

# Revetments

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association



"All Included - Non Excluded"

Volume 1, Number 7

The Tan Son Nhut Association, Washington, D.C.

April, 1999

Recruiting  
Issue ...



# I WANT YOU

IN

# THE TAN SON NHUT ASSN.!

# Goal 2000: A Million Members!

Can you find yourself in **that** picture? Well, you're in there somewhere ... and so's your buddy, and his **buddy**, and his buddies buddies. Over a million people are in this picture: men and women, Air Force, Army, Marines, Navy, Coast Guard, C.I.A., diplomats, civilian contractors, civilian employees, admirals, generals, and endless legions of yardbirds.

Of course, they're not all **in** there at once, but over the eight years of the Vietnam War many of them passed through here, often not just once, but many times. Sure, a lot of them headed out for places like Bien Tuy, Soc Trang, Khe Sanh, Nha Trang, and even out of country to Thailand.

## All Potential Members

And many just walked a few blocks across Tan Son Nhut to their jobs in Seventh Air Force Headquarters and MAC-V, where the leaders of all of the services commanded the combat activities.

And they should all be members of the Tan Son Nhut Association.

A critic might comment **snidely** that this is like asking everybody who goes through O'Hare Airport to join an O'Hare Association. He would **then** laugh sarcastically and say there's **no** point to it because they have nothing in **common**.

We agree about O'Hare, **but** when it comes to Tan Son Nhut, **nothing** could be further from the truth.

Regardless of service, **rank** or status, every man and women **crossing** the concourse at Tan Son Nhut **were** part and parcel of a proud and **powerful** team. And, these individuals were **depending** on the people next to them, not **only** to do their jobs, but also to help defend **their** lives if necessary.

Many media specialists and book publishers are commenting **that** in the last few years there has been a **steady** increase of public interest in the Vietnam Era.

One of our members, **Richard** Fulton, who was a combat **newsman** and photographer at Tan Son Nhut, has been invited to teach a course on **that** subject in a Kansas college.

Other members are **creating** still and motion picture presentations **for** use by civilian organizations and **businesses**.

The TSNA office of **Public** Affairs is receiving more and more **frequent** contacts, letters, telephone calls and **e-mail** from individuals seeking to find **relatives**, friends



The Main Concourse, Terminal at Tan Son Nhut - 1967

or just the story of Tan Son Nhut and the role it played during the war.

One person whose father had just passed away wanted to know the mission and organization of MAC-V's SOG operation. We answer these inquiries to the best of our abilities and resources. That often means referring the inquiries to members who have had experience in the area of interest. And, there have been some great responses.

## Why Get Bigger?

A lot of us are full of big ideas. But big ideas only become substance when there is widespread support, and yes, of course, lots of money.

First, we'd like to be big enough to have a memorial for all those who fell defending Tan Son Nhut for eight years.

Second, we'd like to be big enough to build and maintain a Tan Son Nhut Library of The Vietnam War. Then we could really provide the public with information and graphic presentations of what the era was like.

And there are many more projects that we'd like to get busy on. We want the Tan Son Nhut Association to become the most

positive, and forward-looking veterans, and veterans' descendants organization, possible.

## Become A Recruiter

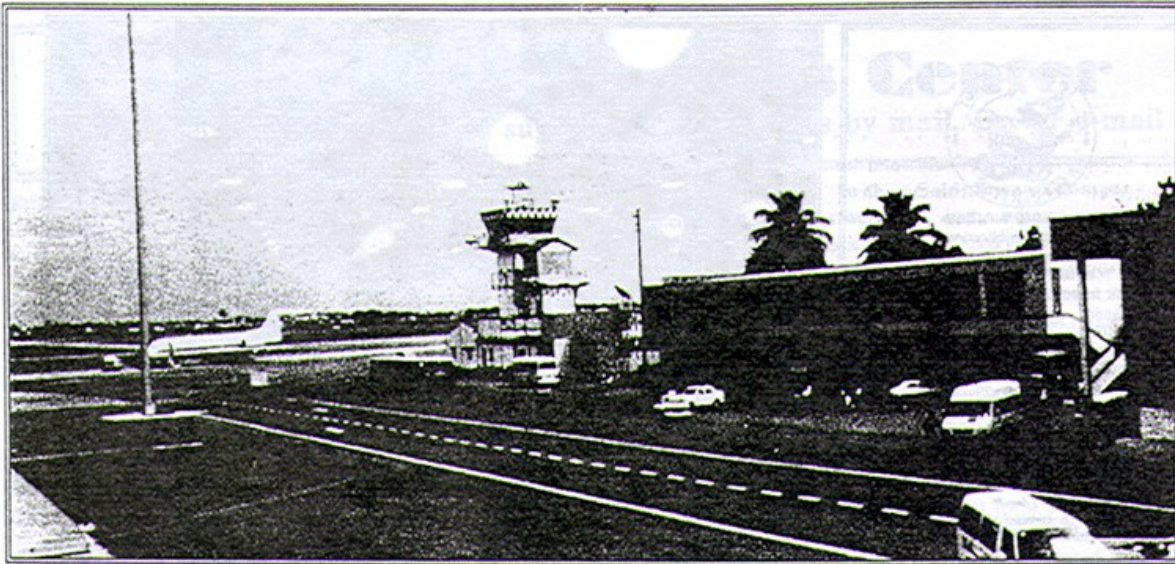
A new member is a man from Pennsylvania, who called me and praised the stories in *Revetments* and asked me if an Army person who had been at Tan Son Nhut could join. "Yes, of course," we replied. Then, rather sheepishly, he asked if it would be possible to buy a TSNA patch, and could he wear it in public. Our reply was, "of course, you were as much of the base as we were."

Unless you live in a cave on the top of Mount McKinley you have scores of Tan Son Nhut people all around you.

Start having informal get-togethers. If you'd like application forms, or you'd like to have some fliers or posters, call or write Public Affairs and we'll be glad to make up something specialized to your area.

Let local media people know that we exist. Ask us for extra copies of *Revetments* to pass around and we'll be glad to send them to you.

Lets start the new century with a million members, or close enough!

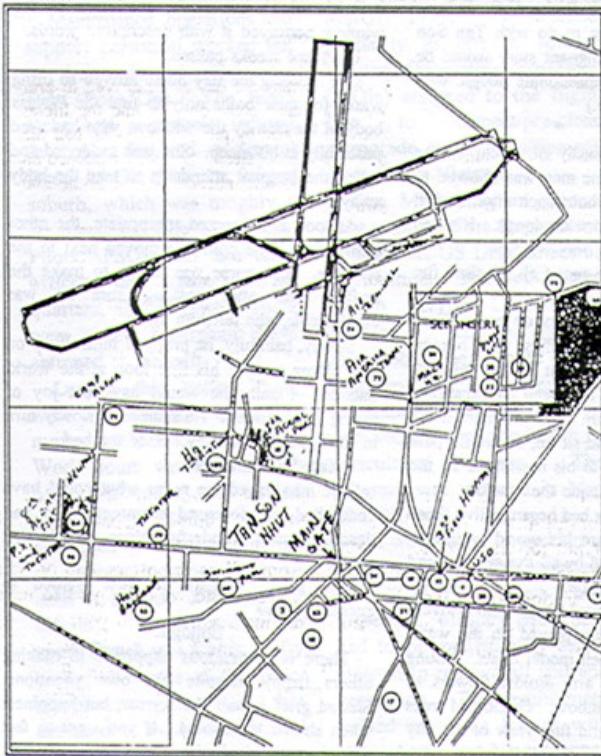


Tan Son Nhut Flightline and Control Tower today  
Another great photo from Frank Ybarbo's recent trip to Saigon

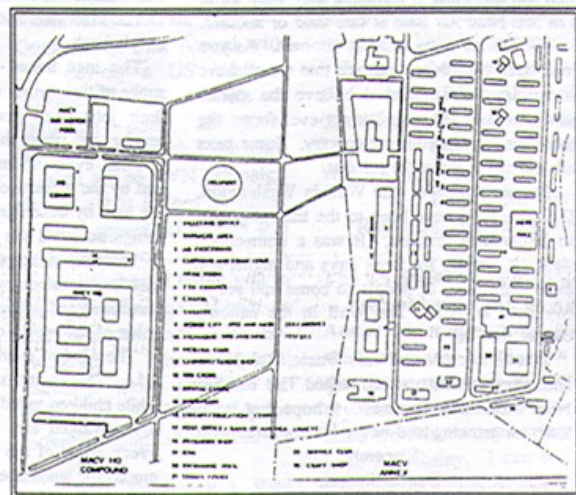
## Tan Son Nhut Maps

A number of members have written and called requesting that *Revetments* get ahold of and publish maps of the Tan Son Nhut area. We are attempting to obtain more detailed and larger scale maps. These are reprinted from the July 1996 Tan Son Nhut Association newsletter.

If any members have larger scale maps, we would deeply appreciate receiving a copy of them. Please do not send originals, things can happen to them.



Tan Son Nhut (Main Area)

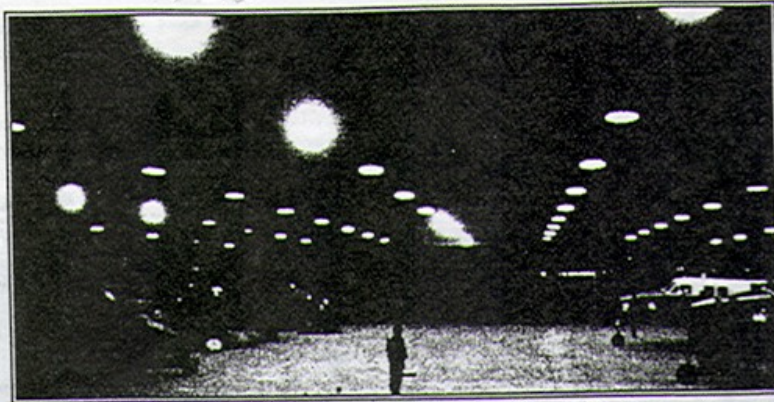


MAC-V Annex



*"All Included - None Excluded"*  
 Revetments is an official publication of The Tan Son Nhut Association, 6203 57th Avenue, Riverdale, Maryland 20737. The Association is a non-profit fraternal organization chartered and register under appropriate statute and law. Editorial offices are located at Suite 709, 330 West Brambleton Avenue, Norfolk, Virginia 23510. Telephone: (757) 627-7746, FAX: (757) 627-0878. E-Mail: hercules29@worldnet.att.net

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Hangar At Midnight, Tan Son Nhut

# The Window

by  
 M. Burglund



## The President's Corner

Dear Comrades,

At our first reunion in Evansville, Indiana, you could tell right away that it was a great success. While in the hospitality room you were with comrades from all over the country who had one thing in common: they were all at Tan Son Nhut Air Base at one time or another.

The stories were running rampant. As you look back on this we can see that we all have something in common. I believe the stories should be told and we must not ever forget the sacrifices we made for our country. Some gave all and we'll never forget that.

I haven't been to The Wall in Washington, D.C. yet, but I have been to the traveling wall in Vincennes, Indiana. It was a tremendous sight. It was up for three days and nights and there were lines of people to come and see it. My goal is to see The Wall in the nation's capital one day.

I have to commend John Peele, Bob Need, and everyone else who has helped The Tan Son Nhut Association to grow. I hope that it can keep on growing and never let our stories die.

Sincerely  
 Don E. Parker,  
 President

(Editor's Note: The following story was sent to Revetments by Member Richard P. Fulton. Although it has nothing to do with Tan Son Nhut, we felt that this poignant story would be well-received by the compassionate people who make up our readership.)

Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window.

The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back.

The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, and where they had been on vacations.

And, every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window.

The man in the other bed began to live those one-hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the world outside.

The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake. Ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Young lover walked arm in arm amidst flowers of every color of the rainbow. Grand old trees graced the landscape, and fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance.

As the man by the window describe all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of

the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene.

One warm afternoon the man by the window described a parade passing by. Although the other man couldn't hear the band he could see it in his mind's eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive words.

Days and weeks passed.

One morning the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths only to find the lifeless body of the man by the window, who had died peacefully in his sleep. She was saddened and called the hospital attendants to take the body away.

As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone.

Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look at the world outside. Finally he would have the joy of seeing it for himself. He strained to slowly turn to look out the window beside the bed.

It faced a blank wall.

The man asked the nurse what could have compelled his deceased roommate who had described such wonderful things outside this window.

She said, "Perhaps he just wanted to encourage you."

### Epilogue

There is tremendous happiness in making others happy, despite our own situations. Shared grief is half the sorrow, but happiness when shared is doubled. If you want to feel rich, just count all the things you have that money can't buy. "Today is a gift, that's why it is called the present."

# The Communications Center

Send us your letters, comments, suggestions, and stories by mail, fax or e-mail

**From the early days ...**

I was an Automatic Flight Control Systems technician (J32570A), attached to the 22nd Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron (TRS), Tan Son Nhut AB, Saigon, from the 363rd A&E Maintenance Squadron, Shaw AFB, Sumter, SC. (1965-1966)

Our unit was the first to use RF-4Cs in Vietnam. Shaw AFB had continuing 90-180 day deployments to Southeast Asia, using RF-101s and RB66s for photo reconnaissance during the early 1960s. RF-4Cs, coming virtually off the assembly line in St. Louis, were introduced in parallel with President Johnson's military buildup in 1965.

Maintenance, operations and support personnel worked out of the main hanger, across from Base Ops. The recon techs had a separate secured facility. Enlisted personnel lived in Gia Dinh, a Saigon suburb, which was roughly a 30 minute bus ride to the base. Pilots, PSOs and non-rated officers had separate living quarters, also in town. There were a few Australian pilots assigned to the unit.

During this period there were times when we could move freely about the city. Work hours were 12 on, 12 off. At times, we carried weapons. Some of us attempted to learn Vietnamese at various locations in town until it became unsafe (night classes). Knowing how to speak French was a plus. Fifty cent filet steaks at the Navy commissary were a hot commodity, and local beer, and San Miguel was far better than the rusty canned (flat tasting)

Schlitz, that was generally free at the compound!

Big event of the year was Bob Hope! I sat within a few feet of President Ky and his family, at the Show, and met Martha Ray (major or lieutenant colonel in the reserves?) Outside our hanger on the flight line.

**Doug Sheldon**  
New Market, Maryland

\* \* \*

**Here's something we didn't know about ...**

I would like to express my appreciation for the copies of *Revetments* that I have received.

I was a Preventive Medicine Technician, AFSC 907X0, assigned to the 377th USAF Dispensary from May 1970 to March 1971. I worked primarily as one of several Military Quarantine Inspectors (MQIs) assigned to the flight line to inspect/pre-clear retrograde cargo for shipment from South Vietnam.

The MQI program was a joint venture of the Department of Defense, US Department of Agriculture, and the Public Health Service Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The purpose of the program was to prevent the infestation of retrograde cargo with vectors of public health or agricultural diseases. The program was initiated in May of 1970.

All wood used in packaging of cargo had to be inspected. All "CONEX" were also inspected. Military equipment had to be meticulously steam cleaned to remove all soil and vegetation. This requirement helped me make friends with many Army and Navy troops.

Shell "Vapona" strips and

rat bait boxes, with conspicuous red streamers were placed inside large items such as helicopters and vans being returned to the 'States. We sprayed all out-going flights with micronized DDT and certified the manifest as MQI cleared. During the course of our MQI duties we learned to coordinate our work with the troops operating the K-loaders, the refuellers, the aircraft maintenance and repair crews, the ACP ramp truck drivers and the people in the ACP who taught us how to read "the board" and what the heck ZULU time was the codes for the different bases.

Also the load-masters and the other flight crew members who often shared their in-flight meals with a hungry MQI.

I would like to take this chance to thank everyone who assisted us in the accomplishment of our mission. Apparently we all did an outstanding professional job.

After 27 and a half years, in October 1997, I received an AF Commendation Medal for Meritorious Serve, an AF Outstanding Unit Award with "V" device, a US Vietnam Service Ribbon with 3 campaign stars, an RVN Gallantry Cross with Palm Unit Citation and an RVN campaign ribbon. It is indeed an honor to have served with each and everyone of you.

A very special thank you to the troops who watched over us and those who kept us fed and "watered." Also a special thanks to those who kept the coffee hot, the beer cold, the movies rolling, and prayed for our safety.

**Frederick A. Feld**  
Huntsville, Alabama

**Soldier wants company ...**

Just a note to say THANKS to everyone involved in publishing *Revetments*. I find it very interesting and look forward to every issue. I can truthfully say with the articles and pictures you display I can close my eyes and 32 years are gone.

I served with the 69th Signal Battalion (yes, United States Army) from 1967-1968, while I was stationed at Camp Gaylor which was located on the left hand side when you came through the main gate and before the two huge "GOLF BALLS" (as you Air Force guys called them). I was there for Tet 1968. I'm hoping by writing to you other Army veterans who were at Tan Son Nhut will join your association. After all, "All Included, None Excluded."

After reading your March 1999 issue which had a really interesting article by Frank Ybarbo about Tan Son Nhut today, I saw another article by Joe "Hot Rod" Johnson, who to my surprise lives near me. I called him and he gave me some very helpful information.

Keep up the good work, take care and God Bless ALL WHO GAVE SOME, and especially THOSE WHO GAVE ALL. WELCOME HOME!

**Dennis M. Byrnes**  
Royersford, Pennsylvania

\* \* \*

**The \$5 Spam Sandwich ...**

It was March 1967, or was it April? Memory plays tricks after so many years. To this day I can name all 80 men in my boot camp company, and have trouble remembering my wife's birthday. I can roll off the stats on a B.A.R. (20.4 lbs. (See Sandwich, next page.)

Sandwich, from Page 5

with magazine and bipod attached. cyclic rate of fire 750 rounds per minute sustained rate of fire 450 round per minute ... On and On, thousands of factoids and bits of trivia. Names, places, events.

With all these memories of 20 odd years of naval service the fear, joy, and boredom, is one that sticks out, and indeed defines the whole Viet Nam experience for me.

Like so many others I arrived at Tan Son Nhut on a no name airline, crewed by stewardesses that were, to say the least, disenchanted with hauling a gang of GIs around. The food service was lax, to put it mildly.

Debarking from an air-conditioned plane in Navy dress whites into the hothouse of Saigon, I began to question the minds of the MacNamara wizards who set dress regs for travel.

Gathered up, sorted out and loaded in buses that must have been left by the French, my group of happy conventioners was at last deposited at the Annapolis Hotel. Food was not included in the ride.

Rolled out at 0600 the next morning, a large E-6 bosun's mate called several names, mine among them.

"You guys are next out, flight leaves in an hour, bus will be here in ten minutes." With that we went to gather up our seabags and watched the rest amble off to breakfast.

The amazing blue bus returned and we loaded up for our return to Tan Son Nhut. By now, we all had passed about 18 hours without a real meal.

Dumped at the terminal around 7:30, a gunners mate and I went in search of some real food. Wherever the Air Force fed its troops, we couldn't find it. An airman first class informed us that their messhall was closed. So much for interservice cooperation. So far my introduction to the 'Nam was less than a rousing success.

Returning to our must point things started to go down hill! Whatever aircraft of whoever's air force or navy was either late or not coming and no one knew when, if ever, it would arrive. We

were to stand-to and wait. Food was not on anyone's agenda but ours.

As the morning wore on, some found what passed for the airport restaurant and managed to take the edge off their hunger.

I, being a salty veteran of two years service, went in search of native cuisine. And, cold beer.

Wandering the huge expanse of the airfield I was amazed at the number of ARVN in various uniforms, fully armed, apparently out for a stroll. The number of enlisted men on motor cycles amazed me. It also appeared that every ARVN officer had been issued a pair of aviator sun glasses and a jeep, probably at birth.

At last I found a VNAF NCO (also in aviators) who spoke enough English to point me to "ba-muoi-ba stand."

This oriental version of a New York street vendor's cart was made out of GI ammo crates and pieces of aluminum. A large tub of ice was filled with coke and Fanta orange drinks, plus what I knew from high school French to be *bier*.

Hunger and thirst quashed any second thoughts and I grabbed for a beer. The old lady in charge of this slapped my hand away and started to mumble about "P" which I figured out to *piastre*. Having a total of \$20 in five dollar bills, I saw no problem in having a snack and a beer. I handed over one of the forbidden fives and received the precious bottle of *ba-muoi-ba*. How it could have been in ice and still been so warm, I'll never know.

Beer in hand, I started to negotiate a sandwich. The old girl spoke just enough to nod an affirmative and pulled out a loaf of what looked like Wonder bread. Smiling, she shook some sauce she call *nuoc mam* on a slice and placed it on a paper plate. Next she pulled a long, green can of GI Spam (remember "meat, luncheon"?), and sliced off a half inch slab, shook some more mystery sauce on it, covered it with another piece of bread, held it out in suddenly perfect English said, "Five dollars please." Not wishing to start my war at a *ba-muoi-ba* stand, I paid and walked away, sandwich and beer in hand.

After much waiting we all finally board a plane for Da Nang, which I found odd since I was going to the Mekong Delta.

But of all lessons learned, the most important was that *nuoc mam* and Spam form a natural barrier

between you and anyone who would dare sit next to you. I made the trip with elbow and leg room to spare.

David Bolton, USN (Ret.)  
Norfolk, Virginia



## Vietnam Military Lore

Legends, Shadows & heroes

by  
Master Sergeant Ray Bows

\* \* \*

"Your masterful presentation of the countless hours of your research is most commendable. I can now appreciate your extra efforts to present this handsome volume properly. This scholarly historical work will add substance to the annals of that painful, disturbing period in our national history."

Lt. General William F. Train, USA (Ret.)  
Former Commandant  
U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks

*Revetments* endorses this great book with pride. He tells it all, from Khe Sanh to the tip of the Cau Mau peninsula. It is a big book, 1,200 pages. It is the most definitive work to date on the subject. On Page 7 of this issue we are proud to have permission to print a touching moment at the gates of Tan Son Nhut.

\$50

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2055 Washington Street, Hanover, MA.  
02339

# Viet-Nam Lore

## Hundred P Alley, Saigon

By  
**MSgt. Ray A. Bows,**  
**USA (Ret)**

(Editors Note: Member George Dye from Florida furnished the following to *Revetments*. Permission to reprint this story has been kindly granted by the author.)

The conception of Viet-Nam as having been nothing more than jungle and remote operating bases was but one facet of the Viet-Nam conflict. The conflict was often brought by the Viet Cong to the cities and outside the main gates of air bases and sprawling depots throughout Viet-Nam. Many servicemen who were stationed in Viet-Nam have no stories to tell of jungle warfare, helicopter assault missions and search and destroy operations. But their story of Viet-Nam is equally part of the American military experience there. Glover Peeler's story was one such account.

Saigon was a wide-open city. A far cry from 1963 when Mrs. Ngo Dinh Nhu's austerity bill prohibited such debauchery as dancing, boxing, beauty contests and cock fights. The sights, sounds and smells outside the air base at Tan Son Nhut were varied and strange. Attractive women dressed in the aodais (the traditional costume split down the side) and signs reading, "Charming Hostesses. English Speaking. Lovely Smile." accented bars and brothels lining the broad avenues teeming with pedestrians, cycloes, taxis and a variety of military vehicles. Open benjo ditches, separating laundry and tailor shops from the streets of traffic, filled the air with smells that Glover Peeler would have to get used to.

### Tan Son Nhut

Peeler arrived Saigon on 12 October 1966 and was assigned to the 377th Transport Squadron. He was warned by friends of places to avoid. Across from the main gate at Tan Son Nhut was the entrance to Hundred P Alley, a labyrinth of muddy alleyways occupied by GI deserters armed with AF-47s, M-14s and shotguns. The area was a refuge for the military misfits that somehow made their way to

Saigon. They lived any way they could: some of them may have been in "Nam" only days when they decided to desert. Few soldiers taking up residence in Hundred P Alley had any options left to them once the decision was made to go there. It was back to the field or the stockade or both. Peeler gave Hundred P Alley wide berth, and rightfully so: it was a dangerous place.

The activity outside the main gate of Tan Son Nhut did not lessen with nightfall. Off duty GIS cruised the bars where they could engage in a conversation of broken English for the price of a Saigon Tea. Such bars were the origin of exaggerated stories claiming that the local beer, Export 33, contained embalming fluid as a main ingredient.

Yet some strange stories were fact. One ritual occurred nightly. Each evening, minutes before curfew, an air policeman at the main gate of Tan Son Nhut would hold his right arm in the air while watching the last 120 seconds tick off on his wrist watch. The inbound GIS knew that when his arm fell, they were in violation of curfew. Those not yet inside the base would hightail it for Hundred P Alley. Mama-San at one of the local houses would have to be compensated, but at least it was better than an Article 15 (nonjudicial punishment), 30 days restriction and a fine. The airmen could always make their way in to the base the next morning. Bed checks were nonexistent; it was simply a matter of being off Saigon streets by 2300 hours.

### Trash Detail

Sooner or later, every airman with 377th had to pull trash truck detail. It was a welcome distraction from normal duties and chance to get a cold beer. The Vietnamese would unload the truck, wash it, and let those on the detail drink free Export 33 beer as payment for the American trash, which was Vietnamese treasure. On many occasions South Vietnamese soldiers would hold up the truck at gun point to relieve it of its lumber, consisting mostly of air force pallets. The members of the

377th would find periodic holdups almost amusing, but the ARVN's were deadly serious. It was a means for them to supplement their meager Vietnamese Army pay; their families depended on it. Stealing trash at gun point in broad daylight was a frequent occurrence.

Living off base in the United States, or for that matter, in most locations around the world, is generally considered a privilege for most Air Force personnel; however, in Saigon and the area around Tan Son Nhut, the privilege of living off base was overshadowed. Uncertainties were everywhere.

Terrorist attacks against Americans were common place, whether they were intricately planned operations, well thought out and executed, like the Brink BOQ bombing, or merely a Viet Cong throwing a rock at an MP jeep while it patrolled G.A. Dinh/Cholon. MPs were told not to chase rock throwers as jeeps were often lured into side alleys where MPs would be killed when the passing jeep would have a grenade tossed inside it.

### Grenade

On 19 February 1967 Master Sergeant Daniel E. Fowler, Chief Master Sergeant Joseph Babineau, Tech Sergeant Billy J. McAvoy, Staff Sergeant Samuel E. Cople and Staff Sergeant Glover Peeler were standing near the jeep that transported them daily from their off-base quarters to the duties on Tan Son Nhut. They paid no attention to a motor scooter carrying two Vietnamese, rounding the corner until its passenger hurled a grenade in their direction. The five men dove for cover. And as the grenade exploded, it took one life -- that of Glover Peeler. Sergeant Peeler died as a result of his wounds six days later.

The Peeler Compound in Saigon was named in memory of the air force sergeant. Glover Austin Peeler III was born on 18 July 1940. His home of record was Jacksonville, FL. His name is inscribed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the west wall, panel 15E, line 91.



### TAN SON NHUT ASSOCIATION APPLICATION FORM

Please mail to: Tan Son Nhut Association, Public Affairs, Suite 709, 330 W. Brambleton Ave., Norfolk, VA 23510

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_ Annual Membership, \$20.00 enclosed/bill me. \_\_\_\_\_ Life Membership, \$180.00 enclosed/bill me.  
(Check) (Circle) (Check) (Circle)

I am interested in joining or assisting in forming an Association regional or local chapter. Yes ( )

I am interested in attending and/or assisting in Association Reunion activities. Yes ( )

Please give us a little of your background (units, tours of duty, service, etc.)

TSN Patches, include \$5 ea. (No. \_\_\_\_\_)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**Tan Son Nhut Association**  
**Editorial Offices**  
**Suite 709, 330 West Brambleton Avenue**  
**Norfolk, Virginia 23510**

