

**“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, Vietnam  
...keeping the memories alive**

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Phan Rang AB News No. 114

**“Stories worth telling”**

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## **PLAYING CRICKET AT PHAN RANG AIR BASE**

**By Bob Howe**

# **Playing Cricket at Phan Rang AB**



**by Bob Howe**

The final weeks of January 1970 were an eventful time for me, starting on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup>, which was my 239<sup>th</sup> day in-country, with an unusual mission flying in our Australian-made Canberra Mk 20 bomber as navigator/bombardier, with No 2 Squadron CO Wing Commander Jack Boast as pilot, to discover on take-off that our wheels wouldn't come up.

Remaining in the local flying area, by radio we discussed the matter with *Mustang* Ground Control and stated that we intended to drop our bombs with our

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wheels still locked down and asked if a local duty *Walt* FAC might get airborne to join us and take us to a useful target, such as a enemy base camp, close in to Phan Rang, where we could drop our load of six M.117 750lb bombs, four in the bomb-bay and one on each wing-tip.

After all, the Australian Government was paying for nearly all of our supplies, including the bombs we dropped, so we didn't want to waste any of them by jettisoning out to sea. While awaiting the arrival of our friendly FAC, we figured out how best to do our level bombing accurately and sure enough we found a target and did just that. I guess not many others can claim a wheels-down bombing mission.

Then the enemy started chasing me. The first incident was later that day while walking back to my hooch from the Mess after dinner, when I was startled by two explosions not too far away, with sparks and loud bangs caused by two incoming 107mm rockets. As was normal routine I promptly joined my Aussie mates heading for safety in the underground bunker below our quarters until the “all clear” was called. Fortunately no one was hurt this time.

I continued to engage in daily combat missions until the following Sunday, when I flew on an early bombing sortie against a target way down in the Mekong Delta (IV Corps). Upon returning to base, I spent the afternoon playing in a cricket match fought between No. 2 Squadron RAAF teams. Here again I was pursued by more rockets.

Back home In Australia, cricket matches are normally played on beautiful fenced-in grassy arenas (known as ovals) but beggars couldn't be choosers on this occasion, so we had decided to play our match on a vacant plot of land on the Phan Rang Air Base, not far from the C-119 *Shadow* and *Stinger* revetments and close to Base and Wing Headquarters. This field was quite some distance from our Aussie barracks, so we were driven there, dropped off and left on our own until later collection when our match was over.

Traditionally, “social” cricket matches between Aussie teams require a good supply of liquid refreshment, so we took ample supplies of our popular Victoria Bitter (VB) beer, which was brewed in Australia and transported across to us at Phan Rang courtesy of national shipping carriers, or, when the unions went on strike as part of their anti-Vietnam War tactics, by the Royal Australian Navy.

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Our Aussie VB beer was very popular with our American brothers-in-arms, with its higher alcohol content compared with stateside products. In fact our beer served as a most useful currency. For example, No 2 Squadron had a boat which was used for towing water skiers at the Phan Rang beach and which was named “Four Dozen”. It was given this name because it was traded from a friendly American for the price of 48 cans of VB. (*See the two photos*).

Anyway, back to the cricket story. Well into our contest and before it had finished, at around 4 o'clock we heard whistling sounds over our heads, followed by a couple of “whoops”, and a few hundred yards away we saw two more rockets explode not far from the *Pedro* Search and Rescue Kaman helicopter pad and the C-119 revetments. (*See photo of revetments*). We all hit the deck and lay flat, unsure if there were more incoming, but from then on it was all quiet, rocket-wise.

After what seemed a long time after the impact, but probably wasn't, sirens sounded around the air base, breaking the silence and signaling that we should all should take cover and head for the safe protection of the nearest bunkers. Being unfamiliar with the local area where we were playing cricket, we didn't have a clue where any were located, so we stayed where we were. We had no transport at hand to take us back to our quarters.

There being no further sign of incoming rounds, we got up from the ground where we lay, dusted ourselves off, and resumed our unfinished cricket match. Again it seemed like quite some time before the “all clear” was sounded. In the mean-time, the Base/Wing Commander decided he would travel to the site of the rocket impact and check for any damage.

We duly finished our cricket match, the enjoyment of which was enhanced by our national liquid product, and a contented group of sportsmen were duly collected and transported back to our quarters to then enjoy a BBQ dinner.

It was then that our CO received a call from an irate Base Commander, who wanted to know why an insubordinate bunch of Aussies had ignored Phan Rang Air Base standing orders in regard to taking shelter during enemy mortar and rocket attacks.

Sure enough, on the way to survey the damage, the Base Commander couldn't fail to notice this wierd group of people running around chasing a small red cricket ball as though nothing had

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happened, and before the all clear had sounded!

With tongue in cheek, Wing Commander Boast chastised us all for not obeying orders, but no punishments were handed out. We vowed to be good boys from then on, the issue was over and such a situation never arose again, at least to my knowledge.

The lasting message from this occurrence was that there was no way that incoming enemy fire would disrupt us Aussies from enjoying our traditional game of cricket! Fortunately for myself, the rockets stopped chasing me after that.



**Launching Four Dozen** – Taken looking north; Guy on the left is Wing Commander Jack Boast, Commanding Officer of No. 2 Squadron, RAAF; Note the guy in the middle this side carefully holding his can of Aussie VB Beer.



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**Beaching Four Dozen – Taken looking south**



**Revetted AC-119 Stingers and Shadows - Taken looking north**

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**This is the real Bob Howe holding up a 107mm rocket fragment.**

### **AF Personnel Never Too Tired To Aid Villager**

**PHAN RANG, Vietnam (7<sup>th</sup> AF)** —Air Force pilots roar off the runway here many times a day in their mission of dealing death and destruction to the communists in the Republic of Vietnam.

But this is only a part of their war against the enemy. These Air Force men after a full day of war turn enthusiastically to the humanitarian task of creating futures for the people of this war-torn country.

Typical of Phan Rang's civic actions are those with village, orphanages, schools and special individuals.

For example, the Phan Rang Catholic Orphanage needed help. When Chaplain (Capt.) Leon Richard, 36, of Worcester, Mass., visited the orphanage after he arrived here last year, he saw the pitiful living conditions of the children and told the men at the air base.

They responded quickly to the plight of the little people. Letters went out to friends at home and the men made frequent trips to the orphanage. Soon, contributions of clothing and money

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poured in.

Phan Rang's medical staff examined the orphans and administered medicine for a wide variety of ailments.

The 366th Air Police Sq. personnel rounded up the children and gave them a bath. Children were taken to town and badly needed materials were bought. A new building was erected, whitewashed, with screens on the windows. Water is presently being taken from a well and carried into the buildings in buckets. With funds obtained from Air Force men, a water pump has been purchased and plans are being made to build an elevated storage tank.

MSgt. Mark B. Arietta, 48, of Torrance, Cal., says, "Hearing the children laughing makes all the hard work worthwhile."

Together with the men, the chaplains have worked long and hard to better conditions at the local high school. Students were going to classes in two shifts with approximately 100 students to a classroom.

Now, two new classrooms finished by Phan Rang personnel are in use. Four more were to be completed by October.

Approximately 50 desks were obtained from the Philippines for the elementary school. Personnel at Chanute AFB, Ill., sent nearly 115 boxes of clothing and food. These were distributed to the children of both the Catholic parish and the elementary school.

As in the orphanage, when the word got around, school enrollment started going up.

In the medical area, base doctors and dentists devote spare time to assisting the physicians at the Phan Rang provincial hospital.

One patient, Huynh Tai, a 9-year-old boy, owes his life to an Air Force doctor, Capt. Harry L. Tucker, 30, of Winter Park, Fla. While on his rounds at the hospital, Tucker examined Huynh who was paralyzed from the waist down because of a bent spine resulting from a 6-month battle with tuberculosis.

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Tucker says the youngster would have died had his condition continued. He sped Huynh to Cam Ranh where he and a team of Air Force doctors performed the operation to save Huynh's life.

Tucker has arranged for Huynh's acceptance at the Elk's Central Florida Crippled Children's Hospital for a complete cure—free of charge.

In a payday fund drive, the entire base contributed to cover the expenses in the States for the boy's father.

Members of the 366th also responded to a call for help from the fishing village of Du Khunli on the South China Sea. The village was in imminent danger of being flooded.

The men built an urgently needed dike. They hauled 220 truckloads of sand in five hours.

Maj. Kha Van Huy, Ninli Thuan Province chief, says, "The same project, if undertaken by Vietnamese with ox carts, would take three years."

Nguyen Van Mui, hamlet chief, says, "The dike will not only protect us from the flood but will also serve as an excellent wharf. It will improve our port facilities considerably and increase our shipping trade."

Col. George S. Weart, 46, of Chicago, wing commander, says, "Our job is to smash the enemy, and at the same time, rebuild the hopes of our Vietnamese friends whose homes and futures have been destroyed by the course of the war." (Pacific Stars & Stripes, Friday, Nov. 4, 1966)

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**Pilot Relates 2<sup>nd</sup> Bailout** (*Phan Fare, The Happy Valley Weekly, February 13, 1969*)

One of the most adventurous rescues in the history of the 35<sup>th</sup> TFW occurred recently when Capt. Fred B. Davis ejected from his F-100 Supersabre over the South China Sea.

Captain Davis for whom this was the second bailout from a battle-damaged aircraft in recent weeks, ejected a few miles from Phan Thiet City, near a small fleet of Vietnamese fishing boats.

“We knew,” Captain Davis commented, “that there were quite a few Viet Cong sampans in the area. I floated there for a minute, and then one of the nearest boats pulled alongside me and motioned for me to come aboard.



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“I was scared, but there were so many other boats around that I didn’t figure I had anything to lose. Once aboard, I tried to tell them that I wanted to go to a nearby destroyer, the Robert K. Huntington. I couldn’t make them understand, and from the way they were looking at me, I wasn’t exactly sure that they wanted to understand.



**USS Robert K. Huntington**

“I took out a smoke flare and lit it, hoping to get the attention of one of the search planes. Finally, one of the forward air controllers (FAC) saw me.

“My problems still weren’t over. By this time, a number of other boats were beginning to close in on us, and I had a good idea why ! About the time I had finished all the prayers I knew, an army Huey Cobra came over and let loose with a burst of .50 caliber machine-gun fire between us and the other boats.

“Whatever ideas the other boats had, they forgot them and did an about face. After this I also had more luck communicating with the people on the boat.”

“Before we could weigh anchor and head for the destroyer though, I had to help them pull in their fishing nets. After about 20 minutes of some pretty strenuous work, we got underway to the Huntington.”

“A life boat me us at the ship, and took me aboard. On the Huntington, I was outfitted in a Navy uniform and a cap with the destroyer’s number lettered on it. The men of the ship were very helpful in trying to get me back to base.”

“First I was taken by Navy chopper to Phan Thiet, and then an O-2 Bird Dog forward air controller aircraft brought me back to Phan Rang.

“Now,” concluded Captain Davis, “I have something to tell my grandchildren about!”

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**‘Missing Man’ Flight Flown** *(Phan Fare, The Happy Valley Weekly, February 13, 1969)*

The seldom seen but traditional Air Force salute to a fallen comrade, the “missing man” formation, flew over Phan Rang Air Base recently as three F-100 pilots of the 35<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing paid a last tribute to a friend.

About one year ago, four F-100 Supersabre pilots arrived at Phan Rang together - Captain Roger W. Carroll, Robert C. Konopka, Robert M. Staples, and Eugene P. McKinney.

The first three of these pilots requested and received permission to fly their last combat sortie in Vietnam together as a requiem to the fourth, McKinney, who was lost in a combat sortie March 24 of last year.

Their flight included the “missing man” formation in two passes over the airfield.

Captain Carroll, who flew 285 combat missions in the F-100, is being reassigned to Reese AFB, Texas, where he will serve as a T-38 Talon instructor pilot.

Captain Konopka flew 235 combat missions in the Supersabre and is being reassigned to Torrejon AB, Spain.

Captain Stales, who flew 237 combat missions during his year in Vietnam, is also being reassigned to Torrejon.

**EUGENE PHILLIP MCKINNEY is honored on Panel 46E, Row 9 of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.**

- Wall Name: EUGENE P MCKINNEY
- Date of Birth: 1/12/1940
- Date of Casualty: 3/24/1968
- Home of Record: JEFFERSON CITY
- County of Record: CALLAWAY COUNTY
- State: MO
- Branch of Service: AIR FORCE
- Rank: CAPT
- Panel/Row: 46E, 9
- Casualty Province: BINH DINH



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**101<sup>st</sup> Troops Learn Charlie’s Game** *(Pacific Stars & Stripes, Wednesday, May 3, 1967)*

**PHAN RANG, Vietnam**— When 101st Airborne Div. troopers face Charlie on his own grounds, they're ready.

The airborne soldiers are prepared the minute they hit the front lines. They've already passed their first major combat test—the "proficiency school" at the brigade's base camp at Phan Rang.

The first of its kind in Vietnam, the five-day school molds eager paratroopers into alert soldiers ready for any situation.

Physical conditioning, adjustment to the hot climate and the spirit of the 101st are inherent in the course.

On the first day at Phan Rang every trooper is introduced to the most qualified faculty in the world. Each instructor won his combat Ph.D. the hard way— with at least seven months of jungle fighting.

Formal training begins the second day with each class, of newcomers cutting teeth on booby traps, claymore mines and punji sticks.

The third day the men fire individual weapons. The M-16 rifle, the M- 60 machine gun and the M-79 grenade launcher receive attention. Swift break-down and accurate fire are stressed.

"You've got five seconds to reassemble that bolt, trooper."

"That barrel shouldn't jump, soldier. Squeeze the trigger, don't jerk it!"

Before the day is over, the airborne troops know the weapons. They also know how to dismantle and fire weapons used by the Viet Cong, including the Chinese-manufactured AK-47 automatic rifle.

The fourth day's activity is patrolling, the backbone of the brigade's "small unit" operations. Ten-man patrols are sent to reconnoiter an area near the base camp, carrying live ammunition.

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No place in Vietnam is 100 per cent safe from VC infiltration.



A, night ambush occupies the fourth evening of training. The ambush previews the fifth day's "final exam," a 485-yard reaction course. Running the rugged combat course with live ammunition and exploding grenades gives the paratroopers some idea of a firefight. With hardened, combat-tested sergeants following each man through, any mistakes are quickly corrected. Special "attention" from the sergeants prevents repetition of mistakes.

"Move in a low crouch," bellows a sergeant.

"Hit the dirt and crawl for cover," booms another.

The paratroopers respond, learning a new lesson every second.

After graduation, the paratroopers are assigned to units within the brigade. Even those assigned to rear echelon jobs must pass through "P-School."

Officers and second-tour veterans also must complete the initial training.

Staff Sgt. Bruce O. Gilmore, who attended the airborne and Ranger schools and in his first tour served as an adviser to a Vietnamese unit, went through the training. No special consideration was given the 13-year Army veteran. To the 101st, he was a "newcomer" until completing "P-School."

"I'm glad I went through it," said Gilmore. "You never get too much training for combat over here."

"P-School" was initiated under the brigade's replacement company in March, 1966. Not content to rest with the basic "P-School" course, the company also initiated two advanced courses—the Sniper School and the Combat Leaders' Course. Only paratroopers with the 1st Brigade for at least three months are eligible.

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The eight-day Sniper School instructs experienced paratroopers in the effective use of highpower, bolt-action rifles, tactical deployment and evasion techniques.

The Combat Leaders' Course is designed for future non-commissioned officers. The six-day training involves small unit tactics, crew-served weapons, land navigation, patrol techniques, demolition and adjustment of artillery, mortars and air strikes.

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**GIs Express Appreciation For Christmas Ditty Bags** *(The Cumberland News, Friday, February 6, 1970)*

Clubs, church groups, auxiliaries, individuals and Allegany County Chapter, American Red Cross, have received many letters of appreciation for Christmas for ditty bags mailed to service people in Vietnam.

The chapter also received a citation making it an "honorary Shadow" for outstanding service to the 17th Special Operations Squadron at Phan Rang Air Base. The unit, called "The Shadows", flies nightly combat missions in Vietnam.

The local chapter, with the assistance of many groups and individuals and its Service to Military Families volunteers, sewed and shipped 791 of the colorful ditty bags containing personal and recreational items to Vietnam.

Letters were received from group commanders, officers and GIs. They all expressed essentially the same thought, "we are not forgotten". One soldier wrote that the bag he received was his only Christmas present. Others gave their names and addresses and requested letters. Several of the men indicated that they would soon be rotated home but asked the chapter and the Red Cross to keep up the good work and to continue the program for those who would be in Vietnam next Christmas.

Jean H. Faup, field director Red Cross, wrote that the local chapter's shipment was directed to his office which serves the Phan Rang Air Base and Phan Thiet, which serves elements of Task Force Southern Army Command. He noted that the Christmas ditty bags had to travel by land, sea and air to reach servicemen who in some instances serve in very isolated areas.

Mrs. Ellen McKenzie has been chairman of the Christmas project during the four years it has been in operation. The chapter each year has exceeded its assigned quota for shipment.

That the program is a worthwhile one and is appreciated by the servicemen in Vietnam is indicated in different words by all of the writers, that someone unknown to them thought



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and remembered them on Christmas.



**VC Fail To Cow Japanese** (*Pacific Stars and Stripes, Friday, Sept. 15, 1967*)

TOKYO (AP) -A spokesman for Japan Peace Corps volunteers for Rural Development of South Vietnam said Wednesday four Japanese youths have volunteered to serve in South Vietnam despite a recent report of Viet Cong terrorism against Japanese Peace Corps Volunteers.

"In Fact," said, Hatsuyuki Yokohama, "we have been swamped with phone calls and letters by Japanese youths volunteering for service in South Vietnam since the terror report reached here Monday."

The report from Saigon said two Japanese farm technicians, Masaharu Kuramitsu and Shigeo Masaki, were injured by a bomb early Sunday against their house in the town of Phan Rang. One was seriously injured, the report said.

Yokpyama said he was at first afraid the Viet Cong terror action against the Japanese would discourage future volunteers from Japan,

He said the incident apparently had the reverse effect, of bolstering the, determination of Japanese youths to contributed their services for South Vietnam's rural development.

He said the four new volunteers, all farm, technicians, will leave, for Phan Rang as soon as accommodations there are readied for them.

A farm training, center is located at Phan Rang, operated by South Vietnam's National Voluntary Service Association, a private organization.

The Japan Peace Corps Volunteers for Rural Development of South Vietnam, is also a private organization financed, by contributions.

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**Viets Go Red-Hunting in Blue With Black Dragon Gunships** *(Pacific Stars & Stripes, Wednesday, November 17, 1971)*

TAN SON NHUT AB Vietnam (Special) — Twin-tailed Black Dragons have replaced the Shadow as the guardian of beleaguered Southeast Asia hamlets.

The dragons are not mythical monsters of ancient lore, but are AC119 gunships of the Vietnamese Air Force's 819th Sq.

Called Shadows when they were assigned to the 17th Special Operations Sq. of the U.S. Air Force, the twin-engined airborne destroyers have joined the VNAF ranks and have been christened Hac Long ("Black Dragon"). They are adding a new chapter to the legendary exploits of gunship crews during more than two years of combat in Southeast Asia.

The AC119 carries four 7.62 miniguns, one more than its AC47 stablemate, and each gun can spew up to 6,000 rounds of fire power per minute. The Black Dragons are creatures of the night, and each carries flares and a battlefield searchlight capable of illuminating areas the size of several football fields.

Each aircraft carries an eightman Vietnamese Air Force crew —two pilots, a navigator, a night observation scope operator, the searchlight operator, and three gunners.

The crew is a careful blend of experienced pilots and capable technicians. Each man has received individual and crew training enabling him to perform a valuable role in the gunships operation.

The pilots received their initial training in the United States then returned to their homeland for gunship tactics training at Phan Rang AB. While at Phan Rang, the pilots became acquainted with the other specialists who would eventually comprise the crews. During the two month long program at Phan Rang however, each man quickly learned to become a part of the tight-knit crew of an AC119.

The first all-Vietnamese AC119 squadron was activated on Sept. 10 at Tan Son Nhut AB, following continuation training with U.S. advisers. Its crews now certified as combat ready, the 819th VNAF Sq. joins the rapidly expanding Republic of Vietnam Air Force for the defense of their homeland against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese.

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**Serving Our Country**



✪Airman I. C. **John J. Metrick** son of Mrs. Alice Metrick, 628 Yale Ave., Morton, is a supply specialist with the Tactical Air Command at George Air Force Base, Victorville, Calif. A 1970 graduate of Springfield High School, Metrick completed a tour of duty at Phan Rang. Air Base, Vietnam. (*Delaware County (PA) Daily Times, Monday, July 24, 1972*)

✪WITH U. S. COMBAT AIR FORCES, Vietnam — Staff Sergeant **Alfred Cruthird**, son of Mrs. Jettie E. Cruthird, 1018 Bell St., Mount Vernon, Ill., is on duty at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. Sergeant Cruthird, a maintenance scheduler, is a member of the Pacific Air Forces. Before his arrival in Southeast Asia, he was assigned to March AFB, Calif.

The sergeant, who attended Mount Vernon Township High School, is married to the former Christene McTier. (*The Register-News - Mt. Vernon, Illinois, Wednesday, January 22, 1969*)

✪Robert Durdy is weapons mechanic at Phan Rang AB. Airman First Class **Robert J. Durdy**, son of Mr. and Mrs. Don J. Durdy, of 24116 52nd W, Mountlake Terrace, Is on duty at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam.

Airman Durdy, a weapons mechanic, Is a member of the Pacific Air Forces.

Before his arrival in Vietnam, he was assigned to Clark AB, Philippines.

The airman, a 1964 graduate of Mountlake Terrace High School, attended the University of Washington. (*The Enterprise Homemaker, Wednesday, April 3, 1968*)

**LETTERS**

As always, another great job. I really appreciated the history of the 315th SOW of which I was part of as a C-123 pilot with the 310th SOS. Please continue with your outstanding work! Thanks--  
Richard Anderson

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**“Share the Memories” at the 2016 Phan Rang AB Reunion, Oklahoma City**  
**[Click here for the latest reunion information](#)**

**[Click here to make your hotel reservation.](#)**

**Please make your hotel reservations now!**

**PHAN RANG STAFF MEMBERS**

**Joseph Burkhart:** Master of Ceremonies

**Robert Kellington:** Tour Coordinator

**Jack Anderson:** Treasurer

**Lou Ruggerio:** Site coordinator/Contract negotiator

**Douglas Severt:** Reunion Coordinator

**Ed Downey/Barbara Brandt:** Ceremonies

**Christopher Boles:** Photographer

**Kirk Minert:** Aircraft Historian

**Bob Tucker:** Keeper of the Rolls

**Joe Kaupa:** In Memoriam

**Bruce Mueller:** Badge Board

**Mike Maleski:** Chaplain

**Jim Erixson:** Associate Chaplain

**Bob Howe:** Australian Ambassador

**FACEBOOK GROUP ADMINISTRATORS**

**Douglas Severt, Joseph Burkhart, David McGaughey, Vincent Joseph Miller  
(Susan Anderson-Miller) and Kirk Minert**

**I hope that you enjoyed this issue of the Phan Rang Newsletter. This newsletter was compiled and published by [Douglas Severt](#). Previous issues of the Phan Rang Newsletter are available [here](#) for download.**