

**February/March
2007**



**A Memorial to the American Experience
In Vietnam**

REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

**Have you thought about
Joining us
At
The Reunion?**

~ May 3-6, 2007 ~

Dayton, Ohio

**We already have 70 members registered to
attend**

Please Join Us!

You'll be glad you did!

**"I now know why men who have been to war yearn to 'reunite'.
 Not to tell stories or look at old pictures. Not to laugh or weep.
 Comrades gather because they long to be with the men who once acted at their best;
 men who suffered and sacrificed, who were stripped of their humanity.
 I did not pick these men. They were delivered by fate and the military. But I know them in a way I know no other men. I
 have never given anyone such trust. They were willing to guard
 something more precious than life.
 They would have carried my reputation, the memory of me.**

**It was part of the bargain we all made, the reason we were so willing to die for one another. As long as I have memory, I
 will think of them all, every day. I am sure that when I leave this world, my last thought will be of my FAMILY and my
 COMRADES ... such good men,"**

Author Unknown

(submitted by Charles Penley)

I was just thinking the other day how it had been 40 years ago I was at TSN. I remembered December 4, 1966 when we were hit. As I recall we had activity 2 nights after that. The first night when we were hit and the flight line lit up from a hail of mortar fire, a young crewman about my age who could not get to safety inside, found my bunker. I remember too not knowing if the enemy would make it to the flight line. I took out my 38 pistol we carried and handed it to him, saying "if you see them just point and shoot." Of course I held onto my M-16.

We were both scared, but I was determined to make sure we were both ok. About 7am after a long night I remember a call to us from CSC about casualties and the dispatcher saying they were missing a crewman. I quickly got on the radio to report he wasn't missing, he was safely in my bunker.

Shortly after that he was picked up and thanked me. I never did get to see him again, as I went from Charley Sector to a newly formed Foxtrot Sector.

Thank you Wayne for your many years of service to our

Country and it's been a pleasure and honor both knowing you and the many others like Charles Penley and being a member of the Tan Son Nhut Association.

Bob Hegele

Thank you very much for the very fast response to my order. The personalized CD's, that I received have surpassed my expectations, job well done!

The CD's, has already answered many questions and brought back many memories and I have just began to explore their contents. I really feel as though I am home now, that added touch of personalizing the CD's sure enhances that feeling of belonging.

Jim Dugan

(Editors Note: I am pleased that you are enjoying the CD's, Jim. The success offering them to our membership has exceeded our expectations. Charles Penley did an outstanding job at putting the CD's together. They represent a huge part of the history of Tan Son Nhut - a place we once called home.)

Founded 1995

By
 President Emeritus Don Parker
 and
 President Emeritus John Peele

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 Five Year Membership: \$80.00
 Life Membership: \$180.00

What some members and guests say about Tan Son Nhut Reunions

I would like to address the reunion experience from the guest's point of view. I have had the privilege of attending the last two TSNA reunions. It has been a very enjoyable and eye-opening experience for me. Just listening to the conversations among the veterans is so very informative. It was so enjoyable watching them open up and begin to feel the friendship of those around them.

I saw that it means so much to all the veterans to have an opportunity to get together and share stories and more importantly feelings about their experiences. They really benefit from the chance to meet with others with backgrounds in Vietnam service. As a wife/guest at two reunions, I saw first hand how deeply touched the first-time-attendees were to be welcomed by their comrades. It is a very healing experience for them. Those who had previously attended looked forward to renewing friendships forged by their common background, no matter what their rank, unit or branch of service, or length of time in-country.

A large number of attendees brought family members with them, so I really was able to see how the whole family is bonded and affected by the experience of the veteran. Everyone is friendly, and ready to enjoy visiting and getting acquainted. I have personally made several friends that keep in touch regularly. I think that many of the children and spouses of the veterans learned a great deal about the experiences of their parent/spouse, and perhaps were able to better understand the emotions (hidden or otherwise) that affect their loved one.

Please don't hesitate to attend this year's reunion and bring your family. You will be glad you did. The "field trips" will be great, and there will be plenty of opportunity for fun and educational experiences. If you are the family of a veteran, please encourage your loved one to attend. Again, you will be glad you did.

I'm hoping to see lots of new faces this year, as well as all the friends from years past.

Sharon Jernigan

Hey, hey, hey, to y'all. In Sep 2005, I attended the Reunion of the Tan Son Nhut Association, at Gettysburg, PA. It was fabulous. I knew absolutely no one except Charles Penley and I had spoken via phone to Wayne Salisbury. From the first minute we arrived at the hotel, we were made to feel like family. Everyone was so nice and all nervousness, just vanished. They even enlisted my help in welcoming the other guests. Hence, the nickname cheerleader, became a part of me. I love these people! They are the Best and we are looking forward to seeing them again. It truly is just a family summer reunion. Dress as you would dress going to your own get together - except it will have no ants and flying bugs to bother you. It is all indoor. Bring your camera and any "mementoes from your service," with you.

You will love sitting beside Charles Penley, who is the Communications Officer. He has all the pictures, maps and history of TSN. There was a line to sit beside his computer and all of his information placed on the table. Yes, you can sit there with him and step back into time because that table and the whole reunion becomes a time machine. Each one of you wonderful people is a part of that machine. Y'all bring something to add to our family and y'all will be gifted with something to take home with you. Charles works on the TSNA every day.

Face it! We are not getting any younger and good health is no longer taken for granted. We've lost a few since 2005. If you can do one thing and have the opportunity to go one place where you will reconnect with yourself and buddies, please, this is the time and place. The door is open. Come on in and you will be an instant part of something larger, than you can ever realize. The TSNA family quilt is growing and you should be a part of it Y'all were part of the Best back then. Come, be a part of the Best now. Y'all did good. Welcome home!!!

You will meet Wayne Salisbury and his

wife, Tobey, who are the good people. They work very hard on this Association and do it with all their hearts. Wayne is the Heart of this TSNA Family, even though he is stepping aside in May. His love and friendship for y'all knows no boundaries. Come and get to know Wayne and Tobey.

Janice Jones

In reading the letters from Sharon and Janice, I was reminded of the first Tan Son Nhut Reunion, I attended in Dayton, years ago. Being in a large group of people I don't know, has always been very uncomfortable for me, but in spite of that, I wanted to go with Bill.

We arrived a day early as we always do, having to fly in from Oregon. As we waited for the other attendees to get there, I became increasingly more anxious. My anxiety was all for nothing. As people began arriving the next day, it felt like a homecoming event, where everyone was so glad to see you, and welcomed you with open arms.

Though we didn't know anyone there, none of them were strangers - they were like family you hadn't seen for a long time. We haven't missed a reunion since that one, and it always feels the same. We look forward to seeing everyone again and catching up on their news, as well as meeting new people and welcoming them to our expanding Tan Son Nhut family. Without a doubt, one of the best things we have done is join this Association and attend its reunions. We have met some incredible people who have enriched our lives immensely.

Please come and be with us in Dayton if you can. We'd love to personally say, "Welcome Home!"

Mary Ann Carlson

**TSNA 2007
Reunion**

**Dayton, Ohio
May 3-6 2007**

One of My Good Memories Of Vietnam

By Jim Dugan

One of the greatest memories brought home from Vietnam, is the memory of friendships made with the Vietnamese who worked along side of us on a daily basis to make our mission possible. Whether they worked as hootch maids, compound barbers, or held a position of greater responsibility, we undoubtedly knew their names, how many kids they had, and where they were from. Knowing them, and forming friendships with them served to break the monotony of a sometimes routine military existence.

For me, it was Tran-Thi-Mai. Mai was the 21 year old girl who was assigned the duty of watchperson over the PA&E water tower at Camp Alpha after the compound's extreme makeover in 1969. A Vietnamese of Chinese ancestry, Mai came from Cholon, and she was strikingly beautiful. A real standout among the other Vietnamese girls on the compound. She caught my eye right away and, being a 23 year old guy, single, and with no relationship waiting back home, I made an endeavor to get to know her.

It took three months to get to the point where we had a conversation, in which she explained with great knowledge what her job duties were. She also told me that she had been married for a brief time to a boy who was an ARVN soldier, but the war had made her a widow at a young age. She spoke, and understood English with little difficulty. When I asked her about it, she showed me three American comic books she had with her. Comic books are picture stories with words. When she would have a problems with the words, she said, the illustrations would help her understand what the words meant. I thought the effort she showed to learn was great.

Over the next six months, Mai became my personal guide, not only to Saigon, but to Vietnamese home life as it existed in Saigon at that time. She lived in Cholon with her mother and four of her

younger brothers and sisters. She told me her older sister was a model who worked out of Pleiku, and her father was an officer serving with the ARVN in Tay Ninh. She had a great pride in her family, and they kept a small memorial altar in their home to honor ancestors.

She gave me a respect for the average Vietnamese family trying to survive under the hardship of war. She experienced both, the French War, and the American War, and still, she and her family survived both.

My DEROS was on June 24, 1970. We arranged to meet outside the main gate of Tan Son Nhut since she did not have to work on the base that day. I remember we said our goodbye on a Gia Dinh street with her sitting on a Honda motorbike, and me hugging her and not wanting to let go. She was crying uncontrollably. When she drove off, I watched until I could no longer see her in the distance, then turned back through the main gate and my flight home.

Over the next two years, Mai and I exchanged letters at the frequency of two a month. Then one day, in late 1972, she wrote to me that she had married an American soldier, and he was returning to an assignment in the states. She went on to say that, by the time I received her letter, she would no longer be in Vietnam. I never heard from her again. Apparently she had made it to America. We had talked about it often. While Vietnam was no bed of roses at the time, America was anti-Vietnam at the time. I didn't feel it was something she should be exposed to. If she did make it here, I hope her life has been a good one. She would be 58 years old today.

Tran-Thi-Mai, one of my good memories of Vietnam.



Welcome Home

American Veteran

By Tony Tidwell

To all of you, and to all the other brothers and sisters who have worn the wonderful uniforms of this country's military services, I want to say, "Welcome Home" and may our wonderful Lord protect you, and yours, for the rest of your lives.

Today, there are thousands of our brothers and sisters who have also answered "Yes" to the call of a very grateful nation. I know that for many of us it might not appear that we were serving a grateful nation, but we did the job we were sent to do.

Today's warriors, no matter what color their uniforms, are serving with pride and distinction, in far-away places. No matter where they are serving, be it Iraq, Kosovo, Afghanistan, or perhaps stateside duties, they have responded with pride and distinction. They, just as many of us did more than thirty years ago, know that their service is essential to this country's freedom.

Putting aside the politics of the current conflict, we must never, ever, give up hope for this nation. She's second to none and deserves now, as she has throughout this great nation's history, the protection afforded by those of us who have, in the past, currently, and in the future, worn or will wear, those beautiful "work uniforms" and protect her.

Times, people, and the world change. But the one thing that never changes is the love for their country that is so proudly displayed by Americans VETERANS.

God bless each and every one of us, and may he see us through these days of uncertainty. We must always be willing to answer this nation's call. We must keep her safe and well. To all of you, I'd like to wish you the best.

Thank You

Tan Son Nhut Association

By Nick Economou

A few weeks ago, I received an email from a stranger wanting to know if I was at TSN at a certain time and with a certain squadron and wanting to know if I knew his father who was a pilot. Well I was at that squadron at that particular time and I knew the son's father who was an RF-101 Voodoo pilot.

We communicated a few times and I provided his son with some mementos of the time period as well as some memories of his father who is now deceased. We now share email jokes with each other and we hope to meet someday.

He obtained my email address from the TSN website. So there's a positive story, thanks to the Association.

My Early TDY Days At Tan Son Nhut

By George Plunkett

I was TDY to Tan Son Nhut, with the 1961st Communications Group, as a Ground Radio Operator, from July 1962 to January 1963. Also from February 1963 to July 1963.

Our radio station was outside the old chow hall, that was actually a WWII airplane hangar. My home unit was the 1st Mobile Communications Group based at Clark AB, PL I was PCS there again from October 1966 to January 1967, moving to Cam Rahn Bay, in January 1967.

I Spent the rest of 1963 and all of 1964 until November, with various TDY assignments, in Thailand, Don Muang AB, in Bangkok, Pittsanuluk, Ubon and Udorn. Was a member of the Udorn team that opened up that base for the USAF.

The Air Commandos and Air America, has been operating from there for a while. The flight line was filled with T-28's, H-34's and C-46's, all shiny metal with no markings. The 1962 - 1963 time period was the best, no curfews. We spent real money, not MPC's and the danger was minimal.

Re-enlisted once and thought about staying in, then got stationed at Hunter AAF, Savannah, GA., with 20,000 ground pounders and 100 USAF blue suiters. After 29 months, I was convinced that attending college was my best course of action.

Would love to hear from anyone who remembers the days before curfews and military payment certificates.

The Only Picture of Me Taken At TSN

By Benny Goodman

Last night I was digging through Gerlinde's sewing room/linen room/office looking for her address book. Lo and behold I found a piece of history that is one of a kind, the only one. The attached picture is the only picture ever taken of me during the entire time I was in Vietnam (3 tours.) It was taken in late Jan or early Feb 1972 in front of the 8th Aerial Port Squadron Station Traffic Office, Rebel Row C130 parking ramp, Tan Son Nhut AB and was originally printed on 3 1/2 X 3 1/2 paper and is by no means a work of photographic art, although I think the subject is rather good looking. Rather primitive by today's stan-



dards. And the photographer was half in the bag. Still it is better than nothing. Thought you might enjoy seeing me with hair that doesn't look like the salt and pepper shaker was dumped on it.

The Camaraderie Of Being In Vietnam

By Jim Dugan

I often visit the various sites on the internet on which Vietnam vets of all services and all periods of the Vietnam War have posted their personal photographs of their tours of duty. No matter what their branch of service, location of unit, or time in that long war, one thing strikes me, it's the amazing similarity in the photographs. It's as though we were all of a same mind. I can thumb through my own Vietnam photos, and compare like moments and situations.

From the serious work of our duties, to the barracks horseplay of our off duty time, we have managed to capture something that others will never see. The camaraderie of being in Vietnam. I feel sorry for those who missed knowing the feeling.

No matter what branch of service you served, no matter what your duty assignment, you did something then that mattered. Always be proud to call yourself a Vietnam Veteran. If you have a story to tell, tell it. If you have pictures to show, share them.

**IT ISN'T TOO LATE
TO REGISTER
FOR THE REUNION**

**SURE WOULD BE
NICE SEEING YOU!**

I Was Honored To Be With Them

By Dave Sanders

I was tremendously honored to be with a wonderful man, Frank Kappeler all day 11/10 who is the gentleman I had my arm around in the picture. He was the navigator with Jimmy Doolittle on Plane 11 which flew over Tokyo. You can watch the movie "30 seconds over Tokyo" or read Invitation: Tokyo to see his story!!! The other two gentlemen whose company I was blessed with the night of 11/10 were Sammy Davis (yeah the guy in the white suit) and Robert Pittman. You can Google both these men to see how great heroes they were. Talk about being blessed. To sit with these guys is like nothing you can describe on earth.

Blessings to all and a quick end to the Civil War.



Personal Products Needed for Wounded Service Mem- bers at Walter Reed

Submitted By Carol Bessette

Officials at Walter Reed Army Medical Center are seeking donations for wounded troops who are forced to leave behind personal belongings when medically evacuated from war zones. Many of the troops arrive with nothing. Because of the speed with which the most seriously wounded are evacuated from Iraq or Afghanistan, their belongings are often left behind and don't catch up. The center is looking for everything from shoes, gloves and winter jackets to postage stamps, prepaid phone cards and razors. The Family Assistance Center requests that no cash or used items be donated. Among some of the more specialized needs are weightlifting gloves (for use by wheelchair patients); trousers with snaps or zips along the legs; umbrellas; and prepaid gas or grocery

cards. Donations can be sent to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Medical Family Assistance Center, Bldg. 2, 3rd Floor, Room 3E01, 6900 Georgia Ave, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20307-5001. (Courtesy National Military Family Association)



Your TSNA

MEMBERSHIP CARD

Did your TSNA membership card get lost or beat up?

Did your favorite dog or cat chew it up?

Would you like a replacement?

If so, please contact

Larry E. Fry, VP, TSNA,

Lfry2@dejazzd.com

and your card will be

replaced at no charge.



Fire Chief
At
Tan Son Nhut
By Bill Ryan

As a MSgt. with 19 years active duty in the air force crash / firefighting and rescue organization, my orders show that I was assigned to Tan Son Nhut (TSN) from 30 Nov 1968 to 30 Oct. 1969 with duty as fire chief. In reality, when I first arrived, I was ordered to our base at Bin Thuy, in the Mekong Delta to relieve the chief there (MSgt. Smith?) who, Personnel assured me, was due to rotate that month.

After I finished in-country processing, I got into a machine designed to convert JP-4 fuel into pure, high-decibel noise. The Air Force calls it a C-123, and off we flew. When I arrived at Bin Thuy, the chief met me with the news that I was way too early, since he did not rotate until April.

Bin Thuy was interesting in the sense of the ancient Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times." The tubes in the fluorescent light fixtures in the ceiling of the fire station were held in place with wire loops. Otherwise, the frequent B-52 raids close by would vibrate them out of the fixtures. Charlie lobbed rockets and mortars into the base with such regularity that Chief Smith told me he believed we were part of their basic training and on-the-job curriculum. Chief Smith, by the way, held a flashlight for the base surgeon when he amputated the leg of an airman wounded in such an attack. And in that location there were a lot of aircraft emergencies to keep us busy, however, such good times, as we well know, cannot last, and I was ordered to TSN after we apprized them of the problem, which their Personnel branch resolved by returning me to TSN with duty as Assistant Chief under the base fire chief, CMSgt. Smart.

If Bin Thuy was busy, TSN was hectic.

TSN had two active runways, serving aircraft from all branches of our armed forces, those of our allies, and civilian aircraft. In 1969 we had some 840,000 aircraft landings or take-offs, making TSN the busiest airport in the world, outdoing JFK (New York), LAX (Los Ange-



Photo By Jim Stewart

les), Heathrow (London), O'Hare (Chicago) and Orly (Paris), with something landing or taking-off at least every thirty seconds, day and night. We were responsible for anything that crashed, burned, exploded, collapsed or fell victim to Murphy's Law - if it can go wrong, it will and at the most inconvenient time and when you least expect it,

One example of Murphy's Law was when I was directing operations at a brush fire off the end of the runway where Charlie had penetrated the base perimeter during TET of 1968. A claymore mine emplaced for our defense detonated in the fire, and I lost the tips of the little and ring fingers on my left hand. One of the balls from the claymore went through the windshield of my vehicle, at heart height where I had been standing



Photo By Dale Baker

just moments before. The security police

told us that they thought Charlie set these fires to see what happened and to detonate any defensive devices like the claymore. (Incidentally, if anyone has knowledge of these enemy activities, please contact me at telephone 253 / 582-2480 or on-line at chfchf1@aol.com. That is a number one in the email address, not an "L").

That little incident put me in the Third Army Field hospital just outside the main gate of TSN for a week. Shortly after my recovery, Chief Smart became ill and was evacuated to the States, so I became fire chief.

The busiest day I recall was one bright, sunny morning when I commanded seven fire and rescue emergencies that occurred within twelve minutes; A fire in the kitchen of the Officer's Club, a heart attack in the main BX, an Air America aircraft off the runway with two civilians on-board, an army helicopter accident, a brush fire in the bomb dump and a few other mishaps — all dealt with successfully with only minor damages and no injuries or loss of life. Some other highlights of my tour were:

- The night-time crash of a C-123 gunship on its take-off from TSN and my assistant chief on the scene reporting being sniped at from the area surrounding the crash site. This necessitated my scrambling the standby Army helicopter gunship to suppress the sniper fire;
- An F-105 sliding off the runway on landing, with pilot trapped;
- A similar incident with a B-57 landing with battle damage, when both crew members were trapped by an inoperable canopy;
- An Army helicopter coming in with the tail rotor inoperative, making lazy circles in the sky with a full load of rockets, ammo and other munitions ready to explode or burn on a very hard landing;
- A Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) T-6 landing with a hung 750 lb. bomb, which came loose as he turned off the high-speed taxi-way and slid along the

concrete right past the front of one of my waiting crash trucks;

- A VNAF C-47 that hit a water buffalo on take-off from Bin Thuy and landed at TSN with the right gear folded up from hitting that beast. It slid off the runway and when we opened the rear door about 46 Vietnamese civilians tumbled out, along with their children, dogs, young pigs and a few chickens.

One year of firefighting experience in Vietnam was said to be the equivalent of twenty years stateside. I never heard anyone argue with that observation.

Shortly after I returned to the states, I was selected for a position at Headquarters, Military Airlift Command, to fill a slot at fire protection management which had recently been converted from a civilian GS-12 to a MSgt grade.

My next three years were spent in relative quiet in that assignment. I retired in 1980 from the firefighting business with 30 years active duty in the rank of Chief Master Sergeant.



Chief Bill Ryan



So far, only four Association members have made known their intention to be a candidate for Directorship. Your Association needs your support. If you can give some time to the Association, please send an email to the

**Chair of the Nominating Committee, Dale Bryan
(dale_f_bryan@yahoo.com)**

Positions:

Known Candidates:

Secretary - Dale Bryan (Currently a Director)

Treasurer - Lois Fry (Currently Pro Tem)

Director of Membership - Walt D'Ambrosio (Currently Pro Tem)

Director – George Plunkett (Currently Pro Tem)

To Be Filled:

President

Director (2)

It is your Association. May we have your help?