



REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

YESTERDAY REVISITED©

By Robert Robinson Gales

The telephone call had not been unexpected for it had been five years since I had received the last one. It was time to rally together once again to enter the time warp of memory to relive those thrilling days of yesterday-the exhilarating experiences of a military conflict 35 years earlier in a place called Vietnam. It had been projected that our hosts for this reunion of Hut 135-the oasis of genteel society at Bien Hoa Air Base, Vietnam-would be two current residents of California, for our last reunion had been hosted in Biloxi, Mississippi, by two attorneys, Russ and Will. A special notice had even been issued earlier by Jon, the air rescue helicopter pilot, and a designated co-host.

What was unexpected and shocking was the news that Jon, the reputed youngest of the group, had passed away earlier during the summer.

How could that be, I asked myself while still receiving and processing the news? Shocking! Jon had braved danger in a war only to live too briefly afterward-35 years later-to pass

away silently and peacefully.

The group had seen combat death firsthand but had managed to come through the hostilities physically unscathed-that is, all except Ken, another attorney, whose foot was broken during an enemy assault on Phan Rang Air Base.

John, or Oz as he is frequently called, the “sleepy-time” forward air controller (FAC), furnished both the specifics of the unexpected passing and of the anticipated reunion-now to be hosted by him and his vibrant wife Kay in Reno, Nevada. But I was in shock and denial. I simply told him I would tell him later about committing to this reunion under the newly revealed circumstances. Who was I kidding? I knew I would go-I had to go as I was now driven to do so by the escalating fear of loss; I just hesitated to make the commitment, as flashes of life and death were pulsating through my mind.

Several days later I committed. “Get the buffet tables ready”, I emailed him and challenged other tentative invitees that their possible non-appearance would not be excused, regardless of the purported justifications. But, of course, there might be some

absences and excuses-and there were. Will, an attorney, was unable to attend for a happy reason, although he had previously made plans to come. His youngest daughter was the homecoming queen at the University of Mississippi and we celebrated that joyous accomplishment. Dave, the major general, was simply not up to the trip, so at about 12:30AM, his time, we called him and woke him up, and each of us told him how much we missed him. Even through the fog of sleep he seemed to comprehend and responded his appreciation. When he heard my voice he uttered: “Bob Gales, my God!”

This reunion was both happy and maudlin. The one five years earlier was totally exciting without any indicia of sadness. This time around, things were different for one of us was no longer physically present and never would be again. Carolyn, Jon’s lovely widow, still afflicted by sorrow, anger, and denial over her, and our, loss, was with us and she presented Russ, an attorney, and Don- “Father-Priest”-with historical artifacts from another era-tapes Jon had sent home from the war-zone those many years ago. She had not been up to listening to them but felt compelled to share them

(Yesterday Revisited continued)

with “family.” But, Jon was there with us, maybe not physically, but certainly spiritually and emotionally, and we all shared memories of him—enduring memories etched into our hearts which we can carry with us forever.

One evening during a spectacular dinner buffet we sat together in a private room with our hearts aching with moments of joy punctuating periods of sorrow. The following evening, after she had departed for home, we sat in John’s backyard under the stars, and with the soft sounds of the running water from the corner fountain, we spoke softly and lovingly about Jon and Carolyn and prayed for them—and, in a way, for ourselves as well. Carolyn would survive, as we all would, but with a heavy heart increasingly lightened by Jon’s memory and the grace of knowing and loving him.

Death is an inescapable result of birth—we will all go through it. Only the scheduling of the event is uncertain. We openly discussed the eventuality of death and its relative proximity to us, especially since we are now all between 62 and 75. I’m the youngest now and Don is the oldest. We’ve all lived good fulfilling lives so far but we are far from ready to go, regardless of God’s schedule for us.

In addition to death, another new topic entered our discussions—a topic that had never before been so popular with us: medical conditions and procedures. We spoke about joint replacements, torn ligaments, bad knees, high blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol, and other similar conditions, and men-

tioned chiropractors, trainers, and doctors. The young warriors of yesterday were now aging warriors of today, and like everyone, our illnesses and afflictions would increase.

Circumstances had changed for several of us during the past five years. John and Jay, both “sleepy-time” FACs, had been involuntarily retired from their commercial airline captain positions due to age. John is now training pilots for a charter airline and Jay simply retired to rocking on his porch and fishing. Before he had passed away, Jon was in the process of relocating to the San Francisco bay area after accepting a new position. The priest now teaches DUI classes. Ken, an attorney, relocated to Tennessee to be near his grandchildren while still waiting for a break that might lead to the sale of one of his screen-play manuscripts. Russ finally retired from the practice of law and does volunteer work at his church. Life has pretty much remained unchanged for Dave, Will, and me.

On Saturday, the last day of the reunion, four of us made valiant attempts to play golf. “Father-Priest” and I shared one cart along with Russ and Ken in another to form a foursome, with Jay trailing along in another cart as official photographer. John merely set us up with a tee-time at the local municipal course and ran off to assist Kay in preparing their home and dinner for us. What a sight! Don, our spiritual guide, plays golf twice a week, and displays a natural grace. The other three of us are more hacker than duffer. I had played golf once five years ago at our last reunion, and before that, not for 25 years! This new course—Rosewood Lakes—was

designed to destroy our confidence and our game with water hazards to the left and protected wetlands to the front and right. Hit a ball other than true to the green or fairway and you lose your confidence and the ball. We smashed some true, and furnished the hazards a substantial number of balls, but as the real champions we are, we did not quit and our spirit remained unbroken. The scores were dutifully recorded and we all joyously took an oath never to reveal them, and promptly destroyed the scorecard. As memory serves, we each shot 62’s—if not for the full 18 holes, surely for part of them!

At our last reunion someone took a photograph of the boys gathered behind the bar at Will’s home. The photograph was enlarged and proudly projected the smiles of the young warriors. Surprisingly, this time no one brought photographs of family to share. We simply brought our cameras and liberally used them to record talking, eating, drinking, joking, and playing. That one print of all of us from the previous reunion will stand out among the rest as a snapshot in time.

We adjourned our gathering with renewed commitment to keep in better more frequent communication with each other, and to facilitate that commitment we appointed Russ to the position of “over-secretary” of the group with an admonishment that failure to faithfully carry out his duties and responsibilities in a continuous, responsible, and timely manner would result in a lifetime appointment. Hopefully we can keep in touch and visit, or at least call, each other when the opportunities present themselves. With one last group



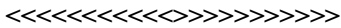
By Rev. Dr. Billy T. Lowe,
Chaplain
Tan Son Nhut Association

(Yesterday Revisited continued)

hug, we separated to again return from whence we came.

My return flights to my family in my Northern Virginia home were not as emotional as they had been five years earlier. There was no encore from above, with few reflective surfaces as we flew high above the mountains. But I experienced both the contentment and serenity of the moment, as well as gratification for the entire reunion. I had been, once again, with my extended family—all good friends from long ago—and we were each returning home.

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BRIG. GEN. PATRICK H. BRADY, Army chief of public affairs, evacuated more than 5,000 wounded persons during two tours in Vietnam as a medevac pilot. He was awarded the Medal of Honor after a series of missions on 6 January, 1968, in which helicopters he flew rescued 57 severely wounded patients under direct enemy fire. Maj. Brady's aircraft were so severely damaged in the dawn-to-dark missions that he used three to accomplish the day's operations. When the day was over, the helicopters had more than 400 holes in them, and two other crewmen had been injured. A native of South Dakota with more than 29 years of commissioned service, he is an ROTC graduate of Seattle (Wash.) University and holds a master's degree from Notre Dame. Among his other decorations are the Distinguished Service Cross, six Distinguished Flying Crosses, the Bronze Star Medal with V device and oak leaf cluster, the Purple Heart and 53 Air Medals, one with V device.

The Tan Son Nhut Association

THIS MONTH OF TAN SON NHUT/VIETNAM HISTORY

On February 2, 1962, a Ranch Hand crew became the first Air Force fatalities in Vietnam. Captain Fergus C. Groves II, Captain Robert D. Larson and Staff Sergeant Milo B. Coghill were killed while on a training mission. Although there was no evidence the aircraft was struck by ground fire, Air Commando T-28s were tasked to fly armed escort on future missions. Ranch Hand operations continued unabated throughout the rest of the year.

February 27, 1962 - The presidential palace in Saigon is bombed by two renegade South Vietnamese pilots flying American-made World War II era fighter planes. President Diem and his brother Nhu escape unharmed. Diem attributes his survival to "divine protection."

(Editors note: Some of us at TSN that day were on special alert guarding the main entrance road (no one knew what was going on), and some Army guys there with us shouted, "If we start shooting, duck—our guns are bigger than yours!")



Results of landing nose down in the Saigon River after above incident (Larry Fry photo)

ATTACKS ON TSN FEBRUARY 1968

Except for the 22nd, 23rd, 25th and 26th, Tan Son Nhut was attacked **every day** this month.

REVETMENTS

February is the month of Love, we often say. Romance and hearts mark a certain day in February as St. Valentine's Day. Cards of affection are mailed or passed along the way by school grade children and on up. It is a holiday that fills us with enjoyment. So it should!

February is the month that marks another kind of love, too. One that doesn't make the press or the holiday. I'm referring to February 3. Not too many are aware that the day has a special name. It is Four Chaplains Day. It marks the heroic deaths of a Catholic priest, a Jewish rabbi, and two Protestant ministers. They gave their life jackets to other crew members on board the sinking troop transport "Dorchester" and went down with the ship in the North Atlantic during the Second World War. In 1943, Father John Washington, Rabbi Alexander Goode, Reverend George Fox and Reverend Clark Poling became men to be remembered. Their selflessness should be an example of us all. We should transcend differences of opinion. We should talk together and work together with that sense of common purpose that those four men had in such abundance.

The thought of Four Chaplains Day makes me think of another who gave up his life for so many. The one that said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

February is the month of love. May you discover many ways to celebrate it!



FEBRUARY 2008

Death In A Saigon Alley

By:

Rod Herrick and Charles Penley
716th MP BN 377th Security
Police

If you were in Saigon, on Jan 31, 1968, around 0300hours, you would know the sounds of everyday life.

The main boulevards were very wide and most of the alleys were barely twenty feet wide.

There, just off Vo Tanh Street was BOQ # 3, located approximately three blocks from the sprawling Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Main Gate.

The enemy, the Viet Cong, terrorists really, are just down that alley that runs north and south beside the billets.

One of the 716th Military Police jeeps manned by SP4 Rod Herrick and Sgt Jerry Bowen (Car-61) gave BOQ # 3 MPs and Nung Guards the verbal warning of the attack on the US Embassy.

Herrick and Bowen then departed that location to give warning to the other BOQ's and BEQ's in their assigned patrol area.

BOQ # 3 was just one of many locations that now came under attack. At first it was just small arms weapons fire. Later, it would be larger and more powerful weapons, claymore mines, machine guns and rocket propelled grenades.

BOQ # 3 called the Military Police for rescue. All 716th Military Police were on duty throughout the city at that time. Several MP emergency vehicles responded to assist them.

The US Army deuce and a half truck, containing numerous Military Police, entered the long alley off of Cach Mang Street, heading north in the alley.

Then suddenly, the enemy opened up with their attack, trapping numerous MPs in the alley. They could not drive the deuce backwards and could not turn it around in the small narrow alley.

Another MP jeep, manned by Sgt Tom Winters (Sgt Rock.) and his partner, (their call sign Car # 60), came to assist the MPs trapped in the alley. They spent most of the first several hours at the alley at BOQ # 3 trying to rescue the men in the alley.

Subsequently, Winters and his partner were pinned down, while trying to assist their fellow MPs who are their buddies.

It was now house to house warfare in Saigon. Sgts. Herrick and Bowen spent most of their time responding to other BOQs and BEQs that were under ground attack. Both of these MPs got pinned down at the Royal Oaks BEQ. Waiting until daylight to get out, one ARVN guard killed several VC. Car # 61's vehicle took five bullet holes but Herrick and Bowen were never hit, Lucky!!!

They took out a lot of VC as did the MP's at the Embassy. Herrick and Bowen went to "C" Company Headquarters to replenish their ammo and grab some food, Bowen stayed at company headquarters and Jerry Howe jumped in with Herrick. They responded to the Den Bigh BEQ and got pinned down there for the next two and a half days.

Twenty-two Military policemen were killed that night. Their names are:

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At the Embassy:

Sgt. Thomas, Johnnie E.
Sp4 Daniel, Charles L.
Sp4 Mebust, Owen
Pfc Sebast, William M.

On the Truck, in the Alley:

Sgt. Grieve, Michael A.
Pfc Lasurk, Danny L.
Sgt. Hiley, Tom
Pfc Ojeda, Nestor
Sp4 Athony, Carey C.
Pfc Richardson, Harry F.
Sp4 Doody, Douglas W.
Pfc Riegel, Terry L.
Sp4 Faught, Frank L.
Pfc Schutt, Randall K.
Pfc Bowen Ronald M.
Pfc Seidensticker, James
Pfc Gilley, Richard A.
Pfc Smith, John T. (Driver)
Pfc Homsley, Ivan D.
Pfc Walsh, James E.
Pfc Kenerly, Warren E.
Pfc Yarbough, Lester G.

A NOTE OF INTEREST

On February 2, 1966, the 460th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing was activated at Tan Son Nhut. Its mission was to control and administer tactical reconnaissance resources in Southeast Asia. Assigned and attached tactical reconnaissance and tactical electronic warfare squadrons, and squadron-size detachments flew day and night visual, photographic, radar, thermographic, and electronic reconnaissance to meet the combat needs of 2d Air Division until April 1966 and for the Seventh Air Force thereafter. Divided reconnaissance in Southeast Asia with another wing in September 1966.

EDITORS NOTE: The following is the first part of an article by:

Richard Carvell
Assistant Professor in Radio-
Television, and
Director of Broadcasting,
Dept. of Radio-Television
Arkansas State University
Jonesboro, AR

12th RITS
Tan Son Nhut
June '70—June '71

NO ATTACKS ON TSN Part 1

As a reporter and journalism teacher after my four years of USAF active duty and a year in Vietnam, I never wanted to hear, "There's nothing happening."

"Nothing happening" is no news. No news makes it difficult to build a broadcast news program or publish a newspaper.

But fortunately that was just the case during my one-year USAF tour of duty at Tan Son Nhut Air Base in Saigon.

There were no attacks on Tan Son Nhut during the entire 365 days I was in country ... and for several days either side on those dates, as well.

Of course, there was plenty of activity going on in other parts of Vietnam, at other bases in 'Nam, and even in Saigon itself. But there were no attacks on Tan Son Nhut during my tour of duty.

Whenever someone asks about my U.S. Air Force service in Vietnam, I usually include this in the ensuing conversation: "I didn't shoot at anyone in Vietnam, and -- as far as I know -- no one shot at me."

I served in Vietnam from 3 June 1970 to 2 June 1971, assigned to the Photo Lab at the 12th Reconnaissance Intelligence Technical Squadron, attached to 7th Air Force, whose headquarters was right next door to the RITS on the Tan Son Nhut Air Base in the republic of Vietnam.



In addition to 12-hour shifts at work, I did a lot of other things to help pass the time during that year. Sleep. Eat. Go to a movie in an air conditioned movie theater. Read a book in an air conditioned base library. Write a letter home. Dub music tapes at the air conditioned tape center at TSN. Visit Sanctuary de Phu My, the RITS Civic Action Project in Saigon. Obviously, I was not in the boonies.

I also read the daily intelligence briefings with its reports of terrorist activity within the city of Saigon itself. And I kept track of all of those attacks. Some attacks seemed to be just random and disruptive. Some were deadly. Although the total number turned out to be few in number, there were Americans killed in Saigon's terrorist attacks during the time I was in Vietnam, along with Vietnamese military and national police. Women and children. Killed and injured by seemingly senseless acts of terror carried out against civilian targets in the city of Saigon.

It did not occur to me until 35 years later as I studied the report of attacks on various bases in Vietnam that during my tour of duty in Vietnam, there were no

attacks on my home base, Tan Son Nhut. Zero. Zilch. Nothing. Nil. There were attacks all around us in the city of Saigon, with its seemingly incompatible tarpaper shacks



and fine French colonial style homes. I was struck by the beauty of Saigon and its buildings captured in the 1960 pictures of Saigon when compared with the pictures I took in 1970-71. The contrast is astounding.

Saigon was teeming with refugees during the time I was there. The streets were full of people during the daytime and way into the night. A grenade dropped on a busy street was bound to take out several unlucky people just because of the ever-present crowd of humanity. I believe that someone told me that the population of the city had more than doubled because the war in the countryside was driving people into the relative safety of the city. The population totaled in the millions ... perhaps as many as 3 million.

I recall my incoming briefing a few days after arriving in country. An Air Force sergeant told me and the room full of newbies that Tan Son Nhut was safe. We were more likely, he said, to be run over by a truck than killed by an attack on the base. That was much different from 1968, for instance. But it turned out that he was correct.

(More) →

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Annual Membership: \$20.00
Five Year Membership: \$80.00
Life Membership: \$180.00

(No Attacks on TSN continued)

There were no attacks on the base.

Fortunately, the trucks missed me, as did attacks on the base. There were no attacks. As a side note, I did see a few instances of trucks on the base running over people or small motor scooters or motor bikes during my tour. The truck always won.

(Check your next issue of REVETMENTS for more!!)

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REUNION 2008
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The 2008 reunion is being worked on and the final information will be released as soon as possible, probably in the next issue as well as on our web page.
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THUNDERBIRDS 2008 SHOW SCHEDULE:

The Air Force Thunderbirds have released their performance schedule for 2008, their 55th anniversary year. The Thunderbirds are the official Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron. The unit consists of eight pilots (including six demonstration pilots), four support officers, four civilians and about 110 enlisted airmen. The lead pilot this year is Lt. Col. Greg Thomas. The other demonstration pilots are: Maj. Chris Austin, Thunderbird No. 2, left wing; Maj. Scott Poteet, Thunderbird No. 4, slot; Maj. Samantha Weeks, Thunderbird No. 5; and Maj. Tyrone Douglas, Thunderbird No. 6, opposing solo. Weeks is the first-ever female Thunderbird, and is in her second year with the squadron.

The partial schedule is as follows:

MARCH	APRIL
15 - San Angelo, Texas	5 and 6 - Punta Gorda, Fla.
29 - Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla.	12 and 13 - Lakeland, Fla.
	19 and 20 - Wilmington, N.C.
	26 - Charleston Air Force Base, S.C.

