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Serving Our Country

A Vietnam Veteran is the Sum of All of His Stories



History of the Combat Security Police In Vietnam Operation Safeside

Operation Safeside in a nutshell: The principles of Operation **safeside** was started during the early days of the Vietnam War. Before **Safeside**, Army units defended airbases from

outside the perimeters, while security police defended the areas “inside the wire.” However, the army units often had to respond to other actions, and enemy forces were than free to move close enough to launch attacks on the bases.

Safeside changed that, replacing the army units on perimeter defense with specially-trained security forces.

MEDIA REPORTS ON OPERATION SAFESIDE

Special AF Unit In Training to Defend Bases

(Pacific Stars & Stripes, Friday, December 16, 1966)

S&S Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON—The Air Force has formed a new type of special air police unit trained in advanced ground combat and guerrilla warfare to expand and strengthen its air base defenses.

It is assumed the unit will head for Vietnam early in 1967, although the Air Force would not confirm this. Eventually special air police units may be sent to major commands worldwide for base security in future emergencies, Air Force officials explained.

Air policemen have been trained over the past few months to operate all kinds of small arms and crew-served infantry weapons, including the 81-mm mortar, special still-classified items of equipment, and the latest techniques of security. Training has been conducted at a special school that was set up at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, as a part of operation safeside.

Air Force officers are due to evaluate the initial training by Dec. 16 before the 200-man squadron is given an operational test at an undisclosed destination — probably South Vietnam — early in 1967.

If the program is successful, officials here ultimately hope to create a special security organization of three groups possibly assigning one in PACAF, one in USAFE and one in the U.S. Air bases are prime targets in both conventional and guerrilla warfare.

In Vietnam the Viet Cong have hit U.S. bases on several occasions, including two attacks on Bien Hoa and one on Tan Son Nhut outside of Saigon. Air police bore the brunt of the Dec. 3 VC

attack on Tan Son Nhut.

An Air Force official said the mission of the new unit basically is to bolster and expand the Air Force defense zone to include the whole base perimeter against- infiltration and attack by a small group.

The test unit is called the 1041st Security Police Sq. commanded by Lt. Col. W. H. Wise.

Air police have been taking ground combat and specialized security training since Sept. 5. Tactical training began Oct. 7 and counter-guerrilla training started Oct. 24. Scout dogs trained at Lackland AFB, Tex., to track and detect infiltrators, form a part of the 1041st.

If the Air Force is satisfied with results and decides to go ahead and form more units like the 1041st, they will be trained in the future at a stateside installation yet to be designated, officials pointed out.

Schofield Barracks was chosen for the initial effort due to its adaptability, housing and existing facilities that have been used by the Army for some time.

About half the men involved in Operation Safeside so far come from the Pacific Air Force units and the remainder from stateside air bases.

New Unit Bolsters Air Base Defenses

(Pacific Stars & Stripes, Wednesday, June 12 1968)

By SGT ROGER A. NEUMANN

S&S Staff Correspondent

Phan Rang, Vietnam - The U.S. Air Force has come down to earth to provide a new defense force for its bases in Vietnam.

A quick-reaction force trained in infantry tactics, the 821st Combat Security Police Sq., arrived here in April and set up headquarters at Phan Hang AB. Its job is to be ready to move on short notice to any air base in the country that is threatened by enemy ground attack.

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Sections of the unit have already set up permanent operations at Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa, Bien Tuy, Pieiku, Phu Cat and Cam Ranh Bay Air Bases.

Tin's new concept in Security Police work, nicknamed "Operation Safeside," is the result of a pilot project conducted for six months last year by the 1041st Security Police Sq. at Phu Cat AB.

Members of the 821st were drawn from Stateside bases and put through a 28-day advanced training course at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

While the men are in Vietnam they are recalled to Phan Rang periodically for refresher courses. Here they also receive instruction in mortar and recoilless rifle fire and learn search and destroy and search and seizure tactics.

Seventh Air Force Headquarters at Tan Son Nhut has control over the squadron, it has had to call out the policeman only once, during the Communist offensive in May when additional men from Phan Rang joined the section at Tan Son Nhut.

The 821st also has intelligence teams working at five other bases with local intelligence teams in analyzing information concerning base defense. They also try to strengthen the working relationship between intelligence and Security Police forces.

"When we leave a base we hope to have that base security police force capable of taking over where we left, off." Said squadron commander Lt. Col. O. D. Sleffey, of Los Angeles, Calif.

INFORMATION FROM U.S. AIR FORCE SAFESIDE ASSOCIATION AND THE VIETNAM SECURITY POLICE ASSOCIATION, INC. WEBPAGE

(The following is used with permission of the U.S. Air Force Safeside Association and Vietnam Security Police Association, Inc.)

During the initial involvement of the USAF Security Police units in the Vietnam insurgency, internal security of remote and vulnerable air bases continued to be carried out under the long existing concept of providing internal protection against the covert threat of sabotage. Internal

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security was geared to detect, capture or destroy a small enemy raiding party attempting to sabotage or destroy aircraft and other priority resources.

Well planned attacks by organized guerilla raiding parties on three of the major air bases in Vietnam forced the USAF to redirect its attention from internal security to providing a well trained and well armed, highly motivated combat security police force capable of repelling raids by experienced enemy sapper units.

A security survey was conducted by the USAF Inspector General in the Republic of Vietnam in 1965 and presented to the Chief of Staff, USAF with the recommendation that a test unit of highly trained Combat Security Police be formed to initiate a new concept, known as "Active Defense."

The development of tactics to support an active defense program would require knowledge of infantry tactics not common to normal security police operations.

With Chief of Staff concurrence, recruiting for the special program began in the CONUS in early 1966. After careful consideration, the U.S. Army Ranger School at Fort Benning, Georgia was selected as the training course for the original cadre of the test unit. Personnel selected through personal interview were sent to Fort Benning and began the first class Ranger School to include USAF personnel on 4 May 1966.

Designated by the code name "OPERATION SAFESIDE", the 1041st USAF Security Police Squadron (Test) was formed at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, and prospective trainees began arriving at Schofield from throughout the CONUS and PACAF.

On 13 January 1967 the 1041st USAF SPS (T) arrived at Phu Cat Air Base, an essentially bare base operation in the Central Highlands of Vietnam whose runway was still under construction.

During this period 13 Jan to 4 Jul 1967, the 1041st secured its Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR) of 9.3 square miles of jungle and rice paddies with active defense tactics developed during its training phase at Schofield Barracks. These tactics included daylight recon patrols, forward observation posts during the day and listening posts at night, operation of tactical motor patrols with gun jeeps, sweep and clear operations, relocation of areas of population,

and the use of the primary tactic in active defense operations: The ambush patrol.

The 1041st prepared for its departure from Vietnam by training a specially organized flight of volunteers from the 37th Security Police Squadron at Phu Cat Air Base in the application of active defense tactics. Most of the special application combat equipment and vehicles were left in Vietnam for use by 7th Air Force Security Police units. The special flight trained by the 1041st amassed impressive results in applying the tactics taught them.

This resulted in the acceptance of active defense tactics by many units throughout 7th Air Force. On 4 July 1967 the 1041st was airlifted from Phu Cat to its temporary bed down site at Fairchild AFB, Washington. On 21 January 1968 the 1041st was placed under the operational management of the Tactical Air Command (TAC).

The Combat Security Police program received official approval from the Chief of Staff and Secretary of the Air Force on 1 July 1968. Prior to that date, due to a urgent request from Headquarters 7th Air Force for more Combat Security Units in the Vietnam theatre, the unit was redesignated the 82nd Combat Security Police Wing and on 8 March 1968 was sent TDY to Schofield Barracks, Hawaii to establish a training site for two CSP units on an immediate basis. The 821st Combat Security Police Squadron was formed and received an accelerated training course and then deployed to Vietnam. A second unit, the 822nd Combat Police Squadron was also formed, trained and deployed from the Schofield site.

Upon completion of the training of the 822nd CSPS, the 82nd Combat Security Police Wing and the USAF Combat Security Police School were transferred to the permanent location at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

The 821st CSPS was deployed to Phan Rang AB, RVN on 13 April 1968 and relieved a Battalion of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, and took over their Base Camp. In August 1968 the 821st was relieved by the 822nd CSPS. In February 1969 the 822nd was relieved by the 823rd CSPS. In August 1969 the 821st returned to Phan Rang and relieved the 823rd. The 821st was deactivated from Vietnam in February 1971.

The Legacy Continues...



U.S. Elite Forces - Vietnam, Squadron/Signal

The below information is extracted from the book titled **U.S. Elite Forces - Vietnam, Squadron/Signal** publications, **Combat Troops Number 7** written by Leroy Thompson. The information regarding **Safe Side** begins on **Page 46**:

Special thanks to Andy Anderson, 822CSPS for allowing the use of his book to obtain this information.

Air Force Combat Control Teams and Combat Security Police

The Air Force had two units serving in Vietnam which should be classified as "special forces" - the Combat Control Teams (CCTs) and the Combat Security Police (CSPs). And while the elite PJs of the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service were as much an elite unit as the CCTs or CSPs, the PJs mission was to rescue downed airmen and while this task often included missions behind enemy lines, it was not a special forces' mission within the parameters of this book.

COMBAT SECURITY POLICE

The Air Force's other special operations unit came into existence as a result of VC attacks against US air bases. The Combat Security Police (CSP) were trained as Air Force "Rangers" and were equipped to function as a quick reaction force should an air base come under attack, or as a seek and destroy unit which could set ambushes to destroy enemy infiltrators outside or on the perimeter of a base.

The forerunner of the Combat Security Police was the 1041st Security Police Squadron which received sixteen weeks of Ranger type training from Army Ranger instructors at Schofield

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Barracks, Hawaii as part of **'OPERATION SAFESIDE'**.

As a result of the success of the 1041st Security Police Squadron during its tour in Vietnam, Combat Security Police Squadrons were formed and trained as an elite light infantry, combining the skills of the Army's Rangers and the British RAF Regiment. Each CSP squadron had an authorized strength of twenty-one officers and 538 enlisted men. The squadron was broken into three flights, each with six officers and 161 enlisted men. Each of these flights consisted of three field sections of one officer and thirty-two enlisted men and one support section of one officer and sixty-three enlisted men. These sections were broken into ten man fire teams. Between April of 1968 and February of 1971, three Combat Security Police Squadrons - the 821st, 822nd, and 823rd - served in Vietnam. Although each squadron was nominally assigned to Phan Rang Air Base during its tour in Vietnam, flights or even sections of the Combat Security Police Squadron were often sent elsewhere on special assignment.

(Cover photo: 1041st SPS (T) Cadre graduation from the Army Ranger course at Fort Benning, Georgia. Photo by CMSgt. Robert Frink.)

Phan Rang Guard reflects on the Loneliness of War



This reflection says an awful lot about the awesome loneliness of nighttime guard duty:

“It is dark now, the star’s twinkling brightly in mock remembrances of times gone past when they flashed their dazzling smiles on youthful lovers. The night air is thick and deathly quiet, heavy with some foreboding knowledge brought by a whispering wind. Every shadow dancing wickedly in the moonlight taunts the imagination with the

fear of a hidden enemy.

“My boots made a soft crunching noise on the loose gravel, which seems deafening in the black stillness enveloping me, and my heart leaps clutching for my throat at the sound of a rat scurrying across my path. A short sigh of relief and I continue on my way until vanishing darkness retreats inevitably before the coming dawn, and another lonely vigil has ended for this lonely guardian.”

The "Bummers" Saga Continues



The "Bummers" Saga



Beach Trip

By Ron Bodine



The "STRAHOUND" Phan Rang's version of the Greyhound and often called the "Cattle Trailer"
Photo by David McGaughey.

I had worked all night before the beach trip so I fell asleep after getting washed off in the ocean. The fresh water had been cut to the base and for a few days and all we had to wash in was non potable water out of a tank trailer. So I thought a trip to the beach in that cattle trailer was a chance to get clean.

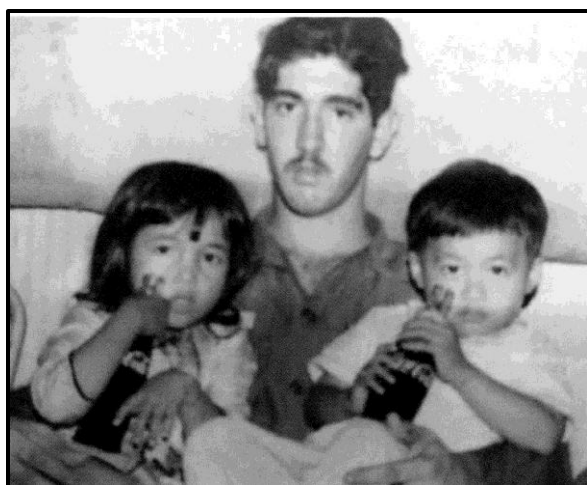
I never knew why Taylor and Sgt. Burns missed the ride back to base, but I sure was glad I wasn't along on that walk back. I remember a lot of things about that walk.

It was a long way back on foot and we were scared because we didn't have any weapons with us. We were in civilian clothes and I had on an orange shirt that could be seen five miles away and I was wearing Ho Chi Min Trail Blazers that were lousy for running. Getting stopped by the Koreans in a jeep who wouldn't give us a ride but warned us about the village ahead that had VC in it. They thought that is was pretty funny. We finally got a ride on a flatbed Lambretta with a couple of older Vietnamese women on back with baskets full of fish. The fish smelled to high heavens but we were thankful for the ride to the back gate.

BROWN’S STORY

By Earl Brown

On February 2, 1966 I took the oath to become a member of the USAF. I flew to Memphis, Tn. (Induction Center) and then on to Lackland AFB, TX. Arriving about 2:00 A.M. sleepy and tired. What a welcome, man, I had never been yelled at like the old Sergeant was yelling. I lined up with up with hundreds of men and what we would wear for the next four years was thrown at us. No matter if it fits its ours. We knew better than to ask for an exchange. My field jacket had a sleeve lining sewn in crooked and it was after I returned to the states before I got it fixed at the tailor shop. February 3rd myself and 59 more boys began basic training. Three days later we found out there was an outbreak of spinal meningitis on the base and this meant no physical training such as obstacle course, no marching and even no firing range. We then stripped and shinned floors for the next six weeks and then transferred to Lowery AFB, Denver, Co. After weapons training at Lowery, I received order to Clark AB, Philippines. Weapons crews were trained in crews of four and us new guys were integrated with some that had already been in Vietnam. Before my load crew could finish training one of our men in Vietnam had been injured and I received orders to replace him at Da Nang, AB. Most of the personnel there were unaware that our planes were even on the base so they didn’t know where our headquarters planes were located.



Earl Brown with Vietnamese children.

This brings me to October 3’ 1966 as I flew from Clark to Da Nang arriving about 10:00 A.M., having been in the Air Force for eight months and one day. They sent this Mississippi boy of on his own! This was during monsoon season, where it rained in and on everything for three months. I went to the MATS (Military Air Transport Service) counter asking for directions to my unit. They phoned around and could not find anyone who had heard of the B-57’s. They sent me down the main street and told me all the headquarters were down that street somewhere. This street was ankle deep in muddy slush and I was carrying everything I had been issued in two large heavy duffle bags. I’m very confused and scared shitless. Time and

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time again I stopped at headquarters with no results of finding my unit. Now by 4:00 P.M. I was no longer carrying bags but dragging them in the mud. On my way back to the transport hanger, I stopped in at an F-100 headquarters I had been in earlier. Some guy at the front desk recognizes me and asked if I had found my unit. I told him I had decided to fly back to Clark. He said “hold on” and he went to the back of the hanger. After what seemed like forever he came back and said I have found your outfit and they are sending a vehicle for you and your gear. Suck a relief that I almost kissed the old sarge.

I went out to wait for my ride and that is when I see a freckled face kid with dry country skin like mine pushing a bicycle up the street in the mud. What is that kid doing trying to ride a bicycle in that kind of mud. He draws closer and looked at my name tag and then informed me he was my transportation. It was none other than Sam T. Boone as he helped me get my bags across the bicycle. He took me to a dark, dank and smelly Quonset hut and said to pick a bunk. A few minutes later I met Reg Fix who threw most of my gear away. Fix took me under his wing and showed me the ropes. I’m still not sure if I really needed to know all the things he introduced me to, but he helped me through a difficult time. In the next month we moved to Phan Rang AB, Vietnam and I began my second year of protecting my Mississippi from being overrun by Vietnamese. Those experiences left a lifelong impression on me and bonds forged there still bless me every day. Heartfelt thanks to the B-57 Bumpers.

Pilot Tells of Bailout

(Phan Fare, The Happy Valley Weekly, January 9, 1969)

Recently, while on a routine mission in the IV Corps area of Vietnam, Capt. **Joseph E. O’Neill**, 120th TFS was forced to bail out of his disabled F-100 Supersabre.

Captain O’Neill and his wingman had already made two bomb runs over their target when the trouble started. “I was on final approach on my third run, “ stated Captain O’Neill, “and I was just about to my release point when I looked to check my air speed and altitude. Then, I noticed the fire warning light for the engine compartment was on.”

The high flying jet jockey was so far through his pass that he decided to finish it, going in and

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releasing his bomb. As he pulled off his run, he noticed that a flight control malfunction light was on. With the combination of the two, he decided to head for Binh Thuy for an emergency landing. After informing his wingman of his intentions, Captain O’Neill started to climb and his plane yawed to the right, he gave it a little right left rudder and he heard a snap - - the left rudder cable had broken, burned by the fire.

“The rudders were flopping around,” he continued, “and I knew that I’d have to get out. I wouldn’t be able to land the aircraft in that condition.”

Captain O’Neill bailed out in the clouds, causing his wingman some concern before he finally broke through the cover on the way down. “I think my wingman was more nervous than I was at the time,” he said, “he had made one full orbit of the area before he finally spotted me.”

The aviator was on the ground for about 15 minutes before an Army helicopter came in and picked him up.

“I was in the middle of an open field,” continued the former Air National Guardsman, “and the nearest cover was a tree line about 300 yards away. If I had to stay there until dark, I was planning to take cover in those trees.”

As it turned out, the downed pilot was might glad to get out of the area before dark.

“I didn’t see anything on the ground as far as enemy was concerned,” he stated, “but when the chopper came in, it received automatic weapons fire from the same tree line that I was planning to use as shelter. I’m glad that I didn’t have to stay, after seeing all that fire come out of those trees,”

All in all, the entire operation took only a little longer than a normal mission, Captain “ONeill arriving back at his home base of Phan Rang about three hours after he had left.

Security Police - Black and White Divide

The author of the following story wishes to remain anonymous because it is all hearsay and he has no details of facts to back it up. This just lends itself to the ‘black and white’ divide within the Security Police unit on Phan Rang. His tour of duty was at July 68–July 69.

Late in my tour I met an airman working in our Orderly Room (35th Co Support) who had been a security AP K-9. I don’t remember his name. His story was that at the end of his day off. After drinking quite a bit, he was called to duty because of an attack on the base and was posted, with his dog.

The next morning, when the alert was cleared those posted were released and were told, by radio, to go to the road for pickup. Because K-9s were picked up separately, the truck did not arrive for him until much later. He said he was sober by this time but extremely tired, having been up for a day and a half.

He fell asleep in the ditch waiting for pickup. When the truck arrived he had to be awakened and when the driver returned, the driver reported him for sleeping on post (technically correct, since he wasn’t off duty until his dog was kenneled).

The airman was court-martialed, stripped of his rank and spent six months in LBJ. Jail time does not count against your enlistment or in-country assignment time, so he was finishing out his tour in RVN at our squadron.

The point of this story (and according to him) is that during this same period, a black E4, who supposedly had spent the day, instead of sleeping, off base partying and was then caught sleeping on post in his assigned tower the next night. The strike-team leader was not challenged when they approached the tower. Fearing something had happened to the posted troop, the team leader climbed into the tower. There he found the E4, who didn’t stir, asleep and snoring. The team leader then took the E4’s M16 and the M60; drove back to Security Headquarters; and returned with a Lieutenant. They climbed into the tower, where they woke the E4 up and took him back to Headquarters.

The E4 did not get any bad time ... was not reduced in rank ... was merely fined $\frac{2}{3}$ his base pay

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for six months. My acquaintance told me this story saying the inequity of the punishments were based on USAF concerns about appearance of discrimination; and the Black Power movement stirring amongst the black airman in the unit.

(This story is third hand and may have been from someone rationalizing and justifying his own predicament, but during the 1970 and '71 time period there were other racial tensions that manifested itself at the base. **Phan Rang Newsletter 120** reports on an incident where two fragmentation hand grenades were tossed into a party of military policemen and fifteen policemen were injured. The article and ensuing conversation on Facebook is titled “**15 Airmen Injured by Grenade**”.)



Bill "Snuffy" Torvik. Bill enlisted in the Colorado Air National Guard. He served in Phan Rang, Vietnam from May 1968 – May 1969. (*Decorah Newspapers, December 17, 2018*)

Staff Sgt. **Roger E. Straw**, son of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas E. Straw, rural Madison, received the U.S. Air Force Commendation Medal at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam. Staff Sgt. Straw was a munitions technician. (*Madison Daily Leader, The (SD), December 4, 1968*)

Bergquist, George E. (Lt.Col. Ret.) In Vietnam, he was stationed at Phan Rang Airbase flying nighttime missions in the B-57B Cambera. (*Gainesville Sun, The, November 25, 2018*)

Norman Nelson, Norman enlisted in the Air Force in 1956 and served 22 years before retiring in 1978. While in the Air Force, Norm worked as an ammo troop and served in a variety of locations, with many interesting experiences. His third and fourth tour took him to Phan Rang Air Base, working with the F-100s and B-57s. One memorable experience Norm recalls took place at Phan Rang Air Base loading ammo during a "hot" mission. "During one particular intense battle occurring 30 miles away, we were loading multiple aircraft with ammo as soon as

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they would land, with engines running, to immediately send them back out," he said. "This went on continuously for hours, and I could see aircraft flying 100 feet apart, inbound and outbound, lined up as far as the eye could see. I have never seen so many gunships in all my life." (*Standard-Examiner (Ogden, UT) November 21, 2018*)

Russell Hall. "I did a full year in Vietnam, and then an additional nine months in southeast Asia," Hall said. "I was home but not long. I'd be gone for three months, and come back for two weeks. I'd be gone for three months and back for two weeks. Hall served in Vietnam in 1970-1971. His tour of duty began at Bien Hoa Air Force Base, a base located approximately 16 miles from Saigon in south-central Vietnam. From 1966-1970, Operation Ranch Hand was stationed out of this base, and was the operation Hall served in. The operation primarily consisted of spraying crops in the area, and is associated with the infamous "agent orange." There were three additional chemicals used in the missions associated with the Ranch Hands — agents blue, white and purple. Hall would eventually serve in Phan Rang, in southern Vietnam. The mission for the Ranch Hands was not easy, and in fact dangerous. The aircrafts Hall would pilot would fly low to spray, and other than tree cover, made the planes susceptible to fire. While the missions were short, only about three minutes, Hall made clear the danger involved. "There was never a mission where we weren't shot at," Hall said, with a far-away look. "It was intense. It was something I'll never forget. "It was three minutes of hell." (*Courier, The (Russellville, AR), November 5, 2018*)

Sgt. **Roger D. Jones**, son of Mr. and Mrs. Harry T. Jones, rural Ramona, was named Outstanding Mechanic of the Quarter in his unit at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam, where he was an aircraft mechanic. He was a 1964 graduate of Ramona High School. (*Madison Daily Leader, The (SD) October 4, 1968*)

Robert P. Stephens Jr. He proudly served his country for 23 years in the United States Air Force. He is one of only a few people known to have survived bailing out of a C-119 “Flying Boxcar” into the North Atlantic Ocean. Steve later became a Master Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Specialist with a tour at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam. (*County Times, The (Hollywood, MD) July 26, 2018*)

George Hutchinson. Hutchinson was a 1965 graduate of Huntington East High School. Twelve years of public education and he never rode a school bus. Because his older brother had served

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in the military, he felt obligated to do the same. He said it just seemed like the right thing to do. Shortly after graduation he enlisted in the Air Force. On his way to Vietnam he stopped in Hawaii where he had been scheduled to receive a few months of training before heading to South East Asia. "After leaving Hawaii I flew to Phan Rang Air Base in Vietnam," said Hutchinson. "Introduction to the activities of the Vietcong didn't take long. Night attacks were numerous that came when least expected. I found out quickly the reason for sandbag bunkers scattered around the base because when those attacks occurred, that's where you headed for cover. There was never a night patrol considered as routine they were all different. My shift was mostly from 9 in the evening till 5 in the morning and there was never any danger of falling asleep from boredom." Hutchinson's tour in Vietnam was cut short because of the death of his father; he was sent home for the funeral. Since he had only a little time remaining in the service he was sent to Pope AFB in North Carolina to finish his time in the Air Force. (*Herald-Dispatch, The (Huntington, WV) July 15, 2018*)

Curtis Smith. Smith, who graduated from Sterling High School in 1970, was a member of an Air Force band in Vietnam called The Black Coalition. The group's lineup changed often as GI's came and went, but at one point featured nine members who took up the bass, congas, saxophone, trumpet and other instruments. "It started off with just four of us and we actually got our start from the Red Cross on the base," Smith said. Most of the soldiers on his base, Phan Rang, were 19 or 20. They would spend time at the Airman's Club, but every night ended in a fight, and Smith got tired of that atmosphere. He was looking for something else to occupy his free time when he stumbled into the Red Cross tent. "I saw these guys kind of crooning and I looked in," he said. "I saw a guitar player and there was a piano, and I asked the lady if they had a bass guitar and they did, and an amplifier, so I got it out and tuned it." The men were playing a song, and he caught their ear when he began to noodle around on the bass across the room. They invited him to play with them. Smith also would go on to play drums in the band. Later, during a Red Cross talent show, a member of the American Minority Servicemen Association caught their act. When Phan Rang began to close down The Black Coalition had an entire barracks to rehearse in, and other soldiers would watch them rehearse because it was better than going to the Airman's Club. "It was kind of like being a rock star," Smith said. "I couldn't hardly go to the mailbox without having to talk to 10 or 15 people, you know, 'Hey when are you guys playing next?' 'Hey you sounded good last week.'" (*Sauk Valley Newspaper (Dixon-Sterling, IL) July 3, 2018*)

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Sgt. Robert D. Jones, son of Mr. and Mrs. Harry T. Jones, Ramona, and a graduate of Ramona High School, was a member of the F-100 Super Sabre wing at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam. He was a jet aircraft mechanic. *(May 9, 1968, Madison Daily Leader, The (SD))*

Warren Melick graduated from Greensburg High School in 1967. Warren was assigned to Phan Rang, RVN, where he was a combat medic. After that, he was sent to Korat, Thailand, where he did his work in the emergency room and worked the flight line when casualties from Vietnam were coming their way. *(Greensburg Daily News (IN) February 3, 2018)*

Capt. **Carl "Bernie" DeNisio**. DeNisio served as a security operations captain organizing the installation's defense at Phan Rang AB, South Vietnam. The battle for Phan Rang began when Air Force dogs detected enemy movement. Air Force (USAF Ret. LT. Col.) **Garth Wright**, who earned the Air Force Cross for his role in the 1969 "Mini-Tet" battle for Phan Rang Air Base. The award is the Air Force's second-highest, said he went into a brushy area and tracked down and killed one enemy soldier before his rifle jammed. "On your left! On your left!" someone cried. "I looked to my left and there was another guy in the grass, and he pointed his weapon at me and then he saw that I had thrown my rifle down because I couldn't get it to unjam," said Wright, who began his career as an enlisted infantryman in the Army. "He thought I was I unarmed, so he turned to the dogs but didn't realize that when I threw my rifle down (I had) picked up a pistol." Before Tet, Security Police had expected to fight small groups of enemy troops trying to infiltrate base defenses. They now absorbed the reality that installations could be targeted by far larger enemy forces. *(San Antonio Express-News (TX), February 1, 2018)*

William Otto "Bill" Day Day attended school in Keokuk and graduated from Keokuk High School with the Class of 1970. After high school, Bill enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, where he was trained in the Airframe Repair career field. During his career in the USAF, Bill was stationed at many duty stations around the world including Phan Rang Air Base in Vietnam. *(Daily Gate City (Keokuk, IA), October 31, 2017)*



A VIETNAM VETERAN IS THE SUM OF ALL OF HIS STORIES

My goal for this newsletter has always been as stated on the masthead, **“Keeping the memories alive by telling the stories that are worth telling”**. At least for Phan Rang, future researchers will have a pretty good idea of what life was like there. Most Vietnam Veterans that I’ve known never talked about their Vietnam experiences until in the company of other Vietnam Veterans. I believe one reason is that there is shared knowledge and whatever you might be talking about the other person could probably complete your sentence because they had similar experiences. It’s so much easier when you can just say “Bookie Bird” or “Provider” and they will completely understand without having to describe a C-123. The purpose of me telling you all of this is to set the stage for a discerning letter that I received that is completely opposite of what I’ve always believed and the letter in itself isn’t unusual, but the writer indicates that all of his friends feel the same way and that to me is the disturbing part.

Here’s his message to me:

Hello Doug.....

You seem to have the jest of things concerning Phan Rang A.B. Vietnam, but you might want to check your information and memory before you include it in your issues. I can only assume you were directly stationed at Phan Rang A.B. not just a hit for awhile and then leave. Otherwise you wouldn't be writing about the base. Then again your memory is off a lot. So my question(s) to you Doug is this. What was it like living in total darkness? Who watched over everybody, behind the curtains, secretly? Who gave/assigned you a rifle and no ammo, and then have you chain it to your bed or in your locker? The major weapon assigned to personal at Phan Rang by the Air Force was an M-16A by Mattel. Only can't remember if it was A or B model. Those of us use to say I hope it is for real and not another toy from Hasbro. Never heard any military personal in Vietnam having their rifle locked or chained to anything... The enemy chained Vietnamese to their weapon and told them either they shoot the enemy or die. The C-123 Squadrons were stationed at Phan Rang...the 311th, 314th, & 315th not Da Nang. Did the lights all over Happy Valley go dark at night? Why would you want to keep the memories of Vietnam alive Doug? The majority of us try to forget not remember nor relive it.

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Our cover was beyond approach at Phan Rang A.B. in 1969-1970. Which plane and route a pilot flew, when a plane went down, how it happened, and type of casualties. If a pilot(s) needed to jettison munitions or an unscheduled aircraft was coming in hot we were kept up to date... I could go on Doug with what was actually taking place. Assigned to a new type of unit I rubbed elbows with some of the Air Forces finest and brothers. We keep in touch when need be, but we don't talk about what we did Doug. Only what has been happening worldwide, our families, anything but the darkness. We know our assignment was always in the darkness. At the top of a mountain, south/southwest of Phan Rang A.B. "Happy Valley" just out of sight, was a place with everything you saw back home. It had running water, paved streets and sidewalks, air-conditioning, TVs, radio, homes not shacks, and the list goes on. That was where the real war was being fought, that was where they played with our lives Doug. Do you know the name of the city Doug? We do. That would be a good question for your readers Doug, ask how many know what the name was. My final comment to you Doug. I'll give you some hints. I was not an M.P., pilot, officer, or work in intelligence nor worked in the CBPO. I am least remembered because that was my assignment.

Best regards to you Doug and have a Happy Christmas

My response:

Hello Herbert,

Thank you for the comments on Phan Rang News 164. Yes, I was stationed at Phan Rang for 18 months during the 1968-69 time periods. My memories of that tour are confined to my own personal experiences and for the most part they were very narrow because like most people I worked 12 hour shifts 6 days a week so the remainder of that time would have been spent at the club, hobby shop and hanging out with my buddies.

You asked me several questions with the first being: What was it like living in total darkness? I don't really know why you asked me that and the only time that I remember that even being mentioned is in reference to those brave souls that guarded the wire at night, either with their K-9 companion or that of an M-16 or both. There has been a lot written about the security of the base, including the contributions of the Australians and Koreans because I don't think we gave them much thought when we were in country, but the realization of their bravery came much later in life. We now recognize those guys, as well as those that had to take to the skies

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in bombers, fighters, FACs or bookie birds as Heroes. They all planned on returning home to their base or bunks, but deep down they knew there was a good chance that they might not.

Herbert, you really didn't understand the Bummers story titled “Unpleasant Memories”. These stories like all of the personal recollections that appear in the Phan Rang News are personal accounts written of the author's experiences. In the case of the Bummers, those guys that loaded weapons aboard B-57's, they were stationed at Clark AB, PI, Da Nang and Phan Rang, South Vietnam, so what they are describing may not have happened at Phan Rang, but why would I, or even you, question the validity of their memory and if I did, I would not change what they wrote.

Your questions like “Who watched over everybody, behind the curtains, secretly?” is kind of cryptic, are you suggesting that was your job hidden away somewhere spying on everyone? You also mentioned that certain squadrons were assigned only to Phan Rang and not Da Nang, but I think you need to check the facts and your memory. Wikipedia is a good source for that kind of information.

You said that the majority of us try to forget, not remember nor relive our memories of Vietnam. I wonder who the ‘majority’ is. I think I have a better feel for the Phan Rang community than you do because I've attended eight Phan Rang reunions, help host a Phan Rang Facebook group with 1600 members and authored at least four years of newsletters dealing with the history and stories of Phan Rang that reaches out to over 1400 and I know for a fact that the MAJORITY have just the opposite feelings. I had the opportunity to talk to a guy the other day that flew F-100's in Vietnam, F-4s in Thailand and flew airliners all over the world the rest of the time and he was absolutely delighted to have me talk to him about his Vietnam experiences. As a matter of interest, he wants more than anything to contact the guy who was his crew chief in Vietnam. Now, why do you suppose he wants to do that?

Herbert, I'm sorry that your assignment was in darkness, but I think you might be in the minority. If you would like to join our Facebook group to see the conversations and talk to the many Phan Rangers that express their feelings and talk about their experiences everyday to see firsthand what the majority is like. Please let me know and also let me know if you want to be removed from receiving the Phan Rang News which has a stated purpose of keeping the memories alive. I myself or anyone that I've spoken to knows of a city on a mountain top that

was as advanced as you describe, so if you could enlighten me, I would appreciate it. My fellow veterans overwhelming told me that because of the opportunity to talk to someone that understands them have helped them come to terms with what happened there!

Cheers,
Doug

And then his response:

Wow. You proved my point Doug.... Your response is typical and doesn't deserve a response from any of us. I've shown..... Oh hell not worth continuing.
Thanks for the Christmas laugh Doug.

Then I vented on Facebook

It's funny and a little disheartening that I received some of the most derogatory and critical comments concerning my newsletter that I've ever received since I've been assembling and putting it out all these years. I guess my first question to him should be why he reads the newsletter and even want me to send him one if he doesn't want to be reminded of Vietnam. He said the majority of us try to forget not remember nor relive it. Very critical of the Bummer stories...he said I REALLY need to check my facts before including stories like those, because my memory is off a lot. Is there any one person that would be completely knowledgeable of everything that happened at Phan Rang...I don't think so. Enough of this BS, I just had to vent.

Some Comments from Facebook- all were extremely positive and I will only post a few of them as there were many!

Howard Taylor: Doug, who and what facts of the Bummer stories are being questioned? You are doing a great service with the newsletter and a great job that takes time and commitment of ones self. Keep at it!

Jimmie L Jenkins: You are appreciated for all of the work and research you put into the newsletter and leading the group! THANKS!

John T. Claybaugh: Doug, you do a great job. Please don't let anyone discourage you. There are

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things that haven't felt comfortable reading. soooo, I just skip over them and read something else. I have learned a lot from your letters.

Joyce Sims Severt (my wife): I really don't know what to say except that even though I am not a Veteran, never been stationed in any war zone, especially Vietnam BUT, I am a Veteran's wife and I'm damn proud of your Newsletter contribution. If that guy only knew the time and effort that you put into it, researching it for accuracy, perhaps he's be a bit more grateful for what you do. I feel my contribution is sharing you to that effort and your group in general because it takes many, many hours away from our time together. So, whoever wrote the above comments to my husband, Doug Severt, please remove yourself from the group. Everyone in this group is or has fought with the devil in their minds because of Vietnam and it is a big help for them!

EL Hoard: Doug we appreciate all you do and say. Keep in mind that some can still barely get through the day, so take some of that with a grain of salt. When I'm uncomfortable with something I close it and move on. Each of us cope in our on way so don't be to hard on yourself. Most of us appreciate you.

Sam Lewis: As they say about the exit door Don't let it hit you in the Butt when you leave .Keep up the great work Doug!

Bob Pahl: Doug, it is apparent that there is a distinct possibility that pain and medication have had an influence in this disgruntled soul. Perhaps his experience and a possible illness have served to harden his heart. Certainly, we probably all have friends who we remember that gave the ultimate sacrifice combined with the bitterness we feel toward a leadership which had made inane decisions which were instrumental in these friends not returning. I think we all would like those with such painful memories not share those feelings but just remain silent and surf the web elsewhere. Continue your outstanding effort.

Steve Russ: You keep doing what you're doing, Doug. First of all, he doesn't speak for the majority of us, nor should he, or anyone else for that matter. We all process our experience in Vietnam in our own ways, and the way this group has grown to the number of members it has today is testimony to the fact that it appears there is a large majority that DO wish to remember our time there and both the camaraderie and experiences we had and have to this day. I have no doubt that many still have trouble processing their experience and understand that. War, regardless of what role you play in it, has a way of affecting those engaged in it. To

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walk away from it and saying it didn't affect them is to deny life itself. I can't tell someone they should let go of the worst parts of the past and move on, although I think that is the healthy thing to do. But that is ultimately a decision each has to make for themselves. Equally I don't feel it is right to assume everyone should or does feel the same as I do, or whoever felt compelled to make that comment that the majority of us don't want to be reminded of Vietnam. Perhaps HE'S the one who needs to get his facts straight. On that issue, if he has information that he feels is important for accuracy, the positive way to handle that is point out a possible inaccuracy and offer that information without being accusatory. But then, that's not the action of someone who views life through the lens of negativity, is it? You're doing just fine, Doug. I'm guessing the majority of us here, including me, appreciate all the work you put into this group and hope you know that and will continue to do so for as long as you enjoy it.

William Diebold: Doug, I don't post much here. But I read it every day and enjoy many of the memories. You are doing a wonderful thing here and there are many many like me who are grateful for what you have done here. Thank you.

Bill Dethloff: Doug I appreciate everything posted on this site. Reading your newsletters brings back memories, some good and some perhaps not so much so. We all remember things differently and I've found your letters have jarred some of those things that I've forgotten or perhaps buried a bit. Stay the course and thank you for your efforts.

Billy Clark: Hang in there Doug ! For every one that doesn't appreciate the news letter you have a hundred that do !!! keep up the good work and don't pay any attention to them !!!

C Dan Brownell: Don't let it bother you Doug, there are always a few old farts who nothing to do except complain and make life miserable for those around them. Keep up the good work and forward march!

Joseph Dias: We all appreciate what you do. For some reason social media brings out the worst in some people. The filter is turned off allowing hate and vitriol to spew forth. For example, I remember back in the days of Compuserve and 9.6 modems when I posted something on a new site about how I arrived at Phan Rang in 2/66 and was “one of the early guys there”. Wow. Big mistake. Some civilian from Red Horse ripped into me about their group was first etc., etc. Called me names etc. You could feel the venom dripping from his whiskey bottle. Since then I

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seldom use social media. Too many sick and suffering people have an open platform. Hang in there. Keep up the good work. Thanks for your dedication.

Paul K. Glasser: Doug Severt, I, as most of us, appreciates what you do and go through to produce the newsletter. So chalk this up to "You can please some of the people some of the time..... " , and then there are those that you will never please. I personally have read every edition, even those before I became a member of the group. History is written by those that take the time to do so. You know that there are not many of us left and our history needs to be preserved. Like others, some things bring back some not so healthy memories, other story's make me laugh and say I remember that; but that is how life is and reality is not so kind. KEEP UP THE GREAT WORK!!

RW Holz: Thanks Doug Severt, for ALL you do! The Newsletter is just a fraction of the untold thousands of hours that You have put into our Group over the years. I know there are a handful of people on this site who do all the work for the rest of us and again, I thank you and them. Pay no attention to someone who deserves No Attention.

Donald E Chatterton: I have been in the group since it was in the hundreds and you were wondering if we would ever get to 500. I remember your posts about how good you felt. I know how much effort you have put into the reunions. I have one suggestion, why not put your newsletters in a book. Keep up the good work!!!

Jim Hemphill: Doug, just keep on doing what you're doing, the newsletter is only a part of what you do for all of us on this site. Those of us who know you, know how much time and effort you take to make this for all the rest of

Bob Jaglowski: Doug, I for one, look forward to seeing your Newsletter every time. Thanks for all your time and effort to make this the best.

Donald Gray: I for one appreciate the newsletters. They are fun to read and sometimes remind me of the good times in a bad situation. Keep em coming

Dan Henry: Doug, it is so obvious that you spend an inordinate amount of time on this website to bring the Phan Rang family together in a mood of respect for what the members contributed to America and to the Vietnam effort. How anyone can berate you; your efforts are beyond the

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pale. You are a patriot extraordinary! (spelling?) Don't let this sway you from your mission. You da man, Doug!

Christopher Boles: From the first issue I read, I am waiting with anticipation of the next one. From where I sit, the body of work you have created is a testament to the men, women, and events that took place in the 6+ years the air base was in operation. It is the only history in existence that tells of what we did there in stories and photos. Don't you dare stop creating!!

Charles Lee Simmons: Doug there's always a sour grape or 2 on the vine. They usually rot and fall off. I don't think any of us can forget Vietnam and sometimes it helps to look back at that year and re-think all that we experienced. I know, for myself, I'm not as critical in my thinking nearly 50 years later than I was at 25 years. Keep up the good work

Jim Erixson: Doug, you are doing a bang up job writing these incredible news letters. I enjoy reading them. I "grew up" at Phan Rang hence will never forget the years I had there. So you help me to remember in your writings, Thank you. I believe it is important to never forget our past and the friendships we made with people from all over the world we would not have made if we weren't there. So it is good to remember and you help to do that. Thank you for your efforts and your love in writing to us. Please keep it up, you're doing a great job.

Floyd Brown: Doug don't let one poor sick person deter you.. We like reading these Memories and want to continue them.. I feel this poor dude is wanting folks just to feel sorry for him.. Ha wants to create a problem to get some attention.. He always has a choice like all of us.. Don't read the post or leave the site.. If something I know will upset me I won't even go there.. KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK We LOVE IT.....

J Joseph Mack: Doug don't let one person's comments bother you. You do a great job putting the newsletter together, and we enjoy reading it. Yes the memories may be sad at times, but they are our collective memories and those memories will be with us until the end. Thanks for your good work.

David Knighton: One malcontent should not be allowed to influence anything. It is his problem and not yours or ours. We see the same thing on the internet all the time. Just go look at reviews of any product and there is always that one who just wants to be different and

negative. You do a great job, Doug. Thank you!

David Wisser: You are doing a great job posting articles & pictures that help all of us keep our memories good & bad of our time at PRAB alive. Don't let a naysayer dissuade you from freely making more posts.

Jack Lamb: Doug, you are doing a great job and for quite some time. Please keep up the good work and good attitude. Merry Christmas. Jack Lamb, C-123 pilot, 310 TAS, August 1970 - May 1971

Dean Delongchamp: Doug, Without you we wouldn't have the site. No one forces us to join. Being a part of your site is a freely made choice. If one does not like the site, leave it. Just speaking for myself, I have gotten back in contact with five squadron mates from my time at PRAB. We've relived mostly good times and shed some tears over a few bad times, but they all were a part of our whole time there. We all see things differently and there are those who will always see the glass as half empty. My theory has always been that if you gave 100 people a five pound gold brick to put in their pocket, 10% would complain because it ripped it. Just shake off the negative ones and don't get in an exchange with them. Take the high road, maybe their comments are helping them shake off some ghosts. I think you see the spirit of this groups membership in all the support you are getting in regard to your post. Nav, 310th SOS, July 1969- June 1970. Merry Christmas!

Buddy Cox: Doug, you are doing a great job. Flying a C-123, I saw many bases and all the big ones in the country. If I had a choice of any of them or Phan Rang, I would choose Phan Rang. We got to serve with Koreans, Australians, Army, Air Force Fighters, Bombers and Airlift. The base was relatively safe with good support.

Donald Luke: Doug Severt: Howdy from the grumpy old guy in Tucson. Congratulations on publishing your 164th edition of the Phan Rang News. It's a shame some piss-ant has to crawl out of his cesspool and attack you for something that didn't sit right with him in the newsletter. I appreciate very much that you have dedicated your own time to the reunions and the Phan Rang News and I'm sure there are hundreds and hundreds . . . perhaps a thousand of more . . . who are extremely happy that you do all you do. You have made it possible for disconnected veterans from Vietnam and Phan Rang to find long lost friends and spend time with them either

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at the reunions or through social media. We all had different experiences in Vietnam, some worse than others and some don't feel comfortable sharing their experiences. Like many, I saw things over there I wish I could forget. I experienced events that slowly shaped me into a different person. You have been a valuable source of information for me. Keep the newsletters coming as long as you can. By the time I discovered the Phan Rang info, I had missed a bunch of the newsletters but was able to go back and read past issues I missed. Although I was only able to attend the reunion in Tucson, I am always looking for an opportunity to attend another one.

Hank Milnark: Doug Severt Just read this entire post and after all the great positive response I sum this up that you do this out of LOVE for all the folks that served at Phan Rang and there significant others. I appreciate all the hard work and time you put into this newsletter. We all have issues in life and have to deal with them, but please keep the Newsletters coming! Merry Christmas to you, Joyce and family and all my PRAB brothers and families!

Ron Keith: Doug Severt, the work you have done is sensational and I am thankful that I have been a part of it. You are one of the great men of our generation. I have been looking for some type of award or some type of recognition for all that you have done. You have helped so many people to in some way have a better life. Saying thank you just doesn't seem like enough. I am sure that Joyce deserves a great deal of credit also. I am sure that it would have been impossible to do so much without her support and help.

There must have been over a hundred responses and I've only included a small portion of those here. I didn't make the original posting on Facebook to boost my own ego, but it certainly has had that effect...just ask my wife, but I thought “Herbert's” opinion was so unusual and for him to imply that everyone in his circle of friends felt the same way was a little discerning to me. I never did get a request from him to unsubscribe from the Phan Rang mailing list, so he will be receiving this newsletter and of course the invitation is still open to join our Facebook group if he wishes to join in on our conversation so he might see the light.

I hope that you enjoyed this newsletter and if you have any comments, please let me know. This news/letter was composed by Douglas Severt. To see a list of all previous newsletters click [here](#). To unsubscribe to Phan Rang News, reply to <mailto:dougsevert@cox.net> and put 'unsubscribe' in subject line.