

**“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, Vietnam  
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Phan Rang AB News No. 115

**“Stories worth telling”**

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**Two Viet Nam Reunions Slated By Red Horse, Air Commandos** (*Playground Daily News, Ft. Walton Beach, Fla., Thursday, November 9, 1967*)

By PEGGY MAY

Two groups of men—those who flew in Viet Nam and those who kept the runways open for the fliers—are planning separate reunions at two of Eglin's Auxiliary Fields on Veterans Day, Nov. 11.

The fliers are the men of the 311<sup>th</sup> Air Commando Squadron, known as "Danang's Finest Hog Haulers" or "Harry's Hog Haulers", named after Col. Harry Howton, who was their commander and is now Commandant at the new Special Air Warfare School at Hurlburt Field, where their reunion will take place.

The combat engineers are the men of the 554<sup>th</sup> Civil Engineering Squadron at Phan Rang and those of the 555<sup>th</sup> Civil Engineering Squadron at Cam Ranh Bay. The 554<sup>th</sup> CES is known as the "Penny Short Squadron", and the men of the 555<sup>th</sup> CES refer to their outfit at the "Triple Nickel Squadron." Their reunion takes place at Eglin's Auxiliary Field No. 2, where the RED HORSE 560<sup>th</sup> Civil Engineering Training Squadron is located.

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Both reunions are expecting to have men from all over the United States come for all the activities and festivities.

**AUTHOR**

The star attraction at the Hurlburt reunion will be author Elaine Shepard, who immortalized "Harry's Hog Haulers" in her bestselling book on the Viet Nam war, "The Doom Pussy." Miss Shepard, in addition to attending the reunion, is scheduled to give a lecture to students in the Special Air Warfare School Psychological Operations-Civic Action Course on Monday, Nov. 13. The course is being given to selected officers enroute to assignments in Southeast Asia, and Miss Shepard will speak on the problems of the working press in a combat environment.

Miss Shepard's book was serialized in October in a seven-part series in the Cocoa Beach newspaper, Today.

Saturday's reunion at Hurlburt is the third such annual affair. Among those making the local plans, in addition to Col. Howton, are Maj. C. E. Caudell, Capt. Bill Studer, Capt. Dick Murrow, Maj. Ed Muro, and T.Sgt. Billy Cooper.

**AIR COMMANDOS**

The Air Commandos fly the aerial highways of Viet Nam on relief and supply missions and land in the jungle on primitive dirt airstrips about the size of a blacksmith's apron, according to author Shepard.

The Viet Cong try to make sieves of the big, lumbering aircraft that were originally built as gliders, with engines added as an afterthought. All missions are flown through the constant harassment of ground fire. If the load is ammo, a direct hit could explode the whole business.

Typical cargo might include concertina, rice, ammunition, people, mail, troops, hogs, cement, spare parts, ducks, chickens or cows, bound for bases or Special Forces in remote outposts, boondocks, or "boomies", military slang for just about as far from civilization as you can get.

Many of the Air Commandos are former supersonic-jet fliers or off the crews of SAC bombers, but all were handpicked for the job of piloting the high-winged, twin - engine assault transports with the tall, upswept tail and huge cargo doors at the rear that yawn open to disgorge paratroops, jeeps, trucks, or bulldozers. Some of the men who fly the reliable old craft carry personal gag cards reading: "A subsonic, fixed wing, century series, assault troop carrier. You call. We haul."

**DA NANG**

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Col. Howton's men flew out of Da Nang, the world's busiest air port. Something lands at Da Nang every 20 seconds. There are fifteen hundred landings and takeoffs on peak days besides two extra traffic patterns for helicopters at the edge of the airstrip.

He says, "In a day it was commonplace for 10 or 11 to come in with inflight emergencies or battered by ground fire."

To the east of the base is the clear blue-green China Sea. Heavily forested mountains of 7000 feet rise on the west and are clogged with guerillas, tigers, elephants, and monkeys. One hundred miles to the north the 17<sup>th</sup> Parallel divides South Viet Nam from North Viet Nam. The once provincial airfield is now a vast US fortress swarming with planes. Thirty types of aircraft are flown from Da Nang.

### **VIET CONG**

Strategic Da Nang is a base that the Viet Cong would love to obliterate. A spidery network of trails leads out of Laos and Cambodia along 900 miles of Viet Nam boundary. The Viet Cong guerrilla who was infiltrated looks just like the Vietnamese peasant in the South.

He wears the same black cotton pajamas and conical straw hat and speaks the same language. Every Vietnamese is suspect - maids, orderlies, everyone. A little old lady with a bucket of water hiding explosives challenges our supersonic jets. An ambassador has called it the unholy trinity—subversion, terrorism, and classic guerilla tactics.

### **COL. HOWTON**

In describing Col. Howton, Miss Shepard wrote, "Harry's wiry, gray-streaked blond crew cut protruded defiantly forward even when wet with sweat. Before a mission his face was comparatively unlined but after a sporty flight, or dicey situation, as the Colonel called it, that face could look like a navel orange packed too tightly in the crate. In his Birmingham drawl Howton spewed corny humor like an honest slot machine—'well, skill and cunning will triumph over suspicion and ignorance every time.'

The VC had the usual 80,000 piaster price on his head, dead or alive, as he fought his third war—World War H, Korea and this one.

Today he is putting his hard earned knowledge of Southeast Asia to work at Hurlburt Field in the brand new Special Air Warfare School, teaching men what to expect when they get "in country."

### **RED HORSE**

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Among the men who take the courses at the school are the combat engineers of RED HORSE, who are making big plans for their reunion out at Field 2 on Saturday, Nov. 11.

Seeing the RED HORSE training center on Saturday will be just part of the reunion plans. Other activities include a special filet mignon dinner at the Elks club on Okaloosa Island followed by entertainment on Saturday evening.

Charter members of the 554<sup>th</sup> and 555<sup>th</sup> RED HORSE Squadrons will be celebrating their second birthday at the reunion. Men of the Heavy Bomb Damage Repair Squadrons will get together for a combination of business and pleasure on Saturday, beginning at 1 p.m. A welcoming address by Lt. Col. Kenneth F. Meyers will kick-off the reunion events. Col. Meyers is deputy commander of the 560<sup>th</sup> CES at Field 2. Col. John Rose is commander. He replaced the former commander, Col. Wm. T. Meredith, who has been reassigned as commander of the 554<sup>th</sup> at Phan Rang.

### **SQUADRONS**

The squadrons, just two of the six now completely operational in Viet Nam and Thailand, were activated Oct. 12, 1965 for RED HORSE and manpower for them was provided from within the Air Force resources because of the immediate need for the capability of providing organic support to tactical units when deployed as part of a joint operation plan, or to support other requirements in War Guidance Plans. And although civil engineering type skills were taken from the existing Civil Engineer force, special training was required for greater weapon proficiency, well drilling and rock crushing, theater of operation construction techniques, and demolition.

Veterans of the two original squadrons are now at Field 2 giving intensive training to men in a 60-day cram course which covers the primary mission, repair of bomb damaged airfields, and many other skills and techniques, all to be carried out under combat conditions. Men from the 560<sup>th</sup> CES here are air-deployed direct to Viet Nam every month, to take their place in the combat conditioned units there.

### **FIRST BIRTHDAY**

Last year's first anniversary of the 554<sup>th</sup> at Phan Rang was not a very festive occasion. The unit was in a combat zone engaged in a crash project to build 67 barracks. Their commander, Col. James F. Conti said, "Morale is an important factor in any Air Force unit, but especially in a combat zone. We want to get these men out of the tents and into suitable living quarters."

And they did, which was perhaps celebration enough for men living under those conditions.

How did the men at Phan Rang help the fliers? To keep 554<sup>th</sup>'s effective efforts to keep from closing the runway, the Red Horsemen under Maj. Kenneth F. Meyers (now Lt. Col. Meyers,

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Field 2, deputy commander) initiated "Operation Quick Fix." They started with the worst depressions and repaired them one at a time at night when missions were seldom flown.

Through the night, under the glare of powerful lights, men of the 554<sup>th</sup> raced the clock to repair the runway before the dawn's first mission.

The 35<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing Commander Col. George S. Weart said, "Without the 554<sup>th</sup> effective efforts to keep the aluminum matting runway in operation, there were many days the 35<sup>th</sup> would not have flown."

In explaining the mission of the 554<sup>th</sup>, Col. Conti said, "We are a paradox in war. We build and repair rather than destroy."

He said, "I've never seen such high morale in my entire 25 years of service. These troops are honed to razor sharpness.

Lt. Col. M. K. Plunkett, 555<sup>th</sup> commander, was equally enthusiastic.

The commander said. "It's pride. These boys are out to prove they can do the job. For the first time in the history of the Air Force Civil Engineering military engineers are being given an opportunity to do a job alone. They have their own their own equipment, work together as a team, and maintain their own identity. They mean to prove that they 'Can Do Will Do.'

**Doom Pussy Gang Sets Reunion in Las Vegas** (*Pacific Stars and Stripes, Sunday, July 27, 1969*)

**TOKYO (S&S)** — The Doom Pussy gang will gather in Las Vegas in August to sing all the old songs, tell lies, relive the horror of the truth and raise toasts to their fallen comrades who couldn't make the reunion.

The Doom Pussy gang are members of the 8th Tactical Bomb Sq. (The Liberty Sq.) and the 13th TBS (The Devil's Own Grim Reapers) who were the first to fly night jet bombing missions over North Vietnam.

They took their name from a Vietnamese legend concerning those who fly into the jaws of the cat of death and the Da Nang Officers Open Mess, their unofficial off-duty headquarters.

Flying B57 Canberra fighter-bombers, the 8th and 13th TBS were the first to drop bombs from jet aircraft in South Vietnam. They staged out of Clark AB, R.P., to Bien Hoa, Tan Son Nhut and Da Nang air bases, finally winding up permanently assigned to Phan Rang AB where the 8th TBS is still flying daily combat missions.

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The Devil's Own Grim Reapers left Vietnam last year and is now deployed at Mac-Dill AFB, Fla.

One of the most highly decorated group of fliers in any war, the Doom Pussy gang was the subject of a best-selling book by the same name published in 1967 by Doubleday.

The pilots, who wore the Doom Pussy patch depicting the head of an evil-eyed cat with a B57 clutched in its teeth, said that "when the flak is so heavy that you can read a newspaper by the light of the bursts, and when the gunners on the ground are hosing your tail off with their best shot — you have seen the Doom Pussy."

Gen. Carl A. Spaatz, who flew as a Spad pilot in France in 1917 with the 13th Aero Pursuit Sq. (forerunner of the 13th TBS), will lead the list of guests at the reunion.

It will be held Aug. 15-17 at Las Vegas Sands Hotel.

Veterans and friends of the two squadrons are invited to contact Lt. Col. Frank R. (Smash) Chandler, Hq. SAC (DXIX), Offutt AFB, Neb. 68113, for reservations.



**The Doom Pussy “Harry’s Hog Haulers”** (*Journal Gazette, Mattoon, Illinois, Tuesday, October 3, 1967*)

THE HOG & COW FERRY: SMASH & NAILS APPEAR: THE DOOM CLUB EXPLAINED

Editor’s Note: This is the second of a six-part condensation of “ The Doom Pussy,” a best-selling book by Elaine Shepard, foreign correspondent. While it is fiction, many events really happened and the rest could have.

By ELAINE SHEPARD

I hitched a ride to Da Nang in a T-39, a snappy little executive type jet, to go on a mission with Harry’s Hog Haulers, which is what they called the outfit run by Lieut. Col. Harry Howton. Officially, it is the 311th Air Commando Squadron, flying 10-year-old twin-engine Providers.

The 311th is a ferry service of people and supplies for towns and Special Forces camps in the jungle. Besides a few Vietnamese, livestock and feed. Harry’s manifest that day included me.

“ I want you to stick two flak vests under you,” Harry said. “ No sense in getting your butt shot off. I see you already have on your iron brassiere,” referring to my flak vest.

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The passengers stood at the cargo door listening to the loadmaster’s routine speech. “ We will land at Hue, Quang Ngai, Aloui, Dong Xoai, Khe Sanh. There is no water aboard. You can drink from your individual canteens. No toilet facilities except a relief tube for the men. And if you get airsick, please try to hit the containers.

### **420 POUNDS OF OLD FRIENDS**

As I started to board, hanging around my waist was a tape-recorder, Polaroid, and Rolleiflex; over one shoulder a Nikon and a bag of film; over the other, tapes and two

canteens; on my wrist, a Rollei sixteen.

I heard a voice say, “ She looks like a gahdam Alpine milkmaid.” I knew it was the voice of Major Nails, whom I had first met at Clark Air Base in the Philippines. And I new that if Nails was there Smash—Maj. Smash Crandell —was not far away. He was at Nails’s side.

Nails and Smash weigh combined. 420 pounds. Nails had played profootball and could still do one-arm pushups until you were tired watching. He could outdrink, outshout, outtalk and out-sing anyone. In him boiled a Rabelaisian passion for loving, eating, talking, deer hunting, flying and endless good fellowship. Smash was a six-foot-four-hulk of a man. He has a lopsided grin, the craziest giggle in the Air Force, and the most amiable disposition until someone foolishly shafted a pal.

Nails had his own private means of communing with God. When he pulled out of a pass and realized the murderous ground fire had missed him again, he would look heavenward and say, “ Thank you, Hubert. Now I’ll take over.”

### **“ASPCA WOULDN’T LIKE IT”**

I climbed aboard to the navigator’s seat.

“ Watch them cows,” hollered Harry to the loadmaster. “ It’s a real dicey situation trimmin’ this motorized Spam can with a bull runnin’ loose in the back end. On drops we have to kick ‘em out, two to a crate, and pray the chute opens. Otherwise, it’s instant steerburgers. The ASPCA wouldn’t like that.”

Airborne, Sergeant Jones explained the technique the pilots used for short strips— called riding the stick-shaker. “ In order to get this beast into a short slick strip use an approach speed indicator on the dashboard that’s tied in with a stick shaker that shakes the control column more rapidly as they near a complete stall. Since the 123 has about the stall characteristics

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of a stream-lined lead brick, this bit of ingenuity starts a warning about five to seven knots before the bird is about to become a free falling object. On these strips it's pretty vital to be at the absolute minimum airspeed to keep from running out of airpatch and completely ruining your day.”

Lumber, two priests, cement, a cow and four pigs were off-loaded at Quang Ngai. I moved to the back of the plane for the rest of the journey, and after the Vietnamese troops scurried aboard for the next leg of the trip, a tiny civilian Vietnamese couple, carrying an infant, timidly climbed the ramp. A soldier and I moved so that they could sit together.

Our 123 pounded down the strip and up, like a grapefruit seed squeezed into orbit. I screeched into Sergeant Jone's ear. “ You sure don't mess around on the ground at Quang Ngai, do you?”

“ Hell, no,” he replied. “ Didn't you know they were firing at us?”

As I looked over at the Vietnamese father, his chin slumped down on his chest. He was dead. A sniper's 30-caliber rifle slug had punctured the plane's underbelly and come up through the flak vest on his seat.

The baby opened brown eyes wide, whimpered to be fed. The mother, a petite woman with exquisite features, stared up at Jones beseechingly. In that second, high above battle-weary Vietnam, it seemed that all the hope and despair of the world were etched in her face.

### **PRISONER OF WAR, FEMALE**

One passenger Harry picked up along the way pictured exquisitely how pathos can work both ways in this exotic, high-stakes war. A 19-year-old fine - boned Viet Cong nurse, captured by the Marines, sat wide-eyed in the C-123. She was clad in black pajamas, a maroon silk shirt, the traditional sloped straw hat, and rubber sandals. Unable to figure out the mechanics of her bucket-seat belt, she thanked, with her eyes, the big sergeant who tucked her safely in. With strange sleepy trust, she put her head on her Marine captor's shoulder.

As the C-123, engines thundering, became airborne, the young nurse's eyes, under lowered lids, rested on a rubber - encased American Marine's body we were carrying back. The girl continued to stare at the dead American four feet from her on a stretcher.

It must have been her first experience at flying, and like some sensitive children on a first roller-coaster ride she got sick. She indicated her condition by touching her tummy with Oriental daintiness. The Marine understood. Gently as if handling an errant kid sister, he handed her a plastic bag and held her head.

The body of the Vietnamese who had been killed by a sniper's bullet was removed at Da Nang, as well as of the Marine.

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Then Harry took me to lunch at the DOOM Club. DOOM stands for the initials of Da Nang Officers’ Open Mess. One careless reporter, afflicted with bone-deep pessimism, had taken a look at the sign and, without inquiring, filed a story reporting that the morale of the men at Da Nang had dipped so low that they had even named their club “Doom.”

**A LIVING BOMB**

“I understood the caution and the rules better when I flew one day with the Fangs,” I told Harry. “They had a captured VC guerrilla they were taking back to headquarters at Da Nang, and he had not been thoroughly frisked. When the chopper was 45 feet off the ground, the guerrilla reached for his crotch. The alert crew chief noticed the furtive movement, picked the guy up, and threw him out of the helicopter. When the guerrilla hit the ground he blew up like a minor ammo dump. His plan had been to take everybody aboard to kingdom come with him. The crew and I were pretty thankful that our boy was on his toes. But that crew chief would probably be condemned as a bully by war critics at home.”

That afternoon mission of Harry’s Hog Haulers included livestock and a batch of Vietnamese recruits, who marched aboard in civilian clothes, patched but starched Sunday-best-fresh. They clung together.

The lads huddled, ‘sleeping on each other’s shoulders or laps, and unself-consciously putting arms around each other. I remembered the 10 cardinal rules issued to a battalion of U. S. Marines: “Recognize that hand - holding among Vietnamese males is a custom of comradeship in South Vietnam and not an indication of homosexual tendencies subject to ridicule and mockery.”

As usual, the air-conditioning condensation began to leak in torrents. Sergeant Jones whipped out his water-repellent poncho to make a tent for some of the boys, then tore up cardboard boxes to shelter the rest. As Harry hit turbulence, one of the youngest, an uncommonly handsome youth with an angelic face, turned green. Jones was there in a flash with a small brown envelope containing a plastic barf bag, then distributed more to the others.

Suddenly my eyes rested on Harry’s big, muscular arm as he prepared for a landing. Sunburned and hairy, sinews rippling, it was an awesome hunk of muscle.

But what held my attention, what I never had noticed before in millions of miles of flight, was the gentleness, the fingertip gentleness of the pilot as he handled the flight controls, throttles, and switches of his aircraft. His hands moved with a surgeon’s precision or as if they were caressing a little bird.

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**Cocktails at Green Apple** (*Journal Gazette, Mattoon, Illinois, Friday, October 6, 1967*)

**VC INFILTRATORS ATTACK BAR; FIRST IS THROWN THROUGH WINDOW: OTHERS KNOCKED OUT OR KILLED**

By ELAINE SHEPARD

Crunch, Reggie and Jake sat at a table in the Green Apple Stereo Club in Saigon. They were in town for rest and recreation. One petite Vietnamese girl was almost invisible in Jake's bear hug. He had made a fairly astonishing leap over the language barrier.

The Green Apple was chaired by a Mama-San who looked like a mixture of every ethnic culture that ever had passed through the Orient. The club was long and narrow with tables along the walls and a service bar across the back. A dozen B-girls invited customers to buy them Saigon tea, which was just that, tea.

Among the patrons was Alby Skurnel, bullet-headed, beefy black marketeer.

Two tables away sat Major Tors Nordstrom, an old and solid pal of Nails and Smash. This short, stocky, balding Swede, a fighter ace with six enemy planes to his credit in World War II, could count among his decorations three Silver Stars, six Distinguished Flying Crosses, 26 Air Medals, and six Article Fifteens. (The latter is the next thing to a court-martial.) He had been a major for 19 years.

**SUSPICIOUS YOUTHS APPEAR**

Five young Vietnamese who had been loitering around the door of the club peered in. Finally one of them entered. He was in his late twenties, handsome, and he swaggered. Dressed in an American golf shirt and well-creased slacks, he stole a glance at Tors as he passed, then took a table at the back of the room near the bar and ordered a Coke.

Mama - San whispered to Reggie, “Viet Cong.”

“ Why don't you kick him in the pants, Crunch?” suggested Jake.

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“ I would, but the little bastard probably has those Botany 500 britches full of grenades,” Crunch replied.

At this moment Major Nails and I were at Luong Phan’s tailor shop picking up some name tags Nails and Smash had ordered. Then we left to meet Smash at a local barber shop.

Outside was the sign Coiffures. Inside, colognes, perfumes, sprays, brushes, combs, and bobby pins lined the mirrored sleeves. Smash was in the front chair. A barber had given him a trim, shampoo, and shave, massaged him from waist to ears, then trapped his stubborn curls under a hairnet to keep them pasted flat while they dried.

### **VC RAISE PRICE ON NAILS**

“ When he gets through, come on over to the Green Apple bar next door,” Nails suggested.

Tors spotted Nails as soon as he stepped through the Green Apple door. He put his glass down and hit Nails a violent blow of affection on the back that echoed up through the roof of Nail’s head.

“ Come here, you overweight s.o .b .! You owe me a drink .” Nails sat down and ordered a round.

“ A guy over a t Second Air Division tells m e they ’ve upped the ante on you and Smash. The VC’s price on your butts is now a hundred thousand p’s apiece. I told you if you kept dropping bombs on those little guys in black pajamas you’d hurt their feelings. They never could take a joke.”

A dozen Vietnamese gradually had materialized in front of the club. A few of them entered. Mam a - San nervously approached the table where Jake, Reggie, and Crunch were buying Saigon tea.

“ I think we should call it off for now,” she suggested with a nod toward the newcomers. “ I don’t like this.” It was unusual for Vietnamese to come into her place. Instinct convinced her they were Viet Cong terrorists. Jake replied, “ M am a-San, how about some more soda?”

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**VC PULLS GRENADE AND—**

One of the Vietnamese took a long look at Nails. At no apparent signal all of the Vietnamese men in the place paid their tabs and headed for the door. The last one reached into his pocket and pulled out a grenade. As the VC pulled the pin, Jake, not as drunk as they thought, sprang from his table, grabbed the grenade, and hurled it into the street. In almost the same movement, he kicked the VC in the face, breaking his neck and shattering his teeth, then took him by the seat of the pants and hurled him through the plate-glass window.

Smash, next door, had heard the explosion. He didn't bother to remove his hairnet or the powder-blue smock. As he reached the street he saw a VC de-pin another grenade and hurl it into the club. Smash hollered a warning and galloped toward the action.

The grenade exploded in back of the bar. Two B-girls were disemboweled. Plaster fell everywhere.

“ The bastard spoiled my drink ,” growled Crunch, then headed for the street to catch a VC.

Alby Skurnel tried to hide behind Mama-San. He was caught by fragments in the temple and died instantly.

**TWO TRAPPED IN CAR**

Smash had seen the fellow who threw the second grenade sprint for a 4-CV Renault. With four strides Smash reached the tiny automobile. He buried his knee into the door and, with one ham-size fist on the roof, flipped the car over on its side. The right doors were not yet closed so two guerrillas were pinned beneath the escape vehicle. Gasoline from the fuel tank sloshed onto the hot engine and ignited. As Smash made it to the curb , the car exploded.

He blocked the getaway efforts of the remaining VCs. One look at the giant Smash and they ran screaming back into the Club, where Reggie hurled a well-aimed bottle of BaMuoi Ba beer, braining the first one.

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“Ruin our rest, will you?” he roared.

Tors, a Karate black belt, kneed another in full flight and heaved him in back of the bar. Crunch uncorked a haymaker which connected with a VC’s adam’s apple and lifted him into the air. He returned to the tile floor like a stone.

The other four headed for the stairs and the balcony but Nails overtook them as they reached the top. The one nearest him reached for something in an inside pocket. Nails didn’t wait to see if it was a grenade. He hit the man so hard he sailed off the balcony and down into Smash’s arms. Smash pitched him through the blown-out front window into the gutter.

These were the first VC Nails and Smash had ever encountered face to face.

## **POLICE TAKE OVER**

One guerrilla on the balcony drew a hypodermic needle from his pocket. He waited for Nails to come to him and, not seeing the palmed needle, Nails moved in. But Reggie had seen the gesture and speared the VC with his kris.

The last terrorist on the balcony slumped to his knees as the White Mice, the efficient, white-garbed Vietnamese police, entered. The situation was in hand.

Jake suggested that they all have a drink. “Who’s your funny friend in the breakaway kimono?” he asked Nails, glancing at Smash’s hairnet.

“Will somebody please close the door?” requested Reggie.

But there was no door—no front.

Then Nails took a look at Smash’s getup, swept the aisles with imaginary palms, grabbed two long - stemmed carnations off a table, and bowed. “What is your pleasure, luv?”

*(Note: These stories don’t necessarily have a Phan Rang connection, but they are very entertaining and in many ways they mirror some of our own Vietnam experiences, maybe not as adventuresome, but pretty close. Doug Severt)*

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**Brief Meeting with Frank Borman**

Apollo 8 Astronaut Frank Borman, right, is greeted by Col. Walter T. Galligan, 35th Tactical Fighter Wing commander at Phan Rang AB, during a recent visit by the astronaut. Borman, who is an Air Force colonel, was on a brief visit as a personal representative of President Richard M. Nixon. The colonel talked with many small groups of airmen, expressing the support of the people in the United States for the job servicemen are doing in the Republic of Vietnam.

(U.S. Air Force Photo by A1C William C. Cannava)

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**Saigon - After 13 Days, 500 Miles**

*(Editor's Note: Spec, it Jim Clare arrived back in Saigon Thursday after his 500-mile hitchhiking journey from the DWZ to this capital city. And he is now getting ready for more pleasant journey—an R&R trip to Sydney, Australia. Pacific Star & Stripes, Saturday, October 4, 1969)*

**By SPEC. 4 JIM CLARE**

**S&S Staff Correspondent**

**SAIGON**—From Dalat it was all downhill, all 180 miles on the road home to Saigon.

The Central Highlands sank through the passes and pine trees south of Dalat on Route 20. First came tea leaves and coffee plants, Montagnard villages, trucks hauling tree trunks, peasants carrying sticks of wood on their backs, and brown-mud igloos where charcoal was made.

Later came rubber trees growing in grid patterns and oozing white sap. Then finally the flat lands, and that meant that after 13 days of hitch-hiking from the Demilitarized Zone, Saigon was no longer far away. It had been a long trip.

There's a lot of civilian traffic on Highway. 20—big diesel buses packed with people and heavy trucks carrying vegetables from Dalat to Saigon and taking hard goods back up to the hills. But not many Americans travel the entire distance—in fact little U.S. traffic passes between II Corps which is supplied from Cam Ranh Bay and III Corps which is supplied from Long Binh.

I left Dalat Wednesday morning in a Pacific Architects and Engineers jeep. Two rides later I landed at a 19th Eng. Bn. base called Bizarre and that's where I spent the night.

Thursday morning the 19th Engineers took me into III Corps to the 169th Eng. Bn. which was also working on Route 20. Since it was just after payday, a two and-a-half ton truck full of engineers was going to Xuan Loc where the troops could go to the PX and take care of a few

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other affairs. I climbed aboard.

They left me off at the intersection of Route 20 and Highway One. I had started my trip at the DMZ Sept. 20 on Highway One, but had to leave it Tuesday at Phan Rang because a section of the road was washed out between there and Phan Thiet. Once back on Highway One, it took just three rides to get home.

The last, from Thu Due, only eight miles outside Saigon, was in a three-quarter-ton truck with two men from the 4th Transportation Command, Sgt. 1.C. James Robinson and Sgt. Henry Wilkins. They had been reading about the trip, they said, but they didn't know who I was when they stopped.

It was Thursday afternoon and it was raining as we drove Over Newport Bridge where the ocean-going ships were docked, and there sprawled out in front, was Saigon.

It's hard to describe Saigon. It's too big, too varied to fit into any one picture, although the main question I heard along the way was: "How's Saigon?"

Saigon has one Presidential Palace and a lot of tin-roofed refugee huts. It has temples and cathedrals and it has small, wheeled stands that sell books, and dried squid and ice cream.

Most of all, Saigon has traffic. The motorcycles and scooters and blue and yellow taxi-cabs that look like bumper cars and drive the same way and jeeps and trucks and three-wheeled cycles all hustling through the streets looking for part of the action.

I had been on the road for 13 days, and had spent many hours without seeing more than one or two vehicles. Saigon was like being inside a pinball machine ready to tilt.

Saigon also has lots of bars, and restaurants and tailor shops. It has many girls in ao dais, mini-skirts and bell bottoms. It has air pollution and dirt. It was home and it was good to be there . It will probably be even better to be in Sydney.



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**New Wing Commander’s Record Impressive** (*Del Rio, Texas, News-Herald, Friday, July 34, 1967 from a story furnished by Laughlin Air Force Base “Border Eagle”.*)

Col. Joseph S. Bleymaier Jr. is the commander of the Air Training Command's 47th Flying Training Wing at Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas.

As commander, he is responsible for the management and leadership of an undergraduate pilot training program graduating approximately 400 new pilots per year for the United States Air Force and allied nations.

He was born March 18, 1943, in Walla Walla, Wash. He graduated from Mary Star of the Sea High School, San Pedro, Calif., in June 1961. He obtained a B.S. degree in humanities and his commission as a second lieutenant from the U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colo., in June 1965. In 1975, he earned a master of political science degree from Auburn University.

His professional military education includes Squadron Officer School by correspondence, in 1971; distinguished graduate of Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., in May 1975; Industrial College of the Armed Forces by correspondence, in 1977; and distinguished graduate of the Air War College, also at Maxwell, in May 1984.

Upon graduation from the Air Force Academy, he was assigned to undergraduate pilot training at Webb Air Force Base, Texas, where he received his pilot's wings in August 1966. After pilot training, he was assigned to Perrin Air Force Base, Texas, where he completed training in the F-102 Delta Dagger. Subsequently, he received F-101 training at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla. His first operational flying assignment was in F-101's and T-33's with the 84th Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Hamilton Air Force Base, Cal., in 1967. In June 1968, he was assigned to the 20th Tactical Air Support Squadron, Da Nang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam. **He flew O-1s and O-2s as a forward air controller instructor at Phan Rang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam.**

Upon his first return from Southeast Asia, Colonel Bleymaier was assigned to the 62nd Fighter Intercept Squadron, K.I. Sawyer Air Force Base, Mich. In 1972, following a year at the Pentagon as an Air Staff Training officer in the Directorate of Doctrine, Concepts and Objectives, Bleymaier became the chief flight examiner in the F-101 and T-33 at Headquarters Aerospace Defense Command, Evaluation Division, Colorado Springs, Colo. In 1975, he was assigned to the 318th Fighter Intercept Squadron, flying the F-106 Delta Dart, at McChord Air Force Base, Wash.

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In 1976, he took command of the F-106 Alert Detachment and served as the base operations officer at Kingsley Field, Oregon. In August 1978, he was assigned to Headquarters Sixth Allied Tactical Air Force, Izmir, Turkey. There he served in Special Operations and then served as the executive assistant to the deputy commander.

Following the Turkey assignment, the colonel began a three year Air Staff tour at the Pentagon. He served as an international political military affairs officer in the Directorate of Plans, Doctrine Division, where his duties included serving as the executive secretary to the General Officer Council on Chemical Warfare, and participating in the Air Force 2000 study. In February 1982, he was assigned to the Directorate of Operations as the chief, Joint Matters Group. In August 1982, he became chief, Air Base Survivability Group, until his assignment to the Air War College in August 1983.

In June 1984, Bleymaier became the commander of the 3503rd United States Air Force Recruiting Group, Robins Air Force Base, Ga. In July, 1985 he was reassigned as the 12th Flying Training Wing vice commander at Randolph, and in 1986, was named commander. Officer Training School, Lackland AFB, Texas.

He assumed command of the 47th Flying Training Wing July 24, 1987.

He is a command pilot with more than 3,300 flying hours, including more than 300 combat missions as a forward air controller in Southeast Asia. His awards and decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross; Defense Meritorious Service Medal; Meritorious Service Medal with one oak leaf cluster; Air Medal with 15 oak leaf clusters; Air Force Commendation Medal with two oak leaf clusters; Air Force Achievement Medal; and the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Silver Star.

Bleymaier was promoted to colonel in September 1983. He is married to the former Marcia Mary Hillenbrand of San Diego, Calif. They have three children: Tim, Steve, and Cindy.

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**Serving Our Country**



✪ MSgt. James R. Kirkland

MSgt. **James R. Kirkland**, son of Mrs. Mary Kirkland, of North St., Crestview, has received the Air Medal for aerial achievement in Vietnam.

Sgt. Kirkland, an airborne aircraft maintenance technician at Phan Rang Air Base, was decorated for his outstanding airmanship and courage on successful and important missions completed under hazardous conditions.

The Korean War veteran is a 1950 graduate of Baker High School.

His wife, Vera, is the daughter of Mrs. Sarah I: Helms, Rt. 1, Niceville, Mrs. Kirland's father, Sam E. Helms, resides in Crestview. (*Playground Daily News, Thursday Morning, December 16, 1971*)

✪ Capt. William K. Turpin

Capt. **William K. Turpin**, son of Mrs. Mary Turpin, 200 Bayshore St., Fort Walton Beach, has received the Meritorious Service Medal at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam.

Capt. Turpin distinguished himself as staff security officer and chief of the installations security division at Ent AFB, Colo. He is now at Phan Rang as security police officer.

A 1956 graduate of Bay High School, Panama City, he received a B.S. degree in criminology in 1962 from Florida State University.

His wife is the former Sharon M. Demarest. The captain's father, Gordon K. Turpin, resides at 1118 Magnolia Ave., Panama City. (*Playground Daily News, Thursday Morning, December 16, 1971*)

✪ Al.C. **Steven M. Stottlemeyer**, son of Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Stottlemeyer of 820 Mulberry Ave., recently served as Communications Group Radio Operator of the Quarter, January-March, at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam. He was recently selected Airman of the Month at his base. His address: Al.C Steven M. Stottlemeyer, FR 220-54-3800; Phan Rang Air Base; APO San Francisco,

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Calif. (*The Daily Mail, Hagerstown, MD., Wednesday, June 23, 1971*)

**LETTERS**

Doug, I enjoyed reading this issue of the Phan Rang newsletter. It seems this one is closing in on my time there, June 70 - Jun 71 with the 315TAW.

Don Brewer

**“Share the Memories”**

**at the 2016 Phan Rang AB Reunion, Oklahoma City**

**Reunion 2016 Notes**

Let me take this opportunity to fill you in on the latest reunion news and if you wish you can download the pdf document that has more details than I will talk about now just by clicking on the link below.

Last week Bob Kellington and I went out to Tinker to visit with the public affairs guy that is going to be responsible for our tour and here is what he has planned for you. First stop will be Building 3001. This building originally started out as a Douglas Aircraft plant that churned out C-47's during the war and today has a C-135 moving line and contains the world largest aircraft engine overhaul facility. You will be pleased that the tour includes a trolley tour through all of these facilities. I've worked at Tinker for over 20 years and I never tired of this tour. I'm sure you will learn a lot and it will make you proud, as I was, of what your Air Force is doing. Public Affairs did inform me that I have to provide a 'Guest List' to them of all the guests that do not have a military ID card. I haven't yet received exactly what information they need, but when I find out I will request that information by email for everyone that has signed up for the tour.

After the trolley tour you will be bussed over to the Navy side for a static display of a Boeing E-6 Mercury aircraft. This will be more than just a static display as it will also include a very informative mission briefing.

That just about does it for Tinker. We figured it will be well past noon when you leave the Navy Side and on the way to lunch the bus could stop at the Tinker Air Park where they have many aircraft on display, such as the B-52, B-1 and many others. Depending upon what your stomach

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is telling you at this point we could go right on to lunch at the Golden Coral (my suggestion) and then come back to the airpark after dinner. The choice will be up to the majority at this point.

The reunion attendance is going very well. The last time I checked we had 70 rooms booked at the hotel. Several people have already had to cancel for one reason or another and I for one will really miss not seeing them this year, but always look forward to next year. That’s why we always stressed that if at all possible, make the reunion this year, because you may not be able to do it again and at our age you have to do it now!

The banquet costs have been determined. The menu is buffet style with Rosemary Chicken, Mesquite Smoked Chicken and a Prime Rib carving station. The cost is \$53 per person. Sending in your money early to Jack Anderson, 826 72nd St. S.E., Auburn Wa., 98092 is greatly appreciated.

If you haven’t already sent in your registration please at least send me the organization and grade that you were when at Phan Rang. Sharon Ping has so graciously volunteered (you can tell she was never in the service) to do the name tags and she wanted to include that information on them. You can [email](#) me with the information.

Bob Kellington, CMSgt USAF Ret. has said he will fill in as master of ceremonies for the banquet. The Chief, has appeared in many walk-on roles in locally filmed movies. I don’t know if that qualifies him for the job or not because I don’t think he’s ever had a speaking role in a movie.

[\*\*Click here for the latest reunion information\*\*](#)

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

**Please make your hotel reservations now!**

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**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.**