

PRESENTATION

AC-119 Gunship association members, please allow me to thank you for this moment to share a vivid memory with you and to thank you for all of your gallant efforts in trying to preserve a democracy in South Vietnam. In order to protect my innocent relatives who still live in Vietnam, I must go by my pen name, McBlair Lee.

My final military duty was as a Flight Mechanic on the C-7A Caribou. My connection with you is through a dear friend I trained with in the Vietnamese Air Force Flight Engineer School, MSgt Phan Quoc Tuan. After graduating from that school, MSgt Tuan was trained by you on the AC-119K Stinger at DaNang Air Base, starting in December 1972. He was the ranking flight engineer and was chosen to train with the VNAF 821st commander, Major Nuoi Huong. His USAF instructor was MSgt Lee Kyser.

Thirty eight years ago, on the unforgettable morning of 29 April, 1975, the beginning of the end for Saigon arrived. During that day, devastating artillery fire and rocket attacks would destroy Tan Son Nhut Air Base and shoot down AC-119K Stinger 52-5889. Nine of the ten man aircrew would perish, including my dear friend, MSgt Tuan.

For all of those who witnessed that event, myself included, the memory of it is as if it had occurred just yesterday. It will haunt us for the rest of our lives.

As a Vietnam War witness and a freelance Vietnamese writer, my desire is to write several historical VNAF articles about what I witnessed while in the middle of that Tan Son Nhut battle field. Those writings may help readers, including future Vietnamese generations, learn what really happened during the final days of Saigon's existence. I hope all who read my articles will sincerely understand the hardships our Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces had to endure and how brave they were in their vain efforts to preserve the freedom of South Vietnam.

The day following the destructive attack on Tan Son Nhut, I pondered the loss of my friend and his fellow crewmembers. Realizing the sacrifices they made, I felt obligated to honor them in the best manner I could. Lest they be forgotten, I vowed to memorialize them by documenting the true events leading to their death. The valiant efforts of the aircrew members of AC-119K 52-5889 delayed the loss of Saigon long enough for thousands of citizens to evacuate the city and escape the wrath of the Viet Cong.

Thirty eight years have passed since I made that vow. Today, I am so happy to realize that promise I made to the spirit of my dear friend, MSgt Phan Quoc Tuan. My VNAF articles might also help all who read them better understand the situation in Saigon at the conclusion of that terrible war.

In closing, my deepest appreciation goes to all of you who had a part in assisting us in fighting for our freedom. And a special thank you to all who participated in training the VNAF aircrew members on the AC-119 gunships.