



REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

A Memorial to the American Experience in Vietnam

NOVEMBER 2019

2019 TSNA AWARDS



This is the photo of Lou and Rhonda, owners of the Veterans Cafe in Myrtle Beach, SC.

They were surprised and very appreciative of receiving the Golden Knight Award from the Tan Son Nhut Association.

George A Bontya

CHAPLAINS CORNER

By Jimmy Smith
TSNA Chaplain

Greetings Veterans and Fellow Members of TSNA: As your Chaplain I welcome all new members of TSNA. My prayers and wishes for each of you is for everyone to have a blessed, safe and happy November. As we enter into November we look forward to celebrating the Thanksgiving Holiday and observing it, hopefully, with family, friends, neighbors or those who otherwise would be alone. It is a time for us to stop and reflect upon what we have been blessed with this past year. Some things that come to my mind is the blessing of the freedoms we have in this country. Freedoms that we fought for and many of our comrades have paid the ultimate price for. I pray daily that God will continue to bless us with this freedom as we are facing troubling times in America. I am thankful for the associations with all of my brothers and sisters in TSNA and the time I have had to spend with you this year. I am grateful for the roof I have over my head, ample food (sometimes more than I need) and clothing to wear. I am thankful that I have been blessed to have recovered from Cancer and have the health I need to serve others, and that I have been given the opportunity to serve my fellow veterans through voluntary service in the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), the Veterans Hospital here in Dayton and in Hospice. It is quite humbling to visit shut-ins and veterans in hospitals, nursing homes and yes even in Hospice Units. I highly recommend doing similar activities because it sends the message to these sometimes forgotten souls that someone cares. I am convinced that God is in control and has spared me because He is not finished with me yet, and that He still has more work for me to do for Him.

As you make your plans for Thanksgiving I urge you to remember those who are less fortunate, and those who have lost loved ones and may be living alone who crave companionship and whose day would be brightened by an invitation, telephone call or a visit. Remember those who are poor and may not even have enough to eat. I donate to Thanksgiving baskets and help to deliver those baskets. It is also very rewarding. Helping others is a very big part of giving thanks. If you will be traveling I pray for a safe journey and I wish all of you a very HAPPY THANKSGIVING.

Again, if you are new to TSNA, I WELCOME you and look forward to meeting you, at the Reunion in Tucson in 2020. I am blessed and I can say without reservation that I am proud to be a part of this important and caring organization. May God bless each of you for what you have done for our country and keep you safe throughout this month and the years to come.

Until next month, this is your Chaplain signing off. Have a blessed month and God's speed to everyone.

Vietnam
A Little History about a “Different War”
TSNA “Revetments” Newsletter for Veterans Day 2019
By Ira Cooperman

The Vietnam War was, to paraphrase several historians, an epic event -- not only for you and me, but for almost three million American servicemen and women, who were deployed to Vietnam sometime during 1955-75 to replace the French after they lost the First Vietnam War.

As a result of the French Indochina War, which lasted from 1945-55, Vietnam, the country, was divided in two -- with communist Ho Chi Minh controlling the North, and a Catholic Vietnamese man named Ngo Dinh Diem in the South.

There were supposed to be free elections in the North and the South immediately after 1955, but they never happened.

I had studied the nations of Southeast Asia during my college days, in the early 1960s. Later, as an Air Force intelligence officer, working with the Central Intelligence Agency, I was stationed in Vietnam, Laos and Thailand in 1965-66.

As a result of my experiences, the Vietnam War became the central event in my life.

Looking back, it's difficult to realize that Vietnam was both the longest single war and the most sustained revolutionary effort of the 20th century.

Lasting for the Vietnamese people for 30 years, from 1945-1975, it ended only when the forces of North Vietnam entered Saigon on April 30, 1975.

The cost of the war's human suffering was monumental and difficult to calculate. In the South, it is estimated that the war produced seven million displaced persons -- one-third of its population.

It precipitated a forced urbanization within Vietnam, one of the most brutal ever.

The war also led to hugely disruptive changes in the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia. Formerly part of French Indochina, both Laos and Cambodia were supposed to be “neutralist” countries. Sadly, both now are considered pro-Communist politically.

In addition to the tremendous loss of life caused by the 30 years' of fighting, the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress estimates that the Vietnam War financially cost our government approximately \$584 billion. The estimates of others are as high as \$900 billion.

Besides the loss of life and the waste of resources, the war also was the most challenging military experience in American history -- despite our military forces directing the greatest volume of firepower the world had ever seen.

The U.S. airwar campaign was the biggest in history. American Navy and Air Force planes dropped more bombs on North Vietnam -- over 7 ½ million tons -- than the total tonnage dropped in all of World War II.

For America, the war had a powerful impact on the lives of our citizens at home as well as those of us in the field, for this was the first war that was broadcast on TV on a daily basis.

Only now, after decades of avoidance and silence, as well as our experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, are Americans finally coming to terms with Vietnam, a war that deeply divided our nation.

In fact, sometimes it wasn't even called a “war.” Many memorials in state capitals and other cities which contain lists of the casualties of America's military actions, use expressions such as the “Vietnam Era,” or “Vietnam Conflict” on their monuments.

No such euphemisms are possible for me, or for the loved ones of the more than 58,000 Americans who died, or the more than two million Vietnamese, 200,000 Cambodians, and 100,000 Laotians who were killed in a war that for America lasted from at least 1955 until 1975.

For some, especially the hundreds of thousands seriously wounded, its effects continue to this day. As the saying goes, “*The war that never was declared, never ended.*”

Whatever history books call it, I know it was war. For I was there, stationed first at the Intelligence Center at Tan Son Nhut Air Base in Saigon, then at a small CIA and Air Force base in Northeast Thailand called “Udorn,” with occasional temporary duty in Laos with “Air America,” the CIA's secret airline.

(If you were part of the 7AF Intelligence Center at **TSN**, or were aware of a secret facility at Udorn known as **AB-1**, I'd like to hear from you.)

In many ways, our nation's incursions in Southeast Asian countries can be described as a different kind of war. Politically, militarily and in its outcome, Vietnam did not resemble what you and I learned in school about America's other wars.

Six U.S. presidents oversaw the war in Vietnam, from Harry Truman to Gerald Ford.

As America's political leaders considered the so-called “Domino Theory,” and getting involved in South-

east Asia in the 1940s, '50s and '60s, Vietnam remained a puzzle to our leaders.

Even though the French had been in Vietnam since the 1880s, and had been fighting Ho Chi Minh's forces since 1945, Vietnam offered neither France nor America any clearly defined borders or identifiable enemy soldiers.

The wars in Southeast Asia featured guerilla fighting as opposed to the kind of set-piece battles that our soldiers experienced in Europe and the Pacific.

For America, the war's casualties came to include our nation's longstanding sense of national innocence, as well as the broad national consensus that had defined American foreign policy since World War II.

When the first American combat troops landed near Danang in March 1965, the U.S. was not fighting some sort of evil empire. We were contending with native people who wanted to rid their country of foreigners.

Further, most soldiers who went to Vietnam had no knowledge of the people who lived there and their culture, and, if they were fortunate to return home, remained more confused than ever.

While the war was going on 10,000 miles away, at home in America, there were at least two wars going on: One between the "hawks" and the "doves," and another between the counter-culture of young people and the centers of political power.

It was a time when conflict was no longer confined to foreign battlefields, but also took place on America's streets and college campuses.

With our civilian government and military establishment both busily manufacturing disinformation, the truth about how badly the war was going might never have emerged were it not for three events:

1. The Tet/Vietnamese New Year coordinated attacks that took place throughout South Vietnam in January 1968 by the Viet Cong, causing CBS newsman Walter Cronkite to suggest that it was time to call a halt to the war;
2. The My Lai massacre of civilians committed by American troops led by Second Lt. William Calley in March 1968, and,
3. The shootings of anti-war Kent State University students by Ohio National Guard soldiers in May 1970, which came to symbolize the deep political and social divisions that so sharply divided the country.

While Vietnam was the first war the American public was forced-fed through television, which had, then as now, its own version of the truth, the staging of the war in living rooms throughout the world did not guarantee any less bias or more realism than any other selected or censored version.

If anything, TV may have made the Vietnam War seem less real than other wars, seen as it was, in full color, but small scale, wedged between our dominant cultures' other fictions, competing for attention with phony war movies, dramas and other absurd offerings such as "The Twilight Zone," and "The Dick Van Dyke Show."

Only the best informed were able to sift out the real news between the reports spoken by TV anchormen and printed in daily newspapers.

Fortunately there were a few journalists, such as David Halberstam and R.W. Apple, Jr. of *The New York Times*, and Jack Foisie and Ruben Salazar of *The Los Angeles Times*, who refused to accept the half-truths offered by the U.S. Public Affairs Office in Saigon.

The public relations briefings offered to the news media every day at five o'clock in the afternoon were sarcastically referred to as the "Five O'clock Follies." I know because I attended a few.

Besides journalists, there were scholarly academics, like Prof. Bernard Fall, who had studied Vietnam for years and wrote several award-winning books attempting to warn Americans of the "quagmire" that the war was becoming -- despite our leaders' best intentions.

Looking back on it, Vietnam was a different war "in-country," for those GIs deployed throughout South Vietnam. Different in the cities, in the villages, in the field or at TSN.

Different if you were stationed way south in the Delta, or in the Highlands in the middle of the country, or near the Demilitarized Zone, along the 17th parallel. Or if you were stationed in Thailand or Cambodia, or secretly in Laos, where the so-called "Secret War" was being waged.

It was different for soldiers and Marines who saw combat, which most of the time was staggering and ferocious. And it was different if you were stationed on an aircraft carrier in the South China Sea, or if you flew a helicopter, an F-4 "Phantom" jet fighter, or a huge B-52 bomber.

Some American troops never saw Saigon. Some (like you?) never left the Saigon area, having flown in and out of its Tan Son Nhut Airport.

Other than the work of photo-journalists, images of where you were in the war were stored away in the heads of survivors, to burst forth decades later.

It definitely was a different war for women -- the 8,000 American women who served in Vietnam, mostly as Army nurses, and a couple of thousand who worked for the USO and the Red Cross; and different for the millions of wives, mothers and sisters waiting back home.

Sadly, it was different for the eight American women who died while serving, whose names are chiseled onto the black Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., alongside all those whose lives were sacrificed in the war since 1959.

It was a different war for people of color, who were drafted in disproportionate numbers, as their white middle- and upper-class counterparts received college or medical deferments (such as some politicians we all know!).

Minorities bore the brunt of the fighting, serving in lower ranks, mostly in the infantry, suffering discrimination as well as the terrors of combat. Some came to identify more with the Vietnamese “enemy” than with the culture they were sent to protect.

It was a different war for those men who refused to go, for the Conscientious Objectors, for those who fled to Canada, or went “underground” as fugitives.

And different for those who went to jail, and for the few who resisted within the military, who refused to kill innocent civilians, and found themselves “suspect” on all sides.

Today, Vietnam seems like a different war in its physical and emotional aftermath, both in the U.S. and in the reunited nation of the Vietnamese people:

For the refugees of the war, for those Boat People who survived and for those who did not; for those who relocated in Western countries and are still struggling to adjust to foreign cultures;

For the Americans and Vietnamese who continue to succumb from the toxic effects of the herbicide, Agent Orange, absorbed into their bodies decades ago; and,

For the Asian people dying or losing body parts from unexploded ordinance we Americans left behind.

It certainly was a different war first for the French, and then for our military forces, and for many Vietnamese who thought they were defending their country and fighting for their freedom.

In Vietnam, the war even has a different name. It’s called “The American War.”

Finally, it is a different war today than it was 50 years ago -- for those who cannot forget it, whether they were stationed in Southeast Asia or not; for those who cannot remember it because they were too young; and for those of all ages who look at the Vietnam War through the lens of current events in Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria.

The Vietnam War was different and spectacular in the literal sense.

Waged in the name of “credibility,” it was intended to project our nation’s image as a superpower, as the mightiest on earth, as if the North Vietnamese, who handily defeated the French, would be afraid of going up against the military might of the United States.

But image-making has its own logic and imperatives. The war was also something less rational and more delirious, harder to control and easier to get “high” on.

Even former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, who was responsible for running the war from 1961-66, in his memoir called *“In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam,”* admits, 30 years later, that United State policy towards Vietnam was “terribly wrong.”

Now he tells us.

In the final analysis, we, the people ordered to fight it, the soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines, were left with the unintended consequences of the war. Veterans, if they were lucky enough to survive Vietnam, or any of our country’s other unpopular wars such as Korea, became our “forgotten warriors.”

Americans often glorify soldiers while battles rage and express gratitude for their service -- especially during observances of Veterans Day and Memorial Day, but quickly forget them when the guns fall silent.

When war claims a soldier’s life, what does that death signify? What is the meaning of a veteran’s service?

What now, a century after World War I, “The War to End All Wars,” and four decades after Vietnam became reunified, when a year in a war zone today, followed by a year or less at home, often followed by orders to deploy back to war, is the new “normal” for active duty soldiers, especially for those sent to Afghanistan?

What now, as our country becomes a nation at peace with being continuously at war?

A scholar of U.S. foreign relations named Fredrik Longevall has given me some answers, and in doing so has taught me a great deal about Vietnam.

In his award-winning book published seven years ago, Fredrik Longevall asks, *“Why do the most thoughtful national security strategists and policymakers perpetually grapple with the lessons of history?”*

“Because,” he answers, *“there are few truly original problems in world politics that have not been confronted before. Over the centuries, strategic overextension by great powers acting on the periphery of their national interests has hobbled ancient empires and modern states alike, in past decades consuming both France and the United States in a dual narrative of disaster in Southeast Asia.”*

The book is called *“Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam.”*

Of all the books I’ve read about the war, and I’ve read hundreds, this is the one I recommend most.

“Embers of War” explains our nation's folly getting into Vietnam in the first place.

The author, Fredrik Longevall, is a professor at Harvard and Cornell universities. The book is available in paperback.

In summary, for those of us who were fortunate enough to return home from war, many came to feel forgotten by the nation that sent us. That's true regardless of the war's name -- Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, or Korea.

As one veteran has written about Vietnam, it *“succeeded only in leaving a legacy of bitterness and unacknowledged sacrifice.”*

What have we learned from the thousands of Americans, including so many friends of ours, whose courage and devotion to duty caused them to make the ultimate sacrifice?

What will be the legacy of those of us who were sent decades ago to fight in foreign lands?

The way in which we and our fellow citizens answer these questions, the manner in which we meet the challenges of veterans coming home today, will say a great deal about who we really are and what our nation stands for.

Wars will continue to permeate the lives of military veterans and their loved ones. But in the case of Vietnam, the healing process has begun.

It is time to add to the growing perception that regardless of one's view of the war, most veterans did their duty proudly and loyally. Their legacy is one of “Duty, Honor, Country.”

The lives of those who have served our nation challenge us, not only to remember them, but to give *meaning* to their lives. For as a poet has suggested, their lives will mean what we make of them.

Blessings to you and to all members of the Tan Son Nhut Association.

(Ira Cooperman served in HQ 7AF at TSN and with Det. 1, 7/13AF at Udorn RTAB and in Laos from 1965 -66. He was Honorably Discharged as an Air Force captain at Shaw AFB, S.C., Dec. 1967.)

Attention TSNA Members and Members Families

TSNA is requesting help from TSNA Members and their families. The TSNA, being made up of Vietnam Veterans, is an age group where we are unfortunately losing members who are passing. TSNA needs to be notified As Soon As Possible by TSNA Members who are aware of a passing or the Families of one of our beloved members who has passed away, and we are asking for your help in notifying us. Please contact one of the following in the event of death:

| | |
|---|---|
| Jimmy L. Smith, Chaplain Home Phone: (937)-429-5713 Cell Phone: (937)-901-9617 (Call or Text) E-Mail: Jimfamhist@sbcglobal.net | Larry Fry, Director of Membership Home Phone: (717)-664-6434 Cell Phone: (717)-201-7279 E-Mail: lfry2@dejazzd.com |
|---|---|

Name and location of the Funeral Home, dates of services and obituary information is also very helpful to us. If notified in time, it will allow us to notify members in the area so TSNA can attend visitations and funerals. Unfortunately, many times we do not hear of the passing until it is too late. We also fear there are others who have passed that we currently do not know about. All of our members are important and our goal is to support them and their families as much as possible. This is only possible when we are notified so we are relying on you to help us. Timing is critical to us. TSNA Members please pass this request on to your families so they will know who to contact in the TSNA Organization in the event it is necessary. Thank you for your attention and thank you for your help.

VETERANS DAY

Ever wonder why Veterans Day is on the 11th and does not change?

World War 1 ended on the 11th month on the 11th day on the 11th hour.

Today I saw a man selling poppies stop a lady and asked if he could re-position her poppy. While doing so, he told that lady she should wear that poppy on the right side; the red represents the blood of all those who gave their lives, the black represents the mourning of those who didn't have their loved ones return home, and the green leaf represents the grass and crops growing and future prosperity after the war destroyed so much. The leaf should be positioned at 11 o'clock to represent the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, the time that World War 1 finally ended.

He was worried that younger generations wouldn't understand this, and his generation wouldn't be around for much longer to teach them.

We must remember those from our current wars too.

EDITOR'S NOTE: I COPIED THIS FROM SOMEWHERE, BUT I DIDN'T NOTE WHERE IT WAS. SO I AM PASSING IT ON AS "AUTHOR UNKNOWN!"



Come to The Wall

Want to be part of an event like that pictured above? Calling all TSNA members in and close to Washington, DC. We need you to come to The Wall on Veterans Day to help past president and co-founder, John Peele, place a wreath as part of the formal ceremony. We have 10 reserved seats, and so far, only two are scheduled to be occupied by John and Michelle. We want to fill the remaining eight seats and have two other members help John march the wreath to The Wall.

Ceremonies begin at 1:00 PM, so you would need to meet John at the Vietnam Veteran Memorial Kiosk no later than 12:30 PM if you want to march to the wall with him. Any others who arrive need only tell ushers that you are with TSNA. Getting a seat will be a first-come-first-served basis.

Hope that John Peele meets up with some of you on Veterans Day.

Dale Bryan, Secretary



FROM THE PREZ

As we now focus our thoughts and plans towards next year's Reunion in Tucson, Arizona, let's not forget what is almost upon us - Veteran's Day.

We have been chosen to lay a wreath at the Vietnam Memorial again this year. Our representatives will be one of our founders and Past President John Peele and his wife Michele.

I know our Secretary Dale Bryan has asked for anyone of our members who live in that area to meet there to be with them for this presentation.

As we approach Veteran's Day just take a moment to reflect and remember our fellow veterans who gave the supreme sacrifice.

Also, I would like to wish you and yours a Happy Thanksgiving.

Randall W Brown
TSNA-President



I really like our sign. Will be handy to take to all Reunions. Thanks to all on procuring this great sign.

Randall

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Web Site: www.tsna.org
 Annual Membership: \$20.00
 Five Year Membership: \$80.00
 Life Membership: \$180.00

HAVE A LAUGH

" Be who you are and say what you feel; because,
 those who matter, don't mind and those who mind,
 don't matter . "

A truly happy person is one who can enjoy the scen-
 ery on a detour.

Birthdays are good for you. The more you have, the
 longer you live.

Ever notice that the people who are late are often jolli-
 er than those who have been waiting for them?

How long a minute is depends on which side of the
 bathroom door you are on.

Living on Earth is expensive, but it does include a free
 trip around the sun every year.

NEW MEMBERS

| | | | | |
|------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| Thomas R. Carlson | Humble | TX trctex@hotmail.com | Dec 68 - Jul 70 | 460th TRW Hq Sq |
| Thomas L. Yager | Westerville | OH thomasyager@gmail.com | Mar 71 - Mar 72 | OSI Hq. District 50 |
| Richard F. Rommel, Jr. | West Melbourne | FL rrommel@gmail.com | Apr 69 - Apr 70 | 460 Field Maint. Squadron |

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