Revetments

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association



Volume 1, Number 4

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

January 1999

Victory at Tet!

January, in particular January the 31st, 1968 was to become a significant moment in time and a powerful reaffirmation of the courage and bravery that can, and always has, been the hallmark of America's military men and women.

The moment in history is now called the Tet Offensive. Hanoi's General Giap was praised by the historian Arnold Toynbee as "the greatest tactician since Napoleon." He massed his forces all across South Vietnam and prepared to strike at over eighty population and defensive centers.

He unleashed his forces in the early evening of the second day of the Tet new years holiday. They stormed into Saigon and Hue, Pleiku and Kontum. At three in the morning of the third day of Tet, they flung themselves again Bien Hoa, Long Binh, and Tan Son Nhut.

For weeks the battle raged, the Americans and their allies quickly gaining the advantage. In the end, Giap was left in utter defeat, the victory, clearly and unquestionable ours.

Giap's only "victory" came five years later when he was handed the place by weak-kneed diplomats and the minions of a jaundiced and cynical

This issue is dedicated to those who fought and won the real victory!



Whose Future?

By Charles E. Penley

Charlie, I clearly remember the first time I saw you on the other side of the twenty kilometer, defensive perimeter fencing, that surrounded Tan Son Nhut Air Base, on the northwest outskirts of the capital city of Saigon. Even though it was thirty years ago, January 31, 1968, and the Tet Lunar New Year Peace Accord was in effect, to me, it really was, only yesterday. You were mostly a shadow, moving about in a manner that indicated to me you were very determined. By keeping yourself behind various structures, trees and bushes, it was clear that you did not want us to know of your presence. You were looking for the element of surprise. Under the rules of engagement we had to determine first if you were friend or foe. You stopped about 100 meters off our west perimeter of Tan Son Nhut. At that distance no verbal challenge of "Halt ... Dung Lai," could have or would have been given. In my mind, I determined that you were indeed, Foe, the Enemy, Charlie, Viet Cong, VC, NVA. Even though I did not know precisely what you were doing as an individual, I did know what your goal was. You were with thousands of your friends and comrades, Officers and NCOs alike.

The master plan for the Tet Offensive, code named "Tong Cong Kich-Tong Khoi Nghia (TCK-TKN, General Offensive -General Uprising)" had begun. We observed you setting up your 81 mm. mortars and then firing them; seeing your comrades blowing up the O-51 Gate with bangalore type charges. We were observing you and hearing you over-taking the O-51 Bunker containing five of my Security Police friends (Sergeants Coggins, Cyr, Fischer, Hebron and Mills, with only Coggins coming out alive after nearly eight hours of you being in the bunker with him). Being attacked with RPG-2 and RPG-7 rocket propelled grenades and AK-47s. The dreadful killing had begun and just as much as you were going to kill me, I was going to kill you. With a hatred!!! I was going to kill you! Coming directly at you with such a hatred in my heart. I had never seen you before but my friends and I knew what you had in mind. You were here to disperse your version of Death and Destruction.

You did not know it at the time, but we knew for several hours that you might be coming that day. We had captured several of your comrades the day before and believe me, when I say they were talking. Most of the mama-sans on the post had not come to work that day. Several of them also told us, "Tonight would be bad place." Then we knew it officially at 1730 hours, when the 377th Combat Security Police Squadron was placed in Security Condition Red, that you probably were coming that fateful night! Around 0322 hours, January 31, 1968, you began your assault on the Eastern perimeter and Northern perimeter of Tan Son Nhut's fortified boundaries.

With your NVA and Viet Cong's massive Tet Offensive, specifically with the multi-battalions that attacked Tan Son Nhut on our Western perimeter, I believed that anyone of us, of the American forces, could die that night. Most of us were very young, eighteen and nineteen years old. I was only twenty-two. I was considered the old man, in my sector. Some of us were single and some were married with children. We looked for to a FUTURE, whatever it may bring us! For the single men, it might be to get married, have children, to experience our sons and

daughters first handshake in life is the greatest of all; the clasp of an infants fist around a parent's finger, raise a family, go to college, to better ourselves and our families. To see our children grow up and become good adults. In due time, for our children to have our grandchildren. Looking back to yesterday, plus thirty years, maybe you might have had such aspirations as we did.

Knowing that you too, must have had loved ones, who care for you. As you see, in a way, you and I were not that much different when it came to our personal home life.

You see, for me to have my FUTURE, I must deny you your FUTURE!!! I didn't have a choice, you made my choice for me when you attacked Tan Son Nhut. As a result of your actions, you died for your country and your beliefs. You made us the Judge, Jury and Executioner. The Judge said, "Charlie, stand up. You have had a trial by combat and have been found guilty, and that the court takes positive delight in sentencing you to ... Death! You are a young man in good health, and the time of the year is wonderful. It's your New Year, the holiday spirit is alive with music and love is in the air, soon grass and other plants will be pushing fresh green heads out, birds will be singing of love and mating, flowers will be dressing up the valleys. But, you son-of-abitch will not see all this, you will be dead and more than six feet asunder, in the deep trench made by a bulldozer on the West end of the runway, covered with lime and then followed by tons of the good earth."

My decision and resulting reactions were made in a split second, the very instant that first mortar round was fired by you and having it land inside the defensive perimeter with that explosion that sounded like lightning and thunder.

As it was reported in the March 11, 1968, issue of Newsweek Magazine, pages 64-65, you were so confident of winning the Battle of Tan Son Nhut and the Battle of Saigon, that shortly before the offensive began, you placed an order at a renowned Chinese restaurant in Cholon for 400 meals to celebrate your victory. Cholon being the Chinese sector of Saigon and a large VC stronghold. In addition, you invited the Vietnamese emigres living in Paris to return to Saigon in order to participate in a coalition government. You also invited the Russian media to accompany you into battle in Saigon so as to write first person articles about your anticipated glorious victory over the Americans. You expected to find ARVN armored tanks at the armor school, to capture the U.S. Embassy, to seize the Saigon radio station (wanting to play a tape-recorded message from Ho Chi Minh). Further, you expected to capture Premier Nguyen Van Loc and force him to order a cease-fire over the said radio station. You were to free several thousand prisoners in prison, arm them and turn them loose on the population. You were to overtake an ARVN post who were finding that their artillery weapons had the breech mechanism removed, to capture American warplanes and (Continued, please see FUTURE, Page 3)



Former Security Policeman Receives Silver Star ... Thirty- One Years Late

On January 31st, Sergeant Alonzo J. Coggins finally receives the formal acknowledgment of his award of the Silver Star that he more than earned thirty-one years ago on the first night of the Tet Offensive.

Coggins is the sole survivor, out of five Security Policemen of the 377th Security Police Squadron manning the O-51 Bunker on the perimeter of Tan Son Nhut in the early morning hours of January 31, 1968. Shortly after 3:30 a.m., the enemies massive my attack against Tan (FUTURE, Continued from Page 2) use them against Tan Son Nhut and the capital of Saigon!

In all of these endeavors, you were never successful!!!

Even though many of us came away from the 'Nam with wounds that would heal with time, there is one wound that seems never to heal. The wound that is in my mind is of memories of those terrible days gone by, of friends good and brave whose names appear on The Wall. The despicable times that we had to endure. My friends were Security Policemen and most were K-9 Sentry Dog Handlers. Most of us had not begun to live our life to its fullest. Today, my previous security police friends are doctors, lawyers, dentists, optometrists, writers, policemen, postmen, laborers and such.

If they are like me, have reached middle age, gained weight and still have their FUTURES!!! Some are members of the Vietnam Dog Handlers Association, Vietnam Security Police Association, The Tan Son Nhut Association, 1st Cavalry Division Association, 101st Airborne (Air Assault) Association, the Military Police Corps Association, and the Son's of the American Revolution.

GREAT WEB SITES!

NEW! KIRK BENNETT's new 377th Sec. Police interest: http://www.cyberstate.infi.net/~ bennett/vietnam.html

C. PENLEY PAGE, 377th, Tan Son Nhut, http://users.intermedia.net/cepenley/index/html D. COOK PAGE, Tan Son Nhut interests, http://host.fptoday.com/COOK/index.htm

J.C.WHEELER PAGE, TSN, military intr.s, http://www.river-valley.net/ NEW! VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL

http://www.vvmf.org TAN SON NHUT ASSOCIATION

http://home.att.net~hercules29/

Son Nhut began.

A sapper unit (later identified as an element of the C-10 Sapper Battalion) drove up to Gate O-51, guarded by Bunker O-51. MACV Rules of Engagement prevented the Security Police from firing on the unit since it has not exhibited hostile intent prior to exploding its Bangalore torpedoes which blew a hole in the perimeter fence allowing the Viet Cong to start pouring onto the base.

The bunker returned the enemy fire but was shortly silenced by two direct hits from RPG2 or RPG7 rockets which killed four of the five Security Policemen.

The squadron immediately dispatched a four-man sector Security Alert Team (SAT), two three-man Standard SATs and a 13-man reserve SAT to the scene. They took positions just south and east of the O-51 Bunker and poured fire into the attacking forces until they were forced to withdraw due to lack of ammunition and perimeter helicopter gunship strikes in the

The enemy held O-51 Bunker fiercely, with Coggins as a prisoner. It wasn't until shortly after noon that a relieving force neutralized the resistance by

Chapters Begin

Revetments was pleased to hear, during December, from several of the recently designated "Officers Pro Tem" that work is going ahead in forming regional chapters of the Tan Son Nhut Association.

Norman Whitlow, of Lancaster, Texas, not too far from Dallas, reports that there is growing interest in forming a chapter soon, or even several, within the Texas region.

He is presently canvasing TSN members in the area, and wants to hear from as many as possible who are interested. His address is: 1451 Chipman Drive, Lancaster, Texas 75134. His home phone is (972) 227-8075, and he's added a FAX at: (972) 218-9669.

Texas now has over sixty-some registered members and Whitlow would like to schedule a get-to-gether as soon as possible So come on, pardners, saddle up and head on out to Dallas and make yourself known at the Whitlow spread.

grenade fire and assaulted and took the position, freeing Sergeant Coggins at last.

Major Thomas Joyce, an active duty officer at Randolph Air Force Base and an avid historian extremely interested in the history of Tan Son Nhut and especially its involvement in the Tet Offensive initiated a search for Sergeant Coggins.

Several former members of the 377th Security Police Squadron assisted in the search and successfully located Coggins in

Although Coggins had only received paperwork from the USAF that he was entitled to the Silver Star, he had never had a formal presentation of the medal.

Major Joyce has invited (captain, during Tet) Colonel Carl DeNisio, 377th Security Police Squadron, and the former Base Commander of Tan Son Nhut, Colonel "Tex" Peebles to conduct the ceremonies to be held at Lackland Air Force Base on January 31st.

Major Joyce has issued an open invitation to any and all former Tan Son Nhut personnel to attend this ceremony.

For further information, contact Major Joyce at phone: (210) 652-2879 or by email at: TJ11736@aol.com

To Take Shape

And in the Old Dominion, Virginia. Alex (Gene) Chaisson of Fredericksburg. is in the middle of a mass mailing to over forty former TSN-ers. He is asking for recommendations for a chapter name and a number of other items that will promote rapid organization of the chapter.

Chaisson tells Revetments that he is hoping to form some kind of meeting in the Spring, probably in the centrally located city of Richmond.

His mail address is 10305 Leavells Road, Fredericksburg, Virginia 22407, and can be reached by telephone at: (540) 898-

So, let's see how long it takes the Virginia cavaliers to form ranks and give us a new chapter.

This makes two! already! We've only got forty-eight more to go at home. and then we've got that new Aussie member. How soon before we'll have a reunion hosted by the Sidney Chapter?



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and The Board of Directors
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Editorial

Upon Saint Bosco's Day

by Robert Stanley Need

On the last day of this month we celebrate, yes, I said *celebrate* the victory of the Battle of Tan Son Nhut. And, for that matter, we celebrate with all of our hundreds and thousands of brothers and sisters all over that embattled country, the total Victory of the Tet Offensive.

Without shame or apology, I dip into Shakespeare's *Henry The Fifth* as the King addressed his troops in the morning of the Battle of Agincourt,

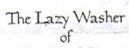
This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remembered;
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he today that sheds his blood with me,
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition;
And gentlemen in England now abed,
Shall think themselves accurred they were not here,
And hold their manhood cheap whiles any speaks,
That fought with us

upon Saint Crispin's Day!
According to the church calendar, the
31st of January is dedicated to Saint John
Bosco who formed the Salesian Order.

On the 31st of January 1968, we went into battle, repulsing and thoroughly defeating the enemy. Most of us didn't know that around the world that day, the Tract in that day's mass was from the Psalms.

You are my refuge, O Lord,
A tower of strength against the enemy,
Oh, that I might lodge in your tent forever,
Take refuge in the shelter of your wings,
You indeed, O God., have accepted my vows;
You granted me the heritage of those who fear your
name!





Tan Son Nhut

Gene Chaisson, Fredericksburg, Virginia
Washing clothes was the last of my
thoughts upon arriving at Tan Son Nhut
around February 6, 1972. However, I
always get a chuckle when I see a box of

Upon arrival we were herded into a large building close to the flight line. We were given an in-country briefing on the do's and don'ts of Vietnam. Luckily, we were rescued by a Medic with an ambulance who turned out to be Bob, the





pharmacy tech) and I went to our new squadron, the 377th USAF Hospital, located across from the heliport and adjacent to the Security Police and OSI

barracks. These barracks resemble a rundown, elongated shed. No windows, just screening and about twenty men on two floors. There were about six showers on each floor. It was the old open bay barracks of basic training time.

Outside, the barracks were surrounded by rotting sandbags stacked about four feet high.

We had several "hooch maids," usually older, black-toothed women who shined boots and washed our uniforms, socks and underwear. I can't remember the price but it was reasonable. The old women were ingenious. They took new, metal 40 gallon garbage cans, soap and water, the laundry, and then stood in the barrels under the showers and stomped up and down on them. This usually occurred about 0900 to 1000 hours when most of the troops were at work, except for the night shift who were already asleep. The laundry was then hung on the sand bags to dry in the hot sun.

As the year went along, and the war casualties lessened, we closed down one of the wards in the hospital. There were several private rooms with air conditioners, a sink and toilet. The Hospital Commander let each section head move into these accommodations and I felt that it was like moving to the Hilton.

Of course this meant a new "Momma (Continued, see LAZY WASHER, Page 5)

The Communications Center

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

Dear Friends,

During this time of year, we pause and reflect on our lives and the friends we have in our lives that bring us comfort, joy and happiness. So, during this holiday season, I wish for you and yours all the happiness and joy that comes with the spirit of Christmas. May you and yours find peace and prosperity in the coming New Year. With us, take time to be thankful for the many blessings we have had this year, and hope that the next year will bring peace to the world and its people.

> Best wishes, Pat and Cleta Patterson Charlotte, North Carolina

In Memorial

Revetments publishes the following letter with deep regret and extends the sincere condolences of The Membership

Dear Sir:

Please remove Thomas Goode, of Winter Haven, Florida from your mailing List. My brother was killed in an auto accident on November 16, 1998.

Tom was proud to have served his country for more than 20 years including 38 months in Vietnam as his family was proud of him.

Although gone from sight, he will always be in our hearts.

Edward J. Goode

To You Daughter,

My father, Sam E. Finley served at Tan Son Nhut during 1966-1967, USAF, 13th Reconnaissance Squadron. I was born in August 1966. While my father was over there he carried this newspaper clipping in his wallet.

Sung and warm you slept in your crib.

I bent to kiss you good-bye. Then pausing a moment for one last glance,

I wiped a tear from my eye.

For now I must leave you for

one long year,

To help keep freedom that we hold so dear.

I know one day when you have grown,

You'll realize the sacrifices shown.

By men who care to fight and die,

To protect this freedom from those who try,

To strip this precious right of men.

So one year of my life I'll spend in Vietnam,

Sharing with others and those to come.

The pride and honor of our country's stand,

To defend this freedom until the end.

Then I'll come home a bit tired,

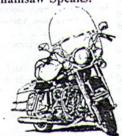
A bit older and try to make up,

The last year to you, daughter.

Caren Glenn Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



Chainsaw Speaks!



Motorcycle enthusiast, Al Strauss sends season greetings to us all, and wants others of motorcycle persuasion to get in touch with him through e-mail: Chainsaw53@juno.com

He also wanted us to see this clipping from the newsletter of the American Motorcycle Assc.

"Driving in Vietnam is hard enough even if you give it 100 percent of your attention. That Government believes anything less is to be So, beginning discouraged. immediately, motorcycle riders in Vietnam who are caught using a cellular phone will be fined \$3. Although that may not sound like much by western standards, the average annual per capita income is only \$300. It is one of the world's poorest countries.

"The Saigon Liberated News reported recently that the use of umbrellas on motorcycles is also being banned. Although traffic never makes it up to the speeds that are common in Western countries, an average of 10 people a day die on Vietnam's roads. Roughly 95 percent of the traffic is on two wheels --either low powered motorcycles or bicycles."

Alan H. Strauss Azle, Texas (LAZY WASHER from Page 4) San." This enterprising lady had a large family who assisted in picking up laundry, shining shoes, etc. Each day the laundry was picked up and returned that evening. Naturally I didn't pay much attention except when they lost a sock, etc. This lady of indeterminate age was always dressed in a rustcolored top and the ubiquitous black trousers. I do remember that she was always demanding a new box of Tide. It got so I was marking each soap purchase on the calendar. One day she appeared before the dispensing window all flustered and speaking broken English and waving her hands around. When you see this sight you can't ignore it, so I followed her, all the while she is telling me, "Machine lazy."

I followed her to a room I thought was a supply closet but the squadron had set her up with an old washer and dryer. Around the three walls were young children, mainly girls, squatting and ironing on the floor. There was a pile of uniforms heaped in the middle of the room. On one side several small boys were busy shining boots and shoes. Almost half way across the room stood the ancient washer. As we entered, "Momma San" once again repeated, "Machine lazy," angrily in the direction of the hapless youngsters, and in the same broken English.

What happened was very apparent. The children had overloaded the old, tired washer and when it began to spin dry it walked right out of its normal position against the wall, and in doing so pulled the plug out of the wall socket.

I wrestled the machine back into position and plugged it in. Much to the amazement of "Momma San" and her babies, it started right up. Again the assembly line started right up and they were cranking out clean, ironed uniforms. That night everyone found laundered uniforms hanging from their doorknobs. Peace descended once again on the hospital.

However, I still get the feeling that I bought more than my share of soap. Still, it was a good deal for all of us. I often wonder if "Momma San" and her brood got out of Saigon and Tan Son Nhut in 1975. I really hope she did and perhaps somewhere in the United States, she now reigns over a laundry empire because of her unique organizational skills.

The Members'

Mail, Call and E-Mail in your "wanteds, for sales, looking for, announcements, etc."

FATHER SOUGHT

BY DAUGHTER My daughterin-law is trying to locate her natural father who was in the 7th Air Force stationed at Tan Son Nhut Air Base in 1965. I do not know his last name. His for future researchers. Thank you first name was William and he for serving your country, welcome was called Bill. He was an E-6 home, and I'm proud of you for or E-7 and was an aircraft answering the call. mechanic who worked inside the 1. Name. hangar. He was Caucasian and 2. Vietnam dates of service. in 1965 he was 27 years old and 3. Rank (at the time).
4. Town & State where enlisted. had been in the Air Force for 9 5. Why did you join military? years. He flew back to the 6. What service were you in? States from Tan Son Nhut on a 7. Age when arrived in country? Seaboard & Western charter 8. Did father serve in WWII/Korea? flight on November 15, 1965, to 10. What organization did you serve in? Travis Air Force Base. My 11. Who was your supvisor and C.O.? daughter-in-law was born on 12. Occupation in USAF? January 22nd, 1966. When 13. Were you wounded in action? Ellen was born, a friend of 14. Medals or commendation received. Bill's, named Tom, came by to 16. What was your role? see the baby, took a picture of 17. Were you involved in any other her and left money. If anyone has any information, or was at the air base at the time, please 18. Explain experiences in detail (use contact me.

Louise Stickney 20. Please state their name(s). Houston, Texas 77077 Telephone: (281) 870-0778 22. Please state their names.

LStickney@worldnet.att.net

TSN Assc. looking for lost members during records shake-Members knowing of previous members who have not 27. been receiving Revetments, 28. Date discharged or retired? please have them contact Pub. 29. What did you do after you left Affairs. (757) 627-7746, E-mail: 30. What lessons can we learn today hercules29@worldnet.att.net

REUNION PLANNERS

WANTED Members interested in planning for, arranging and conducting TSN Assc. Reunion activities, please call VP John Peele, (303) 277-7474, or write to: 6103 57th Avenue, Riverdale, MD 20737.

TSN VET. QUESTIONNAIRE

Please provide your answers on a separate sheet(s) of paper and mail to: Major Thom Joyce, 11726 Jarvis Drive, San Antonio, Texas 78253. My goal is to publish your information in a reference document

- 9. Other relatives in previous wars?

- 15. Did you participate in Tet?
- battles, sapper attacks, or rocket attacks?
- additional sheets if necessary).
- 19. Did you lose comrades in Vietnam?
- 12318 Briar Forest Drive 21. Is there anyone you believe should have received a medal, but didn't?

 - E-mail: 23. Is there anyone who you would like to locate but haven't heard from Since you left Vietnam?
 - 24 Please state their name(s)'.
- SEARCH & RESCUE Help! 25. Do you have any pictures, videos, maps or rosters, etc. from Tan Son Nhut?
 - 26. Would you be willing to donate your artifacts to a TSN museum?
 - Would you be willing to loan them?

 - the military?
 - from your experiences?
 - 31. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you!

Pass your copy of Revetments around to friends!

TET '68

hmond Remembers P.O. Box 31885 Richmond, Virginia 23294

1999 SCHOLARSHIP RULES



order to be considered for a \$1,000 scholarship, the applicant must be a high school senior whose tent of stepparent is a "Vietnum ventrum. Write a short essay on "What is Preedom", and submit this for diging by a panel selected by the TET '61 Board.

All entries must be received by March 31, 1999. Winning essay writers will be notified by phone by May 15, 1999 that they have won.

We will work with High Schools in an effort to award the scholarships at school ceremonies. Since do not know at this time how much funding will be available from our 1999 reasons, we cannot say many scholarships will be given. However, you can be assured that we will give as many as possible

Each spolication rubmined must include the following

- 1. A copy of the parent's or stepparent's DO 214 showing Vietnam service with Campaign Ribbon Anwel.

 2. Short resay on "What is Preedom" (500 word maximum). Easy must be typed and double spaced it will be judged on originality and seatness. An original and three (5) copes, without the authors mane on the copes (we will doed in them), are to be pubmitted. TET 98 owns the easy and can republish it. Wissers agree to furnish us a photo for our scrapboots.

 3. Provide a cover sheet which includes the following information:

 1. Applicant's full easter, address and phone number:

 2. name, address, and phone number of contact person at High School presently amending.

 - mereding
 J. name, address, phose number of contact person as school where application has been made or will be poing for further training and education.

 a statement signed by the applicant that he or will graduate form High School in May/fune of the year of their application.

NOTE: To be eligible for judging, all of the above must be received no later than March 31, 1999 Firster send only by first-class mail - no overnight, Federal express, Purolance, Centified or Registered packages, please! Any package received after our deadline or with postage daw will be returned to sends, unoproced.

TET '68

12TH ANNUAL

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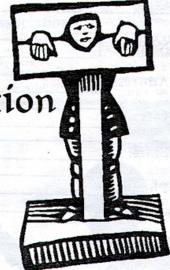
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This guy didn't

send in his application

form yet.



(Please fill out form on Page 8 and return promptly.)

Postage Here

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Norfolk, Virginia 23510

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION & INFORMATION FORM

	1.9
Name:	121700
Address:	
City:	
State:	Zip Code:
Phone:	E-Mail:
Tan Son Nhut Affiliation?	Particular Services Andrews An
The Date of the Control of the Contr	
I would like to renew my membership in January 1999: I would enjoy assisting in forming a TSN Chapter:	Yes ()
I would like to attend a TSN reunion in 1999:	Yes () (Signature)

The Tan Son Nhut Association **Editorial Offices** Suite 709, 330 W. Brambleton Ave. Norfolk, Virginia 23510

