

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.

Phan Rang AB News No. 179 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

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Serving our Country

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35th Civil Engineers Build Giant Filter

(Seventh Air Force News, January 7, 1970)

PHAN RANG - A 10,000-gallon capacity water purification and filtering system, known as an erdalator, was recently set into operation at the base water plant by Col. **Walter T. Galligan**, 35th Tactical Fighter Wing commander.

The largest in the Republic of Vietnam and one of the largest portable units of its kind in the world, the purification and filtering system was constructed entirely by Air Force personnel from the 35th Civil Engineering Squadron.

Operating around-the-clock, the erdalator will produce as much fresh water as four of the base water plant's 12 smaller units. With the completion of the large water system and the recent opening of a 1,000,000 gallon water sedimentation basin nearby, much of the water shortage problems at this air base will be a thing of the past.

According to the 35th CES commander, Lt. Col. **John G. McCann**, credit for Phan Rang AB having the water system goes to two noncommissioned officers from his squadron.

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SSgt. William A. Gardner spotted the unused erdalator at an Army depot, and was Instrumental in obtaining the \$35,000 unit for the base. Once obtained SSgt. **Phillip R. Huckabee** and his crew of civil engineering personnel took over and had the unit in operation in six weeks.

Colonel Galligan, after the dedication ceremony, said, "The effort of the men of the 35th CES in locating, obtaining and erecting this superior unit is most commendable."

Phan Rang Men Snare Snake

(Seventh Air Force News, January 7, 1970)

PHAN RANG - Two airmen one night recently captured a seven and a half foot python on base.

The pair were in a vehicle driving near the south end of the installation when A1C **Charles G. Wells**, who is assigned to the pest control section of the 35th Civil Engineering Squadron, spotted the snake.

SSgt. **Thomas K. Williams**, assigned to the 309th Special Operations Squadron, and Airman Wells caught the python and put it in a box. The snake was then taken to the civil engineering compound and put in a cage.

"After we got out of the truck, I could tell the snake was either a medium-sized boa or a python, neither of which is dangerous to humans," Airman Wells stated. "However, it took the two of us to handle the frightened snake, because it does have quite a bit of strength."

Sergeant Williams, who stated he has handled many such snakes before, related that a small python only eats rabbits and other small animals it can capture.

"The python strikes at its victim to hold it and then coils around its prey to crush it to death. The victim is eaten whole," he explained.

The airmen do not expect to have any trouble with their new pet. "The species of snake we caught is called the Indian python, which can be tamed very easily," Airman Wells commented.

Airmen, Villagers Team Up

Repair Bad Road

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Airmen, Villagers Team Up

Repair Bad Road



(Seventh Air Force News, January 7, 1970)

PHAN RANG - An almost impassable road between Ninh Quy Hamlet and Thap Cham Village was recently repaired, thanks to a joint effort by off duty airmen and Vietnamese villagers.

Earth moving equipment from the 35th Civil Engineering Squadron here and 30 ox carts teamed up to spread about 100 tons of gravel over the three-quarter mile-long road.

"The provincial government, through the base civic action office, asked us to help repair the road," explained MSgt. **James R. Barnett**, pavements superintendent for the 35th CES.

"The road is the only means of getting to the little hamlet," he added. "During the rainy season, a woman in childbirth was being taken to the hospital over the road. The vehicle got stuck and the woman died. The government wants to make sure this does not happen again."

The Army provided the gravel from its rock crushing plant at Phan Rang AB. They also hauled the material to Thap Cham, where it was stockpiled.

"One Sunday we went out with the equipment and started loading the gravel into the carts, some of which were rather small," Sergeant Barnett commented. "We were assisted by a front-end loader operated by one of the Army's civilian contractors. After the Vietnamese dumped the gravel, we used a road grader to level it off."

Sergeant Barnett said he and his men were gratified at the willing attitude of the Vietnamese people. "They turned out in full force to help us, not only by hauling the rock but also by using shovels, rakes and hoes to help spread it," he stated. "Our work was helpful to the Vietnamese, and having been used to loading heavy mechanized equipment, loading ox carts was certainly an interesting novelty."

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James Gilliland

My Life and Times at Phan Rang

Here’s a little history about my life and time at Phan Rang Air Base.

Well my trip started in late May 1969. I caught a flight from San Francisco Ca. to Pensacola Fl. Where I spent a couple of days and then took a bus to Eglin AFB field #2 for my training.

On June 30th I caught a big silver C-141 from Eglin and landed in Anchorage, Alaska. After a 3 to 4 hour delay we had our plane fixed and then off to Yokota AB, Japan. The aircraft broke down again but they it was fixed in short order and we then took off for Pleiku, Vietnam and landed in the middle of the night.

They off-loaded the Red Horse troops and their equipment and they took out the airline seats that were installed in the middle of the aircraft floor and the guys that were continuing on got back on and sat on the floor on the flight to Cam Rahn Bay (CRB).

At Cam Rahn Bay I took a C-123 Provider aircraft for my final leg to Phan Rang.

I processed into the 35th Civil Engineering Squadron. While there I did a lot of different things one of my first assignments was I was loaned out to the motor pool as a mechanic but after a week or so I went back to the squadron and I did a couple of weeks mowing weed (grass) on the flight line. I also worked on fence putting up fencing on the east side of the base.

Another duty was trash pickup all over the base. After about 2 months there we got a new NCOIC in the shop. He split the shop into 2 groups, Equipment and Pavements. I was equipment so I started working on crane jobs at the well site worked on hauling bricks for revetments around Officers trailers.

I also hauled water so you guys could flush the toilet until the water plant was up and running. Built dugout holes so security could drive APC into for protection. Hauled and loaded sand

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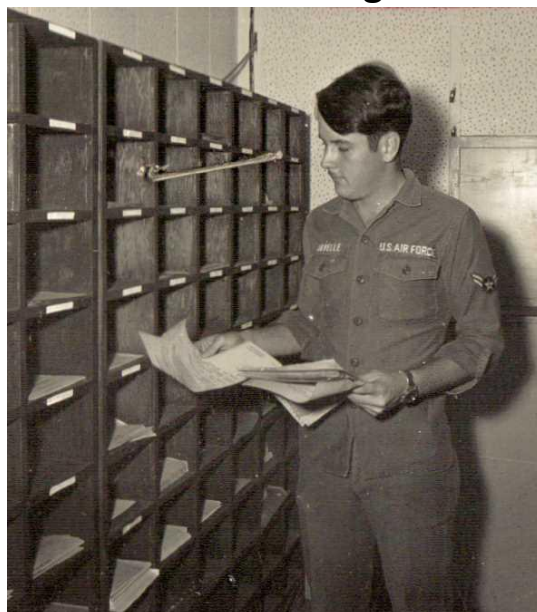
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from off base at the river for all sorts of projects all over the base and one of the last jobs that I had was moving old Red Horse Equipment to the beach. The last job that I had was flight line sweeper for about a month.

On my final day I caught a chopper back to Cam Rahn Bay for the freedom bird. What a year it was! I learned a lot and it might not be as exciting as some of the guys that protected us or kept the planes flying but all the guys in CE said without CE you could be in a world of shit.

So just a little over 50 years ago I went over as a teenager and came back as a grownup. All of us no matter what we did we all had two jobs to do; stay alive and come back home and keep the BASE safe and operational.

Got To Get a Message to You



PHAN RANG AB, Republic of Vietnam (7AF)

THIS ONE IS TO...Airman First Class **Peter A Javelle**, 19, Portsmouth, RI distributes a stack of messages destined for some of the more than 60 units and agencies serviced by the 1882nd Communications Squadron message distribution center here. Airman Javelle is a communications center operator. The message distribution function was switched from base headquarters to the 1882nd building to provide better service. (U.S. Air Force Photo by Christopher P Boles, Det. 5, 600 Photo Squadron, story by MSgt **Charles Collins**, 1992nd Comm Sq. 1969)

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An Unforgettable Date

July
5

by Sam Lewis

July 5th has always been an unforgettable date for me. On July 5th, 1968 I was separated from the USAF and on that same date in 1974 I stood and watched my mother pass into eternity at age 63.

Fifty-two years ago on 5 July, 1967 at about 9:00 p.m. I was stationed at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam and I had just been relieved of regular duty. I was settling down in the Reserve Security Alert Team hut, and was called out with the rest of the team to the Juliet Area on the East perimeter.

When we got there we were instructed to help secure the area where Bernard Ford was lying on the ground unresponsive bleeding from his head with his dog over him. At that time we didn't know if the area was infested with VC who might have downed him or if something else had happened.

The K9 supervisors were immediately on the scene securing the dog so the medics could assist Bernie but it was apparent with the head wound he had died. We stayed there a couple of hours securing the scene until the body was removed and an initial investigation was complete.

The official cause of death was Accidental Homicide but his handler buddies said he most likely had a round chambered in his weapon and the dog alerted causing the weapon to discharge sending a chambered round through Bernard's chin exiting the top back his head . His name is on the Wall.

A few years ago Bernie's niece contacted the Vietnam Security Police Association looking for information about Bernie's Death.

I responded to her request and I told her I was at the scene and directed her to the K9 members to see if anybody there knew any of them knew Bernie. As luck would have it she made contact

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with a couple of his shift mates who knew him well and were on duty that night. She said the only information the USAF had given the family was it was accidental homicide which meant it could have been a variety of reasons since it was self inflicted.

They assured her that it was an accident, the dog had most likely alerted causing it and she was very thankful for the information. Bernie is buried in a suburb of Chicago and she said his immediate family is now buried there with him. She said she visits the gravesite every July 5th.

**To live in the hearts of others is
never to die.**

On this day on 5 Jul 1967
A1C Bernard Francis Ford, 35th SPS
lost his life due to accidental homicide



I came to Phan Rang in early 1968 with the FAC Theater Indoctrination School (sometimes called FACU). We were moved out of Binh Thuy/Can Tho - during and after TET as the bases down there were getting hit almost every night. This is my third trip (Weapons Troop) to Vietnam since 65' and was the NCDIC of the weapons release shop. Again - thanks for the memories ... Craig

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Tribune

Incorporating The Guardian (Victoria) and Qld Guardian

Registered at Sydney G.P.O. for transmission by post as a newspaper. — Category B

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 1970

10 Cents

Canberras Take Part in Viet air murder

Indiscriminate blasting and burning of Vietnamese peasant families is not attributable only to the United States Air Force. Australian bombers are doing it too.

This conclusion must be drawn from a recent article entitled "Fine record of RAAF In Vietnam" by the Air Minister (Senator T. Drake-Brockman), buried in an obscure part of a Sydney Morning Herald aviation supplement (7/9/70). The Minister revealed facts which have been unknown, or little known, to the public before.

Most press publicity about the Australian armed forces in Vietnam has dealt with the limited Army activities in one province close to Saigon. Their casualties are played down in the press And rarely totaled up (they now amount to over 550 dead and some 2000 wounded).

There are no confirmed figures for casualties they have inflicted on the local Vietnamese population, including the armed liberation forces. However even unconfirmed Australian claims would probably not amount to more than twice the Australian casualties.

As to the RAAF, again most publicity is about the medical rescue work of helicopter crews and the activity of the Caribou transport squadron. Less known is the fact, revealed by Drake-Brockman, that part of the helicopter (No. 9) Squadron has been converted to "gunship" operation.

This means their equipment with modern American heavy machine guns which literally hose the ground below with a lethal deluge of 5000 bullets a minute, chopping to pieces

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everything and everyone in their path.

The most important revelations, however, are about bombing. No. 2 Bomber Squadron, equipped with the aging but "reliable and effective" twin-jet Canberras, was moved up To South Vietnam in 1967 after being based for nine years in Malaya. The squadron has been operating from Phan Rang as part of the U.S. 7th Air Force "which directs its operations", according to the Minister.

It must be assumed that this arrangement means (a) RAAF squadron using the normal weapons Of U.S. light-medium bombers, including napalm, incendiary and the dreaded cluster, anti-personnel bombs; (b) U.S. payment for bombs, ammunition, aircraft maintenance and possibly food and upkeep of the 300 personnel of the squadron (an interesting point in view of the Government's recent panic denial of New York Times report that Australian forces were "mercenaries" paid for by the U.S. Government).

The most important revelation lay in the destruction claimed by this squadron and boastfully retailed by Drake-Brockman.

Referring to "night and day raids with devastating effect", he said: "A single Canberra has claimed as many as 33 Vletcong killed) in one bombing raid.

"The squadron tally includes destruction of 7,000 structures (i.e. buildings), 10,000 bunkers (underground shelters), 1,100 sampans and 56 bridges."

He did not mention what happened to men, women and children caught in the sampans (on Vietnamese rivers) and village structures or hiding in bunkers. Even only one person per target would mean a total of nearly 20,000 people killed or wounded. The claim about the 33 "Vletcong" by one aircraft in one raid suggests the total of casualties inflicted by this squadron would be many times that. Certainly 50,000 would be a moderate estimate.

However, this is far from all that was revealed by the Air Minister. He also said: "The RAAF has assigned fighter pilots to forward air control duties with the US forces.

"Their task is to fly into target areas before strike aircraft (including "gunship" helicopters)

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arrive. They mark the targets with smoke rockets. Many of these pilots have been decorated."

The significance of this statement lies in the fact that no RAAF fighter squadron is at present stationed in South Vietnam, according to the Minister himself.

Where do these RAAF fighter pilots come from? Either they are flying U.S. fighters, as part of the U.S. air force operations (in which case they, too, are presumably fed and maintained by the USA, i.e., subsidized) or they fly Australian fighters in from elsewhere to join in U.S. air operations.

Three Australian jet fighter squadrons are based at Butterworth, Malaysia. Much less known is the stationing of RAAF fighters since 1962 at Ubon base, N.E, Thailand, right beside Cambodia and Laos, in both of which US air operations are extensive against the revolutionary forces.

U.S. bombers make attacks in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, using bases in South Vietnam and Thailand; this is apart from B-52 heavy bomber raids from Okinawa and U.S. Navy aircraft carrier raids.

RAAF fighter aircraft, as mentioned by the Air Minister, could be effectively operating as target markers for U.S. bombing raids anywhere in Indo-China, by operating from the Thailand base or by flying in for temporary operational duty at South Vietnam bases

Presumably the toll of human life from the U.S. bombing raids guided to target by RAAF fighter pilots is far greater than that inflicted by one Australian bomber squadron. Yet the question of war guilt for this indiscriminate aerial killing will inevitably arise, and must be sheeted home to the Australian Liberal-Country Party Government, as well as its U.S. mentor.

At the present time, this terrible and unjustifiable mass murder, the execution of which is imposed on young Australian airmen by the policy of an imperialist government, is almost a complete secret kept from the Australian people. It is time it was made widely known.

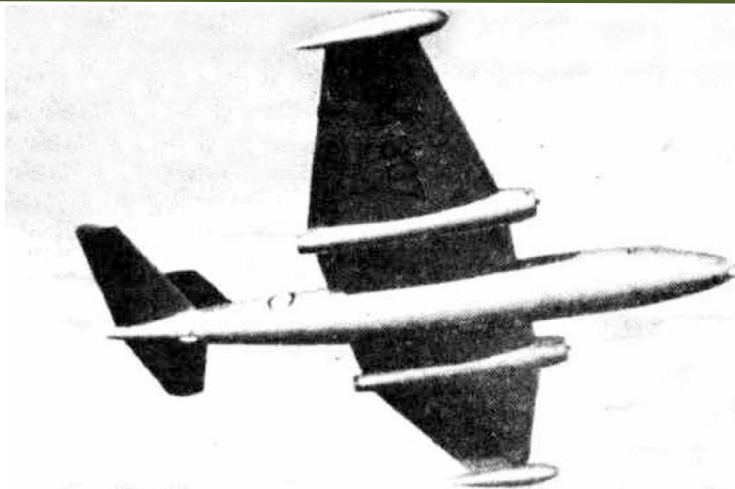
THE WAR STRATEGY

From a report to the national committee, Communist Party of Australia, by ALEC ROBERTSON, national executive member.

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A Canberra bomber...death and devastation in South Vietnam.

WHAT particular aims of Australian capitalism that required its leaders to enter the Vietnam War, and which underlie its continuing commitment of modern air, land and sea forces in no less than four South-east Asian countries - South Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, as well as in New Guinea?

The Australian war is being waged at present in the shadow of the American war in Indo-China, but it is a continuation of a policy that was already clearly formulated in the early 1950's.

At that time the Menzies Government, having already participated on a small scale in the U.S. sponsored intervention in Korea, sent troops to join the British in what it openly called counterinsurgency action in Malaya.

And in 1954, as Wilfred Burchett has revealed in his book "North of the 17th Parallel", Australia secretly promised 6 battalions to support John Foster Dulles' still-born scheme to intervene with nuclear weapons, to continue the collapsed counter - revolutionary war of the French imperialists in Indo-China.

Of course, these and subsequent applications of the policy, have been disguised with Government appeals to chauvinism ... to "stop the southward drive of Asian communism, Better to fight them there than here, don't let all the dominoes fall"; and also, to "help the U.S.A. how, so that they will help us later when our need is great." All this is the classic line of "defence of our homeland."

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In fact, the policy is founded on an Australian ruling class strategy that has nothing to do with defence.

This strategy is based on the perspectives of great profit and growing international influence sought by the dominant forces of a technologically advanced monopoly capitalist regime, in an Australia of vast new resources and a relatively small home market.

They aim for a substantial share of the expanding S.E. Asian market for goods and export capital. Because of Australia's relative weakness, this strategy has always had to be meshed in with that of other, bigger imperialist forces — first UK, then U.S.A. and now Japan.

In the last case, we see Australian strategy as pressing for an indispensable position as supplier of decisive ores and fuel to Japanese heavy industry which in turn is a powerful force bent on the neo-colonialist enslavement of millions in S.E. Asia and elsewhere.

The Australian strategy further seeks a near monopoly of power and exploitation of the peoples of Oceania, especially Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and to varying extents New Zealand and small island communities.

Unfortunately for these perspectives, the peoples of Indo-China, Indonesia, Malaya and elsewhere developed their historic revolutionary actions. The imperialists were forced to co-operate — especially from the time of Geneva in 1954, which was soon followed by the ill-fated SEATO — in protracted counter - revolutionary activity, including a series of wars, still unfolding.

While this is also related to the Imperialist powers' world strategic conflict with the communist Great powers, the particular aim of the imperialists in S.E. Asia is plunder. And Australia's rulers have been among the most enthusiastic originators and architects of this strategy.

That is the reason why Australia has such a long-term and widely dispersed military commitment based on conscription, in the region — described by Menzies in 1966 as being necessary for at least 20 years to come. It explains Australian interest in SEATO, ASPAC, the Asian Development Bank, the coup and consortium on Indonesia, developing

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military relations with Japan, the desire for a pact with Indonesia, the expansion of Australian military power in Papua New Guinea.

It explains all the effort over five years to encourage deeper U.S. military involvement while expanding Australian military capability, which will not exclude nuclear weapons production.

Above all, it explains the intensity of Australian military action in Vietnam, which has already cost this country \$1500 million above other military expenditure, in these 5 years.

It explains Gorton's reluctance to even give verbal praise to U.S. manoeuvres for a degree of military disengagement from the Vietnam military trap, where major military defeat for the imperialist forces is steadily accumulating.

The necessity to go to war to implement their imperialist strategy has now run into the further Complication — both in the USA and in Australia — of significant resistance by the domestic population.

Opposition has not come as a surprise to the Australian Establishment. If their basic strategy was being implemented nearly 20 years ago, by 10 years ago they knew that serious anti-war resistance would develop in Australia after they became involved in serious military intervention. Hence the 1960 Crimes Act Amendments.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the scale of the May Moratorium took the authorities by surprise. Never before had the forces of the State completely lost control of the streets. We of the anti-war forces, too, were surprised by the seeming ease of the achievement. But rightwing political forces, the police hierarchy of all States, and those capitalist economic leaders with whom they both associate in clubs and certain committees, did not waste time. They prepared to ensure That we were not allowed to do this again.

Political "law and order" campaigns were mounted to pave the way and to lay the basis for new legal restrictions on democracy; the police in all major States made long and elaborate plans. Finally they selected for action the two States where prolonged central sitdowns appeared likely to take place.

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In the event, they taught the lesson of who is responsible for violence in this society, and they taught it to a very wide spectrum of people. This lesson strengthens the forces against the war, who have already matured greatly, but it also widens the basis for revolutionary consciousness, especially among young people.

On the other hand, while it has brought temporary political setback to the NSW Liberal Government and thereby weakened the Gorton law and order campaign, there has not been — either in NSW or SA or anywhere else — the slightest suggestion that the police leadership or the real Establishment have been in any way deterred.

We must assume that hardline tactics will be followed by State from here on, to prevent what Police Commissioner Allan actually called, in one statement following the September Moratorium, an "attempt to take control of the city by insurrection." In short, we must place in the centre of our thinking that we are struggling against a ruling Establishment deeply committed to an imperialist, counter-revolutionary war, for which the guilt and the aims are singularly clear — more clear, for example, than, they were in World War 1.

When Lenin in 1915 wrote repeatedly of the inescapable duty of revolutionaries and a revolutionary class to work for "the defeat of one's own government" in an imperialist war, he was not talking just of electoral defeat, but also of both external and internal defeat, destruction of the government with the system it represents.

This is a concept whereby revolutionaries must never move away from seeking to explain the condition of crisis that inevitably develops from a reactionary war, especially for the defeated regimes; and to seek the path to develop revolutionary actions to overthrow the imperialist regime; for only this way can the imperialist war strategy be destroyed. There is no possibility of a democratic peace, even if signed, being observed by the imperialists.

But we should not need to refer to Lenin to know these things. The desperate determination of the Australian Imperialists to pursue their strategy is shown by the genocidal kind of war they are waging; and in their preparation to escalate repressive violence and jailings at home, and in PNG.

Nixon's latest counter-revolutionary manoeuvre, including a proposal for an Indo-China

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Peace Conference, should remind us from the Geneva experience that any new truce concerning some part of S.E. Asia which might be agreed to by Washington in its own world interests, would be regarded by the Australian imperialists as only a prelude to new attempts at penetration, and new counter revolutionary war in other parts, down to and including New Guinea.

Opposed to the war strategy of Australia's rulers is the revolutionary resistance of the People of S.E. Asia.

This, first of all, increasingly threatens the U.S.-led forces with ignominious military defeat which they cannot explain away; secondly it has already plunged Australian society into an ideological crisis. There is very little scope for the effective use of chauvinist arguments to delude the masses as in World War 1, for example. In fact, there is even growing mass sympathy for internationalist, and anti-imperialist concepts, because of the just cause and the impressive conduct of the Vietnamese liberation forces.

A factor now becoming important is the attitude of the Australian people to the war. While Australian casualties are not yet massive (about 550 dead, 2000 wounded), still the cost in conscripted manpower plus material costs and consequences already have led to a mass spontaneous antipathy and resistance to continued involvement in this war, which is further deepened by the considerable disgust at the slaughter and at the Governments Immoral position.

Yet much is still to be exposed. All Australians have to be told much more of these realities of what their young men have been committed to do by the Australian imperialists, and for what purpose.

(Sydney Tribune, Sydney, New South Wales, AU, October 21, 1970)

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The ‘Bummers’ Saga continues...



The “Bummers” Saga



Unseen Scars

By Howard Taylor

From out of the jungles, through the base camps, across the airfields, out of the rice patties and up the hill they came. Battle worn they were as they put the sounds of mortars, rockets, gun fire, and the whirling of the Huey’s behind them. They could still hear the chaos of the medic’s calling for Medevac and the sergeants’ yelling out instructions and there was that awful smell of sulfur from all the gun fire and explosives.

Returning home wasn’t easy either, as they came home to a thankless, ungrateful nation only to be spit upon, egged, and called horrific names such as baby killer. In fact, many would change their uniforms for civilian clothes trying to blend into the crowds in order to get home without protest. They tried to hide the fact that they were veterans as they stashed their memorabilia and memories away in a safe place and attempted to return to a normal life. This is what it was like for them years after returning home.

My time in Vietnam was spent as an aircraft weapons specialist. In 1966 and 1967 I was with the 8th and 13 Tactical Bombardment Squadrons. In 1969 I was sent back to Vietnam with the 8th Bombardment Squadron. These squadrons with the B-57, a medium twin engine jet bomber. Like most everyone that ever worked on the B-57, it was a special plane to all that knew and fell in love with the bird and I was no exception. This first handful of weapons specialist that went to Bien Hoa Air Base became known as the “**B-57 Bummers**”, instead of bombers. They elected to spell it bummers since there was a shortage of personnel in the squadron that often worked long hours, missing showers and laundry calls. In reality, they started looking like bums so one day in the chow hall some airmen from another unit hold them they looked like bums. They said, “Yes we are bums, we are the B-58 Bummers: which stuck throughout the war.

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War seems to build a bond between men that served in combat together with lasts a lifetime. It didn't matter what branch you served or job that you had, there was a brotherhood and the men that served together came to know one another in a deeper way than anyone else. These men entrusted with one another their deepest and most humble being and were not ashamed to express their fears of dying. War is not pretty and the effects of it will stay with a combat veteran for a lifetime. It affects everyone in different ways and some memories are about as fresh in some people's minds today as the day a horrific tragedy happened. For me, that day was the horrific incident of September 26, 1969 at 0100 hours. It is a time embedded and ingrained in my mind to this day along with the name Michael D. Gunnels. I had not known him or his name before that night but it is a name that has been forever carved into the deepest recesses of my mind.

That night, like many other, we received orders for a turn-a-around missions which meant that we had a plane coming in from a night mission and had to have it back in the air within an hour. This was pretty much an impossible task to accomplish if you followed every step the check list required to make a plane mission ready. It had to have fuel, bombs that had to be loaded and fused, ammo loaded for the guns, not to mention checking and correcting any problems that may have showed on the prior mission. In regards to this particular plane, there had been some minor problems with the radio and the left outboard gun did not fire well. Keep in mind also that you are not supposed to load bombs and fuel at the same time and there is also a post/pre flight check that needed to be initiated. There was just so much to do in such a short amount of time that everyone took shortcuts on steps in order to complete their checklist and have the bird back in the air at the allotted time given.

I made the mistake of not breaking all four guns down that night, as I had done several times before. They were electrically fired guns and the cannon plugs were disconnected and laying across the body of each gun. The feed chutes were also disconnected and my gun helper was dropping spent links so we could load fresh ammo cans. I had broken down the outboard gun in order to trouble shoot and see why it had problems firing during the previous mission. As always, there was a lot of movement in and about the revetment and I asked the bomb team leader to set the switches and give the trigger a squeeze so I could check the outboard gun, when he did, the inboard gun fired. In that moment I think I heard three rounds fire but to this day, I could not say for sure. My ears were ringing from the explosion of the 20mm rounds, but I did hear the yell and saw Michael laying on the ramp close to the cockpit with a couple of

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people on each side of him. As I realized what had happened, I went across the fuselage because the ramp where Michael way was crowded. I squatted down to jump from the wing and someone reached up, got a hold of me and put me in the bomber van and drove me back to the shop.

I was still dazed and trying to get my hearing back and someone gave me a cup of coffee. It was chaos, there was people coming and going and I remember someone in my face telling me not to tell anyone I had been working a 12 hour shift. Then a short time later, a couple of guys with brass took me to a building and put me in a conference room where they set-up a recorder and started asking me all kinds of question. I'm not sure how long I was there but it seemed like I stayed in that room until daylight. It was then that I was told that Michael had died. I was given one day off and was put back to work on the guns the following day.

A few days later I was informed that I was being charged with Dereliction of Duty and Negligent Homicide and I would face a general court-martial-martial. The court-martial lasted almost a week and I was found guilty of Derelictions of Duty and not guilty of Negligent Homicide. Of course at that time, I myself sentenced myself to a guilty verdict for life.

Like most war veterans, I came home and tried to forget, but forget I could not. The internal scars are deep for some of us and the guilt we bear may not be seen, but it haunts us and makes remembering hell sometimes. There have been instances where watching television or hearing a particular sound will send a tear creeping down out the corner of my eyes and in the stillness of a dark night, I can still hear the screams, even 50 years later.

In 2002 after a Bummer reunion in Williamsburg, a dear Bummer friend and I went to D.C. to the Vietnam Wall where I located Michael D. Gunnels name and it was as if he reached out from that cold black granite and touched me. I had to go to his hometown and see his family, but unfortunately too many years had passed and his parents were no longer living and I was unable to locate any relatives. I tried, but failed to locate Michael's grave but was only able to locate a memorial at the county court house honoring Michael D. Gunnels. I know that for as long as I live, Michael, you will always be remembered.

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**To live in the hearts of others is
never to die.**

On this day on 26 Sep. 1969
A1C Michael David Gunnels, 35th AMS
Ground casualty.



My Memories

By Chris Walling

I arrived at Cam Ranh Bay late in the evening. When the door of the DC-8 opened I was greeted by amazing heat (given the late hour), humidity and that unique Vietnam smell. I spent the night in a covered hootch. I think I slept, but I'm not sure. A burned mattress and a photo of a burned GI was posted outside the hootch and served to bring home the message that smoking in bed was not a good thing to do and it was duly noted.

Sometime later the second day I boarded a C-130 for the trip to Phan Rang. Just after take-off we heard a strange sound, sort of a sudden ping of metal. It's hard to describe because the cargo area of a C-130 is not a quiet place. Soon the loadmaster came around searching for what he eventually found: a fresh hole made by a bullet; probably a rifle round. It had missed all of the cargo and thankfully all of us. I thought, I've been only in country one day and already being shot at. What have I to look forward for the next 364 days?

Phan Rang: Landing at Phan Rang, I was struck by its size. It looked like a base in the U.S. except there were sand bags around everything. Troops were wearing flack vest and helmets. Some were carrying guns and of course there were these little women wearing strange dress like things and straw conical shaped hats, so no, this was not the U.S.

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One of the fellows in the Bummer group served with me at Perrin in Sherman, Texas. I had known he left for Vietnam sometimes earlier, but I didn't know what base he was assigned to. I could not forget Steven B. Beak of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Steve was a character who loved pranks and I will share two of them.

Here's the first prank that Steve pulled. Late one night Steve snuck up on the outside of the Bummer shack on the flight line carrying a fire extinguisher. As you know, the top half of the shack was screened in. Rotating fans were placed up in the corners to try and help with the heat but not very successfully. Steve quietly raised the extinguisher and discharged it into the back of the shack. Powder went everywhere and covered everything including the now very mad people running out of the shack. Steve ran off laughing his head off. I'm not sure what payback he got but I suspect there was some.

And then there was this Prank pulled by Steve and others, but first some background information. Someone discovered that the empty cardboard tubes that spare gun barrels come in made a great “Mortar Tube”. The top portion of the tube fit so snugly that if you quickly pushed it down it would compress the air inside the tube and the cap would pop off with the pressure. The cap had a metal end so it landed hard and could take several “firings”. Again, late one night, as the line van was slowly making its way to the Bummer shack, Steve and a few others were waiting in ambush. One or more of the “mortars” were fired off landing on top of the van with a loud bang. They all yelled “IN COMING”! The driver bailed out without bringing the van to a stop; I think it ended up in the ditch next to the taxiway. Again if there was retribution, I don't know what it was.

At some point I discovered the bus that brought Vietnamese workers, mainly mana-sans from the town of Phan Rang. I volunteered to ride shotgun on its early morning run. The bus was a Mercedes as I recall with all windows like a typical bus. It was pretty beat up and had a bad muffler so it was noisy as hell. It was still dark when we headed from the base to the town. The road was narrow, barely one car wide. Vegetation was thick on both sides of the road for most of the way and gave the impression of driving in a tunnel. On the first run, as I was sitting in the front passenger seat, a sobering thought occurred to me; how the hell was I going to shoot out of the side window being right handed? Here I am an Air Force weenie, right handed, sitting in the right hand seat of a noisy bus, in the dark with an M-16 in my hand and thinking I'm going

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to fend off the bad guys!

Wow, one morning we suddenly came upon a road block. It was brush and miscellaneous stuff that had been thrown across the road, but enough stuff that we had to come to a stop, but the driver managed to edge around it and headed on into town. They didn't think to turn around and I don't know why. When we arrived in town it seemed like the whole town was up and they seemed upset. Apparently the VC had come through earlier. I seem to remember someone saying the VC took people away, but just don't remember any other details, if I even knew them in the first place.

We felt sorry for our mama-sans that took care of our barracks. We would see her squatting on the floor using a handmade broom that was made from plant fronds and just thought it wasn't right, so we bought a real broom from the PX and were so proud when we gave it to her. We even had to demonstrate how easy it was to use and that it was going to make it easier for her to sweep. She smiled and thanked us. We left thinking we had done something really neat! The next day we found her squatting on the floor sweeping with her old “broom” while our bright and shiny one stood propped up in the corner. She was not ready for the 20th century I guess. Change comes hard for us all.



U.S. Air Force Master Sergeant **Ralph I Hammons**, son of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin H. Hammons, Middle Point, has arrived for duty at George AFB, Calif. Sergeant Hammons, a jet engine technician, is in a unit of the Tactical Air Command which provides Combat units for air support of cunnrnt of U S ground forces. He previously served at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. The sergeant is a 1954 graduate of Van Del High School. His wife, Freddie, is the daughter of Mrs. Minnie Highnight, 303 West Hanna, Davis, Okla. (Delphos Daily Herald, Delphos, Ohio, September 2, 1971)

Captain Frank Ligon Promoted in Viet Nam - **Frank Ligon**, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Burney Ligon,

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who is stationed In Phan Rang, Vietnam with the United States Air Force, has been promoted from lieutenant to the rank of captain, his parents have been notified here. Captain Ligon, who received his degree in veterinary medicine from AAM University. Is writing articles on “The scout dog and the leech” and Is doing research on diseases of dogs. He is also In charge of food sanitation in several mess halls. He has traveled to Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore - cities of Malasia, and to Bangkok, Thailand. Mrs. Ligon Is teaching in Edna, her former hometown and plans to meet her husband In Honolulu, Hawaii during his leave in June. (Fort Stockton Pioneer, Fort Stockton, Texas, March 16, 1967)

Frank Ureta Jr. Arrives In Phan Rang, Viet Nam - Pvt. **Frank Ureta, Jr.**, of Fort Stockton, recently arrived in Phan Rang, South Viet Nam. Ureta has been in U. S. Army for about a year and Is attached to a light maintenance company. Friends may reach him by writing to Pvt. Frank Ureta, Jr., RA 187465502, P.R.S.A.C. 552nd Lt. Maint. Co. (C.S.), A.P.O. San Francisco, 96321 (Fort Stockton Pioneer, Fort Stockton, Texas, March 16, 1967)

Sgt. **Eugene C. Arnold**, son of Mr. and Mrs. Cari Arnold, 621 9th Ave. S., is stationed at Phan Rang, Vietnam; with the 35th Combat Support Group. He left here July 22, after a 30-day leave, and was promoted to sergeant before going overseas. He entered service in June 1967, trained at Lackland Air Force Base, Tex., and was assigned to duty in Greece until last May. (Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune, August 15, 1970)

Sgt. **Andrew J. Stanke**, son of Mrs. Roseann Stanke, Rt. 1, Bancroft, has reported to Laughlin Air Force Base, Tex., for duty as an aircraft maintenance specialist, having previously served at Phan Rang Air Base in Vietnam. (Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune, Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin, January 29, 1972)



MSgt. Billy Clark

Billy Clark - With a tear in my eye and sadness in my heart I regret to inform you that Billy Clark passed away, 22 July 2019. Those are the words of his friend and fellow **Spooky**, Junior Skinner, but I used those words because I couldn't express it any better. He was an icon of the Vietnam era and he did so much to keep the memories alive of those few that honorably flew the AC-47 Gunships in Vietnam. Billy was born December 15, 1937 in Wellington, Kansas to William Clark and Ernestine (Bruce) Clark. He married Norma Arbuckle in 1970 in Altus, Oklahoma. Billy was a

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good man, a patriot who served our nation with honor and pride as a Flight Engineer on board the AC-47 “Spooky” Gunships in Vietnam. He was honorably discharged from the U.S. Air Force after 21 years of service. Rest in peace Billy, we will remember.

Doug’s Comments: I hope that you enjoyed this newsletter and if you have any comments or would like to submit a story, just send it to me. This newsletter was composed and all graphics 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.

The 2019 Reunion shirts are on sale [here](#) along with hats and many other Phan Rang related products.