



REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

A Memorial to the American Experience in Vietnam



MAY 2013

FROM THE EDITOR:

GREAT NEWS!

In the November, 2012 Revetments we had an article regarding the father of Kim Pierre, who works in the Gift Shop at the National Museum of the U. S. Air Force.

We presented a TSNA coin to her to be given to her father, a Tan Son Nhut veteran, who had been hospitalized for over 7 months at that point

So here we are, 6 months later, and we get the following email from Kim:

"Your organization was so sweet to get my father a coin when you were here at the National Museum of the USAF. I just wanted to update you and let you know that after a year in the hospital he has been released and is back home where he is doing very well. I'd like to think that your presentation to him had something to do with giving him the strength and courage to keep fighting and get better. Thank you again for making time for a fellow Viet Nam Vet!

Sincerely,

Kim Pierre"

SPECIAL REUNION ATTENDEES

Fellow Members,

The mission statement of the Tan Son Nhut Association is "To assist military personnel of all eras and their families whenever and wherever possible."

To that end I have invited several military widows who live in the Chattanooga area to dine with us at the reunion.

One of them has so far replied in the affirmative.

Her email follows.

Thanks,

George

**Charity & SGT Clay Prescott
2/278 ACR**

In 1988 after graduating from high school Clay joined the United States Marine Corps and served in Desert Storm. After being honorably discharged he went to work for the family business. In 2006 while attending Middle Tennessee State University he met a recruiter for the National Guard and decided to enlist for the second time in his life.

In April 2007, I was introduced to Clay by a neighbor. Our first date consisted of us watching Oprah on his couch. We talked for hours and he was very sweet and comfortable to be with. After a couple more dates he wanted to get the kids together so we grilled out at his place. The girls all got along well. After that we really didn't do much without the kids being around. Several months later Clay got down on one knee on the deck in his backyard and asked me to marry him.....I of course said yes!!! We were all getting pretty excited about combining our families into one. Little did we know that after a few months of planning we were about to be hit with a little surprise.....I became pregnant with our newest addition. So we decided to discuss what our next course of action should be. I wanted to wait until after the birth; he wanted to be married before she was born. So after many discussions he won and so we were back to planning our perfect wedding - no bridesmaids or grooms-men just me him and our girls.

On July 13, 2008 in front of family and friends we became husband and wife .Our daughter Arden was born

6 weeks later. We moved into our dream house and life was good!!

Fast forward a year. Clay's Unit 2/278 ACR received orders that they would be deploying to Iraq in February 2010. They had to report to Camp Shelby, MS in December 1, 2009.

He returned home a couple days before Christmas but had to return 6 days later. Christmas was his favorite holiday so he enjoyed every minute of it. Little did any of us know this was going to be his last one. His unit got leave the first week of Feb 2010 to see family before they were to deploy on Feb 9 to Iraq. Me, our daughter Arden and his mother drove to Biloxi, MS to spend time with him and see him and his unit off when they left. We arrived on Feb 2, 2010. He was in a great mood and was so excited to see us and was also excited about his deployment. He danced around with our 17 month old little girl, all was well. It was getting somewhat late and we decided to go to bed. I woke up the next morning and for some reason I noticed he wasn't snoring anymore so I called his name and I got no response. I called the front desk and asked for a paramedic. They immediately got there and he wasn't breathing. They started trying to bring him back. He was sent to the nearest hospital with us following right behind. He was moved to ICU later that evening. Less than 24 hours later Clay was pronounced brain dead and I had to make the most horrifying decision to disconnect life support. So on Feb 4, 2010 I said goodbye to my husband for the last time.



JOURNEY TO THE US

By: Susie Ahrens
TSN Employee
1967 - 1973



The journey from Viet Nam to the US and the experience of adapting to the new life.

April 1973 - After the US Armed Forces pulled out of Viet Nam, the International Commission of Control and Supervision (ICCS) was set up by the US to supposedly supervise the "cease fire".

The ICCS consisted of 4 delegations from 4 countries: Canada, Indonesia, Poland and Hungary.

I got a job as a legal secretary for Col. Wolfe, the Canadian Judge in the Legal Office. 8 months later, the Canadian delegation pulled out of the ICCS because of frustrations with the whole situation. They probably knew that it was a waste of time.

April of 1975, when South Viet Nam was at the end of the war, the North Viet Nam forces were taking over the South one town at a time.

South Viet Nam was in total chaos, people were trying to flee the country by whatever means they could find.

The American government made a final attempt to evacuate a number of people who were high ranking officials and who worked for them before, but the plan was not going well, because the other side did not keep their end of the bargain.

Since I worked for the ICCS, and even though the main office was downtown, my boss had a satellite office on TSN so I was able to access the base any time. With the help of my cousin's husband who was an American, my adoptive mother and I were able to get to the last American outpost on TSN airbase called the MACV Compound on Apr 27th with my sister-in-law and five young kids. Her husband (my brother) was an Air Force officer so he had to be at his post. The next day, my sister in law and the kids were allowed to get on a plane and flew to Guam Island with the cousin's husband. My mother and I were left behind because we were in a lower priority category.

The next day, the city was pretty much taken over by the North Vietnamese forces.

We woke up to find no airplanes, no American military personnel around and I was certain we were abandoned. I could hear gunshots and shelling and I knew the battle was very close.

One of the buildings nearby was on fire, apparently it was hit by a rocket.

Dead bodies were everywhere, on the ground and hung on barbwire fence. Many people decided to leave the compound for fear of death, so there was a mass exit.

I was terrified. Two young kids who were left behind by their families clung to me. I promised them I wouldn't leave them. It was a hard decision because it was so hopeless, I faced a life and death dilemma, but I decided to stay. The city was chaotic, no law and order, looting, robberies, killings everywhere, I knew that my home had been looted, we might even get shot on the way home, and I did not want to live under the Communist regime.

Luckily, it turned out to be a right decision. That same afternoon, from out of nowhere, American Marines appeared and started to clear the parking lot with bulldozers, and an hour later, big helicopters appeared in the sky, but as they started to land, they had to take off because of gun shots from the ground somewhere.

The crowd started crying, we felt even more desperate, but about 15 minutes later, they came back and landed one by one, and we cheered as we knew we would be rescued.

One young Marine told us to get in line and leave all of our belongings because they needed to make room for people. I hurried to grab a few things and stuffed them in a small plastic bag. During the chaotic moment, I remembered a folder that contained proof of my schooling and working experience, but forgot about the one with all family pictures.

As the helicopters took off, we were shot at from the ground. I saw one helicopter get shot and smoke came out from the side, everyone started crying and praying. Two Marines sat by the doors on both sides of the helicopter with machine guns and tried to calm us down and told us that they would do anything to protect us. Luckily we got out OK and the helicopter flew over the Pacific Ocean and landed on the aircraft carrier USS "Hancock".

Hundreds and later thousands of Vietnamese boarded this ship, way over the ship's capacity. So the crew had to push several helicopters that were on deck into the sea to make room.

I couldn't believe that they would sacrifice millions of dollars to save a bunch of Vietnamese refugees, human lives at that time seemed so cheap and worthless! The next day, we listened to the radio about South Viet Nam being completely taken over by the communists and we felt like something died inside us. People were sobbing, it was the saddest day. We thought we would never see Vietnam again.

My mother started getting sick on the ship, it must have been too big of a physical shock. There was not enough food or medicine and we lived on crackers and water for 3 days before the ship reached the Philippines. We disembarked on Grande Island as it was setup as a refugee camp. We were given food, clothing and personal necessities.

They tried to ship us out right away to Guam Island but my mother was worse so she was taken to the Naval Hospital at Subic Bay. And since I was the only relative, they allowed me to stay in the hospital with her. A week later, my mother died in her sleep. It was so sudden since she was not very old, nor very sick. I was devastated. The government buried her in Clark Air Force Base in Manila.

The hospital had to pull some strings with the Philippine government so I could go to the cemetery, but I was escorted by an armed guard.



An Air Force chaplain was there and said a few words, and even though I was Buddhist, his presence was very comforting at the time.

I decided to stay at the hospital to help out as an interpreter and some times as a counselor for other patients.

I even delivered a baby one night. I was there about a month and a half, lived among the patients, working around the clock.

The hospital staff gave me a farewell party. The Hospital Administrator, Captain Youngman and the Head Nurse,

Commander Baker, personally thanked me and gave me a letter of appreciation and a plaque.



Then we all were shipped out on a Medevac flight, from Subic Bay to Indiantown Gap, PA

Life was quiet in the camp, and through the American Red Cross, I got in contact with my brother and his family, who were in Camp Pendleton, California.

Apparently my brother (who was a a Major in the VNAF and a navigator) and a few other officers took an airplane and flew to Guam and miraculously met up with his wife & kids.

The government set up several agencies to find sponsors for us, and we found one sponsor who would take all of us. This man claimed he owned an airline out of Las Vegas and would have jobs for both me and my brother in Nevada.

The plan was changed at the last minute. My brother and his family were flown to Salt Lake City. The sponsor put them in a basement of his relative's home and left.

In the mean time, I was flown to his house in Boulder City, Nevada and his wife immediately trained me on cooking, housework and operating a small radio switchboard – connecting calls from the city to the boats on Lake Meade, timing the calls and doing the bills.

I'd work from dawn to dark, apparently they've been saving all the cleaning job inside and outside the home for me. On weekends, we would go and clean other buildings and gas stations (I guess they did this on the side for extra money), and every time I asked about my brother, he would lie and promise that we would be united in Nevada soon. I remember thinking, OMG, what have I got myself into ?

After 4 or 5 weeks, my brother managed to get the phone number where we were, and tried to call, but the sponsor would say that I was out having my hair done or at the movie.

When we finally made the connection, he sent me some money so I could travel to Salt Lake City.

When I told the sponsor I was leaving, they tried to stop me and offered to pay me \$5.00 a day to stay, but my mind was made up so he offered to take me to Salt Lake City in his small airplane.

So the next day we flew to Salt Lake City, only to stop at a small town in the middle of nowhere called Grouse Creek to spend the night in an old abandoned house.

I thought I was going to be killed and no one would ever find me, so I found a room with door and barricaded myself and stayed up all night to be on the alert.

I made it to Salt Lake City and I was so happy to see my brother & family.

We lived in a one bedroom basement full of spiders for about a month, The neighbors and churches came and helped us with money, clothing and necessities. My brother later found a job making \$3.00 an hour at some warehouse and we rented a house on 2nd Avenue.

I went to the Holy Cross Hospital because it was walking distance from home and was accepted for a position in the Credit Dept. despite the fact that I had no experience in credit and collection.

Apparently the Supervisor of that office was touched by my story and wanted to give me a chance so I was picked over 7 other applicants who all had many years of experience in the field. I later moved to the Accounting Dept. and stayed at the hospital for 17 years.

Life in the US was tough as first, everything was different, and we had to learn the most basic things, like operating appliances, shopping for food, learning the city, the bus system, etc.

None of us knew how to drive. We were the first batch of Vietnamese in Utah, so there was no one to learn anything from. The children ranging from 12 to new born, struggled to adapt to a new language, and schools. Luckily I spoke English so learning was not as tough as other families who did not know the language, and we met a lot of good people and neighbors who would take us places, and showed us how things worked.

The first winter in Utah was interesting, since we came from a tropical country and only saw snow in the movies.

We couldn't wait to go outside to "feel" the snow. We learned how to drive, how to shop, how to do banking and money, everything from baby steps.

We eventually learned a new culture, new customs, new way of life. We were homesick for Vietnam and missed our families and friends and it was painful because we didn't know if we would ever see or hear them again, and if they survived the chaos.

The next challenge that was equally difficult was to raise children in this country.

Children are expected to behave and grow up the Vietnamese way like us because it was the only way we knew how.

Children had school pressures, peer pressures and struggled to fit in. They were expected to be Vietnamese at home, and out the door, they had to be American to cope.

I have a daughter and it was the most difficult task trying to find a way to blend two cultures to make it the best of both worlds. It often ended up with a lot of conflicts and frustrations on both sides.

I took a parenting class in order to learn how to deal with different situations. It was helpful but the whole experience was still the most difficult in coping with a new life.

Well, at least we made it, and I can say the story has, after all, a happy ending.

I look back to what I've been through and am somewhat proud of how we survived without being a burden to society; how we got on our feet with hard work and determination; how our children have a good future for the generations to come.

I am thankful for how this great land accepted us, and gave us the opportunities like everyone else, without any discrimination, and I have grown to love and accept it as my home and motherland. God Bless America !



In photo, my brother, his wife, me and the 5 children. It's funny how we looked so FOB (Fresh Off the Boat) !!

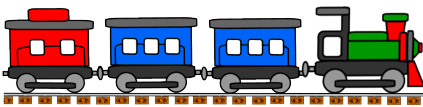


2013 REUNION BANQUET SPEAKER

Major General Lester D. Eisner is the Deputy Adjutant General, South Carolina National Guard, and also serves as the Assistant Adjutant General - Army, Joint Force Headquarters, South Carolina Army National Guard.



Tan Son Nhut Association Reunion in Chattanooga, TN June 13 – 16, 2013 Chattanooga Choo Choo



Schedule of Events

Wednesday	Noon	Hospitality suite and registration opens
Wednesday	?????	Hospitality suite closes
Thursday	9AM	Hospitality suite and registration opens
Thursday	?????	Hospitality suite closes
Friday	9AM	Hospitality suite and registration opens
Friday	1-4PM	Ross Lewis Book Signing
Friday	?????	Hospitality suite closes
Friday	6PM	Banquet cash bar opens
Friday	7PM	Banquet Seating (A SEPARATE SCHEDULE FOR THIS EVENT WILL BE AVAILABLE AT THE BANQUET)
Saturday	8:30AM	Ross Lewis, guest speaker "Monument of Honor/American Heroes"
Saturday	10:45AM	Vans begin loading for Tennessee River Boat Cruise
Saturday	1:30PM	Hospitality suite opens
Saturday	1:30PM	Vans return to the hotel
Saturday	2-4PM	Jerry Childers book signing of his book "Without Parachutes"
Saturday	5PM	Board Meeting
Saturday	8PM	General Business Meeting
Saturday	?????	Hospitality suite closes
Sunday	7:30AM-9AM	Farewell Breakfast Buffet



Tan Son Nhut Association 2013 Reunion Registration

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 _____

EMERGENCY CONTACT NAME & PHONE NUMBER _____

NAME OF YOUR GUEST(S): _____

PLEASE LIST ANY SPECIAL NEEDS: _____

CELL PHONE (WHILE AT REUNION) _____

REGISTRATION FEES

NUMBER OF PERSONS ATTENDING _____ X \$125. = _____

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- Access to the TSNA Hospitality suite in Penn Station, (drinks, snacks, and war stories!) - \$20. *daily if purchased separately.*
- TSNA Friday Banquet buffet dinner. \$65 *if purchased separately.*
- Please circle which activities you are paying for *separately.*
- FREE Saturday 1 ½ hour Tennessee River Cruise with deluxe buffet lunch. Please cross out this activity if you do not plan to take the cruise because TSNA must pay in advance for all participants.
- Upon request to the Choo Choo, airport transportation via the Choo Choo shuttle will be provided at a cost of \$10.00 per room each way.
- Free parking.
- Honored guest speaker to be announced at a later date.

Your room rate has been group discounted to \$120.00 per night. This rate will be honored up to three days prior to and two days following the reunion. The reservations phone number at the Chattanooga Choo Choo is 1-800-872-2529. Hotel reservations must be made no later than **May 22, 2013 to receive this special rate.**

PAYMENT MUST BE MAILED NO LATER THAN MAY 30, 2013.

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

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



CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

A little over half a century ago my young family lived on the western Pennsylvania area called the Westinghouse Valley. A long held tradition for the area set the month of May as an "annual house cleaning" time. Coal dust, snow tracked floors, winter bed clothes and many other tasks like wiping down the wall paper and scrubbing the sidewalks set the daily May pace.

I don't know whether they still have the tradition but May month might just be a good time to establish a tradition to "clean up our acts"! Henry James wrote "It takes an endless amount of history to make even a little tradition". But then Dean Rusk contradicted James by writing "continuity does not rule out fresh approaches to fresh situations".

So what do we do to "clean up our acts"? Well, another guy whose name is too long for this page said "tradition is a guide not a jailer".

Granted there are great traditions (acts) and yet will not the month of May be a good time to evaluate who and what we are?

Those words of Rusk really ring true and especially by adding the thought of TS Eliot "a tradition without intelligence is not worth having".

These words then: The month of May is a time for some self house cleaning and then to proudly move on into a better life.

End of Sermon,
Chaplain Bob Chaffee



One of our members, Ron Boydston, has suggesting showing a picture with the caption, "**Do You Remember**".

Here is a picture he sent along as an example, with the comments: "Larry: Here's another pic for possible use.

It's not totally a still life - the Connie was doing an engine run-up prior to takeoff - but it was a good photo at any rate!

Have a good Thanksgiving. I'm grateful every year to have come back unscathed, even after more than 40 years..."

Ron Boydston
525 Combat Evaluation Group, U. S. Army
Sep 69-Sep 70

NOTATIONS FROM APPLICATIONS

I served with a bunch of USAF best. I remember Chief Jack Hoats, MSgt. Curtis B. Travis, Jr., and many more. The year went fast but now it is just a long ago memory.

I left TSN and returned to Yokota AB, where I finished out my career - made Senior there, worked 20 years in a tech college and now just enjoy life with family and all the nearby Indian Casinos.

Werner T. Segesser
Supply Squadron
Oct 70 Oct 71

I -31-68 I was on duty during Tet, fence line NE side of base.

2-18-68 I was on SAT patrol on the flight line during the first rocket attack.

5-6-68 I was on duty during the spring offensive at the Japanese fort on the north side of base.

Denis R. Cook
377th SPS
Dec 67 - Dec 68

I was supposed to leave Tan Son Nhut for home the day that Tet offensive started. I remained until mid-February.

Joseph Ferrindino
460 TRW Material Control
Jul 66-Nov 66 (Big Eye Task Force)
Mar 67-Feb 68



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Revetments is an official publication of the Tan Son Nhut Association, Inc.
P.O. Box 236, Penryn, PA 17564-0236
The Association is a 501(c)(19) tax exempt Veterans' Organization incorporated in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

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



To go along with the Susie Ahrens story that you probably read by now, this is the logo of the Vietnamese organizations she is active with in Utah.

FROM OUR "CHEERLEADER"

Ladies and Gentlemen - the time is short! If you are planning to attend the TSNA family reunion in Chattanooga June 13-16, 2013, you should get your reservations in early. Last year in Dayton, Ohio, some of the membership were housed in another hotel because the hotel had no vacancies left. Reserve early and get your room or rooms now. Contact George Plunkett ASAP. See y'all there!

Love,
Janice

Addition to Reunion Schedule

In addition to the Friday book signing by Ross Lewis, another attendee will be signing his book on Saturday at 2PM. Retired U. S. Army Colonel Jerry Childers (Chattanooga resident/helicopter pilot-3 Vietnam tours/Board member of MOH Museum in Chattanooga. His book is titled: "Without Parachutes", and the first half of it is about his first Vietnam tour at Tan Son Nhut, in 1964-65.

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