



# REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

A Memorial to the American Experience in Vietnam

JANUARY 2011

TURNING FINAL  
(Part 3 of 3)



By Jim Reed  
Scatback  
Jun 69—Jun 70

In SCATBACK, everything we did was done with great aplomb. In the true tradition of a great outfit, we worked hard and we played hard. There were two parties a month. One was with the FAA guys in Saigon and one was a dance at the SCATBACK lounge across from our hangar at Tan Son Nhut. The monthly dance was well known throughout Vietnam and we had no trouble getting every available nurse, embassy secretary and any other female to come. They loved it. We always did it up right. We all took turns putting the monthly dance together and, when it came to my turn, I was going to make it a special one that everyone would remember.

First, I rationalized that we needed more room. Normally we had the dance in the lounge, but we had all of our beautiful lawn area outside. SCATBACK had a full-time gardener on the payroll to take care of the front lawn, so it was really beautiful. I figured that if I could get two ten-foot high curtains strung on wire from our lounge to the hangar across the street, we could use the manicured lawn in front of the lounge and dance in the street that went between the hangar and the lounge and have complete privacy from the rest of the base. Six cases of San Miguel beer to the parachute shop took care of getting the curtains made up. Tiki torches from Clark on the front lawn and a great band flown in from DaNang on one of our C-118 runs was going to make this a memorable occasion. After a lot of effort, the big night finally came. But after we had sent the buses out to pick up all the nurses and secretaries, a crisis occurred. I suddenly discovered that we had no tiki torch fuel.

While I was wallowing in despair, someone said, "H..., tiki torch fuel is just kerosene, and we have a whole ramp full of it across the street."

I was saved! After draining enough JP-4 out of a T-39 to fill all the pots on our tiki torches, the final act was accomplished to make this the most memorable occasion that ever took place at the SCATBACK lounge. The busses filled with nurses showed up and, as the band played on, everyone danced to the light of the tiki torches and I felt a great sense of accomplishment.

What I didn't know was that JP-4 burns a lot hotter than the standard tiki torch fuel and soon the pots full of jet fuel started to boil and pressurize. The tiki torch flames started to grow and, pretty soon, ten tiki torches were a mass of two-foot wide flames shooting into the air, threatening to blow up and burn everyone there. They made a horrible hissing sound. People were running everywhere and shouting, trying to escape.

By this time, the majority of SCATBACKERS there had been imbibing somewhat, and it must have looked like a Chinese fire drill trying to get all those blossoming tiki torches put out. We finally got some fire extinguishers from across the street and were able to douse them.

It was a great party!

The monsoon in Southeast Asia made flying very challenging. What a sterile word "challenging" is. At times it made it terrifying. I could never understand why the Air Force did not put radar on the T-39 aircraft. Some of the little bug smashers even had radar. But the T-39 didn't, and with the kind of flying that they did, and as cheap as radar had become, it didn't make sense not to have it.

We sure could have used radar during the monsoon in Vietnam. During monsoon, the thunderstorms would saturate the place and, without radar, you couldn't stay out of the thunderstorm cells. We would stumble from one cell to the next. For departures in and out of Saigon, the Cagers (FAA guys) would give aircraft with radar clearance to deviate as necessary to avoid thunderstorms. Because the FAA departure radar was set on secondary returns (IFF transponder) they could not see the weather, so they would give the aircraft authority to use their own radar and deviate as necessary.

As these aircraft deviated, the Cagers would draw the route they took in grease pencil on the scope. Then, if we could get off in a reasonable time, say 10 or 15 minutes, they would run us up the grease pencil line and we'd have a pretty good chance of missing most of the cells. If there was a cell of B-52s en route, we'd follow along behind them to miss most of the thunderstorms. Ingenuity prevailed.

On one of our weekly trips to Clark Air Base in the Philippines, we had a secretary from the Embassy on board. In the climbout from Saigon, I decided to play a little trick on the Cager who was working Saigon Center. He was a good friend who stood well over six feet tall and had a voice like Paul Robeson in the 1936 version of the movie 'Showboat'.

In those days, in the war zone, there were scant few females, and you never heard a female voice on the radio. I decided that when we reached our assigned altitude, which required a mandatory call to departure, we would have the secretary make the call and see how he reacted. I asked her and she agreed.

During the climb, we had her practice on interphone with the headset. "Saigon Center, this is Scatback Hotel, level at Flight Level 290." She practiced until she had it down perfect. When we arrived at the assigned altitude, we gave her the headset and she made the call.

"Saigon Center, this is Scatback Hotel, level at Flight Level 290."

Without hesitation, my friend came back with "Uh, Scatback Hotel, better check your Co-Pilot, I think he's got his seat belt a little too tight."

On another trip, probably the toughest mission we had, I had another occasion to tweak him.

The SCATBACK Delta Mission was an all-night mission that landed at many of the bases throughout Thailand. It was a grinding flight, in which during the monsoon, you bounced from one thunderstorm to the next, trying to maintain a split-second schedule. Departure from Saigon was 2100 hours daily, and you didn't get back until about 0600 the next morning. The only blessing was that around 0300 all of the thunderstorms would begin to dissipate and, by the time you were returning, most of the cells had stratified (died) out.

When we made the mandatory inbound call, 100 miles from Saigon, it was beginning to get daylight and I recognized my friend on the radio and could hear the fatigue in his voice. He had obviously been on shift for some time and was probably as worn-out as we were, coming back from the all night SCATBACK Delta mission.

After the routine calls I said, "Hey, Paul, look at the size of that cockroach over on the right-hand side of your console." After a short time I asked, "Did you look?" His response was a weak, "Yeah." I guess that's the kind of stuff you do to break the monotony.

We were fortunate to have air-conditioned quarters for the SCATBACK Pilot billets. As we were stationed on Tan Son Nhut, we were able to avoid having to quarter in "Camp Alpha," where processing for R&R was accomplished and where people stayed while waiting for R&R transportation. Whenever we had friends come through for R&R processing we would always find an empty bed in the SCATBACK billets so they wouldn't have to stay at Camp Alpha. As I understand it, they had dirt floors, bunk beds, etc.

As an example of the various levels of living in Vietnam, when I got on the Pan American Charter Flight for my R&R, I was seated next to a young grunt, just out of the jungle and still in his grungy fatigues. As we taxied out we struck up a conversation and he said to me, "Boy, wasn't that Camp Alpha great? I almost gave up my R&R and stayed there."

Our route on one evening SCATBACK mission took us north out of Saigon to DaNang and then across Southern Laos, with the first stop in Thailand, at Nakhom Phanom, commonly referred to as NKP, or Naked Phanny. As we left the DaNang area, we heard a mayday on Guard channel, which we always monitored. Some poor bloke had gotten shot down in an A1E and bailed out, coming down on a sandspit in the middle of a jungle river with the bad guys on both sides. He had dug in under some logs and his buddies, also in A1s, were making strafing passes to keep the bad guys off of him. We were up at 28,000 feet and couldn't provide any assistance, but listened with intensity as this scenario was played out.

Somewhere, someone managed to scrape up a Jolly Green Rescue Helicopter and, as his buddies flew strafing passes, the chopper came in to pick up the stranded pilot. We heard the chopper come under withering fire from both sides of the river and, with the Co-Pilot's windshield shot away and one engine shot out plus many more hits, the

chopper had to abort the rescue attempt. Flying down the river below the level of the triple canopy jungle, he was barely able to get above the trees and make it home on one engine. No other choppers were available.

With dark settling in, his buddies continued to make strafing passes until they ran out of ammo. Then they made dry passes until the Vietcong (VC) figured out what was happening. As it finally got dark and they were all out of ammo and with no other resources available, the last transmission to the downed pilot was, "We'll come back and check in the morning. Good luck." That was the last we heard.

I guess that was only one of many sad stories to come out of Vietnam. I've thought of that Pilot often and wondered what happened to him.

I made some very close friends while assigned to SCATBACK. The missions were demanding and you were frequently called upon to use all the training and experience as a Pilot to safely accomplish them. I have stayed close to a number of my SCATBACK Colleagues over the years since we flew through that war. I believe that each of the individuals who spent a tour in Vietnam, regardless of the job they were in, took something special with them when they left. I'm not sure how to explain it, but it seems to be an extra sense of patriotism or a greater love for our beloved country. It was a very special time.

When I returned home from Vietnam, and even before I left to go to that war, I knew that the American public considered it a "bad" war. But I was angry at the way they treated their troops, blaming them for all the things that were wrong with that war. In one of my angry moods I constructed this bit of prose:

### **I wonder why!**

I wonder why in the dark of night  
when I feel a chill in the pale moonlight  
and my mind does things I can scarcely  
tell, as it asks me why my good friends fell

In the lonesome thought that has begged  
for light lo, these many years in the pale moonlight  
does a nation grieve for her long-lost sons  
who have given all so that she might run

Does the soul regret lost days and nights as it  
hangs in space in the pale moonlight? Was the quest  
for freedom worth the price?

**"Yes! I'd give my life and give it twice,"** my friends  
would say, who have gone away.

But does a nation understand the sacrifice of the  
soldier man? The pain, the loss of no more days  
to watch his family slowly raise.

Then, how much is a soldier worth when violent people  
scorch the earth? We all know freedom isn't free.  
And this soldier man is you ... and me.

All are patriots one by one until the call is no more fun  
and there where with we all shall stand, the duty finds the  
lesser man. So listen up all you out there who go to church  
and lend a prayer, think more of what your freedom cost,  
who paid the price and what was lost.

And lend a prayer for those out there who duty found the  
greater man, so those of us who breath free air will live  
a life free from despair.

I believe a nation does have a conscience, and the up-welling of support for the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, in part, was due to the guilty conscience they had for the way they treated the troops coming home from Vietnam.



Department of  
Veterans Affairs

Office of Public Affairs  
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420  
(202) 461-7600  
www.va.gov

# News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
December 17, 2010

## **VA Processes First Claims for New Agent Orange Presumptives** *New Program Speeds Approval for Vietnam Veterans*

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has decided more than 28,000 claims in the first six weeks of processing disability compensation applications from Vietnam Veterans with diseases related to exposure to the herbicide Agent Orange.

“With new technology and ongoing improvements, we are quickly removing roadblocks to processing benefits,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “We are also conducting significant outreach to Vietnam Veterans to encourage them to submit their completed application for this long-awaited benefit.”

VA published a final regulation on Aug. 31 that makes Veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam and who have been diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease, ischemic heart disease, or a B-cell (or hairy-cell) leukemia eligible for health care and disability compensation benefits. With the expiration of the required 60-day congressional review on Oct. 30, VA is now able to process these claims.

Vietnam Veterans covered under the new policy are encouraged to file their claims through a new VA Web portal at [www.fasttrack.va.gov](http://www.fasttrack.va.gov). Vietnam Veterans are the first users of this convenient automated claims processing system.

If treated for these diseases outside of VA’s health system, it is important for Veterans to gather medical evidence from their non-VA physicians. VA has made it easy for physicians to supply the clinical findings needed to approve the claim through the new Web portal. These medical forms are also available at [www.vba.va.gov/disabilityexams](http://www.vba.va.gov/disabilityexams).

The portal guides Veterans through Web-based menus to capture information and medical evidence required for faster claims decisions. While the new system currently is limited to these three disabilities, usage will expand soon to include claims for other conditions.

VA has begun collecting data that recaps its progress in processing claims for new Agent Orange benefits at [www.vba.va.gov/VBA/agentorange/reportcard/index.html](http://www.vba.va.gov/VBA/agentorange/reportcard/index.html).

Submitted by Carol Bessette, TSNA Treasurer

**An April 15th Reminder**

By Carol Bessette  
TSNA Treasurer

April may seem a long way away, but some members may "attack" their tax forms early. Just a reminder: since TSNA is now a 501(c)(19) tax-exempt organization incorporated in the Commonwealth of Virginia, any donations made to TSNA after February 22, 2010 (the effective date of this status) are deductible to the extent allowed by law. If you have questions about a 2010 donation, please contact me ([jbessette@aol.com](mailto:jbessette@aol.com)) or Larry Fry ([lfry2@dejazzd.com](mailto:lfry2@dejazzd.com)), the TSNA Director of Membership.

## From Arlington to Sarasota

By: Terry Longpre  
377th Supply Squadron  
Jan 68—Jan 69

Allow me to preface this week's column by saying, "Only two people died for me, Jesus Christ and the American Soldier."

Saturday was an outstanding day for me as I have mentioned in previous columns 'Wreaths Across America' is one of my favorite projects. I have seen pictures of wreaths at Arlington National Cemetery for years and always thought what a wonderful way to celebrate the meaning of Christmas, the birth of Jesus Christ and to honor those in the military who have gone before us.

Saturday was not only cool; it was foggy, overcast and windy when I mounted up and headed south to the Sarasota National Cemetery for the Annual Wreath Laying Ceremony.

When I arrived I found fifty plus motorcycles already sitting in a long line with the riders standing around talking.

Much to my surprise all of the wreaths had already been placed. I talked with Cemetery Director Wes Jones and he told me 300 people, including students from Sarasota Military Academy, Civil Air Patrol Cadets and leaders, along with the motorcyclists laid the wreaths in about 30 minutes.

Last year there were 300 wreaths at the cemetery and this year they numbered 2,096. Most of them were purchased by individuals, with some being sponsored by corporations and military organizations.

Linda Carson of Sarasota's Channel 40 was the emcee for the ceremony and Representative Greg Steube, an Iraqi war veteran was the guest speaker. In Greg's speech he quoted President Ronald Regan saying "Freedom is never more than one

generation away from extinction." That statement is real and true. Therein comes the thought behind teaching our younger generations the meaning and cost of our freedom. Greg also said "Fewer than 10 percent of Americans can claim the title 'veteran.'" To me that is an amazing number, so few to protect so many.

In 1992 Morrill Worcester of Worcester Wreath's donated 5000 Christmas wreaths to Arlington National Cemetery. Wreaths Across America is now an annual event which takes place on the second Saturday of December at all of the National Cemeteries.

During the wreath laying ceremony at the base of the central cemetery flag pole, the sun came out and provided a clear blue Florida sky to warm us up. In my opinion it was not sheer luck it happened at that moment, God knew what he was doing. Our souls were warm and at that point so were our bodies.

One of the main purposes for the ceremony is to honor all veterans from the earliest to the last one who fell protecting our rights and freedoms as Americans.

If you would like to contact me please do so at [PGRTerry@gmail.com](mailto:PGRTerry@gmail.com).

God bless America and those who have served and are serving in uniform



## THE VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

This information was forwarded to the TSNA at it's meeting in San Antonio by:

Faith Kanno, Head Librarian, Marine Corps Research Library Library of the Marine Corps, Quantico, VA

(Faith Kanno is the daughter of our TSNA Chaplain Bob Chaffee)

The Veterans History Project (VHP) collects and preserves the remembrances American war veterans and civilian workers who supported them. These collections of first-hand accounts are archived in the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress for use by researchers and to serve as an inspiration for generations to come. The Project collects remembrances of veterans who served in World War I, World War II, the Cold War, Korean War, Vietnam War, Persian Gulf War (1990-1995), or Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts (2001-present). U.S. citizen civilians who actively supported war efforts (such as war industry workers, USO workers, flight instructors, medical volunteers, defense contractors, etc.) are also invited to share their valuable stories. VHP relies on volunteers throughout the nation to collect veterans' stories on behalf of the Library of Congress. These stories are made available to researchers and the general public, both at the Library in Washington, D.C., and via the VHP website.

Home page: <http://www.loc.gov/vets/vets-home.html>

There is more: this is Texas Tech's program of the Oral History of Vietnam.

The Vietnam Center and Archives  
Attn: Jason A. Stewart.

[jason.a.stewart@ttu.edu](mailto:jason.a.stewart@ttu.edu) or [www.Vietnam.ttu.edu](http://www.Vietnam.ttu.edu) or Box 41041, Lubbock, TX 79409-1041

## Chaplain's Corner

By: Bob Chaffee  
TSNA Chaplain

"A New Year Dawns". I have used that title for articles and meditations for almost 50 years. It is not that one must make "resolutions" or that there will be startling predictions for new - next year. It's just a reminder that there is a chance for us to put away old things that limit us or ever hurt our present beings and even our futures. Now, for a person who has been in his lifetime at least four wars, many military developments and some very difficult financial seasons it could sound presumptuous to suggest a brightness behind the theme "A New Year Dawns". That is not the case at all. What is suggested is that we stop and spend time evaluation on pasts and realize that God has given us more time on this earth to be more of a value for mankind and put into action some part of us to pay off the good things that have come our way and to overcome the thoughts, actions and events that are on the negative side of our lifetime ledger.

I realize this a more "preachy" Chaplain's Corner than I usually write but it is part of the feeling that comes at this time of a year to the mind of one of the four most aged members of TSNA and an old clergy person. But here is the best part; A blessing for us all: May God watch over us and bless us all in the year 2011". And may all His critters say "Amen".



## Remembering Colonel Cook, USMC

By: Donald Reiter  
Air Force Finance  
Jun 66—Jun 67

Hi, Larry.

I'm not sure who the appropriate person is to contact about this, but I would like for the association to remember Col. Donald G. Cook,

USMC. December seems an appropriate time, since he died in December, 1967. He won the Medal of Honor as a prisoner of the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. I don't think he is well known. I first heard the name when my daughter was assigned to the USS Donald Cook. She sent me a copy of his biography. After reading the book I was really blown away. I think we all need to hear his remarkable story.

(From the Editor:) I suggest you type Col. Cook's name into your favorite internet search site and find more information.

Don did provide one web site that I can repeat without any copyright problems. It is courtesy of the U. S. Marine Corps History Division:

[http://www.tecom.usmc.mil/HD/Whos\\_Who/Cook\\_DG.htm](http://www.tecom.usmc.mil/HD/Whos_Who/Cook_DG.htm)



## NOTATIONS FROM APPLICATIONS

Our compound was on the far side of the base, just down the road from the Army mortuary. We provided communications for Allied Intelligence operations from throughout South Vietnam, passing information from the field to MACV Headquarters at TSN. I missed TET—it happened 1 1/2 years before I got there—and I missed out on the rocket attacks which targeted the populated part of the base (got to read about them in Stars & Stripes afterwards). It was the longest year of my life, and I was very thankful to come home in one piece.

Ron Boydston  
525th Combat Evaluation Group  
Sept 69—Sept 70

Reported to the 460th TRW right out of AMOC. Was at George AFB prior, with the 8th TFW. They were PCS to Obon. I elected to go in country. Selected the Flight Line position with Det. 1 as Line Officer for the RB-57's and other aircraft. Lived off base in leased quarters. Was moved

on base just prior to Tet 67. Was on the balcony watching the fireworks of Tet New Year and told everyone to report to work. As a former Army Guard M48 Platoon Sergeant, I knew what incoming sounded like. I jumped into a jeep with an O-1 pilot and drove out onto the flight line. I helped pull together maintenance troops to pull RF 101s and RF-4s out of burning revetments. Aircraft were burning, hangars were on fire due to Soviet 100 mm rockets. Tracers (red and green) were crossing the flight line maintenance/revetment areas, and we saved at least 6 aircraft and launched the O-1 and others.

Lowell A. Grimaud  
Det. 1 460th TRW  
67-68

I lived in the 800 area at the end of Charlie Row #894. I was on the C-130 ramp on the first night of Tet. We took cover in the sandbagged area between load planning and the flight line. I went on numerous mobilities, mostly to Song Be, Phouc Vinh, and Loc Ninh on both C-130's and C-123's. I went back to TSN in April of 2006. Great trip.

Dennis Lander  
8th Aerial Port Squadron  
Nov 67—Nov 68

First assigned to live loading, I think for around six months. Then picked for tryout in Mobility "The Chosen Few". Was accepted—travelled throughout Nam on missions. Lived in barracks #872 when at TSN. (Not "Home" much). Was in country for TET 72, mostly at Kontum, the worst place I've ever been. For last couple months was stationed at Can Tho, with Mobility Operation Location "Olay". Mobility time was great! Best guys I've ever worked with!

Cary D. Louderback  
8th Aerial Port Squadron  
August 71—August 72





## Remembering TET '68

Michael Mitchell  
12th. R.I.T.S.  
Apr. '67 - Nov. '68

I have to start out by saying that I have just observed another Memorial Day, #63, in my life and it reminded me of what is really important. I am here today because of the many sacrifices made by men I never knew, men who were young men so many years ago in a place that is listed in "history" today, Vietnam. To be exact, Tan Son Nhut AB, Republic of Vietnam during a time that when I look back seems like yesterday but many years ago per my calendar.

The more I read the stories in "Revetments", the more I realize how little I knew about what was going on around me in those days, what was being done by men who deserve the life long respect of men like me but yet may never know that we existed because there were so many of us stationed at that airbase, each doing his job and doing it well without regards to what it might mean to someone else. I believe that's what is learned by one who serves in the military, you do your job and go about your business without realizing how important that job might be. How many lives have I saved or how many will be saved in the future by what I'm doing right now. We tend to not think in the present, it's our job and we do it, one more day in-country and one day closer to going home.

But later, in the future, we sit and look back, we learn that what we did at the time meant so much in the overall scheme of history.

I remember Tet '68, the night suddenly lit up with tracers, the sound of explosions around the base and the 122mm rockets that for weeks would hit the base. I remember also being scared because I didn't know what was going on, everything was suddenly different from my normal routine. I had been on the base for 8

months and the war was on the "perimeter" of the base, or downtown, or in the "boonies". But this night, the war was real, it was close, and I could feel it closing in on me. I was in the Air Force and was unarmed but then why would I need to be armed, the war was somewhere "off in the distance" and anyway, I worked in a very safe building with others like me who did classified photographic work, why did we need firearms? We had a base that was secure and protected by the Air Police and anyway, the VC would never attempt to attack this great base, it would be useless and a suicide mission with no possible chance of succeeding. But this night, Tet '68, this 20 year old airman was starting to realize that something was wrong, something didn't fit and for the next several months my life changed in so many ways.

I grew up, proud to admit it, during the next few months. I was given a chance to leave Tan Son Nhut in April '68 but felt that my "job" in Vietnam was not completed so I extended my tour for another 6 months. That's right, I extended my tour because I had a job to do that was not finished, I knew my job in my field and could do it better than anyone else at the time and had lived through the many rocket attacks, the probes of the base, and even survived being pinned down by a sniper that had gotten into one of the radar towers.

But my story is just one of the many that could be told, nothing special, nothing heroic, just a guy doing his job. I don't even have a wound to show my children, at least not on the outside.

I hear the rumblings, "Let's get to the point" and the point of my story about TSN is the guys that I never knew did so much to protect me. The guys that faced the enemy that I never faced, the guys that did their jobs in a very professional manner. The ones who, in a lot of cases, made the ultimate sacrifice to carry out their assigned duty without regards to who they were

protecting. I have only become aware of some of these things while reading "Revetments" and felt that I had to say something to the many who, like me at the time, were just doing their jobs. I feel that I owe a debt to so many and now all I can say is "Thank You".

I know that when I returned home I was treated differently by a lot of my friends and those people that I would meet. Once they found out that I was in the military and had served in Vietnam, well, let's just say that even in August it could get a bit chilly.

We, the returning Vietnam vet, endured some things that we didn't deserve but I'm sure that most of us took it in a military manner because we knew what we had done for our country and do to this day.

### Prayer For A Fallen Warrior

Do not Stand at my grave and weep.  
I am not there, I do not sleep.  
I am a thousand winds that blow;  
I am the diamond glints on snow.  
I am the sunlight on a ripened grain.  
I am the gentle autumn rain.

When you awaken in the morning's  
hush,  
I am the swift uplifting rush  
Of quiet birds in circled flight.  
I am the soft star that shines at night.

Do not stand at my grave and cry.  
I am not there. I did not die.

Anonymous American Indian

Submitted by Harlan Hatfield  
460th AEMS (PMEL)  
Jan 67—Jan 68

### FAVORITE SAYINGS



"If the mountain was smooth, you couldn't climb it"

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I am ALWAYS looking for additional articles, anecdotes, pictures, etc. to use in this publication. Please contact me at: [lfry2@dejazzd.com](mailto:lfry2@dejazzd.com). You can send as part of an email, as an attachment to an email or whatever! Thank you. Larry

**NEW MEMBERS** 

Mr. Thomas A. Beardslee	MO	tabeardslee@aol.com	Nov 70 - Dec 71	6250th Supp. Sqdn. (OIP)	Dir of Info. 7th
Mr. Richard M. Cummings	ME	cummings@tidewater.net	Oct 67 - Aug 68	460th FMS Prop Shop	
Mr. Paul W. Elledge	SC		Jul 67 - Jul 68		
Mrs. Mary Ann Carlson	OR	mabillcl23@charter.net	N/A		N/A

**IN MEMORIAM**

Mr. Joseph Cartafalsa FL Jan72-Nov72/Jan75-Mar75 7th AF/5VNAF Air Div.

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