



# REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

A Memorial to the American Experience in Vietnam



DECEMBER 2019

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

By Jimmy Smith  
Chaplain

Greetings fellow members of TSNA: As your Chaplain I welcome all new members of TSNA. My prayers and wishes for each of you is for everyone to have a blessed, safe and happy December. We are rapidly approaching one of my favorite times of the year. A time when we can focus on others and share the joy of the season with them.

**Christmas is the Season of Joy and Giving:** My wish is for everyone to have a safe and enjoyable Christmas season and "Merry Christmas" to everyone not offended by the greeting. Happy Hanukkah to all of our Jewish friends as they celebrate the rededication of the Holy Temple during the eight-day wintertime "festival of lights", and Happy Holidays to all others.

**Good Tidings of Great Joy** – In Luke Chapter 2 verses 10, 11 and 14 the announcement of Jesus's coming is made. "Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord'" "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace and good will toward men"

Show your love toward all of your families and fellow Veterans by remembering all who are elderly, alone and without family, or too far away from family to be with them. We, the members of TSNA, are family to them and we may be their only family. They need to know we care. Remember also all those who have lost loved ones this year, as this will be their first Christmas without them. Let us all keep in mind the gift of a Savior given to us from the heart of a loving God and celebrate the true reason for this season, and that is the birth of Jesus and the blessings He brought to each of us. Take the time to list and count the many blessings that come through Him. It may surprise you. Remember also The Bible clearly teaches us the principles of loving God and loving people which includes loving our neighbors, our TSNA family and fellow veterans and helping them, not expecting anything in return, is a true blessing. Keep in mind that what you do for others is showing your love for them. May God continue to bless you with peace and strengthen your goodwill to others!

Thank you to all of our members for your service and your support to the TSNA organization, and welcome to all new members to the family.

Until next month, this is your Chaplain signing off. Have a blessed month and God's speed.

FROM THE PREZ



We are approaching the Holiday season and the busy shopping season.

Just remember our fellow Veterans in the VA, Nursing homes, etc. Stop in say hello, thank them for their service or just visit.

Maybe a goodie basket, bag of treats, or a handshake.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all our TSNA members!

Randall W Brown  
President-TSNA



## Remembering Our TSNA Veterans Veterans Day November 11, 2019 (Submitted by Jimmy Smith, TSNA Chaplain)

This Veterans Day past, the fallen heroes of Tan Son Nhut AFB and surviving TSN troops were remembered in a Veterans Day service at the Tan Son Nhut Memorial Bench located at the National Museum of the United States Air Force Memorial Gardens on Wright Patterson AFB, Dayton, Ohio. This year we honored all TSN Veterans in our service, including those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in defending Tan Son Nhut AFB and all survivors who continue to suffer from the War in Vietnam. Thank you to all members for your service and sacrifices to our Nation. Your service in Vietnam was directly and possibly indirectly responsible for saving many lives on Tan Son Nhut Air Base, and on other installations supported in Country. Lives saved include some of our TSNA members, one of whom participated in the service to honor our heroes.



Members from the VFW Post 8312 Honor Guard in Beavercreek, Ohio made up of: Left to Right: Jim Smith (TSNA Chaplain), Gary Smith (VFW Post 8312 Honor Squad), Harley Groves (Gold Star Parent & 8312 Honor Squad), Jamie Rowe (8312 Honor Squad) and TSNA Member Johnnie Jernigan (Director of Marketing and 8312 Honor Squad) participated in the service. Johnnie Jernigan led the service with opening remarks honoring first those who paid the ultimate price while defending Tan Son Nhut AFB during the 1968 Tet Offensive, then in remembering the service of all veterans who served. He stated their service was either directly or indirectly responsible for saving lives through their sacrifices or in the support services provided to the troops in Vietnam. He commented on all the living Veterans of the TSNA group who served and continue to suffer with medical issues as a result of service in Vietnam. After his comments each participating member had their opportunity to make their own statements.

In lieu of a wreath this year we placed white and red roses on the bench as a memorial to all of our Veterans. The white roses were to represent all who paid the ultimate price in giving their lives to defend our freedom. The red roses represent all living Veterans. Others attending were given the opportunity to comment. Chaplain Jim Smith prayed giving thanks for the service and dedication of all of our brave individuals who served and were remembered this Veterans Day. At the conclusion of the prayer Jim played Taps to remember our fallen heroes. May they never, ever be forgotten.



Front

One of our VFW families, James and Lesley Groves, are Gold Star parents having lost their son in a helicopter crash in service overseas. The Gold Star Memorial is adjacent to the TSNA Bench so we conducted a service at the Gold Star Memorial paying tribute to the fallen. James Groves conducted the service and Jim Smith completed the service by playing Taps. James also participated in the bench service with us.



Rear



**Special for: "Revetments" Dec. 2019 Edition  
"Christmas in Vietnam" By: Ira Cooperman**

The date was 25 Dec 1965.

I had arrived at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut Air Base only 15 days before and was still getting my bearings as a USAF intelligence officer at HQ 2nd Air Division. (The unit changed its designation to HQ 7AF on 1 Jan 66.)

Since I was Jewish, what was I going to do on Christmas? Especially since I was a "new guy" and only knew one other officer.

In the morning, I reported for duty as usual at the Indications Center, which was a series of metal trailers located not far from the TSN flight line.

While most people had the day off, I had volunteered to work since the holiday didn't hold any special significance for me.

It was a "slow day," relatively speaking, for enemy activity which I was supposed to keep track of. So when I learned sometime that hot & humid day that Bob Hope and his entourage would soon be arriving at the base, I made tracks to find out where the show would take place.

Despite the attempts of the brass to keep secret the whereabouts of VIPs like Bob Hope, GIs always got the word before we were suppose to!

When I found the show's location, they were already setting up. Within an hour or so, about 10,000 GIs had got themselves seated, anxiously awaiting to see Ann Margaret, Joey Heatherton, and other gorgeous "legs"! And, oh yes, Bob Hope.

As someone who's also a musician (I play the piano & used to play the cello), I sought out the guys who were going to play music during the show - Les Brown & His Band of Renown!

I met one of Les Brown's staff members and tried to "con" him into allowing me to play bass with the band. (If you can play the cello, you can figure out how to "fake it" on the bass!) But it was "No-go."

However, the band member was nice enough to allow me to sit with the large band, giving me a great up-front view of all the performers on stage.

I sure was homesick that day, seeing so many beautiful American girls and thinking about who I had just left behind in Boston earlier that month. But Bob Hope's jokes, the popular tunes played by the band, and being around thousands of other guys helped me feel much better.

That Christmas at Tan Son Nhut turned out to be a great day in the sun for a Jewish guy, one I'll never forget.

[NOTE: If you wish to contact Ira, his e-mail address is: [iracooperman@gmail.com](mailto:iracooperman@gmail.com)]



## TSNA "AT THE WALL" NOVEMBER 11, 2019

Larry, I just wanted to provide you with a copy of the photo taken at "The Wall" on Veterans Day. John Bessette and I (Russell Clark, Jr.) were in the procession and represented the Association. I am a TSNA member and previously participated in wreath laying ceremonies at The Wall. As a matter of fact, it was Carol Bessette that got me involved.

Russell Clark, Jr.  
Jan 68 - Apr 72  
619th Tactical Control Squadron



**Veterans Day at The Wall**  
**Thank you, John Bessette**

*Editor's Note: The reporting of this annual event by your Association is a bit different this year. This year, in addition to Russ's note and picture above, we present John Bessette's email message to the TSNA Secretary. It conveys the necessary information and John's great sense of humor. John stepped up to perform wreath duty at the 11<sup>th</sup> Hour due to two sudden health issues in the family of former president and co-founder John Peele who was scheduled to lead the placing of our wreath. May we have John Peele and his family in our thoughts and prayers. Note that John Bessette refers to himself as John of Bien Hoa, though the focus of our organization is Tan Son Nhut. John was stationed at Bien Hoa when his late wife and our former Treasurer, Carol, was stationed at Tan Son Nhut. That is not the only link. John flew as a navigator on "Spooky" flights at night over Tan Son Nhut from Bien Hoa to help protect those of us who were on the ground at Tan Son Nhut. He is in all ways a Tan Son Nhut brother.*

Subject: After-Action Report

I got to the "famous" kiosk at about 1100, but was blocked from going to the seats. No big issue there. There was lots of time to wait (waste) before we could take our seats. I mumbled around & met some interesting Army/Navy/AF/Marine vets. Very enjoyable

Finally got to our assigned seats just before the show was about to start. There were the 10 seats assigned to TSNA. One guy was there - someone I had seen in earlier programs - an AF vet named Russ Clark. We settled in & got reacquainted. He recalled Carol from earlier Wall programs, and he also had read your words about Carol in Revetments. He was (rightly) impressed. He also had lost a very close friend - the wife of his best AF Vietnam buddy, then his buddy himself. But Russ did get to him before he passed, and that was terrific.

We did not see anyone else take TSNA seats. but Russ & I carried on. He & I delivered the wreath to its assigned place at the Wall when called out. And Russ got another participant to take our picture with the wreath. Russ said that he will get the photo to you and/or Larry for Revetments.

After the program ended, Russ & I said our farewells. We hope to rejoin at next event.

With all due respect/affection, I remain,  
Faithfully yours  
and obediently yours, and etc etc,  
John of Bien Hoa



By Jim Stewart  
377<sup>th</sup> SPS  
Sept 67 – Sept 68

I was stationed at Tan Son Nhut from Sept. 67 through Sept. 68 in the 377th Security Police Sentry Dog Section as a dog handler. I have attached a photo of my dog Dobe 7X49 and me from December 1967 probably taken by Bob Need's photography unit.

Here's my tale:

On Christmas eve 1967 I was posted with my sentry dog Dobe on post kilo 13 north of the runway. Most K9 posts had a small sand bag bunker on them. Dobe and I were taking a break at the bunker. I was listening to the Armed Forces radio broadcast of the John Doremus show on my "unauthorized" radio. Bing Crosby was singing White Christmas. I sat there with tears in my eyes feeling very home sick and sorry for myself. Bing Crosby's version of White Christmas is still my favorite Christmas song. Every time I hear it I think of my time at Tan Son Nhut.

### *My Christmas Story*

By Fred Stein  
460th TRW

I have been a member of TSNA for ten years or so; and my family and I attended the Reunion near Chanute AFB, Illinois in 2004. Here is my Christmas memory at TSN:

I arrived at TSN AFB in November 1968. My AFSC was 402X0, an aerial photo systems repair technician. I worked on the RF-4C's in the 12th and 16th TRS. To continue on with my Christmas story, I was sent TDY, mid Dec, to Phu Cat AFB, near Qui Nhon, north of Cam Ranh Bay, up the coast. I was at Phu Cat for over two months. My job there was to turn around RF-4C's that had flown a sortie from TSN, and were flying another sortie before returning to TSN. The story on the flight line, a day or two before Christmas Day, was that Bob Hope and his entourage was coming to the base. Earlier, a C-7 Caribou landed with its nose decorated in red, and a Santa Clause painted on the fuselage. Yep, Mr. Chuckles himself had landed, and there would be entertainment soon. I was on duty on the flight line on Christmas Day. There were only one or two birds expected in, to be turned around, but it was my turn to stay on duty as backup / on call. My NCOIC, a young Staff Sgt, told me to "disappear", as he would handle any work that came up. Bless his heart, I thanked him several times, and I was gone.

By the time I arrived at the site of the Bob Hope Show, there were thousands of troops already waiting. People were sitting everywhere, and anywhere, in an attempt to be part of this historic event. There were awesome sound systems set up, so that everyone could hear the show.. From my vantage point, everyone on stage appeared to be two inches tall, as I was far to the rear of the audience. It was a wonderful show full of comedy and entertainment, with Rosie Grier, Ann Margaret, the Gold Diggers, Les Brown Orchestra, and many others who I do not recall. Bob was his usual charming, humorous self. Everyone loved him and his cast of entertainers. I was sent back to TSN in Feb 69 and I remained there until I shipped back to the "world" in Nov 69. I stopped enroute at Anderson AFB Guam to visit my twin brother, who was stationed there for 18 months, as a top- secret crypto decoder/encoder. He and I had an early holiday celebration visit for two days. And after my 30 day leave, I was assigned to Beale AFB CA. until I was discharged Dec 70, along with my twin bro, who was stationed at Vandenberg AFB CA later in 70. We drove home together back to the Midwest on Dec 9, 1970.

**FROM THE EDITOR:** I neglected this year to ask our members for memories from Christmas at Tan Son Nhut.

**So I have gone back and picked up some thoughts from when I asked for comments back in 2015.**

**AND, I am now asking YOU to send me your Christmas at TSN thoughts so I can save them for next year!**

**SEND TO:** [lfry2@dejazzd.com](mailto:lfry2@dejazzd.com).



## The Cross in the Screen or the Magic of Christmas 1971

By: Major Joseph E. Thompson, Jr.  
71-72  
CAMS Fuel System Repair

As I traveled into the Fuel Shop in the back of our "5/4" ton shop truck from the 1200 area to the Tan Son Nhut Flight line on Christmas Eve 1971, I had a sense of inner peace that seemed very unusual to me for being so far away from home. Unlike the year before when I had a deep sense of loneliness and isolation on Christmas Eve when I was stationed at Beale AFB, California just looking for something "holiday" to do. When the shop truck arrived at our plywood shack office at the end of the C-47 revetments there was the normal shift change "chatter" about ongoing work orders and any news from the CAMS Squadron Headquarters as well as wishes for a Merry Christmas to each other. As our shift of myself and four other Fuel SYS Mechanics settled in for our 12 hour stay, we all considered ourselves fortunate that evening, as there were not many work orders so Fuel System Repair was slow that night. I thought this ease in workload may be a sort of Christmas gift to the Fuel Shop but then again maybe it was just the "Magic of Christmas". This was the first of several pleasant happenings that evening.

As the evening went on, my friends and I continued making small talk. As was normal SOP each slow evening a couple of the guys would put the non-descript gray government chairs together in a row to make an impromptu sleeping cot. As we used to say we were going to be "flying the chairs". I did not join them, for some reason. I was very alert that evening even though it was just another 12 hour shift on the Flight line. I was happy to be in Viet Nam and to me TSN was a good assignment. As I sat at the desk, my thoughts went to all the things I had around me here in VN, some great friends, everything I needed was in walking distance. I was an "E-4 over two" and making \$60.00 extra a month in combat pay and it was all tax-free!! Really "raking it in" and I would also be buying a brand new 1972 car when I got home!!! In essence I realize now I was counting my blessings or my non-tangible Christmas gifts. Once again maybe it was the idea of the Magic of Christmas to be able to see the gifts in front of you that were hidden in plain sight.

It was shortly after 12 midnight, as I listened to the others snore it was then that I realized it was early Christmas day morning. Everyone back home is at a Christmas Party I thought. However I was not a bit homesick considering the Holiday!

The shop lights were turned down to allow my co-workers to sleep or better said in Air Force flight line lingo to "fly the chairs on a straight & level course". As I sat behind the gray metal desk and looked through the screen windows that surrounded our 10' X 15' office that evening, I watched the nightly launch of "slap flares" into the sky where they would silently drop over top of the grassy area behind the C-47's. It was then on Christmas morning while looking at this seemingly nightly uneventful routine event by the SP Squadron that another peculiar thing happened. As each of the flares dropped, each one looked like a glowing cross falling from the sky. I kept telling myself that was the screens, creating an optical illusion, but then again maybe it just was that "Magic of Christmas" notion. Simply said to each of you I never forgot that night or its connecting early morning!

At the end of my shift on Christmas Day morning I rushed back to 1200 area to get on the "Blue Goose" bus convoy headed for the Bob Hope Show in Long Binh, VN. It was a Christmas like no other that I have experienced either in the Military or in Civilian life.

Merry Christmas to each of you!!

**Joe**                    **AKA: "Hot-Rod" in 71/72**

*PS : As I finished the article for Revetments one thing else came back to me. There was another gift from the Magic of Christmas. I realized that TSGT Ford did not play his country music that night. He seemed to torture us all with his Country Western cassette tapes each night. Most of us were from Philadelphia or other areas of the North East United States! So Country Western was a bit foreign to us!*

### FROM STAN MORRIS

Christmas 1968 was a special time for me as it represented that my tour of duty with the 377th Security Police Squadron at Tan Son Nhut was coming to a close. Even though there had been an effort put into some decorations at the gate to our compound and the club house, like most short timers, I was on pins and needles and missed the family. On Christmas Eve, about two hours prior to shift completion, my flight chief arrived for his usual post inspection and as he got ready to leave, he turned to me and said, "oh, by the way Morris, you are released from duty the end of shift, your flight back to the world is the 29th." With the exception of my M-16, 38 revolver and my personal ditty bag which held my private stash of 30 plus mags, and homemade Sterno stove, I did all my administrative clearing of the base on Christmas Day. My first Christmas present, if you wish to call it such was the morning following clearing, I heard a loud voice at the front of the barracks holler my name. It was two of the guys I had been stationed with at my previous base and flew to Nam. Luck of the draw was that all three of us were leaving together and were assigned to the same base stateside. Only downside to that was the next assignment was Loring AFB, ME.

Stan Morris  
377th Security Police SQ  
Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN  
Dec 67 - Dec 68

### The Older I get . . .

the simpler my holiday preparations become . . .  
the closer I feel to old friends as I write my Christmas cards . . .  
the more I cherish the oldest ornaments . . .  
the more fondly I remember Christmases past . . .  
the longer I hold on to a holiday hug . . .  
the more I realize Christmas is a matter of the heart . . .  
the tighter my throat gets when I sing "Silent Night" . . .  
the more I enjoy giving than receiving . . .  
the more I try to see Christmas through the eyes of a child . . .  
the longer I sit at night in the glow of the Christmas tree . . .  
the more wondrously beautiful the Christmas story is . . .  
the deeper my awe at God's infinite love . . .  
The More I Love Christmas!

(For the great poem above, the author is unknown, and also unknown is how or where I got it)

### CHRISTMAS AT TAN SON NHUT

Hi Larry,

This is in response to your request for stories about Christmas at TSN.

I was among the first ground forces into Vietnam. (232<sup>nd</sup> Signal Company, 39<sup>th</sup> Signal Bn.)

Things were pretty primitive at that time, but I must say they went all out for us at Christmas. On Christmas Day (1962) I worked the day shift at the Comm Center at MACV, which at that time was located on Pasteur Street in Saigon. Our company provided a deuce and a half to transport us from the Comm Center back to camp for dinner. Of course we all complained because we had to put on our Class A dress uniforms before they would feed us.

Sincerely,

Jim Butler  
Mar 62-Mar 63  
US Army 232nd Signal Company



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### **NEW MEMBER**

Harold S. Hunt, Ashburn, VA [hshunt@email.com](mailto:hshunt@email.com). Oct 66-Feb 74 Civilian Contractor w/MACV&RVN JT. GEN. STAFF.  
(Also a Marine Veteran before TSN)

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