

Revetments

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association



"All Included - Non Excluded"

Volume 4, Number 3

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

December, 2001



PEACE

It is Not Unusual to be Unusual

by

Benjamin White, Lt. Colonel, USAF (Ret.), Norfolk, Virginia

Wall-to-wall Lt. Colonels

When I reported to the Intelligence Directorate, 7th Air Force Headquarters, in August 1968, I was assigned to a branch in which nearly all of the officers were O-5s. I was the junior member of a hierarchy of lieutenant colonels. My immediate boss was a Lt.col; his boss was a Lt.col. And so on for five or six echelons. It was commonly agreed among us oak-leaved telephone colonels that the Pentagon considered us the most expendable members of the Air Force, or quite possibly the top talent need to win the nation's most unpopular conflict.

In order to have a position with a modicum of managerial responsibility and authority, I volunteered for and was made chief of the night shift. I replaced John Powers, an old (read: former) buddy and fellow SAC "crow" (electronic warfare officer). When he learned that I was to replace him, his sage counsel was, "Ben, learn to drink in the daytime." My schedule was 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. Monday through Saturday, with Sunday off. This was not an unusual routine for headquarters troops, but many worked eight-to-five jobs.

My branch, consisting of three other officers and eighteen or so enlisted (all male), was housed in a very plain, but spacious, adequately furnished Quonset hut which measured approximately 150 feet by 60 feet, with a single entrance in one end. The Quonset hut was situated in the Headquarters enclosure a hundred yards or so from the main building. Just around the corner from this entrance was a sandbag bunker which we were to use if the VC attacked, as during the Tet Offensive. Only once were we alerted to possible enemy intrusion at which time we all huddled in the bunker for an hour or so. As I recall, it was a false alarm. The citation for my Bronze Star Medal (in Vietnam, the O-5 Good Conduct Medal) cites my coolness under street for getting my crew in and out of the bunker without panic or injury to a single person.

My branch's job was to receive, evaluate, and consolidate various collection data on the North Vietnamese orders of battle: aircraft, radars, anti-aircraft guns and missiles, and to maintain and publish dynamic orders of battle for use by all Air Force flight crews. The North Vietnamese had very few of these armaments and their numbers and positions changed only slightly over time. Sp our job was not terribly onerous. Never-the-less, we all took our job seriously and I believe we produced creditable, dependable intelligence products.

A crossroad of the world ...

Tan Son Nhut was a bustling base - on the

runway, which accommodated civilian airlines as well as military aircraft, and especially on the streets. Jeeps, six-by-sixes, weapons carriers and other military vehicles- most driven by American and Vietnamese combat soldiers, serious, gaunt and dirty - filled the streets. Not a few wore bloody bandages and used canes or crutches. Many were on base to use the PX, one of the largest in the country. Troops were being flown between the base and combat areas for R&R and medical evacuation. In addition to uniformed Americans and Vietnamese, also in evidence were troops from South Korea, the Philippines, Canada and Great Britain, Australia and other allied nations. I saw none of these who revealed the exhaustion and injuries indicative of combat as did many of the American and Vietnamese G.I.s.

That I was in a combat theater was never far from my consciousness. In addition to regular contact with combat troops, daily briefings kept me up to date on the progress (or regress) of the fighting. Also we could hear explosions of the nightly "Rolling Thunder" bombing by B-52s westward toward the Laotian border.

There was a steady flow of VIPs of various kinds visiting Tan Son Nhut. Some that I recall are President Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Joey Bishop and Billy Graham - I really liked Joey Bishop.

A home away from home

For the first few weeks I lived in an off-base hotel. Since I recall little about that experience, it must not have been too disagreeable. One detail that sticks in my mind is the many flattened carcasses of humongous roaches I saw in the streets between my hotel and the base - some more than ten inches long. After a few weeks, a newly remodeled Quonset hut on base was opened as a billet for male lieutenant colonels. I believe there were about sixty of us - each in a spacious six by ten foot private room large enough for a bed, desk and clothes rack. The bath was down the hall.

At one end of this BOQ was a small outdoor paved patio which very quickly became a focal point for cooking, dining and socializing. I built a picnic trestle table with benches out of scrounged lumber. Others made some chairs and stools. And within a few days there appeared enough charcoal grills and hibachies for the twenty or so residents who gathered each evening to enjoy custom-made meals, a drink or two and male conviviality.

And geckos. At night the single light bulb on the white-washed end of the Quonset hut attracted a multitude of insects. And these

insects attracted the geckos. The gecko is a small four to six inch lizard onomatopoeically named as his name replicates the sound he makes. This little bugger gobbles up bugs with a flick of its tongue. We observed with interest that a still bug was a safe bug. But if the bug moved only slightly, the gecko devoured him.

Intrigue in Hong Kong

My job involved some travel which relieved the boredom of war. Twice I was sent to Thailand to consult with reconnaissance people involved in locating gun-laying radars. I made trips to Guam and to Tokyo. En route to Tokyo, I arranged to change planes in Hong Kong. After enjoying the exotic sights of Hong Kong (like London with Chinese subtitles) I planned to depart in the early evening. I was carrying a briefcase and, while I checked my suitcase in the terminal, I was careful to keep my briefcase with me at all times. After arriving by taxi at the Hong Kong airport, I approached the check-in desk and realized with horror that I had left my briefcase in the taxi. Not only did the briefcase contain classified materials, it also held my flight ticket. In thirty-one years in the military, I was never so horrified at my own negligence.

The desk clerk said he would try to track down the taxi and that I should just go sit down and wait. I did, I waited ... and waited. After several hours I dozed off. When I awoke with a start, I saw that the clerk had changed. I approached the new clerk with severe apprehension. But I didn't even have to tell him about my predicament. He smiled at me as I walked toward him, reached under the counter and held up my briefcase. Hallelujah! I've eluded courts martial.

A very sobering experience ...

By far the hairiest event in my 'Nam tour occurred in my work place. In the middle of an uneventful night, one of my workers, a tech sergeant in his early thirties, approached me at my desk and asked me if he could have a word with me. I knew him as a dutiful, responsible, quiet individual.

I followed him to the end of the room, far from where my desk was situated. He entered a small office and sat down behind the desk. Very emotionally he explained that he had just spoken on the phone with his wife back in Arkansas, and that she had told him that she had found a new love and that she wanted nothing to do with him when he returned home. He said that he had come into this office earlier with the intent to shoot himself. He pointed to an M-16 rifle which I had not noticed leaning against the wall.

(Continued, See Unusual, Page 7)

Notes from Nelson

by
Bob Nelson, Anchorage, Alaska

(Editor's Note: Member, Robert Nelson, Anchorage, Alaska, has been a great supporter of the TSNA and has contributed many welcome comments and material for *Revetments*. The following may foment considerable discussion.)

This Ain't No Rag!

A Statement from Charlie Daniels

There are probably some of you folks out there who are wondering why we (The Charlie Daniels Band) didn't appear on the CMT (TV channel, Nashville, Tennessee) Country Freedom Concert for the Salvation Army to benefit the victims of the September 11th Attack on America.

We were announced and scheduled and had every intention of doing the show, until we gave the CMT folks the lyrics to a new song I had written and wanted to perform on the show.

After receiving the words, they informed us that we could not do the song on the show and when we asked them why they said that the show was a healing type show and they were afraid that the song would offend someone. I would never do anything to hurt the show, but I knew that they had the very epitome of country stars and didn't particularly need us to sell tickets.

With this in mind, I decided to pull off the show for personal reasons that I would like to share with you. Let me preface my remarks by saying that I respect the CMT's right to not allow anything they don't agree with to go out over their airwaves. And in all fairness, I guess they were taking the sensibilities of the victim's families into account. But I respectfully and vehemently disagree with their stand.

First of all, I don't feel that this is the time for healing. I feel that this is the time to rub salt in the wounds and keep America focused on the job at hand. We lost almost seven thousand people in the Trade Towers and Pentagon - and we're worrying about offending somebody?

We have seven-month-old babies infected with Anthrax - and we're afraid we'll hurt someone's feelings?

Brave Americans forced a plane down in a field in Pennsylvania - and we're worried about ruffling someone's feathers?

We're sending our sons and daughters off to fight and perhaps die in a war we had nothing to do with starting - and we're concerned about insulting somebody?

I felt to give in to this political correctness would be to turn my back on the people who lost their lives on 9-11 - and on the brave men and women who defend this country. The title of the song is *This Ain't No Rag, It's a Flag*, and I don't apologize for a word in it. I'll let you all decide for yourselves.

* * *

This ain't no rag, it's a flag
and we don't wear it on our head.
It's a symbol of the land
where the good guys live
are you listening to what I said?

You're a coward and a fool
and you broke all the rules
and you wounded our American pride.
Now we're coming with a gun
and we know you're gonna run
but you can't find no place to hide.

We gonna hunt you down
like a mad dog hound
and make you pay for the lives you stole.
We're all through talking and messing around
and now it's time to rock and roll.

These colors don't run
and we're speaking as one
when we say united we stand.
It you mess with one, you mess with us all
every boy, girl, woman and man.

You've been acting might rash
and talking that trash
but let me give you some advice.
You can crawl back in your hole
like a dirty little mole
but now it's time to pay the price

You might have shot us in the back
but now you have to face the fact
that the big boy's in the game.
The lightning's been flashing
and the thunder's been crashing
and now it's getting ready to rain.

- Chorus -

This is the United States of America
the land of the brave and the free.
We believe in God, we believe in justice,
we believe in liberty.

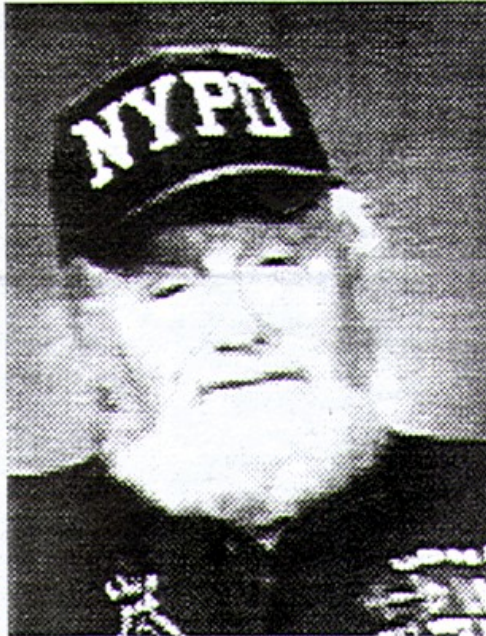
You've been pulling our chain,
we shoulda done something about you
a long time ago.
But now the flag's flying high and the fur's gonna
fly
and by now the whole world's gonna know.

This ain't no rag, it's a flag
old glory red white and blue.
The stars and stripes
and when it comes to a fight
we can do what we have to do.

Our people stand proud
the American crowd
is faithful and loyal and tough.
We're as good as the best
and better than the rest
you're gonna find out soon enough.

When you look up in the sky
and see the eagle fly
you'd better know he's headed your way.
This ain't no rag it's a flag
and it stands for the USA.

What do you think? God Bless America
Charlie Daniels



Country Western star, Charlie Daniels



"All Included - Non Excluded"

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Editorial

The Best of Times

We will quote, as so many others do, Charles Dickens' opening sentence in *A Tale of Two Cities*; "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

We are living, since September 11th, in the best of times. We have rediscovered so many forgotten factors about being American. As so many people have pointed out, the important and vital problems we were concerned about on September 10th, are mostly insignificant and of scant concern today.

Most of us have rediscovered the thrill of unfettered pride in America and Americans. We stand in awe when we return to the realization that America is not just protected by one army, but by two.

One is the domestic army of firemen, policemen, rescue teams, postal workers, city mayors, and millions of other brother and sister Americans who have been here all the time securing and buttressing our daily American life.

The other is the military establishment that now stands in harms way thousands of miles from home to punish and bring



*The Year 2002 Wu, The Year of The Horse
A period of independence, intelligence and determination*

justice to the fanatic madmen who wantonly attacked and murdered thousands of our innocent countrymen.

We, and some have been surprised, have found that we have superb leadership at all levels.

The worst of times would be a period of decadent self-indulgence, self-pity, leading to ultimate defeat.

This is not so in America as we

approach a new year. This is the best of times because we know that we will prevail. It is up to the theologians to argue the pros and cons about God, gods and goddesses.

Whatever great spirit reigns triumphant, He gave Man the inalienable right to live free from tyranny and the strength to defend it forever.

Look forward to a great new year.

Distant Voices

by
Ira Cooperman



Letter to a 22 Year Old Daughter Who Remembers Veterans

Dearest daughter,

Thank you for your phone call last Saturday. It was very nice of you to think of me while you were visiting the Vietnam Veterans memorial in Washington, D.C. I always appreciate hearing from you, dear Lisa, but especially on such special occasions as Veterans Day weekend. You are an exceptional and sensitive person and I love you all the more for those qualities.

At one p.m. the following day, a cold and windy Sunday, I stood by myself on a hillside overlooking the very moving Vietnam Veterans memorial here in Rochester - and thought of you, and Vincent Chiarello, my former Air Force partner, and the other good men I knew in Vietnam and Thailand who are no longer alive. Yesterday's scene was very similar to the one you experienced on the Washington Mall, apart from the sad fact that in Highland Park, in Rochester, there were fewer than eighty persons in attendance for the annual Veterans Day ceremony sponsored by my local chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America.

Except for the playing of "Taps" and firing of rifles in a salute to the dead and missing, it was a peaceful ceremony interrupted only by quiet sobs and silent tears. As each of the small group present, mostly Vietnam veterans and family members, reflected on the words intoned by the speakers, each of us was transported back in time, in my case, to the year 1965. Some in attendance were parents of a son lost in the war. Others were veterans with visible, and invisible, scars. But each of us shared a sense of grief and loss - a mood made all the more poignant since September 11th.

Lisa, I wish I could promise you a peaceful future - a world filled only with love and respect. It was with that hope that I accepted my military assignment orders to serve in Southeast Asia exactly thirty-six

New Member, Olbert H. Hiatt Passes Away

On November 20th, on his way home from attending the Vietnam Security Police Association Reunion, in Hampton, Virginia, Master Sergeant Olbert H. Hiatt suffered a massive heart attack. He died from complications.

Hiatt, from Centre, Alabama, was a member of the 633rd Air Police Squadron at Pleiku Air Base, and the 377th Security Police Squadron at Tan Son Nhut. He participated in the December 1966 attack on the base. He served at Tan Son Nhut from 1966 through 1970.

He was also a World War II veteran, and with three brothers fought in Italy, France and Germany.

He joined the Tan Son Nhut Association in February, of this year, and was quite a supporter of our program. He made many calls to the Public Affairs Office and to our Webmaster, Charles Penley, often just to swap stories. He was eagerly looking forward to our Reunion 2002.

On behalf of the membership of the Tan Son Nhut Association, we extend deep condolences to his family and comrades.



years ago this week. As those who came before me attempted "to make the world safe for democracy," or to serve in "the war to end all wars," I too had hopes for a more peaceful world after my service. Unfortunately, it was not to be.

Now the future of our nation - and the world - mostly is in the hands of your generation. I wish I could give you some sage advice about how to avoid the mistakes of previous generations. All I can say is be aware of what is taking place around you - in your community, in the nation, in the world. Our planet truly has become a global village. Never before have the words of John Donne been more accurate:

"... Never send to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee."

With all my love and memories,
Dad



MSgt. Olbert H. Hiatt, Vietnam 1966

Letters

His worst memory of Tan Son Nhut

I was assigned to 21st Tactical Air Support Squadron from July 1972 to July 27, 1972. I worked in the periodic dock for the 02.

My worst remembrance of Tan Son Nhut was that Bubbles, our dog, that had traveled from Bien Hoa to Pleiku and finally to Tan Son Nhut - was run over by a truck.

Would anyone have a copy of the *Stars & Stripes* front page where he (Bubbles) was featured while leading a "freedom bird" to its parking spot at Bien Hoa? Just wondering.

Master Sergeant Floyd W. Cox
Roseau, Minnesota

* * *

Another C-130 Story

It was December 6th or 7th, 1966, when we were leaving Tan Son Nhut on a C-130 for Tuy Hoa in the evening. The runway lights had just been installed that day at Tuy Hoa and this was the first night flight to land there. We left Tan Son Nhut, but had to return as the tailgate didn't close. We left for Tuy Hoa another 30 to 45 minutes later.

Dean Gard
Bourbonnais, Illinois

A Special Message from Our Sky Pilot



Home for the Holidays

by

Chaplain James Warrington

We have a rightful concern today that all families should have decent and adequate housing. We work in many ways to help people have enough room, sanitary and healthy living conditions, a wholesome neighborhood in which to rear their children. We know also that there is a close relationship between bad housing and juvenile delinquency.

But it is possible for people to have good houses, good living conditions, and a good neighborhood and still be homeless in God's universe. We see people all around us. They are filled with deep anxiety, fear and inner insecurity. They have no deep conviction about the ultimate character of the world itself, and so they go through the motions of living with a haunting loneliness. They are not certain whether this creation is more akin to a Person or to a machine. They ponder: "Is there really love at the core of it, or is it merely the endless repetition of impersonal laws and mechanical forces?"

A remarkable book has been published by the cartoonist Charles M. Schulz, world famous as the creator of the character "Peanuts." The book is titled *Security is a Thumb and a Blanket*. It consists of a series of simple illustrations with brief captions. They appear to be very superficial in character but actually they have profound implications about

what gives meaning to life. The final one in the series shows a little boy kneeling beside his bed at evening, and the words are: "Security is knowing you're not alone."

The Christian religion has much to say to people who are spiritually homeless. When Jesus was born he did not have much of a house around him, but he was at home — and he has helped all sorts of people be at home through the centuries. The poet Gilbert Keith Chesterton mused on this meaning of Bethlehem when he wrote:

"To an open house in the evening
Home shall men come,
To an older place than Eden
And a taller town than Rome
To the end of the way of a wandering star,
To the things that cannot be and that are,
To the place where God was homeless,
And all men are at home."

* * *



God Bless America

**Best Wishes to
all our members
and their friends
and families!**

President and Mrs. Don Parker
Executive V.P. and Mrs. John Peele
Vice President and Mrs. John Evans
Webmaster Charles Penley
Public Affairs, Bob and Lois Need

(Unusual, Continued from Page 2)

Then he began shaking with sobs and gasped that he was a life-long loser who wasn't man enough to kill himself.

Just prior to leaving the Pentagon for my assignment to Vietnam, I had attended a course at Andrews Air Force Base where I learned to field strip an M-16, reassemble it and had fired enough rounds at still targets to feel at ease with the weapon. At Tan Son Nhut I had been issued an M-16 and a forty-five caliber automatic pistol. The M-16 was locked up in the office, virtually forgotten. I was required to wear the 45 at all times on and off base.

Confronted with a suicidal, very depressed non-com and a loaded combat rifle, I was so shaken I could not even remember how to disarm the weapon. I grabbed the gun, walked out to the desk of an officer with whom I had become very friendly, Major Peter Friedman, who was an Annapolis graduate and a collector of small arms. I said, "For god's sake, Pete, disarm this, will you?"

I took the sergeant by the arm and walked him a few blocks over to the base hospital, talking to him in as fatherly a manner as I could manage. I found a doctor, and explained that my man was very depressed and suicidal. "I'll take care of him," said the doctor.

But he didn't. In less than fifteen minutes after I was back at my desk, in walked my tech sergeant. I was outraged. A short time later, the day shift started arriving. I grabbed one of my bosses, a real colonel, explained the situation to him and he said he would take care of it.

And he did. He called the hospital commander and explained what had happened. The tech sergeant was admitted to the hospital where he remained for some three weeks before he returned to duty.

The moral to be derived from this episode is, to paraphrase Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, "in a war it's not unusual for something or somebody to be unusual."



with
Harlan Hatfield
Northfield, California

A Summer's Night in '67

It was a quiet and very dark summer night. The rays of the setting sun had disappeared over the horizon hours ago. The sounds of silence were wafting across the open field to the east.

As you sit all alone you can faintly hear the drone of engines on Spooky as she makes her nightly rounds. You're never alone as long as the Dragon Lady is in the air, and that's a very comforting thought tonight. The flares fall slowly earthward, sending forth their million candlepower rays of light, causing shadows to dance and race from building to building as if they were children playing tag.

If one tries hard enough it is possible to see all sorts of images in the dim shadows. Sudden movement in the field of the dead brings the pulse to a racing rate, all of a sudden you notice you're not breathing in effort to hear, so you force yourself to again inhale the aromatic summer air. Moments later, you see it's only a couple of dogs on their nightly hunt, so you again turn inward to your own reverie.

You think back to the faces of the young men as they stepped off the bus this afternoon. You wonder what kind of world would cause a young lad of 18 or 19 to see things and do things that creates a face of a haggard old man on this young body. You look toward the heavens and ask the great Spirit, "Why can man be so gentle to some things and yet so cruel and unkind to other?" You question the Spirit as to the wisdom of such endeavors and why it is allowed. But your questions are not answered now!

The hour is the darkest and coldest, just before dawn when you finally begin to fathom an answer from the Great Spirit. It comes not as a voice or a sign, but something felt deep within.

The answer is this -

"Mourn not the dead for they are free! But instead mourn the survivor, for he shall forever carry the scars and the memories. And the memories, even though they may be repressed, they shall continue to creep into his consciousness to haunt him!"

In hopes we never forget, I dedicate this to the ones left behind. I will not forget you, and ask the Great Spirit each day to allow you again to join your Country and your families.

Oh, Great Spirit,
Help me always to speak the truth quietly,
to listen with an open mind
when others speak,
and to remember the peace
that may be found
in silence.

Cherokee Prayer

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Constitution Ratification Vote Extended

In last month's *Revetments*, members were called upon abide by and support an intelligently conceived to provide a ratification vote on the proposed Tan Son Constitution.

Nhut Association Constitution. A lot of hard work was put into writing a document that would hopefully please most of the membership. It was also hard work to place the entire document on the TSNA website.

Only 35 members responded. There are still 300 or so members we would like to hear from. To develop into a viable organization, to obtain official recognition and perhaps even Federal chartering, we have to show we

We are extending the vote through December 31, 2001. Please, please vote!

We published the website incorrectly. Please go to <http://www.tsna.org> and make your choice. Or, write us directly at Public Affairs, Suite 709, 330 W. Brambleton Avenue, Norfolk, VA 23510, phone: (757) 627-7746, or E-Mail: hercules29@worldnet.att.net

PLEASE USE YOUR VOTE!

*"Pilgrimage of Honor - Reunion of Remembrance"***Registration Fee Set***The National Cathedral*

The registration fee for the Tan Son Nhut Association Reunion 2002, in Washington, D.C., has been set at \$125.00 per person. This fee will include the Potomac River cruise and luncheon on Friday, April 26, the formal banquet in the evening of Saturday, April 27, and bus transportation. Please remit (check or money order only) to Executive Vice President John Peele, TSNA, 6203, 57th Avenue, Riverdale, Maryland 20737.

Registration fees must reach John Peele by January 31, 2002.

Reunion Schedule: Thurs., Apr. 25: (Holiday Inn, King Street, Alexandria) Registration and informal reception. Fri., Apr. 26: Potomac River cruise and luncheon on board. President's Reception (Holiday Inn) in the evening with pictorial presentation by member, Thomas Tessier. Sat. Apr. 27: Wreath-laying at The Wall; Memorial Service at the National Cathedral; Formal Banquet (Holiday Inn) in the evening. Sun. April 28: Memorial Breakfast (Holiday Inn.) The January Revetments will contain detailed information about accommodations, and the entire program.

Contact one of the following now -

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**REUNION 2002
NEWS**
April 25, 26, 27, 28

The Tan Son Nhut Association
Public Affairs Office
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Renewal Date -



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