



Revetments

An open forum where we can all continue to exchange the memories and pride that we had as we upheld our sacred vow of " **Duty, Honor, Country,**" at the now historic and once mightiest air field in the world.

A Bi-monthly Newsletter

June & July 2007



President's Message

Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, thank you for the faith you have placed in me by electing me to the position of President of the Tan Son Nhut Association -- your association. As the elected caretaker of your association, I will endeavor to follow the course set by my noble predecessors, and I acknowledge that their collective shoes are difficult to fill, but I will try to do so.

My service in Vietnam means something very special to me and while there were difficult times, and dangerous times, I am comforted to know that each of you who served there so many years ago still hold a very special bond with me. As I said during our May 2007 reunion in Dayton, I want TSNA to conduct annual reunions in different parts of the country to enable the greater portion of our membership to attend a TSNA reunion and solicit your recommendations as to possible locations for future reunions.

One thing is clear, however, and that is I want to lead a TSNA reunion, or merely a field-trip, of aging warriors back to Saigon and Tan Son Nhut Air Base in 2008-09.



Featured Story

Dayton Reunion

We gathered from all over the country. We brought wives, daughters, mothers, fathers and sisters. We brought memories of our youth and service to a cause larger than ourselves.

We laughed, reminisced and made new friends. We toured museums, did a little shopping, and later that evening, we broke bread together, and raised a glass to those we left behind.

Plan to attend our next reunion; planning has already begun.

Attendance Statistics

Total attending 139

From a total of 29 states and the District of Columbia.

Longest Distance: Alaska

Largest Number: Ohio = 21
Texas = 19
Virginia = 11
Maryland = 8
MO, PA, VT = 6 each

Enjoy the few pictures shown. For more photos from the reunion, visit the web site of member Gary Redlinski.
<http://www.gtredphotos.com/2007TSNAScatbackReunion.html>

A Return to Yesterday©

Bob Gales, President TSNA

During my comments in Dayton, I took the opportunity to read something I had written in 1998 after I had attended my very first Vietnam-related reunion. My thoughts in that commentary, which I called "A Return To Yesterday," describe my feelings and passion for my service in Vietnam with my Vietnam Veteran brothers. I had shared it with some friends before Dayton and was told it distilled the feelings of everyone who served there. I hope you feel the same:

On Friday, May 15, 1998, with only two and one-half hours of fitful sleep, the middle-aged gentleman departed his residence in Fairfax County, Virginia, and headed for the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport where he boarded the first of his two connecting flights to Biloxi, Mississippi. The flights were not merely a conveyance from one geographical area to another, but far more significant. They served as a segue from the present to the past.

It was not a big event as most reunions go, for there were only nine middle-aged or older men present, five of whom were accompanied on this journey to the past by supportive, but still not fully comprehending, spouses. In fact, the spouses weren't the only ones who initially failed to grasp the full significance of the event, for few of the prime participants were cognizant of the true intensity of the commitment to the return to yesterday and to their colleagues from so long ago.

Thirty years earlier, in a very different life-time, these same nine young men - eight captains and a newly minted major were casually thrown together as fungible components of a great fighting machine engaged in hostilities against a common enemy in a place called Vietnam. They came from three disparate professional backgrounds - five attorneys, three pilots, and a priest and represented diversity in geography, experience, personality, age, religion, and physical appearance.

Seven of the nine were permanent party members of US Air Force components stationed at Bien Hoa Air Base, Vietnam. The other two, while permanently stationed elsewhere in Vietnam (one was from Phan Rang Air Base and one was from Tan Son Nhut Air Base), were at Bien Hoa so frequently, that they were made integrated components of the unit. And what was the unit? Hut 135, Bien Hoa Air Base, Vietnam. You won't find the unit identified in any organizational history

for it wasn't an official fighting force, merely one which facilitated socialization, relaxation, exploration, transportation, and mutual psychological support, as well as enabled the membership to enjoy the additional benefits of food and libation and reasonable opportunities to sleep.

Of the seven permanent party members, three actually resided nearby, not in, Hut 135, for as pilots (two were forward air controllers (FACs) and the third was an air rescue helicopter pilot), they were entitled to air conditioned quarters something those lower on the food chain of importance, the attorneys and the priest, were not. The lower level participants merely served as the stabilizing influence, the landlords, who sublet space in their hut and in their hearts so that others, as well as themselves, could enjoy the good life.

Thirty years later, our respective lives had evolved onto different paths, and each of us had other activities and responsibilities to attend to. There were the pilots. Jon, the air rescue helicopter pilot, remained on active duty and eventually rose to the grade of lieutenant colonel before retiring. He is now the operations manager of a major international airport in California. Jay, a FAC, left active duty and became a senior pilot for a large domestic airline. He is based in Texas. John, or Oz as he was known, the other FAC, also left active duty and became a senior pilot with a large domestic airline that eventually went bankrupt. He is now a senior pilot for a mid-sized domestic airline, and is based in Nevada.

There was the priest. Don, whose nickname "Father-Priest" says it all. Our priest and spiritual guide left active duty and eventually withdrew from the priesthood. After a long career in public service in New York, he semi-retired to a part-time public service position in California.

And there were the attorneys. Dave, at that time the only major in the group, and the Staff Judge Advocate at Bien Hoa, in other words, the senior attorney there remained on active duty and eventually retired in the grade of major general. He is now active in other pursuits in Texas. Ken, an attorney and one of the two non-permanent party members, remained on active duty, and eventually retired as a colonel. He is now a screen writer, residing in Virginia. Will, another attorney, left active duty and returned to Mississippi to build a thriving law practice. Russ, still another attorney, remained on active duty for awhile, but later joined the reserve component, and eventually retired as a lieutenant colonel. He now practices law in a small

Mississippi town. And me. I was the other non-permanent party member. After a period on active duty as an attorney, I joined the reserve component and eventually retired as a colonel. I am now the Chief Administrative Judge for a large federal agency, and reside in Virginia.

Nevertheless, the call went out, and for some inexplicable reason, nothing could be strong enough to dissuade us from reuniting from around the nation to Biloxi, Mississippi, to join our two local hosts, Russ and Will. I am frequently asked, why did you go? But I am unable to sufficiently articulate my reasons except to say the draw was irresistible; I simply had to go! We discussed it among ourselves, and the response was generally identical. We had something individually and as a group, and we did not want to lose it. The unit, once a functioning reality, but now a bright and enduring memory, had again come alive.

And what did we do during the reunion? Just what we had always done: we played, we talked, we joked, we reminisced, we drank, we ate, we photographed each other, we talked about home, and we shared. But this time, there was no shooting. We brought each other current from 30 years ago in warp speed. And the spouses were magnificent. Some were initially conservative and laid-back so as not to interfere with the renewed fantasy of their loved ones. And as they watched their middle-aged warriors become once again young before their very eyes, especially when we sat around and watched, no lived, the slide show with 30 year old visual memories, they too became absorbed into the moment. There we were all young, good looking, vibrant, sharing what we had then with those who love us now. We were no longer merely men, we were now families, including spouses, who understood each other, perhaps better than we knew ourselves. We were not nine families, but one extended family.

Over the years, each of us, in one way or another, had been blessed with good fortune and afflicted with heartbreak and consequences of other fortune. Some had remained married to their spouses since Vietnam; some had married later on; and some of us had seen tumultuous times and had divorced, and later remarried. But we all survived to become extremely successful and productive citizens. Where once we were boys, we were now parents and grandparents. And there was one consistent thread which bound us together: that period in Vietnam was the most memorable year of our respective lives.

Thirty years ago it was reality! I lived it, and lived through it. . . with them. They were merely memories enshrined in the heart and memory of an aging warrior. They are now legend of the kind fantasies are made.

I sat in my seat of Northwest flight 5691 in the last row by the window, feeling rather depressed as the fantasies flashed through my mind. And, as the wheels of this would-be freedom bird lifted off the runway, tears welled up in my eyes and I openly wept. For the first time in 30 years I had again experienced the contentment, the excitement, and yes, the exhilaration, of that time oh so very long ago. The sunlight cavorted about on the water and other reflective surfaces below to provide a dazzling light show as an encore celebration for the reunion, and I appreciated the effort. I cherished every moment of the memories, but that was yesterday, 30 years ago, and this is today. The reunion was officially over, and I was going home.

President Emeritus Don Parker (rt.)



POW / MIA Ceremony



Chaplain's Corner

Transformations

There is a modern tendency to act as if a person was meant to live forever. I am convinced that for some people the subject of death is not discussed because there is a nagging fear that modern science has somehow exploded all the traditional teachings of religion on this subject. Therefore, there can be no valid basis for believing in any kind of personal existence beyond the grave.

It may interest those who have thought along this line to read some words from the distinguished world renown physicist Dr. Werner von Braun. Surely he had a right to speak as a scientist, or as one in touch with all the latest discoveries about life on this planet as well as the nature of the universe at large. This is what he has said:

“Many people seem to feel that science has somehow made religious ideas untimely or old-fashioned. But I think science has a real surprise for the skeptics. Science, for instance, tells us that nothing in nature, not even the tiniest particle, can disappear without a trace. Nature does not know extinction. All it knows is transformation.”

“Now, if God applies this fundamental principle to the most minute and insignificant parts of his universe, does it make sense to assume that God also applies it to the human spirit and soul? I think it does. And everything science has taught me – and continues to teach me – strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death. Nothing disappears without a trace.”

For too long, and among too many of us, the idea has prevailed that there is a conflict between science and religion. We tend to occasionally overlook that God is one, and truth is one, and there can be no conflict between the truths of intelligent religion and those of reverent science. One revelation of God's truth is to supplement, not destroy, His other forms of revelation



The Last Flag Flown at Tan Son Nhut



The flag was presented to the Museum of the U.S. Air Force by Mary Ruth Odell Barton, the sister of Colonel David “Digger” Odell , the last base commander.

She, her daughter Laura Barton Williams, and Laura's daughter, Elisabeth Chivers travelled from California and attended the reunion as guests of the association.

The flag was honored by the TSNA during our Saturday evening banquet.



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