



REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

A couple of short stories about my time at Tan Son Nhut.

By: Harlan N Hatfield
460th PMEL
Jan 67 to Jan 68

First let me set up the scene. The Precision Measuring Equipment Laboratory (PMEL) was located in the Supply Open Storage yard. It was adjacent to the Civil Engineering Carpenter shop, just north of the power generators, and just West of the drainage ditch between us and the 800 barracks area.

The first incident was when they were resurfacing the supply yard. They were taking it down about 6 inches or so and refilling it to make the drainage better. It was being done by Vietnamese contractors and workers. We heard a big commotion outside the Lab and went out to investigate. The Vietnamese workers were going nuts and pointing to an area about 15 or 20 feet from our building and jabbering away. We found the foreman who spoke English and asked what was going on. He said it was something about some snake and the workers were afraid of it. Finally someone killed it, a small green snake about 15 inches long. The foreman said that it was very poisonous, and would kill you in 5 minutes or so. Finally the GI overseer had to get the snake and take it somewhere and bury it before the men would go back to work.

I guess it was a bad one but to us it was just another day at TSN.

The second story has to do with the same project of improving the drainage of the Supply Outdoor Storage Yard. As the bulldozer was working scraping down the soil to allow filling with gravel and such to allow drainage improvement.

I was working in one of the side rooms calibrating some equipment. The air conditioner ducting ran along the outside wall of the building in a two foot high by 2 foot wide wooden duct with the metal ducting inside. Well the Vietnamese operator of the bulldozer happened to back into the building sticking the hitch into the AC duct. Well you can imagine what a noise that made and I was right next to it. I just knew one of the new 122mm rockets had hit us. I figured that it was too far from the perimeter to be a mortar. Anyway we all made a bee line for the front door and found nothing much going on there. Upon investigation we found the dozer with the hitch sticking into the side of the building and the driver was getting a good tongue lashing from his foreman. After a few minutes the heart beat was back to normal and everyone went back to work.

One more day closer to DEROS.



Looking Ahead

By: Larry E. Fry
VP, TSNA
Editor, Revetments

As the graphic by Charles Penley in the previous column reminds us, the 2009 Reunion is fast approaching.

I won't be returning from that trip until October 24, so there won't be enough time for a full Reunion report for the November issue of Revetments, so I will be publishing basically a one story edition for November—the story of TSNA member Tom Tessier's recent trip to Vietnam.

I will then be doing a Reunion Special Edition as soon as I can get all the data together, and everyone sends me their comments and pictures!

FAVORITE SAYINGS



Boys will be boys, and so will a lot of middle-aged men.
~Kin Hubbard~

CURIOSITY: Nature's gift to children by which they learn how little parents know.

Redeye to South Vietnam

By: Ron Boydston
525 Combat Eval. Grp. US Army

In the middle of August 1969 – just about the time that a certain music festival in upstate New York was getting underway - I received the paperwork that I had been expecting since entering the United States Army the previous November: orders to Vietnam.

I was at Fort Gordon, Georgia, where I had finished a radio-teletype course at the Army's sprawling Southeastern Signal School, which trained not only soldiers but those from other branches of the military as well.

The weather in Georgia at that time of the year was sultry - hot temperatures, high humidity, and spectacular thunderstorms that rolled across the piney woods and red clay landscape, flashing and booming like airborne drill instructors. Full of sound and fury, they made good on their threats by dumping copious amounts of water on the earth below.

As it turned out, the summer weather in the southeastern United States was a good preparation for a year in Southeast Asia.

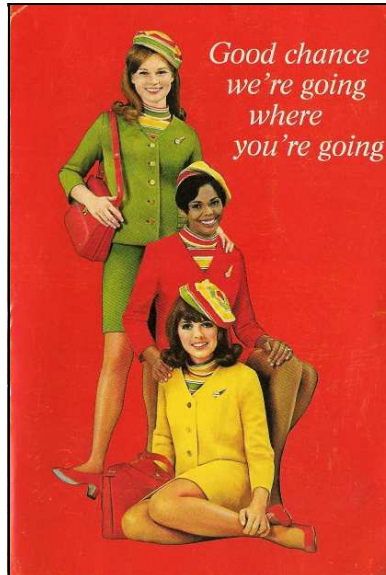
The next three weeks were ones of personal preparation for war: flying home to California, putting my affairs in order, saying my goodbyes, and wondering what the following year would be like.

At least I would be flying to my war. I had heard from my father how Army troops from World War II had sailed to theirs, jammed into the holds of ships for days on end like so much sardines.

At Oakland Army Base I joined up with hundreds of other soldiers who were being outfitted before shipping out. I turned in my stateside issue, received jungle fatigues and boots and even olive-drab underwear, and said goodbye to my old fatigues and Class-A

dress uniform, in which I had been sent to KP the day after arriving.

After a couple of days of processing we were driven to the airport, and lo and behold, the plane we were filing onto was no military aircraft at all, but a civilian 707, a contract flight operated by TWA. Nice!



As I was settling into my seat, I noticed several postcards in the seat pocket in front of me, showing three very attractive flight attendants and a caption that was both ironic and amusing: "Good chance we're going where you're going." Well, sure, and what a coincidence – but this flight and this war were not my idea. "More than 800 flights a day in the U.S.A." read the other side of the card, but I had the feeling that this particular flight was not included in that total.

After 5 ½ hours we arrived in Hawaii, where the jet refueled and changed crews. Aside from our destination, and the fact that the plane was filled to absolute capacity with military types, you would hardly have known that we were headed to a conflict. There was no first-class section on this flight – just row after row of seats the entire length of the aircraft, a testament to military logistical efficiency. We ate well, had seven different music channels to choose from, and were con-

stantly being looked after by the hostesses on board. There was even a purser aboard the flight, although I never did learn exactly what he did for several hundred G.I.s who had one-way tickets to Vietnam.

At the Honolulu airport we were able to deplane briefly if we wished, so I spent some time walking around on U.S. soil for one last time. It was 20 degrees warmer than Oakland had been, with a light rain, and even though it was the middle of the night, there were still people strolling around the terminal in flowered shirts and dresses. There was a little garden in the terminal, with tropical plants and fishes, and I decided that if I ever got the chance I would like to come back to this island paradise. (And 38 years later I did, when our son was attending the University of Hawaii.)

At 0200 hours we were on our way again, flying west into the night, this time on an 8 ½ hour leg to Kadena Air Base on Okinawa. It was windy there, and the plane had to fight a crosswind on landing, which provided a little excitement to the previous hours of humdrum; but we got down ok, took on more fuel, and were soon back in the sky.

I was tired by now, and my ability to think and to write was getting fuzzier by the hour. But then we were across the South China Sea and heading down the coast of South Vietnam, and I, along with the entire plane, woke up. The pilot announced that we were passing over Nha Trang, and remarked that one would not even know that there was a war going on when you were in that coastal resort city. (I made a mental note of this as a possible destination, and months later attempted – unsuccessfully – to spend an in country R & R there, but was turned away by an MP who didn't like the looks of my weekend pass.)

MORE >>>>>>>>>



**These Guys:
Cold War Stories
Told By
Cold War Warriors**

Collected and Edited by Trish Schiesser
2009, Old Lieutenant Press, Portsmouth VA
ISBN 0-9670169-4-0
Soft cover, 718 pages
Reviewed by Bill Grayson (wcgrayson@earthlink.net)
Det.5, 6922nd Security Wing, USAFSS
July 66—July 67

Staff Sergeant Phillip C. Noland was a USAF Security Service Radio Intercept Analyst from 1951 to 1965. Following successive SIGINT assignments in Europe and the Far East, Sgt. Noland experienced baffling health issues and left active duty. He was later killed in a traffic accident in New York City.

Phil's sister, Trish, has spent half a lifetime seeking answers to open questions about what Phil did in the Air Force and the illness that prematurely shortened his career. The discovery of USAFSS unit alumni websites and email contacts enabled Trish's correspondence with a great many helpers, who guided her search for military records that might hold informative clues. Many also dug deeply, 40 to 50 years back into sometimes dimming memories, informing Trish that they remembered her brother or that they had served in 69XX units similar to his, often suggesting ideas about what analytic duties he probably performed. Some helped with translations of the acronyms and abbreviations in Phil's military records and orders. Soon a substantial network of cyberspace helpers was filling the blanks in each others' recollections.

As the email contacts mounted, a colorful first-person mural depicting the normally-hidden world of clandestine Cold War operations began to emerge. Trish was soon able to grasp not only the routines of her brother's classified USAFSS service but something more she hadn't expected. Veterans of a shadowy unseen world, customarily reluctant to "talk about it" and officially gagged by lifetime secrecy oaths, had always lacked a public outlet for trading work-related reminiscences, claiming unrecognized credit, second-guessing the brass, documenting obscure exploits, questioning and criticizing, and otherwise offering pent-up personal commentaries. Before long, an expanding network broadened in scope well beyond the SIGINT world as headquarters types, aviators, blue water sailors, and veteran grunts of ground warfare added to the picture. Sensing their common need to communicate long-suppressed memories, Trish planted an Internet seed asking that Cold War anecdotes be contributed for a book she thought she might pull together.

Trish imposed a late 2008 cutoff for submissions, having selected 227 articles by 70 named authors and 11 who remain anonymous. At 718 pages, *These Guys* presents a spectrum of attempts at writing by many who haven't done much formal writing (some results better than others). Several entries are verbatim emails containing tidbits of info, included just as Trish received them. Quite a few submissions are clearly long-awaited opportunities to vent frustrations that continue to trouble young troops since morphed into senior citizens. The articles are real, un-self-conscious, sometimes raw and spiced with strong GI language. The collection in *These Guys* is an untold part of Cold War crypto logic and secret operations history reported from the indispensable worker-bee level and parallels histories of earlier US wars pieced together from troops' letters home.

These Guys is highly recommended reading for Cold War era veterans of cryptology service, many of whom are going to learn something new or to find an explanation for something they may not have understood way-back-when or will have their memories jogged about long-forgotten events. The collected stories should also be an inspiration to reflective military, military family, and civilian role players of the Cold War years to document and share their experiences and contributions.

For ordering and pricing information, contact the author Trish Schiesser, directly via email: Clara19126@msn.com.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This was Bill Grayson's idea, and is the first installment of other to come in the future. If you would like to contribute in this manner, or with a movie review, etc. just let me know.



FREEDOM ISN'T FREE

I watched the flag
pass by one day,
It fluttered in the breeze.
A young Marine Saluted it,
And then he stood at ease..

I looked at
Him in uniform
So young, so tall, so proud,
With hair cut square
And eyes alert
He'd stand out in any crowd.

I thought how many men like him
Had fallen through the years.
How many died on foreign soil
How many mothers' tears?
How many pilots' planes shot down?
How many died at sea
How many foxholes were soldiers' graves?

No, freedom isn't free

I heard the sound of Taps one night,
When everything was still,
I listened to the bugler play
And felt a sudden chill.

I wondered just how many times
That Taps had meant 'Amen,'
When a flag had draped a coffin

Of a brother or a friend.

I thought of all the Children,
Of the mothers and the wives,
Of fathers, sons and Husbands
With interrupted lives.
I Thought about a graveyard
At the bottom of the sea
Of unmarked graves in Arlington .

No, freedom isn't free.

Linda Z 

Editor's Note:

*"Thank you Linda Z.
Though we have no idea who you may be."*

Contributed by Ted Dodge
377th Supply Squadron
Aug 68-Aug 70

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What God Has Promised

God hath not promised
Skies always blue,
Flower strewn pathways
All our lives through.
God hath not promised
Sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow
Peace without pain.

But, God hath promised
Strength for the day,
Rest for your labor
Light for the way,
Grace for all the trials
Help from above,
Unfailing sympathy
Undying Love

(Author Unknown)
(Contributed by Janice Jones, TSNA Cheerleader)