

"Happy Valley" Phan Rang AB, RVN

...keeping the memories alive

Phan Rang AB News No. 142

"Stories worth telling"

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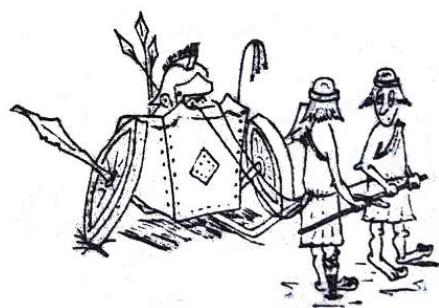
Land of Giants jpg by Bud Short

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ASGRO GAMES HELD AT PHAN RANG BY NO 2 SQUADRON



Wherever they go, Aussies always like to engage in competitive games. It helps expend surplus energy and lowers the temperature in critical situations, like when they were confined to the air base at Phan Rang.

In Phan Rang Newsletter No 100, we saw evidence of their keenness to play cricket. Indeed they even played against a team from Number 8 Tactical Bomb Squadron, organized by Thomas G. Gates and Bob Howe.

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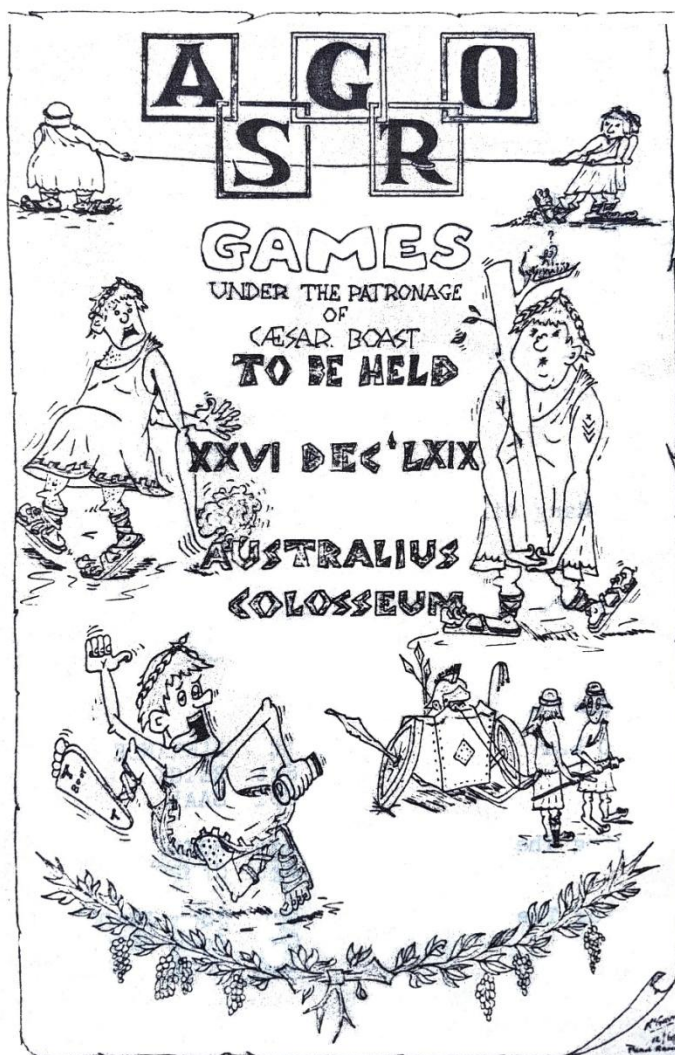
"Stories worth telling"

Another unique occurrence took place at Phan Rang on Boxing Day, the day after Christmas in 1969. It was organised by 'Alex' Alexander, No. 2 Squadron's weapons officer and all ranks were involved in this day of feverish activity, even though the *Magpies* continued to fly combat missions as fragged for that day.



It was called the "ASGRO Games", with ASGRO standing for an amalgam of Australian, Scottish, Greco-Roman Olympics!

"Caesar Boast" was the Commanding Officer of No 2 Squadron, Wing Commander Jack Boast.



ASGRO Games Program, 26 December 1969

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The program for the event listed a number of contests, including field events such as the tug-of-war against an 88 stone catchweight, putting the rock (in the absence of a shot) and caber tossing (the Scottish element).



Tossing the caber

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Track events included the Australian contribution to the multi-national program - a carry the (beer) can race. The "Phan Rang Gift" which was a 100 yards sprinting race, and a "Nui Dat Marathon" was also run.



Nui Dat Marathon runners are cheered on.

Finally the highlight of the day was the glorious Chariot Race. Much effort was put into preparing the chariots. Some were carefully crafted in the squadron machine shop, while others were assembled from bits and pieces and welded together.



Chariot line up

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In this race, each chariot had one rider and four "horses". Here we see a team of pilots, with John Kennedy in the chariot, being pulled by Peter Nuske, Bob Sivyer, Rick O'Ferral and a fourth unidentified "horse".



Chariot team



Chariot Driver



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Competition was extremely fierce as the battling teams were cheered on by enthusiastic Phan Rang spectators.



The race is on

Some intrepid charioteers were determined to win at all costs, including the use of germ warfare.



Using toxic flares to win

As Rick O'Ferral recalled: ***"We were were coming second and closing fast on the leaders when the bastards in front ignited the flares they had attached to their chariot. We were breathing pretty hard by then, after running around the (very rough) dirt track, and several lungfuls of that toxic smoke bloody near killed me."***

The day finished with a barbecue in the lower ranks mess hall with everyone, including those rostered to fly and support the bombing missions, enjoying a great day of letting off steam.

John Blessing wrote on Facebook: I must chuckle about a Vietnamese who had a snack wagon parked near our unit. One of his signs posted on his wagon was, "Dognuts . . . \$xx"

Lucky Devils Hit'em Hard

(Phan Fare, The Happy Valley Weekly, December 19, 1968)

Two F-100 Supersabre pilots of the 614th TFS "Lucky Devils", Phan Rang Air Base, had an excellent mission recently in support of the allied Toan Thang Offensive.

The pilots were Capt. Jerald J. Erskine and 1st Lt. Frederick J. Erickson.

Scrambled from the alert pad at Phan Rang, the jet jockeys reached the target which the forward air controller (FAC) described as Viet Cong (VC) in the open.



"What he had," said Lieutenant Erickson, "was a bunch of Sampans that had hidden under some trees along the edge of a canal. Waiting for him to leave, only he didn't leave. We got secondary explosions on almost every pass, one of which was the biggest I've seen since I've been in Vietnam. It had a two hundred foot fireball, with a 1200 foot column of smoke."

The pilots received heavy ground fire throughout the mission, especially on their strafe passes. The final bomb damage assessment for the strike was five bunkers destroyed, three damaged, five secondary explosions, three sampans destroyed and 10 enemy soldiers killed by air (KBA). The FAC also credited the two with 200 meters of trench uncovered.

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"It was a good mission," concluded Lieutenant Erickson, "It was really satisfying to see our bombs do such a good job on the target. The FAC wasn't sure what the secondary explosions were, but from the way they blew up and kept blowing while we were in the area, we're pretty sure that it was a good sized ammo cache."

(For additional stories of the "Lucky Devils" see Phan Rang News 6 **"Lucky Devils' Kill 20 VC"** and Phan Rang News 125 **"Lucky Devils Prove Luck In Dual Bailout, Pickup"**.)



(Graphics from *Phan Fare, The Happy Valley Weekly*, December 19, 1968)

Air Force, Army Combine, Kayo Bunkers, Slay 45

(*Seventh Air Force News*, July 2, 1969)

PHAN RANG-Two Air Force F-100 Supersabre fighter-bomber pilots destroyed 18 bunkers and assisted friendly ground forces in killing 45 enemy troops 38 miles west-north-west of Bien Hoa recently.

The F-100s were piloted by Maj. Jack P. Bujalski, Harvey, N.D., and Capt. William F. Claudio, Greenport, N.Y. Both pilots are assigned here.

Commenting on the strike Captain Claudio stated, "After rendezvousing with the forward air controller (FAC) over the target we were told we would have to hold because the ground fighting was too close."

"He (the FAC) marked and I went in with my 'stuff', As I made my passes, tracers began coming by the cockpit like popcorn in a popper. The FAC told me the enemy had opened up on me from several .50 caliber machine gun and small arms. Miraculously I wasn't hit," he concluded.

Top Airman From 8th

(Phan Fare, The Happy Valley Weekly, December 19, 1968)

A1C **Thomas L. Bolt**, a weapons mechanic with the 8th TBS was recently named base "Airman of the Month" for November.

Col. Wallace C. Bosworth, vice commander, 35th TFW, presented Airman Bolt the awards which accompanied this honor.

These included field glasses, a tailored suit, a steak dinner for two at the Airman's Open Mess and a Class "A" Letter for his promotion folder.

Airman Bolt was also recently named a member of his unit's outstanding "weapons load team" for September and has extended his tour in Vietnam by six months. He will be spending his 30 days leave with his family during the Christmas season.

50 years ago today

***"Waiting! And the news of the loss of the men of 173rd, and the ambush of the
convoy of the men in the Central Highlands that left our group in Ft. Riley,
still in my mind. People burning their draft cards, protesting the war. I'm on
leave! A new year coming. 1968 what will it bring? Well Jerry let's go to the
bar before we get on this plane."***

(Posted on Facebook by Joseph J. O'Rourke)

Phan Rang Men Aid Students

(Seventh Air Force News, September 6, 1969)

PHAN RANG - This base is conducting its second annual "Dollars for Scholars" fundraising drive to provide financial support for selected local high school students.

The goal of the drive is 200 scholarships worth a total of \$15,000. Each scholarship will provide a selected pupil 1,000 piasters (\$8.47) a month for nine months to defray about half his expenses. Both cash donations and pledges are being accepted from individuals and units to support the program.

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"After determining how many students we can support," explained 1st Lt. James V. Cooley Jr., Springfield, Ohio, base civic action officer, "applications are screened. Scholarships are provided on a basis of academic capability and individual need.

"Most students selected for assistance have lost one or both parents in the war. Without financial aid, these kids would undoubtedly have to quit school to support their families," the lieutenant added.

The "Dollars for Scholars" program is but one of a number of continuing community efforts sponsored by the Phan Rang AB civic action office.

'You Are a Stranger Here but Once'



'You Are a Stranger Here but Once'

(Seventh Air Force News, July 2, 1969)

Maj. Gene C. Sue (left), Framingham, Mass., B Flight, 17th Special Operations Squadron at Phan Rang AB, presents the squadron plaque to WO Tom Sheean, Lithgow, Royal Australian Air Force, Number 2 Bomb Squadron. Mister Sheean, chairman of the Mess Committee for the Australian Squadron's Sergeants' Mess, accepted the plaque from the AC-119 Shadow gunship navigator as a token of friendship and cooperation between the two units.

(USAF PHOTO BY SGT. DONALD L. DIRKSING)

(Seventh Air Force News, September 6, 1969)

PHAN RANG - Two F-100 supersabre pilots of the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing here recently hit a bunker complex 40 miles west of Phu Cat.

The pilots, both members of the 615th Tactical Fighter Squadron, were Capt. William D. Atkins Jr., Coleman. Tex.; and Maj. Billy J. Vinson, Virginia Beach, Va. They were credited with destroying 15 military structures, 6 bunkers and 7 fighting positions.

Major Vinson, talking about the mission, said. “We were scrambled from the alert pad to support a group of friendly troops who were in contact with the enemy. Our target was only one-half kilometer from the friendly troops. We had to be extremely careful and accurate with our ordnance.”

Captain Atkins commented, “It was a very gratifying experience for both Major Vinson and I to be able to help the friendly troops who were in contact with the enemy.”



Gary Pogue Flashback

I was admin clerk with the 19th TASS for less than two months at Bien Hoa, then I went to the 21st TASS (Sundog FACS, O-2 “Smokey”) at Happy Valley July 71 -November 71. From Nov 71-May 72, I was with 21st TASS at Tan Son Nhut. Got some good, “Hey, this ain’t no shit” stories.

One big one at Phan Rang involved a black soldier trying to come thru the mined perimeter at night. He disregarded several warnings from security police to stop and ID himself, so the SPs shot and killed him with approval from Central Security Control. I heard that his DEROS was the next day. Col. Blood, Phan Rang Base commander, went to every unit on base to brief on exactly what happened. He was concerned about the possibility of racial problems; white guys killing a black man.

Another story involved the attack by approximately 200 NVA on Nui Ba Den (NBD), in Tay Ninh Province, around Feb-Apr 72. There were some radio operators from the 21st TASS there along with others (not sure how many or which branch of service). My small admin office was right next to the radio room. All the 21st heavy weights were there listening/talking to the radio operator from NBD as the NVA were firing into the bunker and trying to blow bunker door open with grenades. One 21st radio operator got a bronze star with V device. Think his name was Benny ?? I typed the award certificate up and used to have a copy. Guess the dog ate it.

One big regret about VN . . . not saving the Stars and Stripes newsletters. My thinking got a little cloudy there, ahem!



Why I wear my Vietnam Veterans Cap?

A lot of us Veterans over time have lost the memory and brotherhood of what we once had. When you have worn a combat uniform in a war zone you have earned the right to symbolize the time you were a warrior and now you are a Veteran. When a Vet sees another fellow Vet wearing the cap...History is remembered, preserved, honored and for a moment brotherhood is shared. **That is why I wear my Vietnam Veterans Cap!**

(Shared by Sam Lewis)

I almost had shit burning detail. My second day at Phan Rang I was waiting for an assignment to the engine shop. Walked out into the field for this detail, luckily Jet 1 truck pulled up and the NCO called my name and my buddy's name. We were told since we had experience on F-100 engines we were going right to work on the flight line, NO details. By end of 7/67 most of the latrines were up and running in the barracks areas. Only the trim pad we had a two hole head and I think in the engine test cell. I think the locals were performing this burning duty? Forgot the old engine shop on the east side of the runway had, I think 2 six holers. The shop moved to the west side sometime in early August 67. Posted on Facebook by Louis Scarpitti.

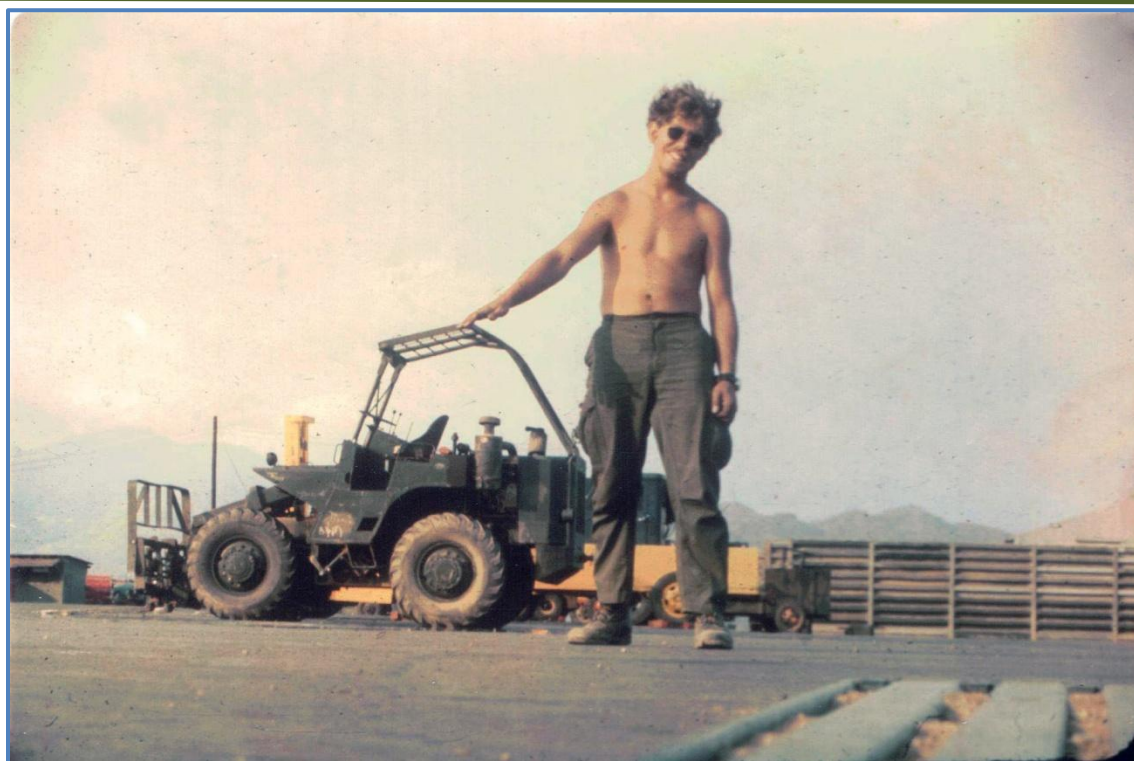
Land of Giants

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Glenn Halberstadt, RT (Rough Terrain) driver, didn't know what I was doing, he thought I was crazy. He was walking toward the bomb dump motor pool and I was laying down on the PSP (Pierced Steel Planking) with my camera. I said "STOP, move a little to the left, put your hand out to the right, a little lower, a little lower, a little to the left, now hold it! Hold it! - OK."

Photo by Bud Short

John Walters Musing about an attack

John Walters wrote: On the lighter side of May 25 1968. I was in the 309th SOS squadron, part of the maintenance crew on aircraft 513 a C123K. Two of us were on duty finishing up our post flight inspection and refuel. We had the auxiliary power unit running. We were done with our inspection and were getting ready to shut down and head to the barracks. With all the noise gone, we heard the sirens, I saw people running with their helmets, flack vest and M16's. I finished securing the aircraft while my buddy went for his weapon. Then I headed to the weapons Conex where I grabbed my gear and M16. We were to take "three" clips of ammo and told if you need more they will bring more out to you. I was the last to get there gear, so I reached in the box and grabbed three clips and stuffed them in my pants side pocket. Since I was last I had to lock up he Conex, I reached into the ammo box again and took another three

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clips stuffed them in my other side pocket, then grabbed three more, locked up and headed to the revetment and into the bunker.

We both looked at each other and stared to put on clips on the edge of the bunker. All totaled we had eighteen clips of M16 ammo. I said "THEY AIN'T GITTIN PAST US", and had a nervous laugh. You could hear the noise front the other side of the base. When the all clear was sounded we all walked to the taxiway, sat down and had a smoke, watching what was going on.

A remark that was made was they want the B57's, F100's and Spookie, "Not Our Trash Haulers". We slept in the aircraft that night. And if I remember the Vietnamese were not allowed on base for a few days and we were restricted to base. *John Walters December 1967 to December 1968.*

Doug's Comments

I have to thank Bob Howe from down under for the wonderful and unique story about the ASGRO games. Bob has contributed so much to the Phan Rang experience that I will be forever grateful, but it's not just Bob, it's those guys that tell their stories either on Facebook or in messages to me that add so much to telling those stories that are keeping the memories alive.

The response so far to our appeal to send in your reunion money early has been phenomenal and it is very much appreciated. There are two reasons; one the contract for the hotel this year requires that we make incremental payments for the banquet. We were worried that we might have a hard time making the schedule of payments, but because everyone responded so quickly we could make the payment in full right now, so that is just one less thing to worry about. The second reason for requesting an early response is that we only have a block of 100 tickets to the Grand Ole Opry and if we see that we need more it is very possible that we can get more tickets added to our block so that we can all sit together. The other thing that goes along with the number of people wanting to attend the Opry is transportation. With 100 people going, I would only need two busses, but if we have more than that we will need another one so I'm waiting to see what the response is before getting a contract for busses.

Because our reunion hotel is a little more expensive than previous ones I've initiated "BilletEase" in an effort to help some members who might not otherwise be able to attend the Phan Rang AB Reunion because of the higher than traditional room rates in Nashville. Room

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rates for an average three night stay would be approximately \$525 and if “BilletEase” could pay for at least one of those nights the room rate for that same period would then be \$350 or an average of \$116 per night which would pretty much be in line with what has been expected for other reunions. Generally I personally have a pretty good perspective of the Phan Rang community and I know who needs help or they may simply state that they cannot afford it so with the members help I will make the decision on who gets assistance. A similar program initiated by Larry Martino collected enough money to allow one members to attend the Seattle reunion that would not have been possible otherwise.

Once again Larry has volunteered to manage this program. If you wish to participate in “BilletEase”, just send a small donation to: **Larry Martino, 10900 Waldour Lane, Austin, Tx, 78748**. If you send a check, please make it payable to Larry Martino.

Your generosity is greatly appreciated and I will keep you updated on the status of this program. If donations exceed our needs I will try to shut it off as soon as possible and if there is money that cannot be returned to the donor I will transfer the money to the Phan Rang Reunion Fund.

I’m still sending out an appeal for your life story. If you haven’t already written and sent in your biography, please consider doing one. You do not have to follow any specific format, but please expand on your Phan Rang experiences. I know most of us worked 12 hour shifts, 7 days a week, and you think you don’t have anything to say, but experience tells us that you probably have a lot of interesting stories in you just waiting to be released. Phan Rang Newsletter 150 will contain only those stories of the members.

In the next issue I’ve been in contact with James Wright, president emeritus and the Eleazar Wheelock professor of history emeritus at Dartmouth College, who has given me permission to include portions of his book “Enduring Vietnam”. The article is titled “A Generation Goes to War” and I think you will really identify with what he has to say. I’m excited about what your reaction will be.

This newsletter was compiled and published by [Douglas Severt](#). All of the grammatical and spelling errors are mostly mine. Previous issues of the Phan Rang Newsletter are available [here](#) for download.

2018 Reunion Information

Click [here](#) to make your Reservation at the Radisson Airport Hotel today. The cost of the room is \$163 plus tax, which includes a buffet breakfast, free internet and parking. There are also some parking spaces for RV's that are just that...parking spaces with no utilities.

The reunion dates are 11-13 October 2018, however the room rate at the Radisson is good for three days before and three days after. As in the past many people plan on arriving early.

We also arranged for a block of 100 tickets to the Grand Ole Opry and that number can and will be increased if we see a demand for more, so the sooner the members send in their money, the sooner we can make that assessment. It's also important to get an early figure so we can get a contract for transportation.

Total costs for the reunion, excluding your hotel room.

\$50 Banquet

\$49 Grand Ole Opry Ticket

\$15 Transportation

\$20 Reunion fee

The total cost then for the reunion is **\$134 per person** if you choose to go to the Opry and **\$70 per person** without the Opry.

Send check to: **Jack Anderson, 826 72nd St. SE, Auburn, Wa., 98092**, Make check payable to Phan Rang Reunion