

JULY 2009



A Memorial to the American Experience
In Vietnam

“All included, none excluded”

REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

THE BOMB DUMP DEC 4/5 1966 ATTACK

By: Mel Thompson
377th Munitions Maint. Sqdn.

Hello to all you TSN'ers out there, it's been almost 42 years since I have communicated with anyone from TSN! I accidentally came across this website yesterday looking for a veteran's biker website that I ran across in the local newspaper obits.....Odd how fate has a way of redirecting our lives, like it's the natural order of things and sooner or later, it's going to catch up with you. I would have been on here ten years ago had I known of it back then.

My name is Melvin (Mel) A. Thompson. I was a Sgt/E4 assigned to the 377th Munitions Maintenance Sqdn. (July '66-July '67) and my duty section was the TSN bomb dump. Since most, it seems, of the vets on this website were with the 377th Security Sqdn., my outfit had a lot in common with these guys due to the fact that they guarded our enclosed compound 24/7. They were everywhere, at the main gate to the ammo dump, patrolled on foot, in jeeps, with K-9's, and in towers. Needless to say I, and the rest of my outfit, felt very safe and secure with this man/ firepower around, plus we had enough ammo to start/finish another war (if the politicians back home would have let us).

I have been reading the postings and looking at pics for hours, and am

blown away by the flood of memories that have crept back into my consciousness. Many of the names and faces have faded into obscurity, but the events are as vivid as if they occurred yesterday. As I read these postings, especially the ones from my tour time period, a lot of it is in reference to the '66 Dec.4/5th attack on TSN. I was in my barracks that night, to the right of the main gate behind the hospital/mortuary compound (my hutch was the first one as you entered the barracks compound, it was the smallest one (10 man), the other 20 or so barracks were 100 plus man buildings).

I was awakened when the rockets were landing and the loudspeakers were ordering all non combat or without arms personnel into the bomb shelters. I can still smell that dank, mildew laced, urine soaked sandbag shelter (drunks would use these shelters looking for a convenient place to relieve themselves, and that was about all they were used for over the years).

It wasn't until daylight that we were allowed to leave the shelters and go to our duty sections, as by then it was deemed the attack was over and we could resume our everyday activities, but to stay alert. I had my own truck (Dodge, Power Wagon) at my disposal and immediately about 6 of us headed out to the bomb dump. Going around the flight line on the perimeter road we could see the smoke and damage that had occurred.

As we got closer to the dump the security activity was increasing with guards and K-9 units patrolling the perimeter fence. We saw 2 dead VC sappers in a ditch near the entrance to our compound and 2 or 3 more dead just south of the compound, as these had tried to blow our napalm and bomb revetments.

Later that day a time bomb was found on a TNT Conex container that was out in the middle of the compound, luckily the bomb was a homemade device which used a wrist watch for the timer and it had just stop working. Had it gone off it would have made one hell of a hole in the ground. As we drove up to the dump entrance we were informed that one of the guards who was assigned this post on a routine basis had killed one of the sappers and had been seriously injured in the firefight. I have often thought about him, since I knew him and we had talked several times a day for the past six months going in and out of the compound, even took him on occasion to the mess hall for lunch.

A couple of days after the attack we heard he was at the Army hospital downtown Saigon and paid him a visit. A couple of days later I heard he had been sent to a hospital in Japan and I never heard anything more about him. Since I have long ago forgotten his name, and there were 15 injured 377th security guards, he was the one wounded at the bomb dump gate entrance, would anybody know his name and whereabouts?

And lastly, the only other vivid memory I have of that attack was when I drove down to MACV Headquarters the next day to see the 15 or so VC sappers lain out on stretchers covered with ponchos. Some had their faces visible and I heard a couple of GI's standing around comment that a few of the dead VC were formally barbers at the base barber shop. It was a strange war, where one day this guy is giving you a shave and a haircut and the next day he is lobbing rockets at you! Hoping all my TSN buds are doing well, if any of you run across this and remember me, please give me an e mail heads up, love to hear from you. And, it's a great feeling to be back in the TSN fold, reading all these postings I can see that there is a great sense of love and caring for one another and I am honored to be a part of it! Thank you sincerely, Mel Thompson



The Bomb Dump at TSN



(Photos courtesy of Mel Thompson)



**2009 TSNA REUNION
PIGEON FORGE TENNESSEE
OCTOBER 15—18**

SEE PAGE 5 FOR MORE DETAILS

The Only Way To Freedom

By Chaplain James Warrington
TSNA Chaplain

The secret of American freedom is to be found, not in it's materialistic success, but in the moral and spiritual values which have guided her people.

Guizot, the French historian, once asked James Russell Lowell: "How long do you think the American republic will endure?" Lowell replied: "So long as the ideas of the Founding Fathers continue to be dominant." The historian Samuel Eliot Morrison has said that these Founding Fathers came to "make over the world in the principles of Christian philosophy – a City of God was their aim." President John Quincy Adams declared: "The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: -- it connected, in one indissoluble bond, the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity." But this was all done with the acceptance of separation of religious belief and civil government, neither one to direct the other.

My greatest thrill in World War II was not of Victory Day in Europe –great as that was – but in my barracks to hear General Douglas MacArthur on board our battleship "Missouri" at the surrender of Japan warn us about the future. General MacArthur said: "Men since the beginning of time have sought peace . . .but the mechanics of an instrumentality of a larger international scope have never been successful. Military alliances, balances of power, leagues of nations, all in turn failed, leaving the only path to be by the crucible of war. We have had our last chance. If we do not now devise some greater and more equitable system, Armageddon will be at our door. The problem is basically theological and involves a spiritual recrudescence and improvement of human character that will synchronize with our also matchless advances in science, art, literature, and all material and cultural developments of the past two thousand years. It must be of the spirit if

we are to save the flesh."

No world government began their college years with the vision of "The Parliament of mankind and the Federation of the world". They forgot you don't make a good omelet with bad eggs.

Legislation cannot produce character! Without renewal of character, urban renewal fails. Changing merely the environment of shelter does not change human beings from bad to good, from cheating to honesty, from hate to love.

Civil government cannot make individual persons sober, nor cure race prejudice. New, clean, beautiful housing soon becomes filthy without quality of living. "Put a pig in a parlor and it is still a pig."

Only a new spirit inside each individual, the Spirit of Christ in my soul and yours, can prevent quarrels and war! The law of divine love produces love of law. Such love can cure envy for wealth of others; produce initiative, energy, ambition; and hatred of laziness, indifference, filth, and disease. It is divine love that prompted us to ask ourselves: "How can we get rid of war in the world, until we rid ourselves of war in our own personalities?" Peace of mind and affections and a peaceful world have to come first into individuals, millions and hundreds of millions of individuals in each generation!

Our Maine philosopher, Rufus Jones, put it all in a nutshell: "You can't have the golden age with leaden individuals!"



How I Arrived In Saigon

By Joe Cartafalsa
7th AF/5VNAF Air Div.
1972 and 1975

It was winter 1971. I was splitting my time between electrical design for nuclear plants and law enforcement. I had flunked my draft physical in 1965 being classified 1-Y because of diabetes. In my two varied jobs I had already worked overseas beginning at the end of 1965. I was a certified pistol and rifle instructor.

I worked as a “job shopper” or contract worker. I always checked off the box meaning I would work anywhere (except in France). I had just returned from England and Germany for a medical procedure when a telephone message came to my parent’s home. I returned the call and a man asked if I would go to South Vietnam for the US Government. I replied that we can talk about it. He told me to go to the Philadelphia Airport and a ticket to Chicago would be waiting for me. He gave me an address and room number to go to when I got to Chicago. I went.

The guy was dressed cheaply and did not impress me. He asked to see my hands and feet – I think he wanted to make sure I had them! He asked if I was afraid of guns. He asked if I could start in Vietnam as a draftsman or junior engineer, bringing whatever tools I would need. I asked what all I would be doing and he simply said “whatever they tell you to do.” I like open ended job assignments.

I received instructions on required shots (i.e. cholera, plague, etc). I received travel orders to 7th AF Hq in Los Angeles and instructions on getting an RVN visa, also in LA. And a airline ticket to LA from Philly with onward connection to Travis AFB. There were a lot of hippy girls that tried to talk travelers to Vietnam from going. Drugs and alcohol were readily available as were other enticements.

We all got aboard a civilian chartered airline with stewardesses and meals. We went to Hawaii where we all bought booze because there was none on the plane. Much of the flight was fuzzy after that but I know we stopped at every rock in the Pacific including Wake or Midway, Guam, PI and Hong Kong. I finally arrived at Tan Son Nhut slightly after 9am. I think transit time was over 50 hours. I’ve been in many airports around the world but TSN was the bottom of the heap. The first thing I did was look for the latrine. I found it but it was overflowing with fecal matter all across the floor. An interesting introduction to this part of the third world.

After I got my bag I went to the military police customs post to leave the international airport area. A low ranking MP went through my bags, finding my syringes and insulin. I was told no drugs or needles were allowed in Vietnam. After explaining that insulin was not a drug he allowed me to keep it, but not the needles. Logic finally prevailed when I told him I would die if I could not inject my insulin.

Previously I had been in northern Germany – in the snow. When I deplaned the heat hit me in the face and sucked the air out of my lungs.

I was told someone from the company would meet me on arrival plus a telephone number and local base address. But this was Sunday, of course. I got a ride to the address I had and then tried the phone number. Next I tried the Transient NCO quarters because my papers said I was an E-9. I could not stay there because once I landed I was an O-1. Eventually I found a bunk in the Transient Officers Quarters. But no one would let me eat as I had no pass. I was seriously thinking about looking for a VC or NVA unit to join! I found out that there was no one in the office on Sunday because I would be the CQ assigned there on Sundays.

I slept a while and then ran into a guy from my plane going to Phu Bai in a

couple of days. He asked if I wanted to get some food and beer. Of course!

Without any ID my friend and I walked out an ARVN gate down to what I found out was the VNAF Officers Club. It had seen better days but it was great to get an ice cold “33” beer after being dehydrated on the plane and walking around the base. After almost finishing the meal, a couple of Vietnamese “hostesses” came over to make sure we were doing OK. After a couple of beers each and a Saigon Tea for each of them they asked us if we wanted to stay with them for the night.

Enough of this, this is a family publication. Anyway, we snuck back on base thru a hole in the wire and took a nap. Finally I found someone from my new office and was assigned a BOQ, got an ID, was issued flak jacket, helmet, BDUs, poncho and other stuff. An interesting 24 hours.

Author Note: This is being written in between multiple heart attacks between November 2008 and January 2009. Soon I’ll go in for a second open heart surgery. If I survive I’ll write more.—Joe



NOTATIONS FROM APPLICATIONS

I lived in the Communications Compound. Don’t remember the building number. Oops—found an old picture. It was Building 283. It was rather calm during my stay. One rocket lobbed in August 1971. It hit the far side of the runway. Work was pretty mundane except during Rolling Thunder. No one wanted to type up the daily casualty report. I did take a tour of Saigon, at least those places we could go. Took in the Bob Hope Show at Bien Hoa Christmas 1972. Rank was SSgt. Went on to retire as CMSgt. In 1994.

Herman G. Schoener
1876th Comm. Sqdn.
April 71—April 72

TET OFFENSIVE

1968

TAN SON NHUT AIR FORCE BASE

By

A1C James T. Brogdon

It all happened on the second day of TET,
All were asleep and no one was expecting it,
Then comes Charlie creeping and sneaking along,
Armed to the hilt singing Ho Chi Minh's song,
Watch all the Americans run and hide,
For they think the South Vietnamese are on our side,
That's what some of us did, I'm sure of it.

Then came the rockets that did more destruction,
It kept us awake and slowed down our production,
Charlie got a little overjoyed and brave one day,
So he blew a hole in the old BX roof they say,
Yipe! Charlie has been lucky all right,
Because he destroyed our Chapel one night.

As the GIs made it to the bunker safe and sound,
They were frightened by the crack-boom all around,
One rocket hit the heli pad not too far away,
Another hit the BX seconds later the same day,
The sound is terrifying as all will agree,
Some never heard it for they're dead you see,
Yes, some hit the barracks, and not just the ground.

STANDING UP

Contributed by:
Charles Penley
TSNA Webmaster
377th SPS



I stood up, I showed up.
I stepped forward, I raised my right hand.
I stood in the gap, I walked in the fire.
I did not run, I did not hide.
I did not dodge, I did not evade.
Consequently . . .
I have nothing to prove, no one to convince.
Those who matter already know.
Those who don't, never will.



Author Unknown

Tan Son Nhut Association 2009 Reunion Registration
October 15—18, 2009
Pigeon Forge TN

OPEN TO ALL INTERESTED IN THE HISTORY AND LEGACY OF TAN SON NHUT AND THE VIETNAM CONFLICT

YES, SIGN ME UP FOR THE REUNION!

NAME _____ BRANCH OF SERVICE _____
ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

NAME OF YOUR GUEST(S): _____

PLEASE LIST ANY SPECIAL NEEDS: _____

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY NOTIFY: _____

IS THIS YOUR FIRST REUNION?: _____ (IF NO, WHAT YEAR(S) DID YOU ATTEND TSNA REUNIONS? _____)

REGISTRATION FEES:

NUMBER OF PERSONS ATTENDING REUNION _____ X \$130= _____

OPTIONAL BUS TOUR :

Smoky Mountain Special 9:00AM – 12:30PM Friday October 16

Enjoy a three hour journey to the upper reaches of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. As you tour on the Smoky Mountain Special you will experience some of the most spectacular panoramic views of the Smokies. Visit the Sugarland's Visitor Center, beautiful mountain overlooks and Newfound Gap, where President Franklin Roosevelt dedicated the National Park in 1940. Your guide will give you the history of the park along with information about the area wildlife and legends of the region.

NUMBER OF PERSONS ATTENDING TOUR _____ X \$27. _____

TOTAL REMITTANCE \$. _____

PAYMENT MUST BE MAILED NO LATER THAN October 1st, 2009

PLEASE MAKE PAYMENTS PAYABLE TO THE **TAN SON NHUT ASSOCIATION** AND MAIL TO:

TAN SON NHUT ASSOCIATION
C/O GEORGE PLUNKETT
587 WILLIAMS CIRCLE
WEST COLUMBIA, SC 29172



SO COME ON DOWN

AND

“FORGE” NEW

FRIENDSHIPS

AND

RENEW

OLD ONES!

WE'VE GOT MAIL!!

From: DickeyAR@state.gov
To: Viet62@aol.com
Sent: 2/18/2009 12:57:37 A.M. Eastern Standard Time
Subj: A query from US Consulate Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), Vietnam

Dear Mr. Plunkett:

I am writing to you from the US Consulate in HCMC (formerly Saigon), Vietnam. I inadvertently ran across your website for Tan Son Nhat veterans while doing some research for an exhibit we are organizing at the consulate.

I am hoping that you would help me get out the word to your membership that we are seeking historic memorabilia to document the American presence in Saigon from the earliest time (first consul came here in 1907) to the present.

If any of your members have any materials or photos that they would like to donate, that would be wonderful. I understand you will have re-union later this year. If you could be so kind as to make an announcement regarding our project, I would be most grateful.

Many thanks,

Angela Dickey
Deputy Consul General
U.S. Consulate Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
dickeyar@state.gov
ardickey@aol.com

From: Viet62@aol.com [mailto:Viet62@aol.com]
Sent: Thursday, February 19, 2009 1:39 AM
To: Dickey, Angela R (Ho Chi Minh City)
Subject: Fwd: A query from US Consulate Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), Vietnam

Hello Angela:

In order to give your request the widest possible dissemination, I asked our webmaster to publish it on our web site. I hope to visit SE Asia again someday. I served 36 months with the USAF over there during the years 1962-63-64-66-67 as a ground radio operator - stationed at Tan Son Nhut, Ban Me Thuot, Soc Trang; Bangkok, Ubon, Udorn and Pittsanaluk in Thailand and Clark AB in the PI.

Thank you for serving our great country.

George

From: DickeyAR@state.gov
To: Viet62@aol.com
Sent: 2/19/2009 3:02:25 A.M. Eastern Standard Time
Subj: RE: A query from US Consulate Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), Vietnam

Dear George (if it is ok to call you that:)

Thanks so much for your quick action and response. I look forward to hearing from some of your membership. And thank YOU for your service to our great country.

You should think about coming back this way. You would not believe how Saigon/HCMC has changed. I would be pleased to show you around our consulate, which is on the site of the old Embassy building. Come to think of it, the Embassy in your day would have been at a completely different location.

Take care and all the best to you. Please let us know if we can ever be of service.

Regards

Angela



U.S. Consulate
Ho Chi Minh City



Welcome Home

By SMSgt Joseph S. Kricho, USAF, Ret.
1876 COMM. SQDN.
Dec 67-Dec 68

I have not failed to notice the number of times the phrase "Welcome Home" is used, whether in sharing stories, emails, or other correspondence. Here is my "Welcome Home" story.

I served in the 1876th Communications Squadron from Dec 1967-Dec 1968. Upon my return to the States, I had mixed emotions about the receptions I received. I was in uniform, and I was very proud of the ribbons on my chest signifying my service in Vietnam. While waiting for my flight out of San Francisco, I was approached by a group of 'hippie' panhandlers. I have never been the type to pass judgment without due cause. (I'm from Missouri: You have to "Show Me.") I reached in

my pocket and gave them a couple of dollars. As I walked away, I heard one of them mutter: "Thanks baby killer." Well, she didn't shout it out to the world, and, at least, she was thankful.

Later that day, when I arrived home in St. Louis, I was greeted by my family. When we got to our house, there was a banner covering the entire garage door stating: "Welcome Home Joe."

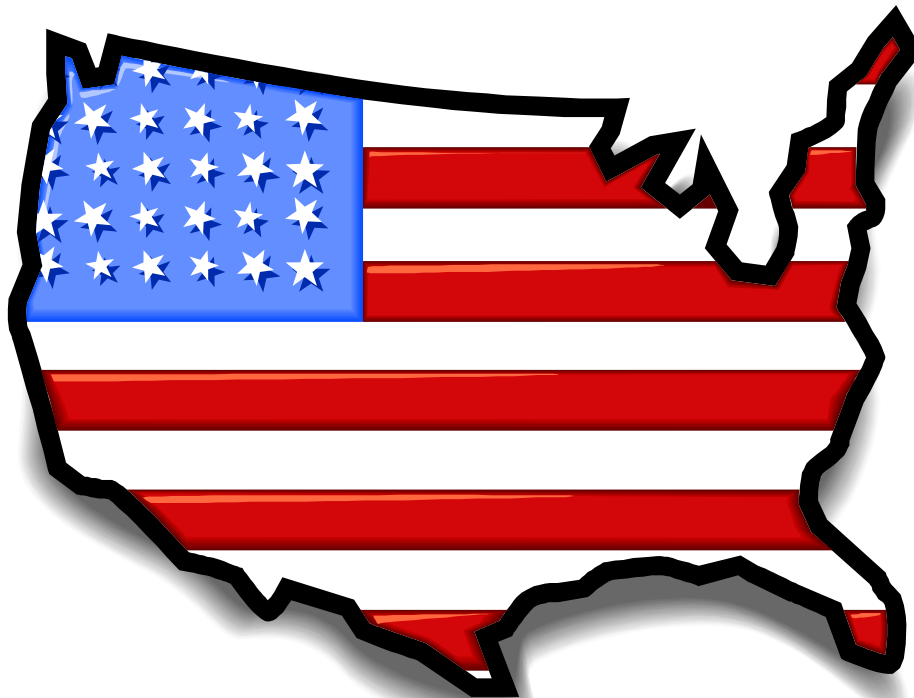
About a year later I left active duty, but returned 18 months later and ended up serving a total of 23 years. I retired in 1990. Throughout my career, I was most proud of my Vietnam ribbons. Although I had earned many others, of supposedly higher value, my Vietnam service ribbons took precedence, at least in my mind. As I approached the end of my career, I noticed fewer and fewer servicemen and servicewomen who wore those Vietnam ribbons.

Fast-forward to the year 2002:

I was now living in Michigan. It was an ordinary day and I stopped at Wal-Mart for some shopping. My car has a Michigan 'Vietnam Veteran' license plate. As I was walking towards the store, I heard a woman's voice from behind say: "Excuse me sir." I turned around to see an older woman approaching. As she neared, she spread her arms, came up to me and gave me a big hug. "I saw your license plate and I just wanted to say thank you for your service to our country."

We never know when or where our rewards will come. I found mine 34 years later, 500 miles from home and from a total stranger in a Wal-Mart parking lot.

"Welcome Home"



WELCOME HOME VIETNAM VETERAN!

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

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My Time at TSN

By: William E. Donnelly

I was assigned to TSN 9/66-9/67, 460th TRW, Armament & Electronic Maintenance Squadron; worked on RF-4C, RB57E, ECM RHAW Systems & the IR photo mapping systems aboard the RB57E.

Aviation Week and Space Technology magazine idiotically provided the VC with tail numbers and parking areas for the RB57E's.

I was there for Dec 4, '66, and yes, the barber in the airman's club was killed that night. I knew him personally; he was a New York Yankees fan (by day) and VC by night!

TSNA is a terrific organization, wish I could have made the connection much sooner.

As with a lot of the vets—I am now pursuing a claim with the VA for AO and PTSD.

My first barracks assignment was in the 800 area as I recall. The barracks were right across the street from where the C-123 (Spray Bombers) Ranch Hands were parked. There was plenty of prop wash and rain runoff to spread the Agent Orange around.

We were relocated to new barracks (700 area?) near the new chow hall, south of the 2 big radar domes.

I can recall a small fire that erupted from a tunnel through the French Graveyard behind our barracks about 1:30-2 AM. Lots of tracers bouncing off the grave stones, ours and Charlie's. One of the guys claimed he saw a VC run right through his barracks!

Another incident involved some air commandos supposedly playing catch with a white phosphorous grenade, it went off and one of the guys caught it right square in the chest. We saw the ambulance crew haul a guy off on a stretcher in bad shape and still burning. This unfortunate incident triggered a shake down to relieve the troops of any unauthorized weapons.

Do my recollections jar any memories? Hope to hear from some of the troops soon.

FAVORITE SAYINGS



Why must the phrase "it's none of my business" always be followed by the word "but"?