



REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

A Memorial to the American Experience in Vietnam



OCTOBER 2018

Guy Gruters Story
TSNA Banquet Speaker

By: Rich Carvell, TSNA VP

How to survive in a North Vietnamese prisoner of war facility? Put your trust in God and forgive your enemies.

That was the stirring message from Guy Gruters, the key-note speaker at the 2018 Tan Son Nhut annual Reunion banquet at the Hope Hotel and Conference Center at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio.

Gruters' aircrafts were shot down twice over North Vietnam. The second time, he was captured by the North Vietnamese and spent the next five years as a POW in six different POW camps. Twice he was in the infamous Hanoi Hilton. While in prison, he experienced a conversion experience and finally forgave the guards who had killed his friend, Lance Sijan.

The terror of war struck Gruters' aircraft on December 20, 1967, in the form of 57mm antiaircraft gunfire. He and his fellow pilot, Colonel Robert R. Craner, were flying at a very low altitude and ejected from their crippled plane under 1500 feet when the plane inverted and lost all hydraulic control from enemy fire.

When Gruters' parachute dropped him to the ground, he ran into nearby woods to hide from the enemy as he heard alarm bells sounding in a village close by. He said he could see hundreds of people racing from the village toward him, many carrying machetes and ready to cut him to pieces. But that was not to be, Gruters said.

NVA soldiers had already captured Gruters, tied his hands and shackled his feet, as the civilians with machetes came closer and closer. But death at their hands was not to be.

The NVA officer on the scene, Gruters said, "saved my life." He ordered his troops to fix bayonets to halt the charging throng as the soldiers surrounded Gruters to protect him from the mob racing toward him. And the crowd did stop, Gruters said, "about ten yards out."

The NVA officer ordered the civilians to open a path for them to pass through, and they obeyed his order.

After his capture, Gruters said he was first put into a bamboo cage in an area south of Hanoi; he was in leg irons and handcuffs to keep him from escaping. The cage had no facilities. His bathroom, Gruters said, was a nearby pond where guards would take him to relieve himself. But things were to get worse.

Gruters was interrogated three or four times every day. Treatment at the hands of the enemy was oppressive. After undergoing interrogation, Gruters said he began to hear voices telling him to stop eating and to commit suicide. It was impossible, he said, for him to stop hating the guards for the ways they treated him.

Hating the guard was an easy thing to do, but Gruters said he came to realize that hating was just wrong. He said he felt he had to stop hating them and prayed, "Jesus, help me." He prayed for hours, Gruters said, and finally was happy when he could honestly pray, "Father, forgive them." It was then, Gruters said, that he knew God was in control and in charge.

Gruters explained the "tap code" system of communications developed by the POWs to communicate with one another, yet keep that communication effort hidden from the enemy guards. For his TSNA audience, he illustrated how prisoners would tap out brief messages. One thing was for sure, Gruters said. Each tapped message ended with either the letters GBA or GBU. GBA, he said, stood for "God bless America." GBU meant "God bless you."

Only one guard spoke English, so Gruters conversed with that guard during interrogation sessions. But he got into an argument with that guard as he tried to "convert" the enemy soldier who insisted that the government gave them everything they needed. Gruters disagreed and argued that everything comes from God. The NVA guard lost it, Gruters said, and began to scream at him in English. Other guards quickly came into the interrogation room to see what was happening.

Because he argued so loudly with the guard – a No-No -- Gruters said he was put into a "hot box" that morning just an hour before noon. He said that he knew he would die in that hot box. But a strange thing happened. Before closing the door to the box, one of the North Vietnamese guards picked up a piece of card-

board from the ground and handed it to Gruters. And Gruters thought, "God is with me. He gave me a fan to keep cool." Then, five minutes after the guards put him into the box, he heard thunder off in the distance, followed by a cooling rain that lowered the temperature in the hot box and all around. He said that he prayed, thanking God for the fan and for the blessing of an end to the torture at the hands of the guards.

In November 1970, the US raid on the Son Tay prison facility west of Hanoi was – as Gruters put it – "the most successful prison raid in history." How could a mission to free Americans at Son Tay be classified as "successful" when there were no prisoners at the facility to be freed? The answer, Gruters said, was that it forced the North Vietnamese to consolidate all American prisoners in one location, and under those conditions, the NVA did not have enough one-person cells to keep prisoners apart from one another. So, for the first time, all of the POWs were together each day, talking, communicating openly, encouraging one another ... but most of all – in defiance of the NVA guards – holding regular worship services each Sunday. The prisoners were ordered to cease the worship services, but they refused.

Gruters said it was "Christian leadership among the prisoners which got us out of captivity."
All Americans held by the North Vietnamese came home in 1973.



DAWN PATROL

Our TSNA group took in the "Dawn Patrol" flying event Saturday morning. We were lucky to have our reunion at this time. The event is held every other year.

This is WWI history for sure. Included with the flying, they had re-enactors in a war encampment and radio controlled model aircraft. Lot's of old vehicles and speakers.

Very educational.

Randall W Brown
President-TSNA



Chaplain's Corner

By Andy Csordas
Associate Chaplain
Treasurer

As human beings we all have good times and tough times. Our guest speaker at the Dayton 2018 TSNA Reunion redefined tough times for me. For readers who were not present Capt. Guy Gruters spent 5 years as a POW in North Vietnam, the latter part in the infamous Hanoi Hilton. It certainly made my "tough times" seem like a walk in the park. I am not minimizing tragedies in our lives, but for me it put things in perspective.

Capt. Gruters talked about how he had to forgive his captors, which of course was no easy task, and how he became closer to God. In his book he states he was closer to God then than any part of his life. He described how the move to the Hanoi Hilton was a great thing for the prisoners because they were finally together, not just one or two to a cell. In his book he said the "prison camp experience resulted in great joy and blessings" because it brought him closer to God. Wow, when we think of that prison we, those who were not there, do not think of it as a blessing.

In his book he also talked about a fellow prisoner, Larry Barbay, who was in prison for seven years. During that time the North Vietnam captors did not give Larry one single letter from his wife who wrote many letters to him over that period. Larry had no way of knowing his wife and five children were home waiting for him, because with no letters from home it could be assumed she moved on. Thank about how tough that would be on you.

So where do we go when the times get tough? Do we turn to God for comfort, peace or understanding? Again, we do have tough times, certainly not a prison camp with daily tortures, but our tough times are real, up close and personal to us in the moment. They can be devastating to us and others.

As King Hezekiah said to the people of Judah, "but with us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles".

Allow the Lord to help you fight your battles.

Honorary Membership in TSNA

Presenting Capt. Guy Gruters his Honorary Membership in TSNA.

Guy gave us a wonderful and insightful talk on the struggles he had gone through as a POW.

Our reunion was blessed by his presentation.

Randall W Brown
President, TSNA



2019 TSNA REUNION-LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS

Our 2019 TSNA Reunion will be held Thursday, September 12, 2019 - Sunday, September 15, 2019.

Our hotel for next year is the **Four Points Sheraton Little Rock Midtown**.

STAY TUNED!!

(More photos from Friday evenings activities)



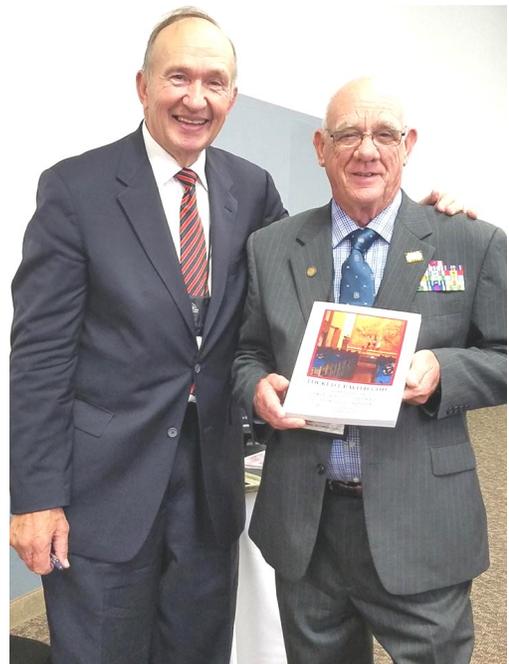
Thank you to the Wright-Patterson AFB Honor Guard - (Notice how perfect in step they are - left feet off the ground And perfect bend to their legs).



AND, a big Thank You to Johnnie & Sharon Jernigan, and Jimmy Smith, for this years meaningful "Missing Man" table setting.



Thanks to the efforts of TSNA Member Jim Stewart, and his brother Joe, all the veterans received a Pin and Proclamation Certificate Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War.



Gary Fields receives his signed copy of Guy Gruters' Book

TSNA Memorial Re-Dedication at Dayton:

By: Dale Bryan
TSNA Secretary

September 21 was a fine morning during the cusp between summer and fall in Dayton with a pleasant temperature and a refreshing breeze. Such a contrast to 2012 when the Tan Son Nhut Association Memorial Bench was originally dedicated. On that morning, there was a very brisk and biting wind, and the participants were much bundled up and not wanting to linger in the area.

On Friday the 21st, we came together again to celebrate and linger at the bench site in what may be termed a rededication.

The honor guard from Wright-Patterson AFB placed the flags before the bench in a patriotic gesture. Associate Chaplain Andy Csordas gave the invocation to allow us to express our humility and thank God for making a day such as this possible.

In a few moments of sorrow, the names were read of those TSNA members who have passed away since the last reunion. Sadly, that list seems to be a bit longer each year to reflect that we are all aging.

Memorial Chair Gary Fields led in placing a wreath before the bench with the flags.

TSNA Member Jimmie Smith blew taps.

The honor guard retired the colors.

Yes, this describes a rather routine and comparatively brief ceremony, but it was really special and very enduring in emotion and humility.

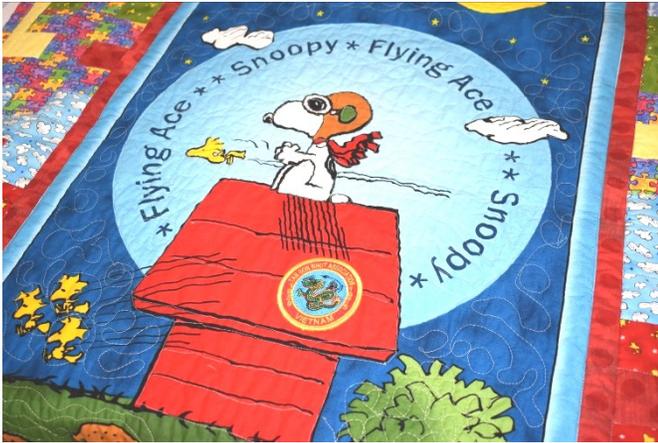


2018 Reunion Silent and Live Auction

Our silent auction at the 2018 TSNA Reunion in Dayton was another success. We want to thank all of our members who both bid on items and who brought items for the Auction. We had a wide variety of items again this year, from Air Force memorabilia to the ever present Ginger Snaps. We also had a group of assorted cups from military posts which netted \$33.00 in donations. Our total receipts for the silent auction was \$1,068.

The two quilts auctioned off netted an additional \$425. The "Snoopy" quilt, made by Victoria Meadows Veblen, was purchased by George Plunkett. The "Patriotic" quilt was made by Richard and Donna Roberts and was purchased by Paul Mortensen, who donated it back to the TSNA for another auction.

The 50/50 drawing netted \$580 with the winner, Judy Masters, donating her share back to the TSNA. Thanks to all the folks who participated, it helps fund our reunions and our scholarships which, as Carol Bessette said, is our organization's legacy.



A TRIBUTE TO OUR LATE TREASURER, CAROL BESSETTE



Prominently displayed in the Hospitality Suite was this Display in Honor of Carol



FROM OUR AMERICAN WIDOWS PROJECT GUEST.

Randall:

I've attached a few photos including our last family photo taken in July 2005. I'm holding my belly in that photo because our son, Christopher, had not yet been born. Our son was born October 11th and Arthur was killed October 19th.

I look forward to this weekend and meeting you personally.

Veronica Mora



At the Banquet: Veronica Mora, Randall Brown, TSNA President, George and "Trish" Plunkett, our TSNA Contact with AWP

PRESENTATION BY JOSEPH S. STEWART II, CDR, USN (RET.)

Mr. Stewart attended the Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD following graduation from Montrose High School. Following graduation, he attended flight training and was designated Maritime Patrol Navigator and Carrier Qualified Pilot in October 1967. He also gained Aircraft Commander and Mission Commander Designations. His assignments in the Pacific took him to the Philippines, Okinawa, Japan, Singapore and Diego-Garcia. He served a tour with the Air Force Institute of Technology, Wright-Patterson AFB, OH, where he was promoted to Commander. He retired from the Navy in September 1988 after serving 26 years active duty and 2700 hours flight time. He awards include, the Sea Service and Deployment Medal, Air Force Commendation Medal and Navy Unit Commendation Medal.

He interviewed Prisoners of War (POWs) intimating and relating stories of a number of them, such as Bud Day, John McCain, William Shay, Mike Roberts, and Thomas Moe among others. Most notably was his story of Brigadier General Bud Day and John McCain. McCain and Day shared a prison cell for several years. When McCain arrived, Day took it upon himself to tend to McCain's injuries resulting from ejection from his aircraft. This went on for a considerable period until McCain regained strength and agility. After these two were separated into different cells Colonel Thomas Moe, who became a cell mate with McCain for 5 years, related that McCain had refused an offer to be released from prison denying NVA a propaganda victory.

Mr. Stewart reminded us that General Day had filed a Federal District Court Lawsuit to ensure retirees would have medical care resulting in what's known today as "Tri-Care for Life" for retirees. General Day is known as the champion of retired health care matters.

He reminisced about Colonel William "Gene" Shay, a WWII POW who survived the German Death March to a POW Camp. (I had never heard of this death march, but am very familiar with the Philippine Death March by Japan). While Shay was in prison he was able to walk to freedom when German guards were not watching or were distracted. (An amazing story).

He also interviewed Colonel Mike Roberts, USAF Academy graduate who was held POW in Bagdad for 6 weeks and related his treatment as a POW.

According to Mr. Stewart, General James "Robbie" Robinson was the senior POW and the glue that held together all the POWs in the Hanoi Hilton POW Camp. Always reminding them of their Code of Honor and not to sacrifice their honor for favors from the guards. The prisoners always looked to him for guidance and advice. Interestingly, General Robinson was my 832nd Air Division Commander at Cannon AFB, NM during my 5 year tour there.

Jim Faulkner
TSNA Director-At-Large



**A PAUSE FOR OUR SANTA CLAUS'S
Rich Carvell, Jimmy Smith, Lynn Patton**



**Taking their Oath of Office are the newly elected Treasurer,
Andy Csordas; re-elected Director of Communications, Gary
Fields; and re-elected Director of Membership, Larry Fry**

REQUEST FOR EXHIBITION LOANS

From Randall Brown
President, TSNA

Freedom Bird: Airlines and the Vietnam Experience Scheduled for November 2018 – May 2019 San Francisco International Airport

SFO Museum is conducting research for an exhibition on the experiences of the air crews that flew the airline charter service into Southeast Asia during the Vietnam conflict. This exhibition will focus on the compelling human dimension experienced by crew members involved in flying thousands of young service men into and out of the war zone. We are reaching out to the airline retiree community hoping to gather stories and borrow objects and images that will bring this chapter of aviation history to life. The types of objects and materials we are seeking for loan include: • Airline publications and communiques • Transit documents, tickets, luggage labels, etc. • Souvenirs • Other materials with special connections to the subject • First person accounts and personal experiences • Letters and correspondence • Journals and log books • Photographs • News clippings and media publications

As part of the Airport Commission, City and County of San Francisco, SFO Museum has produced public exhibition programs since 1980. We are accredited by the American Alliance of Museums and staffed by museum professionals. Please visit sfomuseum.org for additional information. Our Registration Department coordinates all Loan Agreements documents, incoming receipts, and outgoing return receipts, and oversees fine arts care and handling. The Airport will assume all shipping and insurance costs.

If you have personal collections or stories you would be willing to make available for the exhibition, please contact: Sam Scott Curator of Aviation SFO Museum P.O. Box 8097 San Francisco, CA 94128

samuel.scott@flysf.com . (650) 821-6759

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Thanks to Johnnie Jernigan for arranging for the wreath, and Jimmy Smith, our Bugler, for their work in making the Memorial Re-dedication a success

Gary Fields, Director of Communications

BX/PX Special Note:

Johnnie Jernigan, Director of Marketing, wishes to mention that we are temporarily out of stock of #T4 TSNA Lapel Pin.

REUNION 2020

Joe Kricho, Director of Reunion Planning, has begun his “due diligence” on the top three choices for our 2020 reunion. Those cities are: #1, Tucson, AZ; #2, Albuquerque, NM; and #3, Branson, MO. Stay tuned!!

FROM THE PREZ:

We had a young sailor stop by the Reunion at Dayton who was trying to locate some buddies from Tan Son Nhut who might have know his Dad.
His Dad name is:

Fred J. Phillips Jr (Phil)
Air Evacuated-SMSgt-USAF

Fred Phillips III (Son)
Phone-913-269-3511

Tan Son Nhut Association
P. O. Box 236
Penryn PA 17564

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Chaplains Emeriti:
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Rev. Dr. James M. Warrington, TSNA Chaplain: 1997-2018
Presidents Emeriti:
Don Parker, (1947-2014), Co-Founder and President 1996-2002
John Peele, Co-Founder and President 2002-2004
Wayne Salisbury, (1940-2014), President 2004-2007
Robert Robinson Gales, President 2007-2011
George Plunkett, President 2011-2015

Web Site: www.tsna.org
Annual Membership: \$20.00
Five Year Membership: \$80.00
Life Membership: \$180.00



We had good publicity at the hotel entrance!

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