

Revetments

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association



"All Included - Non Excluded"

Volume 3, Number 11

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

August, 2001

*The secretaries were an
important part of Tan Son
Nhut
too!*



Mrs. Bé, Mrs. Dinh and Miss Coo at a 7th AF (DXI) cookout - 1968
from the collection of Member Richard Fulton, Pittsburg, Kansas

MARKING TIME

with Mark Fleisher

White Whales and Tales of Scatback

Officially speaking, the Air Force C-123 transport was nicknamed the Provider. But those who crewed and flew the C-123 assigned to Scatback Operations at Tan Son Nhut Air Base tagged the aircraft with a more affectionate moniker, "the White Whale."

The name came naturally. Look at a fuselage of a C-123 and you will see more than a passing resemblance to the body of a whale. And, much of the body of Scatback's C-123 was painted a pristine white. Hence, the White Whale.

I'd seen the term Scatback several times in the past few months, but had a bit of brain lock as to what it meant. Thanks to retired TSgt. Max Springer of Henderson, Kentucky, a former Scatback flight mechanic (September 1969 to September 1970), I've now got it straight.

"Scatback's job mostly was to transport V.I.P.s in Vietnam and around Southeast Asia," Max e-mailed me. "Our aircraft were equipped with galleys for meals in flight and full bars for drinks. Rotten job, but somebody had to do it. We also flew in-country and out-of-country courier flights - Bangkok, Tokyo, Clark Air Base, etc."

My Congressional Junket

One of my White Whale jaunts took a group of visiting Congressmen and me from Tan Son Nhut north to near Kontum in the Central Highlands. The Air Force had carpet bombed the area in support of some fierce ground action and the brass thought the lawmakers ought to get a look.

It always struck me as odd why the Air Force did an external makeover of the Provider to create the White Whale. Look at it this way - take a relatively slow-moving transport plane, paint most of it white, fill it with Congressmen and other dignitaries (not to mention me) and fly over contested territory.

I think we can all visualize the potential headlines.

Fortunately, the mission went safely. The bomb craters - especially the one used as a dump for dead North Vietnamese Army troops - impressed the Congressmen, all clad in the very latest foreign correspondent-style bush jackets.

"Why, they (the NVA) must have been high on dope to fight with our boys after a bombing like this," said one lawmaker, obviously a keen student of the Vietnamese fighting mentality.

The Night Riders

I had the good fortune to know a T-39 courier plane pilot assigned to Scatback. Captain Paul McManus was the information officer when I was stationed at Otis Air Force Base, Massachusetts, prior to my assignment to Tan Son Nhut.

Captain Mac, as we called him, was a handsome Irishman from a Boston suburb. He had the personality of a swashbuckler with a swagger befitting a fighter pilot. Many of his courier missions around South Vietnam were night flights and I had a standing invitation to come along for the ride.

As the T-39 darted through the dark sky, far from Tan Son Nhut's teeming sprawl, I enjoyed the chance to be alone with my thoughts.

I recently read that Tan Son Nhut was designed for 3,000 people. By April 1968 the estimated population was 25,000, and the influx of daily workers and military personnel living off base swelled the total to 55,000. Each living on base was allocated 40 square feet of barracks space.

No wonder I appreciated the "other world" of night flying, even if I wondered if our presence had triggered any of the muzzle flashes I often saw.

Max Springer related another Scatback mission. "We had one C-47 for in-country jobs," he said. "One of those was to deliver classified film from the 600th Photo Squadron at Tan Son Nhut to any base that had a runway - even a dirt one. The commanders in the field would view the film and make plans for that day."

"We had to land no matter what was happening on the ground. The only exception was if the base was being overrun."

Revetment, August, 2001

That's one mission I'm not at all sorry I missed. But another Scatback assignment appealed to me.

To Shangri-La - or close enough

Ellsworth Bunker was United States Ambassador to South Vietnam and his wife, Carol, was our emissary in Nepal. Scatback designated a C-118 as Bunker's personal plane whenever he wished to visit his wife.

"We would have to land in Calcutta, India, and get diplomatic clearance to fly into Nepal," Max Springer recalled. "The C-118 was decommissioned sometime in early 1970."

Tagging along on an ambassadorial journey to Kathmandu and producing reams of copy and tons of pictures would be terrific. What a coup for Air Force public affairs! What a great way to satisfy my wanderlust.

It was not to be.

My superiors gave the idea a thumbs down, muttering something about respecting the ambassador's privacy and other equally minor considerations. Once again, events proved that three strikers do not argue with gold leaves.

So much for my Indiana Jones-type moment.

Editor's Postscript

In his closing comments, Mark Fleisher makes reference to the relationship between lowly airmen and those wearing gold leaves - airmen versus majors.

Mark and the editor were extremely fortunate to be assigned to the Information Support Division of 7th Air Force's Directorate of Information, under the direction of two fine majors, Lou Castelou and Edward Johnson. A few months ago, Mark located Major (now Lt. Col.) Johnson. He's now in the TSNA and he recently visited Virginia and the editor. After 33 years he revealed the picture of what happened if you killed one of Mark's stories. Picture courtesy of the surviving major, Lt. Col. Edward V. Johnson, San Antonio, Texas.





"All Included - Non Excluded"

Revetments is an official publication of the Tan Son Nhut Association, Inc. 6203 57th Avenue, Riverdale, Maryland 20737. The Association is a non-profit fraternal organization chartered under appropriate statute and law.

President, Don Parker

Vice President/Treasurer John Peele

Vice President/Secretary John Evans

Chaplain James M. Warrington

Public Affairs Robert Need

Communications Charles Penley

Revetments is published monthly at the Office of Public Affairs, TSNA, Suite 709, 330 West Brambleton Avenue, Norfolk, Virginia 23510. Telephone: (757) 627-7746; FAX: (757) 627-0878; E-Mail: hercules29@worldnet.att.net



Thoughts of Our Sky Pilot

by
Chaplain
James M. Warrington

Where can we see God?

Considerable newspaper publicity was given here in these United States to the statements of the Russian cosmonauts that during their flight into orbit around Planet Earth they had failed to see God.

If one studies the Bible the accounts of "seeing" God are really accounts of prophetic vision or revelation concerning the nature of God. "God is a Spirit; and they that worship



They didn't see God out there ...



Street Scene - Saigon 1967

Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth." It is easy to understand why the Soviets have officially taken a position against all religions if it is assumed that we mortal human beings can see God with our normal physical eyes when we so will.

However, it is very important and more constructive to ask: In what sense do we see God? One Jewish rabbi declared: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." He was making the point that what we see in life is dependent on our inner character and attitude.

There are people so absorbed in material pursuits that to them nothing is real they cannot touch or handle; there are others so spiritually sensitive they see the rule of God in all of man's history and in the world around

them. It is a truism that wherever we travel - and this is equally true whether it be on the oceans and continents or above in orbit - we tend to see that which we are prepared to see.

It is unfortunate that those of socialist/humanistic ideology who took part in one of the truly great achievements in human history did not have the spiritual maturity to interpret the cosmonauts orbits more adequately. The Soviets might have pointed out that we humans have been endowed with minds that can think logically; that we are in a world of natural law and order in which we are privileged to unlock the extremely profound natural mysteries; that the more we discover about the size and wonder of the universe, the more we are led to reverence and awe before the majesty of its Creator.

The Communications Center

Ninety Hours to TSN

I just finished reading the July edition of *Revetments*. Was glad to see one of the old EC-47 drivers there, Colonel Harry Patterson. After reading the story from TSgt. Harlan N. Hatfield, it dawned on me that I was one of the few who had quite a different trip from the "States to Vietnam."

Like Harlan, most of the troops arrived via commercial jet transport. I was one of the lesser number who made it over a little slower. I was selected to be a crew member, the flight mechanic, to ferry one of the EC-47s from Grenier Field, New Hampshire to Tan Son Nhut in 1966.

I was fortunate to have crewed up stateside with what I have to consider the best crew one could ask for. My aircraft commander was Lt. Col. Frank Hinkle. We had two other pilots, Major Harold Lagasse and a Captain Anderson. We also had two navigators, Major Al Mattie and Captain Robert Harris.

After our Swamp-Rat training in Florida and a bit of C-47 refresher at England AFB, Louisiana, we sat at home for three months twiddling our thumbs waiting for our aircraft which were behind schedule. Finally we got the urgent call (they had forgotten to call us) and it was a rush to get to Grenier on time. We arrived at Grenier and picked up our completely overhauled EC-47s (then referred to as RC-47s) and headed for Vietnam.

Our route took us first back to England AFB, followed the next day by a flight to Phoenix, Arizona. From there we were off to McClelland AFB, California, to have 2,250 gallon fuel tanks strapped down in the cargo compartment for the over water flights. From McClelland we were off to McChord AFB, Washington.

Finally on the 31st of August we departed McChord and officially began our tour in Southeast Asia (SEA) on that day. We arrived at Elmendorf, Alaska and the next day flew down the Aleutian Chain to Adak. Our longest flight, 10 hours and 5 minutes was from Adak to Midway Island. Then, from Midway to Wake Island, Wake to Guam, Guam to Clark Air Base, where we had additional fuel tanks removed.

It was here I think the powers that be figured out that we had not been through the Survival School in Washington, nor in the Philippines. We departed as quickly as we could to avoid having to make these schools. Hindsight now makes you realize how fortunate we were not to have needed this training.

I do not recall exactly when we arrived at Tan Son Nhut, but I believe it was the 12th of

September. We had taken a day goof-off time two or three times during our trip over. I believe we were thirteen days en route. I do remember our total flying time and it was a little more than the 17 hours of Harlan. We were ninety hours flying time from New Hampshire to Tan Son Nhut. We had no problems with the aircraft other than a precautionary plug change at Elmendorf and a small leak in the oil cooler. We did have one black box radio replaced at either Wake or Guam.

Around the first of November Colonel Hinkle, Major Lagasse and Captain Harris were scheduled to go to Nha Trang and the new 3612st Tactical Electronics Warfare Squadron. Major Mattie, Captain Anderson and myself were scheduled to stay at the 360th TEWS at Tan Son Nhut. The day before they were to leave, Colonel Hinkle told me to have my bags packed in the morning that he was taking me with him. Boy, did that make me feel good. True to his word, the next morning Colonel Hinkle pulled up to the barracks in the pickup and helped load my gear. We were off to the airplane we were taking to Nha Trang.

Arriving at the aircraft Colonel Hinkle told the other flight mechanic, the one scheduled to go with him, to find a seat in back. "Jim, is my flight mechanic," he said. We arrived at Nha Trang and I don't remember ever getting anything other than Colonel Hinkle's verbal order for the move to Nha Trang and had no problems or hang-ups.

Colonel Hinkle, Major Lagasse, Captain Harris and I flew together as a crew for the entire tour, 114 missions. To this date, I know of no other crew to form as a crew Stateside, ferry an aircraft over, and fly together as a crew for a year and come home together.

I do remember one day at Tan Son Nhut that a Vietnamese A-1 came almost straight down, engine screaming and hit in the Bom-D-Bom (Ed. ba-moui-ba) stand on base. I did have photos I took of the aircraft as it was in its dive to the earth and photos of the destruction on the ground - but evidently they are now among the items forever lost.

If any of you know the first name and more importantly, where Captain Anderson could be located, I sure would like to contact him. He is the only one that I have not been in touch with for the past thirty-five years.

I would also like to invite you to visit my website, "The EC-47 History Site" at:

<http://www.ec47.com>

There will be a reunion of EC-47 folks in May (10.11.12) 2002, in Dayton, Ohio.

MSgt. James C. Wheeler
Clarksville, AR jc@ec47.com

Looking for 1966 Tapes

I was with the 377th Security Police at Tan Son Nhut from 14 November 1966 to 14 November 1967. I worked Alpha Sector C Flight. I was wondering if there were any copies of tapes of the attack on December 5 and 6, 1966? I remember some of us being told to watch our language! at guard mount after the attack due to tapes. Also remember pictures of KIA VC lined up on the ground about six or eight in a row. If you have any information at all, *Stars & Stripes*, or anything on this attack I would greatly appreciate it.

Member Mike Lemley
236 E. Mansfield Street
Bucyrus, Ohio 44820
bucyrus@cybertown.com

As they say, in a lighter vein

Member Bob Nelson, Anchorage, Alaska, sends this in "for all Air Force types, especially those in the law enforcement business."

All Good Cops Go To Heaven

Three guys died and went to the Pearly Gates. Upon arrival, Saint Peter asked the first one, "So, what did you do for a living?" The first guy said, "Well, I was a Rapid City Police Officer." Saint Peter said, "Please, make yourself at home. God loves cops." The officer entered.

The second guy approached the Gates. Again, Saint Peter asked, "What did you do?" and the guy replies, "I was an Ohio State Highway Patrolman." Saint Peter said, "Please, make yourself at home. God loves cops." The patrolman entered.

The third guy approached and St. Peter asked, "And, what did you do for a living." The third guy replied, "I was an Air Force cop."

Saint Peter gave a great sigh of relief and then he said, "Thank goodness! Here, take the Gate! I haven't taken a leak all day."

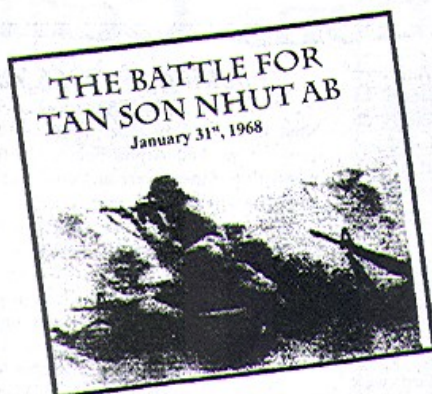
Tet Offensive Patch Available

Member Roy Peters, Warner Robbins, Georgia, informed us that there is a "Survivor" patch and wanted to know how to find them. Public Affairs contacted the H.J. Saunders Mill, Insignia Co., 5025 Tamiami Trail East, Naples, Fla. 34113-4126. They are \$3.75 each, or 10 for \$2.50 each, and 20 or more at \$1.90 each. Phone orders can be placed through 1-800-442-3133 or FAX: (941)774-3323.

The "SURVIVOR" is white on a red background. The Vietnamese Flag is gold and red on a black background. "1968" is white on a fiery background. And the "TET OFFENSIVE" is black on a fiery background.



Battle CD Brings Raves!



"The packaging was terrific. I did not expect it to be that fancy. You guys did a terrific job."

Frank Ybarbo
Mesquite, Texas

* * *

The Tan Son Nhut Association Public Affairs Office was a happy place during July. The initial order of ten has sold out. One individual buying two. And, the office was pleased that the purchasers are satisfied with the professionalism of the production.

Besides verbal praise, the office also began receiving messages, the following member sent two.

The following is a brief note attached to his check. "The tapes are fantastic, and listening to them is a real experience. A lot I had forgotten and some things I never knew. The rocket attack of February 18 really brought back memories. That was the one time in my life that I was truly terrified. Thanks again to the Tan Son Nhut Association for making them available."

He then sent a type written letter. "I spent the first three years of my Air Force enlistment at the old Walker Air Force Base in Roswell, New Mexico and had never heard of the 377th Security Police Squadron. After Walker A.F.B. phased out, my last year of service, 1968, was with the 377th Security Police Squadron at Tan Son Nhut.

"I am forever proud to have served with the men who were at Tan Son Nhut that year of 1968. I would not take a million dollars for the experience of that year with such a group of professional, courageous and dedicated Air Force cops.

Revetments, August, 2001

"It is organizations like the Tan Son Nhut Association and the Vietnam Security Police Association that keep that sacred memory of those men alive and convince my mind that, yes, all of this really did happen.

"As I mentioned to you before, in battle, each person has their own little spot in the fight, trying to hold their position and do the best they can from where they are. Listening to the audio tapes of the battle for Tan Son Nhut, I gained an over all picture of what was taking place and a renewed respect for the men and officers of the 377th Security Police Squadron.

"How we managed to hold such a large enemy force, in the dark of night, speaks volumes to the caliber, courage and dedication to duty of all who were there on January 31, 1968.

"May the courage and memory of Sergeants Louis Fischer, Charles Hebron, Bill Cyr and Roger Mills forever live in the memory of the Air Force Security Police. Also, let's not forget Sergeant Alonzo Coggins who lived through his own hell that night. I have often thought that by the hand of fate, it could have been any one of us assigned to the 051 Gate that night.

"Guys, you did good! Welcome Home."

John Martin
Spencer, North Carolina
377th Security Police Sq., TSN 1968

Thank you, John, for a proud and moving letter. And we continue to thank profusely, Thomas Joyce, USAF Major (Ret.) for making these CDs available to the Association.

Order your historic set now!

To order your 4CD set, prepare a check or money order in the amount of \$49.95 made out to

Anachron Studios

Please do not make it out to the TSNA.

However, mail it to:

Public Affairs TSNA

Suite 709, 330 W. Brambleton Ave.

Norfolk, Virginia 23510

Please allow a week to ten days for delivery

The Taylor B. McKinnon Page

Days At Tan Son Nhut ... and other propwash

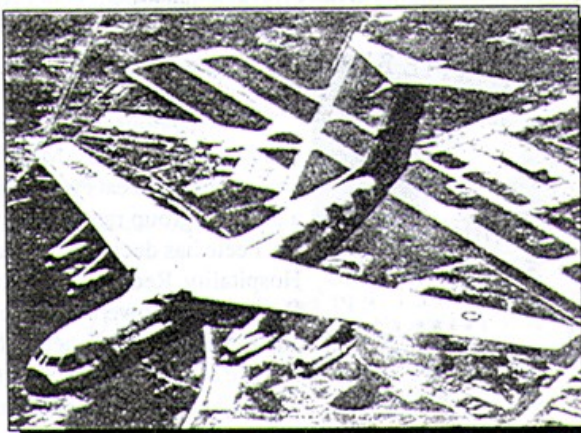


The World of Field Maintenance

I arrived at Tan Son Nhut on May 15, 1965 and was soon assigned to my job as field maintenance officer for the 33rd Tactical Group.

Although I was a First Lieutenant, I actually had ten years service as an enlisted man. Since I had been an aircraft mechanic, I was familiar with all the airplanes which we performed maintenance on at Tan Son Nhut.

The term "field maintenance" came from the old Army Air Forces and Army Air Corps days when bases were called fields. We called them "Chanute Field, Scott Field" and "McChord Field, etc." as late as the mid sixties. Old habits



Lockheed C-141A StarLifter
Four Pratt & Whitney TF33-P-7 Turbofan engines

at Tan Son Nhut, mostly World War II types, or Korean War.

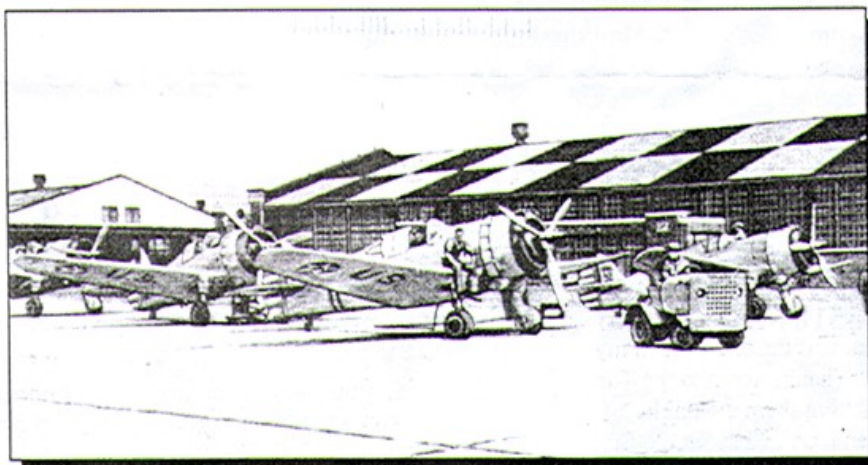
The ubiquitous C-47 "Gooney Bird," the later C-123 Fairchild Provider, and the airplane, flown by Military Air Transport Command (MATS), the old piston engine, prop driven C-124 we all called "old shaky." This craft flew all our heavy equipment and aircraft parts from the 'States.

One day on the ramp I got my first glimpse of the new jet transport which would replace the C-124. This was the Lockheed C-141. It was beautiful. It had swept wings. It was pressurized. It had four

Turbofan jet engines producing 2,100 pounds of thrust each. And, best of all, it carried 11,000 pounds of cargo at 547 miles per hour. All of this at altitudes as high as 34,000 ft., way above the storms and turbulence.

As of this writing, the plane has been in service for over 36 years. Years of very hard service and is expected to remain in the fleet until 2014 or even longer in the Reserves.

The Starlifter is my favorite airplane.



Langley "Field" Virginia, presumed late 1930s - early 1940s

die hard, and the World War II troops and officers were still around as late as 1985, if they got as far as full colonel. They are allowed to stay longer than normal mortals, and even longer if they make general officer rank.

In the old days field maintenance belonging to the base commander provided second echelon maintenance on all aircraft assigned to the field. The enlisted crew chiefs assigned to the operational squadrons provided so-called "organizational" maintenance for first echelon maintenance - servicing, towing and minor maintenance.

I was intimately familiar with all the old airplanes we had

Member's comments prompt reunion change

Member Kenneth Moll of Alexandria, Virginia, wrote Reunion 2002 Coordinator, John Peele: "Should you find people balking at the \$100 banquet price on the *Dandy*," I have an observation. Be aware that a lunch cruise is much better than a dinner cruise for seeing things. The new second boat, *Nina's Dandy*, has an open top deck where visitors who want to sightsee can go up with binoculars and camera."



**REUNION 2002
NEWS**

He also points out that our speakers would find it hard to talk if people's attention is distracted outside. Member Moll has had experience negotiating several lunch cruises for his West Point Class. The lunch cruise is less expensive and they will give a 5 - 20% group rate discount.

Peele has decided then that Friday, April 26 will continue to be Registration and Hospitality Reception. Saturday, April 27 will begin with a Business Meeting Breakfast, followed by a wreath-laying at the Vietnam Memorial, a luncheon cruise, and our Formal Banquet at the Holiday Inn, King Street Alexandria, in the evening.

We are very happy with the response thus far and it looks like this is going to be a great reunion. Please let us know soon that you'll be there!

Contact one of the following now -

John Peele
6203, 57th Avenue
Riverdale, Maryland 20737
Phone or FAX: (301) 277-7474
E-mail: JMPeele6203@cs.com

Robert Need
Suite 709, 330 W. Brambleton
Norfolk, Virginia 23510
Phone: (757) 627-7746
E-Mail: hercules29@worldnet.att.net

Charles Penley
TSNA Website
www.tsna.org

The Tan Son Nhut Association
Public Affairs Office
Suite 709, 330 West Brambleton Avenue
Norfolk, Virginia 23510



Renewal Date



37660X6019

