

"Happy Valley" Phan Rang AB, RVN
...keeping the memories alive
Phan Rang AB News No. 7 "Stories worth telling"

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'Lucky Devil' Pilots Know Motto Is True *(Seventh Air Force News, Sept. 25, 1968)*

PHAN RANG - "We watched the canopy fly off, the seat come out of the airplane, his chute deploy and saw him touch the ground!"

That's how Capt. J. E. Goff, Dayton, Ohio, 614th Tactical Fighter ("Lucky Devil") Squadron, Phan Rang AB, described the scene as a

pilot ejected from his crippled F-100 Supersabre recently.

Captain Goff, a F-100 pilot himself, was scrambled from Phan Rang to aid an Army Special Forces camp about 95 miles west of Phan Rang. When he and his wingman arrived, they found that they were the third flight of two aircraft each at the scene.

"The lead plane of the second flight went in and received a hit, although he didn't know it at the time," continued Captain Goff.

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"Then the second plane went in for his pass, got hit and caught fire. We were in such a position that we were able to get right in on him and see the fire. We told him he was on fire and watched him eject," he recalled.

"Helicopters were called in and attempted the rescue of the downed pilot, but one of the choppers was hit and the pilot wounded so they pulled off. My wingman then went in and silenced a .50 caliber machine gun site. Working under a 1,500 foot cloud layer made him a real good target for the enemy," he told.

Captain Goff then made his passes and silenced more enemy positions.

"Finally," he concluded, "a couple of jeeps from the Special Force camp made a run for the pilot and got him back to the camp unharmed. We were getting low on fuel, so we had to return to Phan Rang. When we got on the ground we found, much to our relief, that we hadn't been hit."

Davis Flies Combat Milestone

(Seventh Air Force News, Sept. 25, 1968)



PHAN RANG - Lt. Col. Dougall M. Davis, Sarasota, Fla., recently passed the 300 mission mark as a B-57 Canberra pilot. And he shows no sign of stopping.

The three-war veteran has been flying with the 8th Tactical Bombardment Squadron, Phan Rang AB, for some ten months and has averaged almost a mission a day.

The missions with the Canberras have been of two types - day missions in support of Allied ground efforts and night missions against enemy road traffic on infiltration routes.

The later have provided Colonel Davis with his most significant missions.

"We were flying a night mission near Quang Khe in the southern Panhandle of North Vietnam when we discovered a fleet of supply boats in the water near the Quang Khe ferry," he said.

"We hit the massed boats with our bombs and then used 20mm cannon against them. The forward air controller (FAC) we were working with gave us more than 75 boats destroyed, more than 75 secondary explosions and more than 100 secondary fires," he noted.

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The mission earned him a Distinguished - Flying Cross. He earned a Silver Star during a mission west of Dong Hoi.

"There had been a report," he said, "of trucks going into a particular area and we were looking at it one night. We saw a few lights from the trucks and decided to hit the area.

"As soon as we moved in we knew we had something big," Colonel Davis related. "Ten or twelve 37mm anti-aircraft guns opened up on us. Whenever they defend something with that much fire power, you can be sure it's a good target," he said.

"We made our bombing runs and about ten minutes after my last pass the whole area began to explode. That place exploded all night! Three and four hours after the strike the explosions were still coming. We then realized that it was an ammunition storage area and were credited with 276 secondary explosions," he said.

Canberra Pilot No. 300

PHAN RANG - Lt. Col. James D. Henderson, Flagstaff, Ariz., a B-57 Canberra pilot with the 8th Tactical Bombardment Squadron, recently completed his 300th combat mission in Vietnam.

Flying from Phan Rang AB the colonel has seen action throughout Southeast Asia. His most exciting mission was flown earlier this year west of Dong Hoi, a city in the southern panhandle of North Vietnam. It was a night mission against enemy truck traffic on the infiltration routes.

"We had seven 37mm anti-aircraft gun sites firing at us on each pass," the colonel said. "In spite of the heavy fire we managed to destroy 10 trucks and were credited with six secondary fires and five secondary explosions."

Colonel Henderson indicated, that the pilot cannot let the anti-aircraft fire interfere with the mission. "Sometimes when you are working on the target," he said, "the forward air controller (FAC) will ask whether you want to go after the guns that are firing at you. You must stay with the trucks though, because destroying trucks is the mission, the reason you are there. You can't let the ground fire interfere with your work or you won't get anything done," Colonel Henderson said.

EXTRACTED FROM AIR FORCE AND SPACE DIGEST, JULY 1968

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Gentlemen, I have just returned from a trip up north and have just (read) the (April) article by Allan R. Scholin. While it was well written, I was disappointed to find that some of the story was missing...

There is a unique squadron in SEA (Southeast Asia) which goes about its business day and night, north and south, doing one helluva good job without any fanfare. They do not have the full weight of SAC behind them (no SEA story's complete without mentioning the B-52) and are not led by a WW II ace, so you very seldom read of their exploits. However, many in the squadron were flying combat in SEA in 1966 (myself included, and one young major who just left this month had been flying combat with the squadron since 1965, operating out of three different bases during that time. Many of our crew members now have over 300 combat missions and 750 combat hours.

As Mr. Scholin said, there is no typical day in the SEA air war. Today an O-2 directed our flight onto a road and river ford; three ford cuts and a ford cut for BDA (bomb-damage assessment). On the way home we looked over a ford we had cut yesterday and what our bombs had started yesterday had competed by the river. The earth and gravel causeway was completely washed away. Three hundred trucks had used that ford just two nights ago.

Speaking of trucks, that's the main order of business at night. Dive bombing and strafing under flares dropped by a FAC, many of our crews have joined the 100-truck club, most of (the others) are knocking on the door. Most squadrons would settle for that score in a year. Our squadron will get more than five times that amount a month. Last month the truck total pushed 600, and late returns could top it.

Mr. Scholin spoke of a flight coming back with “one secondary”. I wonder if Devil 71 appreciated the publicity. After all, he's stationed with us here at Phan Rang and must know that one of our crews would keep it a secret if that were his total BDA. From five to fifty secondary fires and explosions are normal with the record being well over 200, and that's for a single ship.

Our crews are no strangers to flak either. They pickup a little over 1000 rounds a night while hitting targets in 37mm, 57mm, 85mm, and SAM-defended areas. At debriefing we call it heavy when it looks like a carpet of red below followed by a canopy of white above. It's accurate when you hear it pop. In the last two years a lot of gunners have upgraded from three and five levels to seven and nine levels. As in everything, I guess practices makes perfect.

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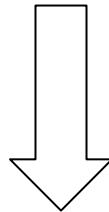
As far as close support goes, I could paper the walls of my room with letters of gratitude from ground troops we’ve supported...The whine of our twin jets is a welcome sound to all friendly forces in South Vietnam.

I do not wish to run down the contributions made by other members of the air arm in SEA. The air war over here is necessarily a team effort. I just want to point out that we are a member of that team and hate to be left out of the box score.

By the way, if you haven’t guessed from the glues I’ve left along the way, the squadron I speak of is the 8th Tactical Bombardment Squadron. We are the only B-57 squadron operating in SEA. We were also the first jet squadron to fly combat over here. If you would care to hear more about us, just as any FAC or member of the ABCCC teams. Of course, they would probably know us by another name--Yellowbird.

Maj. Ernest L. Carlton
8th TBS
APO, San Francisco

Keep scrolling down to see the guys that kept the B-57’s flying.



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“Bummers Grow on Trees”

This photo is of a group of B-57 Bummers waiting for a ride back to the flight line after chow at the old RMK BRJ Chow hall at PRAB. In the tree: Lowest perch: Earl Brown. Upper left Howard "Tater" Taylor. Upper right Rich "Earl" Moody. Sorry, I can't name all of the others in the shot.....67.

Added by John M. DeCillo

Pilot Halts Runaway F-100

(Seventh Air Force News, Oct. 9, 1968)

PHAN RANG - Capt. Henry J. Pirkkala Jr., New Castle, Pa., an F-100 pilot with the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing's 352nd Tactical Fighter Squadron, recently halted his run-away Supersabre after the throttle stuck at 87 per cent power.

Captain Pirkkala, and his wing man, Capt. Sloan L.B. Brooks, Houston, had been scrambled from the alert pad here to aid friendly troops in contact with the enemy.

The forward air controller directed the two Supersabres against a number of enemy fortifications and troops along a canal.

"He told us to expect ground fire," Captain Pirkkala said. "There had' been another strike in there earlier and the friendlies were keeping the pressure on them."

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"We were credited with three enemy fortifications destroyed and headed back to the base," Captain Pirkkala said.

It wasn't until he was landing at Phan Rang did Captain Pirkkala realize he was in trouble.

"I was in the traffic pattern and couldn't understand why I seemed to be going so fast. I touched down about 1,000 feet down the runway. I wasn't decelerating as normal. I pulled' the drag chute," he said, "started the stopping procedures and hit the brakes. During this time I was looking around the cockpit and then I noticed that the RPMs indicated 87 per cent.

"I put the hook down, caught the barrier at 70 knots and turned off the master switch," Captain Pirkkala concluded. "The airplane came to a nice stop."

Water's Guardians Have Tough Job

(Seventh Air Force News, Oct. 9, 1968)



Perimeter Lookout

A1C James C. Williams, a security policeman with the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing's Security Police Squadron, Phan Rang AB, makes a check along the perimeter while guarding the water supply for the base.

PHAN RANG- Guarding the water supply for an entire base is no small job, especially when the water supply is more than two miles from the protection of the main base.

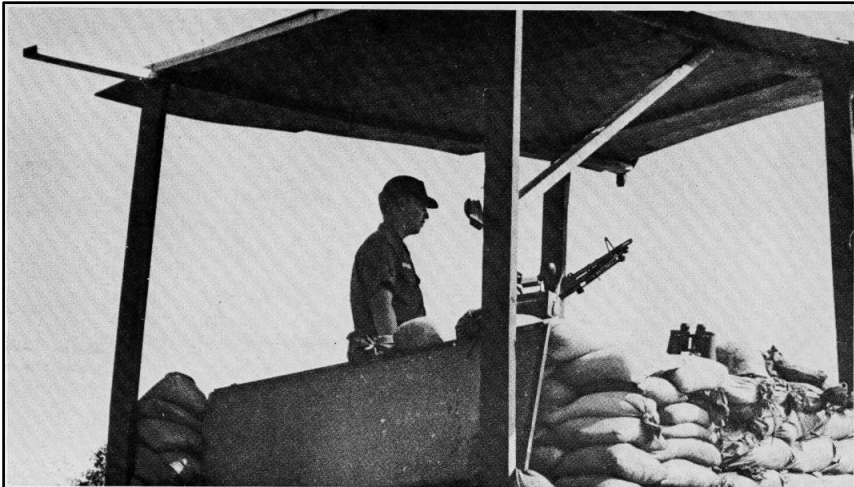
Air Force Sgt. Rolland V. Benson Jr., Jackson, Mich., and A1C James C. Williams, Farmington, Mich., both assigned to the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing's Security Police Squadron, are two of the men who have this responsibility.

During daylight hours the wells are guarded by two security policemen armed with M-16 rifles and an

M-60 machine gun. At night a third security policeman is added to the security team.

"During the day time this post really isn't too bad," Airman Williams said. "It's when it starts getting dark that you begin to worry."

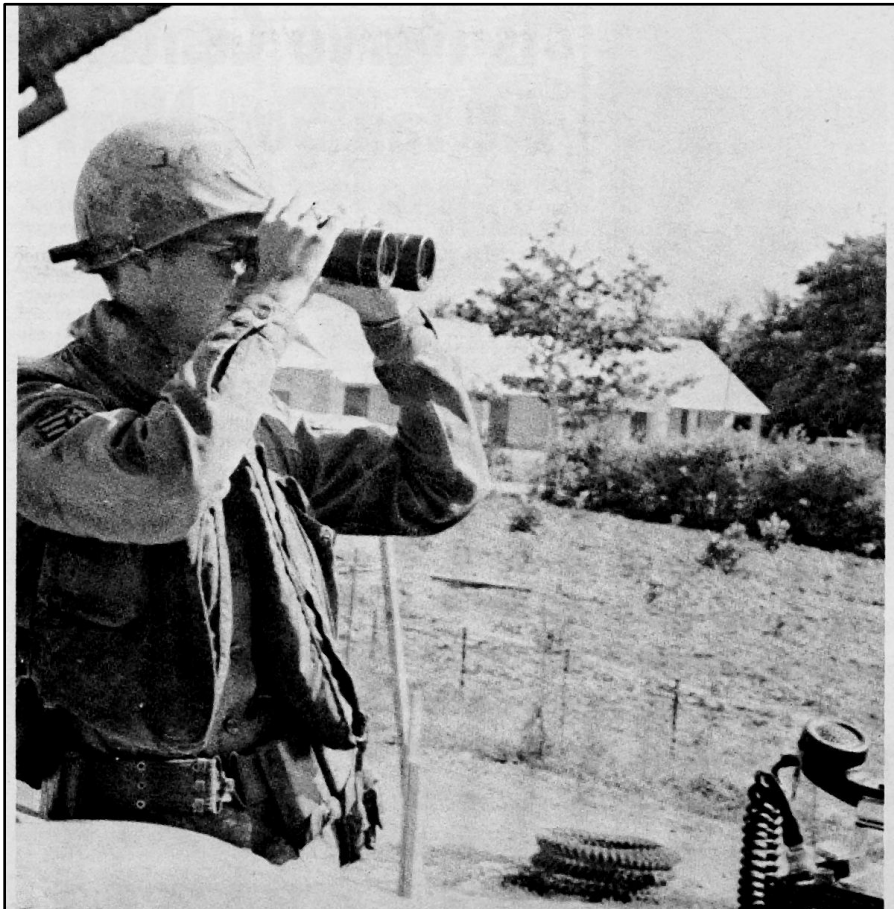
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Watchful Eyes with an M-60 Punch

Manning the M-60 machine gun, A1C James C. Williams looks for possible signs of trouble near the Phan Rang AB water supply area.

"The wells have been hit on several occasions but we have never had anyone get past the perimeter," Sergeant Benson added.



'Long Eyes' for Enemy Movement

Sgt. Rolland V. Benson Jr., a security policeman with the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing's Security Police Squadron at Phan Rang AB, takes a close look around the area outside the perimeter while guarding the wells which supply water for Phan Rang.

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A1C Sam Herold at the wells. Sam Herold wrote on Facebook: “People see this picture of me at the "Wells" (one of the few pictures I have of me in uniform) and it never fails...a hunter will say "a 12 gauge?" I never fully understood why it was issued for a trip to the Wells along with your M-16. I guess the thought was scattershot wouldn't do is much damage to the civilian population.”



Robert Spence on Facebook: No M-12s were issued to Panthers for the Wells. We took an M151 out of the Strip Gate. Crossed over a stream and usually saw the girls of the Strip bathing there.

Usually relieved day shift about 1800; it was a 12 hr shift for the Panthers. This was not known by the Brass or Intell, but on the night

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in August 1968 when the Wells was attacked there was a SSgt SP and 2 Redhorse guys holed up in the hootch with 3 Vietnamese women. Perry and I were on the top of the bunker. Before any calls to CSC were made; those guys got those women the hell out of Dodge. They were long gone by the time George Haskett showed up. Just about dusk a woman with whom I might have had some familiarity came up to the wire. Tried to get her to come into the compound, but she seemed afraid and declined. I have always thought she knew something, but she didn't say.

Later at the hospital the Squadron CO a Lt. Col. asked me what happened at Wells. I covered for that SSgt and the Engineers and the secret was kept. This is the first time I've told the story 45 years later. As we say in the South, don't reckon it matters anymore.

Bill Fisher on Facebook: Wow, I never knew the water supply came from that far out. Thanks to all of you who protected it! As an SP augmentee I spent some nights in guard towers on the perimeter. Saw a big cat (tiger) one night. We called in and were granted permission to shoot it, but when I readied the M-60 the SP I was with said no, that I had to use my M16. I declined and it went on its merry way. LOL

David Knighton on Facebook: There was another pump station at the South side of the perimeter, kind of West of the end of the flight line with a bunker that I was stationed at twice in 1969. Whenever I see the movie, Pork Chop Hill I think of that bunker. Just figured that if there was a bunker that well built it couldn't really be a good place to be.

F-100s Strike Deep

(Seventh Air Force News, Oct. 9, 1968)

BIEN HOA - Two F-100 pilots from the 3rd Tactical Fighter Wing here recently struck an enemy sampan and fortification complex in the extreme southern tip of IV Corps, 115 miles southwest of Can Tho.

One of the Supersabre pilots was Capt. Eugene O. Westback, Aurora, Colo.

"Our target was strung out along both banks of a canal," Captain Westback reported. "We could see the fortifications but couldn't spot the sampans up close to the banks. The forward air controller (FAC) knew their location because he had dropped in low enough to check them out.

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"I worked one side of the canal with 500-pounders and my wingman put his along the opposite bank. On the first bomb pass, we hit a large fortification evidently packed with explosives because the result was a 200-foot fireball and black smoke that mushroomed to about 1,800 feet.

"My wingman then strafed the sampans and I worked over the fortification area on a pair of strafing runs to complete the strike," the captain said.

The FAC credited them with destroying 5 fortifications and damaging 8 and destroying 2 sampans and damaging 3, in addition to the secondary explosion.

SHORT BURSTS

New Commander

Lt. Col Lloyd G. Russell

PHAN RANG -The 309th Special Operations Squadron at Phan Rang received a new commander recently when Lt. Col. Lloyd G. Russell, Atwater, Calif., assumed command from Lt. Col. Wayne S. Crawford Jr., Jackson, Mich.

A veteran pilot with 27 years of flying experience, 14 of them with the Strategic Air Command, Colonel Russell served as the 309th operations officer prior to taking command of the squadron.

A Korean War veteran, he has flown over 425 combat sorties and logged more than 325 combat flying hours in the C-123, Provider since his arrival in Vietnam.



614th Completes 10,000 Sortie

(Phan Fare, December 13, 1967)

This past week, Major John W. Postgate, 33, from Scottsdale, Ariz., completed the 10,000 sortie to be flown by members of the 614th TFS, 'Lucky Devils'.

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At the end of the mission he was met by the squadron Commander, Lt. Col. Kenneth P. Miles and Crewchief, Sergeant I. P. Bommarito.

This flight marked Major Posgate’s 510th combat mission. Both as an F-100 Pilot and as a Forward Air Controller.

AS SEEN FROM MY WINDOW.....

(Phan Fare, December 13, 1967)

Well Done....

I want to take this opportunity, after the recent influx of distinguished visitors, to congratulate all Phan Rang personnel one again. Your efforts are praised each time our base is visited.

Generals McConnell and Ryan, Lt. General Momyer, Senator Tower of Texas, and the Congressional Committee, headed by Representative Hardy, all expressed to me their admiration for the men who have worked diligently and tirelessly to make Phan Rang what it is today. The steady stream of VIP’s who come to Phan Rang are unfailingly impressed with the beauty, cleanliness, and superior facilities here.



Senator Tower of Texas visiting the 614th TFS ‘Lucky Devils’.

Photo courtesy of Robert Kellington. Robert ‘Bob’ Kellington is to the very left in the photo. The other individual next to him is

Your professionalism and dedication are responsible for making Phan Rang what it is today...the showcase air base in Vietnam.

I wish it were possible for our visiting dignitaries to meet you individually to

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pass on their praise.

Since that is impossible, I will do it for them and, again for myself. I am proud of you and always enjoy showing Pan Rang to Visitors.

Well Done!

James A. Wilson, Colonel, USAF

Wing Picked for AF-Wide Competition

(Phan Fare, December 13, 1967)

The 35th Tactical Fighter Wing, commanded by Colonel James A. Wilson, has been selected to represent 7th Air Force in the world wide competition for the 1967 Daedalian Maintenance Award.

“I extend my personal congratulations to you and your entire maintenance organization for acheiving the distinction of being selected for this coveted award,” wrote Brigadier General Harmon E. Burns, 7th Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Material.

“I wish you further success in the competition for selection as the PACAF nominee.”



Some Phan Rang Heroes