

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 122

“Stories worth telling”

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Enemy Attacks on Phan Rang

(An extract from the book *Highest Traditions: The History of No 2 Squadron RAAF*, by John Bennett, pages 301-2)

Personnel being posted to Phan Rang from Australia had to contend with living in a hazardous war zone. The air base was basically secure, but was subjected to intermittent mortar and rocket fire, normally at night, from VC in the surrounding countryside.

Peter Ashley remembered one such attack soon after his arrival at No 2 Squadron, RAAF.

On the night of 5 May 1968, some 17 82mm mortars, of the M30 type made in Communist China, landed adjacent to the 2 Squadron domestic quarters. One was 50 yards from the Sergeant’s living quarters, three more 120 yards away, and the remainder up the hill towards the working area and flight line. It was believed that the attempt with the mortars was to fire them over our quarters and the hill into the flight line.

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On another occasion, a sapper attack group was detected trying to breach the wire by the defence perimeter guards. The VC were carrying satchel charges which they intended to place on aircraft to blow them up. The perimeter guards had a truck with a 0.50 caliber, or .5-inch, machine-gun mounted on the back They cut this sapper attack to pieces. One of the satchel charges was hit with the fire – it blew up and a number of VC sappers were blown to bits. I think there were 16 or 17 of them; one was identified later as the unit barber and another worked in one of the messes.

The internal defense of Phan Rang was provided by the Republic of Korea Army, with external security by the USAF. Coordinated with these forces, No 2 Squadron also made an active contribution to the base’s defense with its own flight of airfield defense guards (ADGs):

...the ADGs of No 2 Squadron patrol throughout the night. They also sweep through the area periodically by day to seek any trace of enemy activity, to familiarize themselves with the ever changing pattern of the countryside, and to let it be known that there is no “no-man’s land” in the vicinity of their base. (quote from GJJ Beck, No 2 Squadron – Vietnam 1968, squadron annual booklet).

The No 2 Squadron CO, Wing Commander David Evans (who served at Phan Rang from November 1967 until November 1968), remembered the value in having ADGs as part of the Squadron:

I felt very fortunate to have a flight of ADGs – even more fortunate was that I had as Officer Commanding the flight, one Flight Lieutenant George Foskett, an ex RAF (UK Royal Air Force) Regiment Wing Commander. He looked at the Ground Defense Plan formulated for the base by the USAF Air Police and declared it a recipe for disaster. I discussed this with the USAF Commander and he asked for Foskett’s assistance. In the end, our man virtually wrote the Ground Defense Plan for Phan Rang base. The external defense was, of course, up to the Korean Battalion adjacent to the base.

Foskett pestered me asking that the (RAAF) ADGs be able to carry out night patrols outside the wire. Eventually I agreed to a limited area outside – my memory is uncertain on the exact distance, 400 yards I think. Foskett was always pressing me for more but I refused – the ADGs role was really to guard No 2 Squadron’s assets. However, on one

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occasion while I was there, our patrol intercepted a VC squad setting up for a mortar attack and dispersed them.



The main entrance of the Officers Open Mess peppered with shrapnel after an attack.

Story and pictures provided by Bob Howe, Australian Ambassador.



‘Handy’ Pilots Remodel Quarters - Self-Help Program

(Seventh Air Force News, February 69)

By TSgt. John B. Mahony

PHAN RANG-Remember the stories of the old West which told of how rugged men built their mountain homes using a little timber off the land, lots of sweat off their brow, and an abundance of self-reliance?

That kind of man is still with us.

Take Maj. Martin W. Mechling, of Denver, for example. When he and 21 other former Colorado Air National Guard pilots moved into their adequate but austere quarters last May at Phan Rang AB, they felt something was lacking.

"We had just left our families in Colorado a few days before," explained Major Mechling, a

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former commercial airlines pilot until recalled to active duty last year.

Then he and the other 380 men of the Guard's 120th Tactical Fighter Squadron, arrived in Vietnam in May. "To make the best of the situation, we decided to make our quarters as home-like as possible," he continued.

"We wanted to re-do our quarters in the spirit of the rustic West-a Colorado theme. And we wanted some symbolic structure in front of our quarters to distinguish our squadron."

Major Mechling, a mechanical and structural engineering consultant as well as airline pilot in civilian life, drew up detailed plans for remodeling the quarters. The plans for carpentry and electrical wiring were reviewed by Air Force engineers and the project was approved.

Two other F-100 Supersabre pilots in the squadron, Capt. Elbert W. Gardner, of Lund, Nev., and Capt. Galen J. Smith, of Littleton, Colo., saw the plans, and their pioneer instincts were aroused. Both men also flew for a commercial airline out of Denver before their Guard unit was recalled. They come from Mormon families whose ancestors pioneering spirit helped settle the Salt Lake Valley.

"But we weren't the only ones," Captain Smith modestly explained. "Every guy in the hootch was swinging a hammer or paint brush before we were through!"

But where do you get building materials in a war zone?

"Most of the material came from leftovers of the big building boom here," the major explained. "Pine that came off shipping crates were cut by hand into shingles for the roof. Used burlap bags became attractive wall-coverings.

"Even the folks back home got into the act," he smiled. "A quarry in Lyons (Colorado) cut three by five-foot slabs of Colorado flagstone which we made into three coffee tables.

"We also got six-by-six Ponderosa pine beams to support the roof."

The entrance-way resembles a Swiss Alps-like chalet with its rustic and rows of overlapping pine shingles and eavesdropping almost to the ground- that highlights the workmanship

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and creative artistry of the pilots. It covers the entrance to the original pre-fab structure like a Hollywood stage set. Two electric lanterns-the kind that burned kerosene in covered wagon days-hang at the entrance.

In front of the quarters, the pilots laid a concrete patio and sidewalk and put a rough-hewn fence around it. Inside the entrance they made a pine-walled den, walnut-stained from the floor half way to the ceiling, and finished to the ceiling with burlap stretched tightly over the wood"

A finely finished bar of laminated, hand-rubbed pine is another woodworking product of the amateur cabinet makers. The bar's cushioned, curved top is a gathering place for "hot mission" stories. Posters of skiers coming down snow-covered slopes in Aspen and Vail of "Colorful Colorado" cover the walls. A painting of a Colorado mountain goat stares down from above a mirror in back of the bar.

All the renovating was squeezed in the few spare moments between combat missions. In their first nine months here the ex-National Guardsmen from Colorado have flown 4,800 combat sorties; more than 185 were logged by Major Mechling.

Although it may not be a substitute for the Colorado Rockies, the Guardsmen feel they have a comfortable western home on Phan Rang.



Bobcats Pound Enemy Targets

(Phan Fare, The Happy Valley Weekly, February 13, 1969)

F-100 Supersabre pilots of the 615th TFS “Bobcats” pounded an enemy position 20 miles from the southern-most tip of South Vietnam recently.

One of the pilots was 1st Lt. Milton R. Sanders who commented, “We had to refuel on our way down to the target, it was so far away.

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“When we got there we contacted the forward air controller (FAC) and he described the target as a VC location on the edge of a canal that led directly into a large lake.

“We had to come in on our bomb runs through a broken cloud layer, and there was a pretty good wind to contend with too. That didn’t affect our accuracy though, we put our bombs right where the FAC wanted them.”

The FAC credited the pilots with a bomb damage assessment of seven enemy structures destroyed and five damaged, two enemy bunkers destroyed, four sampans destroyed and an estimated five enemy soldiers killed.



120th Pilots Hit Enemy

(Phan Fare, The Happy Valley Weekly, February 13, 1969)

In recent action pilots of the 120th struck an enemy location near Binh Thuy in the IV Corps region of Vietnam.

The pilots on the mission were Maj. William H. Neuens, Capt. James K. Fletcher.

Captain Fletcher commented, “This target was one of the kind you dream about. It was right out in the open along both sides of a canal. We rolled into a steep dive on the target and on each pass, hit clumps of fortifications until we had destroyed 16 and damaged 12 more. The forward air controller (FAC) spotted sampans on the canal.

“We destroyed eight of them.”

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Know The Commander - Col. Amin George Jr.

(Phan Fare, The Happy Valley Weekly, February 13, 1969)

Col. Amin George Jr., a native of Port Arthur, Texas, arrived at Phan Rang AB late last week to assume duties of vice commander, 35th TFW. His previous duty station was RAF Lakenheath, England, where he served as deputy commander for operations.

Enlisting in the U.S. Army in September 1942, Colonel George entered aviation training in February of the following year.

He was commissioned in March 1944 and served in the China-Burma-India theater of operations, flying 108 aerial combat missions and 306 combat hours in the P-47 Thunderbolt during the Chinese defensive.

During the period of 1948 through 1951, Colonel George was stationed in England as flight test officer and in 1955, returned to the U.S. to serve at Sandia, Base, N. M.

In 1956, Colonel George was reassigned to the Pentagon, Washington, D.C., as special assistant, and then assistant to the chief of Staff, Hq. Task Force Seven.

In August 1960, he served as director of operations and training at Medina Base, Texas, and later as deputy base commander there.

Reassigned in 1961 as director of operations and training at Bossier Base, La., he was transferred again in 1964 as education and training staff officer, Maxwell AFB, Ala., later serving as chief, Aerospace Division, Squadron Officers' School.

In 1966, Colonel George arrived at RAF Lakenheath.

He is a graduate of Air War College and currently holds a BS degree in Military Science from the University of Maryland and an MA in International Affairs from George Washington University.

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His awards and decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal and the Air Force Commendation Medal.

Colonel George is married to the former Muriel Keogh and they have four children.

(Note: Amin George Jr. died 21 September 2000. He is buried in the Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, San Antonio, Texas.)



Farr Takes Church Post

(Seventh Air Force News, February 1969)

PHAN RANG-The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints servicemen's group at Phan Rang AB, saw a change of leadership recently.

Lt. Col. James D. Wettstein, Salt Lake City, was succeeded as group president by Capt. Anthony L. Farr, Mesa, Ariz. U.S. Army Major Ray Young, church president of the Vietnamese central district, set aside Capt. Farr for his new position.

Colonel Wettstein has been reassigned to Columbus AFB, Miss., after serving a one-year tour here as commander of the 435th Munitions Maintenance Squadron.

Colonel Farr served as a missionary for his church in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut (Eastern States Mission).

He is deputy accounting and finance officer for Phan Rang and is assigned to the 35th Combat Support Group.

MARS Stars for GI

PHAN RANG AB, Vietnam Special) — The base Military Affiliate Radio System (MARS) station here is averaging 1,800 radio-telephone hookups per month between personnel and their families in the United States. The MARS station is operated by the 1882d Comm. Sq.
(Pacific Stars & Stripes, February 1968)

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GI Pops Question on MARS

(Pacific Stars & Stripes, Wednesday, March 26, 1969)

By T.SGT. John B. Mahoney

PHAN RANG, Vietnam (Special) - He is serving in Vietnam and she is a secretary in Chicago. They have never met but plan to marry this us summer.

“I Must admit, our relationship must appear weird to most people,” said Sgt. Larry E. Barton, 22, Artesia, N.M. “but Shari and I love each other, and we feel we have established a solid relationship through the mail.”

But is was his MARS (Military Affiliate Radio Station) telephone call from Phan Rang AB where Barton is stationed, to Miss Sharon Lee Dahlstrom, 22, Bensenville, Ill., a Chicago suburb, that made the engagement formal.

“I’d been building my courage up for this phone call for quite awhile.” said Baron who prepares meals for fighter pilots on alert status in adjacent house trailers. “Thru this morning I got a call from the MARS station saying they got my call to Chicago through. Then I began shaking.”

Barton made the call from his 10-by-50 foot air conditioned trailer half of which is dining room and the other half is a kitchen complete with built-in range and oven, upright freezer and refrigerator. The trailer is located between the main runway and parked F-100 Super Sabre jet aircraft of the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing.

“Hello,” I said. “This is Larry from Vietnam, Over.”

“Yes, Hi Over,” she said”

“Then I said, “Is this Shari? Over,”

“I have one question to ask you. I said. It is very important and I want you to think about it. Over.” I could tell she was not expecting the question.” Barton said.

“Will you marry me? Over”

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“After about a five second delay.” Baron said, “she answered. “Yes, sir.” Over.” She put great emphasis on both words, “Yes, sir!”

“Then I replied. “You have made me the happiest man in the world.”

“Sharon and I ‘met’ when I was TDY (temporary duty) in Da Nang in December, 1967.” Barton explained. “I was up there helping out in the air freight room sorting Christmas mail.

“The USO had posted some Christmas cards that people from all over the states had sent to us.” He explained. “I thought it was great that people we had never met would take time out to write to us. I wrote back to a few that were particularly nice to thank them. One of the cards was from Sharon. That started it.”

The trim airman reenlisted New Year’s Day. He has been in Vietnam for the past 19 months as he volunteered for a consecutive one-year tour at Phan Rang.



(Comments made on Facebook that I feel are worth repeating.)

The Origin of the term “Happy Valley”
Howard Taylor: Hey Phan Rangers, I need help in narrowing down the time frame and would really like to know when and how Phan Rang became known as Happy Valley. If you would could you state you time frame there and if it was being call Happy Valley during your time. I have researched the internet with my limited knowledge to no avail.
Alan Luzzatto: There was an area staked off that had a sign claiming it was to be the site of the "happy valley dependents school". i guess they were looking ahead to building a school for the dependents of a US occupying force.
Jim Gorman: I was there from Dec. 29, 1967 to Nov. of '68. On the Bob Hope Christmas Special

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of '67, the sign on the stage says, "Happy Valley Phan Rang."

Larry Martino Sr.: Howard, I was there 70-71 and it was stenciled on barrels, the drive in, everybody called it Happy Valley.

Robert Spence: Present in 67-68, Happy Valley was on the stage. Do not remember anyone ever calling the base Happy Valley. Never saw an area staked off as Happy Valley and I patrolled the entire base during that time. Most of that was patrolling the perimeter though!

Louis Scarpitti: I was there 6/67-6/68, Bobs show was 28/12/67 it was happy valley when I got there in 6/67. That's my story and I'm sticking to it. The guy who had the bottom bunk when I arrived told me he thought the name was always used by the locals. He arrived in country 5/66, he extended one month, to discharged.

John M. DeCillo: I believe the ground troops tagged it Happy Valley because of all of the contact they made in the area. As in the we're UN-Happy when they had to go there.

Howard Taylor: Found Bob Hope's Christmas visit to Phan Rang in Dec. of 67 and he said I am here at Phan Rang and "it is also known as Happy Valley" so by that it was being called Happy Valley before his visit. Thanks for all the input.

Sam Lewis: Like I said I was there Mar 67 to Mar 68 and I never saw Happy Valley on anything until that theater was spruced up and that roof installed over the stage area for Bob Hope with Happy Valley Theater painted on the front eve. Before it was spruced up for the Bob Hope show all that was there was a stage, a screen, and long lines of wooden benches on poles with no backrests. The Ground troops might have coined the phrase but the base commander in late 67 was responsible for having it painted all over the base.

Robert Kellington: Was there 67-68, worked on Bob Hope Show. I believe it was called Happy Valley before he came over. But many years have passed & can't really remember if before or after. So many thoughts/memories come to mind.

Brice Harris: Dad, Maj. Don Harris, was there from June 1968 to June 69, and in his letters to Mom he refers to Phan Rang as "Happy Valley" in his letters in July of '68.

Tom Barden: I was told it was named Happy Valley because they would get rocket or mortar attacks from the mountains that our F-100's would bomb and no one was there as Charlie would set time delay launches with the flashlight batteries momason would smuggle off base and give to them. It became a laughable ordeal and the troops took it in stride and hence the base became known as Happy Valley.

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(Note: [Bob Tucker](#), Keeper of the Rolls, maintains the Phan Rang AB “Roll Call” a listing of people that were stationed at Phan Rang, listed by rank, full name, organization, and years in country. This list is constantly being updated and periodically posted on Facebook. If you do not have access to Facebook, you can request a copy from Bob and he will email you one and if you have any names to contribute, that would be appreciated as well.)

SUPPLY DUTY - Air Force Sgt. **William B. Steele** of 208 Aisgee street is on duty as a supply inventory specialist with a unit of the Pacific Air Forces at Phan Rang air base, Vietnam. A graduate of Bassick high school in 1960 he was stationed at Randolph AFB, Texas. (Bridgeport Sunday Post, July 14, 1968)

PILOT - Air Force Lieut. **Mark C. Chenis** of 309 Meadowbrook road, Fairfield is a pilot of F-100 Super Sabre jet at Phan Rang air base, Vietnam. He was last stationed at Luke AFB, Arizona. He was graduated in 1962 from Roger Ludlowe high school and in 1968 from Rutgers. He was commissioned on graduation through the Air Force ROTC program. (Bridgeport Sunday Post, July 14, 1968)

JENKINS IN VIETNAM - Sgt. **Jimmie L. Jenkins**, son of Mr. and Mrs. Marvin R. Jenkins, 4405 Kevon Dr., is on duty at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam. His wife, Kay, is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Audie Phillips, 912 Crescent Dr. Sgt. Jenkins is a munitions specialist with the Pacific Air Forces. Before his arrival in Southeast Asia he was assigned to Eglin AFB, Fla. He is a graduate of Madison Heights High School and attended Florida State University. (Anderson Daily Bulletin, Saturday, January 25, 1969)

NASH OVERSEAS - Airman First Class **Larry J. Nash** son of Mr. and Mrs. Leroy Nash Jr., RR 1,

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Frankton is on duty at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam, as a material specialist with the Pacific Air Forces. He was assigned at Kirkland Air Force Base, N.M. before arriving in Southeast Asia. He is a graduate of Frankton High School. (Anderson Daily Bulletin, Saturday, January 25, 1969)

Letters



Hi Doug,

Thank you for all you do. I love the newspaper. One of the best things you do. Happy New Year.

Cheers,

Paul Minert

Hi Doug,

I look forward to receiving Phan Rang News, always something interesting, sometimes emotional. Add my thanks to the other folks who appreciate receiving it.

Thanks Again

Bob Mayzer

Doug

Thanks for all of the work you put into the newsletter!

Jimmie L. Jenkins

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2017 Phan Rang Reunion Information



Dates: 12 - 15 October 2017

Location: DoubleTree Suites by Hilton Seattle Airport-Southcenter, Tukwila, WA.

Tour: Boeing Museum of Flight, 12 Oct.

Banquet: 15 Oct. (Sunday evening)

Discussion: Planning process is still on-going. Jack and his gang are meeting again sometime during the 16-20 January timeframe and I'm sure there will be more information available after that meeting. We still need a dedicated web site to make reservations and I don't think the room rate has been released yet, but it would be desirable if at all possible to know all of these expenses up front, like the cost of transportation and banquet, so we would only have to pay one time. For the first time, we may have enough funds in reserve to pay the entire cost of transportation out of those funds. As you can imagine there are a lot of things to do in the area that would have interest to just about anyone. The hotel is located across the street from the Southcenter Mall, Seattle's largest. There are free shuttles to the mall, airport and to Sound Transit which takes you downtown. More on activities in future issues and on Facebook.

I hope that you enjoyed this issue of the Phan Rang Newsletter. This newsletter compiled and published by [Douglas Severt](#). I try very hard not to repeat a story, but sometimes I find a slightly different version of a previously featured story and I run it, but usually will put a note with it explaining the circumstances. I maintain an index of all the previous newsletters, but only by title and if the title should be different I may not catch it. Previous issues of the Phan Rang Newsletter are available [here](#) for download.