



# REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

A Memorial to the American Experience in Vietnam



SEPTEMBER 2013

## VETERAN'S DAY 2013 "AT THE WALL"

All:

Scheduling difficulties and travel plans have caused TSNA to not be part of the ceremonies commemorating Veterans Day this year. If you would want to participate in future Veterans Day ceremonies, please email me at [viet62@aol.com](mailto:viet62@aol.com) and I will add your name to the roster of volunteers.

Thanks,

George

## IT'S A SMALL WORLD AFTER ALL

In going through old emails regarding potential stories, I ran across some with the following story, which I thought that I had best get typed up, since it all started with the September, 2011 issue of Revetments, and my nephew.

I regularly send my nephew, John Fry, a copy of Revetments each month.

His reply to an article in September, 2011, written by TSNA member Ed Geisler started a string of emails that resulted in the following story.

Monday August 29, 9:20 AM - copy of Revetments goes to my nephew.

Monday August 29, 12:33 PM, John writes back to me: "Is Ed Geisler from CA?"

*Looks a lot like my best buddy out there, Gary Geisler (son of Frank and Anne), in Fresno, and not very common name?*

*If you could ask him that would be cool."*

Monday August 29, 12:44 PM, I wrote to Ed Geisler and copied John's email to him.

His answer: "Larry:

*Hello. I'm related to Frank Geisler.*

*He's my cousin. I have not seen them in 34 years. I know I know.. but I spent my career in the San Francisco area working for United Airlines. I will have to check in with Frank though, my wife is all over me for not getting in touch for so long.*

*Thank John for me.... Poor Gary having a resemblance to me.. (must be a Geisler thing???)"*

To finish the story, here is Ed's email to John, dated August 30, 2011:

John:

*Thank you for your good eye. I have been meaning to get in touch with Frank and Lori for years.. Thanks again... Ed "Butch" Geisler L. L. C. (long lost cousin)"*

End of story .

Larry

## UPDATE FROM ROSS LEWIS

Hello George,

I hope all is well with you. The "Welcome Home/A Monument of Honor" book and project is doing very well. The momentum began when you and all of your Tan Son Nhut members provided the "spark" for this project to be launched in Chattanooga. Now, there are other Conventions coming and the State of Delaware veterans are putting together a statewide event for the spring 2014 with "Welcome Home" being the centerpiece. Also, I have been on NPR

Radio and will appear on at least one TV broadcast here in Jacksonville this coming week....all of this a profound "Thank You" to all of you at TSN.

Of major new developments, many women have been interested in this project as a means of helping their veteran husbands. Please see this very powerful email I received from Amelia (who purchased the book from my website)...this opens a door for tremendous possibilities to empower women in the U.S.

## From Amelia (Navy Veteran's Wife to Ross) speaking about the book:

*"This is a great contribution to our people who served in Nam. As a woman who did not serve, I carried around some guilt myself for not "being trusted" enough by my husband to discuss his experience. Of course I now know trusting me had nothing to do with it. Clyde seems to have adjusted pretty well despite it all but of course evidence all around that many others have not, to say nothing of all the others that keep it well hidden. I hope this helps many of them. Thanks again, Ross."*

George, I would appreciate your sending this email to your membership as my "thank you" to all. I am very grateful for the opportunity of meeting all of you.

Warm regards,  
Ross Lewis

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Ross was recently on a local TV news program. If you would like to listen to it, here is the link:

<http://www.news4jax.com/news/Tribute-to-Vietnam-veterans/-/475880/21493950/-/4e9qhy/-/index.html> .

(Right click on the link and select "Open Hyperlink")

## THE PARKERS AT MT. RUSHMORE

By: Sue Ellen Parker  
TSNA Member  
Wife of TSNA Co-Founder Don Parker

For more than 20 years, Don wanted to go to Mount Rushmore. Life and work got in the way. Finally, on July 23, he and I, and family members Frank and Adele Kolb, made our way to the National Park in South Dakota's Black Hills.

The program started at 9 p.m., Mountain Time. It was the same program seen by nearly three million people each year. The sun was setting behind the four presidents who were carved by Gutzon Borglum.

A 20-minute video on America was shown on the huge screen behind the stage. At the end of the video, one of the park rangers asked all the veterans to come to the stage. They filed down both aisles until almost 100 were in front of the park's visitors.

Don was wearing his vest with embroidered eagles and his overseas cap, denoting he was co-founder and president emeritus of the Tan Son Nhut Association. He was easy to spot among the veterans in their jeans, khakis and shorts.

Suddenly the ranger pointed to the U.S. Air Force veteran. Don walked to the flagpole on stage and unwound the halyard from the cleats, allowing the flag to start its gradual descent. Veterans saluted -- some removing their caps, others rendering a hand salute. Audience members' hands covered their hearts. Even young children who had been fussy, hushed.

Another veteran, also chosen by the ranger, stood by, waiting for the flag to be lowered into his waiting hands.

As Don unclasped the flag, he laughingly said later that he was thinking to himself, "Don't drop it! Don't drop it!"

The two veterans grasped the flag and folded it correctly. Once it was in the triangular shape, showing only the blue field, Don turned with it to the ranger who saluted the symbol of the United States. The Princeton veteran saluted the flag in return and returned to his place on the stage. The closing ceremony was finished amid cheers from the audience.

More than just visiting the memorial, we left the national memorial with a memory to keep forever.



I'm not sure about how many of us will read from the Old Testament words that fit the return to the "Work Months Ahead".

Labor Day is upon us thus the scripture note: Ecclesiastes 11:6: "Sow your seeds in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well".

Granted a large share of us are members of the "retired generation" but we still carry a physical, social and actual commitment to those dear to us.

Sometimes we must wax poetic and for September it's that time. In 1918 Thomas Noble wrote these words that is named "Come, Labor On".

It begins; "Who dares stand idle on the harvest plain while all around us waves the golden grain? And to each servant does the master say 'Go work today!'" He goes on to say: "Away with gloomy doubts and faithless fear! No arm so weak but man do service here: Though feeble agents, may we all fulfill God's righteous will".

But look at this! He ends the poem with this: "And a glad sound comes with the setting sun, 'well done, well done'"

From the Old Testament to World War One, to Vietnam now to September 2013 come these words of advice: "Come Labor On!"

End of Sermon  
Chaplain Bob



Fellow Members,

For our 2014 annual reunion, we will be returning to our birth place, Evansville, IN. President Emeritus Don Parker and his wife, Sue Ellen, acting as our "boots on the ground", visited hotels/motels in the area and made several recommendations to me. After negotiating with various places, the Holiday Inn at the Evansville Airport has been chosen as our reunion site.

The reunion will officially begin on Thursday, 6-12 and end on Sunday, 6-15. Amenities at the Holiday Inn include free parking, free WI-FI, free airport shuttle and free hot breakfast buffet. The room rate, which includes all taxes, is about \$105.00 per night.

It is our intention to place a plaque at the river front park in Evansville. Don Parker is in the process of obtaining the necessary permits and researching any size, height, etc. restrictions.

We have been extremely successful in controlling reunion expenses for the past few years, therefore we have decided to reduce the reunion registration fee this year to \$75.00 per person.

CDR Paul Galanti, a POW in North Vietnam for almost 7 years, has graciously accepted our offer to be this year's guest speaker. I hope that you can join us to greet this genuine American hero.

More details will be published in Revetments and on the web site as things are finalized.

George Plunkett  
President, TSNA



I arrived at TSN in October of 1967, and as I deplaned I thought I would suffocate as I breathed in the thick humidity of Vietnam for the first time. After some weeks of getting to know the base and beginning to explore the exotic city of Saigon, I began to view my life and the long year ahead of me as in all probability, fairly routine.

Then, some months later, when the first 122 mm rocket slammed onto the base somewhere close in the early hours of darkness, I felt its impact and the earth trembled under me, and the message came home to me that life was suddenly tenuous at best.

My hooch was east of Echo Sector, directly east of Camp Alpha and just on the other side of the fence to the north of the army heliport. I worked east of 5<sup>th</sup> Street on the 2nd floor of the 12th Reconnaissance Intelligence Technical Squadron Building, just west of 7th Air Force Headquarters. My job was to locate targets on aerial photography along lines of communication such as roads and waterways and I created target boxes for "Arc Light" strikes. Primarily, I sought clues indicating road improvements, bridge construction or repair, construction equipment, truck parks, troop or vehicle movement, weapons caches, bunkers, POL Storage, anti aircraft sites, armor, and literally anything and everything that looked out of the ordinary or suspicious.

I saw everything from fairly low level aerial photography flown by navy pilots along the river ways in Laos, Cambodia and of course, Vietnam to superb, high altitude "Black Shield" photography over many areas of the north, including Hanoi. I also "moonlighted" as night watchman at the airmen's club.

I celebrated my 21st birthday alone at the Airmen's club on November 21, and will always think of Tan Son Nhut

was my home for the most life changing months of my life. That base and everyone on it became my family and my salvation and part of my spirit still dwells there to this day.

Finally Charles, I read your poem with great interest and emotion... you said it all for 58,000 of our brothers and sisters who never came home. Thank you for your prayer and homage to them; we owe them more than we can

ever pay.

Your friend,  
Barry Hewelt  
12th RITS  
Oct 67-Oct 68

I lived in the SP Barracks in the 1300 area next to the Base Exchange complex and across the road from the heliport. I was in "Bravo Sector" in Bravo Bunker, then in Tango

16. I went into town by myself a lot, enjoying the markets, some bars on Tudu Street and off base at Plantation Road

Donald Segraves  
377th Security Police Squadron  
Mar 69—Mar 70



## TAN SON NHUT ASSOCIATION

### 2014 REUNION

**JUNE 12-15**

**HOLIDAY INN EVANSVILLE AIRPORT  
7101 HIGHWAY 41 NORTH  
EVANSVILLE, IN 47725**

#### GUEST SPEAKER:

**Paul E. Galanti, Commander, U. S. Navy (Retired)**

Commander Galanti was raised in an Army family in many states, Japan, France, Germany and Turkey. He graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1962 and entered Navy Jet Flight Training. He departed for Vietnam with Light Jet Attack Squadron 216 aboard the U.S.S. Hancock in November 1965. Shot down and captured while flying his 97th combat mission in June 1966, he remained a prisoner of war in North Vietnam's infamous Hanoi Hilton for nearly seven years.

Released from Hanoi in February 1973, he served in Navy recruiting in Richmond, Virginia, earned the Master of Commerce degree from the University of Richmond in the evening program and served in the office of the Commandant as a Battalion Officer at the United States Naval Academy.

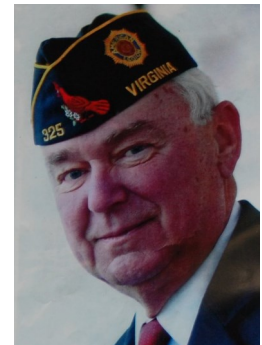
His personal military decorations include the Silver Star, two Legions of Merit with Combat "V", the Bronze Star with Combat "V", 9 Air Medals and 2 Purple Hearts.

After retiring from the Navy, he was the CEO of the Virginia Pharmaceutical Association, the Medical Society of Virginia and the Science Museum of Virginia Foundation.

He's a member of twelve veterans' organizations. The Virginia War Memorial Foundation named its new \$8 million education center after him and his wife. In 2010, Governor Bob McDonnell appointed him Commissioner of the Virgin-

ia Department of Veterans Services, the agency that provides services to Virginia's 830,000 veterans and to the Board of Visitors of the Virginia Military Institute.

He and his wife have two grown sons and live in Richmond.



### A GREAT STORY - FROM OUR TSNA SECRETARY

The following article by Captain The Nguyen, ARVN, was provided to me by his son Tim. Tim relays that his father is gratified that someone is interested in his memoirs. Tim and I are colleagues at Veracity Engineering in Washington, DC where we provide technical support to the Federal Aviation Administration. I know him as Tim, but he is referred to as Thien (his legal name) in the article. Tim was born in Vietnam after I'd left Tan Son Nhut AB. It's interesting that the Nguyen's spent time at Andersen AFB, Guam as refugees. Andersen was my duty station after Tan Son Nhut. I do not think that our views and experiences of either Tan Son Nhut or Andersen are quite the same. I've yet to meet Captain Nguyen, but Tim is scheduling a dinner meeting between us that will occur in the near future.

Dale Bryan, TSNA Secretary



## **Our Last Days in Saigon, Vietnam (Or Escape From Vietnam)**

**By: Captain The Nguyen, ARVN**

This is a real story of our last days in Saigon still fresh in my memory:

By mid-April 1975, nine North Vietnamese Army (NVA) divisions, or 180,000 soldiers, led by Generals Van Tien Dung and Tran Van Tra were bearing down on Saigon from three directions with heavy artillery and Soviet T-54 tanks.

They attacked Xuan Loc, a mere 40 miles to the East of Saigon, but met determined resistance from the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) 18th Infantry division, led by General Le Minh Dao.

For two weeks, severe fighting raged as the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) made a last ditch effort to block the NVA advance on Saigon. On April 21, 1975, the exhausted garrison Xuan Loc surrendered.

President of South Vietnam, Nguyen Van Thieu, resigned the same day, declaring that the United States of America had betrayed South Vietnam. He departed for Taiwan on April 25th, ahead of the main Communist onslaught. By then, everyone in Saigon, knew the war was lost and to stay meant to be sent to camps of reeducation or worse. The people around us spoke of executions and what the Communists would do to their children. They talked of people vanished and tortured, a haunting reminder of what the people had endured in North Vietnam in 1945 when the Vietnamese communists fought with the French colonists.

We also heard in the early days, the Americans were going to airlift children out of the country and we wondered if we could get our children Truc, Thuy, and Thien on one of those airplanes.

Operation Babylift it was called, and over the course of April 1975 would carry away two thousand children. But on April 4th, the first flight crashed at the Tan Son Nhat

airbase, killing most onboard.

We decided we had to find another way as time was running out for Saigon. Americans were fleeing. Wealthy Vietnamese worked bribes to get any route out. Masses of would be refugees mobbed the airport.

As desperate parents, we already thought of offering up our children to any soft-hearted Americans to take them out to a more secure life somewhere beyond this dark and uncertain Saigon.

Luckily, at the last minute, the affidavits of support sent by my brother Toan Nguyen, a naturalized citizen of the United States residing in California, had arrived at the U.S. Embassy in Saigon.

Now it was time! We are going to the airport! We were willing to get our family on any plane we could. Go now! We were at the U.S. Embassy by early morning of April 22nd. We had assembled at designated pick-up points, where we boarded military evacuation buses for what would quickly become the most hair-raising ride of our lives. Each bus was surrounded by Vietnamese, but only Westerners and Vietnamese people with immigration papers like us were allowed to board, a nervous but well-armed young Marine who stood at the door made sure of that.

The bus meandered through the streets, all congested with desperate Vietnamese. The panic-stricken driver put the bus in reverse and backed over something, or maybe someone. Finally, we reached the Tan Son Nhat airport gate, where the scene was even more frenzied than it had been in the streets. The airport gate was surrounded by thousands of Vietnamese. The Vietnamese Military Police (MP) who guarded the gates and the barbed wire surrounding the airport were the only things keeping the mob out.

Our bus had to fight our way through the crowd. If the bus got stuck right at this point for any reason and could not reach inside the airport, I would most likely end up in a concentration camp, staying at least ten years or indefinitely, where I would

have been subjected to horrible acts of torture and indoctrination, because I worked for the South Vietnamese government and supported the Americans.

It was almost dark, with no lights coming on, by the time we spotted a passageway blocked by a roll of barbed wire. At midnight of April 22, 1975, we boarded a C130, a military transport cargo and headed for the Philippines.

From the door of the evacuation plane, we watched Saigon for one last time, and saying goodbye to our land was the saddest moment of our final hours in Vietnam. The C130 military cargo plane climbed to 1,500 feet, above the many landmarks so familiar to us and headed towards the refuge of the South China Sea.

My wife and I glanced at each other with tear-filled eyes for a long time. We are all being lifted heavenward to safety. I knew I was living a moment in history with my wife and my three children.

We arrived at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines in the afternoon, then we transferred immediately to a commercial airline headed for Guam. There, at a refugee camp, we awaited entry papers into the U.S. with our parents who arrived at the camp one day ahead of us. The days strung themselves into days of waiting, standing in meal lines, sitting around tents and barracks, talking about what we had heard America was like. After a 5-day stay in Guam, we flew from Andersen Air Force Base to Camp Pendleton in California. We were in America at last!

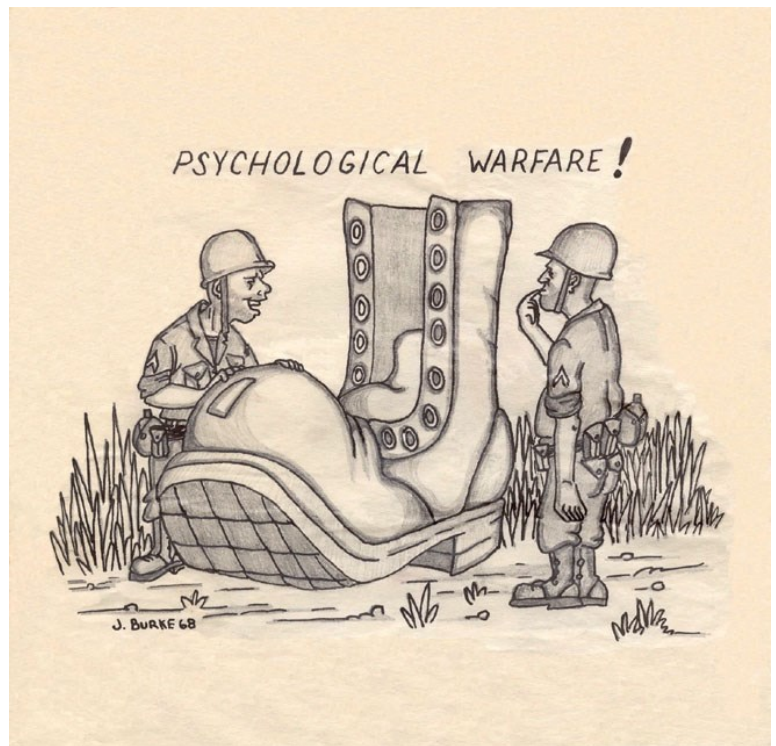
Thirty eight years ago, during Black April of 1975, we came to this land as refugees of war with a pair of empty hands and a bag full of broken dreams. Now, we are in paradise not because of its beauty or richness, but because of its people, the compassionate and generous Americans who took us in 38 years ago, and healed our souls and restored our faith in humanity. We would like to thank 56,000 Americans who died in Vietnam.

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

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



And our thanks again to John Burke, TSNA Life Member,  
for another great cartoon.

## NEW MEMBERS

Billy L. Griffin FL [billylgriffin@bellsouth.net](mailto:billylgriffin@bellsouth.net). Sep 66 - Aug 67 460th FMS Aircraft Pseudraulics  
James E. Long LA [long1007hancoc2176@att.net](mailto:long1007hancoc2176@att.net). Oct 64 - Sep 65 MACV U. S. Army Sup. Com. Clerk

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