

## 12th TFW Association Member Honored

# Tinker names Piazza Gate after highly decorated Airman

May 21, 2014, story by Kimberly Woodruff

One of the Air Force's most decorated Security Forces individuals was honored May 15 during a gate dedication ceremony. On the day known as National Police Memorial Day, Tinker's Gate 31 was unveiled as "Piazza Gate," named for retired Senior Master Sgt. Pete Piazza.

"This is a very special day — a gate with my name on it is very special, and it belongs to all defenders, past, present and future," said Sergeant Piazza. "Without a defender at the gate, no one on base would be safe. So, for all you defenders, I appreciate you."

Col. Christopher Azzano, 72nd Air Base Wing and Tinker installation commander, said those who know Sergeant Piazza can vouch for his humble nature. "I'm pretty sure he's a little uncomfortable having this attention focused on him," Colonel Azzano said. "In fact, Pete has dedicated his life to focusing the attention on other Airmen, our defenders in particular." The colonel said Sergeant Piazza advocates for all past, present and future Security Forces members across Oklahoma through his active leadership in the Air Force Security Forces Association. Sergeant Piazza was elected to the Association's Hall of Fame in 2011. He also remains active as the president of the Vietnam Security Police Association, and was awarded the Warrior Medal of Valor in 2009. "It is no exaggeration to say Senior Master Sgt. Pete Piazza is an Air Force icon, an American hero in the truest sense of the word in a time when that word is used too frequently to describe people who have not met Pete's standard of service," said Colonel Azzano. "It's an honor to know the real deal."



Retired Senior Master Sgt. Pete Piazza addresses the crowd during the May 15 Gate 31 renaming ceremony. The previously named Midwest Blvd. Gate is now the Piazza Gate in honor of the retired Security Forces

## 12th TFW Association – The Piazza Gate at Tinker AFB, OK

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sergeant and long-time supporter of anything Tinker and Security Forces-related. (Air Force photo by Kelly White)

Sergeant Piazza earned the Silver Star for gallantry in action Jan. 31, 1968, during his Vietnam tour at Bien Hoa Air Base.

The citation for the Silver Star presented to Sergeant Piazza by Gen. William Momyer summed it up: “An untold number of lives and literally hundreds of millions of dollars of aircraft and other materiel had been saved through the gallant defense of the base, led at Bunker Hill 10 by Sergeant Piazza.”

Then-Staff Sergeant Piazza resupplied bunker defenders with ammunition while under a heavy barrage of gunfire. He assumed command and led an eight hour counter attack.

“It’s with great pleasure that we recognize and honor an Air Force trailblazer, and there is no better way to recognize a ‘sky cop’ than by dedicating Gate 31 in his name,” said Col. Frank Reyes, 72nd Security Forces Squadron commander. “Pete is a humble man who seeks no special attention. He dedicates himself to our Air Force and continues still to teach and mentor young Airmen.”

Retired Col. Ed Johnson, a longtime friend of Sergeant Piazza, sent Colonel Reyes an email because he was unable to attend the ceremony. Colonel Johnson was the 3rd Security Police commander at Bien Hoa Air Base just after Sergeant Piazza was there in 1968.

“The area where the attack happened was always on my mind,” said Colonel Johnson. “While we suffered losses in that battle, it was successful due largely in part to Senior Master Sergeant Piazza,” he said. “He is a true Air Force hero and well deserving of this honor. I am proud to know him.”

Colonel Reyes said though the battle at Bien Hoa is relatively unknown and missing from history books, “the battle is forever part of Tinker AFB, Security Forces doctrine and will never be forgotten.”

“Senior Master Sergeant Piazza defines the badge and beret that the defenders wear, and what better way to say ‘thank you for your service’ than to honor him with a gate bearing his name for all to see,” Colonel Reyes said.

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### **WILLIAM (PETE) PIAZZA**

“Pete” was born on 18 February 1943 in Schenectady, NY, but lived most of his life in Brooklyn, NY before entering the USAF in 19 February 1960. He is married to Gloria D. Piazza from Baybay, Leyte & Cebu City, Cebu Philippines. Upon retiring from the USAF on 1 March 1988, with 28 years of military service, he went to Rose State College in Midwest City, OK and received his Associate of Arts degree in Criminal Justice on 20 Dec 1989. Pete is the proud father of 2 boys and three girls and lives in Del City, OK.