



REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

A Memorial to the American Experience in Vietnam

MARCH 2023

DISASTER PLAN



By: SSgt Jim Marshall
377 CSG, Hq Sq, Data Automation
Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN
Feb 1970 – Mar 1972

I arrived at Tan Son Nhut AB in February 1970 and assigned to the 377th Combat Support Group, Head Quarters Squadron as a Computer Operator in Data Automation working for the Comptroller (Finance). It was in Building 340 where the Base Exchange was located. If you recall the building was split down the center long ways. The front side was the Base Exchange and the other side Air Force Finance. In the far end of Finance was built a small building housing the computer room whose construction has not changed from those of today. Then there was a breezeway, at the far end, with the latrines on the left, HEY – actual flush toilets, on the right the movie theater followed by the Post Office and all those postal boxes. Then at the far end was the Bank of America teller windows.

We did the Base Level computer processing for Finance, Personnel, Aircraft Maintenance reporting, shot records, finances for the NCO Club and other smaller systems. The absolute most important thing we did was to produce the paychecks; remember those Green Government checks. Actually if you were assigned to Tan Son Nhut or surrounding area close, you were some of the first in the Air Force to have your check sent directly to the bank; Bank of America (BAC) located on the opposite side of the movie theater. This some-how got implemented many, many years, long before the rest of the Air Force caught up. All you needed to do was to get a BAC checking account and let Finance know. Then, in the payroll processing, your name plus pay amount was placed onto a computer listing, the report was totaled and BAC was written one huge Government green check. BAC handled updating all the accounts. The good part of this was the checking account earned 10% tax free interest. The rest of the troops either got a green check or maybe by a Pay Master dispatched out to places like Vung Tau, Bin Thuy, etc. All tolled, we serviced 4K-5K troops knowing if the troops were not paid promptly, it would be our fault and hell to pay.

In an earlier story I described when early Sunday, payroll processing was to begin on Monday, the computer was hopelessly broke and since I was the new guy, I was included in a 4-Man team to execute the **Disaster Plan**. After getting armed to the teeth, yes me a Computer Operator, packing up the computer programs, data files along with 4K+ BLANK US Government Green checks worth millions if stolen, we drove without escort up to Bien Hoa. Leaving Bien Hoa on Monday very early, we drove back to Saigon not knowing we were to wait for a mine (IED) clearing convoy to fall in at the rear. It is said, God looks after children and fools.

In the computer world, even today, when things go wrong it is always at the worst moment. It was late Sunday afternoon, when the computer went down hard and parts needed were not in Saigon. Everything was primed for Monday's Payroll processing to do all the pay checks so as to get them over to finance, along with the Bank of America "LIST" for the crude form of Direct Deposit for those who had a BAC Checking Account. Also Pay Masters would be journeying out to remote locations carrying MPC (Military Pay Currency) for others. The Major sent someone over to the 700 Area to track me down and to grab the two newest guys assigned to our shop. The word was just "**COME NOW!!!!**".

We had gone for almost 18 months not having to execute the **Disaster Plan** which meant I was the only guy who ever had the honor of executing the plan. Now it was time for two new guys to get the experience. Unlike today when computers have evolved into being quite reliable, these 2nd Generation machines were prone to hardware problems either in the Central Processing Unit, Printer, Card Reader or Card Punch. It was not unheard of in the month to have the computer "**DOWN**" for 2-4 days. But luck had been with us for all this time the hardware staying operational in the three critical days to do Payroll.

Maybe breaking down now was just meant to be so I could train two new guys on the process before I left.

All over Vietnam each Air Base was gearing up to run the payroll processing; Bien Hoa, Cam Ranh Bay, Tuy Hoa, Phang Rang, Phu Cat, Da Nang and Pleiku. We all had identical Burroughs B-263 second generation computers using punched cards for input and paper plus punched cards for output. The green government check was just the size of an IBM Punch Card. Since it was too late in the day to drive up to Bien Hoa, **OH Thank You Lord**, the only option was to fly somewhere. The only flight out left for the day was to Phang Rang Air Base. So the Major made a quick phone call asking if we could use their computer overnight. As soon as we arrived, we could have the computer system to process throughout the night and catch a flight Monday morning.

Steps were already being taken to pack up all the punched card boxes containing the Finance programs, data, Run Book Procedures, check stock and even our own computer paper and cards. Someone had already gone to the Orderly Room and checked out M-16s, some extra clips, .38s and extra bullets for we three. Thank heavens there were no steel helmets and flak jackets like the last time although there was a First Aid pouch and holster on my web belt; never know. The Major already had a pickup truck ready to go over to the Aerial Port Squadron for the direct flight to Phang Rang AB; leaving in 45 minutes. I **just** had to ask about our Travel Orders. As I knew any time one traveled there were always a T.O. (Travel Order) created, staffed through Personnel, Finance for funding codes, etc. He said there was no time, it was the last flight today and we're flying **VOCO or Verbal Orders of the Commanding Officer**. Hey, who am I to question a Major.

It was down to the Aerial Port and we drove right out to the plane, a C-123 Provider, two engine, no frills definitely configured for cargo with passenger web seats down both sides and cargo in the middle. It turns out we were the only GI passengers along with a bunch of Vietnamese soldiers with their wives, kids, mothers, live chickens, pigs plus whatever else they were carrying. The Loadmaster ensured all were strapped to something and each of us had some of the most precious boxes between our legs for good measure. The takeoff was just as if you were in an elevator accelerating straight up. Now we got to enjoy the clucking, squealing animals and the Vietnamese who were talking a mile a minute. This was probably their first ride in Cargo Class as it was mine. It was a bit chilly but as long as we were high above the ground to escape ground fire, I did not mind.

When we got to Phang Rang, the Loadmaster came back and gave us a heads up of what was going to happen. It has long been described as a "**controlled crash**" where the plane flies over the base and from, maybe 10,000 feet, performs a tight spiral heading down at what seemed like too fast. Then, at the last minute very near to the ground the C-123 flairs out and lands trying not to drive the plane into the ground. This is to evade possible enemy gunfire if we did the normal long landing approach. I do know the Vietnamese, not to mention the pigs, were as glad as I was to be on mother earth.

Our counterparts in Data Automation were there to meet us taking us over to their Data Center. We pulled up and all I saw were sandbags up and over what looked like a bunker above ground. All of them were waiting to see the looks (**almost terror**) on our faces and we asked, "**Is this it?**". Except for the sign on the door I would have never know it was a Data Center. We were ushered inside and indeed it looked just like ours at Tan Son Nhut. In the computer room, there was raised flooring about 12" high for the A/C to get up into the machines along with a place to run the various power cables. It was quite clean and appeared much like our equipment. At this point they were eagerly awaiting to tell the story "**why the bunker**" and I just had to ask, **WHY?**

Back when the base was built the Data Center was located in a normal, long single wide trailer. They gutted the inside of the trailer installing the computer at one end with the card reader close to the Central Processing Unit (CPU), office space plus door in the middle with the huge printer and punch at the far end facing everyone. The whole trailer had A/C, low humidity and life was good.

One night a single operator was working Midnight Shift when he noticed the printer was having trouble with how the output, fan folded 11x14 paper, was stacking. So down he goes to the far end, presses STOP on the printer going around to its rear, squats down and was folding the paper correctly. The printer was around 3 1/2 feet high, 4 feet wide and 3 feet thick of heavy steel. At that moment a 122mm rocket landed just outside the other far end of the trailer where the CPU was located and exploded. Once the shock wave passed over him along with whatever else, he stood up, looked up and saw stars. The walls and roof of the trailer were

GONE. Luckily he was completely protected, except for the ringing in his ears, by this monstrous printer. In the old days, the computers were called "**BIG IRON**" and this is what saved him. Now I understood when the new Data Center was built, it was engineered inside a bunker.

We checked in with the Major and started the processing. The new guys did most of the work and I just ensured they stayed on track. Heck, I was a Short-Timer. So when I left in a few months, they were going to be the **STUCKEES** when things break at the wrong time of the month. We checked and there was a flight out at 0700 and we were ready. It was down to the Aerial Port at 0600 to check in. For some reason, the Aerial Port at that time of the morning was being run by the Army. I asked for our names to be added to the flight manifest as we were traveling VOCO explaining were Verbal Orders of the Commanding Officer. The only thing he said was "where are your ORDERS, like, **PAPER ORDERS !!!**".

Knowing he was the only obstacle to us getting on that plane, I now realized I needed **PAPER ORDERS**. "**OH**", I said, "I must have left them back at the Data Center.....be right back". I ran back to the Data Center, found a typewriter, paper, some carbon paper and figured I could just create some. I always knew in High School, some-day, I would use **THAT** Typing Class. In my best jargon, I entitled it "Verbal Orders of the Commanding Officer", added some "Travel will commence by air on or about.....", "authorized to carry fire-arms and classified cargo not to exceed 50 pounds....", put a bunch of travel codes on it, etc. Then I made a signature block for the Major, typed his name and I signed it myself as SSGT James Marshall.

It was back to the Aerial Port, handed him a Carbon Copy for the original had to be filed, naturally someplace else and he let us board. That is when I learned you never fight bureaucracy, just go with the flow. The flight back was uneventful with no chickens clucking and pig squealing. It turned out to be a great trip and I do not recall making such a tight corkscrew landing at Tan Son Nhut. It had been a long night and Finance would actually get their checks and list that morning versus on Tuesday. During the remaining months there were no more "**Disasters**" and if there were, I would wave as the others left. I finally left in late March 1972 after 25+ months in-country headed for Buckley ANG Base, Denver, CO and the future beginnings of Space Force.

**DOES ANYONE REMEMBER THIS??
USAF GROUND OBSERVER CORPS
(From the April 2008 Revetments)**

The picture below is a scanned picture of the "badge" I received at a banquet over 50 years ago, for service as a volunteer in the USAF Ground Observer Corps.

My home town, Manheim, PA is in a "valley" of sorts, with decent hills on three sides. On the top of one of those hills was the town's water system's open reservoir. There was a small maintenance shack next to the reservoir.

A friend would pick me up at my home a little before 10 pm (I was 15-16 years old at the time), and we would drive up to the top of the hill and set up in that shack for the next two hours, calling in anything that flew over, after agreeing on what we thought it was, etc. The fact that we were (and still are) in a position to get a decent amount of traffic from Harrisburg, PA, and from flights coming into Philadelphia from the west, made life interesting.

That is about all that I remember about it. Earlier this year I had a few minutes to reminisce about this with my co-observer, when I delivered Meals-On-Wheels to him in his home.

Other than the fact that at this time ('55 to '59) my brother was already in the Air Force, I guess this was my first direct "connection" with the Air Force.

The reservoir has been replaced by a huge tank, my co-observer recently passed away, but seeing this pin recently brought it all back to me.

Are there any other "Observers" in TSNA??

Larry E. Fry
Det. 8, 2nd ADVON
TSN Dec. '61- Mar. '62.



Chaplain's Corner-Without a Gun By Andy Csordas, Associate Chaplain

Desmond Doss wanted to serve his country after Pearl Harbor was attacked so he joined the Army. He actually could have been granted an exemption as he was working in the Newport News shipyard prior to the war, but he was determined to do more.

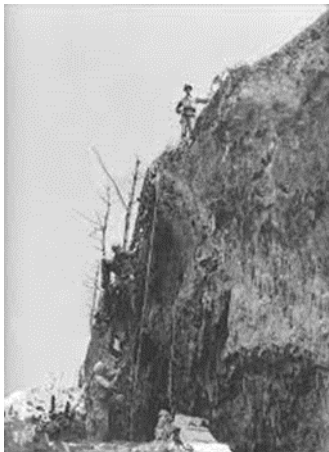
Desmond had been raised with a fervent belief in the Bible. When it came to the Ten Commandments, he applied them personally. During childhood his father had purchased a large framed picture at an auction. It portrayed the Ten Commandments with colorful illustrations. Next to the words, "Thou shalt not kill" was a drawing of Cain holding a club and standing over the body of his dead brother Abel. Little Desmond would look at that picture and ask, "Why did Cain kill Abel? How in the world could a brother do such a thing?" In Desmond's mind, God said, "If you love me, you won't kill." With that picture firmly embedded in his mind, he determined that he would never take life.¹



He enlisted as a conscientious objector and even refused a direct order to carry a gun which resulted in an attempted court martial. His beliefs resulted in a lot of tension between him and the other men in his unit. One of the men even threatened to shoot him when they first went into combat as the other troops believed he would be a liability and not be able to defend them. He was roundly criticized for reading his small bible quietly and going to church each Sunday before he was shipped overseas. His wife had given him that small bible when he left home, it was very dear to him and reading the scriptures provided much comfort.

Doss served on Guam, Leyte and Okinawa, and everywhere he showed an extraordinary dedication to his fellow troops. He was saving lives while others were taking lives. He never hesitated to respond to the call of "medic". Even though he had been mistreated, he never held a grudge.

On Okinawa with the 77th Infantry Division in late spring of 1945 his battalion assaulted a jagged cliff 400 feet high, later known as Hacksaw Ridge. When they got to the summit they were hit with a large amount of artillery, mortar and machine gun fire. The result was a 75% casualty rate, driving back other troops. They were ordered to retreat leaving the dead and wounded to die. Doss was the only one who did not retreat. Doss refused to seek cover praying "dear God, let me get just one more man" as he carried wounded to safety in spite of being exposed to heavy fire. He lived by the golden rule that is stated in **Matthew 7:12** ". . . **do unto others as you would have them do unto you**". **1 Corinthians 13:8** also reminds us "**Love never fails**".



In three more battles in May he exposed himself to heavy fire of all kinds, machine guns, grenades, mortars, etc. to dress wounds and evacuate others to safety. On May 31st he was seriously wounded by a grenade. He cared for his own wounds and waited five hours to be carried to safety. During that process he insisted his litter be given to another badly wounded soldier.

While waiting for the litter bearers to return he was hit by a bullet that resulted in a compound fracture of his arm. Amazingly he found the strength to find a rifle stock and use it as a splint for his arm and then crawled over 300 yards of rough terrain to the aid station. In the process he lost his precious bible, he later sent word for his friends to look for the bible. It was found, dried out and returned to him by very gracious men in his unit. The same little Bible they had criticized earlier.

Through outstanding bravery and determination he had rescued and saved many others that day and that resulted in him being awarded the Medal of Honor for outstanding gallantry far and above the call of duty by President Harry Truman on October 12, 1945. His weapons were his Bible and the Word of God. Truman stated during the presentation that awarding Doss the Medal of Honor was a greater honor than being president.¹

Being dedicated to God and following His precepts does not mean you are a wimp and not courageous. It should mean you are a worthy friend who can be relied on in difficult situations to support others, both our friends and others we encounter. We should ask ourselves are we that worthy friend?

¹ DesmondDoss.com

The Tan Son Nhut Association is accepting applications for the school year beginning in the Fall of 2023 for a \$5,000 scholarship from high school seniors. The student must be a direct descendant of one who served in Vietnam for any period from January 1, 1959, to April 30, 1975. "Direct descendant" means the applicant must be a child or grandchild ("greats" included) from one who served in Vietnam.

Service may be either with the Armed Forces of the United States or the Republic of Vietnam or as a civilian at Tan Son Nhut Air Base either as an American or Vietnamese citizen.

Deadline to apply is May 1, 2023 and must be mailed to:

TSNA Scholarship Committee
c/o Committee Chair
4214 Brenda Street
Jonesboro, Arkansas 72405

TSNA Scholarship recipients must pursue a four-year degree as a resident student at an accredited United States accredited college or university that grants bachelor or higher degrees. However, the applicant may begin higher education studies at a two-year accredited institution and transfer to an accredited school to complete the final two years leading to a bachelor's degree.

The scholarship is awarded in equal amounts over four years, provided the student maintains a 3.00 grade point average at the end of each school term and completes a minimum of 30 semester hours each year. Scholarship recipients must furnish an official transcript at the end of each spring semester.

Complete information about eligibility, distribution of benefits, and renewal of the scholarship and the application are available at the Tan Son Nhut Association website (TSNA.org).

In addition to the application form found on the TSNA.org web page, applicants must submit a number of support documents, including:

A. An official high School transcript showing your overall high school GPA. Minimum requirement is 3.0 on a 4-point scale ... or a signed letter from the high school administration attesting to and listing the student's GPA for each of the last three years of high school.

B. One Faculty or Administrator letter of recommendation (LIMIT TO ONE PAGE).

C. Copies of Standardized Test Scores (ACT, SAT, or other acceptable test scores) if not on high school transcript.

D. Resume' or list of school and community activities, awards and leadership positions.

E. An essay/personal statement written by the applicant addressing what you hope to accomplish as a student in college. Please include your planned major, academic, personal, and leadership goals (LIMIT TO ONE PAGE).

F. Proof (a copy of DD Form 214 of the Vietnam service member and/or other acceptable Documentation) and applicable birth certificates to show that you are a direct descendent by blood or by legal adoption of someone who served in the Republic of Vietnam for any period from January 1, 1959, to April 30, 1975.

In addition, optional information includes participation in JROTC or other patriotic activities as well as the applicant's plans to pursue ROTC in college.

If one wishes to honor a person or to make a donation in memory of someone, please provide contact information so that we may properly advise the honoree or surviving family of your donation. Please send donations to The Tan Son Nhut Association, PO Box 236, Penryn, PA 17564-0236. TSNA is a 501(c)(19) tax exempt veterans' organization incorporated in the Commonwealth of Virginia.



TAN SON NHUT ASSOCIATION 2023 **REUNION REGISTRATION**

Jacksonville FL
Sep 20 - 24, 2022

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

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

RIDE TO THE WALL SOUTHERN STYLE

By Terry Longpre
Jan '68 - Jan '69
377th Supply Squadron

Here is a short version of what transpired during my motorcycle odyssey to the Wall and Rolling Thunder.

We left Bradenton, Florida with a total of 37 bikes, some with passengers headed for Daytona on the first leg of our journey.

Between Bradenton and Daytona we made several stops for fuel, more bikes and twelve motorcycle officers. Upon arriving in Daytona, there were fifty-eight motorcycles. We had traveled 242 miles to get to the start of the "official" ride.

At 0500 hours on May 22nd we were up eating breakfast and preparing our bikes, as well as ourselves for the first day of riding which took us through Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and into Statesville, NC with one hundred and twelve bikes and five hundred and one miles later. We cut our evening short knowing that we would be making another early start in the morning.

At 0500 hours we got up, ate, had a pre-ride meeting and prayer and we were off on the second day of our journey to the Wall. We only have three hundred and eighty-six miles to go to reach our destination of Washington DC. We left Statesville with a total of 162 bikes, along with our law enforcement escort. I have to give the LE motor units a much needed thank you for what they did. I had spent five years of my twenty-seven years as a Deputy Sheriff as a "motorman" and I understood what they were thinking and doing.

By the time we reached Washington, we totaled 268 bikes strong. We had completed our two day journey of 887 miles through what should have been considered absolutely picture perfect weather. It had been in the mid 50's in the morning and up into the mid 70's in the afternoon, under the most beautiful clear blue skies imaginable. I feel that God gave us that weather because he understood what our mission was.

On Sunday the 25th, we were up at the crack of dawn to eat and prepare for what we had all come together for, the "Ride to the Wall". We arrived in the Pentagon parking lot at 0615, knowing that we were going to be there until the start of the parade at noon. This gave me time to walk around and talk with others that had assembled for this emotional gathering. There were people from every walk of life, most were veterans, some not. No matter who they were there was a silence bond between us. It was the need to get to the Wall.

I was able to take numerous pictures of the largest motorcycle gathering in the world. People came from near and far, some even shipping their bikes up from Australia to participate and to bring an Australian Flag that was presented to Artie Muller the National Executive Director for Rolling Thunder. That flag will be housed and displayed in Washington as a reminder of those Australian troops that fought and died beside us in Vietnam.

We had gathered for several reasons, to show respect for those that had given the most precious thing they had for this wonderful country of ours, their lives. And, to make the government aware that there are POWs and MIAs from all wars still out there and we want them back.

At noon the 375,000 - 400,000 motorcycles started to crank up and get ready to make the fifteen minute trip from the Pentagon to the Washington Mall area. I actually started my bike at 1245 and started to move out of the parking lot. At that point I understood why people jokingly call it **rolling thunder**. At times the sound was deafening.

We rode two abreast most of the way, with the crowds stepping out into the street giving us "high and low fives", waving flags and signs, as well as cheering and thanking us. I have to admit it was an emotional ride.

When we arrived at the mall area we parked our bikes and proceed to the "Wall". There were already large crowds in the area. As I looked around at those present, I saw that they had come from every imaginable country, judging by their dress and languages being spoken.

I found several names that I recognized and I stood there crying, along with most of the veterans that were around me. It was my time to talk and listen to those that had given so much. As I stood there, several people came up and patted me on the shoulder, without saying a word. Once I made amends with those lost souls, I suddenly began to feel better. It was hard, but that was the reason for the journey. All together, it took three hours and forty-five minutes for all of the bikes to make the trip from the Pentagon to the Mall area.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is from the June, 2008 edition of Revetments.

Still a great story!

And, 58% of our members were not members then, so it's the first time for you.



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Penryn PA 17564

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



NEW MEMBER

Bruce E. Wimmer Spring Hill FL bwimme@attglobal.net Sep 72 - Feb 73 12th RITS Photo Interpretation & Targeting

NOTATIONS FROM APPLICATIONS

I was at TSN, as an Air Force 2nd Lieutenant, from September '72 until we pulled out in February '73 and re-deployed to Udorn RTAFB. Was there for Linebacker II and the Paris Peace Accords resulting in a cease-fire where we took rockets after the cease-fire was to go into effect. A sign of what was to come.

[Bruce E. Wimmer](#)

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