

January 2006



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

Revetments

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

*Thirty-Eight Years Ago This Month
When The Rumors Came True!*



Bunker 051 Following The Attack

See Page 7

Photo from The Lance Coar Collection

Sent by our Assistant Chaplain Bob Marlowe

When you think you know it all, then you deny yourself the opportunity to learn anything new. When you decide that you've seen it all, you cut yourself off from new and enlightening experiences.

Every day is an opportunity to grow. Always take advantage of that opportunity, for it is a big part of what makes you alive.

No matter how much you've already accomplished, you can still receive great benefit from new challenges. No matter what your level of learning and experience, you can always raise that level even higher.

When you think you have all the answers, get busy and find some more questions. View each new discovery as a starting point, and not as a final destination.

The joy of life is in the journey. The fulfillment of life is in the growing.

Keep that growing going, and never let it stop.

Written by Ralph Marston

A Note From Wayne

I continue to gain strength and am spending more time in the TSNA office doing the Association's work. I continue to receive best wishes from the membership, which is very heartwarming. Thank you so very much.

A change has been made: Vice President, Larry Fry has assumed the duties involving new membership applications and member renewals. This was in the planning stage prior to my illness. Larry is enthusiastically accepting this responsibility, and will do an excellent job.

Many of you know that our Communications Director and web master, Charles Penley, is working hard developing a new Pictorial Remembrance CD. Charles gives me a periodic sneak preview of the format, and I must tell you it will be a very professional pack-

age when it is completed sometime this fall. It is expected that the package will contain at least three CD's. It will present photos sent in by our members, as well as maps, official history, stories, etc. It truly will be a Vietnam historical compilation. Military and civilian libraries, and military historical centers around the country will want this project in their archives.

If you haven't already, I encourage you to send your TSN pictures, documents and stories to Charles for inclusion in this immense project. To help Charles reduce his work load, please, if at all possible, type an index using Microsoft Word describing the pictures.

A reminder to advise the office if you change your email address. The same holds true if you change your postal address.

Member renewals are going very well as of late. Many members include a donation when they send in their renewal. Needless to say we welcome any and all donations. It has helped the association to maintain its financial viability. We thank each of you for making a donation. You're just the best!

Regrettably the decision has been made not to hold a reunion in 2006.

I hope 2006 has started off to be a banner year for each of you. My best wishes, now and always.

Wayne Salisbury

Mysterious Coins

Member Carol Bessette sent in two coins that were used for one reason or another at the TSN Officers Club. One coin is 10 cents, the other (as shown) is 5 cents.

A friend of Carols gave her the coins. Her friend was a USAF weather officer at TSN 1970—1971. Perhaps someone can shed some light on the coins. Let me know and I will pass the information onto Carol.

Thank you, Carol for your contribution to the TSN history archives.



What is the Cost of Freedom Lost?

By Sue Ellen Parker

Editor's Note: Sue Ellen was the winner of the local Elks Lodge adult essay contest, based on the theme: What is the Cost of Freedom Lost? Sue Ellen is the wife of President Emeritus and Tan Son Nhut Association Co-founder Don Parker. They reside in Princeton, Indiana.

In 1965 I traveled with our high school band and adult chaperones. visiting Civil War battle-fields in Gettysburg, exhibits at the New York World's Fair and touring the White House.

My parents and I took trips around the country Once, to return to my summer job, I had to fly home alone. I was 19 and quite "grown up," but it was still a thrill to fly from Little Rock to Evansville. Mother and Dad walked me to the stairs of the plane and waved goodbye from behind a hurricane fence as I flew away

Fast forward to September 11, 2001.

Terrorists brought down skyscrapers and airplanes, killing innocent people. The pain of their deaths hurt everyone, even those who didn't know them. Flights were cancelled for days.

I can remember the first time after the terrorists, attacks when I heard a jet flying high above Princeton. Normally oblivious to such sounds, I looked up to see where the plane was. I remember saying out loud, "You made me look, didn't you?"

That was the first freedom I lost. The freedom of sublime ignorance of what could happen around me.

When my husband and I flew to Reno we were searched with hand-held metal detectors before we could board a plane. We were questioned about our luggage and the possibility of strangers asking us to carry something on board. We had to provide picture I.D.s to prove who we were.

That was the second freedom I lost. The freedom to come and go as I pleased — as long as I bought a ticket and submitted to questioning and searches.

While on board that plane, I saw people whose ancestors were of a different heritage and race than mine, sneaking strange sounding syllables. I was uncomfortable, wondering if their strange dress and language foretold possible terrorists.

That was the third freedom I lost. The freedom to trust strangers who only looked, spoke or dressed differently than I do.

When my husband and I visited the *Arch* at St. Louis, we decided to visit the historical exhibits held below it, but had to pass through a metal detector — after reading a sign that admonished visitors against carrying large bags or wearing backpacks.

I turned to Don and said, "You know what's sad? Our granddaughter will think this is normal as she grows up. She won't think anything about having her bags checked."

This was the fourth and hardest freedom to lose. The freedom taken from my children and grandchild to come and go as I had done when I grew up.

Some of my freedoms have been lost, but the cost could be so much higher I still have the freedoms of speech, religion, public assembly and more.

Thanks to our armed forces and the foresight of our forefathers, our basic civil liberties will never be lost. I remain an American citizen who is grateful for the freedoms that we will never lose

A Bit of History **By Joseph Potter** **(New Member)**

I arrived at Tan Son Nhut on the afternoon of Jan 5, 1966. After a shower we left on a bus for the mess hall. On the way the driver elected to leave the base and planned to return through the main gate. We got almost

there when a claymore mine attached to a bicycle exploded just ahead of the bus. We exited the bus and got into the ditch. After awhile we turned around and went to the mess hall. Welcome to Viet Nam!!

I was assigned to the 3250th OMS and then assigned to the 19th ACS shortly there after. I was in the mess hall when the base came under attack on the April 12 just after midnight. I sought shelter in the concrete Air Police barracks across from the mess hall and shortly after that was asked if anyone was from the flight line. We said we were and was told to report there to shuttle some aircraft around as Charlie was walking the mortar rounds up and down the aircraft parking areas.

Dave Hellings and I got a ride from a Major from base ops. He directed us to record the tail serial numbers of the damaged RF-4C's in front of ops. We waded through ankle deep JP-4 and got all the serial numbers. The Major took our names and stated he would put us in for the silver star, which never happened.

We then started to our duty station (the C-123 maintenance docks) across from the terminal when we heard another mortar round coming in. We hit the deck and then started running for the bunker when we came across an air police A-2C who had got a piece of shrapnel in his back. We helped him as much as possible then returned to Base Ops and told the Major who called for an ambulance.

We then headed for our duty station again when more mortars were in coming. In my haste to get into the bunker I ran through some old French barbed wire ripping my pants and my right knee pretty bad. The mortars were still in coming and one hit just behind our bunker and skidded along the PSP and then exploded and damaged a C-123. The next round hit the oil storage tank across the tarmac, and one hit a fuel truck (JP-4) burning the cab.

It was quite a night. When the sun came up we headed for the barracks (Tilton Hilton #3) and saw all the damaged C-123's along Charlie row. We ran into A-1C Glen

McClusky who was covered in blood. The airplane that he was assigned to was hit in the left landing gear just as he jumped out the right troop door. A very close call.

A-1C Garry Milner was at the barracks and pointed to my leg and asked what happened. I told him it was a long story and a long night. I then hit the shower. That's when I realized it was my blood coming from my torn up right knee, and not from the AP that we assisted as I had thought. It was back to the mess hall for breakfast and then some picture taking. I still have some of those slides.

Dave and I never got the silver star mentioned by the unnamed Major, or a purple heart for my injury as I never went to the hospital.

In May I was assigned to the 377th APS as an augmentee. I did most of my posts across from the transit bomb dump on the C-130 parking area. It was next to a Quonset hut office of a photo mapping wing and in a tower overlooking a salvage yard.

I was transferred to the 12th ACS in July, and went to a squadron beach party at Vung Tu after picking up 32 cases of beer and 15 cases of soda pop at a warehouse. Then off to the beach on a UC-123. While swimming I got tangled up with some Portuguese Men of War (jelly fish) and got stung quite bad.

When we left to return to TSN I had tied some smoke canisters to the spray boom and buzzed the beach as the pins were pulled. We must have looked like an air show.

When we got a new wing commander (315 ACS) he called a meeting and stated that if we had a replacement on board there was no reason we couldn't be home for Christmas. I was scheduled to leave on the December 4 when the base was attacked once again. I finally got a flight out to Travis AFB on December 7th. When I arrived at Travis, I was met by Sgt. Bill Price from the 377th APS. He had heard of the attack on the 4th and was concerned about some friends he left behind.

Traveling over the Pacific on Pearl Harbor Day was a little spooky. I arrived in Boston on the 10th and was home in Hudson, MA.

that night.

That is the way it was. WHEW!!!!

My First Rocket Attack By Stephen Jones (New Member)

I don't remember where the barracks was located where I lived. When I first arrived I was put in a barracks near the 12th RITS. I can't remember the building number. It had two floors and I lived on the second floor. I remember the first rocket attack happened not to long after I arrived. Looking at your archive I see it happened 28 August 1971. Only 3 "STO" rounds landed on the base and with no casualties.

I remember I was asleep on my bunk wearing a tee shirt and skivvies. I quickly put on my flak jacket and hid for cover under my bunk. I could hear the sound of men in heavy boots running to leave the barracks. I guess they were assigned to the 12th RITS militia that would report to our armory and check out their M-16's and other weapons. The 12th RITS militia was an all volunteer "group" of guys who would train with the security police out in the boonies. They always came back caked with mud, hot and dirty. One of the base sirens was located right outside our barracks and it would almost make you go deaf. That siren would go on forever and it was loud!

After what seemed forever, I had the courage to crawl out from under my bed dressed in my skivvies and flak jacket. I walked down the hall looking into everyone's rooms to see if I had any company. No one was in their rooms! The barracks had a separate walled off area at the end the barracks which served as the squadron hootch bar with a small pool table, tables and chairs. I slowly opened the door to the hootch bar and boy was I embarrassed! The bar was full of guys smoking and drinking just like nothing had happened. They were obviously seasoned 12th RITS Tan Son Nhut veterans who couldn't be bothered with something as harmless as a puny rocket attack! My timidity continued for the next 3 months and it took that long to venture off base.

Buddhist Funeral By Tony Tidwell

On my days off, only once a week, I would go out with a group from the USAF dispensary. We would load up in a big army truck, early in the morning, and go out to some outlying village, or hamlet. We would set up tables and provide minor medical treatment to some of the locals.

On this one particular operation, some miles to the west of TSN, we were doing our thing, when we heard the sounds of musical horns, and the clacking of sticks and drums. We were set up down at the bottom of a large dike. As we watched and listened, this group of Vietnamese came across the dike. I have never seen such lovely colors. Those in the front of this procession were decked out in the brightest and most beautiful yellows (mostly feathers and robes), burgundies (like the color of those robes the Buddhist wore), bright reds (mostly feathers), and scattered greens.

It turned out to be a Buddhist funeral procession. I simply don't have the words to describe the beauty of that day, The head nurse, a CMSgt, who was married to a Vietnamese lady, told us that the deceased (being carried by maybe eight guys wearing the Buddhist robes) was probably a person of high standing in the community, mainly because of the extravagant dress and music being played. He told us that we were indeed, privileged to witness such a sight. He said that no more than a handful of Americans had ever observed such a ceremony.

I am really glad to have been a witness to such an event.



Reflections of An Air Force Nurse

*By Joan I Gray,
Colonel USAF (Ret.)*

As I sit here at the computer and think about the recent Veterans Day, I think of my time in service, and the many people I have served with. I served a total of 24 years in the Military as a USAF Nurse. The other night, I watched a DVD called "In the Shadow of the Blade". If you have not watched it, you need to do so. It brings back many memories, some good and some not so good of Viet Nam.

I served at the 21st Casualty Staging Unit at Tan Son Nhut Air Base from December 1969 to December 1970. It was a different stage of my life. I was a senior Captain, and most of the nurses who served with me were what we called baby Lieutenants. I was promoted to Major while in Viet Nam.

I took care of wounded, and also the young men who were sick and needed hospitalization. As I said, I was a little older than the younger ones who served, so my chief told me to watch out for them. "Make sure they could handle seeing the guys who were their same age, and were coming in wounded to be transferred to the states." Yes, I was more mature, but seeing them wounded, made me hate war all the more.

Our unit was responsible for preparing the patients for transfer to Japan or Hawaii, and then eventually home. Some who could not make the trip right away were transferred to the Army 3rd Field Hospital outside the main gate at Tan Son Nhut.

I have some wonderful memories of my time in Viet Nam. We visited orphanages, and took soap and clothing that had been sent from home. The married men always liked going to the orphanages to play with the kids. We went on Med Cap to treat the villagers. Of course this was on our off duty time, but it was the thing

to do. The villagers were so grateful to have their children checked by one of the doctors or the nurse who went with the team.

There were sad times, too. Prior to my service at Tan Son Nhut from 1966 to 1968, I served on a ward, at Tachikawa Hospital, Japan, where I took care of critically wounded coming out of Viet Nam. Many patients did not survive to return home. When I returned to the states, I wanted to do more, so I volunteered to go to Viet Nam. After seeing what the tragedy of war had done, I wanted to be a part of the initial evaluation and treatment of our service members

I came home from Viet Nam a different person, and like many of you, was upset that people didn't care where I had been or what I had done. They did not welcome me or the other nurses as we returned home. Many young nurses of all services ended their military career after serving in Viet Nam. They had no support force to help them readjust. For those of us who stayed in the service, we were fortunate to be able to share our thoughts, feelings and concerns with each other, and were better able to cope. I am still sharing my Viet Nam experiences with many of the younger nurses today. I have served on panels or have been a guest speaker at graduations, at the School of Health Care Science at Sheppard AFB.

I must say I have cried many times, but three times stand out in my mind. During Desert Storm I joined a Viet Nam Veterans group here in Wichita Falls, Texas. When two other nurses and I walked in the room and told them we had served in Viet Nam, the men stood, clapped and welcomed us. I cried that day, and cry today when I think about it. The second time was when I was in Washington for the dedication of the Viet Nam Women's Memorial. Some guys would come up to hug you and thank you. I was so touched by their sincerity, that I cried. I also cried when I watch "In the Shadow of the Blade".

It all seems like yesterday, but I know that it has been 30 years since the war ended, so, in ending this story, about a very important part of my life, I would like to salute you and "Welcome Home", my brothers and sisters.

God Bless you all.



Colonel Joan I. Gray



Women's Vietnam
War Memorial
Washington, D.C.

Tan Son Nhut Association Member Dave Sanders was the Man of the Year in 2003 for the United Veterans Council of Santa Clara County, California and then repeated in 2004 with the same award. The County Government then recognized him in 2005 as Friend of the Veteran for all that he did in 2005 in Santa Clara County. He was picked out of 93,000 veterans for this special honor.



**RESOLUTION COMMENDING DAVID W. SANDERS AS HE RECEIVES THE COUNTY OF SANTA CLARA
"2005 FRIEND OF THE VETERAN* AWARD**

WHEREAS, David W. Sanders, as both past and present Commander of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3982 and past and present President of Mission Santa Clara Charities, has devoted much time, talent, energy and leadership, and contributed funds and other supportive resources to veterans or their family members in times of need. Under David Sanders' husbandry, these veteran programs have brought much-needed financial aid and physical comfort to untold numbers of residents in Santa Clara County, and

WHEREAS, David W. Sanders served in a myriad of positions of responsibility in many County Veterans organizations, including the American Legion Post 564, Military Order of the Cooties, Pup Tent #14, Darwin J. Thomas Memorial Chapter 201, Vietnam Veterans of America, Mike Hammer Chapter 1379 of the Air Force Sergeants Association and the United Veterans Council of Santa Clara County. For many years, David Sanders actively supported these organizations through the San Jose Veterans' Day Parade as a Staging Coordinator, annual Oak Hill Cemetery Memorial Day ceremonies, summer Sunday barbeques at the Veterans Affairs Menlo Park Medical Center for ambulatory patients, Monterey Bay fishing trips for hospitalized veterans, and the annual San Jose Veterans Affairs Clinic Christmas Food and Toy Drive for children of disabled veterans; and

WHEREAS, David W. Sanders has, since its inception, been the prime voluntary force behind the Santa Clara County Veterans Resource Faire. David could always be relied upon to "get the job done" no matter what the task involved. When the Global War on Terrorism began to take friends and neighbors overseas as Military Reservists and National Guard personnel, David was the first to suggest that the Office of Veterans Services focus its attention on assisting current military members and their families; and

WHEREAS, David W. Sanders has unfalteringly volunteered innumerable hours, endless energy, immeasurable resources and professional and technical expertise in many capacities in support of the Office of Veterans Services. David is a vital asset to the Office and a great Ambassador to veterans, military personnel and their families. He puts his personal advocacy into practice by making numerous referrals to the Office and by transporting clients who are reluctant or unable to help themselves. Most recently, David obtained and installed a new flagpole and flags at no cost to the County.

Tet Offensive *January 1968*

Reprinted From *Revtments*, 2000

Rumors grew steadily at Tan Son Nhut Air Base during the January 1968 days leading towards the Lunar New Year, the Tet Holiday of the Vietnamese. The rumors came true during the evening and night of January 30-31.

We have deep gratitude to Member, Charles Penley of Kingsport, Tennessee, who has furnished *Revtments* with a copy of the official history of his unit, the 377th Security Police Squadron, who bravely, and oft-times single handedly, saved the lives of all of us who were there at that time. From this history we have extracted the following report of events as they transpired.

Surprise attack

The attack came without notice, and the size and firepower of the enemy units were without precedence for a major USAF installation in the Republic of Vietnam. The squadron had been placed in Security Condition GREY on the morning of 30 January in response to the increased hostile activity during the Tet "truce," and General Momyer, the commander of Seventh Air Force, had placed all of his bases in RVN on Security Condition RED at 1730 hours that afternoon as a result of rocket and mortar attacks on a number of other installations the night before.

But, except for vague, general reports that the Viet Cong would probably attempt some type of attack on Tan Son Nhut some time before or during the Tet holidays, there was no firm indication of the type or size of attack which the Viet Cong could or would launch. Nor was there any firm intelligence concerning where or from what direction an attack, if any, was coming.

The first such indication that something big was underway came at 0300 hours on 31 January when a report was received at JDOC (Joint Defense Operations Center) that the American embassy in Saigon was under attack. A few moments later, the Vietnamese Joint General Staff compound was also reported under attack, and at 0320 hours, the first rounds fell on the east end of Tan Son Nhut near the POL (fuels) area. But it wasn't until 0333 hours, when mortar and rocket

rounds started to hit the west end near the 051 gate and Viet Cong troops appeared from the tree line, that the 377th Security Police Squadron knew from where the major attack was coming or had any indication concerning its size.

At Least Seven Viet Cong Battalions

Post-attack intelligence indicated that at least seven Viet Cong battalions, augmented by North Vietnamese army (NVA) elements, were involved in the attack on Tan Son Nhut, with the total number of hostile troops estimated at 2,500 men. The majority of these troops, three reinforced battalions with an estimated strength of 500 men each, attacked the west end of the base near the 051 gate, while other hostile units ranging from squad-to-battalion-size applied pressure at eight other points around the base perimeter simultaneously.

The squadron responded immediately with all the resources at its command. The men had been placed on five-minute alert when the squadron went into Condition RED earlier in the evening, and when the first rounds landed near the POL area, the quick reaction teams (QRT) were readied for immediate deployment.

West End Is Major Problem

The major problem, of course, was on the west end of the base. At approximately 0335 hours, a sapper unit (later identified as an element of the C-10 Sapper Battalion) blew a hole in the perimeter fence between the 051 Bunker and the 051 gate, and the Viet Cong started pouring through the breach. (Note; The MACV Rules of Engagement had prevented the Security Police in the 051 Bunker from firing on the sapper unit, which had driven up to the fence line in a Lambretta scooter-tax, as the unit had not exhibited hostile intent prior to exploding its Bangalore torpedoes.)

The bunker returned the enemy fire, but was silenced by two direct hits from RPG2 or RPG7 rockets, which killed four of the five Security Police inside (the only Security Police Squadron KIA's during the battle.)

The squadron's Central Security Control (CSC) immediately dispatched the four-man sector Security Alert Team (SAT), two three man CSC Standard SATs, and the 13-man reserve SAT to the scene. The sector SAT

was the first to arrive. It took a position just south and east of the 051 Bunker and poured fire into the attacking forces until it was forced to withdraw for lack of ammunition, and resumed firing into the advancing enemy forces. The other SATs were unable to reach the bunker because of the intense hostile fire. One standard SAT and RSAT took positions approximately 200 yards southeast of the bunker and opened fire. The other SAT, coming in from the north, guarded against flanking movements on the north side of the penetration area.

Steady, well-disciplined fire blunted the Viet Cong penetration

Next, three 13-man QRTs and platoon of Task Force 35 (30-man platoons of Army augmented under the operational control of the 377th SPS) were dispatched to the west end to form a blocking force directly east of the advancing Viet Cong penetration force, and another Task Force 35 platoon was sent to bolster the southeast flank. These units formed the main defensive line just east of the western most crossover taxiway north and south of the main runway. They were ordered to return the enemy fire and hold their positions.

By this time, an estimated 600 Viet Cong - one reinforced battalion augmented sapper and NVA units had penetrated through the breach in the perimeter fence. This main assault force was armed with or supported by RPG2 and RPG7 rockets, 81 mm mortars, .50 caliber machine guns, hand grenades, automatic weapons, small arms, and other miscellaneous weaponry. Although outnumbered at least four to one and facing superior firepower the Security Policemen and augmented maintained steady, well-disciplined fire and blunted the Viet Cong penetration.

Standoff in the west

Meanwhile, Lt. Colonel Carter, back at JDOC, deployed the other QRTs to reinforce perimeter defense in the northwest, north, northeast, east, Main Gate, Gate 2 and south section of the perimeter; held the third (and last) platoon of Task Force 35 in reserve at CSC in the event of a Viet Cong breakthrough; and worked feverishly with U.S. Army and Air Force counterparts to secure air, artillery, armor, and infantry support for his beleaguered Security Policemen.

Fire support was requested from U.S. Army helicopter light fire teams (LFT's) but clearance was delayed for approximately 45 minutes because the LFT's were unable to distinguish between friendly and enemy positions. A platoon of three Vietnamese light tanks arrived at approximately 0500 hours, but within 15 minutes two of them were destroyed by enemy rocket fire and the third was forced to withdraw. The Vietnamese field commander, Major Chieu, was wounded when one of the tanks was hit. At this time, the Vietnamese commander of JDOC, Lt. Col. Coung, turned over his command to Lt. Col. Bernard L. Garred, Jr., U.S. Senior Advisor to the Tan Son Nhut Sensitive area. A short time before, around 0430 hours, forward air controllers (FACs) reported a very large Viet Cong force in the fields directly west of the 051 Bunker and) 51 gate. This was later identified in post-attack intelligence as two reinforced battalions totaling 900-1000 men. At 0523 hours, friendly artillery received clearance and began taking a heavy toll on these forces outside the perimeter fence.

During this period and for the next hour, the battle on the west end of the base was a standoff. The defense forces kept up a constant but well-disciplined fire on the hostile positions, keeping the Viet Cong pinned down and unable to advance. But, although two companies of Vietnamese airborne arrived to reinforce the defense line, the friendly forces had neither the firepower nor the manpower to counterattack and drive the attackers off the base.

Combat intensifies

At approximately 0600-0613 hours, however, the fire from the Viet Cong positions became extremely intense, and the FACs reported that the Viet Cong in the field to the west of the perimeter were starting to advance toward the base. The defensive forces braced themselves, returned the fire, and held their positions.

About 0630 hours "C" Troop of the 3rd Cavalry Regiment (3/4 Cav) of the 25th division (less one platoon) which had been placed under the operational control of JDC, was sighted coming down Highway 1 from the north towards the 051 gate. Although it suffered heavy casualties in an ambush from a row of houses just north and west of the gate, the troop pushed through and hit the

Viet Cong on the north flank, distracting their attention from the Security Police main defense line. The defensive forces and particularly the 3/4 Cav unit remained heavily engaged with the enemy forces for the next hour. At approximately 0730 hours, "B" Troop of the 3/4 Cav (plus the remaining platoon of "C" Troop) entered the 055 gate at the northwest tip of the base, sped down the outer perimeter road and hit the Viet Cong from the north. At this time, the Viet Cong again increased the intensity of their fire, apparently to cover the withdrawal of the units inside the base perimeter.

The enemy is forced to withdraw

The pressure somewhat relieved, the 377th Security Police and the other defensive forces inside the base counterattacked from the east, driving the Viet Cong off the base, while the 34 Cav units continued to press the attack on the north flank. The Security Police and Vietnamese Airborne forces met stiff resistance, particularly on the south part of their counterattack line and from 051 Bunker, which had been overrun and occupied early in the battle. By 1000 hours, however, most of the Viet Cong had been killed, or driven off, except for the pocket of resistance in the 051 Bunker. The bunker was finally neutralized by grenade fire, assaulted, and taken by Security Police forces at 1215 hours.

Enemy plans foiled at Tan Son Nhut

Post-attack intelligence revealed that the attack on Tan Son Nhut was part of an overall Viet Cong plan to overrun the Seventh Air Force and MACV headquarters and to deprive the Saigon area of fixed-wing airlift support (by taking Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa and the Saigon racetrack) and, at a minimum to force Vietnamese and U. S. acceptance of a political "solution" to the war. The quick response, professionalism and courage of the 377th Security Police Squadron which was the lone defensive ground force during the early critical hours of the battle foiled the most important element of this plan.

Post Script by Revetments

Sergeant Alonzo Coggins was the sole survivor of Bunker 051 and had survived for nine hours under the bodies of his comrades and the debris of the attack, occupied by the enemy. Years later at Lackland he received, at

last, the Silver Star.

The fighting in and around Saigon and its military bases continued literally for weeks. Tan Son Nhut would suffer a devastating rocket attack in the middle of February. Saigon was under curfew for months.

We cannot resist closing with Winston Churchill's proud comment, "Never have so many owed so much to so few."

Let us hereby resolve that the Tan Son Nhut Association shall keep this era's memory unassailable, unblemished, and perpetuated to our posterity.





Members of the 377th SPS, supported by armor, move to resecure Tan Son Nhut AB after penetration by Communist forces on January 31st, 1968.



Members of the 377th SPS open up on Communist forces who infiltrated Tan Son Nhut AB during the Tet 1968 Offensive. (USAF photo courtesy USAF SP Museum.)

Our profound thanks to the 377th Security Police

Tan Son Nhut Association
2413 Brambleton Avenue
Roanoke, VA 24015