

Phan Rang News No. 17

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"Real Pros!" - Air Guardsmen earn "rave reviews" from Regular Air Force comrades for performance in the sky and on the ground in Viet Nam. *(Source: The National Guardsman, September 1968)* By Major Ed Hill *(about the author at the end of the story)*

"THOSE guys are real pros!"

This phrase has been used over and over again to describe the performance of the four Air National Guard Tactical Fighter Squadrons in combat in Viet Nam.

And rightly so. With the ease and grace which professional pilots exhibit, the Air Guard units from Colorado, Iowa, New Mexico and New York made the long, 12,000-mile deployment without accident or incident. Within hours after arrival, the Guardsmen quickly stamped themselves as members of the U.S. Air Force's first team in South Viet Nam.

The units are the 120th TFS, Denver, Colo., commanded by Lt Col Robert Cherry; the 174th, Sioux City, Iowa, commanded by Lt Col Gordon Young; the 188th, Albuquerque, N.M., with Lt Col Fred Fink in command, and the 136th, Niagara Falls, N.Y., under Lt Col LaVerne Donner.



An ex-Colorado Air National Guard F100 takes-off from Phan Rang AB on one of the more than 1,000 missions the 120th Tactical Fighter Squadron has flown since arrival in South Viet Nam.

Some Regular Air Force veterans who had known little or nothing of Air Guard combat capability were apprehensive as to just how much help these "weekend warriors" were going to be "under the gun." Lt Col Tom Knoles, Commander of the 614th Tactical Fighter Squadron, at

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Phan Rang, said: "I frankly didn't know what to expect from a bunch of guys recalled from civilian life."

Col Knoles and the other Regular combat veterans in the war zone didn't have to wait long to find out these "civilian recallees" were highly experienced fliers, possessing outstanding technical know-how and with high morale and a ready-to-fight attitude.

Who but a Guardsman would have believed a man who supported his family as a chemist, lawyer or criminal court judge, could quickly change to Air Force blues and zoom off in a "Super-Sabre" F100 to do battle with the enemy and perform in an outstanding fashion?

What the skeptics didn't know was the high level of experience throughout the Air Guard. Its ranks are filled with World War II and Korean veterans who flew the flak-covered skies over Europe and Asia and are, in fact, involved in their third war. Many of them —and others, too— saw "Berlin Crisis" service. These men have learned their lessons the hard way. Besides, many of the younger Air Guardsmen now in South Viet Nam are back for their second combat tour in this conflict. These are men who spent four to six years in Regular Air Force and Navy flying units, were released from active duty and joined the Guard. Each volunteered to go into combat again because he wanted to remain with his Guard unit.

The movement of the four units from Air Guard status to participants in the conflict began with the deployment of the 120th from Buckley Field, Denver, to Phan Rang Air Base on 30 April. The 174th from Sioux City deployed 14 May for Phu Cat; the 188th left Albuquerque on 4 June, and the 136th departed Niagara Falls 12 June. Both the 188th and the 136th are at Tuy Hoa. Each, with some 350 officers and airmen, made the 12,000-mile over-water flight in three days, though losing a calendar day when passing over the International Dateline. The units left with 20 F100Cs each, and arrived safely with all of them.



This photo just represents an air refueling operation.

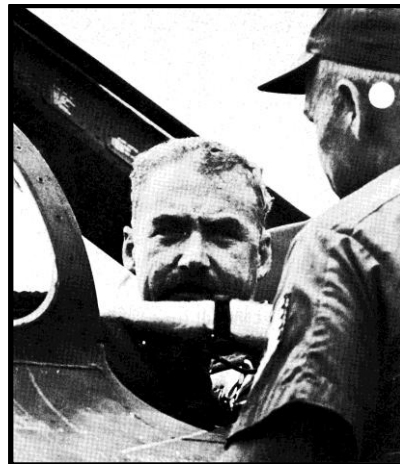
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As the jets taxied from the ramps to take-off position, the Guard pilots were faced with a more than 22-hour flight, mostly over water, and some 11 to 13 air-to-air refuelings. This was old hat to some who had flown to the Middle East last year on a Tactical Air Command-NATO exercise. To most, it was a thrilling, new experience and a challenge.

Overnight stops were made at Hickam AFB, Hawaii, and Anderson AB, Guam.



Ground crewman guides 120th TFS "Super-Sabre" out of its protective earth-filled steel revetment at Phan Rang for another mission.



Capt John Haley of Iowa's 174th Tac Fighter Sq. whose flaming mustache has contributed to the title "The Red Baron," consults with Crew Chief at Phu Cat.

Air Guard maintenance crews had preceded the lighter planes in MAC transports and were waiting at each stop to take care of maintenance problems immediately so the "Super-Sabres" could arrive in Squadron forces, ready for combat.

The long, over-water haul was completed smoothly, and all but four of the 80-odd fighters arrived on schedule. in excellent condition. The four others were a day late. This overseas fighter deployment has to go down as a major accomplishment, difficult for any Tactical Fighter group to exceed.

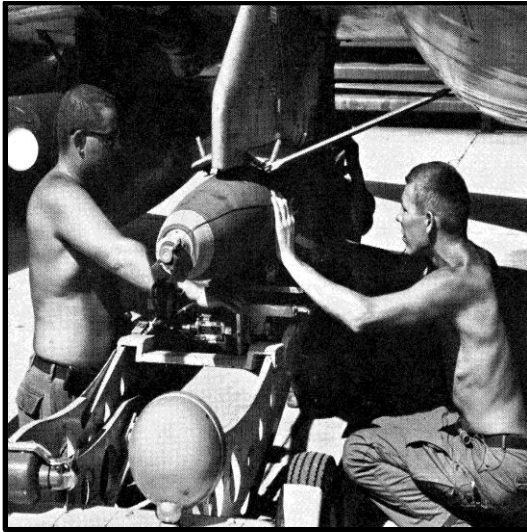
As each unit arrived at its overseas destination, the tired, but eager, pilots were ready for action. They were in combat two days later.

At each of the three Bases where the Air Guard units are stationed, Regular Air Force Wing Commanders appointed veteran host Squadrons to help pave the way for the newcomers.

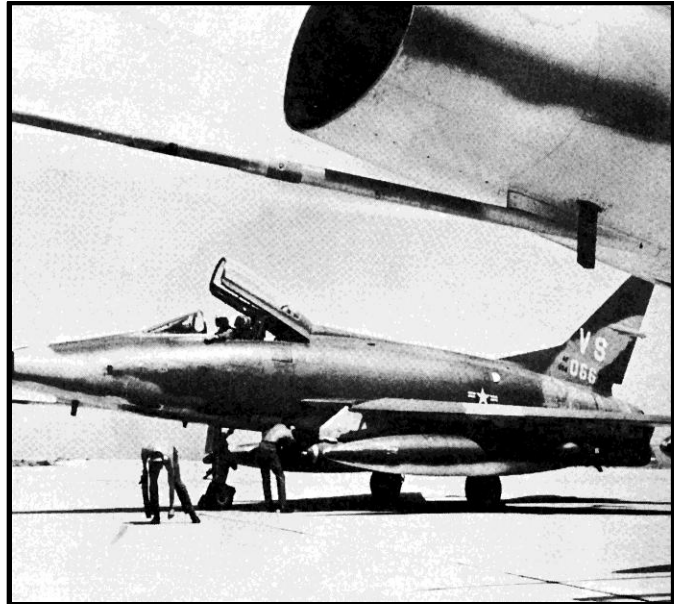
The Guardsmen showed obvious pleasure at the chance to finally use their years of training in a "live situation." They were calm and confident. Their demeanor was such that Regulars quickly let them know they were members of the Air Force team.

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Each unit took about a day to get settled in quarters and offices, and attend briefings on rules of engagement and other technical phases peculiar to combat operations. They were flying combat missions on the third or fourth day.



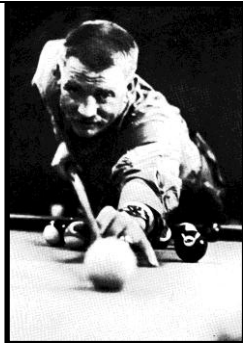
Bomb loading a 120th F100 for a mission in the southern area of Viet Nam. Enemy concentrations around Saigon are among ex-Coloradians' targets.



A beach is not to far - if you want to risk sniper fire and have the time - but 120th airmen are kept going 12 to 16 hours a day, seven days a week.

COLORADO AT PHAN RANG

Col Cherry and his Colorado crew took advantage of their two-week jump on the other ANG units. The 120th, with 21 airline pilots on board, arrived at the tail-end of the second Tet offensive. The Pilots quickly were given survival training at Phan Rang, instead of the normal trip to the Philippines which takes 7-10 days away from combat flying. They were flying "hot missions" almost before they had a chance to recuperate from the long flight from the States. They broke from the starting gate like a bunch of young colts and haven't slowed the pace since. The 120th completed its 1000th combat mission on its 44th day in South Viet Nam. It has been averaging more than 20 missions. a day, seven days a week.



Capt Robert A. Anderson who'd hooked-up with Iowa's 174th TFS through his hometown in Wheaton, Ill., passes time in the alert shack at Phu Cat.



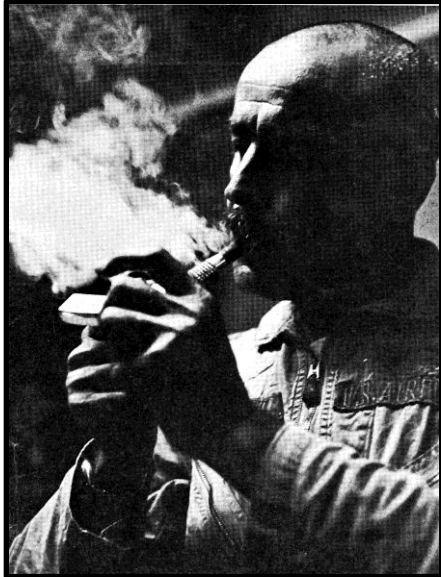
An attorney by profession, fighter pilot by avocation, Maj John France tells how it was to fly the 120th 1,000 mission to Maj William H. Neuens, airline pilot in other times.

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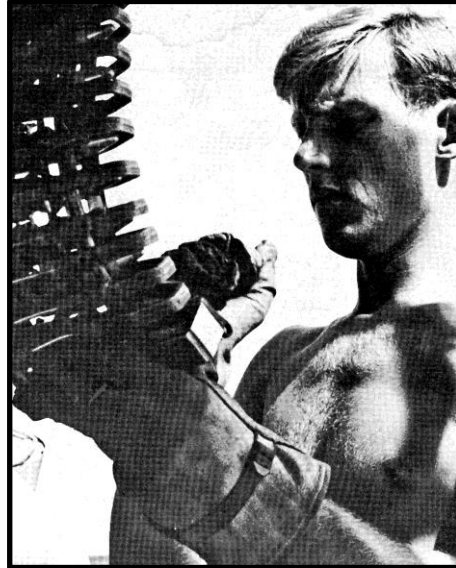
Col Knoles said, after the Coloradans had been in combat some 45 days: "They came in with such a helluva fine attitude it didn't take us long to really admire this bunch. They proved their capability and combat-readiness faster than any other outfit I've ever seen. They have more experience than I could ever have imagined. They are just outstanding and I have no doubt this unit will be Number One before too long. My boys will have to turn on the heat to keep up with them." There is lively but friendly rivalry between Col Knoles' "Lucky Devils" and the Guardsmen and you can readily see the respect they have for each other.

Col Herndon Williams, Commander of the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing under which the 120th is serving, said: "This Colorado bunch certainly has made a good impression. They brought in clean and mechanically perfect aircraft and their attitude has been unbeatable. They actually seemed pleased to be here and eager to get into combat. We have really been pleased with the men that we acquired at Base and Wing level. They all are doing a magnificent job."

Maj John France, 35, a Denver attorney and Air Guardsman for 10 years, was the pilot credited with the 1000th mission. He described it as "routine." "We were turned over to Forward Air Controllers (FACs) on a mission to the South where enemy troops were engaging the Army," he recounted. "The enemy was retreating into a tree line along a canal. We made three bomb passes and destroyed several bunkers and military structures. We strafed some sampans, sinking some but I don't know how many. We got some smallarms fire but weren't hit."



Maj Thurman C. Dabbs, Flight Surgeon of the ex-New Mexico ANG 188th TFS, is one of the Medics who visits native villages, refugee camps and orphanages to treat natives who rarely if ever get to see a doctor.



Ex-Colorado Air Guard Armorer makes an adjustment to insure that ammo feeds faultlessly into 20mm gun on "Super-Sabre."

Most of the missions flown by the 120th are in the southern area and many are around Saigon.

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Phan Rang is a compact Base, nestled in a valley surrounded by hills on three sides and by the South China Sea on the other side. A sandy beach is only five miles from the Base but sun-and-sea worshipper takes the risk of being ambushed by smallarms fire enroute to and from the beach. Actually, the Guardsmen—as do all Air Force people on the Base—work 12 to 16 hours a day, seven days a week, and find little time to do anything but eat, sleep and work.

At the end of June, with 52 days behind them, the 120th was dropping more ordnance than any other Phan Rang unit. Its munitions and release reliability rate was a fantastic 99.5%, and it was averaging more than 24 missions a day.



[Gene Eddy points out some damage on his plane.](#)

Thus, the goal Col Cherry and his men set out to achieve—be the Number One Squadron in 90 days—appeared to be attainable.

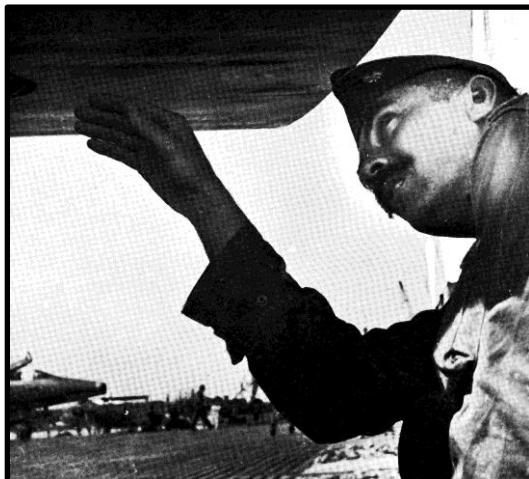
One 22-year veteran Air Force Master Sergeant really went overboard with his adulation when he said: "These Guardsmen are the best flying outfit in the Air Force—next to the Thunderbirds. I've never seen a unit with the esprit de corps they have. Don't let anybody tell you different—they are damn fine fliers and their airmen are tops."

SIoux CITY AT PHU CAT

The main difference between the 174th from Sioux City, and the 120th, is that the Iowa unit has only 11 airline pilots to 21 for Denver. The Iowa Guardsmen have similar civilian and military backgrounds; only five of its pilots, however, normally live in Sioux City —others commuted from places like Minneapolis, Chicago, Dallas, Seattle and New York. The lowans' experience level is just as impressive as that of the other Guard units, and their esprit de corps is just as intense.

Phu Cat is the most isolated of the three Bases where Guard units are stationed. It is also closest to the DMZ, Ho Chi Minh Trail and heavy enemy concentrations.

Phu Cat has good working facilities and more operating space than Phan Rang and Tuy Hoa. But recreation facilities are meager. Water is turned on only for some four hours out of every 24.



[A Denverite flying with ex-New Mexico ANG 188th Tac Ftr Sq out of Tuy Hoa, Maj Walt Jarrett sizes up what enemy ground fire did to his F100. His was first aircraft in the unit to sustain damage sine arrival in South Viet Nam.](#)

Missions flown by the 174th are mostly to the North and are likely to draw more enemy fire than missions

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elsewhere. The lowans completed their 1000th combat mission after 48 days in the theater. The pilots flew 563 combat sorties totaling more than 795 combat hours their first 30 days at Phu Cat.

The 37th Tactical Fighter Wing, commanded by Col LeRoy J. Manor, is top command echelon here.

The Wing gives out "top gun" honors each day to the pilot who flies what is believed to be the best mission. Pilots of the Sioux City unit were voted "top gun" seven of the last nine days of June.

The lowans, as did the Coloradans, received praise even before they arrived at their Bases. Strategic Air Command tanker crews expressed amazement at the highly impressive performance of both units in the tricky art of air-to-air refueling. The New Mexico and New York Guardsmen also were commended for their peak deployment performance.

Forward Air Controllers and Army commanders have given unstinted praise to the lowans for their accurate bombing and strafing runs. One Army commander told Col Young he "had never seen such accuracy before."

A Tactical Air Command inspector before going to Viet Nam, Col Manor had inspected the 174th when it was in Guard status. "I knew it was a truly professional organization," he said.. "I expected a highly trained, combat-ready outfit with superior maintenance and support personnel. They didn't disappoint me.

"Within a week of their arrival here they were fully combat-capable and assumed their position along with our other Squadrons. They have done excellent work in maintaining their aircraft in a high state of readiness, and they began immediately to fly a full Squadron effort on a daily basis.

"Their pilots have done a tremendous job in carrying out their missions, displaying excellent tactical capability and accurate ordnance delivery. Various members of the 174th have been integrated in Wing support activities and each assumed his position along with Regular Air Force people and performed in every way as professionally as the Regulars.

"I've been extremely pleased with the way they integrated in the Wing. They are all real eager and have excellent morale."

He added: "They are flying more sorties than any of our other Squadrons. All they had to learn when they got here was the rules of engagement, and they learned these quickly. This unit has always been tops, and I expect nothing but the best from them here."

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The Mess Officer at Phu Cat, WO John Cobey, a 27-year AF veteran, found the Guardsmen in the Food Service Squadron outstanding. "I shuddered when I heard I was getting some Guard personnel who were former weekenders," he remarked. "I had qualms when I heard one Airman Second Class has a Master's degree in English and another who was a history teacher. I couldn't imagine what good these two 'educated' people were going to do me as Cooks. I was worried over nothing. They have turned out to be the two best men I have in the Squadron."

To Col Richard Burgess, Wing Deputy Chief of Operations, the lowans are "amazing."

"All you have to do is look at the figures—their incommission rate—aborts—bomb damage assessment and other guidelines—and you can readily see they are Number One at this Base," he explained.

Lt Col Rufus Scott, Commander of the 416th TFS, host unit for the 174th, was so elated to have the Guardsmen at Phu Cat that he unconsciously violated protocol by rushing up to the cockpit to greet Col Young when he landed, jumping ahead of four-star Gen William Momyer.

"This unit arrived here with all their equipment in excellent condition and their aircraft in wonderful shape," said Col Scott. "They started flying after the second day here and have been pressing on ever since. They are running a very good show and are really flying sorties. The 174th, as well as all the other former Guard units, have had the same training and requirements as Regular units and they have shown that this policy pays-off. I'd say this unit has fewer problems than any other '100' outfit. I think their performance has proven the importance of the 'COM-BAT BEEF' (100% manning) program and justifies it as being economically and operationally sound. The fine attitude and morale of all the men of the Iowa unit has been a big boost to their complete acceptance as members of the Air Force team."

The attitude of the airmen was expressed by MSgt Thomas Mock, 32, a First Sergeant and former Air Technician. "It's the first time I've been away from my family, but my wife and children are damn proud I'm here and able to serve my country," he remarked. All of us in the 174th have a sense of patriotism we might be ashamed to admit to during these times. In back of everyone's mind is being the Number One Squadron here. I think we are really pushing for this because many Air Force people who have had no experience with the Air Guard sort of look down on us as a bunch of civilians playing at war. When we leave, we want this Base to know they've really lost something."

One Regular Air Force flying officer commented: "We've learned a lot from these Guardsmen. They are really great—outstanding. Their spirit and enthusiasm are contagious. I'm impressed more than anything else with their maintenance personnel and techniques. I'm a seven-year fighter vet and I've never seen any better outfit than the 174th."

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THE NEW MEXICANS AND NEW YORKERS

Since Albuquerque's 188th and Niagara Falls' 136th were nearly a month behind the 120th and 174th arriving into the combat zone, their combat records have to be judged from a short-time angle. But both have been just as impressive as their counterparts at Phan Rang and Phu Cat.

SSgt Dick Larsen, a Regular AF Viet Nam veteran in the 31st Tac Fighter Wing Information Office, explains his impressions of the Guardsmen in this way: "The real story is the way they ceased being Air National Guard and melded right into the Regular Air Force.

"They proved right off they were real pros. In one sense, they were unhappy to be torn away from their families and civilian jobs, but they didn't gripe—they just said 'We're here, let's get to work!'

"I had always considered Guardsmen as sort of draft-dodgers," Sgt Larsen added, "but man, they are anything but. They are strictly business and do a bangup job. They proved real quick they are just as good any Regular outfit. Their emotional level is stable as is their mental approach. The higher educational level of the Guardsmen probably is responsible for their mature approach. They have more cohesion as a unit, having been together for so long. They really work as a team."

Both units have missions from the DMZ South to the Saigon area and around Pleiku and Hue.

Their arrival made Col Abner Aust's 31st the largest Tac Fighter Wing in Southeast Asia. Col Aust, who had been a Regular Air Force Advisor to several ANG units, had anticipated no problems and got none. They've both done a real fine job," he asserted. Their planes and equipment are in excellent condition and they maintain a real good in-commission rate. The personnel are real eager and fit right into the Wing. Their skill and experience level certainly meet Air Force criteria. They want to prove their training in the Guard prepared them for this mission."

Wing policy, which calls for longer periods of flying before checkouts and alert flights, probably will preclude the 188th and 136th from compiling as impressive records as early as Colorado and Sioux City. But both units enjoy superior maintenance, top-line aircraft and spirited personnel, and both are flying more missions than the other "100" units at Tuy Hoa.

Capt John Doherty, a Regular who became Maintenance Officer for the 136th when the Niagara Falls maintenance chief was unable to accompany the unit, has been tremendously impressed in his first association with an Air Guard unit.

"They are a well-trained outfit, extremely capable," said Capt Doherty. "I have never before been associated with a group of people with this wealth of training. I never enjoyed such

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prosperity." One of his acquisitions in the 136th had been a Crew Chief in Japan for him in 1964 and then was with him in Taiwan and the Philippines and later Viet Nam.

"There is a certain comradeship in the ANG that you just don't find anywhere else," he commented. "I can truthfully say I've never been with an outfit better qualified or with higher morale. They are more mature but certainly have the enthusiasm of youth."

The Albuquerque unit is unique in that it has eleven airmen who are practicing attorneys, and also for the fact that more than 90% of the men in the 188th finished their military obligation years ago and were in the unit because they like the Air Guard.

"After we selected the group to go-356 out of some 750 men—we asked those selected if they wanted to go or stay behind," said Col Fink. "Not one man said he wanted to stay home."

Lt Col Dave Henshaw, Commander of the 309th Tac Ftr Sq and host to the 188th, praised the Guardsmen as "a great bunch, just terrific."

"We expected exactly what we are getting from them—a top notch performance," he went on. "They came here with a great attitude. They are real military. They damn well have lived up to everything expected of them and more, too. The guys have done so well I just can't believe it.

"I even looked for things so I could alert the commander to keep them out of trouble. I could find nothing amiss. The enlisted men of both units have been the most outstanding of any group I've ever met."

Col Donner, 136th Commander, was under heavy pressure as he prepared to lead his unit in deployment to Viet Nam. It had the longest distance to fly—some 13,000 miles—and some 13 aerial refuelings were required. Also, two days after Col Donner arrived at Tuy Hoa, he learned that he was the father of a baby girl—his seventh child—born 15 June, the day he landed at Tuy Hoa!

The Niagara Falls group contains four WW II fliers who piloted aircraft during that period over the same areas they are protecting now.

One is Maj Harold Schoultz, who was informed when he arrived at Tuy Hoa that he was now a grandfather. Other WW II fliers are Col Donner, Lt Col Hank Willett and Maj Norm Culbertson.

Five of the New Mexico pilots will be greeting new sons or daughters when they return home, as will dozens of officers and airmen from the other three units.

1st Lt Garth Blakely, a former airline pilot with the 188th, claims he was farthest from home Base—and closest to his present Base—when the mobilization message was sent out 25 Jan. He was in Saigon on an airline mission when he got "the word."

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The 188th carried three spare pilots to assure a full complement. They remained more than a week at Tuy Hoa—to volunteer for flying duty in any of the units there—but were unsuccessful and had to return to Albuquerque.

The Albuquerque and Niagara Falls units have become deeply involved in the MEDCAP Program—medical aid to Vietnamese civilians—during off-duty hours.

Maj Thurman C. Dabbs, 39, a former missionary from Tierra Amarilla, N.M., and Maj Carl Sheusi, Niagara Falls, Flight Surgeons, have spearheaded this movement in the Guard units.

"As Medics in the Air Force, we can go out to these villages, refugee camps and orphanages and treat sick people who otherwise would not enjoy the facilities of doctors all their lives," said Maj Dabbs. "We try to teach them some public health habits and try to teach the Vietnamese how to help their own. I think . . . we can do much for our country—and theirs—by doing this extra work. There are very few physicians in this country and the ones they have are concentrated in the large cities. The villages have to depend on witch doctors and some of their practices are appalling."

The two Guard units at Tuy Hoa have "adopted" a 10-year-old village lad who was on the verge of death when Dr. Dabbs first saw him. They now have him just about back to normal. The Albuquerque unit wants to take care of the boy's future education.

VOLUNTEERS WITH REGULAR SQUADRON

The District of Columbia's 121st TFS and New Jersey's 119th have drawn a Stateside mission of training F100 pilots, but they leaped at the opportunity for at least some of their fliers to get into combat. Early in May, the Air Force said it could use 14 pilots to fly with a Regular TAC unit in Viet Nam.

So many of the Atlantic City and D.C. pilots wanted to go that selections were made by a flip of the coin. The entire D.C. unit volunteered for combat as a unit, but could not be accepted.

The 14 "winners" joined the 355th TFS at Phu Cat, constituting more than half of its pilot strength at the time.

The pilots said there were no problems in integrating into a Regular Squadron.

Lt Col Frank McKenzie, 355th Commander, said: "Everything I have seen about these men has been great. Our Squadron has always been the best over here and still is. The Guard pilots . . . are highly qualified people doing an outstanding job under hazardous conditions. They had no

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troubles integrating into our unit. I would like to have some of the ANG maintenance men because of their higher level of experience."

The first few weeks of the Air Guard's combat duty in Viet Nam have resulted in these facts:

- Each of the four units has become quickly and solidly integrated as a vital part of the Air Force team.
- The units have displayed such exceptional skill, expertise, morale and attitude that Regular Air Force personnel have nothing but praise for them.
- They have solidly proven that Air National Guard units, under the "COMBAT BEEF" program, are 100% combat-ready and capable of carrying their share of the war load.
- The nearly 1,000 Air Guardsmen who have been taken out of the Squadron and placed in Wing and Base activities are fully qualified and competent to step in as leaders of various support elements that require skill, tact and diplomacy and leadership ability.
- Guard aircraft have been maintained in such excellent condition that very few problems were encountered in the transition from Guard status to active combat.
- The Technician phase of the Guard program promotes a hard core of men who have outstanding knowledge and skill which they can impart to those less experienced. This program gives the Guard the air of real professionalism.
- The tremendous success of the Air Guard in Viet Nam stems to a great degree from the desire to prove to everyone that the ANG is competent, capable and eager to augment the Regular Air Force when called upon.
- The entire operation has been a great morale booster for Air Guardsmen and will, in the long run, prove to be of great benefit to the Air Guard.

THE AUTHOR: Maj Hill, a Tennessee Air Guardsman serving on active duty as a special assistant in the National Guard Bureau's Public Affairs Office, spent some 30 days visiting Air Guard units in South Viet Nam, during June and July. A flier in the CBI during WW II, and a veteran of the Korean War and Berlin Crisis mobilizations as well, he worked on newspapers in Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. He is a graduate of the University of Tennessee.

Some Photos of the Air Guard F-100s at Phan Rang

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Photo by David McGaughey



F-100 with a full load. Photo by David McGaughey.

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Returning from a mission. If you look closely you can see the pylon ejector feet hanging down on each pylon. The weapons crew had to bang them back up in place before the next bomb could be loaded. Photo by David McGaughey.



Photo source unknown.

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VS 884 at the Alert pad. Once the aircraft was shut down the hand steering bar was hooked up and the plane was pushed around by hand, as some of the crew was still working on the plane, and then pushed back into the revetment. The weapons guys had already checked the guns to see which ones had been fired and the pylons had been prepped and are ready for bombs.

Late 1970

Added by David McGaughey



Photo by Paul Hinzman

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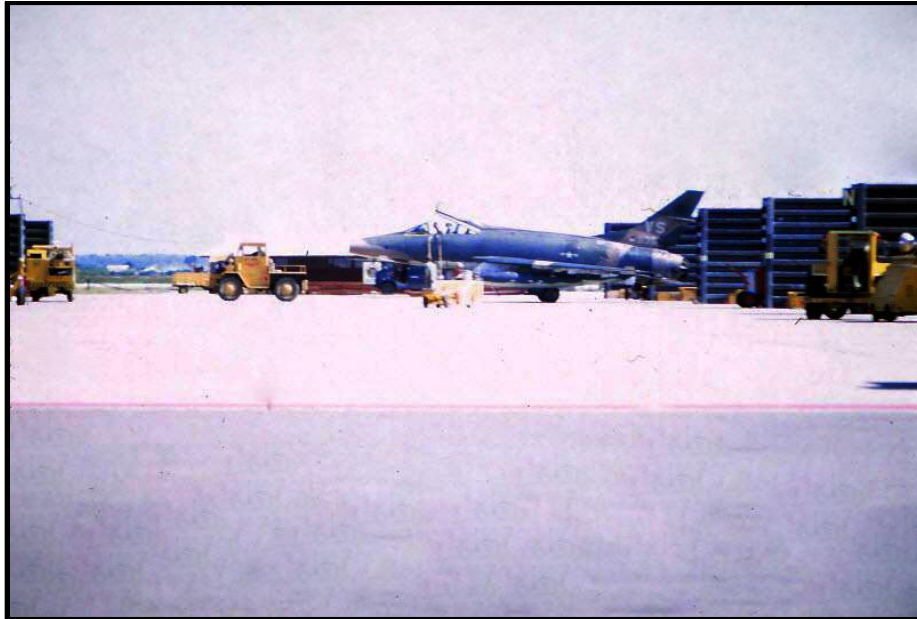


Photo by Paul Hinzman

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



You may now make your hotel reservations for the reunion. Click on the Double Tree logo above and it will take you to the Phan Rang AB Reunion Web Site. Please make your reservations early which will help us greatly in the planning process and also to insure that everyone that wants to attend gets the reunion rate. This is a smaller hotel than the previous year, so we have to watch it very carefully. Remember if circumstances prevent you from attending you can always cancel within 24 hours of your check-in date. If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact [me](#).

Got Photos or Stories that you would like to share with Phan Rangers and other interested Vietnam veterans? If you do, send those treasured pictures and stories to me and I'll include in this newsletter, that reaches out to over 200, or post on Facebook where we have over 550 former Phan Rangers, their families and friends. You can contact [me](#) and I will provide further instructions. Share the Phan Rang story and keep the memories alive.

Doug's comments: I know not all of these stores 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.