

# Revetments

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

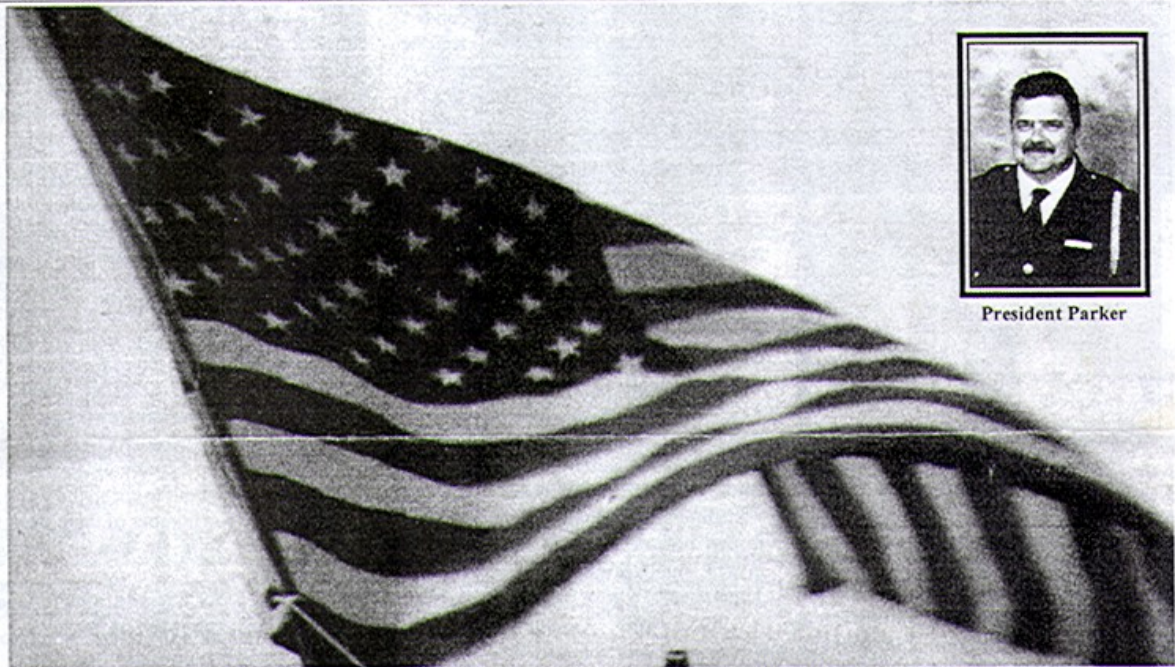


"All Included - Non Excluded"

Volume 3, Number 9

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

June, 2001



President Parker

*Your flag flying from the balcony of the Tan Son Nhut Association Public Affairs Office, Norfolk, Virginia*

*June 14<sup>th</sup> is coming up on us, and to me this day is one of the most important of all the year. It is a time we have set aside to honor our flag. It means so much to many people, but especially to a veteran who fought for it. It is put in his or her casket when he or she dies. There's a Johnny Cash song about the story of "The Ragged Old Flag." If you haven't heard it, try to find it.*

*"Remember: there is no such red in budding rose, in falling leaf or sparkling wine;*

*"no such white as April blossom, in crescent moon or mountain snow;*

*"no such blue in woman's eye, in ocean's depth or heaven's dome;*

*"and no such pageantry of clustering stars and streaming light in all the spectrum of sea and sky.*

*"That's why I'm mighty proud of our 'ragged old flag.'"*

*God bless each of you, and God bless America.*

*Don E. Parker*



# RED DUST

by MARK FLEISHER

(Editor's Note: During the 1930s, Clark Gable and Jean Harlow made a silly movie set in Saigon called "Red Dust." Mark Fleisher gives us a taste of the real thing in the 1960s. The author was an Air Force sergeant assigned to the Combat News Division, 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force, Directorate of Information (DXI) at Tan Son Nhut from September 1967 to September 1968. For much of that time I had the privilege of serving as the division NCOIC. Mark (a longtime member of the TSNA) was an outstanding newsman, giving us some of the finest material from all over the country. We are deeply grateful that he has become a contributor to *Revetments*. Robert Need, Editor)



Mark at Dalat awaiting return to Tan Son Nhut from Song Be

If I remember anything about Song Be it's the red dust.

That dry powdery, wind-blown red dust that covered every patch of bare skin and every fiber of my combat fatigues and every inch of my combat boots. Song Be was a place I'd never heard of in December 1967 - three months into my tour as a combat news reporter.

I would soon know it well.

Song Be wasn't in the picture when I ended my work day and headed for chow and the barracks at Tan Son Nhut. I thought that the next morning I'd be headed to Con Thien, a major hotspot in I Corps within miles of the Demilitarized Zone.

The North Vietnamese had been hammering the Marines at Con Thien (and nearby Khe Sanh) with mortars, artillery and rockets for the better part of three months. An assortment of Air Force B-52 and fighter-bombers were delivering counterpunches with devastating results. C-123 and C-130 transports continually

braved enemy fire to deliver vital supplies to the Marines and evacuate the wounded.

In short, Con Thien was hell and the DXI brass decided we needed somebody up there. The mission was clear; tell the Air Force story from the customer's viewpoint.

I drew the short straw.

Someone briefed me about what was going on up there. It wasn't very reassuring. The NVA had the airstrip zeroed in and the odds were that your aircraft would take a hit. Just pray that the hit wouldn't put you on the weekly casualty lists. Thanks for the encouragement.

I may have been a little bit crazy in those days. But I wasn't stupid and it dawned on me rather quickly that a guy could get killed in this place. Yet I still wanted to go. I volunteered for Vietnam, in part because I wanted to find out for myself what this war was all about. Con Thien seemed a great place to learn.

But while I was somewhat

disappointed, I must admit to a sense of relief when Bob Need came to the barracks and told me that the Con Thien assignment was scrubbed. The new mission: Song Be.

Why Song Be?

The Air Force had spent the better part of the last several days transporting most of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to Bien Hoa Air Base. The arrival of the last aircraft on December 18 marked the end of the largest and longest military airlift into a combat zone. The final tally read 10,024 troops and more than 5,300 tons of equipment moved by 369 C-141 Starlifter missions and 22 C-133 Cargomaster missions.

They called it Operation Eagle Thrust.

Of course, the Screaming Eagles of the 101<sup>st</sup> weren't about to spend the war in Bien Hoa. A good number of them would be sent to the Song Be area and that's where I came in.

Sergeant Steve Sprague, a radio-tape (See *Red Dust* continued on Page 3.)



Steve Sprague (far right) on another assignment interviewing combat troops at Dak Tho



**Red Dust** continued from Page 2 -

man assigned to DX1, and I were ordered to Song Be to - you guessed it - tell the Air Force story from the customer viewpoint; the troopers who had made the long haul from Kentucky and now were alighting from the Air Force C-7 Caribous, C-233 Providers and C-130 Hercules transport at the red dirt airstrip carved out by the combat engineers.

Song Be was an interesting place. Apart from the red dust, the most notable aspect was a hill about half mile from the end of the airstrip. Friendly forces occupied the high ground during the daylight air operations. But Charlie moved in after sunset and kept our nights interesting with sporadic mortar fire.

After four or five days and nights of this routine, Sprague and I decided we had sufficient stories, photographs and tapes to "tell the Air Force story." It was time to head home to Tan Son Nhut. Of course, travel within Vietnam was often a catch-as-catch-can operation. You just didn't pick up the phone and call your travel agent to book a flight to anywhere, let alone Song Be to Saigon.

We found a friendly cargo jockey who could take us as far as Dalat, a comparatively tranquil mountain city that had been the winter home of the Vietnamese emperors and the center of a prosperous vegetable growing area. From Dalat, he assured us, it would be no sweat to catch a flight to Tan Son Nhut.

He was correct - up to a point. Sprague and I got ourselves manifested on a C-123 headed to Tan Son Nhut. We were home free, or so we thought. Then the loadmaster informed us we were being bumped because they needed the room to transport several pallets of lettuce for some general in Saigon.

No sweat. We grabbed another plane and made it to Tan Son Nhut where Lt. Colonel Bill Greener of DX1 met us. (Hey, not bad. A welcome home from a lieutenant colonel!) "You got some great stuff, right?" he asked.

"Yes sir," came the rapid reply. He locked up every roll of film, every tape cassette, and every piece of paper we carried until the embargo date had passed.

I headed for the showers to wash away that red dust.



Mark on another assignment in the Delta. He gave superb coverage of military and civilian medical activities, hospitals and orphanages.

## Trapped in Saigon!

by  
Member, "Wild Bill" Carlson  
Central Point, Oregon

Having been divorced while on my first Vietnam tour, I arrived at Tan Son Nhut in July 1969, a single male age thirty-nine. Being single I made the off post bar scenes. I had made several resolutions such as never getting on one of those motor scooters, also not buying that expensive Saigon Tea, etc. I didn't mind riding the motor cyclo, where the passenger was considered to be the bumper, and rode them on numerous trips to town.

I had been in-country for a few months and had done the downtown, Cholon and other different areas. There was a bar on the road into town that I started spending quite a bit of time in, and met this one girl there.

One evening this girl suggested that I should go to her apartment and wait there until she got off work. It could have been all the 33's or maybe the love bug had gotten to me, as it seemed like a good idea. I figured this was probably my lifetime true love, or I wouldn't have agreed to get on one of those scooters and go. I made her write out a note to the apartment people, as I knew I would never remember numbers and names, being smitten like I was and high on alcohol.

I rode behind this guy, and he could have been the top VC in Saigon for all I knew. We wound our way down all kinds of dark alleys and finally arrived at the apartment building. I showed the note to a *mama-san* and got into my true love's pad which was about 4 or five floors up. My love worked until 10 p.m. at her sales


job - that consisted of selling Saigon Tea and other types of drinks to the American G.I.s.

While waiting in her place, I started hearing noises outside and went to the window and peeked out. In the dark I could barely make out figures scurrying around on the roof one floor below the window. I thought, "My God! It's the VC, and what are they doing - maybe setting up mortars or rocket launchers or something?" It was sobering me up real fast, and I was thinking if they find out I'm here, my life won't be going on much longer.

Finally my true love arrived from work and I told her there were people out on the roof and she said, yes, they were building an apartment on the rooftop. If they could get it built and finished before they were discovered, then no one would make them tear it down. They had no permits or authorization and this is why it was all done at night.

Well, that is one of my harrowing war stories. I think I picked up a couple of grey hairs that night. The true love didn't last the whole tour, as she wanted me to move in. Then she would have wanted all my booze ration to put on the black market - and I had other things to do with it - like drink it.

There are other adventures, like my first trip to the area my friend called Disneyland, but that's another story.

 **Give us a hand**  
in finding you when you move.  
Call TSNA Public Affairs  
at: (757) 627-7746  
or E-Mail: [hercules29@worldnet.att.net](mailto:hercules29@worldnet.att.net)





*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.

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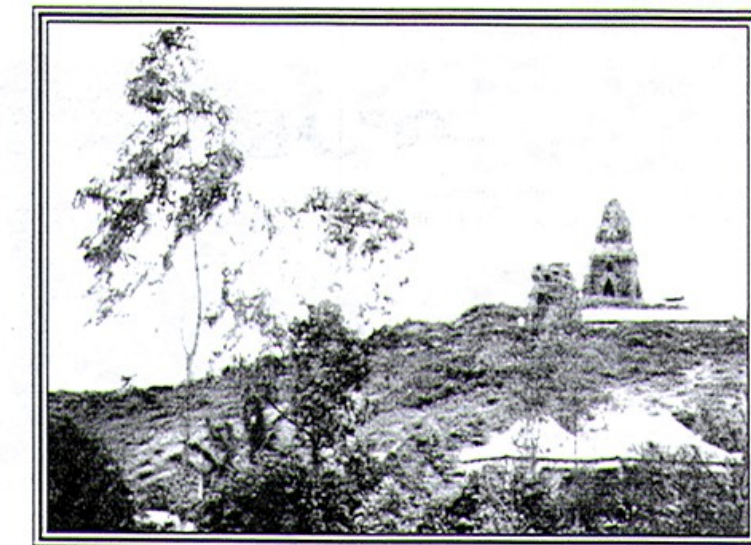


*Thoughts of  
Our Sky Pilot*  
by  
Chaplain  
James M. Warrington

### *A Father's or Mother's Gift*

Not many years ago an influential group of parents in a suburb of Cleveland determined the home needs of their community in a discussion class. For five months they met and studied faithfully the practical problems of social ethics and home religion. At the close of their session a summary of results was drawn up which still reads in part:

"If we have been giving the right of way to personal comfort, social ambition, business profits, or our personal pleasure and self-indulgence, this must stop - for the children's sake. If individualism has run amuck in our homes we must somehow get back to a



A Chinese fire signal tower, taken while on a convoy from Qui Nhon to Phu Cat. There were hundreds of these built during Chinese occupations and Peking would know within hours events that occurred across their Vietnamese territories.

home centered life. We will plan for more sharing of life with our children, cost what it may in sacrifice of selfish adult interest."

This same advice was given recently at the United Nations by one of India's leading educators, who said that parents should give their children not presents, but "the gift of time."

Part of our problem today is that parents, often unconsciously delegate the shaping of their children's lives to agencies outside the home, for example, the school and religious congregation. Certainly these are two important influences in the life of every child, but they can only supplement what is given at home. Neither congregation nor school has the power to offset the tragic influence of neglect, indifference, or mere busy-ness on the part of parents.

When children do not have a proper claim on the time and interest of the home, it is not only the children who suffer but also the parents. How often a man or woman looks back when a child has grown to maturity and says, with a deep inner sorrow:

"Oh, that I had taken the time to be closer to my child!"

#### Report to The Members:

#### *Letter to the President*

As promised in last month's *Revetments*, after review and approval by TSNA President Parker, and a number of other members, the following letter was sent to President Bush and similar ones to Virginia's Senators.

Dear Mr. President:

I am enclosing a copy of the May 2001 issue of *Revetments*, asking that your attention be directed to the article on Page 3, *Tan Son Nhut Memorial Day, April 30*.

You are a veteran of the Vietnam Era, and are a brother-in-arms and comrade to us all. In view of this we respectfully request that you support a bill in Congress for the establishment of a day of recognition, each April 30, as a Tan Son Nhut Memorial Day. We make this request solemnly in respect for the honorable service of the hundreds of thousands of men and women who served at or passed through Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon to fight, for eight years, in defense of human liberty and freedom.

We stand ready to furnish your office any and all additional information you might need in support of such a bill. Thanking you on behalf of all the membership of the Tan Son Nhut Association, I remain,

Most respectfully,

Robert Stanley Need

Public Affairs Officer, Tan Son Nhut Assoc.





## Echoes from Memorial Day

(Editor's Note: Member, Colonel Harry Patterson, Shallotte, North Carolina, is a staunch supporter of the Association and is a regular contributor of material and ideas. On May 20, he wrote: "This came to me last week from a good friend of mine. This is the granddaughter of a retired navigator, who was one of my naves in Japan in the early fifties. His son just retired after 20 years in the Army. This is his daughter. Another son is a Captain in the Naval Reserve. Her brother is in the Army Satellite Center in Maryland, so she has every right to be proud. This saved me from being depressed about there being nothing on the news or in the papers about Saturday being Armed Forces Day. I thought you might be just a little encouraged by this to know that all kids are not carrying guns to school and shooting their fellow students." With pride we pass this letter of Ms. Erin Shanendoah Painter of Reno, Nevada, on to our membership.)

### *How Do You Say "Thank You?"*

How do you say "Thank You" to men and women you've never met? How do you explain to them what their sacrifices have meant to you? How do you tell the families that have been left behind how much their strength inspires you? How do you communicate the deep respect you feel to your own family members without embarrassing someone? How can I, someone who was only a freshman in high school the last time America went to war, say these things and be taken seriously?

Tomorrow is Armed Forces Day. In a little over a week, it will be Memorial Day. How many people would even know there was an Armed Forces Day if it wasn't nicely printed on their calendars? How many remember why we have Memorial Day? For how many people is that now just a three-day

weekend conveniently located at the beginning of summer?

I have been blessed by being raised in a family whose members have served in our nation's armed forces. I have been blessed in that they have never felt the urge to pressure the next generation into serving. They have respected the fact that military service in our country is currently an option, and that it is not an option for everyone. And it is not an option for me, so how do I explain how honored I am to be related to, loved by, these people?

When I was young, my father was the commanding officer of our local National Guard. I never had the experience of being uprooted every few years when transfer orders came. But I know plenty of people who did. My grandfather was career military. My grandmother, father, uncle and aunt lived all over the United States and Japan. How do I tell my grandmother that I respect the sacrifices she made just as much as the sacrifices my grandfather made?

My brother and a number of my friends are currently on active duty. I pray every day that the United States will not get into another war, but if we have to, not until those I love are out of the service. Yet I know that if it happens, they will all do their duty. I know they have chosen this path knowing that they may be called to fight. For this, I respect them more than they know.

So I get back to my original question. How do you say thank you, when those two words just don't seem to be enough? But those are the only words I have, so, to all the men and women who have served in our military, during war and peace, to the families and friends of those who served, whether they came home or didn't - thank you.

While I may not think about it all the time, I do wake up every morning, knowing, somewhere in the back of my mind, that I live in safety from invasion, that so many people all over the world have better lives because of the sacrifices you have made.

When I was in Louisiana, about a year and a half ago, every little town we passed through had some kind of monument to the people who had served, most with the names of those who had died. Every time we saw one of those, my eyes filled with tears and my heart with a profound gratefulness.

I just wanted you to know.

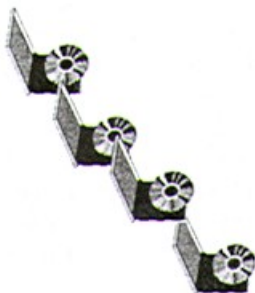
To my brother, father, step-father, uncles and grandfathers, and to the rest of the family who have loved and support those who have served - thank you. I love you.

Erin Shanendoah Painter





# THE SOUNDS OF TET!



The Tan Son Nhut Association proudly announces the production of a Four CD Set presenting the

## "Battle for Tan Son Nhut Air Base - January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1968"

This awesome, moving and heroic transcription from the actual communications net of the 377<sup>th</sup> Security Police Squadron was created, directed and produced by member, Major Thomas Joyce, on behalf of the Association. All profits, after production costs, accrue to the Association. Cost, including shipping and handling is \$49.95. These sets are produced on an individual basis. To obtain your set please send only a commitment in writing to The Tan Son Nhut Association, Office of Public Affairs, Suite 709, 330 West Brambleton Avenue, Norfolk, Virginia 23510. FAXs will be accepted: (757) 627-0878. E-Mail: [hercules29@worldnet.att.net](mailto:hercules29@worldnet.att.net) Do not send payment until notified that your set is ready for mailing. For information only, call (757) 627-7746.

### Contents

#### Disk 1:

Covered Wagon  
Mortars on West Perimeter  
Attack on 051 Gate  
VC/NVA Breech Perimeter  
Blocking Force  
Consolidate the Line  
Friendly Fire  
Ammo Running Low

#### Disk 2:

Echo QRT begins resupply  
Major Bender directs resupply efforts  
Lt. Ingalsbe joins the fight  
ARVN tanks are firing over our heads!  
We're running out of M-16 ammo!  
The line is holding  
Tsgt. Bloom checks status of sectors

#### Disk 3:

VC/NVA escape through hole in fence  
ARVN airborne deploys  
Attack on POL area  
Major Bender is wounded  
Lt. Ingalsbe takes command of the skirmish line  
ARVN jump off attack  
VC/NVA launch multiple perimeter counterattacks  
Armor (3/4 Cav) on the way!

#### Disk 4:

ARVN attack stopped by VC/NVA ambush  
Army tanks (3/4 Cav) stopped by B40 rockets  
Army Huey shot down  
Armor hits VC/NVA left flank  
Army suffers over 60 percent casualties  
February 17, 1968  
VC/NVA launch Russian 122.4mm rockets

#### Memorial Service

Lt.Col. Billy Jack Carter speech, 21 gun salute  
Final moments of the 051 bunker  
They need help at the 051 bunker!  
Sgt. Fischer calls for ambulance  
Sgt. Fischer is wounded  
Alonzo Coggins calls for help  
Sgt. Fischer's final call as VC/NVA take Bunker 051





The Taylor B. McKinnon Page



# Days At Tan Son Nhut ...

## An Introduction to Chinese

It occurs to me that since we have spoken of the Chinese characters which predated the use of the Roman alphabet by the Vietnamese – frequently seen on monuments in Vietnam – that our readers might like a few brief lessons in the philosophy of those characters.

Although there are more of them, six thousand plus, and only twenty-eight or so Roman characters in our alphabet, the task of memorizing them would seem to us to be impossible!

The great number is required because Chinese developed, not as a phonetic system as did the western system, but as a pictorial system *a la* Egyptian. This required a pictogram for each noun, verb, adjective and adverb.

This is not as formidable to master as one would at first think; because there are only a comparatively few so-called radicals, meaning the small "building block" pictogram. They represent basic thought and words and can be combined in a rational way to form more complex thoughts and statements.

I will now demonstrate three or four radicals. The first "radical" I'd like to mention is the word for *big*. This word is

大

## ... and other propwash

pronounced *tae* in Korea; and *dai* in Japan (*Nippon*) and China (*Chung Kook*). Follow my strokes in the proper order as this essential to good penmanship.

Draw a "stopping line" from top to bottom such as 丨, then another sloping line adjoining it, 丿 then a cross line from left to right, 一 (think of a "stick man with arms outstretched").

This brings us to "big" as in Kim Dae Jung, the President of South Korea – or Hyun Dae or Hyun Dai the automobile (the Koreans for some reason use the Japanese romanization in the case of the car).

Remember, a captain in Vietnam was a *Dai* Wee, or top of the company grade officer – a second lieutenant, being a 二 So Wee, small company grade – and a first lieutenant being a *So* Wee 一, middle of the company grades. 一 So is small.

中 Chung is middle. China is 中 Chung Kook, Middle Kingdom. Middle is a box with a line through the middle.

The rank designation are used all over Asia –

一 So Wee – 二 Chung Wee – 三 Dai Wee.

## Wiesbaden Reunion Nears

Greetings! My wife, Carol Bessette, is a member of the Association, having been at Tan Son Nhut during 1968-1969. I was ensconced up at Bien Hoa during that time, but that's another story. I just saw your latest *Revetments* and enjoyed Taylor McKinnon's tales, as usual.

But his mentioning his subsequent assignment to the 7407<sup>th</sup> Support Squadron in Germany brought me to attention. We are planning a reunion of that unit and its associates. Could you run this in *Revetments* even though these units were not exactly based at Tan Son Nhut? (Your wish is our command. Ed.)

Here are the details: 7499<sup>th</sup> Support Group & Squadrons: 7499th/7405th/7406th/7407th. Also 7580<sup>th</sup> Operations Squadron & 6916<sup>th</sup> Security Squadron. Fuerstenfeldbrueck/Wiesbaden/Rhein-Main. All eras 1948-1990. RB-17, RB-26, C-47, C-54, RF-100, RB-57, C-97, C-118, T-29, C-130.

We're coming out of the closet! Reunion 11-15 October 2001, Washington, D.C. Contact John Bessette, Telephone: (703) 569-1875. E-Mail: [jcbessette@aol.com](mailto:jcbessette@aol.com)

John Bessette

3 SOS (AC-47 Spooky), Bien Hoa, 1968 - 1969

\* \* \*





We want the Tan Son Nhut Association Reunion 2002 to be the biggest and best ever. The membership is stabilized at four hundred and is steadily growing. The Reunion is planned for the last weekend in April, Thursday 25 through Sunday, 28, 2002, in Washington, D.C. Executive Vice President

John Peele

Charles Penley  
TSNA Website  
[www.tsna.org](http://www.tsna.org)

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