

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 130

“Stories worth telling”

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‘Red Horse’ Turnover Complete

(Seventh Air Force News, February 7, 1969)

PRAN RANG - A full turnover in assigned strength with no loss of productivity was completed by the 554th Civil Engineering Squadron "RED HORSE," at Phan Rang AB, during the first weeks of 1969.

Starting on Nov. 5, 1968, a phaseout of the squadron began. By Jan. 10, 1969, 12 officers and 384 NCOs and airmen had processed out and returned to the United States.

During this same period, a totally new "RED HORSE" squadron arrived by C-141 aircraft direct from Eglin AFB, Fla., where they had completed their 45-day combat infantry and engineer

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training.

The transition phase and unit training is now complete and the new squadron is fully committed to construction projects in the continuing expansion and development of this base.

During this rotation and training period the squadron maintained maximum construction efforts, completing a total of 24 projects with a project dollar value of \$688,865.

Fourteen of the 24 projects were started and completed during the two-month squadron rotation period while the remaining 10 projects were started by the old squadron and were 30 to 80 per cent complete at the start of the turnover.

Major projects completed and turned over to the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing include two airmen dormitories, two officer quarters, a flight line fire station, security police operations building, protective revetments for the base communications building, and power plant; a concrete access taxiway, an armament and electronics maintenance shop, VASI approach lighting system for the runway, plus asphalt concrete paving for the base supply yard, base perimeter roads, and security fencing.

"RED HORSE" is currently working on 18 major projects which include every type of construction from sewage and electrical lines to steel arch protective aircraft shelters.

In addition to its construction responsibilities at Phan Rang, the 554th also has a deployed unit that furnishes all new construction for Nha Trang AB, and a second unit constructing new facilities at Ban Me Thuot AB.

The combat trained airmen of "RED HORSE" also serve as one of the largest defense forces at Phan Rang, providing perimeter and mobile defense along with the Republic of Korea 1st Battalion, U.S. Army tenant units, Australian Defense Force and USAF Security Police.

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Dated 15-4-1975: fierce front Phan Rang, Xuan Loc

(Ngày 15-4-1975: Ấc liệt mặt trận Phan Rang, Xuân Lộc)



The soldiers captured the provincial captain Phan Rang at 9:30 am on April 16, 1975, smashing Phan Rang's "steel shield", opening the way for the liberation of Saigon.

On April 15, 1975, fighting in Phan Rang took place fierce. Regiment 2 beat the enemy out of the positions of Kien Kien, Ba Thap. The 25th Regiment maintains its position on the outskirts of Thanh Son Airport. On April 16, 1975, the liberation army simultaneously attacked the Phan Rang Line, destroying and disintegrating more than ten enemy troops, collecting a variety of weapons and means of war, including unmanned A37s.

On the Xuan Loc front, on April 15, 1975, the 4th Corps Command focused on the Dau Giay crossroad and the Thi mountain crossroads, threatening to command the 3rd Cavalry Corps in Trang Bom, Beat the puppet counterattack in Bien Hoa, Trang Bom, and at the same time bombarded Bien Hoa airport. The Xuan Loc line had lost its effect because it was out of the defensive system. Bien Hoa defenses became unstoppable, lacking in defensive forces. On April 18, the 3rd Corps was forced to take part of its force from Xuan Loc to Bien Hoa. The remaining units in Xuan Loc were not able to resist the advances of the 7th Division and 341 Division. April 20, forced to flee from Xuan Loc. The strongest defensive line of the puppet military was called "steel door" protecting Saigon was smashed. On April 23, the US president announced: "The

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war has ended with the United States." The east door was extended to Bien Hoa for Corps 2, 4 Corps and 3rd Division (Military Region 5) to enter Saigon.

In the last days of April 1975, the time of "the night before" of Ho Chi Minh Campaign, the strategic battle was speeding, decisive and decisive, resolutely resolved. For more than 20 years, no hesitation, no stopping place to call negotiations. It is necessary to mobilize the combined strength and measures of the people's

war, the task of local forces at this moment is to contribute to the creation of all favorable political and military conditions in order to avoid and reduce casualties in Armed forces, as well as civilians, prevent all activities of the enemy from damaging the material, causing panic during the last hours of the war. The situation posed a specific requirement to dismiss the "Thieu Government without Thieu" who was stubbornly exhorting "death to the last drop of blood," setting up a government, accepting no resistance, National harmony. This orientation has been proclaimed by the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam, the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam, which has become the immediate target of revolution and groups, Patriotic individuals are heading for the National Liberation Front - Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam.

In the first half of April 1975, the battle was more and more active and close to Saigon. In the week of April, the legions from the North, Central and the Central Highlands were present at the locations gathered around, waiting for the order to open the last campaign to liberate Saigon.

To stop our forces, puppet troops deployed most of Division 5 on Binh Duong - north of Saigon. In it, the 7th Division of the 5th Division was responsible for defending in the east and northeast

April 15, 1975: Breakthrough Phan Rang defense

On the night of April 15, 1975, the entire force of the 325th Division was deployed on the 1st Road, preparing to break through the Phan Rang defense line in the direction of No. 1.

At the campaign of Xuan Loc - Long Khanh, on April 15, 1975, we used artillery fire on Bien Hoa airport. At the same time, the 6th Division and the 95th Regiment focused on destroying the 52d ARVN Task Force in Dau Giay, collecting 12 cannons and all tanks of the 3rd Armored Brigade. Highway 1A from Xuan Loc to Bau Ca was cut off. Highway 20 from Dau Giay junction to Tuc Trung, we have completely mastered.

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of Lai Khe, from Phuoc Vinh to Ba Le, Chanh Luu. The 7th Infantry Division in Phuoc Vinh together with the 2nd Battalion of the regiment, the 1st Battalion continued the campaign in Phuoc Hoa with the 937th Regiment. The camouflage force along the 14th lane swept away to block our activities.

In April 1975, the enemy still stubbornly kept Phuoc Vinh, Phuoc Hoa, Phu Giao district strengthened with 8 officers and soldiers of the 301 Company for the commune, combined with reconnaissance troops of the Military Zone continuously. Attacked the local unit of the puppet troops at block 9, the cavalymen at Nha Bo, stepped up the work of enemy combat, to control the enemy here, creating a favorable pedal for the main troops from the northwest Headed for Saigon.

- HA THANG (Former Head of the Party History Department - Provincial Committee for Propaganda and Training)



April 16, 1975: Phan Rang victory, liberating the whole province of Ninh Thuan
(Ngày 16-4-1975: Chiến thắng Phan Rang, giải phóng hoàn toàn tỉnh Ninh Thuận)



Tanks and artillery fire of the enemy troops pursued at the gateway to the yard

On 14-4-1975, the 3rd Infantry Division (Military Region 5) and 25th Infantry Regiment (Central Highland Front) were opened fire artillery fire Phan Rang town. Combining breakthrough, deep

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penetration with vu, our troops quickly break the enemy defenses in the northern town, close to Thanh Son airport. The puppet troops were armed with air and fire from the ship and fired into the fierce fighting force.

Township). All enemy units in Phan Rang comprising over ten thousand were destroyed and disintegrated. Two generals puppet Nguyen Vinh Nghi and Pham Ngoc Sang with many officers, soldiers arrested. We have 36 planes, 37 large guns.

Phan Rang's victory marks a new advance of our military in terms of strength and art to advance the enemy defense corporation by force.

On 22 April 1975, General Vo Nguyen Giap, the Minister of Defense, sent a telegram to all officers and soldiers who had won in Phan Rang. General told the units to urgently reinforce their forces, continue to march forward and develop speedy, bold, unexpected, winning new victories.

- On the battlefield of Thu Dau Mot province, from the beginning of April 1975, the enemy regulated the formation of two defensive lines, both prevent and provide for each other:

- External route, from Ben Cat connecting Phu Giao (from 7 Chanh Luu road connecting to Highway 2 Tan Binh, Highway 14 and Road 16 Binh Co, Binh My).

- The inner route, including Tan Uyen, Chau Thanh, Lai Thieu, Thu Dau Mot town. This enemy line deployed the main force including:
5th Division: Id / e9 closed at 82 Ben Cat, Id / e8 Lo Than; Ld / e7 Lai Khe, Id / e8 and the branch from Chanh Luu to Green Gate, 2d / e7 and 1 branch from Be River to Phuoc Vinh; Ranger troops include: the 33rd

Breaking the "Phan Rang" of the enemy

At 5 am on April 16, 1975, all the troops of the 3rd Division and the 25th Regiment attacked the center of Phan Rang Town. At 9:30 am on the same day, the 101st Regiment captured the provincial governor's palace and captured Colonel Nguyen Van Tu, the governor of Ninh Thuan province. At 10 am on the same day, 25th Regiment was in charge of Thanh Son airfield, capturing Lieutenant General Nguyen Vinh Nghi, deputy chief of the 3rd Corps and Lieutenant General Pham Ngoc Sang, commanding the 6th Infantry Division. The enemy's "shield Phan Rang" was broken.

V.H (sum)

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Confederate Guard around Thu Dau Mot Town with Lai Thieu; The locality includes: d322 closing the river bridge to Phu Giao, d360: Tan Binh - Phuoc Hoa, d306: An Loi - Chanh Luu - Binh Co - Binh My, d321: Phu Chanh, Tan Hoa, Binh Chuan; D316: Khanh Van - Binh Chanh - Tan Ba; D346: Mr. Linh, Mrs. Nghia to Tan Tich; D373: Lac An, Ba Cam Hill; D353: My Phuoc - Thoi Hoa; D361 three southwestern communes; D382 - Lai Thieu ...

By mid-April 1975, the enemy forces in the whole province still had more than three thousand names, including the main soldiers of the 5th Infantry Division, a brigade of marines, a battalion of armored units, ten battalions of security. Along with civilians, civil defense and more than 50 guns ... are deployed on more than 200 large and small military bases. But every effort of the enemy now is just passive defense, support in the world cannot save.

HA THANG (Former Head of the Party History Department - Provincial Committee for Propaganda and Training)



FAC SEES ‘OTHER SIDE’

(The Happy Valley Weekly, September 12, 1968)

A forward Air Controller recently had the opportunity to see the other side of the air war in South Vietnam.

Capt. Harry E. Garrison, is a FAC attached to the U.S. Army’s 25th Infantry Division in Vietnam. In his job he has the responsibility of directing many of the close air support missions that assist the troops of the 25th Division.

He recently had the opportunity to see the fighter pilot’s view of a close air support mission.

Captain Garrison participated in a mission with members of the 352nd TFS. He flew in the back seat of an F-100F Supersabre with Lt. Col. Robert D. Hook the 352nd TFS’s Operations Officers. Capt. Henry J. Pirkkale was the wing man.

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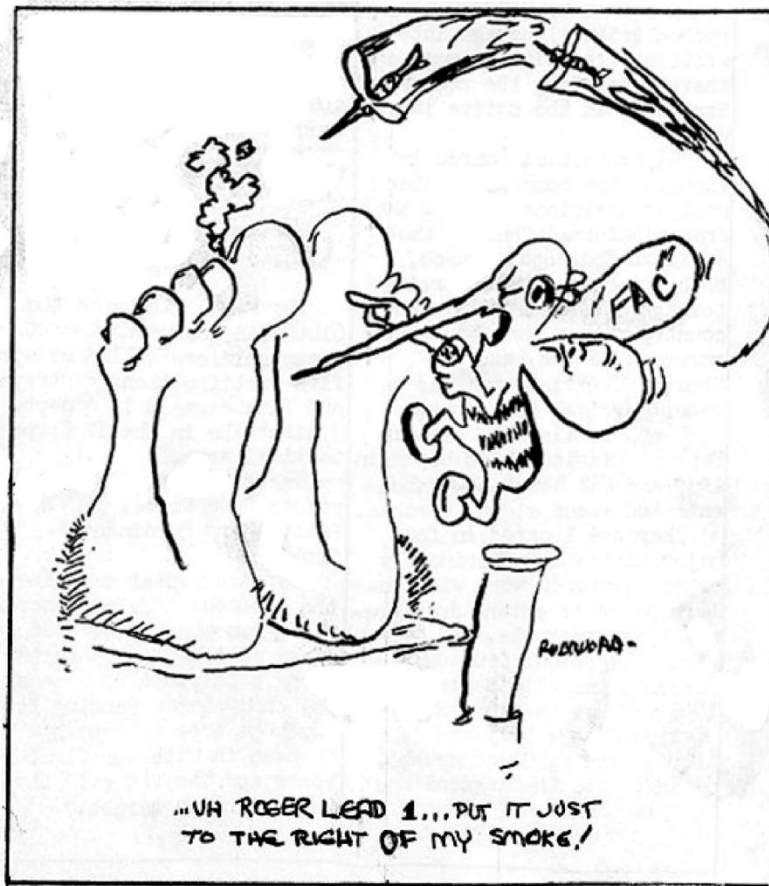
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The mission was against a Viet Cong Base Camp and bunker complex, 55 miles northwest of Bien Hoa.

“The fighter pilots are real professionals,” Captain Garrison said, “and I can really see how important the cooperation between the FAC and the fighters is. I had flown the Supersabre in a training situation in the states,” he continued, “but there is no comparison between combat and training.”

The Bomb Damage Assessment (BDA) for the mission was five bunkers destroyed and three badly damaged.



(The Happy Valley Weekly, September 12, 1968)

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AF Unit Cited for Valor

(Pacific Stars & Stripes, Monday, November 24, 1969)

PHAN RANG AB (Special) — The Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with "V" device for valor was presented to the 14th Special Operations Wing here recently by Maj. Gen. Robert J. Dixon, vice commander of Seventh Air Force.

Earned for exceptionally meritorious service against enemy forces in Southeast Asia from June 1967 to June 1968, the award was received by Col. Clyde S. Cherry of Denver, wing commander. Some of the outstanding wing achievements included killing more than 4,200 enemy soldiers, destroying or damaging 344 enemy trucks and 156 sampans and conducting psychological operations which resulted in the surrender of 15,000 enemy troops.

YANKS DOWN AUSSIES

(Phan Fare, The Happy Valley Weekly, November 7, 1968)

The Yanks overpowered the Aussies in recent international volleyball competition at Phan Rang Air Base between all-star teams from the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing and the Royal Australian Air Force Number 2 Squadron.

The best of five series came as a result of a challenge issued by Wing Commander David Evans, commander, RAAF Number 2 Squadron to Colonel Frank L. Gailer Jr., commander, 35th TFW.

In the first game, the Aussies grabbed an early lead and held on for an easy 15-3 win over the Yanks.

The tables were turned in the second match with the Yanks gaining an early upper hand for the 15-6 win.

In the third game, the Aussies jumped in front 6-1, but the Yanks fought back and tied the score 8-8 and then gained their first lead of the game, 10-9. The two teams exchanged leads several times, but the Americans rallied for a close 16-14 victory.

The USAF team jumped to a 9-2 lead in the fourth and final game, and except for a RAAF rally that made the score 12-8, the Yanks were not seriously threatened and went on for a 15-8 win.

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Brigade Shifted in Half a Day

(Pacific Stars & Stripes, Saturday, February 4, 1967)

SAIGON (7thAF) — Air Force C-130 Hercules airlifted more than 670 tons of equipment and more than 2,000 paratroopers, members of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Div.'s "Screaming Eagles," from Kontum to Phan Rang AB recently.

This 834th Air Div. airlift was completed 13 ½ hours ahead of schedule.

Brig. Gen. William G. Moore Jr., 40, of Stockton, Cal., 834th Air Div. commander, flew aboard the aircraft and personally supervised the airlift.

"The move of the 101st from Tuy Hoa to Kontum and subsequently to Phan Rang, both completed in record time, demonstrated the fine team work which exists between air and ground forces in Vietnam," the general stated.

The airlift began at 4:45 a.m. Jan. 21 as the first C-130 took off from Tan Son Nhut AB. It ended shortly after 4 a.m. Jan. 22, when the last aircraft left Kontum for Phan Rang. Cargo consisted of jeeps, trucks, artillery pieces, ammunition and petroleum. E q u i p m e n t was brought to the field and loaded on pallets in a joint effort by Air Force and Army personnel.

The Air Force Aerial Port commander in Vietnam, Col. J. B. Thomas, 45, of Pearsall, Tex., said, "Those 'Screaming Eagles' really know how to move. They are always well prepared—their cargo on pallets and their rolling stock all marshalled, ready to go."

The colonel singled out Maj. John W. Gilboux and Capt. Joseph Costa, 1st Brigade mobility officers, saying they give real meaning to the word airborne.

On hand to welcome the 101st to Phan Rang was Brig. Gen. Willard Pearson, brigade commander, and Maj. Kha Van Huy, Ninh Thuan Province chief.

Air Force Lt. Col. Joe W. Kennedy, 45, of Klamath Falls, Ore., mission commander for the airlift, said the move had been slated to take 36 hours. The early mission completion was attributed to several things.

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"We've worked with the 101st many times before. We understand their problems and they understand ours. We get along real well together," said Kennedy.

Eight aircraft flew in three 8-hour shifts on the 50-minute flight. Phan Rang is 200 miles south-southeast of Kontum on the shore of the South China Sea.

The C-130s, from units of the 315th Air Div. headquartered at Tachikawa AB, Japan, are under the control of the 834th Air Div. while operating in Vietnam.

‘Gooney Bird’ Turns ‘Dragon’ to Batter the VC

(Pacific Stars & Stripes, Monday, January 10, 1966)

By A3C BOB CUTTS

S&S Staff Correspondent

SAIGON—It dropped American paratroopers over Germany on D-Day; in 1944. It carried food into a starving Berlin in 1948. It launched flares over midnight battlefields in Korea in 1951. It's carried more passengers than any other aircraft in the world. Now more than 20 years after the last one rolled off the production line, the grand old lady of the Air Force has become "dragon lady" in the Republic of Vietnam. The "gooney birds" are shooting back at last.

They don't have the sleek flash on an F-4C Phantom, nor the bravado of an A1-E Skyraider. They don't shatter the countryside like a B-52.

But they scare heck out of the Viet Cong.

The Air Force's AC-47—the initials stand for "Attack Cargo," a new term among military aircraft—is writing another page in the history of the Gooney Bird as part of an entirely new weapons system developed by the Air Force Systems Command, at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio.

The birds are property of the 4th Air Commando Sq., which arrived in Vietnam in mid-November. More than a dozen of the camouflaged carriers are being outfitted now with the "teeth" of the system—6,000 round-perminute Gatling guns, nicknamed "Miniguns" by the Bell Aerospace Systems engineers who originated the idea in 1962.

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"They-didn't think it was possible to design a machine gun that could fire more than 1,000 rounds per minute," said one AC-47 pilot, "until they unearthed the old Gatling, gun idea from Civil War days. The result was the Minigun, an electronic machine gun that fires standard NATO rifle rounds."

The weapon, boosted by ex-Air Force Chief of Staff Curtis E. LeMay in its development, was tested by the 1st Air Commando Sq. at Bien Hoa for a year.

It was here the AC-47s became "Puff the Magic Dragon."

"I don't know where the actual name came from, but the idea stemmed from the Vietnamese fear of the spectacle that one of these birds makes when it's used at night," says Lt. Col Max Barker,. commander of the 4th AC Sq.

"It really looks to them like fire-breathing dragon."

The Dragons, now code-named "spooky" because they fly blacked-out and strike as a surprise, could really be a fearsome spectacle from the ground—especially to a VC.

Spooky-42, the seven-hour, night patrol flight from Tan Son Nhut, does more than, scare Charley. Its job is to help any government units attacked during hours of darkness anywhere in the Delta. It's a big police beat—but Spooky gets around.

The average mission begins when the AC-47 flight, carrying two pilots, a navigator, a Vietnamese observer, a crew chief and two gunners (Most gunners in the 4th AC Sq. get their training as tail gunners on SAC's giant B-52s), arrives over Can Tho, military headquarters for the Delta region.

"Paddy"—air control at Can Tho—directs the fliers to trouble spots in the low-lying Mekong region, and advises on weather, late intelligence, etc.

When the Gooney Bird reaches the trouble spot, usually an outpost under attack, it circles the area watching the flare ship at work and keeping radio contact with ground units. Many times, the mission calls only for the dropping of a few flares.

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"Often the ground units don't even know the Spooky flights are loaded," says AC-47 pilot Maj. John Haller.

But when they do, and Spooky gets to shoot, the crew is ready.

"Many times we'll watch other fighter-bombers at work shooting and blasting up the area around the outpost. It makes Charley put his head down, but it doesn't always stop him. Then we step in," says Haller. an ex-B-52 pilot.

"What Charley doesn't realize is that if he hits the dirt when we fire, he makes himself a bigger target than when he stands. That's because we shoot straight down."

Spooky's three Miniguns, all fired from the left pilot's seat; pour out a river of red tracer fire on the target. At normal firing range, a one-second- burst will blanket a 75-yard square with bullets, one striking in every square foot of the target area. "This doesn't leave much room to hide," says , Haller.

When the guns fire, it's easy to see where the superstitious VC got the idea of a dragon. A huge ribbon of flame pours out of the muzzles of each six-barrel gun, streaking the darkness with yards of streamers.

From the ground the lightning fast guns sound like the eerie wail of a foghorn, the bullets creating a continuous sound.

"For some reason," Haller says, "the VC are scared to death of us. They'll stand up and fight any other type of air support, but when we cut loose, it usually ends the battle right there."

Haller, who flew P-39, fighters in World War II, says, "Flying Spooky is like flying any other kind of airplane. There's no recoil at all from the Miniguns. But it sure is nice to be on this end of the guns."

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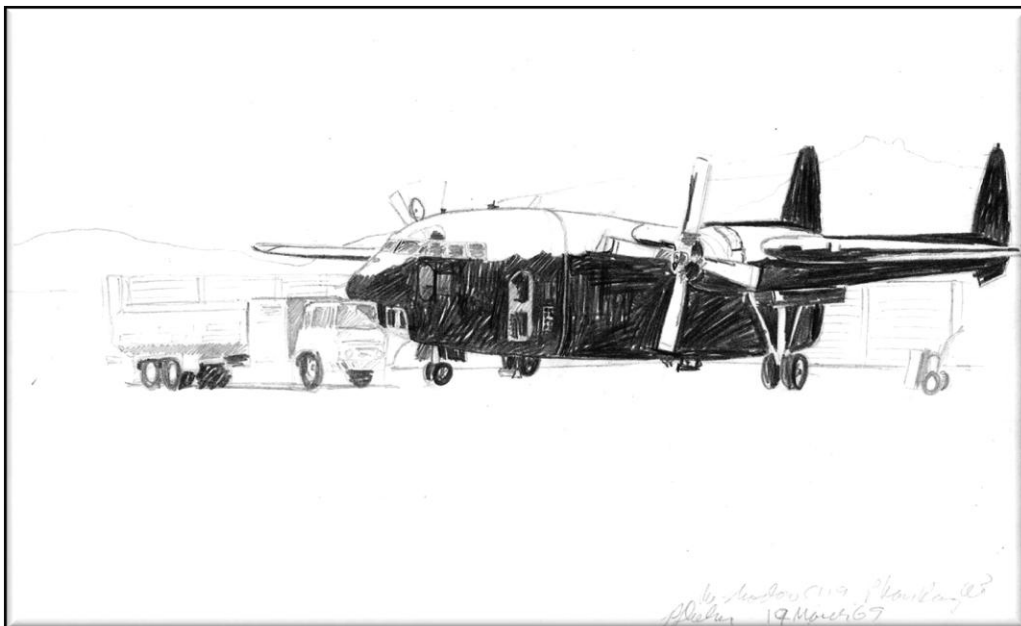
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Pencil Drawings of Phan Rang AB



C-123 landing at Phan Rang from the west. Drawn by Ronald Dreher.



AC-119. Drawn by Ronald Dreher.

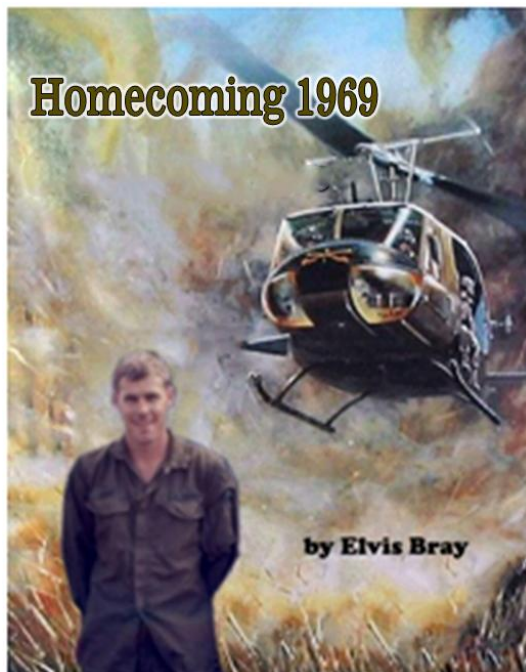
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David Landis' mother drew this from a photograph David took in December 1990 during his first return visit to Phan Rang. This was her only pencil drawing before turning to oils.



Homecoming 1969

Elvis Bray

No mortars or machine gun fire could be heard. Buzzing mosquitoes were my only distraction as I lay sweating on my bunk. I needed time to think. Decisions had to be made, and made soon. My first year in Vietnam was coming to an end and I was running out of time.

I had options. One, go home and spend the rest of my time in the Army spit shining boots, picking up cigarette butts, polishing floors, or any other bullshit

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detail they could think of to keep me busy. Two, re-enlist in the Army for a couple of more years, go home for 30 days vacation and report to Ft. Rucker for flight school. Or, three extend for another year in Vietnam and get out of the Army three months early.

As dangerous as my job is, I feel my chances for survival were better than my brothers would be. Not very smart thinking considering I was flying as an observer on a Scout Helicopter with the 7th 1st Air Cav. That was one of the most dangerous jobs in Nam.

I did the math in my head. If I extended for another year, my brother Ray, who was in the Navy, and my brother Marcus, who was in the Army would both have less than a year left in the military. They wouldn't have to come to Vietnam. Both of them had orders for Nam on hold because I was already here. They wouldn't send anyone to Nam with less than a year left. Ray might end up on one of those swift-boats on the Mekong River and Marcus would have been in the infantry. Both were dangerous jobs.

My first choice was to go to Ft. Rucker and become a pilot. That's what I really wanted. But thinking of the times I had been shot down and all the holes in my helicopter, maybe that wasn't such a good idea.

The thought of one of my brothers getting killed while I was having fun learning to fly helicopters back in the states didn't set well with me. And being an observer in the Scouts allowed me to fly anyway. My mind was made up. I'd extend another year in Vietnam and then get out of the Army.

The next day I ran into one of the Dustoff helicopters crew chiefs refueling at Vinh Long. They were based across the Mekong River with the 9th Division. The 9th was scheduled to be pulled out of Vietnam. “Hey, are you guys going home with the 9th. Division?”

He didn't try to hide his good fortune as big smile spread across his face. “Hell no, man. We're going to Vung Tau!”

Vung Tau was an in-county R&R base located on at the mouth of the Mekong River east of Saigon. It had clean white beaches, pretty Vietnamese women and couldn't be hit by mortars. I had spent my 21st birthday there with my buddy, Gil Ortiz. It was beautiful and one of the safest places in Vietnam.

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“Hey, buddy, what unit you with?” I asked.

“247 Medical Detachment.”

“Save me a spot on the beach. I’ll see you in a month or two.”

He looked at me as if I were nuts. But my mind was made up. I’d re-up for the 247th and spend my next year working on my tan, playing pool and learning how to surf. I had finely discovered a way to outsmart the Army. Yeah, right!

The next day I extended for another year in Vietnam with the Dustoff unit. My parents wouldn’t be happy with my decision. After I explained where I would be stationed and what I would be doing, they wouldn’t worry.... too much. It was better they worried about me than one of my brothers. I decided not to tell them until I got home.

I flew as many missions as I could that last week to help pass the time. Not much happened. I didn’t kill anyone and we didn’t take any hits.

After saying goodbye to my buddies, I boarded a helicopter bound for the Tan Son Nhat International Airport in Saigon. We got there late and I hurried to catch my flight.

“Guys were hooping and hollering like a bunch of schoolboys.”

There was a lot of excitement on the plane when I boarded. Guys were hooping and hollering like a bunch of schoolboys. The stewardesses were good natured and put up with a lot of crap without complaint. Most of them got marriage proposals before we lifted off.

It felt good to be going home in Arizona. But, I had a hard time sharing the other soldiers’ enthusiasm. I was only on vacation and would be coming back way too soon.

I couldn’t help wondering if I had made the right decision. Next year, I’d be flying in an unarmed helicopter. The thought of flying into combat without M-60 machine guns or Cobra gun ship support worried me. When flying Hues into and out of battle zones or flying observer with the Scouts, we always had someone watching our backs. Both of the times I had been shot down,

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someone had swooped out of the sky and picked us up right away. That wouldn't be the case next year.

This wasn't the time to start reconsidering my decisions. I'd already signed on the dotted line. Even though machine guns weren't allowed on medical helicopters, I'd carry my M-16, lots of extra ammo and a pistol with me during my next tour.

“At least they had chosen to go to war instead of running off to Canada.”

Some of my future crewmembers would be conscientious objectors. They wouldn't fight, carry weapons or kill anyone. That didn't bother me. At least they had chosen to go to war instead of running off to Canada. They had my utmost respect. But I didn't want to get shot down with those guys. I'd already decided I would never be taken alive if I had a choice. I would fight to the death and take as many of those communist bastards with me as possible. Having two or three unarmed guys with me would only slow me down and make it easier for the enemy to find me. And if one of my crewmembers were injured, I couldn't leave them behind.

I tried to sleep on the plane as much as possible for the next twenty-three and a half hours. But when I closed my eyes, I saw the people I knew I had killed and wondered how many I had killed that I didn't know about. I recalled the young VC women no older than me dressed in her black pajamas with a bullet in her thigh. She had bled to death on the way to the hospital. I felt no regret. I wished I had killed more of them.

When not sleeping I wondered what I would do when I got home. I'd hang out with my friends, drink a few beers and hopefully get laid. Without a girlfriend, that probably wasn't going to happen. The attitude about the war of the people back home concerned me. I had heard stories about GI's being spit on and called “baby killers.” God help anyone who tried that with me.

When I changed planes in LA to Phoenix, I didn't experience any negative reactions from the people at the airport. No one asked about the war or spit in my face. It was the same on the flight to Phoenix. For the most part, everyone just ignored me. It seemed as if I was the invisible man.

Just before we landed, I noticed a gray haze hanging over the city. I asked the man next to the window if there was a fire somewhere. He looked out the window. “No, just smog.”

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“Smog. What’s that?”

“You know, pollution from all the cars.”

This was a shock to me. I’d lived in the Valley of the Sun most of my life and I’d never seen smog.

My mind raced as I wondered what else had changed. I knew my mom would be waiting for me at the airport and assumed my dad would be there if he didn’t have to work. Would one of my high school buddies show up or maybe some of my brothers or sisters? I didn’t have a clue.

Walking out of the tunnel, I spotted my mom standing in the crowd trying to see over the heads of the people in front of her. It wasn’t hard to pick me out because I was the only man in uniform on the plane. While we hugged, I searched for other familiar faces. There weren’t any. No other friends, family, flags, or signs welcoming me home. And thank God, no protesters.

“Mom, where’s Dad?” I asked.

“We got a divorce.”

“Oh, I didn’t know...” I was too numb to think of what to say. “I’m sorry, Mom.”

“I didn’t want you to worry, son. You already had enough to worry about.”

I looked out of the airport window at the plane I had just arrived on. If I could have, I would have got back on that plane and flown right back to Nam. I was sorry I had come home and was glad I had extended for another tour.

As soon as that thought occurred to me, I was overcome with guilt. My mother had done what she could to save me from horror of my parents divorce and I was feeling sorry for myself. It was no different than the letters I had written her. You would think I was on vacation on some tropical island instead of being in a war. We were both doing the same thing to protect each other. In many ways, my mom was always stronger than I was. Now she needed me. She started walking again and I stopped her. “Mom. I’m so sorry. If there is anything I can do to

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help, I will.” Then I hugged her again. Something my family never did enough of.

“There is nothing you could have done, Son. It’s been a long time coming.”

While walking to the baggage claim, I said, “Mom, I’m going back to Nam in thirty days.”

That statement stopped in her tracks. “Oh my, God, no. Why, son? You’ve already done your duty.”

“They need me, Mom. And I get to choose where I’ll be this time. There is not much war where I’ll be going. I’ll be all right, I promise. Besides it will keep Ray and Marcus out of the war.”

It was a quiet ride home. We both knew the other had been disappointed.

The first thing I did when we got home was take a shower. I turned the water on as hot as I could stand it and stayed there until all the hot water was gone. It was the first time I had taken a hot shower in a very long time. It’s strange how you miss the small comforts of life.

My sister Melba was a year younger than I was. Her husband, Jim Oliver, was a sailor serving on a ship somewhere in Asia. She had moved in with Mom while waiting to have her baby. Pregnant with her first child, she was sick most of the time and spent most days in bed. She didn’t have much money so I gave her airfare for her and the baby for their return trip to Washington State. She commented later that I seemed nicer after I came home from the war. My youngest sister, Patsy had been sick off and on all of her life with infections. One of her kidneys had never developed and she was recovering in the hospital after having it removed. I visited her and made a bad joke saying, “You’re not ‘kidneying’ me are you?” She laughed at the joke but it pained her. I didn’t make any more jokes.

I had sent her a colorful woman’s Vietnamese pants and blouse set. Even though she was only thirteen, the pants were still too short. She loved them and had wore them completely out. I gave her a hand carved painted jewelry box and a doll of a Vietnamese woman. I gave Mom a painting of a junk boat on the Mekong River.

Mom needed our only car to go to work so I really couldn’t go anywhere during the daytime. I never saw my father while I was home and he didn’t come up in conversations. It was apparent that no one wanted to re-visit the past year. I understood. I didn’t want to talk about the war and they didn’t want to talk about Dad or the divorce. As far as I knew, my dad was sleeping in

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his van somewhere. We didn't have any relatives in the area he could stay with. He may have been homeless. I got the impression he was out of state.

The situation left me lifeless and empty. I hated not knowing what had occurred but was afraid the truth might be more painful than not knowing. I didn't feel like doing much and just laid around most of the time waiting to go back to Vietnam. To this day, I still don't know the details of why my parents got a divorce and they are both dead and gone. There are times in every ones lives that are best not revisited.

All my friends were busy with college or girlfriends. I went skiing once with my friend Sonny Turner. I really didn't do much of anything else but take long hot showers and sleep. I was depressed.

Time seemed to be in slow motion. When Mom took me back to the airport, I hugged her, told her I loved her, and asked her not to worry. But I knew she would anyway. That is what moms do. I would worry about her too. I told her she could use all the money in my account that she needed. But even as I said it, I knew she wouldn't. Then I boarded the plane headed back to war.

I had a two-hour layover at the LA Airport. After checking my bags, I went to a small café to get some breakfast. It was early in the morning and the place was almost empty. Sitting at the counter at the end of the bar, I ate breakfast, read the newspaper and watched the news on TV. It showed pot smoking hippies burning draft cards and rioting and protesting in California, Chicago and Washington DC. The hippies looked drunk or stoned and were all flashing the peace sign. I didn't care. They didn't represent my values and I tuned them out.

Everyone in Nam would want to know what was going on in the real world. I bought a current Newsweek magazine to take with me. Two old men came in and sat at the other end of the counter. I saw them watching me in the mirror and knew they were talking about me. One of them leaned forward trying to see the ribbons on my uniform. I ignored them and after a while, they left. When I got ready to leave, I asked the waitress for my bill. She said the two old veterans had paid my tab. I regretted not speaking to them.

The plane was full of new soldiers fresh out of boot camp. I could almost smell their fear. They seemed so very young, which was kind of funny considering I recently turned 21. War had aged

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me. The sight of these new recruits brought back memories of my first trip to Vietnam. At least I had gone over with my company and knew most of the other soldiers on the plane.

After taking a seat, I was bombarded with questions about Vietnam. The new recruits seemed especially interested in knowing how I got my Purple Heart. I didn't want to answer their questions.

“What's the war like, Sergeant?” asked a private.

“What's your MOS?” I asked.

“I'm a clerk.”

“Piece of cake. You should have brought your golf clubs.” That got a laugh.

“Hey, Sergeant, what about me. I'm infantry.”

“Keep your big head down, your little head covered and your socks dry. Avoid the Delta if you have a choice. There's a lot of jungle rot and leeches down there.”

“Why are you going back?”

“I didn't learn how to surf the first time.”

The questions seemed to go on forever. Not wanting to scare them any more than they already were, I kept my answers light hearted. I knew every man's war was different and I nothing I said would alter theirs.

I hated that they were calling me Sergeant. I was a specialist (SPC) E-5, a crew chief, not a Sergeant. It was my responsibility to make sure the helicopter didn't fall out of the sky on the way into and out of the battle zone. Not to lead them into battles. Some of my door gunners had made the same mistake and I didn't correct them. They were scared of the unknown and needed any information they could get.

Even though only one in ten soldiers ever served in direct combat, I knew some of these boys would be returning in body bags. The chances of that happening to me, was just as good, if not

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greater, than theirs. There was comfort in knowing my brothers wouldn't be in one of them.

I wanted to serve my country even though many soldiers felt our country had turned its back on us. To me, it just seemed that way because the hippies were getting all the news coverage. I still believed most Americans hadn't deserted us and I wasn't about to desert them. I had no doubt that I would rather be a corpse in a rice paddy in Vietnam than a coward in Canada.

(This is the fourth short story by Elvis Bray. Previous stories were '**Real Soldiers Don't Cry**' in Phan Rang Newsletter 128; '**Answered Prayers**' in Phan Rang Newsletter 127 and '**So Others May live**' in Phan Rang Newsletter 125.)

PHAN RANG STAFF MEMBERS

Robert Kellington & Joseph Burkhart: Master of Ceremonies

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 Muller: Badge Board

Jim Erixson & Mike Maleski: Chaplain

Bob Howe: Australian Ambassador

Skip Ruedeman: Place Reunion info in VFW Mag.

Lou Ruggerio: Place reunion info in AFA Mag. & VVofA
Newspaper

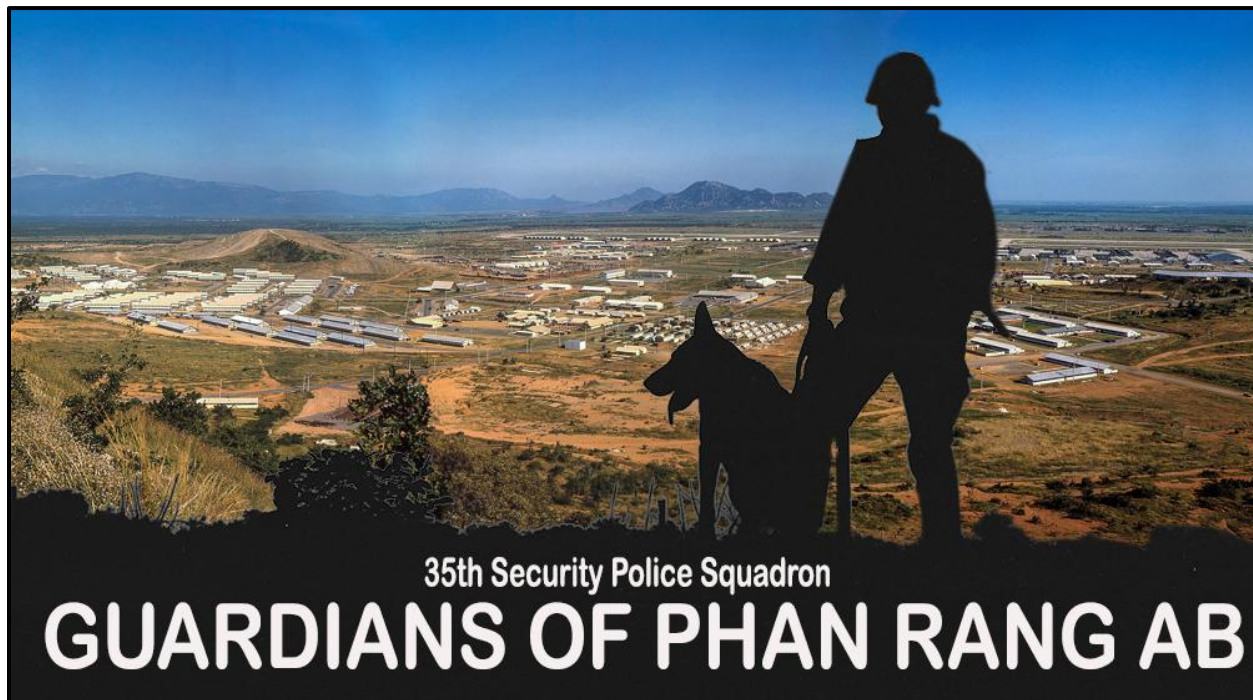
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Guardians of Phan Rang AB

(from a photo by William Diebold and Christopher Boles)



Here are the costs for the Seattle Reunion 2017:

Reunion Fee: \$10.00/person

Plate Banquet Dinner: \$50.00/person

Beef Banquet Dinner: \$55.00/person

Trip to Museum of Flight: \$50.00/person

You can send your checks at any time from now until September 20th. Send them and make them payable to:

Happy Valley Reunion

826 72nd St SE

Auburn, Wa 98092

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See you in Seattle! October 11th thru the 15th

Make your reservation now at the Doubletree Inn Seattle:

<http://doubletree.hilton.com/en/dt/groups/personalized/S/SEASPD-T-PHA-20171010/index.jhtml>

Here’s the latest from the Pacific Northwest

Here are some important dates:

Wednesday, October 11th: The Hospitality Room will open.

Friday, October 13th: Trip to Boeing's Museum of Flight.

Sunday, October 15th. 4:00 PM. Annual Business Meeting. We'll decide which East Coast City we go to in 2018.

Sunday, October 15th: 5:00ish. Group picture.

Sunday, October 15th: 6:00 Banquet.

At this point we have 60 rooms reserved for 103 people by the attendees. My only word of caution, we only have a block of 85 rooms reserved for our group with the hotel. We have been told that it may be possible to increase that block if we show the need. But only if they have the rooms available. I would encourage anybody who's planning on attending to reserve your room now. That will lock-in the \$109/night rate.

We'd hate for a rash of reservations to come in August or September and it's too late for us to negotiate for more rooms. Just food for thought.

2017 Reunion TShirt and Polo Design



The shirts will be offered in different colors besides the white that is shown but specifics are not yet available from the manufacturer.

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Doug's Comments

I hope that you enjoyed this issue of the Phan Rang Newsletter. Since the last issue of the newsletter we've had a lot of new people contact us because of a reunion notice in the VFW magazine and most of them that have email connectivity have been added to the Phan Rang mailing list and are receiving this newsletter, but many are not connected. Many of the guys that I spoke with say that they regret not keeping up with their buddies that they were stationed with in Nam and that is why it was suggested that we establish area ambassadors to try and reach out to those that have no email or Internet connectivity. Calling these guys occasionally to say hi and really be a sounding board because so many really just want to talk about their experiences and they feel much more comfortable talking to guys that have had similar experiences than with anyone else. The list of volunteers that we have so far are listed in the 'Phan Rang AB Staff'. Multiple volunteers for state would be nice. This newsletter was compiled and published by [Douglas Severt](#). Previous issues of the Phan Rang Newsletter are available [here](#) for download.