

Revetments

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association



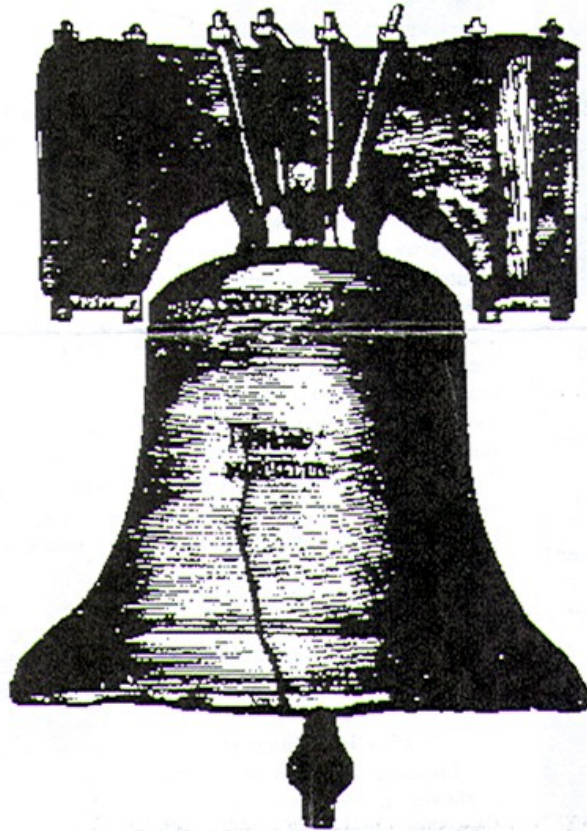
"All Included - Non Excluded"

Volume 3, Number 10

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

July, 2001

Celebrate The Fourth!



The famous "Liberty Bell" hangs in Independence Hall in Philadelphia. It was cast in 1751, and cracked as soon as it was struck. It was recast, and cracked again, but not enough to matter. On July 4, 1776 it was rung in celebration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It is engraved with a text from the Bible, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." It was last rung in 1843.

Then& Now

(Editor's Note: A few weeks ago member Harry Patterson of Shallotte, North Carolina, offered us a suggestion. We said "great, and we'll start with you." Please let us know what your story is, and was ... then & now.)



Tan Son Nhut 1966-1967

Harry C. Patterson, Lt. Colonel, USAF Retired. Was assigned as aircraft commander, 360th TEWS, Tan Son Nhut. Returned to be assigned as Quality Control Officer of the 551st AEW&C Wing, Otis AFB, Massachusetts, and pilot of RC121s until retirement in March 1970 after 30 years.

Worked in real estate, build homes, do woodcarving, and am now completely retired, enjoying life.



Harry & Clea Patterson today.

Stories

(Editor's Note: The stories are starting to flow in. The following story was written by MSgt. Paul "Steve" Simonson of Schertz, Texas. He was assigned to the 315th Air Commando Wing, May 1966 through May 1967. He added a note to the story that made us very happy. "I was prompted to share this slice of my life after the open letter to all of us by Jan Jones in the May issue (of *Revetments*). She is right. We all have stories. Some funny, some sad and many just boring, but we were there. Before we join the dying breed of World War II and Korea Vets, share your stories with those who were there and those who want to know.")

Welcome to Tan Son Nhut

Prologue

As we were landing at Tan Son Nhut, I thought back on my short stay at Hamilton Air Force Base. It was a shock to use what I thought were real weapons during the "combat training orientation" after using worn out carbines for eight years of qualification. I did a good job with the M16, and put the fake grenade where it was supposed to go, but I was concerned about sinking boats in the bay. When they let me fire the M60 across the small valley at barrels, I never did hit one. Actually, I'm sure many of my shots ended up in the bay, but I did manage to miss the boats. So much for my John Wayne act.

Destination Shangri-La

Stepping off the World Airways flight into the hot muggy air of Tan Son Nhut, I glanced around. The apparent chaos was hard to take in with a casual look. After being stationed at Clark and Kadena Air Bases, I knew it was not the typical Far East Air Force Base. An Air Force RF101 was casually sandwiched in between a C-47, C-123, Air France airliner and a small Air America aircraft. Drifting among them were

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people and vehicles that moved without any apparent pattern or direction. Kinda reminded me of LA freeways on a Friday afternoon.

I finally found my way through the civilian airport area to the reception center for lost souls. I thought I might be in Shangri-La when I presented my orders and was told that there was "no such outfit in Vietnam." I was directed to a transit area for the lost and lonely, and advised to get some bedding and find a hooch. Most were under various stages of construction. Being resourceful, I carried my clean sheets, a pillow of dubious character, and an iron cot with mattress to a hooch I managed to call home.

It took two more days to find my place with the 315th Air Commando Wing, assigned to the Director of Maintenance office. In the meantime, I learned a little humility from the Vietnamese women. They just happened to clean your clothes in the shower area. I wasn't too surprised by their presence among us, having been stationed in the Far East before. It was the giggling appraisal of my manly body that actually caused me the most problem. I had to admit I did resemble the Pillsbury DoughBoy with a crew cut after a year at Plattsburg AFB. It was a little rough on the ego.

Haute Cuisine

The first time I walked into the NCO Club after the usual afternoon rains, I was convinced I was in Shangri-La. I stood ankle deep in water collecting in the sunken floor, and became totally surrounded by floating beer cans, cigarettes, paper cups and

(Continued, See *Stories*, Page 3)

Stories, Continued from Page 2

tired. G.I.s. Hungry, I asked a passing waitress for a beer and a sandwich. She pointed to the large opening in the wall where a sweating Vietnamese stood waiting. This man had a one track mind. It didn't matter what I want; he wanted to sell me a cheeseburger. It was one of *many* he had stashed around the corner of the wall. I know that he cooked them in 30-weight oil, but what the heck, it was food.

We had high hopes for the club when they decided to build a two-story addition. Those hopes were soon dashed when they opened up the chow line. It was no different than the chaos that met me the first day I stepped off the plane. Just like the haphazard placement of planes with people and vehicles drifting in and out, we G.I.s wove our way pass the garbage cans near the chow line. Had to look at the bright side though, at least we weren't standing in ankle deep water.

* * *

(Editor's Note: Our next story comes from member TSgt. **Harlan N. Hatfield**, North Highlands, California. He was assigned to the 460th AEM Squadron from January 1967-January 1968.)

Strange Thunder



Hatfield, in country, circa 1967

This is one of my "War Stories" that actually happened to me. I am revealing this little tale about the Southeast Asia part of my Air Force career on the condition that you don't laugh too much at this youngster.

I joined the Air Force as a 19-year old youngster in August 1959. I had decided there had to be an easier way to



Dr. Frankenstein, we presume?

make a living than working on a farm. After a few years of various assignments, Uncle Sam decided, in January 1967, that it was time for me to take a vacation in sunny Southeast Asia. It was wintertime in Minot, North Dakota, so I figured the new venue would be warmer. After an all-to-short leave to move the family home and visit relatives, it was saddle-up-and-go-time.

We had to take some training at Hamilton Air Force Base, California. This entailed doing all sorts of fun things such as qualifying with the M-16, the M61 machine gun and learning about other pertinent subjects. Then we were loaded onto the big bird. We left from Travis Air Force Base at 0200 hours on the beginning of a more or less uneventful flight west. Our en route stops included Hawaii and Wake Island for fuel. At Wake, one of the "blow torches" that makes the big bird go, had to be fixed. Next stop was Okinawa, which would later become home for me, and finally onto Tan Son Nhut Air Base after a total of 17 hours of flying.

Yes it was warm there!

They shuffled us, and our stuff, into trucks and buses and headed for the processing area. First, a head count was

taken to make sure no one had decided to get lost. Next came a long, boring briefing about the country and its customs.

Names and assignments were then called out. I knew I would be staying at Tan Son Nhut. I was a staff sergeant (E-5) working as a technician in the Precision Measuring Equipment Laboratory. We repaired and calibrated test equipment used by technicians of the other services. I was passing time and looking out the "window." Really, there were no windows, but the building had a slanted open siding to allow air to pass through, with open tops and screen wire covering the whole wall.

I kept hearing this strange thunder, but noted there was not a cloud in the sky. After some time, it dawned on me that I was where I was, and that it was not thunder I was used to hearing. Now, I know NO real troopers would have done that. But, give me a break! I was young and naive, so I assume it was to be expected.

Well, none of that thunder ever got to me as most of it was going out, not coming in, which was surely nice.

Welcome Home.

* * *

Win A Coffee Cup

Member **Dennis Byrnes**, Royersford, Pa., sent the following in from the June issue of *Military Magazine*.

Flying out of Tan Son Nhut were C-130s. They carried cargo and passengers. The flights were announced on the PA system as: Phan Rang, Nha Trang, Oai Nhon and Da Nang. To those of us old enough to remember the Jack Benny radio show, the flight announcement had the ring of: Anaheim, Azusa, and Cucamonga. Were you ever on those C-130 flights out of Tan Son Nhut? If so, drop a note to C-130, *Military*, 2122 28th St., Sacramento, CA 95818. Tell us when, and where you went to. We'll throw all the entries into a box and draw out three letters. Those selected will receive a *Military* coffee cup. The drawing will be held one month after receiving the first entry.



"All Included - Non Excluded"

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Thoughts of Our Sky Pilot

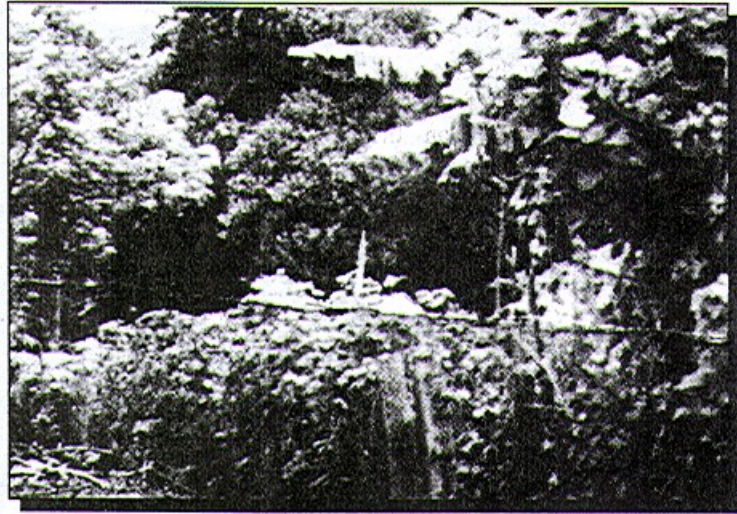
by
Chaplain
James M. Warrington

Beware the Jungle

Someone has pointed out that civilization is like a garden area which generations of people have cleared and beautified through the centuries, but it is constantly threatened by a jungle around it which seeks to take over and destroy it.

We can see this in all of human social relations and group activities. Even the highest forms of religion have a constant battle against secularism, superstition and fanaticism; there is need for continuing reformation and renewal, as is being so widely recognized today.

In our political life there is a fine line between a wholesome discussion and disagreement about basic policies for the common good, and the efforts of those who would make the political



The Jungle near Pleiku and Kontum

arena a place for mass hysteria, mob pressures and demagoguery.

In business and economic life the balanced relationship between the producer and the consumer, and between management and labor, is always threatened by ruthless competition, false advertising, inhuman working conditions, and other "jungle" influences.

We can see this equally clearly in our personal life. For every impulse toward goodness we have a contrary pull toward hatred, cruelty or selfishness. The threat is so constant it is personalized as the evil one, who is forever going about seeking whom he may devour.

Nowhere is the danger more constantly underlined than in the pages of the Bible. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the soul of every human being is revealed as a battlefield between good and evil, between the garden and the jungle. Even such leaders as King David and the Apostle Peter are presented in their weaknesses as well as their strengths.

There is no mincing of words concerning the reality of temptation, and the constant possibility of moral

collapse. A warning has been put bluntly to us all: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

(Editor's Note: Chaplain Warrington is available for counseling and other pastoral activities. Call or write TSNA Public Affairs for an appointment.)



THE BATTLE FOR TAN SON NHUT is a big hit!

Nearly two dozen orders have already been placed for this 4 CD set of the transcription of the communications of the 377th Security Police Sq. at the opening of the 1968 Tet Offensive.

Only \$49.95 (includes s/h)

Call, write, e-mail

TSNA Office of Public Affairs

The 460th Returns to Active Service

At 3:05 p.m., on Sunday, June 24, the following message was sent from Endaver1@aol.com to Tan Son Nhut Association member Master Sergeant William A. Coup:

"Sir,

"Hello, I am Chief Master Sergeant Randy Edwards of the 821st Space Group, Buckley Air Force Base, Colorado.

"On 1 October 2001 we will activate the 460th Air Base Wing at Buckley AFB. Our lineage is tied to the 460th Tactical Reconnaissance Group/Wing. During a search on the web, I noticed you were once assigned to the 460th Tactical Reconnaissance Group/Wing.

"If you have time I would like to talk to you about the 460th, and get some insight for our new emblem and activation ceremony.

"Thank you for your time.

"Sincerely,"

Randy L. Edwards

CMSgt., USAF

Superintendent, 821st Space Gp.



At 11:28 p.m. Sunday evening, Master Sergeant Coup sent out his reply from bcoup@bellsouth.net:

"Dear Chief Edwards,

"I would be happy to talk to you at any time. I was a member of Headquarters Squadron, 460th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing when it was activated in 1966 at Tan Son Nhut Air Base in Vietnam and stayed with it until I returned home in November 1966. It was quite an organization. The thought of the 460th returning to active service is wonderful. I truly treasure the memories of my time in it.

"I recommend you go to the Tan Son Nhut Association website at:

<http://www.tsna.org> where you will find other veterans of the 460th in Vietnam. The organization (TSNA) covers the whole base, but it originally started as a 460th Wing/360th TEWS reunion in Evansville, Indiana. There are quite a few old 460th troops in the association.

"I'm sure you already have a copy of the wing emblem, but if you don't, I have one I could loan you.

"I'm sending a copy of this to our association Public Affairs Officer, Bob Need.

"Would you be interested in having a representative or representatives of the Vietnam 460th at the activation? I don't know if I could make it, but I'm sure we could have a member or members from the Colorado area attend.

"My home is in Boca Raton, Florida and my home telephone number is (561) 394-6751. ... I'll be looking forward to hearing from you.

"Sincerely,"

William A. Coup



Current Association Members listing affiliation with the 460th TRW & units

Baker, Dale M., Davenport, IA
Blackmon, William E., Winston-Salem, N.C.
Christine III, Samuel W., Owings Mills, MD
Coar, Lance S., Penllyn, PA
Colding, Royce G., Aurora, CO
Coup, William A., Boca Raton, FL
Damron, Charles C., Catlettsburg, KY
Donnelly, Lawrence G., Saddle Brook, NJ
Duval, Richard, Winthrop, MA



Fish, Jerald E., Dixfield ME
Gennings, Malcom, Freeport, NY
Griffin, Richard E., San Diego, CA
Hanson, William T., Des Moines, IA
Hatfield, Harlan N., North Highlands, CA
Koopman, David E., Little Canada, MN
Lipscomb, Val J., San Antonio, TX
Masters, Richard L., Austin, TX
McClellan, Thomas W., West Babylon, NY
McElwee, Rodney E., Layton, Utah
Moll, Kenneth, Alexandria, VA
Moran, Edward, Cheshire, CT
Morton, Kenneth R., Chelsea, OK
Nadeau, Ronald W., Fort Walton Beach, FL
Peele, John, Riverdale, MD
Pew, James, Laramie, WY
Phillips III, James B., Berea, KY
Pierson, William, Austin, TX
Pilla, Anthony, Orangeville, CA
Randles, Fred C., Hotchkiss, CO
Robbins, James M., Lewisville, NC
Ruble, Dale, Alamosa CO
Rutherford, Charles E., Santa Rosa Beach, FL
Schirmer, George E., Madison, IN
Skea, Richard B., Edmonds, WA
Smith, James A., Washington, D.C.
Spinelli, Mike, Burlingame, CA
Stein, Fred A., Albert Lea, MN
Temple, Robin J., Fort Ann, NY
Watson, Kenneth, Seattle, WA
Waxman, Robert M., Muncie, IN
Wilgis, Harry J., Baltimore, MD



**Don't forget to tell
us
when you move!**

MARKING TIME

with Mark Fleisher

Life at Tan Son Nhut was not all work. We welcomed sojourns into Saigon, especially when the trip promised a meal far better than what could be found on the base. Of course, we had no idea this particular journey would result in a contretemps over condiments!



The Lunch Bunch

An oddly matched foursome headed to downtown Saigon that early November Saturday for what was billed as a "civilized lunch" at *Ramuncho's Restaurant*.

I was the most recent arrival to the Combat News Division of the 7th Air Force Directorate of Information at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. Six weeks earlier, I stepped off an airplane and walked into the blast furnace of heat and humidity that was Southeast Asia.

Now it was autumn. Who could tell?

My lunch companion: Staff Sergeants Julian Mills and Jerry O'Hara and Master Sergeant Bob Need – Robert Stanley Need, to be precise.

Mills was an amiable North Carolinian whose folksy down home demeanor masked a sharp wit and

nimble mind. O'Hara was a lanky upstate New Yorker with a perpetual 5 o'clock shadow. O'Hara's trademark was an old briar pipe that seemed to leave his mouth only when a refill of tobacco was required. He didn't say much. Most of O'Hara's statements consisted of one variation or another of "(Bleep) you, Need," whenever the imperious master sergeant issued one of his frequent pronouncements.

Need had spent three years assigned to SHAPE Headquarters in Paris. He had absorbed the superior – in his mind, at least – aspects of Gallic culture; an appreciation of fine wine, food, music and literature. An unfortunate overexposure to French arrogance left Bob with more than a dollop of haughtiness and hubris. At times, Need exuded all the humility of a Parisian waiter.

At the same time, he was perhaps the most caring man I'd ever met. He was the shepherd – more often the sheep dog – keeping watch over his flock of lower ranking enlisted men. As the NCOIC of Combat News, Need ran the administrative side of the office. He yearned for an occasional assignment in the field, but the higher ups firmly and frequently said "No."

So Need busied himself with assigning his troops to assignments in the field and making sure they had decent travel arrangements and appropriate gear when they left. He also admonished us, long before the phrase became a cliché, "And be careful out there."

Now to lunch.

Need promised a superb meal of *bifteck* and *pommes frites*. (That's steak and fried potatoes to us non-Gallic types.) And to wash it down, a distinguished bottle of Bordeaux *vin supèrieur*. Steak! Real steak, I thought. Even better than the food at the VNAF Officers Club which welcomed legal tender from all ranks. Obviously far superior to the sandwiches of dog or monkey or, worse yet, rat which were purported to be the bill of fare at Saigon's many street vendors.

Our gastronomic guide led us through the doors of *Ramuncho's* with a typical flourish, greeting the proprietress (*Madame Ramuncho*, I suppose) with a string of French phrases worthy of Charles Boyer. We took our seats and ordered – or – I should say, Master Sergeant Need ordered for us.

Then came the first hint of trouble.

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Mills didn't drink wine. "I'll have a Co-Cola," he drawled matter-of-factly.

Need's eyes widened and his face reddened. "Julian," he intoned, "you cannot drink Coca-Cola with a good steak. It just isn't done!"

Mills stuck to his guns. He explained to Need's satisfaction that he wasn't a wine drinker and wouldn't know the difference between a fine Bordeaux and some Thunderbird bottled the previous afternoon. Why waste a good wine on someone who wouldn't appreciate the experience?

"Oh, alright, Mills," Need conceded. "Have your Coca-Cola."

Our steaks soon arrived, and as Need promised, they looked terrific, or to use Bob's favorite word "EXCELLENT!"

Then the *bifteck* hit the fan. Mills summoned a waiter and asked for a bottle of ketchup. You couldn't beat *Ramuncho's* service and the requested condiment arrived in seconds.

The ensuing conversation went something like this –

NEED: "And what are you going to do with the ketchup, Julian?"

MILLS: "Put it on my steak."

NEED: "Putting ketchup on steak is a sin."

MILLS: "Bob, I like ketchup on my steak."

As the junior member of the group, I kept my mouth shut. O'Hara, however, tried to be a peacemaker.

O'HARA: "Look, Bob, if he likes ketchup, let him use ketchup."

NEED: "If he puts ketchup on that beautiful steak, I am leaving."

Well, gentle reader, I'm sure you can surmise the rest of the story. Mills proceeded to bathe his steak in ketchup and Need arose from his chair and strode out the door muttering something about someone being a Philistine.

We three remaining members of the Lunch Bunch ate in silence for the next few moments. Finally, O'Hara turned to Mills and asked, "How's your steak, Julian?"

"Just great, Jerry, just great."

(Editor's Note: *Je ne comment pas.*)

The Taylor B. McKinnon Page

Days At Tan Son Nhut ...



Air Commandos

During my readings of various articles and letters submitted to *Revetments*, I have been impressed by the quality of some of the writing. But I have also noticed that some authors were unable to properly identify

the aircraft they were working near at Tan Son Nhut. Also, they were unable to relay to the readers the type of aircraft upon which they flew as passengers on missions which could have carried them to that big Air Force Base in the sky.

For that reason I decided to start a series of articles describing the airplanes which we were acquainted with at Tan Son Nhut, although all of us were not completely aware of what they were when we saw them or even when we traveled on them.

The first in the series will be one used in World War II and Korea. But first I must describe the origins of the Air Commando Squadrons.

In 1963, President Kennedy was reviewing a joint exercise of Air Force Tactical Air Command airmen and U.S. Army Special Forces. He was extremely interested in establishing military units which could operate in a clandestine mode in any area of the world without the press gaining knowledge of United States involvement.

To fill this need the U.S. Army established the Special Forces and the Air Force began establishing the Air Commando units.

They had operated in Burma successfully during World War II under the command of the famous Colonel Phillip Cochran (called "Flip" Corkin) in the *Terry and The Pirates* and *Steve Canyon* comic strips.

At the exercise of which I spoke earlier, I think it was at Fort Benning, Georgia, President Kennedy commented to the service chiefs, after the exercise, how neat and professional the Army troops looked with their bloused boots and name tags. But, he continued, the Air Force mechanics looked like "garbage men."

Don't take offense, readers. I was there, and none of us wore the same type of fatigue uniform, nor did we shine our brogan shoes. We bought our fatigues from the Army/Navy surplus stores because we didn't like the

... and other propwash

Air Force issue "baggies" or the Air Force two piece "gray loose fits" which lasted about three washings.

Of course, the Air Force generals were terribly embarrassed by President Kennedy's comments. Within weeks the Air Force had a new "dress fatigue" uniform. All Air Commando units wore it full time. It included bloused boots, shined, a blue neck scarf and a French Foreign Legion campaign hat.

The first airplane selected was the C-46 "Commando," which up until the C-123 came out was the largest two-engined airplane ever built. Don't confuse this with the smaller C-47.

So, there it is

Ky Era Photos Wanted

Marvin J. Wolf, noted Los Angeles writer, is assisting the former South Vietnamese Prime Minister, Vice President and Air Marshall Nguyen Cao Ky in writing his memoir that has already been described as "audacious and charismatic."

Turning to the Tan Son Nhut Association, Mr. Wolf said in a message last week, "I am helping (Nguyen Cao Ky) write his memoirs, to be

published next year by St. Martin's Press. I am looking for photos that he could borrow to use in this work. General Ky lived on Tan Son Nhut for many years, and also served as base commander before he became the Vietnamese Air Force commander."

Mr. Wolf invited TSNA members to visit his website at: <http://come.to/marvwolf>

Association members having photos they would care to share should write Mr. Wolf directly at 13237 Warren Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90066.



Marvin J. Wolf, Author
1st AirCavDiv. 1965-66



Nguyen Cao Ky



The Dandy at night.

Gala Banquet Set For Reunion

The high point of Reunion 2002 (April 26, 27 and 28) will be the gala banquet on board the Potomac River cruise vessel the *Dandy*. You will enjoy three hours of gourmet dining while viewing our Nation's majestic monuments. The cost is \$100 per person. The Reunion 2002 will begin Friday afternoon with registration at probably the Holiday Inn on King Street in Alexandria. Executive Vice President Peele is negotiating the costs which will be announced in the next issue of *Revetments*.

Friday evening activities will be held in the Hospitality Suite. Saturday morning, members will attend a Breakfast business meeting. At noon, there will be a formal wreath-laying at the Vietnam Memorial. Members will be provided with a variety of tour plans to points of interest during Saturday afternoon. Members will board the *Dandy* between 6 and 6:45 p.m. Peele is presently contacting distinguished individuals as guest speakers during the banquet. Sunday morning there will be a Memorial prayer breakfast. **PLEASE LET US KNOW AS SOON AS POSSIBLE IF YOU ARE PLANNING TO ATTEND! LET'S MAKE THIS REUNION THE BIGGEST AND BEST!**

Please contact one of the following now -

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



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