



# REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

A Memorial to the American Experience in Vietnam

SPECIAL REUNION ISSUE



Beginning on Wednesday, June 11, these are the two faces you would see as you came into the Tan Son Nhut Association Hospitality Suite.

Thank you Harlan Hatfield and Charles Penley for your “as usual” outstanding efforts in keeping everything straight, and in welcoming our fellow members, returning attendees, and for sure, all of the new folks we had in attendance this year. Thanks to Chaplain Chaffee also!

One of the activities that took place in that marvelously huge room was the delivery of two wonderful (and delicious) sheet cakes, courtesy of the Evansville Convention & Visitors Bureau. Our thanks to them for this surprise treat, and also for the wonderful cooperation that we received from EVERYONE involved in making this reunion the great success that it was.

Pictured below are those who got the first taste of the cakes.



Our Tan Son Nhut Association and US flags were centered on one wall of the Hospitality Suite, along with some other memorabilia.

Many folks took advantage of the weather on Thursday and Friday, and took in some of the sights of the area.

My wife and I arrived earlier in the week, and we did get to see the LST 325 on display on the river. Very impressive.

There were also some good restaurants in the area. When I asked at the hotel front desk where there was a Fed-Ex Office so I could get some printing done, I was handed a sheet with directions to “Rafferty’s”, and “Fed-Ex is across the street.”

We didn’t bother to ask what Rafferty’s was, but we soon found out—a great restaurant with good service, good food, and pleasant surroundings. We only ate there three times during the reunion week!

On the following pages are articles and pictures submitted by many fellow TSNA folks. My special thanks to those members of the Board who were “volunteered military style” for their articles.

I hope you enjoy them as much as we all enjoyed being there as part of this wonderful reunion.

Larry Fry  
Editor, Revetments



**WOLFGANG SAMUEL  
GUEST SPEAKER  
2014 TSNA BANQUET**

By: Rich Carvell, TSNA VP

German Boy – Wolfgang Samuel – had some TSNA members near tears as he related his early life in Germany and his escape to the American that he has come to love and serve.

Wolfgang W.E. Samuel, Colonel, U.S. Air Force, retired, delivered a personal recollection of his boyhood in Germany to members of the Tan Son Nhut Association at its annual Reunion banquet Friday evening, June 13, 2014, in Evansville, IN.

The audience of Vietnam Veterans, their spouses and special guests were in awe at Wolf's story. He also tells this story of this part of life in his book "*German Boy: A Child in War.*" In the book's forward, written by Stephen E. Ambrose, the American historian and author, Ambrose says that one of the remarkable elements of Samuel's autobiography is his "... honesty about what he saw, said, felt, and thought." Wolf carried out that honesty in his TSNA keynote speech.

Perhaps the most riveting element in his story was his escape with his mother and sister from Sagan which was about to fall to the Russians in December 1946. A knock on the door at 10 p.m. by a German lieutenant warned the family of approaching Russian troops. The officer's urgent advice was to leave Sagan immediately. They headed for the train station and left nearly everything behind ... except what they could put into three suitcases.

After convincing the ticket master that they were not from Sagan, but from Liegnitz (because Sagan residents were not yet declared as refugees), tickets were issued for him, his sister, and their mother. It was snowing, but the three of them found a place on the train platform where their mother thought they would have a better chance to actually get on the train. Wolf sat on his suitcase, waiting in the cold for many hours.

When the train finally arrived, Wolf's mother told him to stay put and went off to find a place for them to board the train once it stopped at the station. She disappeared in the crowd; everyone was pushing and shoving to get aboard. He soon saw that the train cars and boarding board platforms were filled with humanity, and there appeared to be no place for him. Then, a man he did not know called his name: Wolfgang. Wolfgang. He wanted Wolf to hand their suitcases to him through a window, and he finally managed to get the biggest suitcase into the window. But as the suitcase disappeared into the train, the train whistle blew, and the train began to move. Wolf was still on the station platform. And as the train picked up speed, Wolf came to the realization that he might be left behind. His panic level rose.

Wolf raised his hands above his head and pleaded with someone – anyone – to pull him into the window as the end of the platform came nearer and nearer. Suddenly, he said, hands grabbed him and pulled him through the open train window. He was aboard and getting away from Sagan and the Russian army.

In his book, *German Boy*, Wolf writes that his first encounter with an American soldier was not a good one; the soldier took his belt. But that was to change. As he watched SS prisoners being moved from a building, an American soldier approached. He had noticed two things about American soldiers. All of them, he said, smoked or chewed. "Chewed what? I didn't know," he said.

But Wolf said that the soldier handed him something wrapped in yellow paper, and Wolf just stood there, holding it. So, the soldier wrapped a piece of gum, popped it into his mouth, and began to vigorously chew to show him what to do. Wolf said he followed suit.

Chewing the gum until it lost its flavor, Wolf spit it out on the ground. "No," the G.I. said. Wolf understood no English, and the American spoke no German. So, Wolf said, the soldier handed him another piece of gum, then took his own gum out of his mouth and stuck it behind his ear. The lights went on. Now he knew. Never throw your gum away.

Fast forward to the time when Wolf and school – a real school -- were once again reunited. And his fascination with flying was re-kindled because on his daily walk to and from school, he passed by a field where old German airplanes were parked. Often, he would take the time to explore the abandoned planes, climb into one, and imagine himself flying one of them.

Later, when the Russians began to limit ground access to Berlin, American airplanes began to show up at the RAF airfield in Fassberg. Wolf was fascinated by the Americans who, he said, were different from all of the soldiers he had met before. Soon, the airbase was filled with American C-54 Skymasters which were filled with coal and flying to Berlin. Watching the C-54s day and night again re-kindled his desire to fly.

Eventually, Wolf's mother met and married an American airman named Leo. They left for America in early 1951. But that, as they say, is another story.

But there is a Post Script. In an email a few days after the TSNA Reunion in Evansville, Wolf wrote one of his "Vignettes of a Booksigner," of which TSNA board members have become familiar over the past few months. In the email, he explained the reason for his vignettes: "I am a writer, so if something comes my way that is extraordinary - I like to share the experience with friends." We are glad he chose to share this with us, and we are glad to share it with all of you. About his banquet speech, he wrote:

"I spoke on how a German boy (me) became an American boy, taking them back to World War II and the brutal years that followed. Half way through my presentation I saw tears streaming down the cheeks of a lady sitting near me [Trish Plunkett was only one of many who shed real tears]. When I finished (after 45 minutes) there was a moment of total silence - then a standing ovation; no one fell asleep, including the worried chaplain [who had told Wolf earlier that a 45-minute presentation would be far too long]. I tell this story because it provides the setting for what follows."

"As the guest speaker I was chosen to present Challenge Coins to members of the Evansville Children's Choir (who gave a great performance) and the members of the Harrison High School Color Guard, who had all been invited to stay for dinner. The young boys of the Color Guard approached me singly, made a left turn to face me, then gave me the smartest salute they were capable of. After I presented the coin they'd do an about face and march off. The members of the Children's Choir were a bit less formal, several telling me how my story had touched them. A long line had formed by that time of people wanting to shake my hand and talk. Then someone asked if I would be so kind and sign one of my books, and before you knew it there was a new line of people who wanted their German Boy and other books signed. All this took quite a while. In the meantime, Mr. Carvell, the organization's vice president, [actually it was TSNA secretary Dale Bryan who caught the omission and jumped up to correct our error] made an apologetic announcement: We've forgotten to present a Challenge Coin to a young Army ROTC cadet who was supporting the Color Guard. He then casually handed her the coin. After all the handshaking and book signing I noticed this young girl in army greens standing patiently near me. When the last book was signed she approached and asked hesitantly: "Sir, I didn't get the opportunity to salute you along with the others. May I do so now?"

"Well, there are moments in life, good and bad, one never forgets - this was one such moment for me. The young girl saluted smartly, I shook her hand, and she departed like all the others had before her, doing an about face and marching off. Believe me, when you meet youngsters like that you, I, know that our land will be in good hands when we pass on. We are the past and that young girl and all the other youngsters I met are our future - and they are very proud of the legacy we left for them."

"I just had to share this story."

"Be good to yourself, and remember who we are: proud Americans."

Thank you, Wolf Samuel, thank you.







The Banquet is about to begin!



The Color Guard posting the Colors



"Ladies and Gentlemen - Present Arms"



Representatives of the Evansville Children's Choir sang our National Anthem to begin the Banquet, and also presented some music for us during the meal as well. Thanks to all of them. They were great!



Thank you John Peele and Sue Ellen Parker for your part in the moving "Missing Man Table" Ceremony. And thanks also to Johnnie and Sharon Jernigan, and Jimmy Smith for their very necessary parts in this presentation as well.



The Color Guard members pose after receiving their Challenge Coins.



## Dedication of the TSNA Memorial Bench

By Bill Coup

The dedication of the TSNA Memorial Bench took place at the Old Courthouse in Evansville on Saturday, June 14, 2014. We were fortunate to have a beautiful sunny day to have the ceremony. It was well attended and there was a group of unexpected guests that arrived to join us at the ceremony.

The local chapter of the Rolling Thunder motorcycle group joined us. In their yellow tee shirts and gear they made a great impression. Don Parker and John Peele joined them for a group picture. They were a welcome addition to our celebration. We visited with them before and after the dedication.



George Plunkett opened the ceremony by ordering the posting of the colors. After the posting of the colors, there was a Benediction by Bob Chaffee, our Chaplain. George Plunkett then asked Don Parker and John Peele to unveil the Memorial Bench. There was originally supposed to be a plaque, but there was a manufacturing defect that made it unusable. Monumental Memories, a local memorial company, donated a bench to replace the plaque. They did a beautiful job. The gold lettering on the bench contains real gold. The price for the bench and installation was \$5,000 which didn't cost the association anything since it was donated.



Following the unveiling, Vanderburgh County Commissioner Stephen Melcher welcomed the association members and guests. Commissioner Melcher is also a veteran and a member of the American Legion. He presented a proclamation passed by the county commissioners. He then read the proclamation:



“Whereas, the Tan Son Nhut Association has been established to respect all of those services personnel from the United States Air Force, Army, Navy, Marines and Coast Guard, as well as the many civilians who served at any time during the Vietnam conflict at the great airdrome at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon, Republic of Vietnam; Whereas, the Tan Son Nhut Association was organized to assist military personnel of all eras and their families whenever and wherever possible; Whereas, the Association is an open forum where Vietnam veterans continue to exchange the memories and pride that they had as they upheld the sacred vow of “Duty, Honor, Country” at the now historic and once mightiest air field in the world; Whereas, the motto of the Association is “All Included None Excluded”; Whereas, the Tan Son Nhut Association will hold its 20<sup>th</sup> annual reunion June 12-15, 2014. Now, Therefore, be it resolved that the Vanderburgh County Board of Commissioners offers this proclamation and appreciation to the service of the men and women of all military branches who served at Tan Son Nhut during the Vietnam conflict. We especially honor and revere those brave and historic individuals who were wounded or “gave their last full measure of devotion” during their service there.”

Dated this day of June 3, 2014. The Board of Commissioners, again, Joe Kiefer, President;

Marsha Abell, Vice President; Stephen Melcher, Member, and attested by Joe Gries, Auditor.

Commissioner Melcher joined with Don Parker and John Peele for a photograph of the memorial bench.



The bench will be put in storage until a new memorial park is built in Evansville where it will be prominently and permanently displayed.

As the dedication was coming to a close, we were very pleasantly surprised to see a flyby of World War II P-47 Thunderbolts that was being done for another local celebration. It couldn't have been better timed. It was truly a fitting climax for our dedication.





## OTHER NOTES AND PICTURES FROM THE DEDICATION CEREMONY

Good morning.

This year we will be leaving our footprints in Evansville, Indiana, where pride in being an American is still a mainstay of society.

This is my 7<sup>th</sup> consecutive year in planning annual reunions for TSNA and I have never before encountered such great cooperation from city government, county government and local business people.

(The above from remarks by George Plunkett, TSNA President.)



A member of Indiana Chapter 6 of Rolling Thunder and a man who "predicts" rolling thunder, TSNA Secretary Dale Bryan



Don Parker, Sue Ellen Parker, Michelle Peele, John Peele  
**THE TSNA CO-FOUNDING FAMILY**



## MORE FROM THE MEMORIAL BENCH DEDICATION



Everyone waiting in front of the "Old Courthouse" for the Bench Dedication Ceremony to begin. It was a beautiful day.



As they did the night before for the Banquet, the Color Guard posted the Colors for the Dedication Ceremony.

### REMARKS BY TSNA PRESIDENT GEORGE PLUNKETT

More than twenty years ago two Vietnam veterans began separate searches for their buddies from over there.

With much encouragement from their wives, they posted notices in the VFW, American Legion, DAV and other magazines.

Early in this process, John Peele read one of Don Parker's notices and gave him a call.

They decided to pool their resources at that point and our first reunion was held, here in Evansville, in 1993.

And tsna has been growing ever since. We now have more than 500 members – all thanks to John Peele and Don Parker.

To honor this achievement, the TSNA Board of Directors has unanimously agreed to present our co-founders with plaques honoring their efforts.



Don and John with their newly awarded plaques of Appreciation.



TSNA President George Plunkett is presenting a challenge coin to Kristin Comer, the administrative assistant to the Vanderburgh County Commissioners, at the Saturday bench ceremony.

Kristin was our champion and made our case to the Commissioners' to allow us to have the ceremony there since the river-front park was not available.

She also had the county provide us with chairs, a podium and electric power for the PA system at no cost to us.

A really nice and helpful person



## SILENT AUCTION

By: Carol Bessette  
TSNA Treasurer

Once again, one of the true stars of the reunion was the Silent Auction. It seemed even bigger than usual, with five full tables of items. At one time, I counted over 75 various objects for sale, ranging from homemade delicacies to artwork to some truly standout items.

No one could pass the "Dragon Flowerpot Container" without examining it and wondering, "Who in our midst is so creative?" The Dream Catcher plaque with a background reminiscent of the flag of South Vietnam is another item that attracted much attention. Surely all eyes were on the bottle of Jack Daniel's Single Barrel Select Tennessee Whiskey (complete with two glasses etched with the TSNA 2014 Reunion emblem)--that was hard to pass by.

But the star of the show was, without a doubt, the reversible Patriotic Quilt--the craftsmanship, the red/white/blue theme, and the time and effort to prepare an item of this size and complexity were truly inspiring.

And, once again, our members and guests responded with enthusiasm--by the end of the evening, the TSNA bank account had added \$1604, solely due to the generosity of those who donated their time, effort, and workmanship to the Silent Auction, and to the generosity of those who bid on these items. Thank you, one and all.



## AT THE BENCH DEDICATION

Everyone knows - and wants to pet, "Tyr", Earnest (Zeke) Wymer's Service Dog.



And yes, during reunions we also have a TSNA Board of Directors meeting. Of course, we "get together" via emails MANY times during a given year, but Reunions are one time we don't have to hit "REPLY TO ALL" and "SEND" to get our opinion across to all.

In this picture I do believe George is asking Dale, "Well, is it going to rain or not?" (Just kidding. And our outdoor activities were over by the time this meeting was held on Saturday at 5 PM)





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



Trish Plunkett, Rena Csordas, and Sue Ellen Parker smooth out Don Parker's special TSNA Reunion Quilt - made by Sue Ellen of course. You will notice it is also what was used to cover the Memorial Bench before it was unveiled on the 14th. Thanks Sue Ellen!

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** My sincere thanks to all who wrote for this issue and to our photographers as well. My thanks to Benny Goodman, Bob Laymon, Rich Carvell, Andy Csordas, Sue Ellen Parker, The Patton's, Joe Kricho, Nigel Brooks, Gary Redlinski, and whomever I forgot.

### **Book Signing**

**By: Dale Bryan, TSNA Secretary**

One of the highlights of our reunion was the book signing by our banquet speaker, Colonel Wolfgang Samuel. He conducted the signings in the hospitality suite on Friday afternoon and after the banquet.

He was signing copies of *German Boy*, a book that might be considered, millenniums later, another rendition of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. That made his speech much like the singing of those classics by a poet in an ancient tavern. His book begins during the end of World War II in Germany. The *Iliad*, too, is about war and takes place in Troy. Both depict in great detail many of the horrors of war. His escape from war torn Germany was followed by trials, tribulations, setbacks, and ultimate achievement or victory. His journey, or odyssey, was replete with its own figurative Cyclopes and Sirens.

He is personable in a one-on-one setting, so those talking with him during the signing know that they have a new friend.

The book was a definite hit, for he was happy to state that he sold every copy that he brought to the reunion.

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