

Revetments

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association



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

December, 1999

Season's Greetings!



Christmas Cards sent by Vietnamese nationals
to people on Tan Son Nhut Air Base, circa 1967-1968

from The Mark Reveaux Collection

Greetings From Old Friends

We were not alone in Vietnam. We had more friends than we realized.

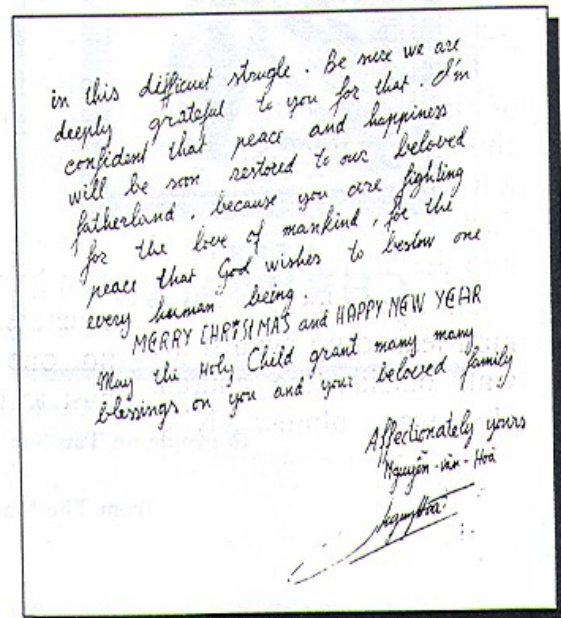
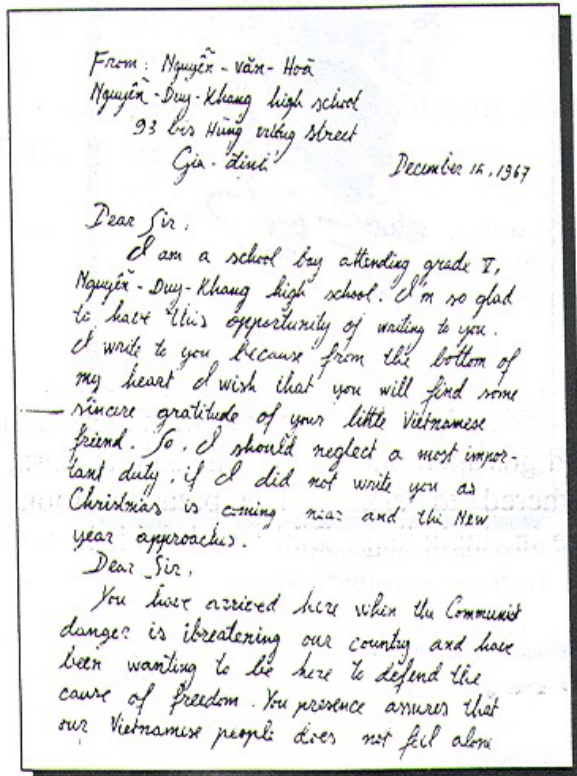
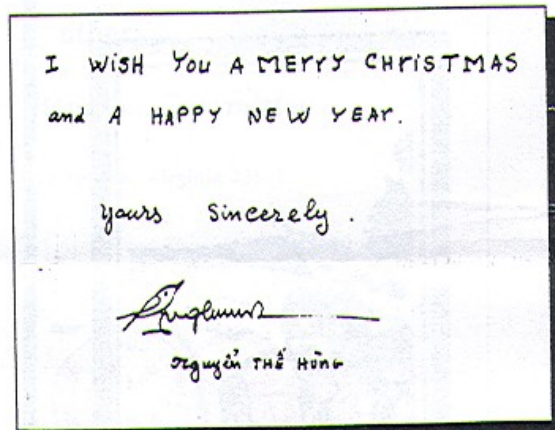
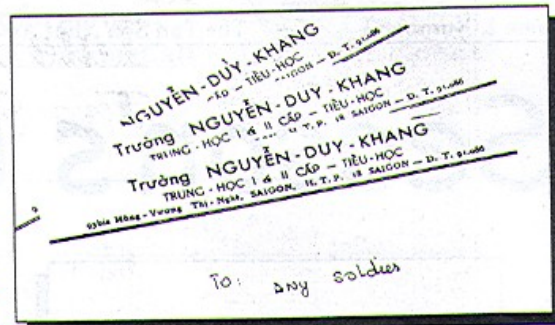
Member Mark Reveaux has kindly shared an example of this as we publish these Christmas greetings that young Vietnamese students prepared and presented to all of us at Tan Son Nhut.

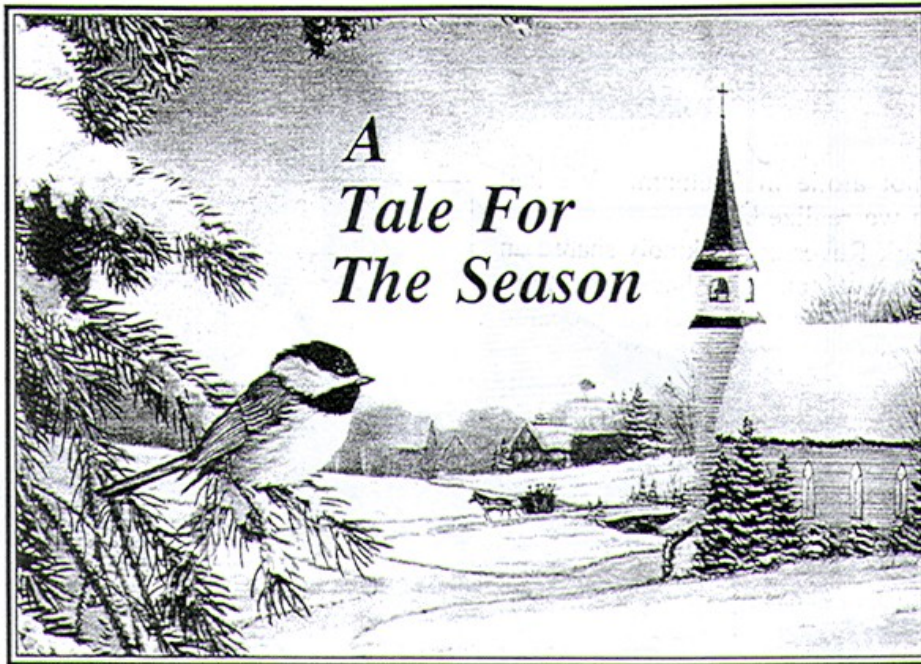
They were left at the U.S.O., at the chapels and even at the Main Gate for distribution to us.. They poignantly remind us that regardless of the outcome, many people of the country were proud of us as defenders of their freedom and democracy.

At the top right are three of the envelopes, each poignantly hand addressed "To: Any Soldier."

At the middle right is the closing of one letter, and the two at the bottom are a complete letter.

The sincerity and sentiment of the season has never been expressed so profoundly.





A Tale For The Season

(Editor's Note: The following was sent to us by one of the earliest members of The Association, Denis Cook. He comments that, "This is a beautiful statement that we all should learn.")

It was a cold winter's day that Sunday. The parking lot to the church was filling up quickly.

I noticed, as I got out of my car, that fellow church members were whispering among themselves as they walked into the church.

As I got closer, I saw a man leaned up against the wall outside the church. He was almost lying down, as if he were asleep. He had on a long trench coat that was almost in

shreds and a hat topped his head, pulled down so you could not see his face.

He wore shoes that looked thirty years old, too small for his feet, with holes all over them, his toes stuck out.

I assumed this man was homeless, and asleep, so I walked on by through the doors of the church.

We all fellowshiped for a few minutes, and someone brought up the man lying outside. People snickered and gossiped but no one bothered to ask him to come in, including me.

A few moments later church began.

We all waited for the

preacher to take his place and to give us the Word, when the doors to the church opened.

In came the homeless man, walking down the aisle with his head down.


People gasped and whispered and made faces.

He made his way down the aisle and up onto the pulpit. He took his hat off his hat and coat.

My heart sank. There stood our preacher. He was the "homeless man."

No one said a word.

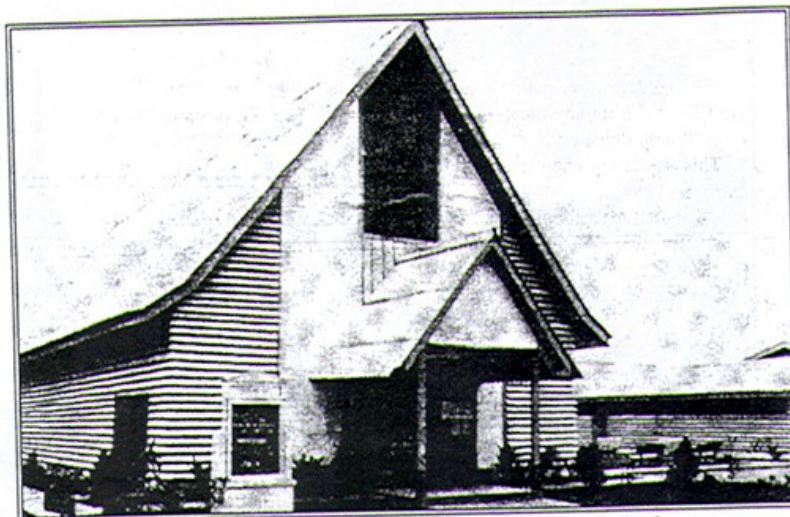
The preacher took his Bible and laid it on the stand. "Folks, I don't think I have to tell you what I am preaching about today."



All Inclusive - Non-Exclusionary

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My House shall be called the House of Prayer for all people.
 The Main Chapel at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, from the Reveaux Collection

The Last Salute

by
 Robert Stanley Need

On the last day of this month, at midnight, the millions of people across this earth who use the Western calendar, will stand in awe that not only is the year turning, but a century and a millennium are passing too.

It will be a profound moment of both reflection and speculation; of the regrets and prideful accomplishments of the past; and of the temerity of the unknown and of our glorious hopes for a happy, productive, and secure future.

One thing will not and must not change, especially for Americans. Our forefathers found one necessary credo that we cannot abandon to the past nor fail to observe in the future, and that is, "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

As the music, the bells and cannons sound across our country at midnight, let us all remember the sacrifice, the duty and honor, that we and our comrades gave so freely so that our nation can move forward into a new century and millennium still free, still the standard-bearer of liberty for the whole world, and as another patriot once said, "The best possible hope for mankind."

At midnight let us all give one last salute for those of our comrades who gave "their last full measure" and cannot join us as we arise in the dawn of a new era still proud and free.

The Night Before Christmas

(Editor's Note: The following poem was sent to us by Member, Alan Strauss, of Azle, Texas. It was written by a Marine stationed on Okinawa, Japan.)

'Twas the night before Christmas,
 He lived all alone,
 In a one bedroom house made of
 Plaster and stone,

I had come down the chimney
 with presents to give,
 And to see just who
 In this house did live.

I looked all about,
 A strange sight did see,
 No tinsel, no presents,
 Not even a tree.

No stocking by mantle,
 Just boots filled with sand,
 On the wall hung pictures
 Of far distant lands.

With medals and badges,
 Awards of all kinds,
 A sober thought
 Came through my mind.

Once I could see clearly,
 The soldier lay sleeping,
 Silent, alone,
 Curled up on the floor
 In this one bedroom home.

The face was so gentle,
 The room in such disorder,
 Not how I pictured
 A United States soldier.

Was this the hero of whom I'd just read?
 Curled up on a poncho, the floor for a
 bed?
 I realized the families that I saw this
 night,

Owed their lives to these soldiers
 Who were willing to fight.

Soon 'round the world,
 The children would play,
 And grownups would celebrate
 A bright Christmas Day.

They all enjoyed freedom
 each month of the year,
 Because of the soldiers,
 Like the one lying here.

I couldn't help wonder
 How many lie alone,
 On a cold Christmas Eve
 In a land far from home.

The very thought
 Brought a tear to my eye,
 I dropped to my knees
 And started to cry.

(Continued next page)

(Christmas, from Page 4)

The soldier awakened
And I heard a rough voice,
"Santa don't cry,
This life is my choice:

"I fight for freedom,
I don't ask for more,
My life is my God,
My country, my corps."

The soldier rolled over
And drifted to sleep,
I couldn't control it,
I continued to weep.

I kept watch for hours,
So silent and still,
And we both shivered
From the cold night's chill.

I didn't want to leave
On that cold, dark night,
This guardian of honor
So willing to fight.

Then the soldier rolled over
With a voice soft and pure,
Whispered, "Carry on Santa,
It's Christmas Day, all is secure.

One look at my watch,
And I knew he was right,
"Merry Christmas my friend,
And to all a good night.

* * *

(End Note: The author has asked, "Please, would you do me the fine favor of sending this to as many people as you can? Christmas will be coming soon and some credit is due to our United States service men and women for our being able to celebrate these festivities. Let's try in this small way to pay a tiny bit of what we owe. Make people stop and think of our heroes, living and dead, who sacrificed themselves for us. Please do your small part to plant this small seed.")



The Communication Center

Send your comments, stories, want ads, and announcements, to Ste.709, 330 W. Brambleton Ave., Norfolk, Va. 23510. FAX: (757) 627-0878. e-mail: hercules29@worldnet.att.net

We've done it again!

If member Padgett thinks we don't like C-130s, we can't wait to hear from all you irate C-123 people! In last month's *Revetments*, on Page 6, in Major McKinnon's column, we ran a picture of a C-123, and had the unmitigated gall to label it as a C-23 Provider. Five copy editors have been subsequently released. Please forgive us again.

Your Obedient Servant,
The Editor

* * *

A Comment from our web site ...

Interesting web site ... having spent some time in the 8th Aerial Port Squadron at Tan Son Nhut, I guess I qualify for membership. Was thinking that it would be really kind of neat to have USAF squadron/unit patches for all the various units that were based at Tan Son Nhut. Especially since I now understand that most all of the unit insignias at the squadron level were unofficial, and as such do not have a place in the USAF books of heraldry and history.

Ed Albert
Master Sergeant, USAF (Ret.)
Location Unknown

* * *

Serious Warning ...

Thought I would send you this bulletin if you don't have it already.

Please pass this on to whoever you know has e-mail.

If you receive an e-mail entitled, "It takes Guts to Say Jesus," DO NOT OPEN IT.

It will erase everything on your hard drive. This information was announced yesterday (Nov.21st) morning at IBM. AOL states that this is a Very Dangerous Virus, much worse than "Meliss," and that there is NO remedy for it at this time.

Some very sick individual has succeeded in using the reformat function from Norton Utilities, causing it to completely erase all documents on the hard drive. It has been designed to work with Netscape navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer. It destroys Macintosh and IBM compatible computers.

This is a new, very malicious virus and not many people know about it.

Pass this warning along to everyone in your address book and share with people on line so it may be stopped. Please practice cautionary measures and tell anyone that may have access to your computer. Forward this warning to everyone that might access the Internet.

Alan (Chainsaw) Strauss
Azle, Texas

* * *

Reunion planning underway ...

Vice President John Peele and Executive Coordinator, Norman Whitlow, are currently developing programs for the Year 2000 Tan Son Nhut Association Reunion, during the third week of June, in San Antonio, Texas.

Among speakers who have already given tentative acceptance is B.G. Burkett, the co-author of the best selling, *Stolen Valor*. His widely discussed book



Lt. Burkett, as a ready action rifle platoon leader in Vietnam.

graphically separates distorted myths from the truth of those who participated in the Vietnam War.

Also speaking will be Thomas Joyce, Major, USAF (Ret.), the developer of the Battle Force Labs, at Lackland AFB.

On Page 8 is a brief questionnaire. Please respond as soon as possible. And we hope nearly all of you are planning on attending this great reunion.



Day Five (Part 1)

When is an Air Base not an Air Base?

I have seen instances in which newspaper writers referred to Tan Son Nhut Air Base as Tan Son Nhut "Air Force" Base. I have also heard many service members who were senior enough to know better make the same mistake while referring to our bases on foreign soil.

This convinces me that many of us do not understand the rules concerning these terms. The matter is further complicated by the fact that the rules are sometimes "bent." This is partially because one of the recent Air Force Academy graduate Chiefs of Staff has seen fit to eliminate all Air Force Regulations, which we were bound to comply with by force of law.

He thought them too restrictive and a deterrent to good morale, and replaced them with Air Force Instructions which are merely sketches of what the Air Force wants us to do, and kind of leaves it up to the individual to do as he pleases in filling in the gaps.

I find it ludicrous that anyone with any experience at all would think that a military organization can be successfully run with specific regulations. IBM certainly believes in them.

This lack of regulations has already had its results. Remember the Boeing 737 crash in eastern Europe which killed Secretary Ron Brown. The approach plates for landing at that particular airport had not yet been approved by USAF. The approach called for the simultaneous use of two non-directional beacons. But the T-43 had only one ADF receiver aboard, but the young lady officer flying the airplane pushed on anyway and clipped the side of a mountain.

To get back to the base naming issue, the Air Force has "Fields," like Hurlburt Field in Florida with its own runway which is a satellite of an Air Force Base. Eglin AFB in this case. It has Air Force Stations like Los Angeles Air Force Station with no operational runways. But in this case it is called Los Angeles Air Force base because

someone of authority wants it this way.

It has Air Force Bases where the Command is on the base with operational capability, a runway and a flying mission. And it has Air Bases which are located on foreign soil where the sovereign will of the people would be insulted if it were insinuated that the soil was occupied by a foreign power. Thus, the term "force" is avoided and the mental fiction is that it is merely one of their air bases, in other words, purely diplomatic.

Ever notice that Hickam is an AFB as it is on U.S. soil and Andersen AFB on Guam is on U.S. soil. But anything east of that is an Air Base.

Meanwhile back at TSN

Our new Chief of Maintenance and Commander of the 33rd CAMRON, who replaced Colonel Owens, was a gent of southern background and a former enlisted man (OCS), by the name of Braxton Carter.

Colonel Carter was the most intellectual boss I had ever had, and that holds true until the end of my career. I last saw him at the bar of the Maxwell AFB Officers Club whilst having a beer as a respite from my studies at the Air Command and Staff College in 1975.

Saigon fell during that same period, and we discussed that matter. It was April and May, and our Vietnamese officers were stranded in Montgomery, Alabama. Most elected to go back to Saigon and rejoin their families, though they knew, or should have known that it would lead to years of cruel political re-education in the camps. I offered to establish a bank account for my best friend in this country, but he replied, "I want to sleep in my own bed."

My first thought was, jeez, I know Montgomery is dull, but that dull?

Colonel Carter referred to this base naming exercise as "mental masturbation" and I tend to agree.

The story to why Colonel Carter replaced Colonel Owens is an interesting tale and deserves to be told.

We had aircraft assigned to the group which were for administrative purposes and were also used to ferry troops to Hong Kong and Taipei on R&R, which the troops called "I&I" for intercourse and intoxication.

They consisted of World War II era C-54 aircraft, first flown in 1942, and the Air Force's first four engine transport designed for that purpose. The Army Air Forces had some four engine C-87s which were B-24 bombers modified on the assembly line with cargo doors instead of bomb bays.

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The C-54 was a honey, but unpressurized, which though uncomfortable the crews and passengers, made it a dream for maintenance troops since it was uncomplicated to maintain. This restricted it, for the most part, to flying not more than 10,000 feet, MSL (mean sea level). Half the earth's atmosphere is gone when you reach 18,000 MSL.

It became the civilian DC-4 after the war. The aircraft which replaced it in 1953 (the year the Korean conflict ended) was the Douglas C-118, which looked like a stretched C-54, but was pressurized and had square windows, plus big R-2,800 engines instead of the R-2,000 engines of the C-54.

The way the engine numbering system works is that the "R" stands for radial engine (with cylinders arranged in a circle around the crank shaft), and the 2,000 indicates that the engine cylinders' displacements all together with the pistons at the bottom of the stroke add up to 2,000 cubic inches.

Pi time R squared, times the stroke, time the number of cylinders is the formula which all you old flight engineers well remember. How many of you remember "PLANK?"

The tale of the ailing C-118

In any case, the rear spar on the newer C-118 aircraft, right behind the number three engine (third from the left) had developed intergranular corrosion, presumably where the exhaust of the No. 3 engine swirled under the wing.

One of our Quality Control inspectors picked at it with a pencil, and the pencil went clear through the rear spar. There are only three of these spars holding the airplane up. The front, middle and rear spar, or No.3, which all run parallel from wing tip to wing tip and in concert hold up the airplane.

Our consensus was that the C-118 would have to be returned to the Stateside depot at Kelly AFB, Texas, for major maintenance. But the operations people had no four engine pilot to ferry it that they could spare. I suspect that none of them wanted to risk their lives flying an old transport of unknown structural integrity half way around the world.

But, we in Maintenance, had a qualified pilot with real big cajones, and was a World War II B-17 Jock, Lieutenant Colonel Owens, our dashing Commander, Chief of Maintenance

To be continued in next month's

Revetments

Tan Son Nhut an oasis for ...

The River Rats

Being a member of the Tan Son Nhut Association means a lot to David Bolton, retired Chief, U.S.N.

Stationed on the LST Harnett County, jammed in some 316 feet with ninety some other "river rats," constantly engaging the enemy lurking everywhere along the hundreds of miles of the Mekong and Bassac deltas was just routine duty.

Coming for brief visits to Tan Son Nhut were moments of blessed relief.

His very first stop in Vietnam was Tan Son Nhut, where our efficient processing officials, thinking that the Mekong was somewhere up north, promptly piled him on a VNAF cargo plane and shipped him to DaNang. After several weeks of kitchen police duty, someone got ahold of a decent map and sent him back south to his vessel.

Tan Son Nhut, to Bolton, was a place to unwind, buy real stuff in the B.X., take long hot showers and wear clean clothes. And, of course, it was a springboard to the pleasures and glory of Saigon.

And in the Airmen's Open Mess, he, as with any G.I. had more than his quota of tall tales to tell. He had his sober and painful incidents, but he also had moments of humor, like the time when his smaller patrol boat blithely sailed over the Cambodian border and they were interned for a while as the brass and the diplomats figured out what to do with them.

They soon let them go and they went back to their interdiction of enemy sampans sneaking through the canals and tributaries.

Bolton is not given to unnecessary flattery, but honestly believes that the people at Tan Son Nhut were hospitable, and comments, that no matter where you were, "we were all in it together."

Like Tan Son Nhut Air Base itself, he feels that the Tan Son Nhut Association is a "centralized" gathering place for all those who served in Vietnam. After all, he says, the motto says it all, "All Included -- None Excluded."



Anything you want, delivered right to your door



Better than Las Vegas -- The Airmen Open Mess, TSN



A night on the town -- Bolton in center



The Harnett County -- LST.821 -- Spacious living, river view



Bolton (standing) enjoying his river cruising days with a buddy

June Reunion Poll

The Tan Son Nhut Association is in the preliminary stages of planning for an Association Reunion in San Antonio, Texas during June, 2000. At this time we would like you to either fill in the following information, or call (757) 627-7746, FAX: (757) 627-0878, or E-Mail: hercules29@worldnet.att.net at your earliest convenience.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone, FAX, e-mail: _____

_____ Yes, I am planning to attend (with _____ others).

_____ Yes, I would be happy to work with the Reunion Committee.

Please send to: Suite 709, 330 W. Brambleton Avenue, Norfolk, Virginia 23510

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