

# *Revetments*

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association



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## *Luncheon With An Old Comrade*



**A Special Issue**

(These TSN photos courtesy of Carlos Chien)





Colonel Phung Van Chieu  
arrives at the  
TSNA Public Affairs Office

*For a few poignant hours...*

## *A Visitor Takes Us Back Home to Tan Son Nhut*

by

Revetments Editor Robert Stanley Need

A new member to the Tan Son Nhut Association, Phung Van Chieu had looked forward to joining other Association members at the Reunion 2003 scheduled for Fredericksburg, Virginia during April. When it was canceled, he decided that he would come east

Shortly before Colonel Chieu had arrived, the colonel's cousin, Mr. Rang, from Virginia Beach, had also arrived. Rang, had been a Vietnamese Air Force Sergeant and had been assigned to the General Staff quarters adjacent to Tan Son Nhut.

Association President John Peele, due to a serious personal situation, had been forced to cancel his trip down from Washington. He sent a brief message to the colonel and Bob Need read it. After a brief apology for his absence, John closed by writing, "Colonel, I hope and pray that someday your grandchildren and mine will be sitting and enjoying the happy sunshine along the beautiful streets of a free and peaceful Vietnam." John's words were an invocation to the warm feeling of comradeship that was filling the office, bonds that have been the special gift of soldiers for millenniums, born in the fury of combat and held dear in soft glowing memories of the after years.

### A luncheon that will long be remembered.

A few blocks away from the Public Affairs Office is a quiet beautiful Chinese garden with pools filled with carp and goldfish, willows gently swaying in the wind, and rock formations with flowing, falling water. In the center of the park is an imposing, beautiful pagoda. The park and pagoda are a gift from the people of Taiwan in gratitude for the support Americans give them in maintaining their

(Continued, next page.)



Vice President Need (L) reads the welcoming message from  
TSNA President John Peele to Colonel Chieu (R)

Jerry Norville, lives close to Fredericksburg, and had already invited Chieu to stay with him during the reunion, and he renewed his invitation when Chieu decided to come anyway.

Colonel Chieu arrived Thursday, April 24<sup>th</sup> at the Richmond, Virginia airport and was greeted by Jerry Norville and relatives of Colonel Chieu's from northern Virginia. The next morning, Jerry took Chieu for a brief tour of the old colonial capital of Virginia, Williamsburg. Then, going south to the Chesapeake Bay, they crossed the bridge-tunnel of Hampton Roads and headed for the TSNA Public Affairs Office in downtown Norfolk.

### Time stops and years dissolve

Phung Van Chieu exhibits a reserved but powerfully dynamic personality. From the very moment he entered the office with his warm and cordial "I have come to see my friends," he captured the respect and instant friendship of those who were waiting for him. Members Ben White, Wayne Salisbury and Bob Need introduced themselves.



(L-R) Members Jerry Norville and Ben White, Colonel Chieu,  
Mr. Rang, and Member Bob Need



independence from mainland China. The pagoda disguises a small but fine restaurant that overlooks the Elizabeth River.

Chieu was amused and appreciative of the location we had brought him to. At first, there was light-hearted banter around



Mr. Rang and the colonel prepare to enjoy a meal among old friends.

the table. He has a highly developed sense of humor. He speaks English beautifully and French with impeccable accent and tone.

Then, shortly he is moving on his own volition to recount many incidents from his long years as a warrior.

When he was very young, he was a French master sergeant at the age of twenty-one. When the rupture with the French came, he went to pilot training and

became a fighter pilot for the Viet Minh, vividly remembering the battles surrounding the fall of Dien Bien Phu. In the chaos during the separation of Vietnam, a French officer protected him and helped him to escape the north to Saigon.

#### "I knew you all"

Eventually he rose to the command of the 33<sup>rd</sup> VNAF Air Wing at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, and was deeply involved with security, working extremely close with the Americans. There is a special pride in the spirit of fellowship he shares with Americans. He never throws away words cheaply. He turned

at the table and looked at every person around it straight in the eyes as he slowly said, "I knew you all. I saw you all daily. I worked with you."

And yes, he certainly did. He personally decorated scores of Americans of all ranks. Our member, Jerry Norville, was one of the recipients of his decorations. He knew Colonel Farley Peebles, the commander of the 377<sup>th</sup> Air Base Wing intimately. He knew admired, and fought along side Lieutenant Colonel Billy J. Carter,



As Commander, 33<sup>rd</sup> VNAF Air Wing (Courtesy of Colonel Chieu)

commander of the 377<sup>th</sup> Security Police Squadron, who led his brave unit in the heroic defense of Tan Son Nhut during the fateful night of January 31, 1968, in the opening battles of the Tet Offensive and on into the endless days that followed.

The ceaseless march of history continued and Chieu faced it with determination and resolve.

Chieu's American comrades would continue to come and go. He mentions each person he knew with a sincere and gentle pride coloring his voice - Lt. Colonel Benton, Captain Holliday,

Major Bender, all of the 377<sup>th</sup> Security Police - Colonel Budway, Colonel Coe, and scores of others across the vast airdrome that was Tan Son Nhut Air Base. He mixes these comments with short vignettes about Air Marshall Nguyen Cao Ky's activities on the base.

#### Endgame

In 1973 most of the Americans departed after the signing of the Paris Agreements. Colonel Chieu and his units were left to nervously sit out the ominously deceptive lull in the conflict with the north. Slowly the pressure began to mount and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) began its massive inexorable march south.

Eventually Colonel Chieu was relieved of his duties at Tan Son Nhut and assigned the command of Bien Hoa Air Base. The Spring of 1975 would subject the people and forces of the Republic of South Vietnam to all those devastating and paradoxical elements of war - terror and compassion - fear and pride - destruction, fire, violent death - heroism and bravery against unbeatable odds.

The juggernaut rolled relentlessly southward - a spreading panic as DaNang fell, and then Ban Me Thout, Pleiku and onward towards the gates of Saigon.

Colonel Chieu and his forces at Bien Hoa mounted a staunch defense of the base. But finally it became inevitable that it would be overrun at any moment. On orders from Saigon, Chieu was

(Continued, next page)



Lighter moments with Colonel Peebles



Even lighter moments with Colonel Peebles



Serious moments with Colonels Peebles, Carter and Chieu



Colonel Peebles receives a VNAF decoration for valor (These TSN photos courtesy of Colonel Chieu)





Walking back from the pagoda talking about the part they played in the maintenance and defense of Tan Son Nhut.  
(L-R) Rang, Chieu, Need and White

ordered to destroy the remaining structures and retreat from Bien Hoa. He told them he would comply immediately and fly his helicopter, with his copilot, to Tan Son Nhut. They told him that was impossible because Tan Son Nhut was undergoing brutal devastation by heavy air attacks and the runways were totally unuseable.

Fulfilling his orders, he and his copilot took off and headed for Nha Be, on the Saigon River, previously the headquarters of U.S. naval operations in the Mekong Delta.

Chieu's family, his wife and three sons, had just been airlifted out on one of the last flights from Tan Son Nhut. This flight had been arranged by a very good American friend. Just before the plane was to leave, his wife came back off the plane and told him she was going to stay with him. She said she'd asked another refugee lady to take care of their sons. Chieu sternly told her no, and escorted her back onto the plane. It took off and they reached Guam safely.

#### Escape by fits and starts

The authorities at Nha Be were not necessarily enthusiastic about giving Chieu any fuel for his chopper. But after a little persuasive verbal arm-twisting Chieu got enough fuel to lift off again and make it to Vung Tau. Order and control of the country were practically non-existent and it certainly was a "you're on your own" situation. He wrested more gas from the Vung Tau people and they skipped over the rice paddies of Delta and made it to Can Tho and the airstrip at Bien Tuy. After more haggling Chieu and his copilot managed to reach Phu Quoc Island in the Gulf of Siam. His destination was, hopefully, to reach Bangkok, Thailand.

He recounted how the strip at Phu Quoc was filled with twenty or more Republic of South Vietnam fighter and bomber aircraft. But they were useless for there were no more ammunition, bombs, etc., available. The commander at Phu Quoc allowed Chieu a little bit more gas, and they placed on board a barrel of fuel with a hose.

Chieu and his faithful copilot lifted off and made it across the Gulf of Siam, crawled along the hostile Cambodian coast

and barely made it to the bald-headed summit of a mountain in the range separating Thailand from Cambodia. They landed and clumsily managed to empty the fuel from the barrel into their tank.

Lifting off again they tried to make the last leg of their journey to Bangkok. But, using up fuel rapidly they found that they would be forced to land short of their goal. The copilot asked Chieu where he thought they should land. Thinking a moment about the possibility of hostile peasants, he told the copilot to look for a pagoda.

They found one and landed. They went in and talked to the monks. The monks gave them robes and took them to the nearest town where the Thai authorities took charge of them. Reaching Bangkok, Chieu received help from the international refugee assistance group and he made it to a happy reunion with his wife and sons in France.

#### A very special relationship

Phung Van Chieu and his family presently reside in Pasadena in Orange County, California. He appears to be very happy and is enjoying life in the United States.

There are over three hundred thousand Vietnamese living in Orange County. He is extremely proud, and was visibly touched with emotion when he described his feelings for, and appreciation of the sixty foot high Vietnam-American memorial that has been erected in Westminster Memorial Park in Orange County.

(Continued, next page)



From the raising of the American soldier to stand beside a Vietnamese soldier on the pedestal of the memorial in Westminster Memorial Park.



Just as the luncheon was coming to a close. Colonel Chieu, with that unmatched courtesy and humility of the East, apologized that he had not been able to bring his gift to us, because, as he said, it is not yet finished. He is going to be sending us a special plaque in appreciation of those who served, along side him, at Tan Son Nhut Air Base.



Colonel Chieu and his cousin, Mr. Rang

Returning to the Public Affairs Office, Chieu and Rang were interested in seeing the things that the Tan Son Nhut Association is accruing. Pictures and other artifacts contributed by members, Lance Coar, Larry Keipke, Mark Reveaux, John Peele, Rick Fulton and many others, often touched them and even brought

bittersweet smiles to their faces.

But it was when they noticed the large Saigon Facilities Map that webmaster and board director Charles Penley has been furnishing the Association, that they became agitated. Taking it down off of the wall and laying it on Bob Need's desk, everybody huddled around Chieu as we excitedly went



through the "I worked here - gee, there's the club - where's Trough Minh Ky - etc."

They all had stories about all the locations on the base. And, as the conversations went on, it slowly turned to the Tet Offensive of 1968.

The talk was a lot

softer, and fingers pointed to - "This is where I was - all the action around the main gate here - and the western perimeter - this is where they first came through."

Immediately Chieu's finger moved out and he rested it gently on Gate 051. Thoughts of Louis Fischer, Cyr and

the rest of those who died in defense of the base filled the mind, and reminded us that this was not the first time. The attack in December 1966 killed the first K-9 doghandler to die in Vietnam, George Beovich.

I recalled the words of General John Shaud and his initial article in the first issue of *Revetments* in October 1998. Shaud said, "We weren't just a headquarters somewhere. We had operational units. We were taking incoming from an

enemy - were in combat - we were engaged, and I think some of us would argue, we were more engaged than a lot of places."

The tale of war, pain, heroism and endurance goes on endlessly. The Americans left Tan Son Nhut with their poignant memories with many a tragedy etched on their hearts. Chieu left as he was fighting for, but watching his homeland crumble into mindless tyranny.

But for Chieu's cousin Rang, it has long continued. When he first arrived Bob Need sat on the office balcony with him and they talked about what had happened to Rang.



He had stayed with his family in Saigon. He endured retraining and the establishment of a new life foreign to the lively, free-thinking Saigonese. And, he was finally imprisoned for a long period, finally



being freed in 1992 and escaping to Thailand, and on to the United States. He had been forced to live in fetters, and with Eastern stoicism, he leaned over and lifted the legs of pants. With all this talk of memorials, Rang's memorials are two eternal scars.

Colonel Chieu would like to see the establishment of a dramatic, enduring bond between the Vietnamese veterans in America and the Tan Son Nhut Association. He reports that the VNAF Association meets every April in northern Virginia and he more than cordially invited us to attend next year. He promises that Nguyen Cao Ky will also be in attendance.

Throughout our luncheon, Colonel Chieu expressed his considerable admiration of our establishment and our endeavor to build a lasting memorial institution in the name of the Tan Son Nhut Association. He has offered his assistance in any way to help us. He has asked that we send him a formal letter that he can translate into Vietnamese and send throughout the country to the various Vietnamese communities and associations inviting new members.

We have all found a fine new member and friend. When he left, it took a while to return to reality of the present.



The goodbye portrait - (L-R) Jerry Norville, Phung Van Chieu, Mr. Rand, Bob Need, Ben White, Ms. Pat Ralyea, and (unseen) Wayne Salisbury behind the lens.

Colonel Chieu receives a VNAF document. (These TSN photos courtesy of Colonel Chieu)





Founded 1995

By

Don Parker & John Peele

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#### Membership Information

Annual Membership \$20.00

Five Year Membership \$80.00

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Send to Public Affairs, address above.

## Thoughts of our Sky Pilot

by TSNA Chaplain

the Reverend Dr. Billy T. Lowe



### What Inspires – What Motivates?

As we approach another Memorial Day, I have pondered, "What is it that inspires and enables ordinary citizens to rise to the challenge of battle, to be willing to make the ultimate sacrifice of their lives in service to country? What is it that motivates them to respond and continue wherever called upon to do so?"

The answer is, of course, values.

The proud legacy of our military, and our country, is grounded in these core values: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless-service, honor, integrity and personal courage.

**Loyalty** means to bear true faith and allegiance to the United States Constitution, your unit and other airmen, sailors, soldiers and marines.

**Duty** means to fulfill your obligations.

**Respect** means to treat people, as you would wish to be treated.

**Selfless-service** means to put the welfare of the nation before your own.

**Honor** means to live up to the values of your military branch.

**Integrity** means to do what's right, legally and morally.

**Courage** means to face fear, danger and adversity.

These values have made our military strong. We, in this country, owe a great debt of gratitude to those who sacrifice their lives so that we can live free. We can begin to repay that debt by not forgetting, by remembering that for which they sacrificed and fought and died.

Charles M. province states it so well: "It is the soldier, not the reporter, who gives us freedom of the press. It is the soldier, not the poet, who has given us the freedom of speech. It is the soldier, not the campus organizer, who has given us the freedom to demonstrate. It is the soldier, not the lawyer, who has given us the right to fair trial; and it is the soldier, who salutes the flag, who serves the flag, and whose coffin is draped by the flag — who allows the protester to burn the flag."

Samuel Francis Smith wrote it in 1831, but the words are just as profound for 2003:

"My country 'tis of thee,

Sweet land of liberty,

Of thee I sing;

Land where my father died,

Land of the pilgrim's pride,

From every mountainside,

Let freedom ring."

God bless all of our veterans, as they have blessed us.

*Billy T. Lowe*



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# Communications Center

## Revetments Porno Corner



In last month's issue of *Revetments* on Page 6, in Bill Grayson's reviews of current video tapes being produced by *Traditions Military Videos*, we published an (800) phone number for ordering purposes.

Member Eugene St. Pierre, of Lewiston, Maine, brought it to the attention of one of the trolls who is supposed to proof *Revetments* before it is printed, that dialing the published number of *Traditions*, (how shall we put it?), "turns you on" to an X-Rated number. Please get a pencil and jot down the correct number: (800) 277-1977. In correcting this number we now have no responsibility for all those numerous members who have just raced to dial the previous number. And, we offer our sincere gratitude to Member Eugene for helping us preserve our high standards of moral rectitude.

**"If you've worn the uniform, this one will get you!!!"** says Member Bob Nelson, Anchorage, Alaska, who seems to know practically everybody in the world. He sends this in from Angie McLean wife of Chaplain (Col.) David McLean, Ramstein Air Base, Germany.

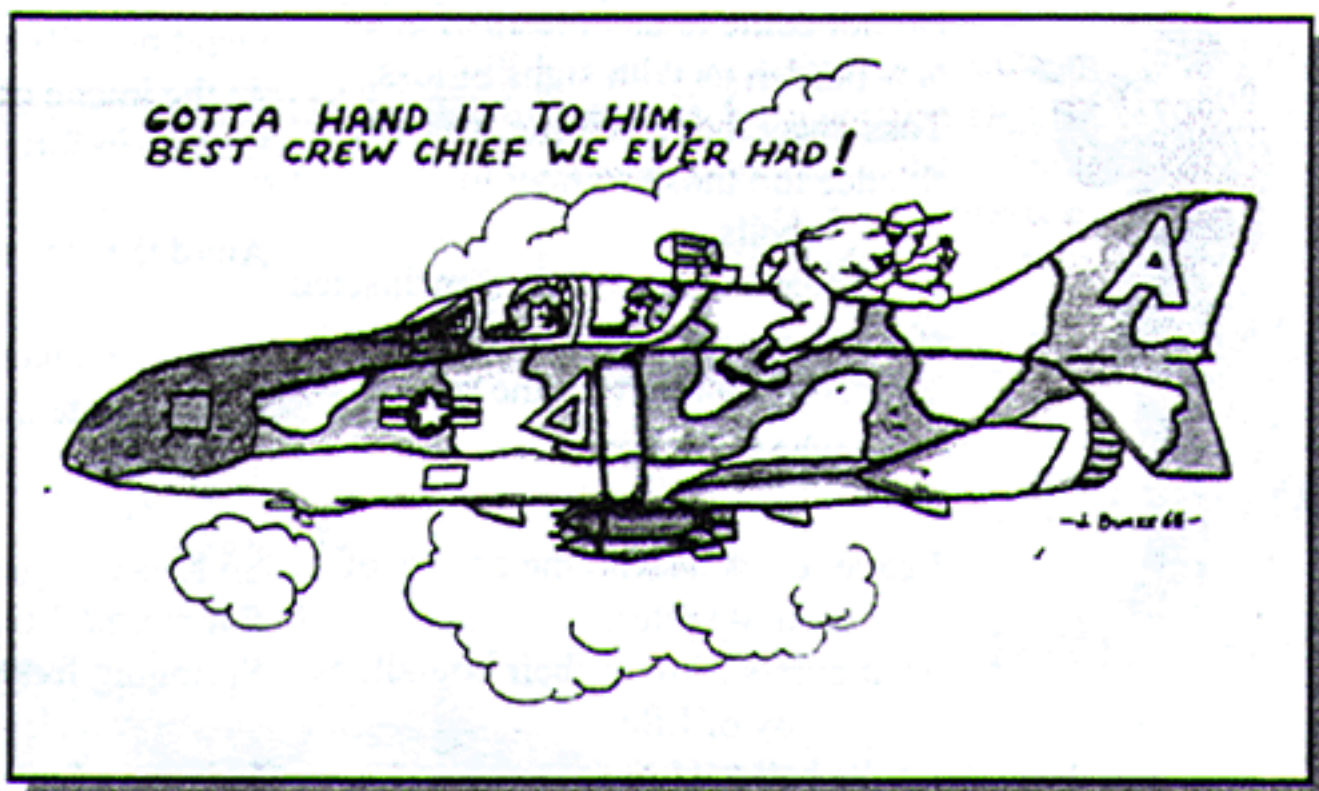
"The German Army is at the gates of all military installations in Germany providing control 23 hrs. a day to relieve U.S. Forces that are in the middle east. Our governments may be at odds over Iraq policy, but military understands military.

"As usual I was running late on Sunday, March 30<sup>th</sup>. So you can imagine my frustration level as I approached the main gate of Ramstein Air Base only to find traffic backed up! Nearing the checkpoint I realized that not only was there a long line of cars but traffic had come to a complete stop as a result of all entrance gates being close.

"Over the past 18 months, there have been many opportunities to practice our patience as we have had to 'hurry up and wait' as a result of heightened security. While we realize the necessity, it's still frustrating at times for even the most easy-going folks. This was one of those times for me! I needed to be where I was going, and I needed to be there NOW!

"The German soldiers, the one manning the entrances of American Military installations here in Germany, were just milling around, chatting as if those of us in line had all the time in the world.

"Things seemed to go from bad to worse! The German gate guards began walking among the stopped cars, asking us to turn off our engines and headlights. I realized that no traffic was exiting or



I drew this one for my dad, TSgt. James E. Burke. He was turning wrenches on Phantoms with the 615<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron at Da Nang, while his son was at Tan Son Nhut. Dad was a veteran of World War II, Korea and Vietnam. He retired after thirty years service in the Air Force. He passed away in Louisiana on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1985. This cartoon will always be as close to my heart as he was - and is.

*John Burke*

entering the air base. My feelings of frustration began to turn to ones of concern. Just what was going on?

"A few minutes later I noticed blue lights approaching from the direction of the air terminal. Close behind were two military medical buses with their Red Crosses. Lights were on in the buses and I.V. bags could be seen hanging. It was then that I realized that these were more of our wounded warriors being transported from the battlefields to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center for treatment.

"I certainly wasn't prepared for what happened next. All of the German soldiers, our gate guards, began walking toward the concrete barriers that divide the inbound and outbound lanes of traffic. As the blue lights neared, more German soldiers seemed to appear from nowhere, lining the road, shoulder to shoulder.

"Right on cue, without a word being spoken, these soldiers snapped a sharp salute as the busses drove past, rendering 'present arms' until well after the last bus had passed.

"Needless to say, I was speechless and deeply moved. What a show of respect for fellow soldiers!"

**Have you ever been, are you at present, or do you know - any MCB**

**128 Seabees** - The Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 128 will be holding its Reunion in Gulfport, Mississippi next April 15<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup>, 2004. This event is open to all

MCB 128 Seabees. Addition information can be obtained by contacting President John Rickman at (228) 374-6859, or by calling Vice President George McDanel at (618) 259-4694. Or write George at 204 E. Airwood, East Alton, Illinois 62024.



## New Membership Czar Wants Your Input!

At a recent TSNA Board of Directors meeting, Director Wayne Salisbury, of Roanoke, Va., was appointed as the Dir. of Membership programs. He has already started planning, but he is looking for input from you. If you have suggestions, ideas, or would like to work along with him, especially in building regional or metropolitan groups. Contact him:

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or use Public Affairs Office:

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# Epitaph for a Wartime Memorial Day



Do not come to us in tears of grief,  
Nor burden us with sighs of loss,  
Toss away those wilting wreaths,  
Silence too those somber tolling  
bells,  
And speak no more of cold encheiseled  
stones,  
This does no honor to the persons  
whom we love.

Leave to us instead the echoes of  
their laughter,  
That bursts forth in their boundless  
joy of Life,

That rang throughout the halls of home,  
Like the clarion calls of angels horns,  
Summoning their families to gird for battle,  
And triumph in those little daily victories  
Where wrong is banished and blessed good prevails.

Stand proudly here with us in humble awe and wonder,  
At the image of those whose love of God and Nation,  
Sent them forth so bravely to defend their faith and  
flag,

Amid the steaming cauldrons of war's most hellish  
battles,

Bearing no hatred but bound in a sacred code of duty,  
Returning to stand guard forever at the gates of their  
beloved country.

So speak not to us of loss, but speak to us of gain,  
For eternal Life is an endless flowing river  
Springing fresh and pure from the sweet fountains of  
heaven,

Floating each of us alone in separate spirit boats,  
Some floating briefly side-by-side, some coming slowly  
from behind,

And some, like theirs, sailing rapidly ahead to their  
rendevous with God.

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