



# REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

## *Back to the future – leaving Tan Son Nhut*

By: Ron Boydston

*Ron Boydston was stationed at Tan Son Nhut from 1969-1970, working as a U.S. Army radio-teletype operator with the 525<sup>th</sup> Combat Evaluation Group, which processed intelligence from field sites in South Vietnam and passed it on to the war planners at MACV. This is the third of three installments.*

As the months of duty at Tan Son Nhut passed, without being really aware of it, I became an old man.

In calendar terms it was just another year that was going by, but in other ways it was far more than that. I had entered the Army and gone to Vietnam as a young man, but I had gone through an accelerated course in time, and had somehow passed psychologically through middle age and into my senior years.

My ambitions and interests, which had been those of an optimistic college student, had given way to indifference. Oh, I did my duty. I had become an NCO, was a team chief in charge of my shift at the communications center, and had even been appointed as a barracks sergeant, a job which included hauling drunks out of the club, keeping porn off of locker doors, and helping get the place tidied up for the inspections that came around like clockwork, war or no war.

I followed the regs, did what was asked of me, and attempted to help the newer soldiers to adjust to the monotony and hardships of military life in a place far from home.

But I was jaded and tired, and not much concerned about what happened any more. Caring required interest, and interest had vanished sometime in the first few months of my tour. Now I was just along for the ride, bumping along towards the end of my assignment. My outlook was as faded as my fatigues, which were now several shades lighter than those of new arrivals.

After the failed R and R weekend at Nha Trang I had gotten to see a little of the country, a consolation to be sure but a welcome change to Saigon nevertheless. One weekend I had traveled north to visit some friends at one of our field sites in Phan Thiet, a rugged place on the coast with a commanding view of an inland valley and the South China Sea. One night there I had watched as a fighter worked over an enemy position some distance from us by the light of a parachute flare that had been thrown out of a chopper. The two aircraft were audible but invisible in the darkness, the helicopter clattering in circles while the jet hissed back and forth on its runs, stitching a pattern of destruction on the target below, its handiwork visible only in a gray dust-cloud that was being churned up on the ground.

Another time I had couriered some cryptographic equipment to Danang, a

somber and brooding place with mountains all around and very little of the relatively carefree atmosphere of Saigon. I had been issued a .45-caliber pistol with instructions to shoot first and ask questions later if anyone had tried to give me a hard time, and had traveled upcountry looking like a military gunslinger with the piece on my hip; but happily nobody did, and so my gunfighting experience remained safely in my holster and imagination.

And at about the nine-month mark we had even had – wonder of wonders – a visit from Miss America and her retinue to our obscure little compound, an event that brought soldiers from out of the woodwork like termites who knew that an exterminator was about start operations. I happened to be off that day, and by getting to the club two hours early I had been able to even get a seat. Hot dang! I had forgotten what actual American women were like. There was the occasional sighting of an American-style woman around the base, and during a visit to the downtown Saigon USO I had spied a few comely lasses; and there were some very beautiful South Vietnamese women, but they were classified under “wartime environment” and off-limits to my interest and involvement.

But the experience of seeing a number of real live good-looking American females was like a shot of hormonal caffeine, and the buzz lasted for a couple of days.

But these events were short-lived di-

versions from the military life cycle I was in, and I was no different than one of my utility uniforms – toiling away and getting sweaty and dirty, getting washed and hung out to dry for a couple of days, then being pressed back into service to do it all over again.

But one August day, some 335 days into my tour, I woke up as a short-timer, with a month to go, and as was the custom in our unit, drew up a calendar for my wall locker, with a pair of eyes staring out from the narrow space between the top of a pair of boots and the bottom of a helmet.

The schedule of that last month was outwardly no different than that of the other months that had preceded it, but at the same time it was profoundly different. Things that I had not allowed myself to think about for a very long time were beginning to stir, thoughts of home, of going back to college, and of life outside a theater of war.

But the day finally came, and I was headed north to Bien Hoa, orders in hand, and walking onto an aircraft that carried no camouflage or armament. Once again the plane filled to capacity with soldiers, and as the wheels came off the runway, a spontaneous cheer went up from the entire length of the plane. This flight was on its way out of Vietnam, and we were on it; no takeoff had ever been so exhilarating.

Once again we were many hours in the air, but this time we were headed back to a future that had been put on hold. As we crossed the international dateline, and the sun went down behind us, I took leave of the never-ending days and weeks, of Tan Son Nhut, of Vietnam, and of all the day-to-day activities in an environment where men are looking to either kill or be killed.

Because I had just two months left on my enlistment, I was discharged; there would be no stateside assignment for me. A DD214 was typed up, I was

fitted for a new set of Class As, and my active-duty Army career was over. A week later – it still seems unreal when thinking about it after all these years - I was enrolling for classes at our local community college, and starting on a beard that would stay on for some weeks. Compared to the long-hair fashions of those days my growth was quite modest, but it was glorious not having to shave, or report for formations, or for details, or for anything else military.

As a veteran returning to school, I was several years older than most of the other students, and I looked at them with the newly-acquired eyes of an old man. They were just kids; most of them had not been much of anywhere, and certainly not in a war. What did they know about life? Or for that matter, about anything else?

I had left Tan Son Nhut, but followed the media reports, for even though I was out of the Army, a part of me had been left there; it was an experience that has heavily influenced my life ever since.

In 1973, when the last of the American troops pulled out, I wondered how long the South Vietnamese could hold their own fighting a western-style war. The ARVN soldiers that I had occasionally come into contact with dressed sharply and seemed to be having a good time, but the entire South Vietnamese military mostly seemed to mimic the American way of doing things, and seemed content to let the Americans do most of the war's dirty work.

When Vietnam fell to the communists at the end of April 1975, and rockets came raining down on the base, I followed the news with a sadness bordering on grief. I was living near Chicago at the time, married less than a year and attending graduate school, when the war came to end; and I have to this day a few yellowing and tattered pages from the Chicago Tribune dated April 30, 1975, with the headline "Saigon Surrenders," and a map of

the city with Tan Son Nhut at the top of it, accompanying the stories of the final urgent evacuation of the remaining Americans from the city, along with the now-iconic picture of a helicopter evacuating people from the roof of the American Embassy.

When the soldiers of the former South Vietnamese Army were sent by the tens of thousands to "re-education camps," there was more sadness, and still more when the boat people poured out of Vietnam in great numbers, trying to stay out of the hands of the victors.

But when the communists re-named Saigon "Ho Chi Minh City", I was filled not with sadness but with anger, and to this day the new name sticks in my throat as a verbal symbol of the present government of that long-suffering country – ugliness instead of beauty, harshness instead of charity, oppression instead of justice – a jack-booted authority that tramples on history and grinds freedom into the mud beneath its unyielding heel.

It was, and is, an ideology that crawled straight out of the pit of Hell, and I was glad to have had the satisfaction of trying to send it back to where it came from, even if in a losing cause.

The young look forward to the future they do not yet know; the old look back at a past they know all too well. But there can be value in remembering, and so I remember.

I remember gathering for an extended family Thanksgiving dinner at my uncle and aunt's home in 1970, just two months after ETS, and being profoundly grateful for living in a land of peace and prosperity.

I remember going to Vietnam as a young man, part of a generation that came to adulthood during the 1960s and 70s - a generation that is now growing old, and beginning to be wearied by age, as the weight of passing years slowly increases.

I remember the war dead who were off-loaded from the choppers at the mortuary just down the road from us, on their way home but unaware of the fact, their lives cut short; they never had the opportunity to grow old and weary, and their names are carved on a wall in Washington, DC.

I remember reading that among the last American deaths from enemy fire during the war were two Marine guards, both of them in country for less than a month, who were guarding the main gate at Tan Son Nhut when a rocket landed on their position. I knew the location well, having passed by it a number of times during the course of my year there.

I remember seeing firsthand a beautiful country, torn in two over two radically different philosophies of life and governance, a nation that has now been unified under the red flag and iron fist of communism.

I remember learning that duty, honor, and country are not abstractions to be waved about like little flags on the Fourth of July, but tangible assets that can be used in the purchase of costly ideals, transactions made in the currency of blood, sweat, and tears.

And I remember being discharged from the Army with a green, yellow and Vietnam Service ribbon as one of the decorations on my dress uniform. It incorporated the colors of the flag of the Republic of South Vietnam, an experiment in freedom and democracy that no longer exists politically, but that lives on in the hearts of a generation of Vietnam veterans, of which I am one.

These things I remember, and I hope to never, ever forget them.



## ***The April 1966 Mortar Attacks***

By: Michael J. Oszman  
CW2[R]  
U. S. Army

My memory of the April 1966 mortar attacks was helping fight the AV gas fire. One tank with what I heard was filled with 50,000 gallons of Aviation Fuel blew up. The flames seemed to go hundreds of feet into the air.

There were several problems confronting the firefighters; these included the fear that the other tanks would explode and the lack of water to fight the fire. There was no way to fight this gasoline fire with water; the firefighters' were trying to cool down the other tanks. My job was driving an M-series water truck to any source of water and filling the truck. I would then back up to a fire truck and the water was pumped into the truck.

One of my memory bites was the SCREAM: "ONE OF THE OTHER TANKS IS GOING TO EXPLODE". This happened several times and all the men and equipment would beat a very hasty retreat. It was then back to the fire. The fire burned a long time—at least 6 hours. I feel that the Tan Son Nhut FIREFIGHTERS WHO FOUGHT THIS TERRIBLE FIRE WERE HEROES, and I was happy to help.



### ***UPDATE FROM MIKE***

Michael W. Sirriner, Spec 5  
3<sup>rd</sup> Region District Traffic Office  
ATCO/ACA/TMA/MACV  
507<sup>th</sup> Transportation Group  
TSN 67-68

An update on the Message from Mike printed in the March 2009 REVETMENTS: In my last message I reported on my pursuit of benefits from the VA, and the fact that the VA now agrees that if you were boots-on-the-ground in Vietnam, you had exposure to Agent Orange, and diabetes and prostate cancer are both accepted as

service connected. Depending upon severity, both together can generate a 50% disability or more, which also means you can get full medical care, too.

I encouraged everyone who was in Vietnam to go talk to a Veteran's Service Officer (VSO), especially if you have diabetes or prostate cancer. You may be eligible for some benefits and not even know it. (If you haven't been tested for either, you should, and it is easy. They say that every man will get prostate cancer if you live long enough.)

UPDATE: Just today I received my "decision" from the VA. I was granted disability for the prostate cancer (I had surgery 12-5-08, and the prognosis is good!), diabetes, and tinnitus, which I didn't even ask for. Payments are retroactive to date of application (7-28-08), and I am expecting a check for around \$16,000 this month, and am on 100% disability (\$2,769/month for the prostate cancer surgery) through June. As of July 1, I will go to 70% disability and get \$1,324/month.

Your VSO will help you with the paperwork, and the extra income and peace-of-mind will be well worth it. Do it, and spread the word!

I am no expert, but drop me a line at [msirriner@verizon.net](mailto:msirriner@verizon.net) if you have questions or want to talk about the good old days at Tan Son Nhut and in Saigon.



(Mike Sirriner at TSN)

Editor's Note: On this page is the result of some emails and snail mails back and forth between John Hagler, his daughter, and myself. The email below explains the picture and poem better than I could, so it is being copied as received. Enjoy!

Larry

Thank you so much for the current copy of the Revetments, as usual. I'm disabled and pretty much a shut in and this is one of my "shots in the arm" each month. I've seen it go from a very very good amateur publication to a very very good professional one. I'm pretty much wheel chair and home bound so can't make the reunions but please rest assured if you can that I always have and will be there very much in spirit each time. I met a lot of you while on "Courier duty" and didn't run into a sour apple in the bunch. Well, that's a lie. I was there wasn't I. :-). You guys and gals have a good time and enjoy yourselves. I'm sending you a check for \$25 by snail mail. It's not much but maybe it'll buy some chips or dip of something or name tags for the hospitality room or some small part. At least please know you're being thought of from New England. I'll eat some Chowder in your honor. Please keep up the good work.

I am not much on writing stories/prose but have had some poetry about Vietnam published that I would be willing to send you along with the appropriate release forms. Also, my daughter is a photographer and has one particular b & w photo she has won quite a bit of recognition and awards with which is of an arrangement of my jungle boots, boony hat, dog tags, and P-38. It was inspired by my tour in Vietnam and Arlo Guthrie's song, "When A Soldier Makes It.Home".

**WSU - RVN**  
(Revision)

1963 - 1967 - four years  
Woody's "Thundering Herd"  
at the Cotillion

A Sea Symphony, Brahms 2nd  
...Mendelssohn's Italian.

Good friends close, on our own  
for a wondrous journey.

College of Fine Arts  
Wichita State University  
Pure Heaven on Earth.

1967 - 1968 - eight months nine days  
AFVN, Gooooood Morning.....!  
White Rabbit, I Left My Heart....  
We Gotta Get Oughta This Place.

Soulmates and buddies, and--  
it don't mean nothin.

Alone on a terrifying trip.  
College of Deadly Arts  
Republic of Vietnam  
Absolute Hell on Earth.

2008 - four decades and a wake-up  
WSU 67 so very very far away,  
RVN 68 right here.  
Is Heaven that far--  
and Hell that close?

John Hagler  
Det 1400 ARFCOS



Original photo by Kaia Dawn Hagler, used with permission.  
The above Revetments photo by Larry Fry



John Hagler 1967



# Tan Son Nhut Association 2009 Reunion Registration

OPEN TO ALL INTERESTED IN THE HISTORY AND LEGACY OF TAN SON NHUT AND THE VIETNAM CONFLICT  
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NAME(S) OF YOUR GUEST(S): \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE LIST ANY SPECIAL NEEDS: \_\_\_\_\_

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY NOTIFY: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF ARRIVAL: \_\_\_\_\_ DEPARTURE: \_\_\_\_\_

## REGISTRATION FEES

NUMBER OF PERSONS ATTENDING \_\_\_\_\_ X \$130. = \_\_\_\_\_

PAYMENT MUST BE **MAILED** NO LATER THAN October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009

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## ***More on Pigeon Forge***

***Everything that you normally see at a very large tourist resort, is what you will find in Pigeon Forge, TN. Gatlinburg, TN is next to it. Both cities are resort cities.***

Great Smoky Mountain National Park. It is the most visited park in the nation.

Cades Cove, shows how we used to live. Plenty of deer can be seen. Sometimes bears can be seen.

Ripley's Believe It Or Not Museum.

Dollywood, is owned by Dolly Parton. She has a real steam locomotive, and you ride it.

Numerous dinner theaters.

Helicopter flights.

Great Food.

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Bungee jumping.

Cherokee Indian Nation is just across the mountain.

Take the Sky Lift to the top of the mountain for additional views, restaurants, etc.

### **October 1-31 Pigeon Forge Rotary Club Craft Fair**

Patriot Park. For more information call (865) 909-3446 2-31

### **Dollywood Music & Harvest Celebration**

The Annual Pigeon Forge Harvest Festival lasts from September 12-October 31 and features all sorts of events that display the very essence of autumn in the Smoky Mountains.

**Pigeon Forge Rotary Club Crafts Festival** - This crafts festival is one of the biggest in the area and runs from September 27-October 25. You'll see crafts from numerous artists from various states. You can find them at Patriot Park in the middle of Pigeon Forge (behind the Old Mill). They are located in huge red and white tents in the park. The proceeds go to various charities, so this is a great event to take part in.

**Dollywood National Gospel & Harvest Celebration** - Dollywood continues the fall festivities with amazing Southern Gospel throughout the park from October 3 - November 1 featuring over 250 free concerts by performers such as the Isaacs, Karen Peck & New River, Jeff & Sheri Easter, Gold City and so many more! October is absolutely one of the best months to visit Dollywood and the Dollywood National Gospel & Harvest Celebration is a huge reason why. The harvest celebration brings numerous craftsmen into Dollywood to showcase various Appalachian craftmaking such as basket weaving, spinning, fiddle making, wood working, glass blowing, and all sorts of other things sure to amaze all members of your family. Be sure to also check out our [tips for visiting Dollywood](#) as well.

**Visit the Tennessee Museum of Aviation:** [www.tnairmuseum.com](http://www.tnairmuseum.com).

### **Tennessee Artists and the Historic Arts & Crafts Community**

The Historic Great Smoky Arts & Crafts Community, founded in 1937 is the nation's largest organization of independent artisans. Close to a hundred [shops, studios, galleries](#), and inviting little eating establishments line an eight mile loop along Route 321, Buckhorn Road, and Glades Road. Most of the little Tennessee artists' [shops and studios](#) are clustered here and there along a winding road that follows the contours of the hills.

The Tennessee artists and crafters of the Great Smoky Arts & Crafts Community are a very talented and diverse group. You'll be amazed at their creative endeavors. As you take in a Gatlinburg art gallery or artisan shop, you will see gorgeous quilts, old-fashioned straw brooms with hand carved handles, exquisitely woven baskets, beautiful jewelry, hand dipped scented candles, Victorian ceramic pitchers, pottery, dulcimers, stuffed bears, leather vests, and much more. It is a perfect complement to your [Gatlinburg shopping](#) experience. You will marvel at the talent of the many painters who paint such wonderful scenes of the mountains. These original, hand-made treasures make great gifts or decorations for your home.

**Great shopping at the Tanger Outlet** ([tangeroutlet.com/sevierville](http://tangeroutlet.com/sevierville)). Over 100 shops in an outdoor mall

**AND OF COURSE—THE REASON TO COME IN THE FIRST PLACE—TAN SON NHUT ASSOCIATION REUNION!!**



**Tan Son Nhut Association**  
**P. O. Box 236**  
**Penryn PA 17564**

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{Graphic by TSNA Webmaster Charles Penley}

### **NEW MEMBERS 2009 TO DATE**

Jeffrey P. Bardsley 13th Tech Recon Squadron May 66-May 67  
Timothy Stinson 377th Combat Support Group Apr 69-Mar 70 [timothystinson@msn.com](mailto:timothystinson@msn.com).  
Paul Mancuso 460th FMS Oct 67—Oct 68 [pmancuso@nycap.rr.com](mailto:pmancuso@nycap.rr.com).  
Jimmy Avera 1876 Communications Squadron Jun 71-Jan 72 [jmavba@bellsouth.net](mailto:jmavba@bellsouth.net)  
Don Dawkins 460th AEMS Mar 69-Feb 70 [dawkinsl@bellsouth.net](mailto:dawkinsl@bellsouth.net).  
Raul Rodriquez 377th Transportation Squadron Apr 69-Apr 70 [csg377@hotmail.com](mailto:csg377@hotmail.com)  
Chobby A. Betts 460th Tac Recon Wing Oct 67—Oct 68 [chomar2@cox.net](mailto:chomar2@cox.net)  
Charles E. Hodges 8th Aerial Port Squadron Nov 65-Nov 66 [ed.dh@hotmail.com](mailto:ed.dh@hotmail.com)  
Keith W. Krier 460th FMS Dec 68-May 69 [kkrier@woh.rr.com](mailto:kkrier@woh.rr.com)  
Thomas J. DiGuglielmo 1876th Communications Squadron Feb 71-Dec 71 [tomdi2000@yahoo.com](mailto:tomdi2000@yahoo.com).  
Francis J. Bracken, Jr. 377th SPS Sep 67-Sep 68 [fjllb@cox.net](mailto:fjllb@cox.net).  
Dennis Lander 8th Aerial Port Squadron Nov 67-Nov 68 [bluz4u@hotmail.com](mailto:bluz4u@hotmail.com).  
Robert A. White 8th Aerial Port Squadron [rwhite1066@gmail.com](mailto:rwhite1066@gmail.com).  
Dale Borland 377th SPS Feb 68-Feb 69 [prindale@windstream.net](mailto:prindale@windstream.net).  
Gordon A. Case 509th R. R. Group-Davis Station Jun 67-Jun 68 [gacase@bellsouth.net](mailto:gacase@bellsouth.net).  
Arthur I. Mackey, Jr. 716 M. P. Bn. Co. "C Sept 69-Sept 70 [covert1970@aol.com](mailto:covert1970@aol.com)  
Michael J. Oszman '64; 66-67;68-69 [froggywizard@msn.com](mailto:froggywizard@msn.com).



### **FINAL PCS**

Jeffrey P. Bardsley, from Washington. 13th Tech Recon Squadron May 66—May 67

