the building, a substantial number are on the roof looking over the waist-high wall at the action. Actually, things are quite dangerous with shooting close by, if not actually at us, flames nearby, and an assortment of our aircraft shooting and rocketing "Victor-Charlie" targets very close to us – so close, in fact, that we can actually see the enemy one block to the west. I think this is what I had expected that war would be like: shooting, explosions, noise, smoke, and devastation of buildings. What I did not expect were the extraordinarily vivid colors and periodic boredom of war.

Tuesday, May 7, 1968: You know what happened Sunday evening and all day Monday. Well, Tuesday was more of the same, lots more! I was BOQ duty officer from 0300 to 0600 hours when Tan Son Nhut Air Base was hit by rockets in two flurries. The USAF and VNAF found out today the rocket launchers that had been responsible for hitting the base were located one block and four blocks from Horne Hall, so commencing in the morning, the area surrounding Horne Hall was hit by Skyraiders, Huey-copter gunships, F4Cs, F100s, ARVN troops, and every imaginable type of rocket, mortar, bomb, napalm, etc. Victor-Charlie had a company or larger sized force in the area at the time the raid started. The ARVN were all over the area tossing different colored smoke bombs around to designate friend or foe or specific target. The aircraft came so close to us that they released their ordinance behind Horne Hall just to hit the enemy on the other side. It's a pretty weird feeling looking up to see rockets and bombs released behind and above us seemingly coming our way. I've heard of the army calling for napalm near their positions or sending mortars straight up to kill the enemy 20 feet away, but this is really scary.

By late afternoon, the place was almost in total destruction. Flames were everywhere. Flak had been hitting our patio routinely after each pass and several of fellows got souvenirs, even those fools who jumped for flak like grabbing a foul-tip baseball, only to learn too late that flak is real hot! Everyone who hadn't already used up their film did so by nightfall.

Then the news came. An enemy regiment of North Vietnamese Regulars had arrived in the area and the fighting turned even uglier. Machine gun fire and grenades could be seen and heard, and we braced for a ground attack against Horne Hall. The flames from the fire were so close that the US Army BEQ to our west evacuated and left our flank bare. We all got together and decided to hold out and defend the integrity of Horne Hall. Each man was armed either with a Horne Hall M-16 (we had only two of those), or a Horne Hall 12-gauge shotgun (we had seven of those). Each Nung guard was armed with a carbine. It was quite funny noticing all those unauthorized private weapons come out when the going started to get rough. My Walther PPK .380 (James Bond's weapon) was strapped on and fully loaded and ready to go.

With the news that we were to stay, I decided to take a short intermission in the bathroom. There I was, sitting there saying to myself, what a dumb thing to be doing now that the emergency was at hand. I had often wondered what I would do during a crisis and I found out – I'd be doing exactly what I thought I would be doing. I finished up and heard there had been a change in plans. Rather than remaining in Horne Hall, it was decided to abandon the BOQ because of the situation and move to a nearby BOQ which supposedly had superior defenses. I was in the last group to leave so I picked up a box of shotgun shells and joined with a guy holding a shotgun. We had been waiting for a truck to pick us up but it never came and the army and MPs we had for cover started yelling that the enemy was on the way down our street and to get the hell out of

there. That was the commencement of my real combat experience. We could clearly hear the enemy weapons and saw them one block away coming towards us.

There were a number of defenders already out the Horne Hall door on the ground, facing west towards the enemy. We were to exit the building, get low to the ground, and, in waves of two, leapfrog to the rear towards Plantation Road until everyone was away. As I stepped up to the door, ready to jump at the signal, I said to myself for one brief moment, "Oh God, what a way for a JAG to get hit." But you know, after that short moment, I wasn't scared at all. I had often wondered how I would act when potential death met me at the corner, and you know, I came through without a hitch! I now know I will not panic in a war emergency and believe me, it is quite a comfort to know.

We finally made it to the Idaho BOQ at about 8:30 p.m. and immediately set up a command post for Air Force personnel. Lt. Col. Fite of the Idaho BOQ informed us that we were guests and were to pick up all dirty dishes and glasses from the tables and if we couldn't we could leave his BOQ. He said that in the event of a mortar attack we should hit the deck as the walls were of hollow tile. He discussed the weak defenses of the building and added: "We don't have blankets, we don't have beds, we don't have beans, whoops, we do have beans!" After two hours of watching the area explode in flames, we decided to return to Horne Hall because of its superior defenses. We went back with only one casualty. The Nungs, who had remained there while we bailed out, were very happy to

have us back. I slept in my bed upon arrival better than any night since I've been here. Can you imagine, here we are expecting a ground attack and I sleep like a baby.

Wednesday, May 8, 1968: I found out Tan Son Nhut Air Base had been hit by about 14 rockets this morning, but as I said before, I slept and didn't hear a thing! Back to work! Despite fierce fighting in the Bien Hoa area with two North Vietnamese divisions attempting to blow the bridge to Saigon, I managed to get a jeep to the office at Tan Son Nhut Air Base on the newly reopened Plantation Road. The buses were still not running. We flashed down the road, stopping only at ARVN checkpoints and viewed the French Cemetery where Monday's fighting took place. The buildings are simply smashed!

Major Shull of the 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force legal office called to tell me to get ready to go to Bien Hoa Air Base with him. I drew a .38 revolver with 38 rounds and an M-16 with seven clips. I took my helmet and utility belt, but not my flak vest which remained on the tripod in my office. We took off on a Caribou CV-2 for Bien Hoa Air Base and an Article 32, UCMJ Investigation where I was to serve as defense counsel. As an accomplished warrior, I flew right into the new hot area with North Vietnamese below. While waiting for our return flight, there was a base alert, and while we hit the bunker, we heard no incoming and saw no new damage.

I finally got back to Horne Hall for some AFVN television news and saw another view of our demolished neighborhood. I also heard some more distant fighting. Just another quiet day at the office. . .

## REGARDING REUNIONS

By Robert R. Gales  
TSNA President

I had previously mentioned the possibility of **regional reunions** in addition to **national reunions** because I was thinking about those members with health issues and limited budgets. I don't want any member to feel left out of TSNA activities simply because it is too costly to travel to a national reunion located at some too distant location. I agree that members on the coasts shouldn't have to routinely travel to the opposite coast to attend a national reunion, and if we do a rotation of national reunion locations, they should be able to attend at least 2 of every 3 national reunions. For example, the national reunions already held were as follows:

- 2007 was in Dayton, Ohio (mid-eastern)
- 2006 - no reunion
- 2005 was in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania (eastern)
- 2004 was in Bourbonnais, Illinois (central)
- 2003 - no reunion (the one scheduled for Fredericksburg, Virginia was canceled)
- 2002 was in Washington DC (eastern)
- 2001 - no reunion
- 2000 was in San Antonio, Texas (southeastern)
- 1999 - no reunion
- 1998 - no reunion
- 1997 was in Hampton, Virginia (eastern)
- 1996 was in Dayton, Ohio (mid-eastern)
- 1995 - no reunion
- 1994 was in Evansville, Indiana (mid-eastern)
- 1993 was in Evansville, Indiana (mid-eastern)

Thus, we have been west of the Mississippi River on only one occasion and that was for San Antonio in 2000. The other national reunions were either in the east (3 times), mid-east (4 times), or central (1 time) regions. Given those statistics, I believe the southwest, west, northwest, south, or central regions are long overdue to host a national reunion next year. To ignore those regions and the membership located there is to reduce TSNA to a regional rather than a national or international organization.

On the other hand, we could also offer **regional or special interest mini reunions** for those in certain locations, perhaps 6 months before or after a national reunion. A regional reunion would anticipate those members who reside in or near the region and a special interest mini reunion could focus on specific units or time periods.

My hope is that TSNA membership will furnish input regarding possible 2008 and 2009 national reunions in the southwest, west, northwest, south, or central regions. I have already heard some recommendations for the following locations, in no particular order: Seattle, Washington; St. Louis, Missouri; Charleston, South Carolina; Tampa, Florida; Nashville, Tennessee; Colorado Springs, Colorado; and Phoenix, Arizona. Also, there may be some interest in visiting the Vietnam Center in Lubbock, Texas. I solicit your suggestions today, along with your pledge that you will attend a reunion held at your suggested location(s).

Also, very high on my agenda is a **special reunion or field trip** to Saigon, Vietnam in 2008 or 2009, in addition to, or in lieu of, a national reunion.





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**'Twas The Night**

"Twas the night before Christmas, he lived all alone,  
in a one bedroom house made of plaster and stone.  
I had come down the chimney with presents to give,  
and to see just who in this home did live.

I looked all about, a strange sight I did see,  
no tinsel, no presents, not even a tree,  
No stocking by mantle, just boots filled with sand,  
on the wall hung pictures of far distant lands.  
With medals and badges, awards of all kinds,  
a sober thought came through my mind.

For this house was different, it was dark and dreary,  
I found the home of a soldier, once I could see clearly.

The soldier lay sleeping, silent, alone,  
curled up on the floor in this one bedroom home.  
The face was so gentle, the room in such disorder,  
not how I pictured a United States soldier.

Was this the hero of whom I'd just read?  
Curled up on a poncho, the floor for a bed?  
realized the families that I saw this night,  
owed their lives to these soldiers who were willing to fight.

Soon round the world, the children would play,  
and grownups would celebrate a bright Christmas day.

They all enjoyed freedom each month of the year,  
because of the soldiers, like the one lying here.

couldn't help wonder how many lay alone,  
on a cold Christmas Eve in a land far from home.

The very thought brought a tear to my eye,  
dropped to my knees and started to cry.

The soldier awakened and I heard a rough voice,

"Santa don't cry, this life is my choice;  
fight for freedom, I don't ask for more,

my life is my God, my Country, my Corps."

The soldier rolled over and drifted to sleep,

I couldn't control it, I continued to weep.

I kept watch for hours, so silent and still  
and we both shivered from the cold night's chill.

I didn't want to leave on that cold, dark, night,  
this guardian of honor so willing to fight.

Then the soldier rolled over, with a voice soft and pure,  
whispered, "Carry on Santa, it's Christmas day, all is secure."

One look at my watch, and I knew he was right.

"Merry Christmas my friend, and to all a good night."

--Anonymous

Sent in by Janice Jones, TSNA "Cheerleader", and  
sister of Charles Penley, TSNA Webmaster.

