

Revetments

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association



"All Included - Non Excluded"

Volume 3, Number 7

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

April, 2001

The Spirit of Flight



His first gas engine powered model airplane - 1942
From Member, Lt. Colonel Albert T. Keeler's book, *VIP Pilot*

Members Moved by Last Month's Issue

(Editor's Note: The article "Call To Arms" in the March issue of *Revetments*, and the inserted account of Master Sergeant Olbert Hiatt's experiences during the night of December 4 and into the day of December 5th, 1966, brought a wave of response. There were considerable e-mail and telephone exchanges, and letters to our office. We want to share some of their thoughts with you.)

Now I Know...

Just finished reading my newsletter and the insert of March. In the insert and after reading Master Sergeant Hiatt's account of the December 4, 1966 attack by a Viet Cong battalion on Tan Son Nhut on that date, I now know the fate of Mr. John Cole, his last words, and the fate of the rest of his outfit.

I didn't know until now that Johnny was only in country one day, the story of what actually happened, and last but not least, his last words!!

It is also ironic that the VP-2 picture of our P-2V-7s on the base were in the newsletter as well.

I sure would like to send this story to the old neighborhood local newspaper as that was the last picture I saw of John which was printed in that paper. The review (a possible boot camp graduation picture, dress uniform) along with the bad news.

Regards and thanks to Master Sergeant Olbert H. Hiatt for coming forward with this story as it must have been tough to recount for him. Please thank him and tell Sergeant Hiatt "welcome home." Regards,

A Former U.S. Navy Assignee at TSN
Robert Bailey
Ardmore, Pennsylvania

... And From Another Part of the Field

I arrived at Tan Son Nhut in September 1966. I remember going through Customs at the civilian terminal and when the air policeman told me to turn over all my U.S. currency for military script with the exception of pennies. I gave him every last cent, a total of 5 cents. He asked me for my greenbacks. I told him that was all I had. He then said, "What happened to your money?" In true Airman fashion I looked him in the eye and said, "San Francisco."

Like most of us, I spent two days at Hamilton Air Force Base learning everything I needed to know about the M16. The AP gave me my 5 cent MPC and told me, "Welcome to the Republic of Vietnam."

Due to working in a classified field (like we didn't want the NVA to know that they were sending troops through Laos - and we knew it - type thing), I was sent to a transient barracks. You remember, over by the parking apron for those big C-130, C-47 and C-123, whatever those big green airplanes were.

I reported to a chief master sergeant at Headquarters Squadron and he allowed as how I was newly assigned to Tan Son Nhut and 7th Air Force was the largest unit on the base, we were allowed to have two seats on the Board of Governors of the



Comrades guarding the perimeter, Tan Son Nhut 1968

Airmen's Open Mess. He told me I would take care of this around my soon-to-be assigned duties. He asked me if I had been to the Mess yet. I replied that I only had 5 cents, so was deferring that pleasure until after payday. He reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet and gave me \$20 and told me he expected it back on payday. He said he didn't care what went on at the Board Meetings as long as whatever was decided was in the best interests of *HIS AIRMEN*.

As the years have passed I came to understand that this was leadership in the best tradition of the American Military. I knew that there was no way that I was going to fail this man and my fellow airmen.

My second or third night in-country, a sergeant that I had been stationed with at Offutt Air Force Base took me into downtown Saigon. Of course I saw Viet Cong everywhere - and then nine years later I guess I was right.

After my first night in town I managed to find my way back to the transient barracks and hit the rack. Out of nowhere these sirens started to off, and I, in my stupor, remembered that this was the alert for the BIG ONE!!! I had located the bunker for my barracks the day I was assigned, and now I made my way there in a timely fashion. I was the first one in, and then as others showed up I was pushed further towards the middle of the bunker. I spent about 30 minutes wondering why I would want to be stuck in a crowd in the middle of the bunker with no way out except over, under or around other airmen. I told myself that was the last time I would be the first one in.

Now, let's move forwards to what was (until the last newsletter) some night I recall, but couldn't remember the date. Master Sergeant Hiatt's account put a name and date to one of those events in our lives, that in later years, you wonder if it really happened.

On the night of December 4, 1966, I was bent over a photo stereoscope looking at picture of North Vietnam or Laos taken by an RF4C aircraft when the siren went off. I, and my fellow photo

(Continued, See: **Part of the Field**, Page 3)

(Part of the Field, from Page 2)

interpreters went across the street to the 7th Air Force Headquarters Building. As we filed in I took a seat on one of the chrome and vinyl couches that all Air Force offices had in their waiting rooms. There were three or four of us on the couch and lots of other men milling around the foyer and down the halls just past the air police desk. This AP's job was to check the I.D.s of everyone entering the building.

As we listened to his radio we could hear all kinds of radio traffic – and then a voice very calmly saying, "They've killed my dog and now they're coming towards me" – and then silence.

It seems that within minutes of this something exploded nearby and the double doors of the headquarters building were pushed open by the concussion. I found myself at the bottom of the stack behind the sofa with two or three guys on top of me. This is where we jumped when the doors banged open. I have no memory of standing up and leaping behind that couch.

The air policeman thought that it might be a good idea if we moved further into the building and down one of the hallways in case of closer explosions. Since he had an M16 and all I had was a #2 pencil, I felt that was a wonderful suggestion.

Now I can put a name to this man – Airman Second Class George M. Beovich, Jr. This Memorial Day when my VVA Chapter does our annual twenty-four hour vigil for those five hundred plus men from our greater Cincinnati area, I will include George's name and a flag will be placed on our field of honor that is part of our memorial in Clermont County, Ohio.

I remember that for weeks after this incident there wasn't many K-9 handlers that came into the Airmen's Mess who had to pay for a drink. I, and my buddies, felt it was an honor to do so, and when I meet one of you men in the future, I'll be proud to buy the first one.

At the Vietnam Veterans of America Nation Convention in August, 1999, at Anaheim, California, I picked up a t-shirt with an emblem in the form of a K-9, with the words "WAR DOGS, the untold story available on video, February 16, 1999."

The back reads:

"WAR DOGS

Americas forgotten
heros,

They protected us on
the field of battle.

They watch over our
eternal rest.

We are grateful."

I keep this shirt
for very special
occasions, usually
sometime during
Memorial Day
weekend.

As you can see a
short note about
something that
happened thirty-five
years ago just turned

into pages of memories. God bless you guys – and Welcome Home.
Sincerely,

George C. Kinnaird
Loveland, Ohio



... And Finally, A Suggestion

That story from the security police NCO. I was out of the security police when that happened, but still had many friends who were air cops.

We didn't hear about it, though, being dog men, we did hear about Nemo, of course. I'm not saying it didn't happen, but I do have some vibes that maybe others do too.

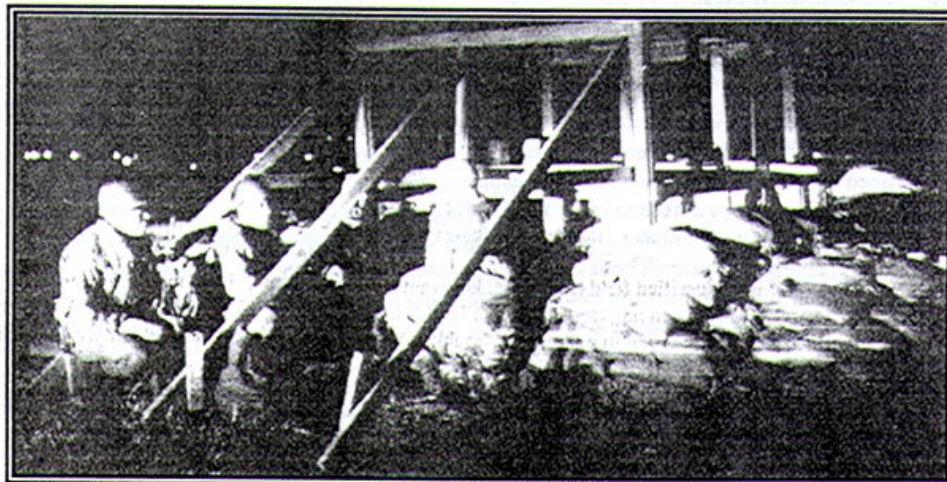
When did the black stripes come in? And if he had all that infantry experience in World War II (and how old is he?), then it seems to me that a combat vet would not have moved directly on to the A/O without scouts out. Time spent in reconnaissance is seldom wasted.

But let us say that it happened just as he reported it. An AIR FORCE COMMENDATION? No way. That story reads like Silver Star or higher.

So a suggestion. Why not have the Tan Son Nhut Association President get in touch with the United States Air Force Chief of Staff and request an investigation concerning the award.

I was tempted to pick up the phone and contact my congressman, but decided that this was a Tan Son Nhut Association call to make – or not to make. Am I off base?

Richard Fulton
Pittsburg, Kansas



Night on the Main Line of Defense (MLR), Tan Son Nhut 1968



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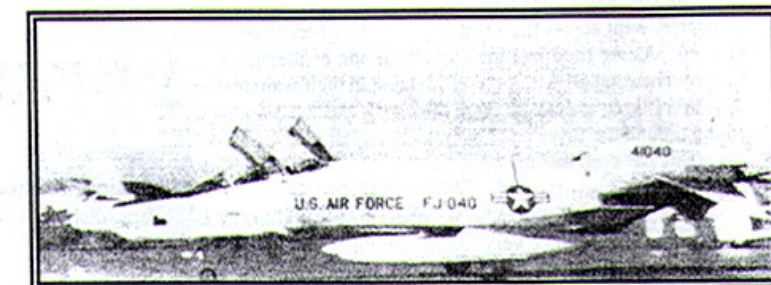
Thoughts of Our Sky Pilot

by
Chaplain
James M. Warrington

The Right Name

There was a belief that appears frequently in the Bible that if a person were able to identify a spirit and call it by name, then that person could have power over that spirit. This is not far from our modern convictions that if a medical doctor can accurately diagnose an illness, the doctor has gone a long way toward its cure.

A wise observer of modern life, Dr. John Verderly, has said: "I believe that we could often control the evil spirits which possess us if we could or would only call them by their right names. We all have our little list of names we like: Tired. Overworked. Under-Great-Strain. Put-Up-on. Cheated (a great favorite among young people). Unlucky.



RF-4C, on the Tan Son Nhut runway, 1965
From the collection of Member Doug Sheldon (See Page 5)

"Then there is another list of names we all hate: Hangover. Selfish. Petulant. Jealous. Hotheaded. Lazy. Thoughtless. Rude. How many times might the evil spirits which possess us be more easily exorcized if we were only wise enough, or honest enough, or brave enough to call them by their right names!"

These words made me think of a woman I know who boasts to her friends that she is a very frank person; and then in the name of "frankness" she begins to condemn and besmirch other people with reckless abandon. The right name would be "character assassination."

I think about a man I know who in many situations says he is acting "strictly on business principles and then proceeds to do deeds that should accurately be called "cruel" or "inhuman."

The same tendency was indicated in a recent newspaper account of an automobile accident in which it was stated: "The car failed to make the curve." The car indeed failed, but wasn't someone driving the car?

How unconsciously we shift our responsibility to people or things beyond ourselves! How hard it is to be honest and call things by the right name.

Chaplain Warrington is available for counseling and pastoral service for the members. Please call Public Affairs, Phone: (757) 627-7746 or E-Mail: hercules29@worldnet.att.net

Missing Units at Tan Son Nhut

Some months we feel that nobody is reading *Revetments* – and at other times it seems like the membership is reading it with a fine tooth comb – March was a case in point.

Page 2 and 3, this month, show the response to the Hiett account. But there was also the case of the "missing units."

Member **Jim Stewart, Montrose, Michigan** called us and wanted to know what happened to the 6220th USAF Dispensary, as it was not listed on our directory of TSN units on Page 4, in the March *Revetments*.

And then, Member **Bob Jarboe**, wrote regarding the list. "You have an article 'Who Was At Tan Son Nhut Air Base?'" Is the list of units intended to be inclusive of all years beginning with 1959 and ending in 1975? I ask because I was stationed at TSN from May '63 until the end of April '64. My unit was the 6220th USAF Dispensary until it was later redesignated the 33rd USAF Dispensary. Our dispensary also functioned as the Air Div. Surgeon's Office supporting 2 dispensaries other than TSN in RVN and 3 in Thailand."

And we find more "missing units" in a message from **Terry Love, Lakeville, Minnesota**. He writes: Thanks for printing up my photos in the latest issue of *Revetments*. I have had a lot of great reaction from them, including (Member) **Bill Burekhalter (Kirkwood, Missouri)** who was shot by that sniper in the radar tower.

(Cont.. See Missing Units Page 5)

The Communication Center

Missing Units, from Page 5

On Page 6 of the latest issue, was a list of units that were stationed at Tan Son Nhut. I remember a few more units that were there. They were the 2nd Signal Group, 90th Replacement Company, and various VNAF units.

I am not a professional photographer. I have worked for Northwest Airline now for 30 years. Photography has always been just a hobby with me. I use lots of my photographs and slides for basis for my writing of aviation books (written 12) and magazine (written dozens), and assisting other aviation authors.

My last book was *Wings Of Air America*, Schiffer Publishing Ltd. I took lots of photos in that book at Tan Son Nhut of Air America aircraft.

My next book will be out soon, entitled *The L-Birds - American Combat Liaison Aircraft of World War II*. I am almost done with my next one entitled *Curtis C-46 Commando In Action* for Squadron / Signal Publications.

Then Doug Sheldon, New Market, Maryland, sent us pictures and comments about another "missing unit."

He wrote: Enclosed are two photo's, the Fall of 1965, taken at Tan Son

Nhut. At the time I was assigned to the 22nd or 23rd (?) Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron deployed from Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina. In one photo, I'm the AIC in fatigues, accompanied by a GE Tech Rep. The other is one of our



Doug and friend, TSN 1965 RF-4Cs. Over the years, I have never heard any reference to my old units. Any information from your office would be appreciated.

We arrived at Saigon in September 1965. The maintenance shops and reconnaissance (photo interpretation) trailer was in the main hanger, across of Base Operations. The enlisted troops lived in Gai Dinh, and the air crews at a separate compound, also in the city.

John Peele (Exec.VP) (an aircraft mechanic) published the original list in the original newsletter of 1995. Bob Need, (Pub.

Affairs)(a combat newsman) republished the original last month.

We are glad to hear from the membership about the additional units we "missed." We would like to ask all of our readers to forward information about these units so that we can improve and expend our accurate archives.

New Life Member tells why he made the decision . . .

I have enclosed a check for \$180 for my life membership in the Tan Son Nhut Association.

As one of the few members of the 377th Security Police Squadron who actually had five consecutive tours, one being the first one-year tour and four six month extensions, I think I should be a life member. And, I am happy to pay for it.

I enjoy reading the publication of our association and some of the interesting stories, letter and notes that I have read within.

After Tet, I became the NCOIC of the rocket spotting towers on Tan Son Nhut. We had three towers, Tango One, Tango Alpha and Tango Ten where we used artillery scopes to spot launch sites of enemy mortars and especially the 122 and 107-millimeter Russian and Chinese rockets.

In many events we had the base sirens going before the rockets actually impacted. I am hoping we saved many lives by being vigilant and reporting enemy launch sites. Sincerely,

Thomas N. Tessier
Nashua, New Hampshire

Goodies from the renewal envelopes . . . Thanks for all the work you are doing. The "Revetments" is great. It just keeps getting better.

Sam Martin
Palmyra, Pennsylvania

MACV Patches Available

Don't ask how, but Exec.V.P. John Peele has unearthed a carton of MACV original patches. We are making them available to the membership for \$7.00 each. This is a truly historical item. Please send request and check or money order (only) to the Public Affairs Office, Suite 709, 330 West Brambleton Avenue, Norfolk, Virginia 23510.

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The Spirit of Flight . . . and other matters

by Robert Stanley Need, Editor



On Page 2 of last month's *Revetments* we reported the bill by Nebraska Senator Chuck Hagel for the establishment of an "educational center" adjacent to the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial. We then went on to indulge in an impassioned plea for support of this program by the members of the Tan Son Nhut Association. Our credo being that each and everyone of use bears the responsibility for providing posterity with a truthful accounting of the sacrifices that American men and women, of all services, make on behalf of the defense of this nation and its freedoms.

The poignant picture of the young Al Keeler and his first engine powered plane, set amid the background of the lush Susquehanna River valley near Stevensville, Pennsylvania, seemed to be giving us a strong silent message relevant to this "truthful accounting" we must offer to American posterity.

Our sermonizing last month might have struck some that we felt that nobody is doing anything about this "education" process. But when you take a long hard look at the membership of the Tan Son Nhut Association, you find just the opposite. It seems like every day we hear that our members are already hard at work in this "education" area and are providing examples and patterns of dedication for the youth of America.

We have a surprising number of members who have a splendid talent for writing moving and truthful accounts of their experiences, giving posterity a fountain of valuable knowledge. There is Al Keeler's thrilling and vibrant account of a pilot's life from World War II thought Vietnam, in his book *VIP Pilot*.

Dennis Boyer reaches out and provides the poignancy of reflection in his book *Northern Frigths*.

Medal of Honor recipient, Michael Novosel, also takes us from World War II and into the heat and combat of Vietnam in his book *Dustoff, The Memoir of an Army Aviator*. Thomas Tessier and Terry Love are businessmen, but are also skilled authors who share their love of aircraft and their experiences in many articles and books.

Richard Fulton gives us a gripping account of the Tet Offensive in his book *Malish*, and then goes on to lecture and teach the true story of Vietnam in local Kansas colleges.

George Croft is sending us material and photographs of the Historical Site he has built at the United States Marine Base in Twentynine Palms, California. He is dynamic man who firmly believes that "there are hundreds of true stories that should be told, and retold until America listens and understands what our military went through ... every American can do this, and if many who possess the ability to communicate don't get started, we lose." We are looking forward to providing our readers with a comprehensive look at all of the great accomplishments and experiences this fine member has made.

John Shaud and John Peele are giving untiring efforts to support and build the Air Force Memorial in Washington. They are both in the forefront of many active duty and veteran associations, including the Air Force Association, at the national level.

Ira Cooperman, a top executive in the New York State American Heart Association, is also a gifted and prolific writer of his Vietnam experiences.

Carol Bessette is a guide to the great monuments and important points of interest in the national capital. And, we can certainly

assume that those she conducts on these tours receive true and valuable accounts of her military and Vietnam experiences ... especially at the Vietnam Memorial (The Wall).

Charles Penley presents us all and our experiences and memories to the whole world in the Tan Son Nhut Association internet website. David Koopman also tells the Vietnam story in his excellent website. And Taylor McKinnon produces the music of our time, while teaching aerodynamics at San Bernardino State College.

The young, newly retired, Thomas Joyce, is an ROTC Instructor in Kentucky, and with his superbly researched knowledge of Tan Son Nhut, its battles and Vietnam in general, his students are very privileged to have him. He was too young to be with us back there, but he is truly one of us and a vital segment of this "education" business.

And Chaplain James Warrington continues to be the steward of our souls and give us all the ministry of his compassion and experience.

We are doing something now, and our Association will have much to provide to the new facility being planned for The Wall.

That's why we'd like to hear from all the rest of you. Those mentioned above are but a handful of our members.

The military establishment today, complains that there is little motivation among our young people to join or stay in the military services. Dedication to the defense of our country does not come from signs and slogans, nor is it bought for a handful of silver.

Thomas Jefferson said, "Eternal vigilance is the defense of liberty." Dedication comes from inspiration, and inspiration comes from knowledge. That little boy, Al Keeler, was caught on camera receiving inspiration that led him from childhood into the life of a dedicated warrior and protector of his nation. The person who gave him, or taught him to build that little plane was an elder, like us, reaching out with his experience and knowledge to a child.

Join us all to tell our youth about the Spirit of Flight ... and Duty, Honor, Country.

Au Revoir . . . Vietnam

The Last Posting at The Main Gate

by

Member George T. Leather, Saugus, Massachusetts

March or April?

It was 1973 ... the exact date escapes me right now I had just finished a temporary duty tour at Bien Hoa with the 377th Security Police Detachment 1.

Spent several tours of duty outside of the Peace Commission talks which began at Tan Son Nhut in January 1973. I recall the humiliation of standing next to my Viet Cong counterpart during talks. The National Liberation Force delegation had been afforded the comforts of Camp Alpha during the peace talks.

Secretary Kissinger and Vice President Agnew had been through Tan Son Nhut, evidently to convince Republic of South Viet Nam President Thieu that the bogus peace pact was a good one.

Anyway, our bags were packed and it was obvious that we were leaving any day.

At some point after returning from Bien Hoa, our 377th Security Police Squadron air base defense unit was incorporated into the 377th SPS law enforcement unit. I think this is how I found myself on the Main Gate at Tan Son Nhut on the final night of the 1973 American military withdrawal from Vietnam.

It was not like the chaotic end of the American presence in the Republic of Viet Nam which was to occur in April 1975.

As a matter of fact, it looked like it was just going to be another long and boring late shift. The lumbering C-130 gun ship circled above, dropping illuminating flares and it was approaching 2 a.m. My Quan Canh (Vietnamese military policeman) partner and I were somewhat surprised when a deuce and a half (truck) pulled up and the driver said to me, "Get on."

I think I hesitated for half a second and was about to say goodbye to the Quan Canh. But, he turned his back on us, not looking very pleased. I don't blame him. I knew and he knew that his future was not too bright.

I very quickly got over his problem and hopped onto the back of the truck.

Back in the cantonment area, we changed into khaki uniforms and were transported out to the flight line. To my astonishment, two TWA 747s were parked on the tarmac.

Cool!

Maybe they had *round-eyed* stewardesses aboard!

It seemed like forever that we stood loosely about in ranks. The large, bright orange sun was beginning to come up. It was daylight when a convoy of vehicles pulled up. Out alighted all kinds of official looking people. I recall at least one table being set up with chairs.

A National Liberation Force official was chatting on a field phone. And I'll never forget the female Viet Cong with a green chiffon scarf wrapped around her pith helmet. She began photographing us with an old (I think, eastern-block) camera.

We began to board. Some of us flipped the female VC the bird.

"V.C., *beaucoup toom - toom!*"





Revetments, April, 2001

TSNA Association Reunion 2002!

Executive Vice President John Peele has announced the formation of a planning committee to begin formulating plans for a Tan Son Nhut Association National Reunion during the last weekend in April 2002, in Washington, D.C.

"We want to get started working on this early," Peele said. "We want this to be the biggest and best we've ever had. I want the information out early and I want that information to be detailed and exact so that all the members will have time to arrange their schedules so that they can be there."

When asked why April was selected, he replied, "There are several good reasons. There is less strain and expense in coming to Washington accommodations and services at that time. April weather is usually very mild in Washington. And, April is a significant month, for April 30, 1975, the base closed its gates. We've discussed many times establishing April 30th as Tan Son Nhut Memorial Day - a day to remember all those who served there and all those who gave their lives defending it."

He goes on to say, "We have grown rapidly in the past couple of years and I feel we need a good, well-supported reunion for a number of reasons. First of all, of course, is the honor and camaraderie that comes with meeting each other and remembering the experiences that have impacted the memories of Tan Son Nhut in our hearts and minds. But also, we have work to do, a constitution to ratify, and we have to establish firm goals for achievement in the future of the Association."

Peele welcomes any and all who would like to participate in the planning for the reunion, especially those who reside in the vicinity of Washington, D. C. He may be reached by writing: 6203, 57th Avenue, Riverdale, Maryland 20737; or telephone (301) 277-7474; or e-mail: JMPeele6203@cs.com

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Renewal Date -



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