



# REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association  
A Memorial to the American Experience in Vietnam



AUGUST 2023

## Chaplain's Corner-Watchman on the Wall

By Andy Csordas, Associate Chaplain

Most of us remember where we were on significant dates in history. The 9/11 attacks, the space shuttle blowing up and when JFK was shot are a few that come to mind. On November 22, 1963 I had just entered Algebra class and heard JFK was assassinated. If we were old enough we remember many of the details surrounding that event, I even remember Jack Ruby killing Lee Harvey Oswald on live TV.

What has been lost to many was the speech JFK was to give at a luncheon in Dallas that day. The following is an excerpt from that speech:

*We, in this country, in this generation are, by destiny rather than choice, the watchmen on the walls of world freedom. We ask, therefore that we are worthy of our power and responsibility, that we may exercise our strength with wisdom and restraint, and that we may achieve in our time the ancient vision of "peace on earth, goodwill toward men." That must always be our goal. For as it was written long ago, "Except the lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."*



In that portion of the speech he references several scriptures: **Luke 2:14** (KJV) . .

**and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"** This refers to the multitude of the heavenly hosts praising the birth of Jesus. He also refers to **Psalm 127:1** (KJV) **Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.**



Of course JFK is referring not to a house, but referring to our country. If you recall this was after the Cuban Missile Crisis when the world came very close to an all-out nuclear war. JFK sought peace and God's protection upon our country. JFK was no stranger to war, if you don't remember his PT-109 story I suggest you look it up and read it. He truly believed we needed to trust God for our country and the world's survival.

Of course things just seem worse now sixty years later. We need God more than ever to protect us, including our country and us as individuals and families. We need God as our watchman or what we deem as our safety net may be useless. Do you trust God to build your house, which is your family? We may still have a difficult time

for assorted reasons, but God is the one who brings real peace and freedom. Trust him today and be the spiritual leader of your home.

Larry:

Got my Challenge Coin holder, my neighbor made for me. Digging out my coins now. Rest are in storage.

Randall Brown

JULY 21, 2023



My service in Vietnam means something very special to me and while there were difficult times, and dangerous times, I am comforted to know that each of you who served there approximately five decades – one-half century ago – still hold a very special bond with me. During our May 2007 reunion in Dayton, Ohio, as your fourth President, I took the opportunity to read something I had written in 1998 – nearly three decades after I departed Vietnam – and after I had attended my very first Vietnam-related reunion. My thoughts in that commentary, which I called "A Return To Yesterday," describe my feelings and passion for my service in Vietnam with my Vietnam Veteran brothers. I had shared it with some friends before Dayton and was told it distilled the feelings of everyone who served there. I hope you feel the same:

**A RETURN TO YESTERDAY**  
**By**  
**Robert Robinson Gales, President Emeriti, TSNA**

On Friday, May 15, 1998, with only two and one-half hours of fitful sleep, the middle-aged gentleman departed his residence in Fairfax County, Virginia, and headed for the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport where he boarded the first of his two connecting flights to Biloxi, Mississippi. The flights were not merely a conveyance from one geographical area to another, but far more significant. They served as a segue from the present to the past.

It was not a big event as most reunions go, for there were only nine middle-aged or older men present, five of whom were accompanied on this journey to the past by supportive, but still not fully comprehending, spouses. In fact, the spouses weren't the only ones who initially failed to grasp the full significance of the event, for few of the prime participants were cognizant of the true intensity of the commitment to the return to yesterday and to their colleagues from so long ago.

Thirty years earlier, in a very different lifetime, these same nine young men – eight captains and a newly minted major – were casually thrown together as fungible components of a great fighting machine engaged in hostilities against a common enemy in a place called Vietnam. They came from three disparate professional backgrounds – five attorneys, three pilots, and a priest – and represented diversity in geography, experience, personality, age, religion, and physical appearance.

Seven of the nine were permanent party members of US Air Force components stationed at Bien Hoa Air Base, Vietnam. The other two, while permanently stationed elsewhere in Vietnam (one was from Phan Rang Air Base and one was from Tan Son Nhut Air Base), were at Bien Hoa so frequently, that they were made integrated components of the unit. And what was the unit? Hut 135, Bien Hoa Air Base, Vietnam. You won't find the unit identified in any organizational history for it wasn't an official fighting force, merely one which facilitated socialization, relaxation, exploration, transportation, and mutual psychological support, as well as enabled the membership to enjoy the additional benefits of food and libation and reasonable opportunities to sleep.

Of the seven permanent party members, three actually resided nearby, not in, Hut 135, for as pilots (two were "sleepy-time" forward air controllers (FACs) and the third was an air rescue helicopter pilot), they were entitled to air conditioned quarters – something those lower on the food chain of importance – the attorneys and the priest – were not. The lower level participants merely served as the stabilizing influence – the landlords – who sublet space in their hut and in their hearts so that others, as well as themselves, could enjoy the good life.

Thirty years later, our respective lives had evolved onto different paths, and each of us had other activities and responsibilities to attend to. There were the pilots. Jon, the air rescue helicopter pilot, remained on active duty and eventually rose to the grade of lieutenant colonel before retiring. He is now the operations manager of a major international airport in California. Jay, a "sleepy-time" FAC, left active duty and became a senior pilot for a large domestic airline. He is based in Texas. John, or Oz as he was known, the other "sleepy-time" FAC, also left active duty and became a senior pilot with a large domestic airline that eventually went bankrupt. He is now a senior pilot for a mid-sized domestic airline, and is based in Nevada.

There was the priest. Don, whose nickname "Father-Priest" says it all – our priest and spiritual guide – left active duty and eventually withdrew from the priesthood. After a long career in public service in New York, he semi-retired to a part-time public service position in California

And there were the attorneys. Dave, at that time the only major in the group, and the Staff Judge Advocate at Bien Hoa – in other words, the senior attorney there – remained on active duty and eventually retired in the grade of major general. He is now active in other pursuits in Texas. Ken, an attorney and one of the two non-permanent party members, remained on active duty, and eventually retired as a colonel. He is now a screen writer, residing in Virginia. Will, another attorney, left active duty and returned to Mississippi to build a thriving “big-time” law practice. Russ, still another attorney, remained on active duty for awhile, but later joined the reserve component, and eventually retired as a lieutenant colonel. He now practices law in a small Mississippi town. And me. I was the other non-permanent party member, essentially on loan from Tan Son Nhut Air Base. After a period on active duty as an attorney, I joined the reserve component and eventually retired as a colonel. I am now the Chief Administrative Judge for a large federal agency and reside in Virginia.

Nevertheless, the call went out, and for some inexplicable reason, nothing could be strong enough to dissuade us from reuniting from around the nation to Biloxi, Mississippi, to join our two local hosts, Russ and Will. I am frequently asked, why did you go? But I am unable to sufficiently articulate my reasons except to say the draw was irresistible – I simply had to go! We discussed it among ourselves, and the response was generally identical. We had something individually and as a group, and we did not want to lose “it.” The unit, once a functioning reality, but now a bright and enduring memory, had again come alive.

And what did we do during the reunion? Just what we had always done: we played, we talked, we joked, we reminisced, we drank, we ate, we photographed each other, we talked about home, and we shared. But this time, there was no shooting. We brought each other current from 30 years ago in warp speed. And the spouses were magnificent. Some were initially conservative and laid-back so as not to interfere with the renewed fantasy of their loved ones. And as they watched their middle-aged warriors become once again young before their very eyes, especially when we sat around and watched, no lived, the slide show with 30-year-old visual memories, they too became absorbed into the moment. There we were all young, good looking, vibrant – sharing what we had then with those who love us now. We were no longer merely men, we were now families, including spouses, who understood each other, perhaps better than we knew ourselves. We were not nine families, but one extended family.

Over the years, each of us, in one way or another, had been blessed with good fortune and afflicted with heart-break and consequences of other fortune. Some had remained married to their spouses since Vietnam; some had married later on; and some of us had seen tumultuous times and had divorced, and later remarried. But we all survived to become extremely successful and productive citizens. Where once we were boys, we were now parents and grandparents. And there was one consistent thread which bound us together: that period in Vietnam was the most memorable year of our respective lives.

Thirty years ago it was reality! I lived it and lived through it. . . with them. They were merely memories enshrined in the heart and memory of an aging warrior. They are now legend of the kind fantasies are made.

I sat in my seat of Northwest flight 5691 – in the last row by the window, feeling rather depressed as the fantasies flashed through my mind. And, as the wheels of this would-be freedom bird lifted off the runway, tears welled up in my eyes and I openly wept. For the first time in 30 years I had again experienced the contentment, the excitement, and yes, the exhilaration, of that time oh so very long ago. The sunlight cavorted about on the water and other reflective surfaces below to provide a dazzling light show as an encore celebration for the reunion, and I appreciated the effort. I cherished every moment of the memories, but that was yesterday – 30 years ago, and this is today. The reunion was officially over, and I was going home.

### POSTSCRIPT

Life is beautiful, but sometimes also cruel. While all my brothers at that first reunion – generally individuals who would now be in their 70s, 80s, or 90s – will always be in my heart and memory, several have gone on to greater rewards. Rest in peace my brothers, until we meet again.

**TAN SON NHUT ASSOCIATION 2023**  
**REUNION REGISTRATION**  
**Jacksonville FL**  
**Sep 20 - 24, 2023**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ GUEST NAME \_\_\_\_\_

STREET ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

TEL ( \_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

SPECIAL NEEDS (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

**Choose one of the following:**

**1: FULL Reunion Registration including banquet**

Number attending \_\_\_\_\_ **\$95.00 = \$** \_\_\_\_\_

Full Reunion Total Remittance: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Banquet Only Friday, September 22, 2023**

Number attending \_\_\_\_\_ x **\$65.50 = \$** \_\_\_\_\_

Banquet Only Total Remittance: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Bus Tours**

**Bus tours can be selected and will be billed separately when destination and price is determined**

**Mail this form with payment (check only) to:**

**TAN SON NHUT ASSOCIATION  
P.O. BOX 236  
PENRYN, PA 17564-0236**

**REGISTRATION FORM WITH PAYMENT MUST BE RECEIVED**  
**NLT September 1, 2023**

Questions regarding Registration should be directed to:

Paul Mortensen  
Director of Reunion Planning  
[TSNAreunions@gmail.com](mailto:TSNAreunions@gmail.com)

**Hotel Information**

**Double Tree by Hilton Jacksonville Airport  
2101 Dixie Clipper Drive  
Jacksonville FL 32218 Phone (855) 689-8135**

**Booking Link: <https://bit.ly/TanSonNhut>**

Please note, the entire URL must be copied and pasted for it to work properly.

**In the event you encounter issues with the reservation link, please make reservations by contacting Hilton's reservations department directly at 855.689.8135 and reference the Tan Son Nhut Annual Reunion group block or the group code TSN**

**Room Rates: \$124.00 plus taxes for standard rooms, \$144 plus taxes for a suite**

## Biography: CDR Alan J. Billings

U.S. Naval Aviator – Systems engineer – Inventor - Author

### TSNA 2023 Reunion Speaker

As a U.S. Naval Aviator, CDR Billings rose from the enlisted ranks to become the Commanding Officer of the oldest combat search and rescue squadron in the Navy. He was a member of the Navy's only helicopter attack squadron (which was the most highly decorated squadron of the Vietnam era.). CDR Billings was a highly decorated combat veteran serving four tours in Vietnam. He was awarded more than 40 medals and citations for his service to the country, including the Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry along with 24 Air Medals. He completed a successful 22-year naval career in aviation and has qualified in more than 20 different aircraft. His final two tours included; Air Boss on the USS Belleau Woods, LHA-3 and Program Manager for the Navy's air and surface computer software.

He holds a master's degree in computer systems from the Naval Postgraduate School and an undergraduate degree in engineering. He has designed, and built ground support hardware and software for combat aircraft (F/A-18, AV-8B) that were used in Desert Storm. He invented the Ground Maintenance station adopted by the Naval Aviation Logistics Command Management Information System (NALCOMIS). He holds a Commercial pilot's license including fixed wing, rotary wing, multi-engine, and instrument ratings, land.

His first book, "Seawolf 28" received a five star review from the Military Writers Society of America (MWSA). His second "SHEEPDOGS" received a gold medal "First Place" from the Branson Stars and Flags Book Awards.

### SPECIAL. PLEASE TAKE NOTE!!

#### AWARD NOMINATIONS 2023

A highlight of our reunions has been presenting awards to members that have stood out in service to the Association and even non-members or organizations that have given of themselves to their community. This year will not be an exception. We need nominations for 2023. A listing of awards and their criteria are on the TSNA Website.

Any TSNA member may make a nomination, but they may not nominate themselves.

To nominate a member, non-member, or organization, please contact Andy Csordas at: [acsordasvvet@gmail.com](mailto:acsordasvvet@gmail.com). If you nominate by surface mail, send it to:

TSNA  
PO Box 236  
Penryn, PA 17564-0236.

All nominations must be received **ASAP**. One of the awards committees will make all selections.

Dale Bryan  
TSNA Secretary

### A FAVORITE SAYING

*Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you will land among the stars.*



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

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**Web Site: [www.tsna.org](http://www.tsna.org)**  
Annual Membership: \$20.00  
Five Year Membership: \$80.00  
Life Membership: \$180.00



**DALE BAKER PHOTO**

**1968-1969**

**Det.1, 460th TRW**

**NEW MEMBER**

**Harry L. Everly, Macon, GA [everlyco@yahoo.com](mailto:everlyco@yahoo.com) 12th TRS, Dec 70 - Aug 71 Crew Chief RF-4C #67-42**

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