



# REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

A Memorial to the American Experience in Vietnam



DECEMBER 2016

## Auld Lang Syne

By: Kathy Penn  
Wife of TSNA Member Hugh Penn

This song popped into my head and triggered a blog a few years ago when my husband heard that an old friend from his days in Vietnam had passed away. Peter Umbras, a Tan Son Nhut Association member, had been in the hospital for a month and had been improving, so we were surprised and saddened by the news. Up until about twelve years ago, the two hadn't spoken since those long ago Air Force days.

Wikipedia tells us "*Auld Lang Syne* ... is a Scots poem written by Robert Burns in 1788 and set to the tune of a traditional folk song. The song begins by posing a rhetorical question as to whether it is right that old times be forgotten, and is generally interpreted as a call to remember long-standing friendships."

*Should old acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind?*

*Should old acquaintance be forgot, and old lang syne?*

Well, for my husband, the answer is a resounding "No." When he retired twelve years ago, he had time on his hands, and he set about locating friends from his younger days. This was before Facebook, so he did it the old-fashioned way: he used the on-line white pages. I often overheard him leaving messages like, "are you the Joe Smith who went to Whiteford Elementary School or served in Pleiku?" Believe it or not, he located quite a few old friends this way.

My husband found Peter in upstate New York, and he subsequently joined us at a Pleiku Air Base Reunion in Fredricksburg, Virginia and then again in Newport News. It was Peter who got Hugh involved with the TSNA group when he invited Hugh to join him at a reunion in Charlotte.

Using that same low-tech technique, my husband located two other Vietnam buddies in the Midwest, and one joined him at a Pleiku Reunion in St. Louis. He and several of these guys even caught up on a conference call one time.

He also unearthed a few grammar school friends. Because he moved around quite a bit as a child, he didn't go to the same high school as his boyhood friends, and despite fond memories, lost touch with them. Once they reconnected,

though, they invited him to a high school reunion, where he was able to touch base with a good many of them.

When he locates an old friend, they stay in touch through email, Facebook and the occasional phone call. Though he has some more recent friends—recent as in the last ten to twenty years—I know he treasures his friends from long ago. He has invested heavily in maintaining these friendships, and I'm sure he'd agree that the investment continues to pay him huge dividends. As the song goes, here's to old friends.

*... there's a hand my trusty friend!  
And give me a hand o' thine!  
And we'll take a right good-will draught,  
for auld lang syne.*

So, as you raise a glass on New Year's Eve, take a moment to remember both old and new friends. Better yet, make some time in the new year to reconnect and let them know you thought of them. Happy New Year to one and all.

**{EDITORS NOTE:}** (To read more from Kathy, visit her website [kathymanospenn.com](http://kathymanospenn.com) where you can also order her book "The Ink Penn, Celebrating the Magic in the Everyday." The section, "Proud to be an American—Patriotism, Parades, and Perspective" is sure to resonate with TSNA members.)

MARK  
YOUR  
CALENDAR  
NOW!

SEPTEMBER 14-17, 2017

TSNA 2017 REUNION



**(MEDAL OF HONOR MUSEUM ARTICLE STARTING ON PAGE 2)**

On the next page you will find a great article and pictures from TSNA Member Garry Arndt.

After he sent it to me back in January, I "subscribed" to info from the MOH Museum.

In early November I received an update from them.

## THE MEDAL OF HONOR MUSEUM (NEW)



The National Medal of Honor Museum will be built on the marshlands at Patriots Point on the eastern shore of Charleston Harbor, adjacent to the "iconic Ravenel Bridge" and the historic USS Yorktown. Built on pylons, the pentagonal concrete and glass structure will rise 128 feet, matching the adjacent aircraft carrier's height. Its shape is defined by five projecting galleries, "clustering into a single star-like form." This, as described in the project's description, metaphorically represents the "stories of many individuals are gathered into a powerful collective narrative - the story of the Medal of Honor."

A total of three buildings will make up the 107,000 square-foot museum:



"A grass-topped land pavilion that will house the museum entrance and lobby, a 240-seat auditorium, a museum shop, curatorial and archival space and administrative offices for the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, the Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation and the National Medal of Honor Museum Foundation."

"A museum building that will include a Hall of Valor that can accommodate public and private events, celebrations and memorials; eight permanent and two special exhibits galleries; and conference, meeting and classroom space, and a small café. A two-level pedestrian bridge – the lower level for groups and conferences and the upper level to take visitors to museum exhibits – will span a ravine to connect the pavilion to the museum."

"A 140-seat chapel at the tip of the site, overlooking the sea, will be connected to the museum by another two-level pedestrian bridge. It will serve as a place of contemplation and celebration for public as well as personal events."



<http://www.archdaily.com/622650/safdie-architects-release-final-designs-for-national-medal-of-honor-museum/>.

**Cite: Karissa Rosenfield. "Safdie Architects Release Final Designs for National Medal of Honor Museum" 22 Apr 2015. ArchDaily. Accessed 3 Jan 2016. <http://www.archdaily.com/622650/safdie-architects-release-final-designs-for-national-medal-of-honor-museum/>.**



**Aerial View of Proposed Building.**

A couple pictures that I took on the Yorktown, Patriot Point, Charleston, SC. Garry Arndt, 4th SOS (AC-47 Gunship) DaNang; 14APS (CRB). Aug 69 - Aug 70

## A VISIT FROM VIETNAM

By: Susie Ahrens  
TSNA Member  
Vietnam native

We picked Minh up at the Salt Lake International Airport the afternoon of June 27th. She was coming from Houston where she spent 3 weeks visiting her sister. It was so great to see her here in Salt Lake City and not a noisy, dusty Saigon for a change.

Minh and I have been friends since we were both 18 years old. In 1967, I got a job with the US Air Force, working in the Tape Center; Minh was the librarian for the Base Library. We shared the same building and thus became friends very quickly. There were two other girls besides Minh in the library, Jackie Phuong and Hieu. Mrs. Walsh was their supervisor, then later Mrs Matlock, the two civilians who worked for the Air Force as contractors.

Minh was cute as a button, and even though she was 18, she was quiet and reserved. Jackie was a couple of years older, pretty and funny. Hieu, on the other hand, was over 30 and grumpy, so we all regarded her as an old maid.

Young GIs would hang around the front of the library most every day, waiting to talk to these two beauties, or to walk them to the Main gate, or check out books and return them the same day, so they could talk to the girls (under the watchful eyes of the lady supervisor). Some were braver and asked them out on a date. Us girls would giggle and make comments about the guys. Those were fun days for us mixing business with pleasure.

Minh and I had a lot in common. We were both from poor families and had to quit school to get jobs to support our parents. We also had the same taste in music, books and movies. Since our building was in the same area with the Base Theater, and the guys who worked there would let us in, we got to watch any movies we liked. It was fun sharing laughs with movies like the Odd Couple, the Out of Towner etc... Sharing the chill and sadness of Dr. Zhivago., learning songs from famous musical films like "The Sound of Music", and "My Fair Lady". And since I worked at the Tape Center, we loved to listen to different kinds of music. Our favorites included Connie Francis, Tony Bennett, Andy Williams, Perry Como, Frank Sinatra ... We loved to take our lunch on the grass, under the shade of a big tree, discussing movies and songs, and did a duet of "Those Were the Days", our favorite.

In 1972, Minh left the library and got a job with a private company down town, for fear that the base would be closed. Lots of rumors back then.

Minh and I remained friends and we would see each other

a couple of times a month. Minh lived in Thu Duc so we would meet for a movie downtown, then go to our favorite alley for our favorite food, and she came and spent the night at my house. She was like a member of the family.

By this time, I had a job with the ICCS (International Commission of Control and Supervision) as a Legal secretary. I hung out with a new group of friends and spent a lot of time partying. Minh urged me to attend the VAA (Vietnamese American Association) a very reputable English school in Saigon. I am glad I listened to her and went thru five colleges classes which proved to be extremely helpful for many years to come with jobs and assimilating into the American life. It's fair to say I was inspired by her and feel thankful to this day.

When South Vietnam fell in April 75, I was rescued and later settled in the US. We didn't have a chance to say goodbye, and I couldn't write her until the late 1980's. When I came back to VN the first time in Sep 1989, Minh was there with my family at the airport. What a reunion it was! I thought I would never see her again. Life had not been kind to either of us at the time. I had just gone thru a divorce, death of the ex, and bankruptcy; and a single mom, starting my life over. But it all seemed trivial comparing to what Minh had to go through. She had suffered so much hardship after the Communists took over South Vietnam. Her dad passed away and she became the matriarch who had to take care of 8 siblings with no jobs, money, or food.

The new government made sure everyone was dirt poor and on the verge of starvation. The South Vietnamese were robbed of all their properties, dignities and human rights. We spent nights at her tiny apartment on Tran Hung Dao Street talking until we both lost our voices.

Minh survived, and somehow found jobs with various companies and because of her English knowledge, experience and diligence, these jobs led her to better jobs with foreign companies and subsequently became an English teacher. She's had a passion for the English language and has never stopped improving her language skill. Minh has always told me the reason for her success was because of her training with the US Air Force at a young age. I've felt the same way. The US Air Force had groomed us both into responsible, hardworking and disciplined adults and these attributes have helped us both with working careers in the past 40 years.

This was Minh's first visit to the US. It's not easy to get the US visa when you are a poor person in Vietnam. To apply for a visa, you have to pay \$160.00 whether it's approved or not. They'd look at your wealth and connections in Vietnam to ensure that you will return. Minh's situation did not qualify, but when she was granted an interview, it became easy when she mentioned that she would visit Salt

Lake City, Utah as the lady interviewer happened to be from the same city,

We took Minh on a vacation to Northern California in our RV since it would be a different experience for her to travel from state to state in a fifth wheel. We had fun at different RV parks. She got to see Reno, Sonoma, Muir Woods National Monument. San Francisco was a big hit, the items on her bucket list were fulfilled; to cross the Golden Gate bridge, and to ride the Cable car, to eat Clam chowder for the first time and shivering in the cold wind to take pictures of Alcatraz...priceless memories.

Minh and I had over 40 years of catching up, and we did just that during the three weeks she stayed with me. We took her to different highlights of Utah since the deserts, mountains and lakes are so different with ocean sceneries in Vietnam. Everything was new and exciting. it was fun to watch her seeing and touching the snow for the first time (we were up on the 10000 ft high mountain, and there was a pile of snow from last winter). I let her try American and Italian food. She liked them OK, but still preferred the dishes with "nuoc mam" LOL. It's a trip of her lifetime and both Glen and I have tried to make it as pleasant and memorable as possible. We sang "Those were the Days" again and really felt the connection with the lyrics.

Minh left a few days ago. I miss her already. I miss our morning coffee on the deck in my back yard. I hope she had fun and lots of fond memories and a good trip home. I am thankful for our lifelong friendship and the time we had together, I wish her well and I hope we'll see each other again.



Which is Minh? Which is Susie? (Minh is in the white dress)



A drawing of Minh which Susie drew many years ago.



Minh and Susie—2016

## NOVEMBER 11, 2016 "AT THE WALL"

By: Carol Bessette  
TSNA Treasurer

The Tan Son Nhut Association once again participated in the Veterans Day wreath-laying ceremony at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The TSNA group consisted of Gary and Diane Redlinski (frequent attendees at these ceremonies), Ricci Pineau (first time to visit The Wall--all the way from California), Russ Clark (has participated several times in the past), and John and myself.

General Barry R. McCaffrey, USA (Ret.) was the Master of Ceremonies, and it was interesting to hear him trade quips with one of his NCOs from Vietnam, who was on-stage with him. The Keynote Speaker was Major General Charles F. Bolden, Jr., USMC (Ret.), who is presently serving as Administrator, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). He flew combat missions from Thailand 1972-73, and was selected as an astronaut candidate in 1980, eventually traveling to orbit four times aboard the Space Shuttle between 1986 and 1994. He commanded two of the missions and piloted two others; his flights included deployment of the Hubble Space Telescope, and the first joint US-Russian Shuttle mission, with a Russian cosmonaut as a member of his crew. A most interesting and inspiring man!

One speaker represented an organization that was new to me: Purple Hearts Reunited [purpleheartsreunited.org/](http://purpleheartsreunited.org/) They look for military medals that are being offered online (sometimes at really high prices) and try to return the medals to the families. Three adult children of one recipient were given a very impressively mounted Purple Heart that had belonged to their father. Check into the website--one man, a member of the Vermont National Guard, got upset by seeing these medals on ebay, etc., and started this organization.

There were several firsts this year, one being the presence of an Honor Flight from Nevada, all Native Americans. Their "wreath" was very distinctive, and they were a good addition to the groups.

A less serious addition was "ordinary people" walking among the crowd, passing out candy and homemade chocolate chip cookies to the veterans. Great! John and I have participated on Veterans/Memorial Day ceremonies for 6-7 years, and this was a first.

Another first was being approached by an eight-year old boy who had prepared a thank-you note as part of his third grade project. He had colored it and handwritten a note (been given the words by the teacher), and presented it to me, while his parents (father is recently retired US Army Intelligence, now working for the VA) photographed the

scene. It was very heart-warming.

We hope other TSNA members from around the country will be able to plan a trip to DC to see "our" memorial. Any time is fine, but Veterans Day and Memorial Day are special; you suddenly find yourself with hundreds of men and women with shared experiences, shared memories, and shared emotions. You will not be a "stranger."



(Left to right: Russ Clark, Ricci Pineau, Carol Bessette and Gary Redlinski)

(We thank all of you for representing TSNA again this year. Gary travelled from New York state, and Ricci came all the way from California)

## VETERANS DAY 2017

By: Carol Bessette, TSNA Treasurer

This is a special event that has only taken place five other times in The Wall's history. In November 1982, the names were read aloud in the Washington National Cathedral as part of a week-long National Salute to Vietnam Veterans. The names were read at The Wall during the 10th anniversary observance in 1992, the 20th anniversary in 2002, the 25th anniversary in 2007, and the 30th anniversary celebration in 2012.

John and I have participated in this several times, and even though we have no direct link to the names that we read, you definitely feel an emotional link. It is possible to request to read a specific name, and the staff does its very best to ensure that this happens. It is very emotional when someone is reading the name of a father, a brother, a friend; the first time we were there, a man was reading the names of the men in his platoon--that was very emotional.

You can sign up to get the initial registration information at [www.vvmf.org/reading-of-the-names](http://www.vvmf.org/reading-of-the-names) I would recommend that if you want to be sure to read a specific name.

One of the most read passages of the Bible's words are read worldwide but are also most misunderstood! They come as the words that tell of the birth of Jesus in Matthew 2 and Luke 1+. Historians have tested the Biblical Times and character listings and found their ways to question why we celebrate Christmas and why on December 25<sup>th</sup> each year. Well, for the guy who lives on the "Corners" these questions are a waste of time. He believes the Christmas season is God's way of bringing families together to share their love of each other and praise God for giving us life and each other! It is a season of reaching out to thank our God for so many blessings.

When talking to TSNA vets a theme comes out about those years at Saigon holds memories of family and the moments that prompted feelings of blessings given to them and their outreach to children in their home and also those of another land that need love and care!

So many who claim they are "not believers" get changed each year in late December. The resident of "The Corner" says "God just pinched you to admit you know how to love."

As per the style of this monthly writing the ending would be:

"End of Sermon" NOT SO!

This sermon of God's love goes on through our Christmas caring and that the events of Bethlehem has taught us all how to care for each other as God has cared for us by giving us a time to feel the events told in the Bible and be made aware FAMILY, LOVE and sharing of ourselves.

"The Sermon goes on because of Christmas being worldwide!"

Chaplain Bob Chaffee  
TSNA Chaplain

**1968**

From: Carol Bessette  
TSNA Treasurer



I have been contacted by an independent film company in Berlin that is preparing a series of films on 1968--not just the Vietnam War/Tet Offensive and the student demonstrations in the US, but the student demonstrations around the world, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy, etc. They are very interested in 8mm and Super8mm films from US military members who were stationed in Vietnam during 1968. I can send more information to those interested; contact me at [jcbessette@aol.com](mailto:jcbessette@aol.com) or (703) 569-1875.

On November 11, as we have been doing since 2012, members of TSNA were present at the TSNA Memorial Bench, located at the National Museum of the U. S. Air Force to present a wreath, flags, prayers, and play "TAPS" to honor all veterans, and especially, TSN veterans.

Taking part in this years activity were TSNA Members Rob Griffith, Johnnie Jernigan, Charles Templeton, and Jimmy Smith. They are shown, left to right in the photo below.



(Photo by TSNA Member Sharon Jernigan)

**TSNA SCHOLARSHIP FUND**

Fellow Members - Scholarship Fund Donations beginning with our last reunion total \$1225.00. We can do better.

There is no better way to honor a fellow comrade, or a former NCOIC who helped your career progression, or a teacher from long ago who stimulated your brain cells, or a parent who never lost faith in you, than to make a donation in his or her name to our Scholarship Fund.

I think that we all have enough ties, dress shirts and bathrobes. Ask your children to make a donation to the scholarship fund in your name.

There is no better Christmas present than to receive notification that someone in your life has remembered you with a donation to such a worthwhile endeavor.

We may be America's forgotten generation, but our deeds are legendary and our goals worthwhile.

Merry Christmas from call sign Paris, 2nd Advon.

George R. Plunkett  
President Emeritus  
TSNA



## THE CHOW HOUND

By: Lewis B. Agnew  
USAF Pac Postal & Courier Region  
Jan 68 - Jan 69

My favorite place in Vietnam was the chow hall. It probably saved my life one morning! The chow hall opened at 6:00 a.m. and my 12-hour shift in the Saigon AMT registered mail section ended at 6:00 a.m. At 6:00 a.m. sharp I left my tour of duty and was going directly to the chow hall. A mortar rocket hit the roof of our workroom at 6:05 a.m., and four airmen were wounded by shrapnel.

My chow hall inclination almost got me shot another time. I was waiting in a line of airmen waiting for the chow hall to officially open when I heard carbine fire! Two of the airmen in our line had been shot! We all ducked for cover. I was told later that a soldier had gone berserk, and one of our security police had shot the berserk soldier out of a tower nearby. Lo and behold, forty eight years later I met another Vietnam veteran that had been in that dangerous line with me. I did not know that airman even though he had lived in the barracks next to mine. His name is Randall W. Brown!

My chow hall passion had me running through enemy fire to get to my beloved chow hall one morning. It was almost dawn May 6, 1968 when VC were spotted coming through the French cemetery that was directly across from the south perimeter road at Tan Son Nhut AB. Our barracks were across from the south perimeter road. I heard carbine fire, quickly put on my uniform and rushed to the upper level balcony of the barracks to see where all the shooting was taking place. I had a stadium-like view of a battle between our forces and the VC advancing toward our perimeter fence. A couple of tanks had rolled in and were taking heavy fire from the VC. The tanks with their .50 caliber mounted machine guns were giving the VC hell. Hold everything! The chow hall was open, and I was hungry! I started up the road through the 1200's barracks area. The firefight was still raging! I saw splinters flying off the powerline posts above my head. I ran a hundred yard dash the rest of the way to the chow hall. As usual I had a great breakfast. I drank four glasses of milk at every meal at the chow hall; I loved milk! I walked back to the barracks and went to the second floor. The firefight had narrowed down to just a couple of hot spots where the VC had a stronghold in the cemetery. Our pilots flew over and dropped two 500 pound bombs on those locations. Shrapnel went everywhere! I saw holes tearing into some of the metal lockers in the barracks. I dived under a bunk! All was well. The chow hall would be open again in a few hours. In all seriousness, I am thankful to all the Security Police, Military Police, Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, American pilots and South Vietnamese Forces that kept Tan Son Nhut from being overrun by the VC and especially

that morning so that this postal specialist could accomplish his mission.

Another time at the chow hall I was sitting by a screen window where I could see the helicopter landing pad nearby. All of a sudden I heard a loud POW,POW,POW not from weapons fire but from the engine of a helicopter. I looked up and saw a helicopter falling like a rock. The helicopter exploded in a big cloud of smoke and fire when it hit the ground. Those poor guys didn't have a chance of surviving the crash!

My best experience at the chow hall was sitting and talking with Reverend Billy Graham. He had come to Tan Son Nhut to preach at Tan Son Nhut on Thanksgiving Day in 1968. Afterwards he had come to our chow hall to eat Thanksgiving Dinner. We were both North Carolina natives and had just small talk about our beloved North Carolina. I had made my decision for Christ at one of the Billy Graham led revivals in Charlotte when I was a boy, which made that encounter in Vietnam even more special for me!

To sum up, if the VC had gotten near the chow hall, I would have demanded my M16 to defend it!

Thank you to everyone at the 2016 TSNA Reunion for sharing memories of our times at Tan Son Nhut AB and for giving me that "Welcome Home" feeling as a new member! I counted it an honor to be with you and hope to see you all next year!



Chow Hall "0" ? Early 1962. (Your Editor sorting napkins)



**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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**TO ALL**  
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