



REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

A Memorial to the American Experience in Vietnam

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A MOVING MOMENT AT THE "MOVING" WALL



By: Paul Mortensen, Mar 66 - Feb 67, Det 19, 9th Air Postal Squadron
TSNA Director of Reunion Planning.

I was working as an ambassador at the Vietnam wall when it was in Payson, Arizona this past week of August, 2022. It was a 3/4 size replica of the wall.

I just wanted to share about one of the most powerful moments that I had during that week.

The wall was set up on the soccer field that Payson high school utilizes.

There was an elderly Native American gentleman that hobbled onto the field, and as soon as he came through the gates onto the field, he started tearing up.

I approached him and asked if he needed a wheelchair and he nodded yes, so I got him a chair and asked if he was looking for a particular name.

He gave me the name, I looked up where the name was on the wall, and wheeled him over to the wall, and pointed to the name.

He broke down in tears and said "that's my little baby brother". I sat beside him for 15 minutes and he cried and cried, and finally wiping the tears away from his face he nodded and said "it's time for me to go home".

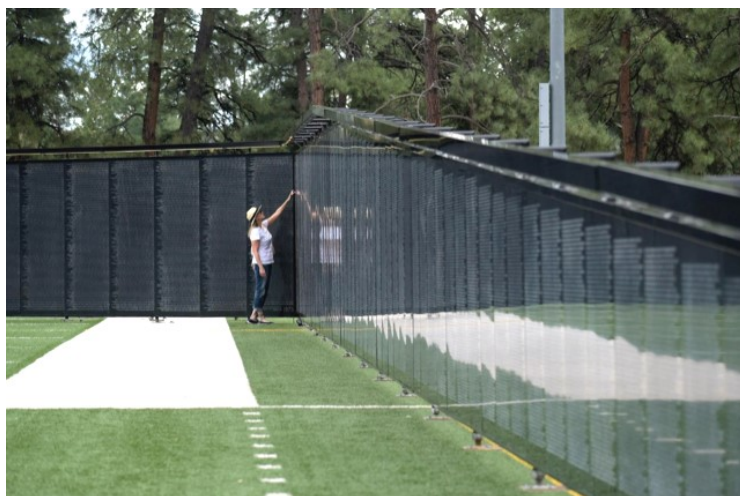
I don't know if he meant his earthly home or his heavenly home, but it was so heartwarming for me to be able to assist this elderly gentleman in finding the name of his baby brother.

There is a program The Wall has started called "In Memory", where we can place in memory the names of our brothers and sisters who passed away after returning from Vietnam, whose lives were cut short due to illness or accident from their service in Vietnam.

The Saturday before Father's Day, family members can go to Washington, and read off the names of their loved ones who are NOT on the wall but died due to injuries or illnesses obtained in Vietnam.

The Moving Wall at Payson, AZ

Photo by Paul Mortensen





Me with 122 mm rocket

The rocket attacks created an urgency to make sure all barracks were sandbagged. For several weeks 800-1000 airmen working in 3 six-hour shifts filled sandbags. Not only was the work exhausting, but it also exposed us to small arms fire from the west perimeter as we worked under floodlights. On Tuesday 27 Feb I was on the 0030-0630 shift. At 0200 the lights were doused due to a rocket attack. We pulled sandbags off of the 50-foot flatbed and within 10 minutes had built some protective pill boxes. Thirty minutes later the all clear was given and a full colonel ordered us to load the sandbags back onto the flatbed. Not a soul complied! At 0515 we were attacked again but enough sandbags were still available for shelter. I slept for about 20 minutes, head face down in the cool damp sand, helmet pulled tightly over my head.

With every sundown the sense of foreboding would arise. Various curfews placed upon the civilians during my final 5 months required us airmen to do KP and garbage details which called me out from under my bed – the only place I felt somewhat secure after dark. The sirens would sound, usually between 0100 – 0400. I felt so vulnerable when having to cross the base for KP during these hours. A few times the sirens would put me into a nasty ditch. Many were false alarms but they created lots of psychological terror.

As each airman got shorter his apprehension grew. One fellow dug a hole in the ground between huts 911 & 912 to which he ran a cord and light bulb. He slept there during his final weeks before his PCS to England, which we all envied. Later we heard that he died

in a car crash in England. Irony!

I chose Sydney, Australia for my R&R, April 22 – 28, 1968. Because this narrative is about Tan Son Nhut I will keep my R&R comments brief. Eight hour flight from Saigon. Ubiquitous turbulence crossing the Equator as sinks & toilets (air masses) fight to decide which direction to swirl as they're draining. Refuel in Darwin. So strange to see falling leaves; Sydney smells just like October in Tacoma. Indeed, April is mid-Autumn in Sydney. Enjoyed relaxing baths and cold Victoria Beer in my hotel room. Explored the city, took local harbor cruises, went on an outback cookout, visited Taronga Park Zoo. At a restaurant a middle-aged couple heard my *accent* and inquired of my Vietnam status, upon which they paid for my dinner, drove me on a tour of the city.....and the lady kissed my cheek good-bye! My last night in Sydney I attended the Billy Graham Crusade. Sunday morning the Sydney Herald was warning what was to become in mere weeks *Mini-TET, May '68*. I considered, then dismissed a desperate desire to flee to Canada.

THE FINAL STRETCH

Returning from Sydney I had 68 days to go. The nervous countdown continued, made worse by the increasing rocket assaults on TSN, and attacks upon civilians downtown, which led to more civilian curfews, more loss of local labor on base, ergo more KP rotations which required cross-base travel after sundown. B52s were now bombing close enough to TSN to knock down the ceiling tiles in my office.

I never took my formal 3-day in-country R&R to Vung Tau but in June I took 3 days off to fly to Cam Ranh Bay to visit old buddies from my days at McChord AFB. Got myself a painful sunburn as we spent many hours cavorting in the South China Sea.

With 30 days to go I was at last a *short timer* which, according to local tradition, allowed me to attach a ribbon to my lapel. The ribbon was an unauthorized attachment to the uniform but USAF tolerated the practice. This was the black & yellow ribbon from the neck of a bottle of Seagram's VO, the contents of which were always shared with one's fellow Airmen.

On July 5th I boarded a bright green Braniff Airways B-707 headed for Travis AFB, with stops in Manila, Guam and Honolulu. The sense of freedom and relief was unforgettable and all onboard broke into rousing cheers as we climbed to safe altitude above Saigon. But I also felt guilty that I was abandoning my friends. A heartfelt salute to 377th SPS and elements of the 25th Infantry Division for keeping us safe.

STATESIDE AGAIN

PCS to Andrews AFB, Maryland. Got promoted to E-5. Having served 3 years and 5 months, I was relieved from active duty in January 1969 under the *early out* program.

CIVILIAN LIFE

I earned a Bachelor's Degree in Biology and worked as a pharmaceutical sales rep. Later I became self-employed dealing in used diagnostic medical equipment. I once had hopes for a flying career and to that end I obtained a commercial pilot certificate, multi-engine and instrument ratings. In 2009 a 12-year battle with cancer took my wife after 35 years of marriage. Thanks to our faith in Jesus, Christ Lana and I have an eternal future together. Retirement has allowed time to learn to play the guitar, hone my Spanish speaking skills, do mission work in México, and coach college track & field. *Life is good.*

FINAL THOUGHTS

Two reminders of my home town were ever-present at TSN. The reminders became acutely painful after Tet '68. Carling Black Label beer was brewed in my home town, Tacoma, WA. In fact, as a civilian, I had worked for the NPRR and as a switchman had delivered rail cars of brewing ingredients to Carling. And on any given day the TSN flight line hosted C-141 Starlifters from 62nd MAW from my home town McChord AFB. Oh God! How I wished I could have flown home to safety on one!

Regrets:

1. Should have accepted Miss Phuong's offer to come to her house to learn Vietnamese.
2. Should have brought home a flag of South Vietnam
3. Should have kept the .50 caliber bullet that plunged through the ceiling of Dining Hall #3 and landed at my feet.

I feel privileged to have been an eye-witness to history, even as limited and as relatively safe as was my tour. Now, my letters, photos and memorabilia keep my memories astonishingly fresh, as if I was there just yesterday. Would I like to return for a visit? No. Because everyone who has returned to TSN says that virtually nothing is recognizable except the radar domes.

In June of '68 I was rooting for the Bobby Kennedy campaign. What he called *Vietnamization* was Bobby's plan to increase material support, but to reduce US troop strength. This plan appealed to me because I deeply resented the cowboys, those thousands of young Vietnamese males who scootered their girlfriends through Saigon streets. *They*, not U.S. troops, should have been fighting and dying for their own Country.

I understand the reasons for our involvement in Vietnam, while at the same time I believe that the War was one of the greatest tragedies in human history.

RECOMMENDED READING

The Boys of '67: Charlie Company's War in Vietnam, by Andrew Wiest, draws about the sharpest contrast as can be found between the REMF life at TSN, and the heart-breaking stories of the infantry in IV Corps, not too far south of TSN.

If I had to sum up in just one sentence my most vivid recollection of Tan Son Nhut...It was non-stop activity 24/7/365.

Thank you very much for reading. I welcome your memories, corrections, questions, comments. Email: pmcclurg2@cox.net And *Revetments* needs your stories! For the record, I quit smoking 25 yrs ago.

Philip G. McClurg, E5, USAF, 1965-1969

My souvenirs



Miss Phuong & me



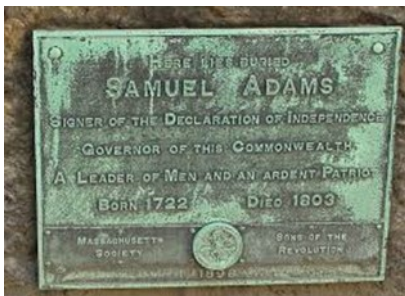
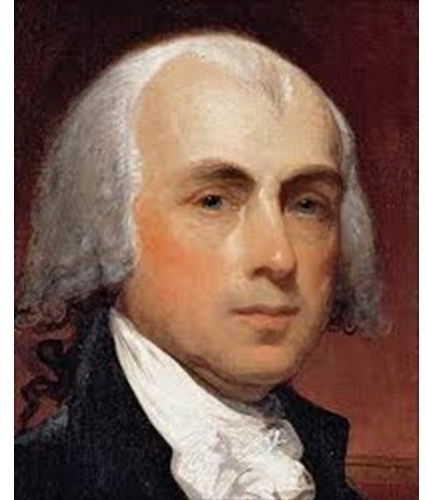
Chaplain's Corner-Educating our Youth
By Andy Csordas, Associate Chaplain

We all understand the importance of educating our children and today there is much discussion about what we should be teaching them to make them successful in life. We can all read accounts of our schools failing our children including one high school that had a cumulative gpa for their “graduating” seniors of well less than 1.0. There are articles out there that discuss how less than half of graduating classes are competent readers, it goes on and on.

Samuel Adams, founding father and called “the Father of the American Revolution” had a serious-minded opinion on education and what we should emphasize. Of course he thought the three “Rs” were important to ensure we had a growing literate society to allow the country to prosper, but he also offered another subject he thought just as important or perhaps more important.

2 Chronicles 34:3 tells us **“while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David”**. This passage is referring to Josiah, he became King of Judah at eight years old and at the age of 16 he sought the God of his nation. That nation, Judah which is Israel today, still benefits from the reformatations that Josiah started in 632 BC.

Samuel Adams thought teaching our children about God was very important. One of his quotes is as follows: *Let divines and philosophers, statesmen and patriots, unite these endeavors to renovate the age by impressing the minds of men with the importance of educating their little boys and girls, inculcating in the minds of youth the fear and love of the Deity . . . and leading them in study and practice of the exalted values of the Christian system.*



What we teach our children has long term ramifications. Just like the long-lasting reforms made by Josiah over 2500 years ago, what we teach our children today can have long lasting consequences on our country’s future and their future.

So how do we make a difference? We have all been around more than a few years and hopefully we better understand what is important in life and what just a passing fancy is and how meaningless some things we thought important can be. Do we prayerfully consider how we encourage our young people in the ways of God, or do we just ignore what is happening. We must have an open relationship with God so we are able to listen when

He talks to us.

Proverbs 19:27 says, **Stop listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge.** The Words of Knowledge are found in the scriptures, the inspired Word of God. Make sure you use this all important guide to life and not stray from the words of knowledge and teach them to our youth.

ATTENTION REUNION ATTENDEES

Do you have any allergies, “intolerances” or handicaps??

If you do, and did not note them on your Reunion Registration, please get in touch with me to be sure your information gets passed on to the Hotel and Reunion Staff.

Paul Mortensen Email: paul@themortensens.com.



LEAVING JAPAN (AND THE AIR FORCE) EARLY, THANKS TO TIME SPENT AT TAN SON NHUT.

By: Larry Fry, Det. 8, 2nd ADVON, Dec '61 - Mar '62

My DEROS date for leaving Japan got changed to an earlier date due to my being TDY to Tan Son Nhut. And then I was told that since there were no flights available on that new date that they scheduled one even earlier.

My original DEROS was to be 6/12/62. I have orders that changed it to 5/23/62. And I have my flight orders dated 4/6/62, for leaving Japan on 5/9/62.

Since I was stationed at the Air Force's Washington Heights Housing Annex, in "downtown" Tokyo, they had a nice car and Japanese driver pick me up and take me to Tachikawa Air Base, about a half hour drive.

Things got interesting right away after arriving at "Tachi".

We found out that we were going to be flying back to the states on a "Flying Tigers" turbo-prop "CL-144", swing tail 198 passenger plane. OK, we can handle that.

Sooo, it turns out that this plane (pictured here after landing in Alaska),

needed a lot of fuel to get to Alaska. AND, the Tachikawa runway was too short for the thing to take off fully loaded with fuel. So, we did a "short hop" to Haneda International Airport, filled the tanks, and headed for a long, long, flight to Alaska, in that high-pitched noisy aircraft.

As we started down from cruising altitude to land in Alaska, those of us directly under where the "swing-tail" meets the airplane body, we got more than a little bit wet from the condensation coming down from the seam above us.

OK, we are at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska – in the United States, where they have to unload our luggage and we go through Customs.

We are in the terminal waiting for our luggage when we get the announcement to get the heck back on the plane.

Turns out we were a "non-scheduled" flight, so there were no Customs folks available to check in 198 folks.

We are now southbound, and are informed that we will be going to San Francisco International Airport for our Customs stuff.

This is a bit of inconvenience for some, but we were all happy for some folks who were on Emergency Leave, since they would already be at San Fran airport, and didn't have to get there from Travis. And, our airplane crew was busy helping them get flights out of San Fran, so they could get right to a flight ASAP.

Now, we need to get to Travis. There must have been a lot of calls and decisions being made while we were coming from Alaska, because as soon as we cleared Customs, we got on busses to go to Travis.

I will never forget that trip, since our bus driver was a baseball fan, and had the ball game on the intercom system, and I still think he spent more time talking to other baseball fans on the bus than he did driving the darn thing!!

OK, the Air Force had just changed the timing for release from the Air Force to a longer number of days than previous, and they even had us on work details during that time.

I'm finally out of the Air Force, and am waiting for the train that will take me – and a bunch of other "airmen" eastward.

Two guys come over to me and said, "Weren't you the Chaplain's Assistant at Tan Son Nhut?" Yep, that was me – 3 months prior.

You never know who or what you are going to run into!

There was one interesting part of the train trip eastward. At Ogden Utah, they stopped and added a car that had come from Southern California. Most of the occupants of that car were a whole bunch of girls from a Catholic school or college.

Somewhere in the time after their joining us, a whole gang of men and women wound up doing the "Hokey-Pokey" through the passenger cars on that train.



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**Tent City, before screening
Tan Son Nhut Air Base
January, 1962
(Photo of, and from, Larry Fry)**

NEW MEMBER

Richard D. Hoppe Platte SD Sep 68 - Sep 69 12th TRS Aircraft Maint - Crew Chief RF-4C

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