

Phan Rang News No. 12

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Announcing the 2014 "Happy Valley" Phan Rang AB Reunion

Where: DoubleTree by Hilton, Reid Park, 445 S. Alvernon Way, Tucson AZ

When: October 9-11

Single/Double rate \$99

Banquet 11 October in the Bonsai Room

More details and instructions will be forthcoming.

160 U.S. Viet Planes Rip Bases in North

Saigon (UPI) - United States and Republic of Vietnam jet fighters and bombers penetrated into communist North Vietnam Tuesday and blasted two key targets.

A U.S. Air Force spokesman described the 160-plane strike as "the biggest ever" against that country.

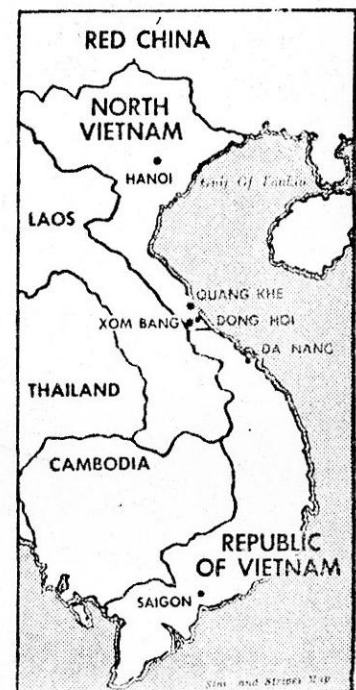
It was the first time that the powerful U.S. B-57 Canberra jet bombers have been used against North Vietnam.

The previous punitive strikes against the north were limited to Skyraiders, plus the smaller U.S. fighter bombers.

The spokesman said at least three of the raiding planes were downed by antiaircraft fire from communist positions.

The planes crossed the military demarcation line shortly after 3 p.m. and blased a key naval base at Quang Khe and supply depots at Xom Bang.

An American military spokesman said both targets were between 70 and 80 per cent destroyed.



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U.S. Air Force F-100, F-105 and B-57 Canberra planes flew the raids along with Vietnamese Air Force A-1E Skyraiders.

"We had several losses but I won't go into that because operations are still going on," Lt. Col. Harold L. Price of Orlando, Fla., said. Price is U.S. Air Force operations director for the Saigon - based 2d Air Div.

"At least three were downed by antiaircraft fire which pilots report was light and not very accurate," Price said.

Radio Saigon, meanwhile, reported that one Skyraider was shot down by communist antiaircraft fire. It said the pilot ejected and was rescued by helicopters.

Price said that at Xom Bang, near the Laotian border, considerable secondary explosions were noted after more than 100 U.S. Air Force fighters and bombers delivered their punches.

Xom Bang was an ammunition supply dump.

At Quang Khe where the Vietnamese Air Force planes hit, 60 to 70 large buildings and 3 to 5 naval patrol vessels were destroyed, the spokesman said.

He said the Quang Khe buildings, some as long as 200 feet and two stories high, were used to support naval operations.

"As I say, this is preliminary because the smoke obscured most of the target," Price said.

(At Xom Bang, more than 120 tons of bombs were dropped, and at Quang Khe between 50 and 70 tons of bombs were dropped, AP reported. Bombs ranged in size between 250 pounds and 750 pounds.)

The American escorting fighters did not participate in the strike at Quang Khe, but the strike at the supply depot at Xom Bang was an all-American show.

Xom Bang is about 10 miles north of the demilitarized zone and about 15 miles inland from the Laotian border.

Lt. Col. Vu 'l'huong Van, director of the Vietnamese Air Force Operations Center, said the Vietnamese planes encountered fairly heavy antiaircraft fire and "kinds of fire" during the brief strike.

A joint statement on the raids said the American and Republic of Vietnam governments "wish to avoid widening the conflict" in this area but were "compelled to make clear to

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Hanoi that north Vietnam will be held fully accountable for continuing aggression against the Republic of Vietnam."

The statement declared that the installations bombed were being used for the direct support of the Viet Cong guerrilla campaign in this country.

It cited as "conclusive new evidence" the February discovery of huge arms shipment aboard an ocean-going North Vietnamese vessel sunk off the coast of the Republic of Vietnam.

The fact that these arms and equipment were brought from North Vietnam and intended for use by the Viet Cong "is established beyond question," the statement declared.

The statement also cited recent acts of terrorism against civilians in the Republic of Vietnam by the Viet Cong as a reason for -the raids. It specified several in which a total of 139 civilians were killed during the past two weeks.

WASHINGTON (UPI)—President Johnson said Tuesday night that six U.S. planes were downed Tuesday during bombing raids on North Vietnam.

Johnson said he had been informed that five of the six pilots whose planes were downed have been rescued. He said he got up shortly before 3 a.m. EST to check reports of the attack.

TOKYO (UPI)—Communist north Vietnam said that on the basis of preliminary reports six U.S. aircraft were shot down and "many others" damaged in Tuesday's massive air attack on its territory by the U.S. and Republic of Vietnam.

Radio Hanoi, in a broadcast monitored here, said the communist Voice of Vietnam Radio called the attack an "extremely serious new war act of the U.S. imperialists and their stooges. . ."



The Unsung Canberras by Maj. Frank R. Chandler

On February 19, 1965, near the small Vietnamese town of Bien Gia, 45 miles east of Saigon, a B-57 Canberra jet fighter-bomber rolled into a dive and dropped two 750-pound bombs onto the green jungle canopy below. The bombs fell directly on the smoke rocket dropped there moments before by a forward air controller (FAC). Intelligence information had shown that the target was a Viet Cong command post and

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communications center. A huge secondary explosion followed the drop, smoke mushrooming skyward in a dirty grey cloud.

That strike marked the first time American jet aircraft were used to deliver ordnance in South Vietnam. Until then, only propeller-driven aircraft had provided the air support needed by ground forces.

The Canberras flew 16 sorties against that particular target on February 19th. They were joined later in the day by F-100 Super Sabres that also dive-bombed and strafed the area. Infantry troops, who entered the target zone later, determined that it had indeed been a VC stronghold. They reported that the air strikes had inflicted heavy damage and caused the surviving enemy insurgents to evacuate their positions.

The men flying that first strike were members of the only two B-57 bombardment units in the United States Air Force—the 8th and 13th Bomb Squadrons. Respectively, these units—"The Liberty Squadron" and the "Devil's Own Grim Reapers"—lay proud claim to the honors and traditions of the 8th and 13th Aero Squadrons which date from May 1917. They are among the oldest units in the Air Force and a roster of past members reads like a chronology of the Air Force itself.



Figure 1 RB-57E 55-4245, Pilot Capt. Paul Rankia, Photo by Kirk Minert

Although the modern Air Force leans toward heraldic symbols on its unit insignia, the familiar emblem of the 13th still depicts a skeleton holding a scythe underscored with the inscription "Devil's Own Grim Reapers." This emblem, reminiscent of the unit's colorful past, is still worn by squadron members. The unit emblem of the 8th Bomb Squadron pictures an American Eagle atop the Liberty Bell.

Following the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964, a number of B-57s

were deployed from their home station at Clark Air Base in the Philippines to Bien Hoa Air Base. The Canberra crews stood ground alert and flew visual reconnaissance missions over South Vietnam, but no bombs were carried and no strike missions were assigned. On Halloween night, the Viet Cong carried out a mortar attack on Bien Hoa

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with the B-57 parking area as the primary target. Several aircraft were completely destroyed and many others damaged. During this time, the B-57 was scheduled to be phased out of the United States Air Force inventory. It was first delivered to Tactical Air Command in 1954, but several more modern aircraft made it obsolete for nuclear war—the mission for which it was originally intended.

But now the situation demanded a fast, high-flying aircraft able to carry a heavy load of "iron" (conventional) bombs and loiter over a target for extended periods if necessary. The counter-insurgency action in Vietnam required an aircraft that could dive-bomb and strafe accurately. An aircraft used under these circumstances had to be able to take heavy battle damage and still maintain the capability to bring its crew back from the engagement. The B-57 more than met these mission prerequisites.

The jet crews had to "grin and bear it" when their counterparts who flew the Skyraiders from Bien Hoa engaged in good-natured banter about the Canberra's lack of combat experience. These A-1 pilots, along with the Vietnamese Air Force, were the stalwarts of the air war against the Viet Cong. The B-57 fliers itched for a chance to prove their worth.

And then they got their chance.

Late in the evening of February 18, 1965, the order finally came, sending the B-57s on



Figure 2. BOMBS AWAY--- A U.S. Air Force B-57 Canberra Bomber releases its bombs in the highlands of central South Vietnam. Photo by Kirk Minert.

their first live bombing mission. The armament crews worked throughout the night loading aircraft with four 750-pound bombs on the wings and nine 500 pounders in the bomb bay. Wing guns were loaded with .20 millimeter high explosive incendiary ammunition or .50 caliber ammo, depending on the aircraft model. Crew chiefs tenderly cared for their birds, knowing that this was it. The mission was relatively simple with the target only 50 miles away, but everything had to be exactly right.

The early morning hours were spent drawing maps and planning everything in intricate detail. On several other occasions it had appeared that the jets would be sent on a bombing mission, but the order had always been cancelled. Now, however, as preparations continued, most of the men began to realize that this was actually going to be their first day of combat in the war in Vietnam. It was.

The checklist was complete. The first Canberra taxied from its parking slot and rolled gracefully down the line between two rows of aircraft to the accompaniment of cheers

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by the remaining ground and air crews. The Liberty Squadron and the Devil's Own Grim Reapers were about to engage in their fourth major conflict.

The rules of engagement required that missions flown in South Vietnam be under control of a FAC. The Canberra provided a somewhat unexpected bonus in its potential because it carried two crew members. The B-57 navigator-bombardier was able to keep the FAC in sight, watch the target area, direct the rest of the flight, and call off instrument readings to his pilot during the run. He could also compute corrections and call out check list items to assure that cockpit configurations were correct for each type of attack. This crew coordination allowed the pilot to keep his head in the gunsight and concentrate on flying the aircraft during a bombing or strafing attack. The two-man concept gave the B-57s pinpoint accuracy.

The B-57 crews began averaging two missions a day per man following their initial strikes.

On May 2, 1965, crews of both the 8th and 13th Bomb Squadrons participated in a major raid on the Xom Bang Barracks in North Vietnam. Executing a low-altitude approach to the target, the 20 B-57s "popped up" at the last possible moment and destroyed over 95 percent of the target. Only two aircraft sustained battle damage.

As was the case in Korea, the 8th and 13th were soon called upon to perform night armed road reconnaissance, this time in North Vietnam. The B-57 crews were the first to perform this task, one of the most hazardous and demanding missions in the Southeast Asia theater of operations. As pioneers in this type of mission, the Canberra fliers had to develop their own night delivery techniques. Flares, carried in the rear bomb bay, would be dropped over suspected routes of travel. Once the ground was illuminated the planes would dive beneath the flares and attack communist vehicles crawling, blacked-out, along the mountain roads of North Vietnam. The success of this technique is underscored by the fact that this operation in an expanded form is still being used. The constant toll exacted by the night-flying B-57s considerably slowed the resupply of enemy forces in the south. The North Vietnamese were forced to change and repair their routes constantly, expending men and materiel sorely needed for more militant endeavors.

These were the types of missions flown by the Canberra units prior to May 16, 1965. On that Sunday morning, a bomb inadvertently exploded under the wing of a B-57 on the parking ramp at Bien Hoa. Sympathetic explosions followed on other bomb-laden aircraft and the entire area went up like a huge string of Chinese firecrackers. When the holocaust had ended, 10 Canberras, 11 A-1s and a Navy F-8 that had landed only moments before had been destroyed. Twenty seven American lives were lost with 102 men wounded.

Only seven Canberras survived the blast: four were in the air on a mission and three were at the end of the runway preparing for take-off when the blast occurred.

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Within two days, surviving squadron members were conducting combat operations from Tan Son Nhut AB In Saigon. With seven airplanes and two tents pitched by a taxiway for an operations and maintenance office, the job of rebuilding a combat unit was begun.

The unit was built up to normal strength again within the next few weeks. Replacement aircraft and men were flown in and the tempo of combat increased. The Canberra crews were among the first called in to aid the stricken Special Forces camp at Dong Xoai in June when it was partially overrun by a regimental size force of the enemy. Armed with a staggering array of 81mm mortars, machine guns, recoilless rifles, and flame throwers, the Viet Cong had taken advantage of the low hanging clouds and darkness to launch an attack. By morning (when airpower was called in) the VC had overrun the camp's airstrip and occupied half of the camp itself.

In spite of a 900-foot scattered-to-broken ceiling obscuring the target, the Canberra crews elected dive bombing to insure accuracy. The initial drops destroyed six Viet Cong antiaircraft sites. As a result of the B-57 flak suppression, the A-1s striking the approach routes to the compound were able to halt the Viet Cong drive temporarily. The forward air controller at one point called for tactical support against "anything moving outside the compound walls." Close air support was later credited with breaking the enemy attack and reducing friendly casualties.

In July 1965 the B-57 operation in Vietnam was moved from crowded Tan Son Nhut AB to Da Nang. Soon after their arrival the B-57 crews were assigned to fly flak suppression missions with the UC-123 "Ranch Hand" aircraft. These defoliation sorties were flown low and slow over some of the toughest terrain in the world for this type of flying. And hits from ground fire were the rule rather than the exception. Crews suffered casualty rates of almost 50 percent; so high that they wore lavender flying scarves symbolizing the incidence of Purple Hearts awarded the crew members. The "Ranch Hands" and the "Cranberry" fliers immediately established a fine rapport and set about developing tactics that would make the fast jet B-57 compatible with a slow-moving defoliation UC-123. The result of their experimentation was what was tagged locally as an "alternating spiroid maneuver." As the 123s sprayed the jungle in echelon the Canberras would spiral back and forth across the top of them. Each fighter-bomber, in turn, would have the area immediately ahead of the Ranch Hands in gunsight so that any enemy ground fire would come under immediate fire from the air.

A silent testimonial to the effectiveness of the batwinged B-57 in the current conflict is the fact that the Royal Australian Air Force recently assigned a squadron of their Canberra aircraft to Phan Rang AB to fly combat missions side by side with the Liberty Squadron and the Devil's Own Grim Reapers. Captured Viet Cong prisoners have confessed that the B-57 is among the most feared aircraft in the war. Fear of an avalanche of bombs from an unseen B-52 is their greatest dread, but the Canberra never seems to run out of bombs. They press in on enemy positions persistently. The VC refer to it as "can sau," or caterpillar, which is considered disgusting in Vietnam.

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The two B-57 squadrons have compiled an impressive record during the period that they have been flying combat missions in the war in Vietnam. During the first mission of the war against Mu Gia Pass on the Ho Chi Minh trail in February 1965, a fighter pilot summed things up pretty well. Four Canberras had just made a dive bombing pass on the choke point, a section of the road along a hill only 20 feet wide. Every bomb dropped by the four B-57s fell exactly on the target area causing a landslide that obliterated the road amid a heavy cloud of dust and smoke. One of the F-100 pilots flying patrol above witnessed the attack —evidently the first time he had seen this type of aircraft in action. His comment on the radio reflected genuine amazement. "You guys do good work."

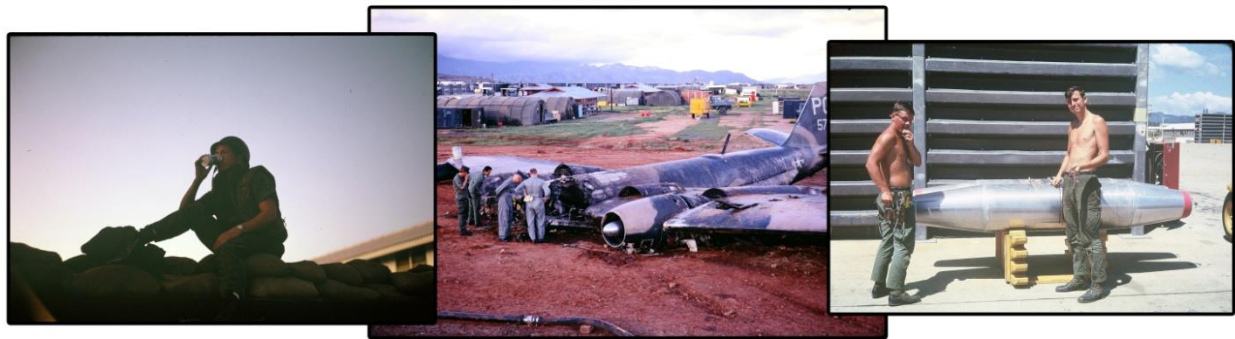
When the history of the air war in Vietnam is permanently recorded, that small band of men who flew two dozen B-57 Canberras over the steaming jungles and rice paddies of Southeast Asia will have a prominent place. By then the Liberty Squadron and the Devil's Own Grim Reapers will have successfully and gallantly completed their fourth major engagement.





New Arrivals in Happy Valley

Just a few of the picture recently added to the "Happy Valley", Phan Rang AB Facebook Group in the last couple of days. Log on and check them out. If you aren't a member request to join the [happy group](#).



4 U.S. Aircraft Brought Down In Indochina *(source and date unknown)*

SAIGON (AP) --- Four American aircraft were shot down in Indochina, including a top secret U.S. bomber on a mission along the Ho Chi Minh trail in southern Laos, the U.S. command said Monday.

One American crewman was killed, five were wounded and three were rescued. The losses raised to 7,379 the number of fixed-wing planes and helicopters reported lost to all causes in a decade of fighting in Indochina, the command said.

In addition to the top secret B57 bomber lost over Laos, the U.S. command reported the loss of two light observation helicopters Sunday 40 miles apart in an area roughly 75 miles north of Saigon, and the loss of an F100 fighter-bomber in Cambodia. All of the U.S. casualties were aboard the helicopters.

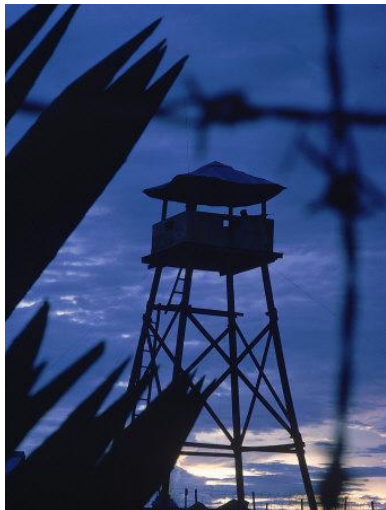
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First B-57 Loss

The loss of the B57 was the first of the newly equipped secret bombers that began flying combat missions in Laos Oct. 1.

The South Vietnamese command reported Monday that Viet Cong terrorists hurled a hand grenade into a crowd of Vietnamese villagers watching a television program Sunday, night, killing four persons and wounding 46 others.

Headquarters said the incident occurred at Trung Hieu, a village in the Mekong Delta 65 miles southeast of Saigon. Officials said the four persons killed were civilians but 11 of the wounded were soldiers.



The University of Saigon Final Exam

© 2011 by Chaplain Steve Janke

Show up for duty and know where to go.
Be alert for your buddies all in a row.
Trust your k9. He's been there before.
Make sure he has clean food and water at his kennel door.

Get on the right truck with all your gear.
Try not to show your innermost fear.
Know your drop-off place and the lonely walk to your post.
And try to forget all the stories of French soldier ghosts.
Quarter that post and radio to CSC and the man.
Then look for some cover in the lay of the land.

Help the new guys as much as you can.
Your bacon may depend on them somewhere just beyond the bend.
Your grade for the exam is left up to you.
Remember you were very young and willing and that should count a lot too.
So don't judge yourself too hard. We did the best we could.
We showed up for duty as every soldier should.

(Steve is a member of the "Happy Valley" Phan Rang AB Facebook Group)

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U.S. Urges Quick Release Of Off-Course Transport

WASHINGTON (AP) — An airliner carrying 214 U.S. servicemen to Vietnam is being held today on a Soviet island in the Pacific Ocean after being forced to land by MIG fighters.

The chartered DC-8 was on its way to Vietnam from McChord Air Base in Seattle, Wash., Sunday when, the U.S. government said, it strayed off course and was forced to land on Iturup Island, a part of the Kuril chain in the northern Pacific.

The State Department immediately contacted the Soviet embassy in Washington and urged the quick release of the plane, its passengers and the 17 crewmen.

A Japanese air force radar station said it began tracking the plane at 7:30 p.m. EDT Sunday and warned the pilot he was on a course that would cross the Soviet-held island.

The pilot replied, "We cannot alter our course," Japanese sources said, indicating the plane already was under MIG escort.

The sources said the plane was tracked another five minutes before it disappeared from radar screens at a position about 30 miles south of Iturup Island.

U.S. Ambassador Llewellyn E. Thompson said in Moscow he was told by Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin and First Deputy Foreign Minister Vasily V. Kuznetsov the incident is under investigation.

The Pentagon said the pilot of the chartered Seaboard-World Airlines jet, Joseph Tosolini, talked by radio with another American aircraft during the incident.

According to the Pentagon, the pilot of the Seaboard plane reported about 7:20 p.m. that MIG fighters had intercepted his aircraft. Accounts differ as to whether the message was unintelligible to Flight 253A due to static or whether the message was received but the crew did not have time to react. Two Soviet MIG fighter aircraft, piloted by Yu. B. Alexandrov, V.A. Igonin, I.F. Evtoshenko and I.K. Moroz, intercepted the DC-8 at 2320 UTC (8:20 am) and directed it to follow by firing warning shots. The DC-8 was led to Burevestnik airfield on Soviet-controlled Iturp Island, landing at 2343 UTC (8:39 am), on the 2400 m (7900 ft) concrete runway. No damage to the plane was reported by the captain as he shut down the engines at 8:42 am.

Burevestnik was a Soviet interceptor airfield served only by a military post and a small village. Initially all the Americans were confined to the aircraft and allowed outside to a radius of about 100 meters of the plane. Food in the galley ran out the next day, and the

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Soviets delivered military rations of brown bread, canned cheese, butter, weak coffee, beef bouillon, noodles, and cigarettes. The female cabin flight crew were allowed to sleep in a maintenance building on the second night.

Diplomatic negotiations between the United States and Moscow began almost immediately with U.S. Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson already in Moscow for nuclear arms reduction talks. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which had been negotiated just weeks earlier, had been signed by U.S. President Lyndon Johnson on that day. Ambassador Thompson informed Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin that the airspace violation was unintentional, but Kosygin explained that his hands were tied and that the incident was under investigation.

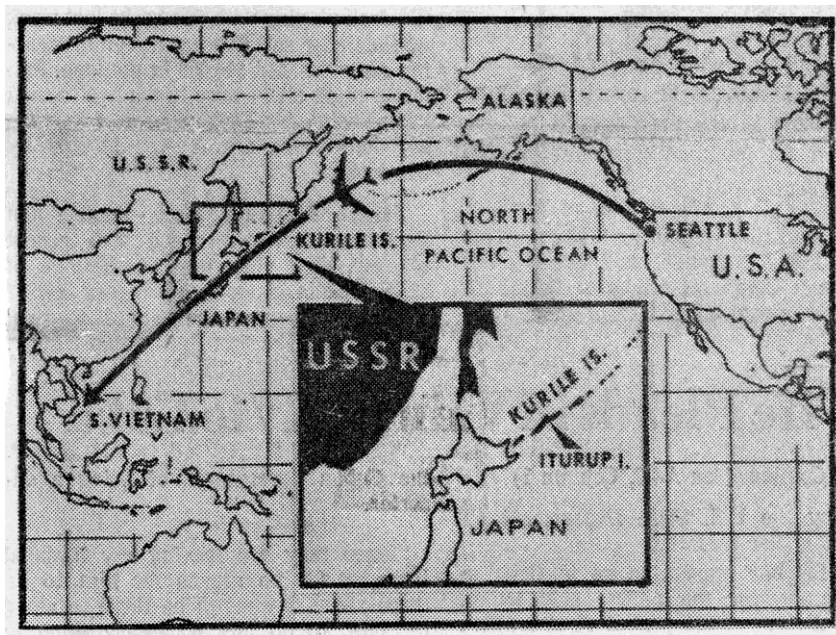


Figure 3. Planes Route - Map shows route of a civilian plane carrying American servicemen to Vietnam which was intercepted by Soviet fighter planes and escorted to a Russian island north of Japan.

The following day Thompson was given a short protest note by the Soviets, partially declassified CIA document indicated that Deputy Minister Kuznetsov added the personal comment that the USSR "did not wish to do anything to worsen our relations" but expressed it was most important to have a quick reply. The U.S. issued a short note of apology, and Tosolini also apologized, allowing the plane to leave. Upon landing at Misawa Air Base in northern Japan about an hour later,

Tosolini retracted his apology, insisting the plane had not strayed into Soviet territory.

The incident was a diplomatic embarrassment for all parties, playing into the hands of the Soviet Union by distracting the U.S. from arms talks. The Sino-Soviet split reached a peak at this time and with China viewing the USSR's release of the plane as aiding Americans in the fight against North Vietnam, one of China's allies.

In December 1968 Seaboard was forced to pay a \$5,000 civil penalty to the Federal Aviation Administration, as its onboard Doppler radar was not properly certified.

News From many sources from "Happy Valley" Phan Rang AB, Vietnam
...keeping the memories alive

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Note: I know not all of these stores may have a dateline of Phan Rang, but we have a lot of members and readers that have an interest in stores dealing with the B-57, F-100, C-119, C-47 and C-123 aircrafts. Some may have friends or may have even been stationed at one time at these other bases.

Also if you are new to the Phan Ranger mailing list and you would like copies of previous issues of the Phan Rang News, just send [me](#) a note and I'll will send one your way. If you know of a Phan Rangers that would be interested in receiving news about Phan Rang AB, please let [me](#) know and I will add them to the mailing list.