Revetments

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

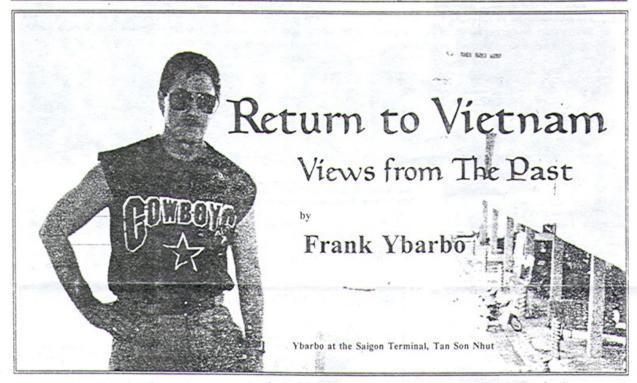


"All Included - Non Excluded"

Volume 1, Number 6

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

March, 1999



Editor's Note: In December, Member Frank Ybarbo returned to Vietnam. We are more than proud to publish his account of that trip. We only regret that *Revetments* technical ability does not measure up to the excellence of Ybarbo's splendid photography. With apologies to Frank we at least are trying to give our readers a touch of his experiences.

* * *

Like many before me, I served in Vietnam exactly thirty years ago in 1967-1968. My tour of duty was strictly at Tan Son Nhut Air Base located on the northwestern edge of Saigon.

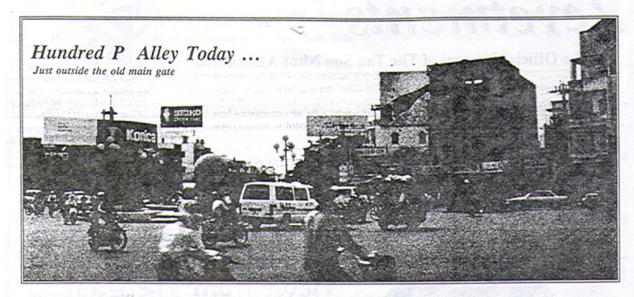
I know many of you remember this base, especially Security Policemen who were there with me during the Tet attack in the early morning hours of January 31, 1968. We lost four good men (Louis Fischer, William Cyr, Charles Hebron and Roger Mills) in the 051 Bunker (Echo 37) which was located on the western perimeter of Tan Son Nhut, and took the brunt of the attack. As I recall, the 051 Bunker Area was assaulted by three enemy battalions. Without exaggeration, the five Security Policemen (including Alonzo Coggins who survived) in the bunker, and the 377th Security Police Squadron fought gallantly against overwhelming odds. In my mind, I can still hear their frantic radio transmission for help as tracer fire, flares and rockets lit up the night sky.

Recently (December 1-7, 1998) I had the fortunate opportunity to return to Saigon. During my visit I made it a point to see Tan Son Nhut one more time and try to locate the area of the 051 Bunker. Believe it or not, the bunker is still standing. With the help of some excellent Vietnamese guides.

Tung and Hoai, and some slick maneuvering (this area is a restricted military zone) we located the bunker. The 051 is the only bunker still there. The original barbed wire perimeter of the air port has now been replaced with a twelve foot concrete wall. Highway One (also still there) is a bustling, busy two lane thoroughfare.

At first, because of all the area improvements and the concrete security wall, I could not locate the exact area of the 051 Bunker which sat approximately forty meters east of Highway One. As we were searching down Highway One I just "happened" to see the roof of what appeared to be an old bunker protruding above the concrete wall! With the assistance of the two Vietnamese guides, I was able to get to the area and to the top of the wall to get a view of the lone

(Please turn to Vietnam, Page 2)



Vietnam, Continued from Page 1. standing monument. It was the 051!

For a moment, all I could do was stare in amazement. I couldn't believe it was still there! As I stared and recalled the battle, it seemed to just stand silent and alone as a reminder of the sacrifices of war.

The area across Highway One which used to be an open kill zone with just a few dwellings and rice paddies is now built up with businesses all along the highway. The old Vinatexco factory, from which the Viet Cong staged their attack, is also still there but now operates under another name.

Much of the flight line looks the same as it did in 1968. Most of the revetments have been removed but were replaced with concrete canopies which are still there and visible from the terminal. The original control tower, adjacent to the old C-130 and main terminal area is still in use. The original airport terminal has been remodeled on the inside but looks the same on the flight line side as it did in 1968. The front of the terminal has also been remodeled; however, I was able to clearly recognize the area as it was in 1968.

The original main gate to the base has been removed and the main gate area and the area along the main gate road which led west to the Security Police barracks, Mars; station and heliport is now open and commercial business area. Tan Son Nhut has been downsized and the perimeter moved about two hundred yards north of the main gate road. The two large octagon water towers east of the old SP barracks are still there. These towers helped me recognize the area. Many may also recall the areas just outside the main gate referred to as "100 P Alley." This area of buildings is also still there.

In consideration of my Bien Hoa counterparts, I travet to Bien Hoa in hopes of photographing Bunker Hill 10. However, after the long ride there, photographs were not allowed anywhere around the base area. The highway to Bien Hoa from Saigon and the Bien Hoa area are now all built up with very little countryside.

Saigon still looks much the same as it did in 1968, but is much more crowded. You can see some modernization and building improvements such things as cell phones, street phone booths, fax machines, photocopy centers, and believe it or not "the Yellow Pages." Anyone desiring to return need not have any anxiety or concern about the trip. The Vietnamese people are friendly and have no animosity towards Americans. The city was safe and relatively inexpensive. Western influence is very much alive and English is still widely accepted and spoken.

Although the official name of the city is Ho Chi Minh, everyone continues to call it Saigon.

"Again," one thing this trip taught me was God Bless America And Her People." We are a really blessed nation. I feel more proud now that I had the opportunity to defend our way and assist the Vietnamese people. To me, the trip was well worth it.



Ceremony Becomes A Day Of Triumph for All Who Served at Tan Son Nhut

For the week or so after February 12th, cyberspace was filled with messages flashing back and forth across the country among members of the Tan Son Nhut Association, and many others, exchanging feelings of honor and pride in being the comrades of a brave and heroic man, of having served their country well, and of having had the honor to serve at Tan Son Nhut Air Base.

Revetments cannot report the event anywhere near as well as Bruce Kilgore, of AFSFC, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, in his article, Vietnam Memories.



Alonzo Coggins

Little did I know some 27 years ago as a friend gave me a quick tour of Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Vietnam, that a casual tour of the base would provoke such strong memories later in life. In December of 1971 I was a young Airman First Class learning the ropes and finding Space A flights in South Vietnam in search of a Bob Hope show.

Officially I was returning to Thailand after attending the 7/13th Air force Heavy Weapons Course at Phan Rang when "opportune" airlift left me overnight at Tan Son Nhut. I was fortunate as one of my tech school classmates spotted me at the terminal and offered a ride. Sadly I can't remember his name, but bits and pieces of his "base tour" have been forever etched in my memory.

The most significant of those memories were his comments about how Bunker 051 had been overrun during Tet '68. I've always known that four Security Policemen gave their lives defending the base during Tet, but it wasn't until a few weeks ago that I learned there was a survivor of that intense fight.

Enough about me, and on to the real story of the past few days.

Major Tom Joyce, a member of the Headquarters, AETC/SF staff, and a history buff, discovered that the sole survivor of Bunker 051 had never been officially presented with his Silver Star and Purple Heart. Major Joyce spent countless hours researching the topic and searching for our unrecognized hero who was ultimately located in Jamaica, New York.

Major Joyce then went into high gear to insure the survivor was recognized in an appropriate way. Many people jumped on the bandwagon to make this a special event. I'm especially glad that we have an organization like the Air Force Security Police Association to provide financial support to ensure that our hero and his wife could be properly honored.

On Thursday, February 11th, I was honored to be one of the representatives of the Air Force Security Force Center to participate in a luncheon honoring that survivor. The lunch, sponsored by the San Antonio area Security Force Chief Master Sergeants, was to introduce this hero to local Security Force NCOs.

What an experience, to be in the presence of Mr. Alonzo J. Coggins! He's such a humble man who credits God for his survival. The stories are almost unbelievable, but true. There were many heroes during Tet '68, and lots of praise. Unfortunately A/IC Coggins was seriously wounded and was evacuated to the 'States before any award could be presented. He spent 8 months recovering in an Army hospital in Colorado where he was medically retired. His awards were mailed to his home without any special fanfare.

About 250 people gathered at Carter Hall (the Security Force Academy) on Lackland AFB, Friday, February 12th, for the ceremony to honor Mr. Coggins.

The Tan Son Nhut Tet '68 story was presented in detail including video of the actual battle from both the American and Viet Cong perspectives. It was specific and graphic!! The audience was obviously shaken when the video showed the massive explosions as American force shelled the overrun bunker containing the already wounded Coggins. After watching those videos we all knew that God was watching over Coggins that day. You could feel the emotion in the room as an audio tape from soon after the attack was played.

Then Lieutenant Colonel Billy Jack Carter, the 377th Sec. Police Squadron Commander. conducted a memorial service at Bunker 051 for the four dead comrades. To think that after so many years we were finally presenting the Silver Star to a hero in a building dedicated to the memory of the man who commanded that unit, and were listening to Colonel Carter's voice in a very special memorial service.

Emotion boiled forth again when four

airmen, in full camouflage, representing the four dead comrades presented the American flag to Lt. Colonel (Ret.) Carl Bender. Bender, a Silver Star recipient who was the 377th SPS Operations Officer during the battle, in turn surrendered the flag to Coggins.

An extra treat was the presentation of the 377th Sec. Forces Squadron's quideon with its battle streamers by the squadron's current First Sergeant. The 377th SFS is now located at Kirtland AFB, New Mexico, and is our most decorated unit.



Major and Mrs. Thomas Joyce

Comments Pour In

Among the flood of comments sent to Major Joyce, we like to offer those of Master Sergeant Clifford A. Lewis.

"I just wanted to personally thank you for the wonderful ceremony today. It was 31 years overdue and it touched me deeply. You provided a great service to these warriors of yesteryear. You also provided the defenders of today and hopefully tomorrows with a proud and honorable history that most never knew existed. For what it is worth I'm very proud of you and the efforts put forth to pay tribute to these great and honorable men. We all owe them so much. Hopefully, they will finally be given the place in history they so richly deserve. My grandfather used to tell me that 'history is our greatest teacher' and I've tried to know, understand and pass on this history. Until I met you I've never really known any other SF person who knew and understood the importance of history. I've learned a great deal from you and I thank you. I just want you to know what I consider you, Major Joyce, as not only the guardian of our history, but the greatest champion as well. Thank you, and God bless you."

Editor: The sergeant is talking about us all, every man and woman who served there!



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Editorial

Au Revoir, But Not Good Bye

by Robert Stanley Need

At present, until the Association Constitution is ratified, and permanent elections are held and a Department of Membership Affairs is established, the temporary Public Affairs Department is handling the membership roster.

As of this issue, there is a total of 608 individuals designated as members from the files assigned to the Public Affairs Department.

All of these people have been receiving *Revetments*, starting with the October 1998 issue.

From the enclosed application membership form, Public Affairs received 232 returns, with all of them requesting renewal on January 1. They were all sent a membership card and a statement for \$20, or Life Membership at \$180.

To date, 146 reinstated their regular membership, and 8 have generously become Life Members. A remaining 78 are still outstanding with their remittals.

That still leaves 376, from whom we have not heard a word.

In last month's Revetments we announced that we were going to expunge all of those who had not responded by February 15th. Since the Tan Son Nhut



Home Sweet Home, Tan Son Nhut Style from the camera of Member Loren Peterson



The President's Corner

Association is not made of money and has none of the resources of great organizations like the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars, this removal of 376 names would have saved us \$124.08 on the mailing costs of this issue.

But, you received this issue.

Why, because you think we're chicken? Why, because you think we're just after your money? Why, do you think we're just too lazy to screen the files?

None of the above.

In the last half a year the letters, email, faxes and phone calls that have been received by Public Affairs have not only convinced us, but has at times, emotionally dedicated us to building and expanding this Association.

The Virginia Chapter is meeting next month. Norman Whitlow is down there in Dallas shaping up an organization that will represent us in state and nation memorials coming up this year. Jim Stewart and others are seeking an early meeting this spring in Michigan.

Elsewhere in this issue you can read about the Coggins Ceremony at Lackland. The Security Police and Doghandler Associations played tremendous roles in this event, but the Tan Son Nhut Association is also credited with making its contribution.

Public Affairs is loathe to remove a single name from our rosters. Many of these are becoming personal friends of us, and so very often each other across the nation. We are constantly being called for phone numbers, e-mail and mailing addresses when individuals find us on the

I would like to thank everyone for all the hard work they have been putting into the Tan Son Nhut Assocation.

I know that everyone has enjoyed the newsletter. But to keep up this kind of success, we need new members. It is up to each of us to spread the word that the Tan Son Nhut Association is on the move upwards.

When John Peele (Vice President) and I had our first reunion in Evansville, Indiana, we didn't have any idea that we could grow as much as we have. I know from past experience that if you haven't attended one of our reunions, you should make plans to do so.

If you have any ideas or comments, please contact Bob Need at:

hercules29@worldnet.att.net and he will see that your comments are in the Revetments newsletter.

Here's hoping to see all of you at our next reunion.

Yours in comradeship, Don E. Parker, President

Internet. The relatives and friends of those killed at Tan Son Nhut call us and write us to assist in telling their story and wanting information about them.

Each name on our roster is someone you and I either knew, came just before or just after we left, sat across the chow hall, shouldered us on the streets or worked in the next revetment on the flight line.

There are no strangers in this association. We all knew each other or should have then. If you really don't want to stay, okay. But we'll really miss you.

The Communications Conter

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

ANOTHER VIEW -

I found your Tet article on Page 1 of Revetments (January, 1999) particularly interesting; I arrived at TSN two months later, and many friends I made there had gone through Tet.

take However, I your exception to statement about "weakkneed diplomats and the minions of a jaundiced and cynical med." I think that the ever-increasing number of "Vietnam books" suggest that there may be just a bit more to Giap's "victory" than your statement indicates. We should not forget that the public and the media originally were supportive of the war. What changed, and why, will be written about and debated for years to come.

have opportunity of observing the reaction of the public in a special way. For the past five years, I have a licensed professional tour guide in Washington, D. C. As I regularly accompany Americans of all ages, from all parts of the country, visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. I have stood with parents who cried as

they saw their son's name; I have stood with former military personnel who cried as they relived their memories; I have stood with former peace protesters who cried as they relived their memories. I have seen a wide range of emotions and heard a wide range of comments.

One comment in particular summed up much of what I have heard. A woman, now well in her 60s, talked about how she had originally been very supportive of the effort in "We were Vietnam. fighting Communism, and that is a good thing. I believe totally in what we were doing. But then the cost got too high." She ended up protesting the

There were no easy answers then, and there are no easy answers now, however comforting it may be to fall back on simplistic scapegoats.

Lt. Col. Carol Bessette Springfield, Virginia

More Tales From Tan Son Nhut

An Army View of TSN

by Loren Peterson Galesburg, Illinois

I joined the Army in August of 1966 at 17 years of age. I wanted to be a military policeman but was too young.

When I got to Tan Son Nhut, 79th Ordnance Detachment, GMGS Hawk (General Maintenance General Supply for Hawk Missile batteries) I was able to get a job in the Security Platoon. We were directly on the perimeter and had control of that small section, plus general security elsewhere on the compound, plus the main gate to the 79th.

I remember all the Security Police that rolled through our gates to fill up with ice. They would, in turn, drop off goodies that they got off the planes, like ice cream and real milk.

After leaving Tan Son Nhut I went to Giessen, Germany for a year and a half before discharge. I was in Brigade and Battalion Artillery in the Intelligence Section. We were nuclear.

Now I am a Senior Quality Engineer for Maytag Corporation, at their refrigerator factory in Galesburg. I am really happy I came across the Tan Son Nhut (web) sites! Thanks for your efforts! * * *

From Tan Son Nhut to Port au Prince, Haiti

A lesson well learned and passed on by

Joe ("Hot Rod") Thompson King of Prussia, Pennsylvania

In October 1971, I PCS'ed from Beale Air Force Base, California to Tan Son Nhut. I was essentially a brand spanking new E-4, and also a "newbee" to TSN. I was so new that I was still wearing the standard green stateside fatigues with the blue and white name tapes.

One day that October after all the inprocessing was over and was finally working on the flight line, my shop chief sent me up to the main part of the base from our shop with the shop's blue pickup truck. I do not really recall what I was sent there for however. I can remember the events of the return trip very clearly.

When I reentered the flight line from the area near the AGE shop, I became disoriented, not really sure where I was, or the proper way to get to the Fuel System Repair Area located at the end of the flight line. All I knew was that I had to get over to where the "gooney birds" revetments were and make a left. In the course of my travels I also knew how late in returning I was and what would have been done to me at Beale for such an offense.

Unbeknownst to me in the hot sweaty pickup truck, I was also (Please see, Tales, Page 6)

TSN Virginia Chapter Meeting

A founding meeting of the TSN Virginia Chapter will be held in Norfolk, Virginia, Saturday, April 10, at 12 noon. Attendance is not limited to Virginia members only, all interested are invited to attend.

Call Regional Director Chaisson at (540) 898-0239, TSN Public Affairs at (757), 627-7746 for details.

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Tales, from Page 5

being followed by the Law Enforcement Security Police in their 1/4 ton truck. When I reentered the flight line they had the pleasure of seeing me drive a little too fast, in addition to not executing the proper passing procedures in the vicinity of a C-47 getting ready to "pull chocks."

The security police judiciously pulled me over and asked me for my military driver's license, specifically the one with "Viet Nam" stamped on it. As my luck of the day would have it, this particular license was in my barracks room. What else could go wrong?

I quickly envisioned myself now having a "chat" with the 377th CAMS Commander, Captain Matthews, regarding my unique driving skills and lack of flight line safety knowledge.

I pleaded with the security police that I needed to get back to my shop to return the truck.

They agreed, and as soon as we pulled into my work area, my shop chief Technical Sergeant "Shorty" Yarbrough, appeared from the "office," nothing more than a plywood and tin-roofed affair. One of the SPS immediately gave him a full briefing on my inefficiencies as a driver. Shorty listened to the tale and then said to them, "This man just got here, and he will get into a lot of trouble. Please let me handle this."

The SPS reluctantly agreed to let Sergeant Yarbrough handle my punishment, and released me into his custody. As they left he looked at me and said in his most stem voice, "Number One, what were you doing speeding on the flight line?!? What were you doing passing an aircraft?!?"

When I could offer no immediate explanation, he proceeded to properly chew my butt. The experience was sufficiently unpleasant that I found myself considering that it would have been better had the SPs taken me away.

Shorty looked at me and said, "You know what, Sergeant Thompson? Your new name is 'Hot Rod!' Come on, Hot Rod, let's get a cup of coffee."

For the remainder of my tour in Viet Nam, everyone in the Fuel Shop knew me by that name. I never forgot the incident, or Shorty sticking up for me, and 2 also didn't do any more speeding on the flight line. I knew that if the same thing had happened at Beale, my shop chief would have probably fed me to the nearest lions, even if that meant a long drive to the closest zoo.

Many years later, I am still in the military, having made the move to the Army, earned a commission, and eventually found myself in the Army Reserves. To my surprise and great pleasure I had the unique ability to pass on the wisdom taught me that hot morning in 1971, this time in another hot climate.

In September of 1994, I was attached to the Civil Military Section of the 10th Mountain Division during Operation Uphold Democracy, in Haiti.

On day I received a call at the Civil Military Operations Center from a very irate military policeman who was working the entry point to our compound.

"Major Thompson! We just had one of your sergeants leave out here speeding, and carrying Haitian nationals in the back of the humvee!"

I asked him to let me handle it. When the offending buck sergeant returned from Port au Prince, I properly chewed his ass in a fashion that I hoped would have made Shorty proud, and then christened him with my nickname of 23 years earlier ... "Hot Rod."

I experienced deja vu that evening as his buddies picked up the new moniker. But the label had the desired effect: his driving became more responsible and there were no more complaints from the military police.

Thanks, Shorty, for bailing me out ... I never forgot it!

The Navy Gets Cute - at Tan Son Nhut

David W. Schill

Moorestown, New Jersey

My friend, Walt Campbell and I had served in the same U.S. Navy Seabee battalion and were leaving Da Nang together for Australia as our chosen R&R location. Since we had been taken over by our sister battalion located at Cam Ranh Bay, we were eligible to leave for R&R out of

Tan Son Nhut instead of Da Nang. We thought this was too cool, since being stuck in a unit based in I Corps our entire tour meant there was no hope of ever seeing other parts of Vietnam. Now that our old unit went home for decommissioning, the new unit's southern location gave us new hope.

We caught the Air Force C-130 coastal shuttle at the Da Nang Air Base in December 1970 and headed south for our dream vacation. With a couple stops en route, we finally arrived at Tan Son Nhut and taxied in. Our orders told us to remain over night at the in-country R&R Center at Tan Son Nhut and be ready for departure the next day for Sydney.

Upon arrival at the R&R Center, we waited in a short line for berthing assignments and chance to relax for the evening in the enlisted quarters.

Much to our surprise, the billeting soldier told Walt that the officer's quarters were to the left, while he told me the enlisted quarters were to the right.

Now Walt, being extremely quick on the uptake, told the Spec-4 that I was his guest. The doggie apologized and redid my assignment to reflect a room next to Walt's.

Hurrying away with keys in hand, and snickering to the point of liquid coming out of our noses, we could not believe our good luck. Who wants to sleep in the barn with all the other animals when we could be in white-sheeted heaven with the upper crust.

After seeing our rooms, we headed to the club and tried to recount why the soldier thought Walt was an officer. We wore the same greens, had the same "U.S. Navy" above our left pockets, had different name tapes above the right pockets, but that shouldn't have looked "officer-like." What could it have been?

Ah Hah!

Walt's enlisted title was SW3, or SteelWorker Third Class (E4 in pay grade). Naturally the Spec-4 thought I was three steps below plant life, but he thought Walt was some sort of Senior Warrant Officer 3rd grade, or something like that.

And, of course, on Walt's hat was a silver eagle with chevron under it which added the icing to Revetments, March, 1999

the false cake (the "eagle" is what we Navy pukes call a Crow and with one chevron under it signified a Third Class Petty Officer, or E4).

We never did get caught and went on our merry way to the land of down under.

Unfortunately, the week was all too short, ending with a journey north of sad troopers filling the void of the Pan Am 707 bound for Tan Son Nhut and the land of things that go bang in the night.

Walt got out after his tour. I made BUCS (Builder Senior Chief, or E8) and still do drill weekends at Lakehurst, New Jersey, happy to have such memories to pass on to the young, impressionable minds of the "New Navy."

Editor's Note: David Shill would like to hear from any former Seabees from the Vietnam War era. He will send them a Vietnam Era Seabees Newsletter and hope they will join the VES Association. He can be contacted at 132 Harding Avenue, Moorestown, New Jersey. His phone is: (609) 234-2273, with a Fax at: (609) 234-2914. And cybergeeks can reach him at: DWSchill@aol.com

. . .

The Literary Scene

Revetments is discovering that the TSN Association has a number of talented and gifted writers among the membership. And, we'd like to uncover more of them.

MALISH! is a fine book on life in the Air Force during the '60s, and especially during Tet '68 at Tan Son Nhut. It is by Member Rick Fulton.

. . .

SITTING DUCK, Adventures of a Saigon Warrior is another account of life in, at and around Tan Son Nhut. The author is Member Nicholas Boldrini.

NORTHERN FRIGHTS, a fascinating look at Wisconsin folklore includes poignant echoes of Vietnam. It is by Member Dennis Boyer.

For information on ordering these books, contact the TSN Public Affairs, Ph: (757)627-7746. E-Mail: hercules29@worldnet.att.net

Ine Comic Section

Editor's Note: One of our members is trying to get funny with us ... and he is! Captain Robert B. Chambers of Richardson, Texas sent *Revetments* a very amusing letter that we couldn't wait to get into print.

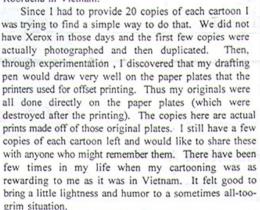
* * ;

Dear Tan Son Nhuters,

I am getting just old enough that I cannot remember what I have already written you!



Whatever, ... enclosed are cartoons done for the Air Force News Service through the 7th AF Information Office during the year 1966. During that time I was a combat film team director for the Air Force, making 16 mm. color motion pictures of the war, taking still photos and serving as Liaison Officer for CBS, NBC, ABC and Time/Life. At the same time I was a cartoonist for the Air Force News Service. My cartoons appeared not only in the 7th AF News, but also on the back pages of Pacific Stars and Stripes as well as in all of the base newspapers on air bases around the globe. The series was known as "Robrucha in Vietnam."





Have fun with them and keep printing! Sincerely,



WHAT PRACES YOU SIDE THESE WISHEST AND THE PRACES AND SIDE THESE WISHEST AND SIDE THESE WISHEST AND THE PRACES.

Robert B. Chambers, Captain, USAF, 1966 VN









TAN SON NHUT ASSOCIATION APPLICATION FORM

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

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City:	Principles of the second secon	State:	Zip Code:	
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Annual Membership	, \$20.00 enclosed/bill me.	Life Members	hip, \$180.00 enclo	sed/bill me
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I am interested in joining	or assisting in forming a	n Association regional	or local chapter.	Yes ()
I am interested in attending and/or assisting in Association Reunion activities.			rities.	Yes ()
Please give us a little of y	our background (units, t	ours of duty, service, e	tc.)	

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

