

November/December 2005



A Memorial to the American Experience
In
Vietnam
"All Included-None Excluded"

Revetments

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association



Happy Holidays!

Thoughts of Our Sky Pilot
 Rev. Dr. James M. Warrington
 Chaplain, TSNA



Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address March 4, 1865

Fellow-countrymen: At this second appearing to take the oath of the Presidential office there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first....with high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to the progress of our arms is ventured....both parties deprecated war, but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish, and the war came....

Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with or even before the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of the other men's faces, but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God must needs come, but which having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always subscribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

With malice toward none with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are on, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.



TSN 30 Day Short Timers Calendar
 From Jim Stewart
 (Artist Unknown)

President Emeritus Don Parker
 and
 President Emeritus John Peele

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A Different Time Same Place A Different Name By Bob Anisko

The following three part story identifies the beginning and subsequent memories of someone who can first remember hearing of "French Indochina" when he was about seven years old. Little did this person know that he would twice serve in this "exotic" geographic area, and then return there more than 30 years later. That someone was me.

PART I (1963)

In 1961, after completing the Air Police School at Lackland AFB, I was sent to Tachikawa Air Base, Japan. Sometime in late December 1962, ten of us were sent TDY for 90 days to a place called Vietnam. I remember the names of 3 persons who went to Vietnam with me: Harvey R. Clark, George B. Hill, and Robert M. Cruz.

We first flew into Clark Air Base on an airlines called Southern Air Transport which had some of the cutest looking flight attendants. After a few days at Clark, and Angeles City, we took off on a C-130 and first landed in a place called Bien Hoa before going on to our final destination of Tan Son Nhut (located near a little city called Saigon). Little did I know that I would be returning to Bien Hoa for a PCS tour in 1964. When we arrived at Tan Son Nhut, we were assigned to the 6220th Air Base Squadron Air Police, which probably was the predecessor of the 377th Security Police.

At this time, there were probably less than 10,000 Americans in-country, and no combat troops other than Special Forces, helicopter pilots and USAF pilots. The duty was fantastic. At this time, not much was going on except for the coups which finally resulted in the assassination of President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Ngu. The famous Dragon Lady was in vogue.

The things I remember most were: carrying World War II carbines while racks of M-16s were not used; USAF pilots were flying A1E Skyraiders with Viet-

namese Air Force markings; going on a "joy ride" with an Army Caribou to all kinds of Mekong Delta towns; a typhoon coming in unannounced and flipping planes on their back; sitting at the end of the Tan Son Nhut runway guarding RF-101 Voodoos and watching Pan Am 707's crank up for a very quick takeoff; many trips into Saigon to enjoy its "fruits"; and going to a place called Bangkok for the first of 3 R&Rs. What a place to spoil an 18 year old. Every time I think of Bangkok I smile. When I do this, my wife of 30 years, Zosia, (Polish for Sophia) asks why I am smiling. I just smile again. I went to Bangkok with a guy named Paul Laroche. I believe that he also joined me on a trip to Japan. I haven't heard of him since. I wonder if he is still smiling. Things were so good in these days that 3 of us extended for another 90 days before returning to Japan in June 1963.

PART II (1964-1965)

After returning to Tachikawa in 1963, I knew that Vietnam was in my blood. I knew that I was scheduled to return to the states in 1964, which I didn't want to do, so I volunteered to return to Vietnam. I got my wish. I received orders that I would get a PCS to Vietnam. The orders read: 34th Tactical Group, APO 96227, which translated to Bien Hoa.

Upon arrival at Bien Hoa in May 1964, I was assigned to the 34th Air Base Squadron Air Police, which I believe was the predecessor of the 3rd Security Police. Again, things were kind of slow during this period, that is until November 1964 when Charlie decided to pay Bien Hoa a visit.. I'll discuss that later.

Some of my more vivid memories of Bien Hoa were: USAF pilots who were now flying US marked aircraft; we were now deploying with M-16 rifles and M-60 machine guns; while we were guarding the ammo dump near the old French fort, we were guarded by a Vietnamese K-9 handler - the only problem was that he was sleeping under a mosquito net, his dog was tied up to the ammo boxes, and his rifle was lying on the ground; watching the U-2s, and C-130 aircraft with the reconnaissance drones under their wings take off and return. In those days, we all wondered where they went. When we

asked, we were told "Top Secret". A hint: The Stars and Stripes reported that a "pilot less U2" was shot down over Red China; 2 more R&R trips to Bangkok; and a number of junkets for various reasons to Nha Trang, Da Nang, Pleiku, Du Co, Ban Me Thuot, and Gia Nghia.

The true wake up call came in November 1964. The USAF had just brought in the "new" B-57 jet bombers. After watching all the propeller planes, the jets really seemed like something, even if they were small. I think they caught Charlie's attention because before very long his mortar team came by and paid their respects by blowing the hell out of the B-57 pad. The finger of the future had been pointed.

Then in April 1965, just a couple of weeks before I was to come back to the states, four of us were sent TDY to Qui Nhon to guard some A1E aircraft. I believe that we also guarded Madame K's place of business. The other 3 persons were Ron Pounds, Gerald Lummus, and Jim Starling. I wonder what happened to them. Charlie's Welcome Wagon wasn't far behind. He mortared the billets we were at. Can you beat that hospitality?

PART III (1998)

Notwithstanding the fact that 33 years had gone by since I left Vietnam, Vietnam never left my psyche (and probably never will). I thought about returning to see what it was like, and most reports by people who traveled there were favorable. I decided to make the trip. All I had to do was convince my wife to make the trip with me.

I started by asking my wife if she would like to go on an exotic vacation to a place with lots of sandy beaches. After she said yes, I told her where we were going. Her eyes said it all and her affection really grew as she got all of her shots.

We first stopped in Tokyo for a couple of days and visited Tachikawa Air Base which is now totally run by the Japanese. No USAF forces were present. We then took off for Bangkok. It was kind of strange to hear the Northwest pilot state that we were now flying over Da Nang and would shortly be over Laos. We then landed in Bangkok. Don Muang was as I

remembered it, but there were no USAF aircraft visible, as there had been in the 1960s. After a couple of days in Bangkok and Phuket (a resort south of Bangkok on the Andaman Sea), it was off to *deja vu*.

As the Thai Airbus approached Tan Son Nhut, I could see the Saigon (oops Ho Chi Minh City) skyline in the distance. I didn't remember the tall buildings that now dotted the skyline. I immediately wanted to take photos of Tan Son Nhut, but the flight attendants cautioned against it for security reasons. I would have to wait until later. The most striking feature of Tan Son Nhut, were the bunkers which didn't exist when I was there and the old dilapidated hangar which did exist when I was there. We cleared customs with no problems and stepped outside into the madness of the cab drivers wanting your business. And then there was the heat, which with the smells brought the far distant past rapidly into the present. Luckily, our tour guide met us with his air conditioned van.

It was now time to become a tourist. On the first night, we had a dinner cruise on the Saigon River. It was mainly westerners on the cruise with all of the Vietnamese on their bicycles and motorcycles watching us. The next day we were off to Tay Ninh, Cu Chi, and Vung Tau. It was a long day with the heavy traffic and pollution.

At Tay Ninh, we visited the Cao Dai Temple and saw the Black Lady (Black Virgin) Mountain. At Cu Chi, we visited the tunnels. After the visit, to the tunnels, my wife decided that she would not like to return to Vietnam for a second "vacation". At Vung Tau, where I paid a brief visit in 1963, we went on top of Jesus Mountain which had a large statue of Christ, and an excellent view of the surrounding area. I don't know how much water I lost after climbing Over 900 steps to get to the top.

The next day we were off to Bien Hoa. We passed through Long Thanh and Long Binh, the latter of which I never heard of in my time at Bien Hoa. A part of Long Binh is now an industrial park while the other part is manned by the Vietnamese Army. Finally, we arrived at Bien Hoa. I really didn't remember the

town, and the hooches that I remember couldn't be found. We got to the main gate of Bien Hoa, but we couldn't get in because the base was now manned by the Vietnamese Air Force. The old water and radar tower were still visible. After coming so far, I was disappointed that we couldn't get onto the base. Maybe another time.

The last day was spent in Saigon. We visited the old Presidential Palace (now called Reunification Hall), the Saigon Cathedral, the old Congress building (now an arts center) and the site of the old US Embassy. It was torn down and will be replaced by a new US Consulate. We also drove around Cholon where I had spent many fine evenings. Then the time came to leave. It was at this time that I took some pictures of Tan Son Nhut. As we took off for Bangkok, I knew that I would like to return to Vietnam again. As noted, my wife didn't share this view. She stated that next time, I would have to go alone or with some friends. Any takers?

In spite of not getting onto Bien Hoa, the trip was fantastic. I would highly recommend a trip back to anyone who is so inclined. Everyone treated us great. But I swear they are more capitalists than communists. Uncle Ho is definitely spinning in his grave. Watch your wallet because they still do love the dollar.

Kadena To Tan Son Nhut By Frank Burke

I just finished looking at y'all in Revenments and got to wondering something -- especially since your hair color and style is similar to mine. Were any of the TSNA members stationed at Kadena back in 1957 and do any of them remember me? This was in the time-frame when the fancy new Enlisted Club was opened there. Remember the write-up in Time Magazine?

Back then I wore a very short crew cut and was a Marine sergeant E-4. In the early Spring of 1957 I had the privilege of appearing on Kadena's AFTV station for a month or so while the regular announcer (USAF airman) was back

home on emergency leave. I was TDY from the Far East Network Okinawa (FENO) where I usually held down the all-night DJ slot.

I think I was attached to the 313th Air Division and was billeted in a Quonset hut with a bunch of AF master sergeants. One old timer was surprised to see that I came "loaded for bear" -- I had an M-1 rifle and all the 782 gear Marines lug around (I was originally detached from the 3rdMarDiv to FENO). He told me he hadn't carried an M-1 since WWII and asked if he could "take care of it" for me. I let him take it.

There weren't very many TV sets on the island in 1957 and if anyone saw me on the air it was when I did the news at 1800. Besides the announcer there was an AF engineer who stayed out of sight pretty much. The station was in a drafty building that had previously been an officers club. The one Dage camera was mounted on a wheeled tripod and if it wasn't tied down when the wind blew through the cracks, it went rolling all over the studio. A far cry from what we have today.

I guess TSN existed in French Indochina back in those days, but I don't think I ever dreamed of going there one day.

I'm one of those who "passed through" Tan Son Nhut. I was a Combat Correspondent with the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing at DaNang 1966-67 and first saw TSN in November 1966 when I came down with the 1stMAW Band (did a story on the Band) to march in the RVN National Day parade.

I next saw "your home" in August 1967 when I arrived after extending my tour of duty -- I was reassigned to AFVN Saigon where I eventually became the AFVN-FM Saigon program director/DJ. I Departed for CONUS the end of March 1968 from TSN the morning after y'all got an "open air sky light" in the Terminal.

Long ago and far away...

Semper Fi,



A Vietnam Experience by Doug Sheldon

The time was August, 1965. I was 23 at the time, an Airman First Class. My unit, the 23rd TRS was from Shaw AFB, SC. We ferried the first RF-4C's to Tan Son Nhut. The trip for support personnel from SC to Saigon took almost a week. Maintenance personnel, like myself, deployed on C-124's. Our big event en route was an engine replacement at Pearl. Spent a few days in Honolulu as a result, while old Shaky was repaired.

At the time I had mixed feelings about the war. But, I thought we were doing the right thing. And, I supported President Johnson.

There were no quarters at the base for us. The aircrews had their own compound, and the enlisted lived in Gia Dinh – an old missionary -- half way between TSN and downtown Saigon. Work schedules were 12 on, 12 off.

Buses were available for transportation, and any of us that wanted to drive was welcome. I will never forget my first time. Driving on the streets of Saigon, in a 29 passenger bus, was an experience. Someone in admin issued us GI drivers licenses (VN), but I don't recall that we ever took a test.

There was a large, secured complex next door to our living spaces. A small group of CIA (?) shared this facility with an Army (Special Forces) helo outfit. Our fear was the VC would aim for them, and hit us instead. Turns out, our neighbors were a great bunch of guys. And quite possibly, even kept us safe.

While still at Shaw, and on world wide shots, I had to get a plague shot. This was like a knock out punch! A second one was due after arrival in VN. I pencil whipped my shot record. If I was going to be sick again, it wasn't going to happen in Saigon. And, if I got the plague, well, so be it.

We had no mess hall so chow meant going to one of the clubs on base, finding a snack bar, a downtown restaurant, or on occasion, going to the Navy commissary in Cholon. I avoided the local street vendors! The commissary had great filets though, and they were dirt cheap. There was a charcoal grill at the "missionary",

so we ate lots of steak. And more steak. We shared our steaks, and our freebie American beer in the rusty cans that we couldn't seem to get rid of with our buddies next door.

My job specialty was automatic flight controls (AFCS). The RF-4C had a good (auto pilot/damper) system that rarely failed. At least on our birds. But, you have to remember that these aircraft were brand new. We started receiving them at Shaw as quickly as they came off the McDonnell-Douglas assembly line. Unlike stateside duty though, one guy on a shift was often considered sufficient. Plus, I spent my first few months at Shaw learning the RF-4C system, from soup to nuts.

We had an Australian Air Force pilot assigned to our squadron. Always knew when he was taking off. He tried to turn that RF-4C into a VSTOL! This guy was as rugged as they come, but after you pick up enough ground fire, you get airborne in a hurry.



L-R G.E. Tech Rep friend and me

I had a G.E. tech rep friend, and he and I decided we should take a class to learn Vietnamese. Classes were ok for a while, until the time would run over, and we found ourselves hunting for a nonexistent World War II vintage "Renault" taxi in a not so nice part of town, late at night. I wasn't permitted to carry my AR-15, and civilians didn't carry, so, we didn't finish the course. So much for our good intentions.

In the course of time, I developed a routine. I worked, read, ate, indulged in some San Miguel, and did my best to not invite trouble or put myself in a foolish situation. Although the war was not in the middle of Saigon, GI's were never the less being shot in the city for obvious reasons.

Occasionally, we'd meet an entertainer on base, e.g., Martha Ray, who was on reserve duty. And of course, there was Bob Hope, Ann Margaret, and Joey Heatherton, at Christmas. General Westmorland, and President Key and his wife were a few rows behind me, at the Bob Hope show. At the time, I thought, impressive.

I had another friend, Jean, an A2C in my unit that had grown up in France. His French was flawless, and through his language skills and our collective resourcefulness, we discovered that speaking French was a valuable asset. My French was limited, but I did live in Paris and Brussels as a kid, and took quite a few years of French. In any event, it got us into some local sporting events, clubs, and shows that would have basically been off limits, if for no other reason, ignorance, due to a language (culture) barrier. Then, there was Walt. He was in my section. Walt was from Connecticut, and every week (it seemed) he would receive a 'care' package from home. This routinely consisted of a large loaf of Italian bread, sliced through horizontally, and was hollowed out just enough to package a bottle of vintage Johnnie Walker. I don't think the APO/FPO ever caught on, and probably didn't care. We had access to a Class VI store, but, Grandma was going to take care of Walt, never the less. And she could wrap a package!

The highlight of my VN experience however was something totally different and unexpected. My father, at the time, worked for Caltex (Oil), corporate, in NYC. A good friend of his was a man named Jim McGinn, the Southeast Asia regional manager for Shell Oil. On one occasion, Jim sent his car/driver (1958 Chevy) to the missionary to pick me up for dinner. Obviously, my father had been in touch with Jim. He had only recently sent his wife and kids back to the states, as safety for civilian dependents had become a major issue with the increased escalation of the war.

He had a gorgeous home, in a suburb of Saigon that I had never seen, or even knew existed. And, I never would have. We met for dinner with an Army General friend of his, and the general's son, who was a merchant mariner. Their names escape me, unfortunately. The son was

only a few years older than me. We ate at one of the most exclusive restaurants in Saigon, and then did the rounds at a few night clubs, which I can only compare (now) with something extraordinary in New York or Frisco or Vegas. The tab for this outing was out of sight.

Besides the escargot, the superb French cooking, the atmosphere, the meticulous service, and the well educated French-Vietnamese people that I met – including refined, beautiful ladies – there was the conversation that I most remember. A major discussion was on the economics and the politics of the war. Yes, there was shelling, and the distant sounds of artillery, but for these people, the war was secondary. This was all business. There was money to be made, and they were making it. Local US Army convoys were being ambushed daily, but the unescorted Shell Oil trucks had free passage. The young merchant mariner would be rich, before he was 30. I could go on, but why.

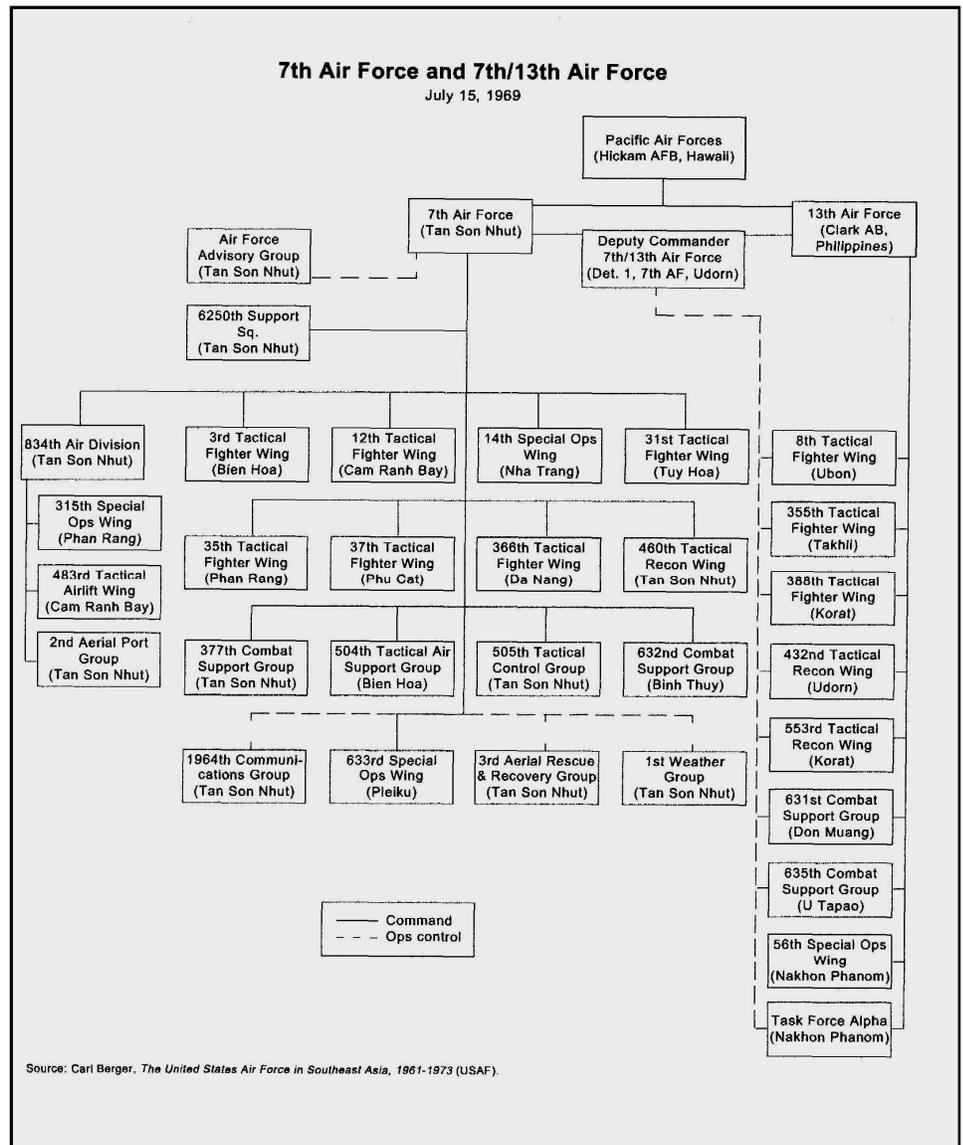
After that night, I questioned what we were doing in Vietnam, more than I ever had before.

A few months after I had returned to the states, my father sent me an obit on Jim McGinn. He had had a heart attack while boarding his flight home from TSN, and died on the plane.

Also, this is in memory of a special friend, Glenn Ellis, also from Shaw. Glenn and I pulled duty together, nights, for most of my tour, and shared many, many conversations. His family and my family became close friends, and lived in the same trailer park in Sumter, SC. Glenn survived Nam, and became a police officer in Tucson, AZ. He was shot in the ear by a thug during a convenience store robbery, while off duty, and ultimately died of complications.



History Item



377th Combat Support Group Commanders Tan Son Nhut Air Base

Colonel George Budway, April 8, 1966; Colonel Grover K. Coe, October 8, 1966; Colonel Farley E. Peebles, October 4, 1967 *; Colonel Benjamin B. Shields, July 26, 1968; Colonel Frank E. Marek, September 1969; Colonel Harold E. Hobbs, July 31, 1970; Colonel Charles D. Gunn Jr, July 10, 1971; Colonel David A. Odell, June 27, 1972 - March 28, 1973.

*Colonel Peebles lives in Texas, and is a member of TSNA.

From Tan Son Nhut to Port au Prince

A lesson well learned, and passed on

by

**Joseph E. Thompson Jr.
MAJ, CA, USAR**

In October of 1971, I was transferred from Beale AFB in California to Tan Son Nhut Air Base in the Republic of Viet Nam. I was essentially a brand spanking new Air Force E4, and also a “newbie” to TSN. I was so new that I was still wearing the standard green stateside fatigues with the Blue and White name tapes.

One day that October, after all the in processing was over and I was finally working on the flight line, my Shop Chief sent me up to the main part of the base in the shop’s blue pickup truck. I do not really recall what I was sent for, but I can remember the events of the return trip very clearly.

When I reentered the flight line from the area near the Aerospace Ground Equipment (the light carts and generators we used to maintain and service the aircraft), I became disoriented, not really sure where I was or how to return to the Fuel System Repair Area located at the end of the flight line. All I knew was that I had to get over to where the “gooney birds” revetments were and make a left. I also knew how late I was and what would have been done to me at Beale for such an offense.

Unbeknownst to me as I sweated inside the hot pickup, I was also being followed by the Law Enforcement SPs in their ¼ ton truck. When I reentered the flight line they had the pleasure of seeing me drive a little too fast, in addition to not executing the proper passing procedures in the vicinity of a C-47 getting ready to “pull chocks.” The SP’s judiciously pulled me over and asked me for my Military drivers license, specifically the one with “Viet Nam” stamped on it. As my luck of the day would have it, this particular license was in my locker in the barracks. What else could go wrong?

I quickly envisioned myself now having a “chat” with the squadron commander, CPT Matthews, regarding my unique

driving skills and lack of flight line safety knowledge. I pleaded with the SPs that I needed to get back to my shop to return the truck. They agreed, and as soon as we pulled into my work area my shop chief, Technical Sergeant “Shorty” Yarborough, appeared from the “office,” nothing more than a plywood and tin-roofed affair. One of the SPs immediately gave him a full briefing on my inefficiencies as a driver. Shorty listened to the tale and then said to the SP, “This man just got here, and he will get into a lot of trouble. Please let me handle this.”

The SPs reluctantly agreed to let TSgt Yarborough handle my punishment, and released me to his custody. As they left he looked at me and said in his most stern voice, “Number One, what were you doing speeding on the flight line?!? What were you doing passing an aircraft?!?” When I could offer no immediate explanation, he proceeded to properly chew my butt. The experience was sufficiently unpleasant that I found myself considering that it would have been better had the SPs taken me away. Finally, Shorty looked at me and said, “You know what, Sergeant Thompson? Your new name is ‘Hot Rod!’ Come on, Hot Rod, let’s get a cup of coffee.”

For the remainder of my tour in Viet Nam, everyone in the Fuel Shop knew me by that name. I never forgot the incident, or Shorty sticking up for me, and I also didn’t do any more speeding on the flight line. I knew that if the same thing had happened at Beale AFB, my shop chief would have probably fed me to the nearest lions, even if that meant a long drive to the closest zoo.

Many years later, I am still in the military, having made the move to the Army, earned a commission, and eventually found myself in the Reserves. To my surprise and great pleasure I had the unique ability to pass on the wisdom taught me that hot morning in 1971, this time in another hot climate. In September of 1994 I was attached to the Civil Military section of the 10th Mountain Division during *OPERATION UPHOLD DEMOCRACY*. One day I received a call at the Civil Military Operations Center from a very irate MP who was working the entry point to our compound. “Major Thompson! We just had one of your sergeants leave out of here speeding, and carrying Haitian nationals in the back of the HMMWV!” I

asked him to let me handle it. When the offending staff sergeant returned from Port au Prince I properly chewed his butt in a fashion that I hoped would have made Shorty proud, and then christened him with my nickname of 23 years earlier: “Hot Rod.” I experienced déjà vu that evening as his buddies picked up the new moniker, but the label had the desired effect: his driving became more responsible and there were no more complaints from the MPs.

Thanks, Shorty, for bailing me out. I never forgot it!

Family, Friends and Faith

During my recovery from heart surgery my wife’s sister, Jody, sent me a figurine of three children holding hands in a circle. Inscribed on the base of the figurine were the words Family, Friends and Faith. All three played a major part during and after my surgery.

I will be forever grateful for the thoughts and prayers of my TSNA friends. Thank you for the phone calls and cards. It has meant a great deal to me.

I am slowly regaining my strength and will be back working full time for all of you. I know my illness has created some confusion among some members—emailed not answered, membership matters messed up, etc., but soon I’ll get things back to normal. I appreciate your patience.

May your heart and home be filled with warmth this Christmas-time.

With deepest respect, and regards,

Your friend,

Wayne Salisbury



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