

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN
 ...keeping the memories alive
 Phan Rang AB News No. 153 **“Stories worth telling”**

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A Year In Vietnam

by Ben H. Swett

A Year In Vietnam

By Ben H. Swett, Colonel USAF (Retired)

Ben was a navigator in C-123 aircraft and Civic Action Coordinator for the 315th Tactical Airlift Wing at Phan Rang, Republic of Vietnam, in 1970. He attended Sea Survival School enroute to Vietnam.

Tues 23 Dec 1969 - Arrived at Cam Ranh Bay, Republic of Vietnam, and caught a C-123 "Bookie Bird" to Phan Rang.

I was taken to a building called "Howard Johnsons." I looked out the window, saw sand-bagged firing positions and a very tall hill, and asked the man who brought me, "Who owns the hill?" He laughed and said, "We do. Just sit tight and somebody'll come get you." Shortly, a Major came in, greeted me by name, and led me to the "hootch" where they had my room ready. It was rather nice, I thought. About 9 x 12 with a plywood closet, dresser, desk and chair, window air-conditioner (inoperative) and a double bunk. I asked who had the other bunk, and was told,

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"Nobody. Majors are assigned one-to-a-room." The denizens of my hootch were having a party on the concrete patio. Maj. Steve Gilbert was playing his banjo. Everyone was eating charcoal-broiled ribs and drinking Lancers out of the bottle. They all said, "Welcome to Vietnam!" and I thought, "This isn't what I expected."

Wed 24 Dec - Cleaned hootch room. Called the housing office and contracted to pay a couple of Vietnamese men to fix the air conditioner. Unpacked and stowed my stuff.

Thu 25 Dec - Christmas Day. Nothing special. Loafed and wrote letters.

Fri 26 Dec - Cleared in to Phan Rang -- finance, flight records, medical, dental, etc. Assigned to 315th Special Operations Wing, 311th Special Operations Squadron. Told I'm scheduled to be re-assigned to Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Air Base, Thailand, to "Operation Candlestick" which is C-123 night surveillance of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Four C-123's and six aircrews will relocate there shortly.

Sat 27 Dec - Trying to check out in aircraft. Nobody much interested, it seems.

Sun 28 Dec - Went to church at Aussie Number 2 Squadron next door to my hootch.

Mon 29 Dec - Squadron orientation briefings. Started looking into the Squadron Civic Action Program. Very interesting.

Tue 30 Dec - In-country briefings by base personnel office, doctor, etc., etc. Met the Base Civic Action Officer, Capt. James V. Cooley, and was impressed by the amount of good work being done. The flight surgeon said: "This is a biologically hostile environment. You are all targets, all the time. But the main threat is not the VC or the VD, though both of those can get you. The thing you have to watch out for is dehydration. You can't imagine how much water you have to drink. Your body is full of holes. It leaks. And if you're not sweating, you're dying. Next is the loss of electrolytes -- salt. Take two salt tablets a day. And during the day, lick your shoulder or wrist once in awhile: if your sweat doesn't taste salty, take two salt tablets immediately. As for the rest of what can happen to you, if you start to feel sick, or if anything -- anything -- punctures your skin, come see us. If it doesn't kill you immediately, we can probably patch you up."

Thu 1 Jan 1970 - Fly 5.2 (8 sorties). Bao Loc, Bien Hoa, Bu Dop (hot: sporadic small arms fire, put on flak vests and helmets), Bien Hoa, Can Tho, Binh Thuy, Nha Trang, and back to Phan Rang. Wing renamed 315th Tactical Airlift Wing (TAW).

Fri 2 Jan - Studied Squadron, Wing and Base Civic Action Programs.

Sat 3 Jan - Fly 5.9 (5 sorties). Nha Trang, Can Tho, That Son (hot), Bien Hoa, Phan Rang. Two hour weather delay at Nha Trang. Impressive large Buddha statue there.

Sun 4 Jan - Told again that several of us will be going to NKP shortly.

Mon 5 Jan - Three 107 mm rockets hit near Base Chapel parking lot.

Tue 6 Jan - Fly 5.8 (7 sorties). Tan Son Nhut, Vinh Long, Binh Thuy, An Thoi, Tan Son Nhut, Duc Phong Special Forces camp, Phan Rang.

Wed 7 Jan to Thu 15 Jan - No entries in calendar. Mostly reading local regulations and Civic Action history.

Fri 16 Jan -- Fly 4.6 (5 sorties). Song Mao (pilot had to radio Army to move their helicopters farther away from the runway so we wouldn't knock the rotors off with our wing tip), Cam Ranh Bay, Ban Me Thuot (rudder locked, our crew chief fixed it), Tan Son Nhut, Phan Rang. Told I am now the 311th Squadron Civic Action Coordinator.

Mon 19 Jan - Attended Ninh Thuan Province Civic Action Council. Very interesting. There are a lot of projects going on, all very well coordinated with the Vietnamese. A representative of Luong Giang hamlet asked the Council for "electricity". After discussion, it turned out he was asking for a small gasoline-powered generator and enough wire to have a light in their hamlet office-school and one out on the perimeter of the hamlet so artillery spotters would know where they were. I said we could take care of that, and was assigned the project.

Tue 20 Jan - Two 107 mm rockets hit about 75 yards from Base Headquarters as I was walking about 200 yards away, going to get my mail. Heard the two bangs and turned in time to see the

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two clouds of smoke, but by then it was already too late to dive in a ditch. Decided that rockets either hit you or they don't, so it's useless to go around worrying about them.

Thu 22 Jan - Briefed 311th Squadron on our Civic Action Program, and took up a collection for the "electricity" project at Luong Giang hamlet. It was more than enough for a small Honda generator, two all-weather light fixtures and 300 meters of wire. Two men said they were going to Phan Rang City to get a load of charcoal for bar-b-ques. They would buy all the material for the project and take it to Province Headquarters for delivery to Luong Giang.

Sat 24 Jan - Fly 1.3 (3 sorties). Troop drop at Cam Ranh Bay, 112 VN in 4 passes, all good. The drop zone is a little tight. Salt water at one end, rocks at the other end, trees on one side and a power line next to a road on the other side. Decided I don't like the standard airdrop tactics for C-123 aircraft, which are to come in straight and level and do timing to the release point by terrain features abeam the aircraft. Started developing my own tactics based on experience with fixed-angle bombing in Strategic Air Command.

Sun 25 Jan - Two 107 mm rockets hit on the flight line, but didn't hit any aircraft. Mission planning for re-assignment trip to NKP.

Mon 26 Jan - All packed and ready to go to NKP. Got a phone call at 8 pm and was told I'm not going to NKP. The Wing Commander [Colonel Leslie J. Campbell, Jr.] wants me here to run his Civic Action Program. Job title is 315th TAW Civic Action Coordinator. He assigned me to that job late yesterday.

Tues 27 Jan - Fly 6.2 (10 sorties). Ban Me Thuot to Bao Loc shuttle, 273 passengers, several round trips. Jumped ship for awhile at Ban Me Thuot, test-fired weapons. I asked the men at Ban Me Thuot Airlift Control if they had a place where I could test-fire my revolver. They grabbed an assortment of weapons from their copious collection and took me in a jeep across the flight line to the dump. I fired my .38 caliber revolver, an AK-47 and an air-cooled .30 caliber machine gun. An Army outfit on the flight line launched a weather balloon, and the Airlift Control guys shot at it. An 8-inch self-propelled howitzer in that Army compound turned its barrel toward us, fired just over our heads, and the shock wave from the shell almost blew us away. The weather balloon escaped upward.

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Fri 30 Jan - Fly 3.8 (4 sorties). Cam Ranh Bay, Qui Nhon, Cam Ranh Bay, Phan Rang. Unsafe nose gear. Bad radios, High winds. Tough day.

Sun 1 Feb - Wrote letters. Went to the Aussie Church.

Mon 2 Feb - Assigned to an Accident Investigation Board for a C-123 [tail number 54-0688] that ran off the runway at Binh Thuy into a rice paddy on 3 Jan 1970. No casualties. It took the Army several days to get heavy lift equipment in there. By that time acids in the rice paddy had eaten the bottom of the fuselage so the aircraft was a total loss except for the engines.

Tue 3 Feb - Fly 5.3 (8 sorties). Ban Me Thuot, Song Mao, Nha Trang, Phu Cat, Pleiku, Quin Hon, Cheo Reo (a weird runway on top of a hill), Phan Rang. A perfect mission. C-123 pilots had to have special training before they were authorized to land at Cheo Reo, because the wind blew over the top of the hill and then DOWN the slope near the landing end of the runway. Pilots had to come in very high and very steep, to avoid being caught in the downdraft and pushed into the hill short of the runway.

Wed 4 Feb - Accident Board

Thu 5 Feb - Hootch meeting of Wing Civic Action Coordinators with 35th Base Civic Action Officer. [Civic Action Officer was a full-time job. Civic Action Coordinator was an additional duty.]

Fri 6 Feb - Fly 7.0 (8 sorties). Bao Loc, Song Mao, Nha Trang, Phu Cat, Pleiku, Quin Hon, Cheo Reo, Phan Rang. Fini flight for Lt. Col. Farris (311th Deputy Commander). Before the mission, Col. Farris very strictly told the crew that he didn't want any kind of low fly-over or other display, and they played it straight, but after they parked and shut down the engines, the whole squadron pounced on him, drenched him with water, and carried him to the beer tent for a fine party.

Sat 7 Feb - Collect maps and Civic Action info from Information Services Officer.

Sun 8 Feb - Accident Board

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Mon 9 Feb - Squadron Civic Action office cleaned, files refined.

Tue 10 Feb - Studied Intelligence reports on Luong Giang and Luong Tri hamlets. Luong Giang is a Montagnard hamlet and is colored pink on the map, which means they may be supporting the VC. Luong Tri is a Cham hamlet near the back gate of the base and is considered friendly.

Wed 11 Feb - Six sappers tried to penetrate the north side of the base. Two were killed, one wounded and captured, the rest escaped. Spent the day meeting with Base CAO, Buu Son District Civic Action, CORDS and Deputy Province Chief.

Thu 12 Feb 0930 - Meet with Deputy Province Chief for Social Welfare, all CAO's.

Fri 13 Feb - Fly 5.8 (8 sorties). Bien Hoa, Loc Ninh, Bien Hoa, Loc Ninh, Song Be, Phu Loi, Song Be, Phan Rang. The "Visiting Officers Quarters" at Song Be was a group of cement half-culverts about 4 feet in diameter and 8 feet long, like half-round concrete tents, with a stack of sandbags near each end, just big enough for one man to crawl into. Explanation: they are a lot better than tents as protection from mortars.

Sat 14 Feb - Wrote letters

Sun 15 Feb - Church at Aussie Number 2 Squadron. Stayed for lunch and visiting. Went with them to the club for supper.

Mon 16 Feb - Dollars For Scholars planning at 2000 hrs in my hootch. Eight 82 mm mortars hit in the north area of the base near the beach gate. I and a couple other newcomers got on the floor, but the old-timers laughed and said, "Those are far away. If you need to duck, you'll know it."

Tue 17 Feb - Fly 0.7 (1 sortie). Helped onload 7 Vietnamese Boy Scout leaders for Da Nang, and 3 Civic Action Officers for Tan Son Nhut. Decided to escort the Vietnamese. Rode with them to Cam Ranh Bay in a C-123, jumped ship, escorted them plus three other Boy Scout leaders to Hue in a C-130, which is where they were going. Caught a C-130 back to Cam Ranh Bay and an armored truck to Phan Rang.

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Wed 18 Feb - Fly 5.7 (10 sorties). Da Nang, Pleiku, An Khe, English, Phu Cat, English, An Khe, Pleiku, Cam Ranh Bay, Phan Rang. While at Da Nang, I talked with Lt. Klee, the 311th Operating Location Civic Action Coordinator. They have some very interesting projects, including an orphanage they have helped for several years.

Thu 19 Feb - Visit Luong Tri hamlet with 3 members DSA, DCAO (VN). Luong Tri is surrounded by a high, thick berm of prickly-pear cactus. Didn't expect to see cactus in Vietnam, but this province is mostly desert because two mountain ranges shield it from the monsoon rains. Lots of irrigated fields. Hamlet chief says they need a road, and points out where the present path has been eroded by a stream so badly that vehicles larger than motorbikes can't get through. I said I'll see if we can help.

Fri 20 Feb - Coordinate transportation for Dollars For Scholars picnic on base with Law Enforcement Office. Talked with Mr. Huong at the base bank while opening an account for 315th Civic Action.

Sat 21 Feb - Coordinate with CORDS Chief, Buu Son District. Visit Cham Temple.

Sun 22 Feb - Accident Board

Mon 23 Feb - Dollars For Scholars coordination. Talked with Jay Scarborough, an American teacher at the An Phuoc Ethnic Minorities High School. He is sponsoring what he calls "Project Inquiry" to expand the students' awareness, but they don't have any usable maps of the world or even Vietnam. I said I would see if I could get some maps.

Tue 24 Feb - Dollars For Scholars coordination. Accident Board.

Wed 25 Feb -- DOLLARS SCHOLARS VISIT THE BASE. About 200 students from Duy Tan High School were brought from Phan Rang City on busses for a tour of the base, walk-through a C-123, sit in the cockpit of an F-100, rest stop at the passenger terminal, and a picnic lunch at the outdoor theater. It was a fine day. I almost caused an international incident when their lady English teacher asked me what we were having for lunch. I said, "Hot dogs and potato salad and baked beans." She said, "This hot dog, I think it is a sandwich?" I said, "Yes." One of the students tugged at her sleeve and obviously asked her what we were talking about. She must

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have translated literally -- hot dog sandwich -- because about thirty students turned green. I started saying "No" but she said, "Some Vietnamese people, they eat this sandwich, too." I said "Oh?" and she said, "Yes, the Montagnards." (They do eat dog.) I said, "No, no. This sandwich is just called a hot dog. It is made of beef." She translated, and the students turned a little less green, but they weren't really convinced until we got the picnic area and some of the boys tried the sandwiches. They slathered them with mustard, took a few bites, and pronounced them good. Then they all ate two or three, as teenagers usually do.

Thu 26 Feb - 311th Squadron Commander's Call. Accident Board complete. 4 Civic Action projects started.

Fri 27 Feb - Wrote letters. Farewell party for Capt. Cooley 1600 at the Club. He asked for and received a seven-month extension of his tour, and is being transferred to Tan Son Nhut as the Base Civic Action Officer there.

Sat 28 Feb - Wing Commander's Call

Sun 1 Mar - Party for Capt. Cooley 1130 downtown. He obviously has made a lot of friends here. Talked with John Page [Capt. John Page, 311th TAS Admin Officer].

Mon 2 Mar - Fly 5.6 (9 sorties) Cam Ranh Bay, Bao Loc, Bien Hoa, etc. No new fields, but a good day.

Tue 3 Mar - Tapped to rewrite Squadron Base Defense Plan.

Wed 4 Mar - One 107 mm rocket hit near the Data Processing Building. One man killed. [Sgt. Joe Nathan Tucker, while he was building revetments to protect people against rocket and mortar attacks. Six other men were wounded.]

Thu 5 Mar - Tapped for base survey board: inventory and document all property at NCO Clubs, Officers Club, Billeting and Base Recreation facilities. Assigned a team to do this.

Fri 6 Mar - Civic Action briefing for commander. Planning NCO Club survey. Work on Base Defense Plan. Talked with John Page.

Sat 7 Mar - NCO Club Survey. It looks like they have almost everything on their inventory list, plus a lot of stuff that was "found on base" including several trucks, some slot machines being repaired, and enough weapons to equip a small army. The NCO Club Chief is cooperating and easy to work with.

Sun 8 Mar - Fly 6.3 (8 sorties). Tanh Linh. Took them a water truck. Two companies of NVA in contact near there. Goats all over that area. While we were flying along at 6000 feet, we heard an artillery warning on the radio. I checked the coordinates on my map and said, "That's near us! Let's get out of here!" The pilot said "Look!" and pointed forward. Two artillery shells were flying in formation, moving diagonally upward and to our right in front of us. They were long and slim and rather pretty to watch, but too damn close for comfort. The pilot radioed on Guard Channel, "Cease fire until we get out of your area!" and we went elsewhere as rapidly as possible.

Mon 9 Mar - NCO Club. Took a truck to the beach to inventory the NCO Club Annex there. Very nice beach. Worked on Civic Action job continuity folder.

Tue 10 Mar - Hassle Billeting about inventory. They're not cooperating. I asked the Base Commander to lean on them. Worked on Civic Action job continuity folder.

Wed 11 Mar - Fly 6.4. (8 sorties) Phan Thiet, Soc Trang, Quau Long, Vi Thanh (in the Delta). Took a plane load of Aussies to Luscombe.

Thu 12 Mar - 0800 Billeting meeting. They are cooperating. Worked on Civic Action job continuity folder.

Fri 13 Mar - Dental and shots. Civic Action trip to Duy Tan High School to coordinate Dollars For Scholars.

Sat 14 Mar - Seven 82 mm mortars hit north side of base. Received tape of the previous inventory for Billeting survey. It looks like they are in pretty good shape.

Sun 15 Mar - Letters. Survey.

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Mon 16 Mar - Stand by to brief Gen. Brown on Civic Action program. [Gen. George S. Brown, the 7th Air Force Commander] Not called to brief.

Tue 17 Mar - Civic Action job continuity folder. Col. Hoffman has assigned me as the 311th Squadron Navigator [Lt. Col. Robert W. Hoffman, 311th TAS Commander].

Wed 18 Mar - FLY 5.3 (2 sorties). One of six C-123's deployed from Phan Rang to Pleiku to Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand, for "Operation Commando Pepper."

Fri 20 Mar - Fly 4.3 (4 sorties). Operation Commando Pepper. From Udorn to landing zone and return, twice. Two different landing zones. No radio aids. A long day. There was very bad visibility to the first landing zone [LS-117 New Xieng Dat, 19-26N 102-44E, 1300 x 90 feet of clay runway, land heading 060, takeoff heading 240], because it was the "smoky season" on the west side of the mountains. I had to put my head out the side window and look straight down to see enough to navigate. There was karst all over that area (limestone columns as much as 1000 feet high), but we were well above them -- for the moment. When we were about five minutes away, I gave the pilots the heading and estimated time of arrival over the landing zone. It was a wide spot in a dirt road on the other side of a ridge, so the pilot, Capt. Larry Prose, couldn't see it until we got there and he banked the aircraft to look down for it. He set up a close-in traffic pattern to keep the landing zone in sight, and then used "commando reverse" to get down quickly (reversed the pitch of the propellers in flight). We dropped like a rock. I didn't know any airplane could do that, and it scared the heck out of me. We had been told we were going to pick up passengers, but no one was there, so Capt. Prose got on the radio. He was told we should offload the few boxes we brought with us (they looked like vehicle or aircraft parts) and someone would pick them up. Getting out of there was also challenging. We had to climb through smoke and haze between columns of karst, with two turning points, using headings and stop-watch timing. There was fair visibility to the second landing zone [LS-15 Ban Na, 19-18N 102-57E, 1234 x 52 feet of sod/clay runway, land heading 350 takeoff heading 170], but the approach was over a high hill with a very steep descent into the valley and an uphill landing. As we were planning the mission, an Air America pilot said they wouldn't try to land there in a C-123 and asked how we planned to do it. One of our pilots said we would take only half a load of fuel so the aircraft would be light enough to have a lower minimum airspeed, approach using full flaps at minimum airspeed, clear the top of the hill by 30 feet, drop the nose and chop the

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power, then pull up the nose and add power if necessary for the uphill landing. The Air America pilot said, "Well, that ought to work, but I wouldn't want to try it." Several of our pilots laughed and one said, "That's why we get the big bucks!" (Air America pilots were paid a lot more than Air Force pilots.) The approach and landing were hairy, but we did it as planned. The crew chief and I were sent out on the flanks with M-16s to provide cover while unloading refugees. Then we did the downhill takeoff, followed by an immediate sharp right turn because the hill facing us was too high to climb over. All in all, it was a professional piece of flying. That night at the bar, Col. Hoffman said he was told my navigation on the first sortie was "Off by 100 yards and 5 seconds" and bought me a drink.

Sat 21 Mar - Thu 26 Mar - Operation Commando Pepper. Not in my flight log. After the first day we were told not to record these missions because we "weren't there."

Fri 27 Mar - Fly 4.0 (1 sortie). Udorn to Phan Rang. Forgot 1615 dental appointment. Clean quarters. Phone call from Province Headquarters: the people of Luong Giang hamlet want to thank me personally for providing them with electricity.

Sat 28 Mar - Chopper to Luong Giang Hamlet. A fine visit. Call dental to reschedule.

Sun 29 Mar - Sick. Quarters all day.

Mon 30 Mar - Helped squadron write up some DFC justifications. Some Civic Action. Feeling sick. Low-grade fever. Aches and pains and weak-all-over. Felt like I was coming down with the flu, so I talked to the flight surgeon at lunch and regaled him with my symptoms. He was not sympathetic. He said, "You dummy! You didn't listen to my in-country briefing. Come here." He dragged me to the water-jug and handed me an eight-ounce glass. "Fill it." I did. "Drink it." I did. "Again." I did. "Again." I was beginning to slosh. "Do it." Somewhere in the middle of the fourth glass of water, I suddenly burst out in perspiration. "Now," said the flight surgeon, "You are at the minimum level of hydration. And ..." "Yes," I said meekly, "Don't forget the salt tablets." He grinned, clapped me on the shoulder, and went back to his lunch.

Tue 31 Mar - All day on NCO Club inventory correlations. Talked with John Page, Bill Tomashunas.

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Wed 1 Apr - Good day in Civic Action! Draft status report. Uniform project. Passenger project. Progress in several. Twelve 82 mm mortars hit north part of base, and two 107 mm rockets hit near the munitions holding area. No casualties.

Thu 2 Apr - Reorganize 311th Awards and Decorations program. Civic Action status report. Heavy NVA attack on Dak Seang Special Forces camp near Cambodian border.

Fri 3 Apr - Fly 4.8 (6 sorties). Number 2 jet starter burned up at Nha Trang. Maintenance replaced it. Continued mission. Thonle Cham, Ninh Than, Tan Son Nhut, Phan Rang. Called Capt. Cooley at Tan Son Nhut.

Sat 4 Apr - Flight plan all day for trip to Taipei and Kadena. Briefed crew.

Sun 5 Apr - Fly 8.2 (1 sortie) to Taipei. Good nav leg. Used noon-hour sunline fix.

Mon 6 Apr - Shop. Look around. Good supper at Chinese restaurant. Letter to Wyn.

Tue 7 Apr -- Bought books, watch, jewelry.

Wed 8 Apr - Fly 3.1 (1 sortie) Taipei to Kadena. Took airline back to Taipei.

Thu 9 Apr - Fly 5.0 (1 sortie) Taipei -- abort and return -- tip tank not feeding.

Fri 10 Apr - Shop. Took airline Taipei to Tan Son Nhut. Rocket attack. Tough night.

Sat 11 Apr - Fly 1.8 (2 sorties) Tan Son Nhut to Phan Rang with stop at Song Be. Was told how the sergeants from 315th CAMS acquired the building for the Thap Bao Tu School.

Sun 12 Apr - Civic Action trip to see the Thap Bao Tu School. Very nice. Took pictures. Rest. Clean room. Talk with John Page.

Mon 13 Apr - Squadron Civic Action report. Awards and Decorations reorganization. Heavy NVA attack on Dak Pek Special Forces camp near Cambodian boarder.

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Tues 14 Apr - Short fuse, another General, another briefing. Worked to 4 am.

Wed 15 Apr - Briefing OK. Civic Action work till 3 pm. Nap, supper & talk.

Thu 16 Apr - Short-order review of NCO Club account, and fast prep for my Theater Qualification Check tomorrow with bundle drop at Cam Ranh Bay.

Fri 17 Apr - Fly 4.0 (2 sorties). Theater Qualification check with Flight Examiner Maj. Ernie Servetas. I planned a 90 degree turn at the end of the nav leg with a straight-in descent to the drop zone. When we got near the end of the nav leg, he said there was (simulated) artillery fire going in ahead of us. I cut the corner, started descent, turned into the drop zone so we rolled out and leveled off about 15 seconds before release and used my fixed-angle sighting method. First drop 30 yards, second drop 15 yards. He said, "Good work. **Qualified.**"

Sat 18 Apr - Scott's 13th birthday [our son]. NCO Club inspection again. 7th Air Force won an award for its 1969 Civic Action program.

Sun 19 Apr - Fly 3.1 (3 sorties). Combat drop at Dak Pek canceled for weather. Big argument over drop tactics. Servetas and others insist on going by the book, which means coming in straight and level at 300 feet. I say we will get our asses shot off by every bad guy in the vicinity. We should minimize our exposure to ground fire -- come in steep, level off close to the drop zone and use my fixed-angle sighting method for the air release point. After lengthy and heated argument, the Deputy Commander asked if I can provide the computations and teach my tactics so they can be used if needed. I said, "Yes, I'll do that." End of meeting. Went back to my hootch and put my airdrop computations for Dak Pek on a checklist-size card.

Mon 20 Apr - Started up the hill to the Club for breakfast with several other men, but saw the bus coming and decided to catch it now rather than later. Briefed navs on drop tactics. Flap over drop card. I agreed to some modifications to make the card easier to use. Dollars For Scholars trip. New scholar. More computations for drop cards. When I got back to my hootch in the evening, someone said, "It's a good thing you skipped breakfast this morning." I asked, "Why? Did they burn the eggs again?" and was told a 107 mm rocket hit just outside the Club as the men I was with were going in for breakfast. It threw fragments through the wall in front of them and behind them. Nobody was hit, but there wasn't enough room in that line for another

man.

Tue 21 Apr - Fly 4.7 (4 sorties). Combat drop at Dak Pek. As it turned out, the Forward Air Controller (FAC) directed us to come in over the top and down the side of a steep ridge, so everyone had to use my tactics and drop cards. We were number 4 of 5 birds, and dropped 6 pallets, 60 yards short and 100% recoverable. All the drops were recoverable, but some were as much as 150 yards short. Took cargo to Kontoon. More computations.

Wed 22 Apr - Fly 4.3 (4 sorties). Combat drop at Dak Pek, 40 yards short and 100% recoverable. All the drops were recoverable, and the worst was 100 yards short. Took 2 KIA to Cam Ranh Bay. More computations.

Thu 23 Apr - Briefed drop tactics and results. The dive tactic works -- none of us got hit at Dak Pek although there were still a lot of NVA in the area. Drops tended to be short. To have the right sighting angle, the nav has to make sure the top of his helmet is pressed up against the overhead panel. Civic Action trip around Province. While visiting one of the hamlets, the locals started ringing an alarm and everyone got behind the berm with weapons. I had my revolver, and someone handed me an M-16. Two men in black pajamas were coming toward us along a dike between rice paddies, waving papers over their heads and shouting, "Chieu hoi!" Surrendering. We took them to Phan Rang City in the back of our truck with an armed guard watching them. They didn't make a move, just grinned and were glad to get cigarettes.

Fri 24 Apr - Wrote letters. Civic Action & room clean-up. Mailed boxes.

Sat 25 Apr - Rest and work on room. Talk with John Page.

Sun 26 Apr - Update Civic Action job continuity folder. Letter from Mom.

Mon 27 Apr - Civic Action coordination. 311th Squadron dining in at the Club. Watched an AC-119 firing at something about 10 miles northwest of the base at sundown. 8 pm phone call: Deputy Province Chief invites me to go with him to Luong Giang hamlet tomorrow for honors.

Tue 28 Apr - Helicopter to Luong Giang . AC-119 firing pass was perfect. Civic Action uniform project, analysis of tasks, problems. Phone call from 311th OLAA in Da Nang: "Can you move six

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sewing machines from Tan Son Nhut to Da Nang? The last time we tried it, they got stolen." I said yes and got the contact info.

Wed 29 Apr - Fly 5.4 (7 sorties). Downwind landing almost over-ran at Think Ngun. Picked up sewing machines at Tan Son Nhut and delivered them to Da Nang. Went to Seabee outfit and talked with a Master Chief about the Thap Cham water system problem: a layer of granite. He came to Phan Rang with us and fixed the problem.

Thu 30 Apr - Briefing on night drops. NCO Club recheck all afternoon. 7th Air Force Civic Action report. Night drop canceled. About this time, I started going out in the C-123 parking area late at night, after the maintenance men had finished their work. I usually found a group of men in one of the revetments, shooting dice. The first time I did this, I could see they were worried that I was going to reprimand them, so I said, "Peace. I'm not after your buns. I have a proposition for you to consider." I told them about Dollars For Scholars, and showed them a picture of one of the students with his or her name and grades and special need situation on the back. Then I said, "This is my proposition: if you all agree, I'll put the picture in the pot. Whoever wins the pot gets the picture. I get the pot and the winner's name and unit and phone number. Then, when I go downtown to deliver the scholarship, I take the winner with me. He can present the scholarship personally, or just be there." They never turned down my proposition. I didn't do this very often, and I never played for more than one scholar per night, but I got several scholarships this way, and I always took the winner with me.

Fri 1 May - NCO Club recheck all day. Civic Action monthly report. Night drop canceled. President Nixon has ordered troops to go after the NVA sanctuaries just across the border in Cambodia. Yay!

Sat 2 May - Civic Action reports in. Coordination with Base Civic Action Office. Letter to Wyn. Late night mortar attack, 10 rounds, hit the base dump.

Sun 3 May - Sick with a cold and such miseries. Two 107 mm rockets hit the parking lot by the base chapel early this morning, one killed a Vietnamese woman who worked at the chapel. I went and looked at the parking lot when I got my mail. Not a very big hole in the asphalt, only about a foot across, but the fragments are deadly.

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Mon 4 May - Sick. Wrote coordination letter to Mr. Hau (Deputy Province Chief).

Tue 5 May - Civic Action trip to Buu Son District HQ, Duy Tan High School, Province HQ. Someone said the people like sweets, but have little sugar. CORDS is trying to introduce sugar cane. I said I thought strawberries would grow very well here. Visit Luong Tri. The parachute on a parachute flare failed and the flare went through the roof of their hamlet office-school. 35th Combat Support Group will fix the damage.

Wed 6 May - Six 82 mm mortars hit the base dump early this morning. Heard that a 1st Sgt. caught a drug pusher. Civic Action trip to Duy Tan High School to deliver scholarships. Took several of the donors along to present their scholarships. Stopped by Province Headquarters to see what happened to the two VC who surrendered. One was a farmer. They gave him a job carrying rice sacks to tide him over and two hectares of irrigated land. He has planted onions. The other was a wood-worker. They gave him a foot-operated lathe and he is making rungs for ladders and railings.

Thu 7 May - Fly 4.3 (3 sorties). Short notice combat drop at Dak Seang, 50 yards long and 100% recoverable. Six aircraft, all drops recoverable. Commanders and navigators like my drop tactics. Someone has given my checklist-size cards a name: Computed Air Release Position (CARP) cards. I am to develop more CARP cards for troop drops and various combinations of pallet loads and parachutes.

Fri 8 May - Took my nav Standboard exams -- OK.

Sat 9 May - Fly 2.7 (7 sorties). Dropped 230 VN at Cam Ranh Bay, in 11 passes at 1250 feet, plus 2 passes HALO at 10,000 feet (high altitude jump, free-fall, low altitude opening) all good. Because most VN only weigh about 100 pounds they take 80 seconds downtime from 1250 feet and seem to float around like dandelion fluff, but they learn to steer their chutes very quickly so the downtime computation isn't as critical as it otherwise would be.

Sun 10 May - Rest, work on plan for a radio-controlled model helicopter. PM alert for special mission to Thailand, drew up 6 charts.

Mon 11 May - Special mission to Thailand cancelled. Got radio control for model helicopter. [I

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eventually realized that I could not make a functional rotor control mechanism and quit this off-hours project.]

Tue 12 May - A little Civic Action - but everything hung up right now.

Wed 13 May - Fly 3.9 (6 sorties). Drop troops at Cam Ranh Bay, 114 VN in 10 passes, all good. One 44-man drop and 2 HALO. VN jumpmaster & open release.

Thu 14 May - Fly 3.2 (6 sorties). Drop troops at Cam Ranh Bay, 159 VN in 7 passes, all good. Three 40+ man drops and 2 HALO. Finished Civic Action Program Status report to Wing Commander.

Fri 15 May - Civic Action coordination

Sat 16 May - Sgt. DeLucas had a dope pusher arrested. Twelve 82 mm mortars hit the other side of the base.

Sun 17 May - Fly 6.9 (4 sorties) Two combat drops at Ha Tan, 7 pallets each, 70 yards long and 30 yards long, 100% recoverable. A rocket burst below and behind us in the camp during the first drop -- big bang, no damage to the aircraft.

Mon 18 May - Province Civic Action meeting canceled. Talked with Jerry LaBombard (Ninh Thuan Province CORDS Chief). Took a truckload of cut-down uniforms to the Cat Gia PSDF. They're a fine bunch of teenage "Minutemen."

Tues 19 May - Coordinate Civic Action with 311th Squadron -- got permission to use "WH" storage shed for Civic Action material. PM alert for combat drop at Hiep Duc tomorrow. Map study and tactics planning.

Wed 20 May - Fly 5.9 (4 sorties). Combat airdrop at Hiep Duc. Pilot Maj. Don Rice. Copilot 1st Lt. Scott Bohner. Flew mission as planned, dropped 4 pallets, 50 yards long, 100% recoverable. [DFC mission] I initiated a Technical Order change to install a seat belt across the opening to the pilots' compartment and a checklist change saying the navigator should buckle the seat belt behind him so he wouldn't fall out of there backward when the pilots did the abrupt pull-up for

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a bundle or pallet drop, as I almost did on the airdrop at Hiep Duc. [These seat belts were installed in all 315th aircraft during the next two months. Many years later, I saw a C-123 on static display at Dover AFB, and the seat belt with one end hanging down on each side of the opening to the pilots' compartment was still there.]

Thu 21 May - Letter from Wyn. Squadron duties. Civic Action coordination. Dollars For Scholars = Go! Told to prepare airdrop briefing for DCO.

Fri 22 May - Stood by all am to brief. Not called. Wasted day. Col. Campbell's party. [Col. Leslie J. Campbell, Jr., 315th Wing Commander from May 1969 to July 1970.]

Sat 23 May - Fly 5.7 (3 sorties). Cam Ranh Bay (My Ca drop zone), U.S. troop drop, 42 in 6 passes. In-country jump qualification for cooks, bakers, clerks, etc., assigned to 101st Airborne Division. Just before one sortie, while waiting for the pilots to start engines, one very small troop said, "My mother wouldn't want me to do this."

Sun 24 May - Rest. Clean room. Stars & Stripes for 20 May reports a VC woman said that VC are being told the Allies will withdraw from Vietnam this year because of strong protests back home.

Mon 25 May - Civic Action Project Board, coordinate 1 June Duy Tan High School Graduation Ceremony.

Tues 26 May - Flight plan & brief trip to Clark AB.

Wed 27 May - Letters from Wyn & Mom. Flight delayed 24 hours. Letter to Wyn.

Thu 28 May - Fly 5.6 (1 sortie) to Clark. Rough nav leg: LORAN out, TACAN and other radios unreliable. Used sunlines and driftmeter. Came in OK. Shop at Clark.

Fri 29 May - Fly 5.0 (1 sortie) Clark to Kadena. Instructing Maj. Joe Snyder. Good.

Sat 30 May - Kadena. Slept. Shopped. Visited my step-brother, Jack Arpin, who is stationed here with the U. S. Navy.

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Sun 31 May - Kadena. Mucho shop. Bought camera.

Mon 1 Jun - Fly 6.2 (1 sortie) Kadena to Clark. Bought monkey pod dishes, etc. Sorry to have missed the Duy Tan High School graduation.

Tue 2 Jun - Fly 4.7 (1 sortie) Clark to Phan Rang. Perfect nav leg, LORAN and TACAN working.

Wed 3 Jun - Buu Son District coordination. Maj. Jack Robinson, Capt. John Page, Sgt. Young, Lt. Burman.

Thu 4 Jun - Fly 5.8 (7 sorties). Hoc Mon drop zone 5 miles north of Tan Son Nhut, bundles 10 yards and 5 yards, ARVN troops 75 yards and 240 yards (they were late starting out the door by about 3 seconds = 219 yards). Tapped for Wing Standboard Navigator (Flight Examiner, replacement for Maj. Servetas when he leaves).

Fri 5 Jun - Rest. Letter and packages to Wyn with tapes I and II. Saw Col. Hoffman about Burman. [Lt. Burman got in trouble for missing a couple of early briefings and almost missing a flight. He didn't wake up when his alarm clock rang. I decided he must be turning his ears off when he slept and suggested he get an alarm clock that turned on a bright light. He did that and it worked.) John Page fini party.

Sat 6 Jun - Update Civic Action paperwork. Reproduce 35 mm slides.

Sun 7 Jun - Letters to Dick James [my Aircraft Commander for seven years in B-47's in Strategic Air Command], Mom, and Carol [my sister]. Prepare Civic Action briefing for Colonels Reed and Blood [Col. Charles S. Reed, and Col. Kenneth T. Blood, Jr.]

Mon 8 Jun - Civic Action trip around Province, Don Brewer, John Page, Sgt. Edmister. Prison Education Project. Hospital Linens Project.

Tue 9 Jun - Dreary day. Rain!

Wed 10 Jun - Civic Action Prison project. Perimeter guard shot a water buffalo last night. While

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I was riding the bus from the C-123 area to my hootch in the evening, I heard the man in front of me tell the man next to him: "I had a bad day. I was in a tower on the south perimeter last night. My partner felt sick and went back to the guard post. His replacement hadn't arrived, so I was alone. I heard something moving out there in the dark and called the guard post, but they didn't know what was happening and didn't tell me what to do. I kept hearing something moving, getting closer, like men sneaking through the bushes. Finally, I opened fire with the M-60, shooting at the sound. Didn't hear any more sounds. Come daylight, it turned out I shot a water buffalo. A bunch of officers took me out there to apologize to the owner. They gave him some money and said he could cut off all the meat he wanted. He and some other people did that. Then the officers told me to bury the rest of the buffalo. Do you have any idea how big those things are? It took me all day, and I just now finished. But I did learn one thing. From now on, if it isn't shooting, I'm not shooting."

Thu 11 Jun - Fly 2.7 (2 sorties). Instructor Navigator check by Wassal and Servetas. Night drops at Cam Ranh Bay with new light system, all good. Was told that four Vietnamese were kidnapped last night, one village chief killed. Wedding Anniversary # 15.

Fri 12 Jun - Dopey all day. Heard about a "Maid lugging rockets." No confirmation.

Sat 13 Jun - Letters from Wyn and Bruce [our son]. Sent Wyn tape III, R&R info and orders.

Sun 14 Jun - Fly 5.2 (8 sorties). A Vietnamese kid spilled a bottle of number 10 nuoc mam in our plane. The fumes were awful. The pilots opened their windows, but the fumes came forward and almost blinded them. Landed at Tan Son Nhut. Got a box of Tide and hosed out the plane. [It still stank of rotten fish several months later.] Took a specially-equipped team to Muc Hua, to kill rats and spray for lice, because there has been at least one case of bubonic plague there.

Mon 15 Jun - Mostly slept.

Tues 16 Jun - Fly 5.3 (7 sorties). As we were climbing out at dawn, we heard, "Good morning, Vietnam, this is God on Guard with a communications check. All stations report." One station after another reported in for the next hour. Drops at Hoc Mon, bundles 5 yards and 50 yards, ARVN troops 90 yards and 40 yards. Two shuttles to Song Be.

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Wed 17 Jun - Charcoal run, Buu Son District HQ. Presented Civic Action briefing at Wing Commander's Call. Appealed for school supplies, and uniforms when people leave.

Thu 18 Jun - Fly 7.6 (7 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon, bundles 00 and 25 yards, VN troops and U.S. advisors 200, 25 and 50 yards. While we were waiting at Tan Son Nhut between sorties, a U.S. Army Special Forces Lieutenant commandeered our aircraft. He had orders that said we were to put him over a set of coordinates in the northwest corner of South Vietnam. All he had with him besides his helmet and two parachutes was an M-16 and a canvas bag. I asked him what was in the bag. He said, "Money." I thought, "Special Forces paymaster. He's jumping into hostile territory, solo, to pay mercenaries. That takes guts." We refueled at Pleiku. I avoided several red circles on the map where there were known or suspected enemy anti-aircraft guns, and put him over the set of coordinates at 15,000 feet for HALO. We continued straight ahead for ten minutes, so as not to give away his position, and then returned to Pleiku. Took cargo to Djamap -- the field was surrounded by pallets of rice captured from the NVA in Cambodia + lots of mud.

Fri 19 Jun - CAO meeting. Check Form 5 [flight records]. Check on a roll of 16 mm movie film I found laying in a road. Shows airdrops. Not classified. Photo lab doesn't know who took it. Sent Wyn tape IV.

Sat 20 Jun - Civic Action, review program. New BCAA starting anew.

Sun 21 Jun - Accompanied a medical Civic Action team to Phuoc Thien hamlet. It was a fine visit. They need a pump. Base theater pm, saw movie "Cactus Flower." Letter from Scott.

Mon 22 Jun - Thap Cham visit. Bought a pump for Phuoc Thien hamlet.

Tue 23 Jun - Fly 3.9 (3 sorties). Deploy to Pleiku. Attempt to evacuate refugees from Ban Lung, Cambodia, but field too muddy to land. [The first aircraft on this mission was piloted by Major Don Rice. He had Colonel Parrish with him. They landed at Ban Lung, in the mud, and on-loaded refugees. When they took off they used every bit of "runway" and only made it because Major Rice had set the flaps down 10 degrees more than normal for takeoff. Colonel Parrish decided to cancel the rest of the C-123 flights into that field that day, including those that were already airborne. It was utter chaos on the ground, and when they arrived back at

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Pleiku, their loadmaster said he did not have an actual count of the number of refugees on board, but he figured it was around 200. Email from Don Rice, 2009] About this time, word was getting around that Civic Action had a friend in airlift, so I started getting phone calls asking for help. One was from an Army Civil Affairs Lieutenant near Cheo Reo. There had been a flood in that area. They had plenty of help from Buddhist Boy Scouts and Catholic Boy Scouts and CORDS and etc., but the flood had filled the underground bins people use to store rice, and spoiled the rice. Could I get them some rice? I said, "I'll see if I can." Next morning I went to the early briefing and looked at the schedule. Four crews were going into Djamap. I asked one of the pilots if he was coming out of there empty, and he said, "Yes." I said, "Why don't you ask the troops at Djamap to load six pallets of the captured NVA rice that is just sitting there, then shoot a practice assault landing at Cheo Reo on the way back and give the rice to the Army Civil Affairs Lieutenant." He asked, "Civic Action?" and I said, "Civic Action." I talked with the other three pilots, and the result was, they moved 24 tons of rice in less than 24 hours from the Army Lieutenant's telephone call, with no paperwork. He telephoned again that night to thank me, and said it was enough rice to last until a scheduled truck convoy arrived.



This photo was taken in May 1970 at the lake produced by the new artesian well at Thap Cham (near the base gate) should be: 1/Lt Jim Burman, Capt. John Page, Capt. Nate Rogers (?), and Major Ben Swett.

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Wed 24 Jun - Civic Action report. New navs check. Went to Red Horse construction squadron and talked with the Chief Master Sergeant about the 600 meters of access road to Luong Tri hamlet. He said he had some new troops who needed practice operating the road grader. I said the hamlet also needed a culvert. He said "No problem." All he needed was a note from me saying this was a Civic Action project so they could get off the base. A few days later, he sent the road-grader and the culvert and a backhoe to install the culvert. They did a fine job of it.

Thu 25 Jun - Fly 4.3 (6 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon, bundles 75 and 00 yards, troops 00 and 100 yards. Took a max load of Aussies to Luscombe, and cargo to Vung Tao.

Fri 26 Jun - Squadron paperwork. A grenade was found on one of our aircraft, in a paper cup with the pin pulled. The crew chief spotted it and called EOD. They removed it safely. Package from boys. Very nice. Sent Wyn tape V and books.

Sat 27 Jun - Trip to Phan Rang City and Beach Gate. Took photos. Civic Action passenger problems -- they need a note to get on aircraft. Taking job as Standboard Navigator.

Sun 28 Jun - Great flap, all day. Wing is being reduced in size. Some of our aircraft and crews will be sent stateside. Some of our navs are not qualified for overwater flights, and I am to sign them off or qualify them. I won't sign them off, so I have to qualify them.

Mon 29 Jun - Nav flap all day again. Sallee, Cotter, Phillips. Letter from Wyn.

Tue 30 Jun - Overwater nav classes for Cotter, Sallee. Clean Standboard desk.

Wed 1 Jul - Wing is getting two more navs. Set up flights. Much study. Letter from John Page. Given both Wing Navigator AND Standboard Navigator jobs. I said that isn't a good idea because I will have to evaluate my own product. Told that's my problem. This double assignment means I will have to train and qualify navigators AND Instructor Navigators AND Flight Examiners, and then recommend my own replacement as Wing Navigator or Standboard Navigator.

Thu 2 Jul - Fly 4.0 (1 sortie) overwater qualification check for Maj. John Cotter, OK.

Fri 3 Jul - More running around getting the ferry crews checked and equipped.

Sat 4 Jul - Fly 7.0 (4 sorties). Song Be (propeller), Tan Son Nhut. Loaded 76 ARVN troops for Dalat. Overflew Dalat because weather too bad to land. Went to An Thoi Island, overflew because of water on the runway. Took the ARVN troops to Bien Thuy, which is a long way from Dalat. Back to Phan Rang. Takeoff at Phan Rang was delayed to onload a C-123 propeller (disassembled) plus the chief of the propeller shop and a couple of his troops. Somebody had taxied over a fire-extinguisher bottle at Song Be and dinged the tips of one prop. When we got there, the chief studied the prop. About an inch and a half of the leading edge of the tip of each blade was curled back. He said to chock the wheels tight and stack ammunition boxes in front of that propeller. When that was done, he told the pilots to make sure the ignition was off, braced a pencil on the top ammunition box, held it against the prop, told his troops to pull the prop through slowly, and thus scribed all the blades. Then he got out a hack saw and started sawing off one of the blades right on the scribed line. That was a lot of work. His troops and both aircrews and I took turns on the hack saw. Then he smoothed the cut-off tips with a file. Finally, he said to the pilots, "Crank it." The engine started and ran smoothly. Everyone piled aboard their aircraft and we departed Song Be. Later, I was told that engine ran smoothly all the way home. The pilots throttled it back a little because it had a slightly higher RPM than the other engine.

Sun 5 Jul - Fly 1.9 (1 sortie) to Tan Son Nhut to train 19th Squadron navs in troop drops.

Mon 6 Jul - Fly 2.6 (4 sorties). Maj. Slevin troop drops at Vung Tau (Phouc Tuy drop zone), 260 yards, 200 yards and 125 yards in a strong cross wind. Not bad.

Tue 7 Jul - Fly 4.0 (7 sorties). Maj. Slevin and Maj. Bob Baker troop drops at Vung Tau (Phouc Tuy drop zone). All good. Fly 1.5 back to Phan Rang (1 sortie).

Wed 8 Jul - Fly 4.5 (1 sortie) to Clark instructing Lt. Bridges. This aircraft is going stateside, but not with our crew. Met the stateside navigator at Clark.

Thu 9 Jul - Waiting word on C-123 from Kadena to get back to Phan Rang.

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Fri 10 Jul - No word on flight from Kadena. Called Phan Rang. They said "Come home, must qualify Lt. Sallee for ferry trip stateside."

Sat 11 Jul - No C-123 from Kadena. Midnight show for C-141.

Sun 12 Jul - Fly 3.8 (6 sorties). Depart Clark 0330 on a C-141, arrive Tan Son Nhut 0800. Depart Tan Son Nhut 1035 on a C-123, flew 6 sorties, arrive Phan Rang 1640. Rat race.

Mon 13 Jul - More Sallee panic all day. Met with Col. Parish. [Col. John T. Parish, Jr., 315th Deputy Commander for Operations.] I said unless the Wing can set up an overwater mission to qualify Sallee, there isn't any way to do it.

Tues 14 Jul - Flew 6.6 (7 sorties). Hoc Mon drops. Instructor Navigator check for Capt. Nate Rogers, instructing Bridges and Gibson, all OK.

Wed 15 Jul - Final Sallee panic. Wing can't set up a special overwater mission. Lt. Sallee isn't qualified and must be scrubbed from stateside ferry mission. Told I am to take control of all nav flight scheduling to make sure this doesn't happen again. The Squadron Commanders may not like it, but that's the way it has to be. 309th TAS is inactivated and 12th SOS "Ranch Hand" is scheduled for inactivation.

Thu 16 Jul - Fly 3.9 (3 sorties) Drops at Hoc Mon, instructing Jack Slevin. Had to abort the last drop at 10 seconds to go -- lost all hydraulics and ramp door closed. Could happen in combat. Sat around Tan Son Nhut all day and finally went back to Phan Rang. Initiated a checklist change to require pinning the ramp door open prior to drops.

Fri 17 Jul - Setting up nav program. Schedule overwater training. Ken Woodward new student.

Sat 18 Jul - Fly 1.8 (5 sorties). Stan/Eval check for Lt. Wayne Bridges, night troop drops at Cam Ranh Bay (My Ca drop zone), all good.

Sun 19 Jul - 1st nav schedule flap, 311th, Molloy. Turned out OK. Stan/Eval paperwork. Civic Action trip to Hoai Trung hamlet. Hoai Trung was a Montagnard hamlet. We took agriculture tools (hoes, shovels, rakes), salvaged parachute shroudline (which they really like and use for

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everything from sewing thread to tying their houses together), and packages from people in the States. One package had a doll that opened or closed its eyes and said "Mama" when someone sat it up or laid it down. Several of the old Montagnard men sat around and played with it, saying "heh, heh"-- which is their way of laughing uproariously. After dark, a team from CORDS showed a movie of the moon landing a year ago. The Montagnards weren't impressed -- they only know the moon is high enough to clear the trees -- but they liked the Donald Duck cartoons. They called him "Mister very angry duck!"

Mon 20 Jul - 2nd nav schedule flap, Command Post, Snyder. Commanders don't want me to schedule their navs because they have other things for their navs to do. Col. Parish told them why the Wing has to do this. Got shots, etc., for R&R.

Tue 21 Jul - Fly 6.0 (6 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon, Instructor check for Murphy and drop check for Slevin, all OK. 3rd nav schedule flap. Col. Parish explained it to them. Forms galore. Nav program moving. [While I was gone, a rocket hit near the Base Exchange at Phan Rang and killed **Sgt. Richard Max Pearl** of the 1882nd Communications Squadron.]

Wed 22 Jul - Fly 2.3 (3 sorties). Phan Rang to Ban Me Thuot to Bien Hoa, then to Tan Son Nhut for R&R flight tomorrow. Met with Civic Action Office and TAC Analysis Office at Tan Son Nhut. Phan Rang received the 7th Air Force Civic Action Award.

Thu 23 Jul - R&R Trip. Departed Tan Son Nhut 2030. Refueled on Okinawa. Gained a day crossing the International Date Line. Arrived Honolulu at 1630. Wyn was there to meet me. She had rented a very nice room on the 23rd floor of the Rainbow Towers facing Diamond Head. I thought, "This must be the room where they take the photos of Diamond Head for postcards."

Fri 24 Jul - R&R. Shopped in the International Trade Mart, had lunch in a Chinese restaurant, shopped some more, and went to a night club featuring Don Ho. He sang his trademark song "Tiny Bubbles" but he didn't seem to be enjoying it.

Sat 25 Jul - R&R. Walked around the Polynesian tourist area (Ola Moana), swam and sunbathed, and went to the Hilton for supper and a night club show.

Sun 26 Jul - R&R. Took a seven-hour bus ride all around the island. The mountaneous north

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coast was spectacular, and so were the waves coming in on it. The guide said it was the best surfing area in the world, but not many were willing to try. We saw orchids everywhere, and fields of pineapples in various stages of maturity. That night there was a luau at the Hilton.

Mon 27 Jul - R&R. We went shopping in the Polynesian area, and then to Paradise Park where a very large and very friendly parrot sat on my shoulder and nibbled my hat. That night we had a Chinese dinner delivered to our room.

Tue 28 Jul - R&R. Next day we went sailing on a large glass-bottomed catamaran. The underwater view was fascinating. Just as we were about to step out of a door onto the deck, a big wave swept across the bow. I saw the spray coming and tried to stop Wyn, but she stepped past me and got drenched. She looked cute, but wasn't pleased by that adventure. We went back to the room, dried off, had lunch at Fisherman's Warf, swam and sunned in the afternoon, and had a champagne supper at the Hilton.

Wed 29 Jul - R&R Trip. Wyn on 0800 plane, me on 0930 plane. Refueled on Wake Island and Okinawa. Wake Island is TINY -- I stood on the ramp and saw ocean in all directions.

Thu 30 Jul - Lost day due to crossing International Date Line.

Fri 31 Jul - Fly 0.5 (1 sortie). Arrived Tan Son Nhut 1130, caught a C-130 to Cam Ranh Bay, then a C-123 to Phan Rang. In my quarters at 1730. Was told the pull-down maps for 10 schools had arrived and were turned over to the Province Education Office for delivery.

Sat 1 Aug - Worked nav overwater schedule all day. Ninh Thuan Province Health Assistance Program is working. In late July and early August, American and ARVN forces re-captured Kham Duc Airfield from the NVA who had captured it in May 1968. The 315th TAW flew many assault airlift missions in support of that operation, and several aircrew members earned DFCs. Kham Duc was near the Laotian border due west of Chu Lai, and had parallel paved runways over a mile long. It had once been Vietnam President Ngo Dinh Diem's private hunting lodge, and he had the airfield built in the late 1950s. [Note: Lt. Col. Joe Jackson of the 311th squadron earned the Congressional Medal of Honor on 12 May 1968 during the evacuation of Kham Duc. There is a photo of his C-123 on the ground as he rescued a combat control team -- it is the only photo of a Medal of Honor action as it was happening.]

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Sun 2 Aug - Day off. Wrote to Wyn, Mom. Cleaned room. Strawberries! After supper, I got a call from the air freight terminal saying they had a large pallet for me, and went to the terminal. It was about half a ton of little strawberry plants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, all nicely packed in little boxes with cardboard dividers, wooden floors and risers for the layers. The pallet was addressed to Major Ben Swett, Civic Action, Phan Rang, Vietnam. I had not ordered it and didn't know it was coming, so it must have been arranged by the University professor to whom the Lieutenant sent soil and water samples and climate data. Unfortunately, I can't find or remember the name of the Lieutenant or the University.

Mon 3 Aug - Strawberries. Cleaned up 309th accident reports. Stan/Eval paperwork. I assembled about 20 volunteers to start delivering the strawberry plants, and went with the first delivery to Luong Tri. The volunteers put the plants in holes cut in the sides of 50-gallon barrels filled with dirt, and also planted some along the banks of irrigation ditches. I went back to my office, and they took the rest of the strawberry plants to the RD Cadre for distribution around the Province. [I don't know if the strawberries survived in Ninh Thuan Province, but they were spreading rapidly along the banks of irrigation ditches before I left. I recently read that Dalat is famous for strawberries, brought there by the French in the 1930's.]

Tue 4 Aug - Fly 5.1 (6 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon. Instructor check for Nicholson, first drop for Kothanek, all OK. Took cargo to Vung Tao.

Wed 5 Aug - CARP cards. Over-water and other Stan/Eval paperwork. Threw out another ton or so of old paperwork.

Thu 6 Aug - CARP cards. Drop mission canceled.

Fri 7 Aug - Fly 5.7 (6 sorties). Nha Trang (large seated Buddha), Bien Hoa, Bien Tuy, Muc Hoa. Low pass to look at the very large reclining Buddha near Ham Tan.

Sat 8 Aug - 1330 Base HQ for Civic Action Award. Presenter didn't show. CARP cards pm. Maintenance put a new floor in my room. Dollars Scholars put on a variety show, very good.

Sun 9 Aug - Off till noon. CARP cards and paperwork. Stars & Stripes for 6 August has an article

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saying the Communists know their main force units have failed in South Vietnam, and they will have to go back to guerrilla warfare, but the South Vietnamese people aren't supporting them.

Mon 10 Aug - Worked on CARP cards. Letter to Wyn. Bookie 527 [tail number 55-4527] crashed at Cam Ranh Bay today, three killed. [Major Grant Reed Waugh, pilot, Capt. Dwaine E. Mattox, co-pilot, and TSgt Bernard F. Morrill, Flight Engineer, all of the 310th TAS.] They were using full flaps during a steep approach for a practice assault landing; a flap hinge broke; that flap went above level while the other flap stayed full down causing uncontrollable roll, and they went into the water almost upside-down just short of the runway. The loadmaster, **Robert Agrifolio** survived. "Bookie" was the radio call-sign for all 315th airlift missions. See Phan Rang Newsletter 143 for the story on this crash. The "Bookie" number was assigned to the mission being flown and not to individual aircraft as such.

Tue 11 Aug - Fly 1.4 (2 sorties) to Tan Son Nhut to train navs. Bundle drop canceled. Talk with Bob Baker. Wing set a record for sorties. [When I stayed overnight at Tan Son Nhut, the 19th TAS provided a bunk in their officers' quarters. This worked both ways: at Phan Rang, my top bunk was available when needed, and sometimes a tired pilot or navigator arrived in the middle of the night.]

Wed 12 Aug - Fly 3.8 (6 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon. Troop drop qualification for Capt. Stephens, 241 VN, all very good, so good I took a nap. Mexican food for lunch.

Thu 13 Aug - Fly 4.0 (6 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon. Troop drop qualification for Capt. Potts, 231 VN, all good. Bundle drop canceled. Talked with new navs.

Fri 14 Aug - Fly 3.6. (6 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon. Troop drop qualification for Capt. Sher, 245 VN, all good. Cleaned up drop folders for 19th TAS.

Sat 15 Aug - Fly 1.2 (1 sortie) Tan Son Nhut to Phan Rang. Received the Phan Rang Civic Action Quarterly Award for April through June, presented by Col. Frank Mertely (Phan Rang Base Commander). Worked on drop folders. See **Phan Rang Newsletter 26** "Swett Given Civic Award" (Pacific Stars & Stripes, Friday, August 21, 1970).

Sun 16 Aug - Took a day off. No mail in 12 days.

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Mon 17 Aug - Received Air Medal for Operation Commando Pepper. Worked on nav schedule, Civic Action, Awards & Decs letter. No mail.

Tue 18 Aug - Fly 5.0 (7 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon. Theater Qualification for Maj. John Kothanek. He did very well.

Wed 19 Aug - Admin duties. Paperwork. Col. Parish's map. CARE PACKAGE from home, with goodies and letters. Excellent.

Thu 20 Aug - Fly 5.2 (5 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon. Theater Qualification for Lt. Wayne Bridges, good, instruction for Lt. Sam Gibson, OK. Weather was bad at Phan Rang, so we landed at Bu Prang until it cleared.

Fri 21 Aug - Slept late. Paperwork, Nav overwater schedule.

Sat 22 Aug - Paperwork. Letter to Wyn.

Sun 23 Aug - Overwater schedule, paperwork.

Mon 24 Aug - Fly 7.7 (1 sortie) to Taipei. Stan/Eval check for Lt. John Molloy, OK. Having chills & fever in flight, feeling sick.

Tue 25 Aug - Taipei. Feeling very sick, went to Embassy (Navy) hospital. Overheard two doctors talking while they looked at my x-rays: "Where is he?" "Standing out there in the hall." "Do you mean he walked in here?" "Yes." I didn't like the sound of that. They told me I have "quadralocal" pneumonia [four areas, one in the top and one in the bottom of each lung], gave me antibiotics (a shot and pills), and told me to rest at the hotel.

Wed 26 Aug - Taipei. In bed most of the day. Article in "Stars & Stripes" about me receiving the Phan Rang Civic Action Quarterly Award for April through June.

Thu 27 Aug - Taipei. To hospital am. Doing better. A little shopping pm. Bought a nice set of chinaware dishes for Wyn at the Navy Exchange. They will mail it to her. [She was very pleased,

partly because the shipment didn't all arrive at once. She got another box of chinaware in the mail every couple of days for more than a week.]

Fri 28 Aug - Fly 9.4 (2 sorties). Taipei to Da Nang to Phan Rang. Long hard day. Very tired. Missed all meals except a sandwich at 0930.

Sat 29 Aug - Work overwater schedule, My Ca drop zone scheduling problems. Five new navs arrived in the Wing this week.

Sun 30 Aug - Rested.

Mon 31 Aug - Civic Action meeting -- told the whole program is about to be canceled by a policy change coming out of 7th Air Force Headquarters. I asked why and was told, "Vietnamization. We're pulling back and turning everything over to them."

Tue 1 Sep - Fly 4.7 (5 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon. Theater Qualification for Maj. Bob Baker of the 19th Squadron. He did very well.

Wed 2 Sep - Finance, mail. Got Nomex flight suits -- don't like them. They're too hot and not comfortable. Letter to Wyn.

Thu 3 Sep - Fly 5.9 (6 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon. Theater Qualification for Brian Stephens and Doug Potts, all OK. My 36th birthday. Had a steak and a bottle of Lancer's at the Club.

Fri 4 Sep - Rest. Admin.

Sat 5 Sep - Fly 7.6 (10 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon. Troop drop qualification for Lt. Col. Dick Williams and Maj. Clyde Campbell. They did well even with tough shifting winds. Dropped 349 VN -- all in the drop zone. Pilot was Col. Reed. [Col. Charles S. Reed, 315th TAW Commander.]

Sun 6 Sep - Off am. Admin pm. CARP cards.

Mon 7 Sep - Fly 4.5 (5 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon. Troop drop qualification for Maj. Bill Pantle,

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128 VN, OK. Jet engine burned up, had to evacuate aircraft on runway. Waited while maintenance replaced the engine. It didn't take them long. Letter to Mom.

Tue 8 Sep - Fly 2.8 (3 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon. Had to abort drop at 15 seconds to go -- a flap hinge broke just like the bird that crashed at Cam Ranh Bay, but fortunately it happened as the pilots were retracting flaps, so no uncontrollable roll. More Tan Son Nhut ramp time.

Wed 9 Sep - Paperwork. Got a lot done, all little things.

Thu 10 Sep - Fly 4.9 (5 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon. Had a three hour weather delay at Tan Son Nhut, but completed Theater Qualification for Bernie Sher. On the last bundle drop, the pilot did a diving S-turn to keep the drop zone in sight between the clouds. I happened to look up through the top windows of the cockpit from where I was standing in the cargo compartment and saw a C-119 drop a string of paratroops in front of us. We were going to fly right through those troops. I got on the interphone and yelled, "Abort! Abort the drop! Break right!" The pilot immediately leveled the aircraft and did a hard right turn, so we missed the troops with plenty of room to spare. That night at the bar, the pilot, Capt. Pat Stajdel, bought me a drink and said, "Don't ever buy yourself a drink if I'm around."

Fri 11 Sep - Civic Action Officers meeting on the new Community Relations (CR) program that is replacing Civic Action. Worked on CARP cards, nav paperwork.

Sat 12 Sep - Designed a fuel cruise control worksheet for ferry missions. Paperwork. Letter to Wyn.

Sun 13 Sep - Flight schedule loused up. Tried to get to Tan Son Nhut all day. Finally told no need to go.

Mon 14 Sep - Scheduling navs for ferry flights -- 99 changes and then ferry mission postponed 30 days. Ug.

Tue 15 Sep - Fly 2.1 (3 sorties). Cam Ranh Bay -- checked on My Ca drop zone and loading problems -- then cargo to Phan Thiet. Got back before noon. Big panic -- Operation Commando Pepper again -- helped launch 2 birds and 3 crews. Hectic day.

Wed 16 Sep - Bad back. Admin.

Thu 17 Sep - Fly 4.2 (4 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon. Check ride for Lt. Sam Gibson. He busted it. Bad aircrew briefing, got lost in the drop pattern, and lined up on the downwind side of the drop zone for troop drop, so I had to abort the drop. No way.

Fri 18 Sep - Paperwork. CA/CR meeting. Feeling bad -- back & stomach. Missed \$75 drawing at the Club -- they called my name but I wasn't there.

Sat 19 Sep - Tried to rest up. Still feeling bad, but back is better. Letter to Wyn.

Sun 20 Sep - Fly 5.3 (9 sorties). Instructing Lt. Gibson, map reading and emergency procedures. He did OK. I have 3000 flying hours as of this week. Feeling better.

Mon 21 Sep - CA/CR meeting. New CR Board of Governors. Maj. Harry K. Strong, 315th Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, was elected president of the five-man Community Relations Fund Board of Governors. Under the new 7th Air Force directive, all donations, either by an organization or an individual, will have to be made to the fund and not directly distributed to the Vietnamese recipients. This includes both money and material goods. The fund will receive, store and distribute all donations based on the needs of the community. This will be done through personal presentation by the donor wherever possible. When donations to the fund are for a specified purpose, such as the Dollars For Scholars Program, every effort will be made by the board to insure the donation is distributed accordingly. If it isn't possible, the money will be used for other community relations projects being funded by the board.

Tue 22 Sep - Fly 5.9 (9 sorties). Tac Nav instruction for Maj. Claude Campbell, OK. Passenger sorties to Pleiku, Kontum, Phu Cat, English.

Wed 23 Sep - Trying to salvage whatever is left of our Civic Action program since 7th Air Force killed Civic Action by replacing it with the Community Relations program. Col. Blood backs my effort. He said the GI's love Civic Action, but the commanders hate it. He didn't offer an explanation, and I didn't ask him why they hate it.

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Thu 24 Sep - Fly 5.3 (6 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon. Theater Qualification for Lt. Col. Dick Williams, Instructor Qualification for Maj. Bob Baker, both good. There are three new Thai navs in the 19th Squadron at Tan Son Nhut. Our squadron commanders are responding to my suggestions for salvaging CA/CR.

Fri 25 Sep - Paperwork & CA/CR. Letter to Wyn.

Sat 26 Sep - CR meeting 0930. Worked on CR all day in room.

Sun 27 Sep - Fly 6.4 (7 sorties). Tac Nav check for Maj. Bill Pantle, OK.

Mon 28 Sep - Work on analysis of Ninh Thuan Province article in the Washington Post that looks like it was written or edited in Hanoi. Brief Bill Pantle on CA/CR.

Tue 29 Sep - Fly 2.3 (5 sorties). Cam Ranh Bay to coordinate drops at My Ca drop zone (hopefully). Stopped for awhile in Dalat. Very pretty. Worked on nav overwater schedule for October. Wyn's 38th birthday. Tried to call her on the MARS telephone link, but couldn't get through. All their lines were busy.

Wed 30 Sep - Worked on airdrop briefing guide. I have 281 days in country, 76 to go. Letter to Mom. 12th Special Operations Squadron "Ranch Hand" inactivated.

Thu 1 Oct - Revise nav airdrop briefing guide.

Fri 2 Oct - Trip to town. Delivered Civic Action uniforms for PSDF. Saw Mr. Owen, SPA.

Sat 3 Oct - Rewrite AFM 55-123 Chapter 8 [the official C-123 airdrop procedures that detail the meaning of "Go by the book"]. Talked with Bill Pantle almost all night while consuming a couple bottles of (very sweet) Chinese plum brandy. Just as we finished the last bottle I was forcefully reminded that I can't drink that much brandy.

Sun 4 Oct - Fly 4.5 (6 sorties). Cargo sorties. Needed a break and this is a good way.

Mon 5 Oct - Work on Chapter 8, new airdrop briefing guide.

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Tue 6 Oct - Fly 1.7 (2 sorties). Went with a bladder bird taking helicopter fuel to Tan Linh. Aircraft has a huge canvas bag (bladder) that covers the cargo compartment floor about 5 feet deep. Took some photos at Tan Linh. Stopped one crew member from taking a photo of a very old Vietnamese man being bathed outdoors by his wife or daughter, because the old man seemed embarrassed. Worked on airdrop briefing guide the rest of day.

Wed 7 Oct - Awards & Decs. Base closed to change MPC [Military money, changed often to avoid counterfeiting and currency speculation. U.S. money wasn't allowed on base or off base in Vietnam.] Talked with Mr. Huong at the base bank. He likes my Civic Action stories.

Thu 8 Oct - Fly 5.1 (9 sorties). Instructing Lt. Gibson, simulated drop at Nhon Co, he did OK. Fini flight for Maj. Don Rice. I made it a point to fly with him on his finis flight because he was my pilot on the Hiep Duc airdrop mission.

Fri 9 Oct - Drew up assault approach chart for Chapter 8, also large briefing poster. Letter to Wyn.

Sat 10 Oct - Arrangements and briefings for trip tomorrow. Paperwork at Stan/Eval.

Sun 11 Oct - Fly 5.9 (1 sortie) to Clark. Overwater check for Lt. Bridges, OK.

Mon 12 Oct - Fly 6.3 (1 sortie) Clark to Kadena. Instructing Maj. John Kothanek. He is a bit slow, but does very well considering he was an Electronic Warfare Officer for a long time. Feeling poorly.

Tue 13 Oct - Kadena. Feeling sick -- diarrhea.

Wed 14 Oct - Kadena. Delay due to Typhoon Nora at Clark. Took hot pepper sauce to stop the diarrhea. It worked.

Thu 15 Oct - Kadena. Feeling better.

Fri 16 Oct - Kadena. Shopped. Bought sewing kit stuff for CA/CR, \$280 worth.

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Sat 17 Oct - Fly 5.8 (1 sortie) to Clark. Took over navigation to avoid an ADIZ [Air Defense Identification Zone] violation. Turned and flew along the ADIZ until we got to the entry corridor. An air defense radar operator was watching us and radioed, "That was pretty good navigation, Bookie. No foul, no penalty." Got wood flowers for Wyn.

Sun 18 Oct - Fly 5.0 (1 sortie) to Phan Rang. Good trip. Kothanek flew an OK nav leg. Nose wheel shimmied hard on landing, but pilots kept us on the runway.

Mon 19 Oct - Worked on C-123 airdrop regs. Have to rewrite more of AFM 55-123. Letter to Wyn.

Tue 20 Oct - Fly 2.0 (2 sorties). Tan Linh again, with a helicopter fuel bladder.

Wed 21 Oct - Took the day off. Mailed beau coup boxes, filed for per diem, etc.

Thu 22 Oct - Fly 6.0 (6 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon. Theater Qualification for Bill Pantle, excellent. Familiarization ride for Lt. Col. Lou Bernasconi. Dinner at Col. Wright's trailer. [Lt. Col. Robert Wright, 310th TAS Commander.]

Fri 23 Oct - Worked all day on rewriting AFM 55-123 checklists and Chapter 8. Received a globe of the world in the mail from Mom for An Phuoc High School. Wing party, and visited Aussies.

Sat 24 Oct - Met with Col. Parish. He wants Lt. Col. Bernasconi for Wing Navigator. I said we should see how well he does in qualification checks. Hootch party.

Sun 25 Oct - Met with Col. Parish. I recommended Maj. Bill Pantle for Standboard Navigator. He agreed. Worked on airdrop and overwater checklists.

Mon 26 Oct - Worked on Chapter 8, checklists and scheduling.

Tue 27 Oct - Fly 4.2 (4 sorties). An all-day affair with two missions to Cam Ranh Bay. Bundle drop qualification for Lt. Col. Bernasconi, Maj. Marshall and Capt. Ken Link. Instructor qualification for Maj. Nicholson and Capt. Douglas Potts. Flight Examiner qualification for Capt.

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Nate Rogers. All did very well.

Wed 28 Oct - Work on Chapter 8 and airdrop checklists. Letter to Dick James.

Thu 29 Oct - Work on Chapter 8 and airdrop checklists.

Fri 30 Oct - Chapter 8 and checklists. Helped Bud Smith build a Ringmaster model airplane. Letter to Wyn.

Sat 31 Oct -- Worked Chapter 8 and overwater schedules.

Sun 1 Nov - Went in to fly -- didn't need to, decided not to. Worked on Chapter 8.

Mon 2 Nov - Chapter 8 all day. Received two gallons of slate paint in the mail from Mom. She bought them at a local hardware store in Arkansas, and had to get the covers brazed shut before the post office would take them.

Tue 3 Nov - Test flew Bud Smith's Ringmaster model airplane -- it flies OK. Trip to An Phuoc High School, took globe, got their old blackboards. Jay Scarborough was very pleased with the globe and the set of eight pull-down maps he received earlier.

Wed 4 Nov - Fly 2.9 (4 sorties). Bladder bird to Tan Linh and Ham Tan. Worked Chapter 8 rest of day. Letter from the University of New Hampshire saying I have received my Masters Degree. Letter from Bruce.

Thu 5 Nov - Fly 6.3 (8 sorties). Load of 80 VN Navy from Nha Trang to Tan Son Nhut. Load of 60 VN Special Forces and families from Tan Son Nhut to Nha Trang. Troop drops and bundle drops at Hoc Mon by Gibson, Link and Marshall. All did well. Letter to Wyn.

Fri 6 Nov - Fly 4.6 (6 sorties). Troop drops at Hoc Mon by Lt. Col. Bernasconi and Capt. Titi (RTAF), both qualified. Pilot was Maj. Surapong (RTAF).

Sat 7 Nov - Chapter 8, schedules, coordination for more drops. Letter to Bruce.

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Sun 8 Nov - Took refurbished blackboards to An Phuoc High School. Lt. Printz did the work using Mom's slate paint. A fine trip. Planning Navigators Union Party.

Mon 9 Nov - Civic Action briefing for Col. Reed at 0800 tomorrow. Worked on it most of the night. Mamma-son Ngai fired for stealing. Evidence was circumstantial.

Tue 10 Nov - Bruce's 11th birthday. Missed bus, got chewed for being late, then was told Col. Reed doesn't want my briefing but does want to see me in his office. Made me wonder if I was in trouble. Turned out the request for a Civic Action briefing was just an excuse to get me in his office to tell me I'm on the list for promotion to Lt. Col.

Wed 11 Nov - Worked on Chapter 8. Bill Pantle went to Da Nang with Vietnamese Red Cross workers. Letter to Wyn.

Thu 12 Nov - Fly 0.9 (2 sorties). To Cam Ranh Bay for drops at My Ca drop zone. Drops canceled due to rain and poor visibility. Nate Rogers went to Tan Son Nhut to drop qualify Collman. Good! Planning a party for all 315th navigators. Worked on "medal" and "citation" for Nick Nicholson. Called the Club and reserved largest room for 22 Nov.

Fri 13 Nov - Fly 3.6 (4 sorties). To Cam Ranh Bay for drops at My Ca drop zone. Theater Qual for Campbell, OK. Instruct Maj. Brown. Navigation recheck for Lt. Gibson: he busted it badly. Not prepared at all, borrowed Campbell's map and mission plan, got lost 4 miles off course and too low to clear a mountain. I had to take over navigation to get us back on course and altitude. Bernasconi has accepted responsibility for arranging drops. OK! Sent letters to all 315th navigators announcing the "Navigators Union" party at the Club 2000 hrs on 22 Nov.

Sat 14 Nov - Worked on Chapter 8. Received a large box in the mail from Ila [my mother-in-law]. Very good. Packages of dried fruit on top. On-lookers said "Oooo!" and helped themselves. They weren't interested in the layers of shorts and tee-shirts and books, etc, and drifted away. Then, at the bottom, lo and behold! Another layer of dried fruit. I hid those packages in a dresser drawer.

Sun 15 Nov - 1400 critique of Lt. Gibson in 311th Commander's office. I said Gibson should be grounded for his repeated flying safety violations. Commander said to give him another chance.

Worked on Chapter 8.

Mon 16 Nov - Slept in am. Chapter 8. Nav exams for Maj. Lloyd Brown. Letter to Mom.

Tue 17 Nov - Fly 6.0 (8 sorties). Instructor Qual for Maj. Pat Marshall instructing Lt. Gibson, both OK. Learned that my port call to go home is 8 Dec at Cam Ranh Bay.

Wed 18 Nov - Chapter 8 graphs and checklists. Mr. Huong invited me to his home in Phan Rang City for the evening to thank me for my work in Civic Action. At supper with his family, they gave me a plate of chicken heads. I said I knew this was an honor, but the honor should go to the oldest man present. Then I couldn't stand my hypocrisy anymore and said, "And besides, I don't like to eat chicken heads." There was a long silence. Then Mr. Huong's aged father leaned over and whispered to him, and he translated: "The father says, he thinks you are the only honest American ever to eat here." I said, "Thank you." Everyone smiled, the chicken heads were transferred to Mr. Huong's father, and we continued with the supper. As I left, Mr. Huong gave me a lovely table lamp.

Thu 19 Nov - Fly 5.3 (4 sorties). Phan Rang to Tan Son Nhut with Bernasconi instructing Gibson. Changed aircraft for drops at Hoc Mon. Troop drop and Theater Qual for Maj. Lloyd Brown, OK, in minimum time. Caught Bookie 101 while taxiing for the ride home.

Fri 20 Nov - Chapter 8 forms. Jerry LaBombard (CORDS Chief) and Mary Maughn came to pick up our Civic Action sewing kits. They will deliver them to the RD Cadre.

Sat 21 Nov - Chapter 8 and drop mission checklists. 311th Squadron party.

Sun 22 Nov - Navigators Union Party! The biggest blast of the year. As they arrived, each navigator was given a "Pilot-Attention-Getter" (1-inch diameter stick 14 inches long) and I opened the meeting by reading the detailed instructions for its use. After suitable refreshments and many war stories, the meeting was called to attention for the formal presentation of "The Flower of Taiwan" medal to Maj. Merrill S. "Nick" Nicholson because he had "repeatedly, frequently, persistently and forcefully volunteered to undertake lengthy aerial flights over the hazardous, shark-infested, typhoon-plagued waters of the South China Sea for the purpose of bringing economic succor and relief to impoverished people and struggling business

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establishments of Taiwan." More refreshments and war stories and presentations followed. At the end of the party, they called me forward and gave me a plaque. Hand-carved on the back, it has: "Presented to Ben H. Swett, Lt. Col. (select), CINC NAV 315 TAW, Phan Rang AB, RVN, Nov 22, 1970, by the Navigators Union." The front of the plaque has a metal plate with the words: "Dirty Old Men Need Love Too."

Mon 23 Nov - To work after lunch, haircut and neck massage. More checklists. Letter to Wyn.

Tue 24 Nov - Checklists. Meeting on Navigator part of Vietnamization. Found the Regulation that covers it, but Vietnam doesn't really have any trained navigators, so they will have to cross-train pilots.

Wed 25 Nov - Cleaned up Civic Action office. Worked on checklists. Cleaning room.

Thu 26 Nov - Fly 5.2 (6 sorties) Drops at Hoc Mon. Standboard Nav Flight Examiner qualification for Bill Pantle, good. Drops for Bernasconi, good. Instruct Gibson, fair. Thanksgiving Day hoagies at Tan Son Nhut and 311th Squadron feast at Phan Rang.

Fri 27 Nov - Supposed to fly, drop at My Ca -- rained out. Worked on checklists, drop planning folders. Checking out Bill Pantle to take over CA/CR program.

Sat 28 Nov - Bookie 102 [tail number 55-4574] crashed at 1330 yesterday in hills west of Cam Ranh Bay. Bob Baker was on it. 79 people, 6 U.S. from the 19th TAS at Tan Son Nhut [Maj Robert L. Baker, 1Lt Marvin S. Arthington¹, 1Lt Frederick M. Rader, TSgt William B. O'Keiff, Sgt

¹ **Dave Lampila** was following various threads on his old friend, Marve Arthington, who was killed in the C-123 crash on November 28, 1970. Marve was a good friend. We had been in pilot training together in Laredo, C-123 training at Lockbourne, survival schools in Washington and the Philippines, then assigned to Phan Rang and immediately moved to Tan Son Nhut when we arrived in December. In Saigon, we were both eventually re-assigned to the 315th working the Bookie flights. Marve arranged the loads and I monitored and directed the C-123 flights during the day. We were both attached for flying. I had flown the same flight as Marve the day before his crash. I had a beautiful sunny day over the mountains, not our typical route. He did not. I did not know for many years that his body had been found. I've visited the Wall to see his name. It seems 41 years after the crash, I'm still looking for closure. Your writing helped in finding another piece of the story. **Ben Swett responded:** They were flying the regular passenger mission from Saigon to Nha Trang and back. Apparently, they didn't land at Nha

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Allen J. Bodin, A1C Frederick R. Neef] and 73 VN. Waited all day for the weather to break so I could fly search with the FAC. 311th Squadron Commander's Call gave me a fini plaque. Saw Lt. Gibson at the bar, with his head down over his beer. I asked him if he realized Bookie 102 hit near where he would have hit if I hadn't taken over his navigation recheck mission. His head went down farther. I said, "I think you can be a good navigator, if you have finally realized that people get killed for navigators' mistakes, and you won't be hand-carried forever." He nodded but said nothing. [Later I heard that he did well on his qualification recheck missions.]

Sun 29 Nov - Bookie 540 [tail number 54-0649] crashed today at 0820, 15 miles south of Cam Ranh Bay. [Capt Cecil Gerald Moyer Jr, 1Lt James Francis Saxby, SSgt Grayson Henry Newberry, SSgt Harry Allen Watson, Capt Norbert Albert Podhajsky] There were 44 people aboard, including 14 U.S. on their way to catch their freedom bird. I flew 2.2 with the "Walt" FAC (O-2) looking for Bookie 102. Didn't find them. Bill Pantle flew the second sortie with the FAC. Didn't find them. At the bar that night, some idiot said, "Why are you and Bill busting your humps flying with the FAC? They're probably all dead anyway." I blew my top: "Look, Mac, if it's you laying out there in the weeds all busted, what're you thinking?" He said, "I guess I'm hoping somebody's coming to get me." I said, "Right! That's why Bill and I are looking for them. We've got to keep the faith." He put his head down and nodded.

Mon 30 Nov - Stood by all day to search for Bookie 102 and 540. Total of 123 people, 38 U.S. Weather in the hills was impossible. No use losing another bird. But hard waiting. Glad to hear that Dusty Rhodes wasn't on Bookie 540. [He had finished his tour and was going to Cam Ranh Bay to catch his freedom bird. As he was walking out to Bookie 540 a friend of his said "Why don't you come and ride with me?" so he changed aircraft at the last minute.]

Trang because of high winds and bad visibility, and headed back to Saigon, but they were flying in zero visibility and didn't climb soon enough or fast enough to clear the first mountain that is over 4,000' high. They hit 500' below the top of the mountain. Bill Pantle found the wreckage nine days later, as I reported in my diary, and guided a helicopter to it. The PJ got into the wreckage and said everyone was dead. He also said the wreckage and the bodies had been looted of everything useful, no doubt by the locals. Because they knew everyone was dead, and there was no road up that mountain and no place to land a helicopter, plus awful weather, the recovery team didn't get there until after Christmas. By that time, the wreckage had been burned, again no doubt by the locals, using fuel from the aircraft fuel tanks, so there wasn't much left. The recovery team sent the remains to Hawaii for identification, which took awhile. That is why you didn't know Marvin's body had been recovered.

Tues 1 Dec - Stood by. Squared away Stan/Eval and Civic Action jobs for Bill Pantle. Started cleaning room and packing.

Wed 2 Dec - Stood by. Finished Chapter 8 and checklists -- they are ready for final typing on mats for printer. Talked with Bill Pantle.

Thu 3 Dec - Fly 5.7 (6 sorties). Drops at Hoc Mon, instructing Gibson. Dropped my last 3 bundles, 00 yards. Fini flight, but no party. My own fault because I didn't tell anyone it was my fini flight. Stevens talked with me; Bernasconi bought me a beer.

Fri 4 Dec - Packing and clearing. Bookie 540 was located today on a mountain south of Cam Ranh Bay by U.S. and ARVN Rangers. We were told the GCA operator flew him into the mountain -- 5 nautical mile radar range error. There were two VN survivors, found making their way West toward the highway, no American survivors. [37 years later, I learned there were two American survivors, Vincent J. Fairbrother, Jr, and Gary Aldredge. The Rangers found them the next day, 5 December, at the crash site. They were badly injured and had no food or water for seven days.]

Sat 5 Dec - Cleared the base -- finance, flight records, medical, dental, etc. Good help and support from all agencies. Appreciated it. Given a copy of a recommendation for the Bronze Star Medal for my work as 315th Wing Navigator and Flight Examiner signed by Col. Parish. A very nice write-up. [It was disapproved somewhere up the line. I didn't get the Bronze Star.] Found out I was awarded the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm for my work in Civic Action. It came to the Wing and was put in my file, but no one arranged for the Vietnamese to present it.

Sun 6 Dec - Loafed, packed, wrote letters.

Mon 7 Dec - 0900 wakeup. Said so long to everyone in the C-123 area, and went back to my hootch in the evening. Bill Pantle and several other men came to my room. He found Bookie 102 this afternoon while flying with the FAC. They guided a helicopter to the crash site, but the rescue team found everyone dead. Many men gathered in my room and around the door to hear about it. Bill was shaken by what he saw from the air. He said, "They were all dead, but I

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"Stories worth telling"

kept the faith." I said, "Yes, Bill, you have kept the faith." The Chaplain left abruptly, returned with two bottles of Jack Daniels, and set them on the table. The alcohol helped us talk it out. Zero sleep.

Tue 8 Dec - Fly 0.7 (1 sortie) 0630 takeoff Phan Rang to Cam Ranh Bay. Last flight in a C-123. I flew 106 days of my 350 days in Vietnam, for a total of 462 sorties and 474 flying hours in C-123's, plus several flights in other aircraft that didn't count because I wasn't a crew member. While waiting at Cam Ranh Bay, I was paged by name, and wondered who in the world knew I was there. It was a phone call from the Phan Rang personnel officer. His opening line was, "I hope you didn't buy a house in Alamogordo." He said my orders have been changed. I'm not going back to the Air Force Office of Research Analyses at Holloman AFB. I'm going to Air Force Systems Command Headquarters at Andrews AFB, Washington, DC. Departed Cam Ranh Bay at 2230 on a chartered airliner.

Wed 9 Dec - Arrived Kadena 0220, departed 0330. Arrived Yakota 0530, departed 0755. Gained a day crossing the International date line. Arrived McChord 2310, departed 0030. Arrived Denver 0350, departed 0820. Arrived Oklahoma City 0940, departed 1420. Arrived Ponca City, Oklahoma, airport 9 Dec at 1535. Wyn and our boys and her family were there to meet me. Glad to be home.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

...keeping the memories alive

Phan Rang AB News No. 153 “Stories worth telling”



Service Details

Current Service Status

USAF Retired

Current/Last Rank

Colonel

Current/Last Primary AFSC/MOS

2816-Staff Development Engineer

Current/Last AFSC Group

Engineer

Primary Unit

1980-1985, 2716, Defense Logistics Agency (DLA)

Previously Held AFSC/MOS

1525B-Navigator-Bombardier

2695Z-Scientist

2716-Acquisition Management Officer

Service Years

1955 - 1985

Doug's Comments

This is the longest newsletter, ever. While this diary gives you an excellent look into the daily activities of an aircrew member in Vietnam please remember that each person's experiences are unique. Someone loading bombs on aircraft, cooking the meals or guarding the base will have entirely different war time experiences so this is not to be construed as the consummate

Air Force Vietnam experience. On a personal note the author, Ben Swett, and his wife just celebrated their 63rd wedding anniversary this June 2018. In addition I just discovered that his

relative was the founder, and name sake of the village in Wisconsin where my paternal grandparents and great-grandparents settled upon arrival in America from Germany. Recently an idea has been floated that we have a reunion with our brothers from the No. 2 Squadron in

Australia and the response was very favorable, so stay tuned. This newsletter was compiled and published by [Douglas Severt](#). Previous issues of the Phan Rang Newsletter are available

[here](#) for download.