

FEBRUARY 2009



A Memorial to the American Experience
In Vietnam

“All included, none excluded”

REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

THE TAN SON NHUT ASSOCIATION

2009 REUNION

PIGEON FORGE, TENNESSEE

The Tan Son Nhut Association is pleased to announce our guests-of-honor for the 2009 Reunion in Pigeon Forge, TN:



Lieutenant Thomas R. Norris, USNR (Ret.)

LT Norris and Col Whitcomb will keynote our Saturday evening, October 17th banquet with a PowerPoint presentation on the search & rescue effort to recover aviators shot down just south of the DMZ in Vietnam during 1972. During the briefing, both Norris & Whitcomb will emphasize the supporting roles of units and personnel assigned to Tan Son Nhut AB and co-located HQ USMACV.



Colonel Darrel D. Whitcomb, USAFR (Ret.)

Nguyễn Văn Kiệt, former-PO2, RVN Navy Seal (LDNN) & Sea Commandos, recipient—U. S. Navy Cross for Bat 21 rescue has also been invited to join us in Pigeon Forge, but we do not know yet of his availability.

Col Whitcomb will open with a situation-briefing of events surrounding the North Vietnamese Army "Eastertide Invasion" of Military Region I during the spring of 1972, and the subsequent shoot down of EB-66C s.n. 54-0466, with sole-survivor Lt Col Icaal "Gene" Hambleton, call sign BAT 21 Bravo, beginning Hambleton's legendary escape & evasion from enemy forces on 2 April 1972 {and lasting 11 1/2 days}. The following day, 1st Lt Mark N. Clark, call sign NAIL 38 Bravo was shot down in his OV-10A {2 km southeast of BAT 21B} and evaded capture over the next eight days. After numerous rescue attempts, and losses of SAR aircraft and life, Gen Creighton Abrams, COMUSMACV ordered no more helicopter rescue attempts.

LT Norris will then step forward, recounting how he and RVN sea commando Petty Officer Nguyễn Văn Kiệt infiltrated behind North Vietnamese lines, twice over a period of two days to rescue Lt Clark, then Lt Col Hambleton from their E&E positions, while they were surrounded by 30,000 invading NVA troops, supported by heavy NVA armor, AAA, SA-2 & SA-7 SAMs, and long-range 130mm artillery.

The Rescue of BAT 21 is the most famous SAR effort in the history of the Air Force, and was characterized in the 1988 Hollywood movie **BAT 21**, starring Gene Hackman and Danny Glover. There are also two books on the subject.

Over eight hundred strike sorties were flown in direct support of the BAT 21 SAR effort (including close-in B-52 Arc Light bomber strikes). At least eight US rescue aircraft were shot down, two US rescuers became POWs, and eleven American heroes paid the ultimate price attempting to rescue three fellow Americans down behind enemy lines during the Eastertide Offensive of 1972.

A total of 234 medals were awarded to individuals for the Bat 21B & Nail 38 B rescue missions.

LT Norris received our Nation's highest recognition -- the Medal of Honor.

However, in making this ultimate sacrifice, the TSNA pause to remember the motto of these heroic search and rescue forces:

"That others may live"

John 15:13

"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."



Citation:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a SEAL Advisor with the Strategic Technical Directorate Assistance Team, Headquarters, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. During the period 10 to 13 April 1972, Lieutenant Norris completed an unprecedented ground rescue of two downed pilots deep within heavily controlled enemy territory in Quang Tri Province. Lieutenant Norris, on the night of 10 April, led a five-man patrol through 2,000 meters of heavily controlled enemy territory, located one of the downed pilots at daybreak, and returned to the Forward Operating Base (FOB). On 11 April, after a devastating mortar and rocket attack on the small FOB, Lieutenant Norris led a three man team on two unsuccessful rescue attempts for the second pilot. On the afternoon of the 12th, a Forward Air Controller located the pilot and notified Lieutenant Norris. Dressed in fishermen disguises and using a sampan, Lieutenant Norris and one Vietnamese traveled throughout that night and found the injured pilot at dawn. Covering the pilot with bamboo and vegetation, they began the return journey, successfully evading a North Vietnamese patrol. Approaching the FOB, they came under heavy machine gun fire. Lieutenant Norris called in an air strike which provided suppression fire and a smoke screen, allowing the rescue party to reach the FOB. By his outstanding display of decisive leadership, undaunted courage, and selfless dedication in the face of extreme danger, Lieutenant Norris enhanced the finest traditions of the United States Naval Service.



RVN PO **Nguyen Van Kiet** {shown at left with LT Norris} was awarded the US Navy Cross, http://www.homeofheroes.com/brotherhood/seals_kiet_award.html the only Vietnamese national so recognized during the Vietnam War.

More about our special guests is continued on Page 3. —————>

Colonel Darrel D. Whitcomb is a 1969 graduate of the United States Air Force Academy. Col Whitcomb served three tours in Southeast Asia as a cargo pilot and 'Nail' forward air controller in the OV-10 Bronco and 'Raven' FAC in the O-1 Birdog. He is the recipient of the Silver Star medal, Distinguished Flying Cross w/ Oak Leaf Cluster, Air Medal w/ 16 OLCs, etc.



Col Whitcomb transferred to the Air Force Reserve and flew the A-37 and A-10 with the 926th Fighter Wing and the 442nd Fighter Wing. He also served tours in fighter plans on the Air Staff and in mobilization plans on the Joint Staff. He then served on the faculty at Air Command and Staff College and as the mobilization assistant to the commander of the Air Force Doctrine Center at Maxwell AFB, Alabama. Whitcomb retired in the rank of Colonel in 1999. He then became a career airline pilot for Delta Airlines until his retirement in 2003. Mr. Whitcomb recently completed a tour as a contract pilot serving and operating in Iraq.

Whitcomb has written numerous articles for magazines and periodicals and has published two books, *The Rescue of Bat 21* in 1998 and *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm* in 2006. He now works part time as a consultant to the Department of Defense, working on the history of Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR). His most recent project was chronicling the history of US Army "Dust-Off" CSAR, in the post-Vietnam time period.

Col Whitcomb has actively served as an officer/member of numerous Vietnam War heritage associations, is an accomplished public speaker and has made guest appearances as a subject-matter-expert on the History & Military Cable TV Channels.



The 2009 TSNA reunion will be held in Pigeon Forge, TN at the MainStay Suites (www.mainstaypigeonforge.com) beginning on Thursday, October 15 and ending on Sunday October 18. To obtain the special rate, reservations must be made by calling toll free 1-888-428-8350. Mention "Tan Son Nhut Association 2009" to get the special rate.

The rate is \$102.00 per night, plus tax. This rate will also be offered for up to 3 days prior and 3 days after the reunion dates for those planning to come early and/or stay later. A total of 129 guest rooms are available and we expect a large turnout, so please make your reservations early. MainStay Suites feature 1 or 2 beds, kitchens, a sofa and iron/ironing board.

Reservations made with a credit card will not be charged to your account until you actually check into the hotel.

Some of the amenities offered are a business center, cable/satellite TV, elevators, exercise room, free continental breakfast, free high speed internet, indoor and outdoor heated pools, guest laundry and a free newspaper (Monday thru Friday). No pets are allowed.



Tan Son Nhut Association 2009 Reunion Registration

OPEN TO ALL INTERESTED IN THE HISTORY AND LEGACY OF TAN SON NHUT AND THE VIETNAM CONFLICT
YES, SIGN ME UP FOR THE REUNION!

NAME _____ BRANCH OF SERVICE _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

NAME(S) OF YOUR GUEST(S): _____

PLEASE LIST ANY SPECIAL NEEDS: _____

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY NOTIFY: _____

DATE OF ARRIVAL: _____ DEPARTURE: _____

REGISTRATION FEES

NUMBER OF PERSONS ATTENDING _____ X \$130. = _____

PAYMENT MUST BE **MAILED** NO LATER THAN **October 1st, 2009**

MAKE PAYMENTS PAYABLE TO THE "TAN SON NHUT ASSOCIATION" AND MAIL
PAYMENTS TO:

TAN SON NHUT ASSOCIATION

C/O GEORGE PLUNKETT

587 WILLIAMS CIRCLE

WEST COLUMBIA, SC 29172



TSNA GOLFERS!!

If you would like to arrive early for the reunion and play golf in the Pigeon Forge area, please email me with your name and phone number. Tee time reservations are not accepted more than 30 days in advance. I will contact Eagles Landing Golf Course on Sept 14 and give them a list of interested participants

Here is an internet link to the golf course at URL: <http://www.seviervilletn.org/DepartmentPages/Golf.htm> And don't forget - the MainStay Suites will honor our special Reunion rate for three days before AND three days after the Reunion - so come on down

George Plunkett Email: Viet62@aol.com.

TWENTY-SEVEN FEET FROM IMMINENT DEATH

By: Charles E. Penley:
377th SPS
TSNA Webmaster

Just past 0333 hours, January 31, 1968, a passenger jet bearing the Seaboard World logo took off toward the west end of Tan Son Nhut Air Base, located on the NW outskirts of Saigon. Upon clearing the western most perimeter fence, the sky lit up like a Christmas tree, with thousands of green tracer rounds. It was evident that the enemies tracer rounds were trying to find their airborne target and cause the jet to crash and kill all those aboard. You see, this was not just an ordinary jet, but a Freedom Bird.

It contained men and women of all the services, who had completed serving their one year tour, in Vietnam and were currently on their way to the States; to home and to loved ones. The enemy had not been successful in their endeavors.

It was at that moment when I observed death approaching for the very first time. The enemy had already made their presence known on the Eastern perimeter and Northern perimeter of the base by attacking thirteen different locations. Now, they were apparently coming for us. With a determination in their minds that I have never experienced, they came. I am glad to say that my partner this night was A1C Alan D. Tucker, 377th Combat Security Police Squadron. The Security Police had been placed in Security Condition Red at 1730 hours, on January 31, 1968, as a result of rocket and mortar attacks on a number of other installations the night before. Almost none of the Vietnamese civilians had come to work throughout the base. A few enemy soldiers had been taken prisoner and interrogated earlier that same day.

Almost immediately A1C Tucker made the first of many radio calls. With a

seriousness in his voice he radioed, "Security Control, Tango-4 !!! Go about 100 yards out directly in front of my post. There's about twenty men out there. They're setting up mortars." Central Security control immediately requested additional information from Tango-4. Once more Tucker spoke into his hand-held radio, "They're directly in front of my post, a hundred yards off the west perimeter. They're setting up 100 yards in front of the west perimeter. They are directly in front of the West perimeter. This area must be illuminated because they might try to attack the base."

A Vietnamese taxi-cab pulled up in front of the O-51 Gate, which was approximately 100 yards from Tango-4. The VC in the taxi-cab, members of the C-10 Sapper Battalion using Bangalore type charges, blew a large hole in the O-51 Gate and fence line. This allowed the enemy to by-pass the mine fields on either side of the O-51 Gate. The O-51 Bunker, a concrete and steel re-enforced structure adjacent to the immediate South of the O-51 Gate, returned the enemies fire, but, within minutes was silenced by two direct hits from RPG-2 or RPG-7 rockets. They killed four of the five 377th Security Policemen inside (the only 377th Security Police Squadron KIAs during the battle). The O-51 bunker was being manned by SGT Alonzo J. Coggins, SGT William J. Cyr, SGT Louis H. Fischer, SGT Charles E. Hebron, SGT Roger B. Mills.

I am sad to inform you that within minutes of the initial attack that Sgt's Cyr, Fischer, Hebron and Mills lost their lives. I am proud to say that I had served with each and every one of those brave men in recent days and weeks, knowing them very well. As A1C Tucker was making his report, the NVA and their VC counter-parts began firing their ordinance. Literally, all hell broke loose with the enemy's firing of 122 mm rockets, RPG-2 rockets, RPG-7 rockets, 81 mm mortars, recoilless rifles, crew served .50 caliber machine guns, small arms rounds,

hand grenades, automatic weapons, small arms and other miscellaneous weaponry impacted on the base.

It was then that A1C Tucker continued to make his situation reports to Central Security Control. What was at first twenty men became swarms of assault troops. They were coming on post under the enormous barrage being laid down by their own comrades. There was no holding back the magnitude of the enemy movement facing us. Their ultimate goal was to take over Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Seventh Air Force Headquarters and Military Assistance Command Vietnam (General Westmoreland's command post), and to have a popular uprising of the local citizens. Some of the NVA in the first human wave were pilots. They were to make their way to the flight line and commandeered planes or helicopters and use those aircraft's to further attack Tan Son Nhut, Air Base and the city of Saigon.

TSgt Billy M. Palmer, Echo Sector NCOIC in his gun jeep, was enroute to our location as a result of our calls for assistance. However, TSgt Palmer and his quick reaction force personnel were quickly surrounded and were pinned down for the next several hours. No friendly forces were able to approach the O-51 bunker or Tango-4 tower, due to the intense enemy fire.

I took a quick look in a 360 degree direction and observed that the enemy was all around Tucker and myself. The military terminology is not they are close, but that they are close-in. It's unbelievable how many there are of them. We can see them so very clear, with the popping of slap flares and the C-130 aircraft's dropping even larger flares. These flares make the night-time look like daylight. Surely, they have spotted us. A1C Tucker and I will remain on our security post for the duration of the attack. Not because we want to, but the current situation demands it.

Movement and talking must be kept to an absolute minimum. Then I heard Tucker, with an agitated voice, make his next report, "Tango-4 to Security Control !!! Tango-4 to Security Control !!! There are thousands of them coming on base directly in front of this post !!! They are directly in front of this post !!! Tell them they are coming from the house in front of this post !!! They're forming up more people !!! VC are over-running the base !!!"

A1C Tucker continued, "They've covered the O-51 Bunker, but there's nobody out there firing !!! We need someone to cut them off out there !!! Tango-4 to Security Control !!! Right in front of my post, we are being assaulted !!! We need help down here !!! Tango-4 !!! The VC are directly below my post !!! The Vietnamese bunker below my tower is where they're at !!!"

Hit that and wipe them out !!! The VC are also in the O-51 Bunker !!! Tango-4, Security Control !!! If you blasted those houses in front of me and the bunker to the left of me. They've been coming out of there for twenty minutes. They're still coming from there!"

We heard on the radio that fire support was requested from the U.S. Army helicopter light fire team (LFT's), but, clearance was delayed for approximately 45 minutes because LFT's were unable to distinguish between friendly and enemy positions. All kinds of rounds were coming at us from the North, East, South and West. At that time, it did not matter to Tucker and me if it was friendly fire or enemy fire. Mortal or bodily damage can be inflicted on our location by either side. Tucker and I were caught in the damn cross-fire. As the hours went by, I did not worry about myself but, I was determined to save my partner that night.

It's unbelievable. Around 0600 hours, another wave of the enemy was approaching the Western perimeter of the base. The fire from the Viet Cong positions became extremely intense.

About 0630 hours, I observed "C" Troop of the 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment (3/4 Cav) of the 25th Division fighting their way down Highway 1, from the North. They had been fighting for several hours to reach our Western perimeter. At 0730 hours, "B" Troop of the 3/4 Cav entered the Northwest corner of the base and sped down the outer perimeter road to fight the Viet Cong from the North. The fine soldiers of the 25th Division suffered heavy casualties of men and their armored vehicles.

You see, I am Tango-4 !!! Made of steel and wood, and I have sandbags stacked only four bags high around the base of the tower. But, you already know that my partner that night is real. Earlier in the night he had climbed the twenty-seven feet to enable him to enter the tower and begin his tour of duty, thereby saving his life. A1C Tucker, having made it through the night, had not been wounded. Those 100 yards away in the O-51 Bunker gave the ultimate sacrifice. Without a doubt, A1C Tucker's radio messages to Central Security Control were right on the button, telling them where the enemy's location is and the various movements being conducted by the enemy, thereby saving unknown numbers of lives.

In fact, the O-51 bunker and Tango-4 was at the very center of the battle. A1C Tucker was the closest living being to see the enemy's carnage of the O-51 Bunker and those brave men within. Then later on, the American Forces and South Vietnamese Forces utilized three South Vietnamese tanks, Tan Son Nhut base artillery and mortars, Spook the Magic Dragon and the razor-back helicopters. They brought tremendous fire onto the enemy on the perimeter. In particular on more than one occasion the O-51 bunker itself was targeted. A job well done to all those involved. TSgt Palmer, A1C Tucker, Sgt Cyr, Sgt Fischer, Sgt Hebron and Sgt Mills received Silver Stars for their heroism.

<<<<<< TSNA >>>>>>

Those "deuce and a half's", or—fixing flat tires on a 2½ ton shop truck

By Gary Edwards
377CES Fuel System Maint.

Recently, I was thinking about the 2½ ton shop truck we acquired, that the MPs took away from us, since we were not assigned it just like a lot of other shops on base.

We had at one time nine guys in my MOS assigned to take care of two storage tanks, assorted piping, valves and pumps. After they took our truck we had to go back to taking the bus as far as we could, and then walk the rest of the way to the shop.

With that many guys we had very little work for everyone to maintain the Fuel Yard. At least twice a week, half of us were going to the base theater for something to do.

One of the problems we always had with the 2½ ton was it seemed we spent half the time at the motor pool repairing flat tires. Since the truck had eight rear tires. One of the rear inside tires was usually the one we had to repair as the pair in front of the rear pair was always picking up junk and tossing it into the inside rear.

On one repair trip, the motor pool had a pair of these big tongues to pull whatever out. Whatever was in the tire only stuck out only about a quarter of an inch and was so chewed up you could not tell what it was. When you looked at it on the inside of the tire, the rubber was wrapped around what looked like a huge spike. I grabbed a sledgehammer to beat it out a little more, so I could get a better grip with the tongues.

When I finally got it out I just about had a cow as it was an M-16 shell that I was beating on!

After repairing the tire you had to put the beading, I guess you would call it, back on which held the tire on the rim.

To air the tire up you put the tire in the cage just in case the ring did not hold, blowing the tire off the rim and possibly hurting yourself.

Nope, that never happened to us.

Also – talking about “transportation” and the 2 ½ ton trucks - It used to crack me up that right before lunch hour or whatever time the Vietnamese civilians got off for lunch or after their days work on base, I used to count down on my watch and would say to whomever I was with, “Watch out, here comes the “Hells Angels”, with all the civilian mopeds they were driving. If they stuck out their arm for a turn, they usually did not look back to see if it was clear to make a safe turn. They were turning regardless. Their mind set was “I am turning, get out of my way”. With the 2½ ton shop truck we would play “I dare you”. With our 2 ½, there were not any takers.



THE EARLY YEARS

By John Mayfield
13th RTS

After being stationed at TSN from 64-65 many obstacles had to be overcome.

It was decided that eventually there could be an attack on base and how would we defend our selves. Some where up the chain of command it was decided to take limited Airmen off base to train them for perimeter defense.

I was in one of the first groups to be trained in perimeter defense. I had been in the AF for almost 3yrs and 5 months and had only fired a rifle once. Back then the current M16 was called the Ar15.

We were shuttled onto a bus and off base we went. The bus did have webbing on the window but I was leery what would happen if we were stopped while we were on our trip. No munitions were given to us till we ar-

rived at our location. We must have driven about ten miles off base.

Upon arrival at this location that had set up a perimeter and fox holes for firing. We all fired that day and everything went smooth. Although I thought if VC were in the area they would be over to see what was going on. It was then decided we needed to be shown how to fire a grenade from the AR15.

Each Airman was coupled with another Airman. We must have had 15 groups. We were shown how to attach the grenade to the weapon. There were wooden boxes placed about 200 yards (my guess) from each fox hole. Each Airman sat down with his weapon with his partner behind him. Then each weapon was given a grenade to fire. I think you can see were this story is going.

The Airman sitting on the ground then raised his weapon to the angle he needed to fire on the box (in reality the enemy).

Then his partner would stand behind and adjust the angle. Once the partner thought the angle was correct all groups' partners were to pull then pins. Everyone then was to dive into their bunker. The bunkers had one flaw. They should have left a small opening for the Airmen to see how close they came to the box (enemy). To tell you the truth I was scared as hell that once I fired the grenade would not be launched. Once fired we were all supposed to dive into the bunker. Now I do not know the distance to the box but fragments of shrapnel travels a long way. Some of the Airmen decided they wanted to see if they came close to the target. I believe at least five Airmen were hit in the face or upper body from shrapnel. I looked over and saw at least 3 Airmen with blood flowing from their face. We were immediately herded back on the bus for a quick trip to the infirmary. I never heard of another group after that day going off base for special training.



The following account is from an email by Bill Stribling to a friend

NIGHT MISSION

By Bill Stribling
Razorbacks '67-'68

Fred, I talked to Joe Howell on the phone last night, remember he was crew chief with you and Chad Payne sometimes. You don't like to talk about Vietnam, but I had to pass this along. Do you remember a Viet outpost NW of Saigon in the forks of two rivers? We flew many missions in support of them, and always took a LOT of ground fire every time we went. Well they were under a massive ground assault, and ran low on everything. More than a few slicks tried to resupply ammo and food, and were shot up and driven off. We were on StarCom and CMD control called the Pigs, and of course Chad volunteered us. I was on the wing ship with Davis, Stringer, Klinker and yours truly. This was during the second TET of course. We stacked ammo and "C" Rations in the doors all the way to the ceiling, took off and away we went. Chads plan was for us to go in low and fast with all of the lights out, and kick the crates out within the fort perimeter. Both our ships hit the target, and we were gone before the VC could shoot us down. The reason I related this mission was, Joe told me last night that of all the missions during the darkest days of TET, he was more afraid and fearful on this one than any other. I was scared too, but I thought we had a good chance, and we managed to pull it off, and buy our little buddies some more time.



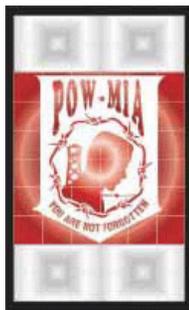
Bill Stribling

Revetments is an official publication of the Tan Son Nhut Association, Inc.
 P.O. Box 236, Penryn, PA 17564-0236
 The Association is a non-profit fraternal organization chartered under the appropriate statutes and law.

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POW-MIA TAIL LIGHT DECAL SET



VIETNAM VETERAN WITH RIBBON
KEY FOB



POW-MIA AUTO MAGNET



VIETNAM RIBBON PATCH



USA/VIETNAM CROSSED FLAGS LAPEL PIN



VIETNAM 1959-1975 LAPEL PIN



"IN MEMORY OF . . ." VIETNAM PATCH



VIETNAM VETERAN LANYARD



BALL CAP DOOBER



VIETNAM VETERAN WITH RIBBON PATCH



VIETNAM VETERAN OVAL



VIETNAM VETERAN WITH RIBBON LICENSE PLATE

MY HOOCH MATE AT TSN

By Hugh Ames
 Hq 7th AF

After I had been at TSN, General Jones took over, and brought CMSgt. Bob Mauk along as Office Manager. (Bob had the same job with General Hunter Harris at PACAF earlier!).

Bob could have lived in an air conditioned trailer but refused and came to live with the rest of us Chiefs. I wonder how many others would do this?

What was great having Bob with us, was he chose to bunk with me, and I, as well as others, really were the beneficiaries of a lot of good things.

We were gifted with many of the General's eats and other benefits. Bob always shared. He worked one heck of a lot of hours, but he always had

time for us and kept us well informed as to what was happening.

Bob went with General Jones when the General became both Chief of Staff of The Air Force and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Bob still always had time for those of us in the Pentagon and elsewhere whenever we wished to shoot the breeze with him.

Great jobs in the past? Yes. But now Bob became Manager of the "Daytona 500 Raceway"!

Alas, tragedy struck Bob in that somehow he was struck with a brain disorder that required he have close care and thus he did not recognize nor could he speak to any of us again.

When Bob passed away, a great representation of Air Staff and Joint Staff General Officers and their staff attended his funeral.

I pray none of us will suffer Bob's last days, but I hope he is aware how much we all appreciated his comradeship, no matter his station in the Air Force.

NOTATIONS FROM APPLICATIONS

Stationed at Kelly AFB Texas. Flew Scatback Missions. Flew C-118 airplanes, supported 7th Air Force flight Operations.

Gene Snowden
 Scatback



Our hooch was located just north of heliport, near dining hall on road to Camp Alpha. Worked as Combat News Editor in 7th AF Compound.

Timothy Stinson
 377th CSG
 April 69—March 70

