

“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. 182 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

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A Wing, a Prayer and a Good Maint. Man

(Pacific Stars and Stripes, Tokyo, Japan, June 22, 1971)

PHAN RANG AB, Vietnam (Special) — Some people might consider bringing the pilot home safely to be the primary concern of the aircraft mechanic; but his job is much more than that.

Through the skills of these highly-trained technicians, dependable aircraft are available to move vital supplies, people and machinery, and to give support to friendly ground forces in combat with the enemy.

There are more than 2,000 maintenance personnel at Phan Rang AB, divided into three full combat wings: the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW), flying F100 Supersabres; the 14th Special Operations Wing (SOW), using AG119 Shadow and Stinger gunships, the C47 and O2 Super Skymaster psychological operations aircraft; and the 315th Tactical Airlift Wing (TAW), tasked with aerial resupply throughout Southeast Asia using jet-assisted C123 Providers.

Professional aircraft mechanics and munitions men assigned to the four flying squadrons and three maintenance support squadrons of the 35th TFW can load their aircraft with ordnance and have them ready to fly again in less than two and one-half hours after they return from a

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combat mission.

The mechanics of the 35th TFW spend about 26 man-hours per hour of flying time repairing and inspecting the wing's Supersabres.

The 35th Field Maint. Sq. (FMS), one of the units of the 35th TFW, broke all wing records in March when it completely rebuilt 43 J57 jet engines for the FIOOs.

Working in shifts around the clock, seven days a week, the men of the 35th FMS were aided by 23 temporarily assigned personnel from Tinker AFB, Okla., Cam Ranh Bay, Bien Hoa and Tan Son Nhut Air Bases in the Republic of Vietnam, and Naha AB, Okinawa. “They did a lot of hard work,” commented M.Sgt. Fred Williams, non-commissioned officer-in-charge of the propulsion branch. “There was no slack. These are a very dedicated and professional group of people.”

“Everybody pushes as best they can,” remarked a phase dock mechanic. “We get a couple of new guys in who aren't familiar with the F100 and they may turn up defects in the aircraft that even the most experienced maintenance technician has missed.

“We work as a team and check each other's work. When I'm finished with my job, my buddy checks it, and when he's finished, he has someone else check it before the quality control people give it the final okay.”

How do the fighter pilots feel about all the attention given to them by the mechanics?

“They're a great bunch of guys,” exclaimed a young first lieutenant. “Sometimes I go down and see what I can do to help.”

“After spending a couple of hours with us,” broke in the mechanic, “some of the pilots would invite us up to their lounge area or come up to ours, and we would rap about our jobs.”

The gunships are the responsibility of the 14th SOW. “We fly primarily night missions,” Chief M.Sgt. Joe B. Davidson, NCOIC of maintenance control explained, “but our, repairs are done 24 hours a day, whether it be routine line maintenance or major phase work.”

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The average maintenance performed on these reborn workhorses requires 17 man-hour, per flying hour on the Shadow, and 40 man-hours per flying hour on the more sophisticated Stinger. Each gunship goes through phase maintenance after every 100 hours of flying time.

Routine maintenance and battle damage repair is conducted at the wing's forward operating locations at Tan Son Nhut, Da Nang,, and Phu Cat Air Base in the Republic, and Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand.

“The work is constant — always push, push, push, push,” remarked a Stinger maintenance technician. “We get one bird in, then out again, and then we have another one to work on right away. Sometimes we have as many as four aircraft waiting for phase work.”

The psychological operations portion of the 14th is assigned one of the oldest, the C47 Skytrain, And one of the youngest, the O2 Super Skymaster, aircraft in the Air Force inventory. Maintenance averages about 10 man-hours per hour of flying time on the C47 and about, five man-hours per hour of flying time on the O2.

The ,315th TAW and its four squadrons have a different mission, that of resupply throughout Southeast Asia. Assigned C123 Providers, their maintenance requirements differ from the combat-oriented requirements of the 14th SOW and the 35th TFW.

M.Sgt. William R. Scudder, 315th TAW maintenance control NCOIC explained, “The F100s have a specific mission. They go out and drop bombs, shoot cannons, and then come back and recover here. Cargo aircraft differ considerably. We fly several sorties out here, but they may go from here to Cam Ranh, Bay AB, and from there to Da Nang Airfield; We may not see the same aircraft for a couple of days,”

About 85 to 90 per cent of C123 maintenance is done during the night, so the planes are ready for the next day's launch.

The 315th TAW engine shop handles all C123 Provider reciprocating engines in Southeast Asia. “We get them in, rework and repair them, and then get them back out to the owning unit as soon as possible,” Scudder explained.

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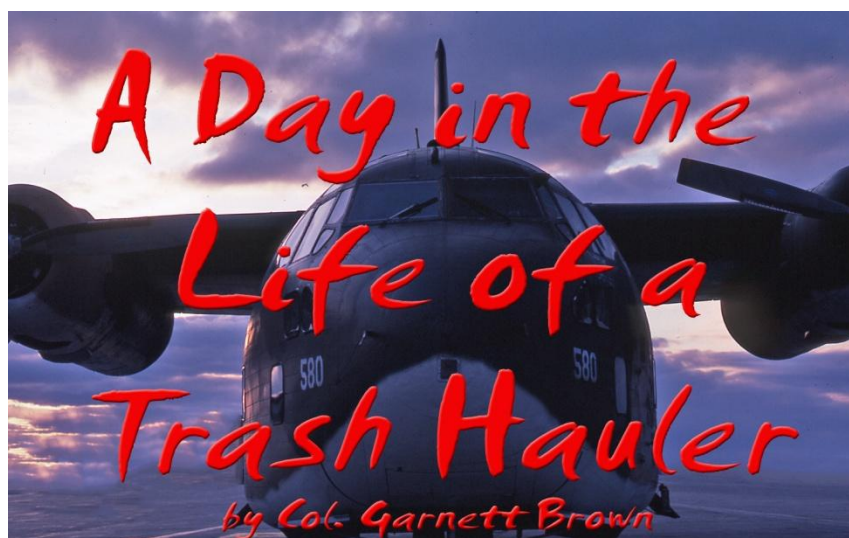
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The wing’s maintenance personnel also provide minor maintenance for the General Electric J85 jet engines which augment the C123s’, piston engines.

Sometimes a C123 will suffer battle damage at one of the many isolated airstrips in Vietnam. When this happens, maintenance personnel are immediately airlifted to the site to provide on-the-spot maintenance and get the Provider back to Phan Rang for any extensive repairs that may be needed.

Even with the great diversity of missions performed by the three wings assigned to this central coastal air base, the job of the maintenance airman is the same — **“to keep ‘em flying, safe and sure.”**



A Day in the Life of a Trash Hauler

NOTE: This is an excerpt from the 2006 book, “Charlie” Brown’s Vietnam Journal, A Tactical Airlift Pilot’s View of the War, © by Garnett C. Brown, Jr. It was published by Publish America, ISBN 1-4241-3021-2. The book is no longer “in print,” but copies may be found on secondary markets.

“Charlie” was stationed at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam from 1970-71, assigned to the 315th Tactical Airlift Wing as a Flying Safety Officer, attached to the 310th Tactical Airlift Squadron for flying duties.

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His boss at the time, Colonel Kenneth Blood, 315th Wing Commander, asked him to write a story for the 7th Air Force Combat Safety magazine. He wanted a story about what it was like for a new guy in the C-123. The article follows:

Ever wonder what it is like to fly in Vietnam?

Specifically, what it is like to fly a veteran

transport on combat support missions

in the war zone? Then add your name to

the crew list and come along on . . .

A Day in the Life of a Trash Hauler

The day starts at 0530 with an alarm clock ringing in the darkness of a closet-sized bedroom.

The captain, still a month new to Southeast Asia, rolls out of bed and silences it with a slap.

He slips on his shower clogs and pads down the hall to the community latrines. Twenty minutes later he's dressed in a fire-resistant flight suit and deep-cleated jungle boots. He grunts as he picks up his heavy black leather flight bag - - the one with all the aircraft manuals, charts, computer and assorted tools of his trade. He thinks it might be lighter if he'd take out the bottle Scotch whiskey he carries for possible bartering with the Army troops at the forward operating bases.

Outside, it is still dark. A million stars light the oriental sky as he sits down with several other quiet crewmembers. They are waiting for the 0600 bus to take them to the other side of the field, where their airplanes have already been awakened and serviced for the days' missions.

The blue Air Force bus is only five minutes late today - a new record. The ride around the perimeter of the airfield to the other side takes ten minutes. It is a quiet ride, as each man thinks his private thoughts about the war, today's flight, and going home.

The captain swings down from the bus and deposits his bag on the ground in front of the squadron operations building. He walks past the other buildings in the area to the end one . . . the mess hall.

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The quiet is gone. Bright lights and voices of cooks, maintenance men, shift supervisors and aircrews mingle with the smells of bacon and oranges, eggs and creamed beef on toast (affectionately known as “something on a shingle,” or words to that effect). A quick breakfast, and by 0630 it’s daylight, and the captain is back at Operations.

This morning’s pre-mission briefing is scheduled for 0700. In the 30 minutes until that time, a pilot has to check the contents of his metal map case. Because each mission is a fragment of the overall daily logistics schedule, it is called a “frag.” The map case is called the “frag bag.” It contains both instrument and visual flight rule charts, letdown plates, and Enroute Supplement, Tactical Aerodrome Directory and numerous forms that could be required during the day’s mission. The pilot must check the schedule to see where he is going today.

“Let’s see; the 513 mission goes to Song Mao, Bao Loc, Cam Ranh Bay, Ban Me Thuot, Cam Ranh Bay again, Phan Thiet, and back home to Phan Rang.”

Then he must check the airfield folders for any field he hasn’t been to previously, to see what the approaches look like and to determine what he’ll encounter there. Next he checks the NOTAMs (Notices to Airmen), and then makes sure his publications are all current and that he has signed the Crew Information File.

The last item on his personal checklist is a walk across the street to the Life Support Section, where he picks up his survival vest, headset, web belt with survival knife, ammunition and .38 revolver. He loads the pistol, adjusts his gear and heads for the briefing room. There he sees the other captain he’ll be sharing the cockpit with today. They sit down and wait.

“In one minute,” the tall, red-haired Lieutenant Colonel is saying, “the time will be exactly zero seven hundred hours.”

The crews are seated in rows facing a small platform. The first briefer covers the weather around the country. The next man covers intelligence. Then the Lieutenant Colonel again addresses the crews. He discusses safety and the Emergency Procedure for the day. Finally he asks someone in the audience to call out the immediate action items for a particular emergency:

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“Jet engine fire on the ground. Copilot on the 513 mission.” The copilot thinks they must pick on the new guys. He clears his throat. “Start switch shutdown; motoring switch - - motor; all engines - - shutdown.”

“That is correct.”

In 15 minutes the briefing is concluded. The crew has 45 minutes to get airborne. They load their gear, then climb into the back of a battered blue van for the ride to the revetments and their aircraft. Each aircraft is parked in a three-sided steel revetment. It has no roof. The idea is to protect the aircraft from damage. If a mortar round hits one aircraft and sets it on fire, damage to adjacent aircraft would be minimized. As the pilot and copilot step out of the van, they’re met by the loadmaster and flight engineer, who have been completing their preflight inspections of the plane. The two sergeants smile and say hello, small beads of sweat on their foreheads already showing the day will be another hot one.



Usually the aircraft is loaded before the crew even arrives. A ‘duty loadmaster’ will be on duty in the early hours of the morning to assist the aerial port personnel in the loading of all aircraft slated to operate that day. This picture is actually the start of an off load, but the on-load process is basically the same. Pictured is a 25k aircraft loader capable of holding 4-463L

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aluminum aircraft pallets, an AT forklift with adapters on the tines that are equipped with skate rollers for on/off loading single pallets and a 40-foot flatbed tractor trailer used to haul the cargo between the freight terminal and the aircraft revetment parking areas. Photo by Doug Severt

After the pilots stow their gear, the crew gathers by the tail of the plane and briefs the day's mission and the operating procedures to be followed. Fifteen minutes before their scheduled block-out time, the “Before Starting Recip Engines” checklist is completed, and the aircraft comes to life with a throaty growl and a cloud of bluish-white smoke as the R-2800 engines start.

The next task is to back the aircraft out of the revetment. Props in reverse pitch, they slowly back straight out, then turn to line up on the taxiway. Props out of reverse, the twin engine transport eases out to accomplish the day's mission.

The pilot jokes that he once went with a girl who was having trouble learning how to drive: “She said flying must be so much easier since you never have to back up!”
(While backing under its own power is unusual for most aircraft, it is routine for C-123's in Southeast Asia.)

The seven sorties the crew on the 513 mission will fly today take them to a variety of bases and areas. They operate near mountains; over sandy beaches; off-shore to avoid ground fire when possible; and over dense jungle - - all in the same day. They'll dodge thunderstorms and rain showers and enjoy rainbows playing colors in the clouds. They will land at fields with modern concrete runways 10,000 feet long and 150 feet wide. They'll also squeeze into fields with dirt or metal mat runways only 2,000 feet long and 60 feet wide. They'll refuel twice, gravity-feeding gas into the tanks from on top of the wings. There is no modern center point pressure refueling on the Provider.

And a real Provider the C-123 has become. The K model, in Vietnam, has two auxiliary jet engines as well, which permit a crewmember to think he is a bush pilot as he maneuvers the stubby craft into, and out of, crude strips at or near the aircraft's maximum gross weight of 60,000 pounds.

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Crew duties fill the average 40-minute legs and leave little time for relaxing. For example, there will be numerous radio calls to control sites requesting artillery advisories and flight following. “Firing and following,” it’s called. They’ll have to fly over uncontrolled landing strips - - those with no control tower - - and make radio calls “in the blind” to alert any other traffic in the area prior to landing. The crews must be especially alert for the many Army helicopters that operate throughout Vietnam. At some fields, they will have to fly a high approach from a random - - rather than a standard – landing pattern, almost diving to the runway at the last possible moment in a steep assault approach to avoid ground fire from enemy troops ringing the field. That’s when the crew is thankful for the armor-plate that has been added to their cramped cockpit.

As the pilot brings his craft over the landing threshold, propellers at full increase and jets at idle power (prepared to make a go-around if necessary), he’s one with the control yoke and rudder pedals and throttles, particularly at a field that has been carved from a hilltop, or one that has a steep uphill gradient. Plus, maybe a crosswind. On speed, a few knots above his stall speed, he “arrives.” An arrival is usually firmer than a normal landing. Simultaneously, he pulls the throttles back into their reverse detent, reversing the pitch on the propellers and providing full reverse thrust, and tromps on the brakes. The jets shutdown automatically with reverse, shutter doors closing in front of the intakes to prevent them from ingesting flying debris picked up from the dirt runway. The anti-skid brakes chatter, and the C-123 stops easily in 1,600 feet. It all happens quicker than it takes to read about it.

Since the Provider’s flight controls are not boosted, but are direct mechanical linkages, you can tell a man who has been flying them for a while by his calloused left hand and large left bicep! His right hand controls the throttles, while his left must maneuver the aircraft.

The aircraft engines will probably be left running while on the ground at this forward operating base; and, if the area is particularly hazardous, the crew may opt for a “speed offload.” For this procedure, the loadmaster removes the chains holding down the palletized cargo and opens the rear doors. Once at the offload location on the field, the pilot stops, runs up the engines, then releases the brakes. The aircraft lurches forward and simply drives out from under the cargo! An aircraft left too long on the ground at a forward base is likely to attract mortar fire.

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This picture is a perfect example of off-loading the aircraft by having the aircraft lurch forward and the cargo just rolls off the aircraft. At this remote unimproved airstrip this load of 4x4s was just loaded on the aircrafts 'skate rollers' and will roll off the airplane onto the barrels when the aircraft lurches forward.

The takeoff is as spectacular as the landing, as the Provider climbs out of the heat and humidity into the cooler air at 6,000 to 8,000 feet. The air conditioning is simple to operate at those altitudes . . . just slide the big side cockpit windows open! Modern? No. But like her sister ships -- the C-7 Caribou and the C-130 Hercules -- she carries the goods where they are needed.

The cargo carried today represents a wide variety of the goods that are airlifted daily in Southeast Asia. There are pallets of ice and crates of oranges. There is chocolate milk and boxes of fresh corn-on-the-cob. There is a stack of fresh bread. Here is a refrigerated shipping

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container full of five-gallon cartons of ice cream. Over there are pallets of mortar shells and small arms ammunition. There will be petit Vietnamese nuns and a few refugees. Even two small Jeeps will be airlifted. One of the most important things carried is the U.S. mail.



The aircraft is also capable of air dropping troops and cargo. In this picture, the aircraft is configured to drop paratroops which they are in the process of doing. The picture also shows the ‘skate rollers’ on the cargo floor on which cargo of all types can be placed and tied down for flight and also palletized cargo on 463L aircraft pallets, which also have to be tied down with either chains or straps because there is no locking mechanism. A view of the canvas seating is also visible on both sides of the aircraft.

The 513 mission will airlift 21.5 tons of goods today. The crew will log 7.4 hours of flying time, and they won’t get home till 1900 hours. It is a long day. Routine? Yes, but few tactical airlift missions can be called routine. Weather, terrain, old equipment, uncontrolled air traffic, artillery and enemy action see to that.

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HOME AT LAST - Returning home after the last mission of the day a C123 Taxi to the MAC ramp for off load. If the load consisted just of cargo, the returning aircraft would likely just taxi to their assigned spot in the revetments and the cargo would be off loaded at that location, but if passengers were part of the load they would more than likely taxi to the MAC ramp in front of the passenger terminal. A first time passenger on the aircraft equated the trip to a “suicide mission”. Photo by Doug Severt

Once back home, it feels good to shut down the engines for the final time, with the aircraft’s nose securely tucked back into her revetment, waiting for the hard-working maintenance troops to massage her troubles away.

But the aircrew isn’t finished yet. First, there is the crew’s bus ride back from the flight line. Then to Life Support to unload the revolver and hang up the gear. Next comes the maintenance debriefing for the pilots. Finally, the copilot turns in the frag bag, and the crew finishes signing all the paperwork.

It’s time for a cool brew in the squadron party room. Last, as evening darkens the sky, comes the bus ride back to the other side of the base . . . and rest. It has been a busy day for all concerned.

Our new pilot has been introduced to part of the giant logistics system in Vietnam. “Trash

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Hauler” refers to all the airlifters – C-123, C-7, and C-130 – as well as their crews. Their cargo, of course, is not trash but important goods and materials vital to our efforts in Southeast Asia.

They say the airlifters haul the “beans, bacon and bullets” in Southeast Asia, and that is true. Each type aircraft utilizes its special talents for the job assigned. It’s not a haphazard job, either. The crews – officer and enlisted, air and ground crew – are professional, and safety is their byword. It has to be.

Although they sometimes get shot up, and sometimes shot down, the airlifters do a tremendously important job, one that has little glamour. But the look in a GI’s eyes as he meets the aircraft at a tiny fortified Special Forces camp, when he sees that bag of mail tossed into his waiting Jeep, makes it all worthwhile.

“Thanks,” he says with a grin.

“No sweat,” you reply. **“All part of a day in the life of a trash hauler.”**

Comments: The venerable Provider is an integral part the collective memory of Phan Rang AB for many people and for some such as myself who planned, loaded and offload the trash from this aircraft, it is the most iconic plane of Phan Rang. Over the years that I’ve compiled this newsletter, there have been some wonderful, sad and tragic stories concerning the C-123. Just as the story above gives you a day-by-days overview of life with the Provider, Ben Swett, a C-123 navigator kept a diary for his entire year in Vietnam. See Newsletter 153. Reading his diary you will discover the trials and tribulations the air crews faced every day. Some days were probably ho-hum, but most were met with unique challenges.

To get a feel for what it was really like to be there on the ground and in the air, flying, loading, coordinating/planning missions, Robert Chappelle wrote a book from his experiences flying the Providers all over Vietnam from his home base of Phan Rang. His book is “Tales of Phan Rang” and it starts in Newsletter 26 with the first chapter and there is a chapter in every newsletter ending with chapter 18 in Newsletter 43.

Then there are the stories that still haunt some of us today...some more than others like the crash of Bookie 102 on 27 November 1970 and the crash of Bookie 540 just a few days later on

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29 November. There were survivors, but there also was a great loss of life as well. The account of these crashed are detailed in Newsletter 150 and other articles during the run of this publication.

There are other significant stories that have been included in the Newsletter, but they really are too numerous to mention. After reading some of these stories and gaining some knowledge of the aircraft you will begin to see that it was the perfect aircraft for the missions that it was tasked to perform. The ‘**Little Aircraft that Could**’.

Special thanks to Garnett “Charlie” Brown, Col (USAF, Ret.) for allowing this story to be shared.

Picture note: The title picture is not from Vietnam, but was taken by me at Goose Bay Airport, Labrador when two C-123s stopped in for fuel on their way to Europe.



U.S. ARMY'S ELITE UNIT'S ATROCITIES UNCOVERED

Many of the men from Tiger force look back with regret

Quang Ngai, Vietnam - For the 10 elderly farmers in the rice paddy, there was nowhere to hide. The river stretched along one side, mountains on the other. Approaching quickly in between were the soldiers, an elite U.S. Army unit known as **Tiger Force**.



Though the farmers were not carrying weapons, it didn't matter: No one was safe when the special force arrived on July 28, 1967.

No one.

With bullets flying, the farmers dropped one by one to the ground. Within minutes, it was over: Four were dead,

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others wounded. Some survived by lying motionless in the mud.

Four soldiers later recalled the assault.

“We knew the farmers were not armed to begin with,” one said, “but we shot them anyway”

The unprovoked attack was one of many carried out by the decorated unit in the Vietnam War, an eight-month investigation by The Toledo Blade shows.

A review of thousands of classified Army documents. National Archive records, and radio logs reveals a fighting unit that carried out the longest series of atrocities in the Vietnam War and commanders who looked the other way:

- The platoon, a small, highly trained unit of 45 paratrooper created to spy on enemy forces, violently lost control between May and November 1967.
- For seven months, Tiger Force soldiers moved across the central highlands, killing scores of unarmed civilians — in some cases torturing and mutilating them — in a spate of violence never revealed to the American public.
- They dropped grenades into underground bunkers where women and children were hiding and shot unarmed civilians, in some cases as they begged for their lives.
- They frequently tortured and shot prisoners, severing ears and scalps for souvenirs.

Long investigation

For 4 ½ years, the Army investigated the platoon finding numerous eyewitnesses and substantiating war crimes. But in the end, no one was prosecuted and the case was buried in the archives for three decades.

To this day, no one knows how many unarmed men, women, and children were killed by platoon members 36 years ago.

At least 81 were fatally shot or stabbed, records show, but many others were killed in what were clear violations of American military law and the 1949 Geneva Conventions. In more than

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100 interviews with The Blade of former Tiger Force soldiers and Vietnamese civilians, the platoon is estimated to have killed hundreds of unarmed civilians in those seven months.

“We weren’t keeping count,” said former Pvt. Kenneth Kerney, a California firefighter. “I knew it was wrong, but it was an acceptable practice.”

Many details of the period question are unknown: Records are missing from the National Archives, and several suspects and witnesses have died, In many cases, the soldiers remember the atrocities and general locations, but not the precise dates.

Memories still clear

What’s clear is that four decades later, many Vietnamese villagers and former Tiger Force soldiers are deeply troubled by the brutal killing of villagers, “It was out of control,” said Rion Causey, 55, a former platoon medic and now a nuclear engineer. “I still wonder how some people can sleep 30 years later.”

Among the newspaper’s findings:

- Commanders knew about the platoon’s atrocities in 1967, and in some cases, encouraged the soldiers to continue the violence.
- Two soldiers who tried to stop the atrocities were warned by their commanders to remain quiet before transferring to other units.
- The Army investigated 30 separate war-crimes allegations against Tiger Force between February 1971 and June 1975, finding 18 soldiers committed crimes, including murder and assault, according to investigators. No one was ever charged,
- Six platoon soldiers suspected of war crimes were allowed to resign during the investigation, escaping military prosecution.
- Summaries of the Tiger Force case were forwarded in 1973 to President Richard Nixon’s White House and the offices of Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger and Secretary of the Army Howard “Bo” Callaway, according to National Archives records. Through his secretary, Schlesinger declined to comment, Callaway said he didn’t remember the investigation.

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Documents remain closed

To this day, the Army’s Criminal Investigation Command refuses to release thousands of records that could explain what happened and why the case was dropped. Army spokesman Joe Burlas said last week it may have been difficult to press charges but couldn’t explain flaws in the investigation.

The Army interviewed 120 witnesses and tracked down former Tiger Force members in more than 60 cities around the world. But for the past three decades, the case has not even been a footnote in the annals of one of the nation’s most divisive wars.

Thirty years after U.S. combat units left Vietnam, the elderly farmers of the Song Ve Valley live with memories of the platoon that passed through their hamlets so long ago.

Nyugen Dam, now 66, recalls running as the soldiers fired into the rice paddy that summer day in 1967, “I am still angry,” he said, waving his arms, “Our people didn’t deserve to die that way.

“We were farmers. We were not soldiers. We didn’t hurt anyone,” But one former platoon soldier offers no apologies for the platoon’s actions.

William Doyle, a former Tiger Force sergeant now living in Missouri, said he killed so many civilians he lost count.

“We were living day to day. We didn’t expect to live. Nobody out there with any brains expected to live,” he said in a recent interview, “So you did any god- thing you felt like doing, especially to stay alive.

“The way to live is to kill because you don’t have to worry about anybody who’s dead.”

To cover up the shootings, platoon leaders began counting dead civilians as enemy soldiers, five former soldiers told The Blade.

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A review of Army logs supports their accounts.

For 10 days beginning November 11, entries show that platoon members were claiming to be killing Viet Cong — total of 43. But no weapons were ever found, records show.

Causey recalls a report to commanders, “We would call in on the radio — ‘seven VC running from hut. Shot and killed’ — Hell, they weren’t running. We didn’t know if they were VC.”

Sgt. James Barnett told investigators he once raised concerns to platoon leader Lt. James Hawkins that Tiger Force soldiers were killing people who weren’t carrying weapons.

“Hawkins told me not to worry about it,” he said. “We can always get the weapons later.”

Brutal attacks

During the rampage, the soldiers committed some of their most brutal atrocities, Army records show.

A 13-year-old girl’s throat was slashed after she was sexually assaulted, and a young mother was shot to death after soldiers torched her hut, according to the records.

An unarmed teenager was shot in the back after a platoon sergeant ordered the youth to leave a village, and a baby was decapitated so that a soldier could remove a necklace, the records show.

During the Army’s investigation, former Pvt. Joseph Evans, another Tiger Force soldier, refused to be interrogated. But in a recent interview, he said many people who were running from soldiers during that period were not a threat to troops.

“They were just running because they were afraid. They were in fear. We killed a lot of people who shouldn’t have been killed.”

Time and again, Tiger Force soldiers talked about the executions of captured soldiers — so many, investigators were hard pressed to place a number on the toll.

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And most soldiers just kept quiet, even if they didn't participate.

“Remember, out in the jungle, there were no police officers. No judges. No law and order,” Kerney said in a recent interview. “Whenever somebody felt like doing something, they did it. There was no one to stop them.

“So we watched and didn't say anything. We turned the other way Looking back, it's terrible.

“We should have said something. But at the time, everybody's mindset was, ‘It's OK.’ But it wasn't OK. It's very sad.”

By the end of November, the long campaign was over.

Medals awarded

At a ceremony at the Phan Rang Air Base on Nov. 27, 1967, medals were pinned on the chests of Tiger Force soldiers, including Doyle.

By early 1968, the war was changing.

North Vietnam began its own campaign, the Tet Offensive, attacking 100 villages and cities in the south.

Tiger Force was sent to defend a base near Cambodia.

For medic Rion Causey, the war was no longer about killing civilians but defending American strongholds as the enemy moved toward Saigon.

As the base camp was overrun and soldiers were dying, he came to a grim conclusion: “The only way out of Tiger Force was to be injured or killed.”

He was right.

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On March 6, 1968, he was injured. As he was lifted by the helicopter, he recalled looking down at the Tiger Force soldiers below.

“I remember just kind of saying to myself: ‘God help you guys for what you did. God help you.’ “

Tip starts probe

An investigation began with a tip in 1971: A Tiger Force soldier had decapitated a Vietnamese Baby. The statement by, former Sgt. Gary Coy would spark an Army investigation that would not end until 1975.

Led by a field agent in San Francisco, the case eventually used more than 100 agents to, interview 137 people. In the years after the 1968 My Lai massacre, top military official’s promised to take war crime accusations seriously.

But an inspection of thousands of records of the Tiger Force case shows agents failed to follow their own rules.

They were supposed to investigate as soon as a complaint was filed. They were supposed to monitor key suspects. They were supposed to track down victims.

Those procedures were ignored, seriously, undermining an investigation that would turn up some of the worst atrocities of the war.

At least six suspects were allowed to leave the Army during the investigation, escaping possible court-martials. The Army could have stopped their discharges while the case was pending.

While suspects were allowed to leave the Army, so were witnesses. Because it took investigators a year to act on Coy’s complaint, 11 soldiers were discharged and could not be forced to testify.

Other witnesses included Vietnamese civilians. But U.S., investigators failed to go to South Vietnam to track down witnesses.

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(**Tiger Force** was the name of a long-range reconnaissance patrol unit of the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 327th Infantry, 1st Brigade (Separate), 101st Airborne Division, which fought in the Vietnam War from May to November 1967 and was stationed at Phan Rang AB. **Source:** Salina Journal, Salina, Kansas, October 20, 2003)



Academy Grads Donate To Vietnam Orphanage

(Colorado Springs Gazette, Colorado Springs, Colorado, January 19, 1971)

The Air Force Academy's Association of Graduates donated \$100 to the Tan Tai Catholic Orphanage near Phan Rang City, Vietnam, recently on behalf of the family of the late Maj. James R. Weaver, 1959 USAF academy graduate. The money was presented to the orphanage by three academy graduates stationed at Phan Rang Air base.

The donation came from the Major James R. Weaver Memorial Fund, administered by the Association of Graduates, and in memory of Maj. Weaver, who was killed in an aircraft crash off the Coast of England in May 1970.

In a letter accompanying the donation, Capt. Frederick L. Metcalf, executive secretary of the association, said that Maj. Weaver actively supported Tan Tai Orphanage through the base's civic action program while he was stationed at Phan Rang Air Base. The orphanage cares for 68 Vietnamese children and is run by four Roman Catholic nuns.

Three F-100 Pilots Present Award

The gifts were presented to Sister Marie Aimee De Jesus at the orphanage by Capts. **Gilbert D. Mook**, Charleston, R. I., and **Craig L. McKinney**, Falls Church, Va., and 1st Lt. **William W. Taylor**, Glastonbury, Con. All three are flying F-100s with the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing Phan Rang Air Base.

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War Zone Reports

Vietnam - A Country of Many Faces

(Dubuque Telegraph Herald, Dubuque, Iowa, May 7, 1967)

PHAN RANG, South Vietnam —This southeast Asian country is only about as big as our state of Florida But its changes of terrain and climate are almost too many and varied to comprehend.

Low craggy mountains through the central highlands, sand dunes and desert climate along the mid-coastal region, swamp and rain forests in the delta Jungle like forest in the north. Monsoon seasons arriving at staggered times; and the hot seasons likewise. And all of this is happening in a land the size of our state of Florida.

The extreme climate and terrain variations are said to be caused by two situations. First. Vietnam is subject to unusual air currents which cross over it in irregular patterns. This no doubt also explains the ever-present, whipping wind. Secondly, this country is ribbed with medium-size mountain ranges which deflect and separate the air currents, thus creating irregular pockets of varying weather.

At Phan Rang the weather is hot . . . arid And, of course, the wind was gusting Sometimes it felt like an open furnace door. The land around Phan Rang is rugged, much like the foothills of Colorado. The flatness of It is interrupted in places with low scrubby mountain ranges and large hills (looking like super ant hills with foliage).

Through this environment I sought seven Dubuqueland servicemen. I located three—finding them at different points around the newly laid concrete and asphalt air strip **Eugene Roe, Jr.**, 21, son of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Roe of Green Island, Iowa, was off duty and relaxing in his barracks. I asked about Green Island and he told me it was a small community about ten miles south of Bellevue.

Roe’s air force unit had been reassigned from the Philippines and would spend a total of 18 months in Vietnam. The young airman worked as a weapons specialist. He said he hoped to get a job at the Savanna Ordnance Depot at Savanna. Illinois, after his discharge.

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Another air force maintenance specialist, 22-year-old **David Losen**, was found late in the day on duty at a workshop hangar Losen is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Losen, Decorah, Iowa His specialty is instrument repair. Losen also plans to use his military training as an investment towards a career. He has applied for a commercial airline job.

A specialist of a different breed, **Les Wagner** is a fire fighter. The 22-year old airman, the son of Mrs. Dorothy Wagner, 1361 Gilliam St., Dubuque, is a member of the air bases’ fire and crash rescue department. When on duty, this unit stands ready on a 24 hour a day basis.

The fire fighting teams are a close-knit bunch, full of spirit and good fellowship. During their spare moments they had started a poultry farm and had planted a garden (victory, I presume). In addition, a number of stray dogs served as mascots to the unit.



Wagner -“I believe in our involvement in this war”



Roe - “It’d be beautiful country without the war”



Losen - “My greatest impression? Watching this base grow.”

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The Bummer Saga continues and ends with these stories



The “Bummers” Saga



Phan Rang Stories



By John Moore

Bombs

Our crew was sent out to one of our planes that had not been able to release a 750 pound bomb. We were supposed to get it to release manually, replace the bomb rack and reload the bay for the next mission.

The Bomb lift truck was placed under the bomb and as the B man on the crew, I begin the procedures to manually release the bomb.

Nothing worked.

The lift was lowered a bit so that it was maybe an inch below the bottom of the bomb so that the bomb was swinging free to release any binding that might be keeping it from releasing manually.

It still refused to release.

The crew chief made a silly decision to have the bomb lift moved out from under the bomb and he proceeded to lay down on the ground under the bomb, trying to figure out the reason that it wouldn't release. About this time, the line truck came along to see what we were doing with

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the problem. When he found that we were having no success, he instructed us to tighten the chocks and leave it because the plane needed to fly. He said that if the pilot couldn't release it again, we would deal with the problem then.

I tightened the chocks, tucked my feet per procedure and did the required shake of the bomb to insure that all was mounted well and tight.

Quicker than any of us could blink, that 750 pound bomb hit the ground. The man above was watching over us that day because if it had dropped when the crew chief was under it or I had failed to tuck my feet away from under the bomb, it would have been a sad day for our crew. As it was, we were just quite shaken, but ok.

Our crew was sent out to load the bay on one of our planes. There were four 500 pound cluster bombs loaded on the wing racks. The procedure was to NEVER do a system check when any stations were already loaded. The crew chief decided that it will be OK to do a check on the bay only. He climbs into the cockpit, hits some switches, and four cluster bombs hit the concrete at once. Needless to say, the shit hit the fan that day and if memory serves me correctly the crew chief lost his job and the crew was split up.

Commanders Call

The monthly commanders meetings were something that most dreaded to see come up. When possible they were skipped. This particular month, I almost skipped it but finally decided to attend. I was sitting there with my mind who knows where when the commander called me front and center. I was so surprised and shocked at being called up that saluting the commander never crossed my mind. He then called the other members of my crew front and center. Since I hadn't, no one of them saluted him either. Needless to say, the first sergeant as well as our shop NCO had some choice words for us after the meeting. As it turned out, our crew had been called up for some kind of commendation.

Short-Timer Party

My cube mate went out with three other members of our shop a short time before we were scheduled to return home. Don't remember what time they left, but the plan was to party hard in celebration of the upcoming trip home. They started the party at the airmans club. When they got bored there, they moved over to the Aussie club. The spirits there were a bit more potent. Then someone came up with the bright idea of stealing the 1st Sgt's Jeep. Like most vehicles, no key was needed, so away they go and next they decided to go to the end of the

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runway to see who was working that night. Bad decision. They go to one end of the runway and visit for a while and three of them decide to go to the other end using the taxi way. They were not using their lights so as not to be seen by the guard tower. As they rounded the turn at the other end something goes wrong, they turn over and all are thrown from the jeep. The fourth guys find out what happened and starts running back to the shop to get the truck. Not sure what good he thought the truck would do, but the AP's spot him thinking he is VC. They had already been authorized to shoot to kill, but a plane taxis through their line of sight and save him. The three that were in the Jeep were in pitiful shape...peeled the skin off their back, arms, legs...just everywhere. They had to scrub one another down daily to keep from getting infected, lost all their rank, and almost didn't get to come home on time.

A bad night for sure.

JEEP



By Dan English

I arrived at Clark Air Base, P.I. in February of 1967. We were the new guys...the 'Jeeps'. We were put up in temporary base housing which consisted of Quonset huts by the Airman's Club if I remember right.

Most of us had never even heard of a B-57, but we were informed that soon we would be loading bombs and guns on the Canberra in a place called Vietnam.

I don't remember a lot about the training at Clark. We loaded a bunch of BDU's or Bomb Dummy Units. We loaded these by hand in the bomb bay. Our real on-the-job training happened at Phan Rang. My first time was with crew chief Mike Shadley, Donald Garner and

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Rudolph Lamb. While at Clark we were introduced to a number of the ‘Veterans’.

We heard stories of Phan Rang and Da Nang. The names of Chaney, Taylor and many more elicited respect because they had been there; they were the veterans and we were the “Jeeps”.

Before long we became the veterans after several of our own TDY’s to Phan Rang.

(Special thanks to *Howard Taylor* for sharing these stories with us and more importantly for inspiring his former ‘Bummers’ to tell their stories and to put them all together in a book. They now become the collective history and memory of Phan Rang AB, RVN.)



Combat Controller

(Seventh Air Force News, August 27, 1969)

Air Force combat controller Sgt., Lonnie E. Stewart, Cares, Calif., of the 834th Air Division calls the pilot of a C-123 Provider to provide him landing assistance. The Phan Rang AB controllers aid C-7 Caribou and C-123 crews in resupplying Allied forces in the Republic of Vietnam. (U.S.

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Air Force Photo by Maj. Ed Lindberg)



Air Force Maj. **Raymond A. Malacarne**, son of Victor Malacarne, 1625 Eighth St., has been decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross for aerial achievement in Vietnam, Malacarne, an F-100 Super Sabre fighter bomber pilot at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam, provided close air support for friendly forces at Dak Seang, Vietnam, which were being attacked. (Sarasota Herald Tribune, Sarasota, Florida, December 20, 1970)

Staff Sgt. **Walter A. Roche**, son of Mrs. Rose Roche, 3113 Cortez Road, W, Bradenton, has received the Air Force Commendation Medal at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. Roche was decorated for meritorious service as a fire protection supervisor with the 35th Civil Engineering Squadron at Phan Rang Air Base. (Sarasota Herald Tribune, Sarasota, Florida, December 20, 1970)

Gary Hamilton Awarded Commendation Medal - Technical Sergeant **Gary R. Hamilton**, son of Mr. and Mrs. E. B. Hamilton, 2171 West 171st street, Hazel Crest, has received his second award of the Air Force Commendation medal at Loring Air Force base, Maine. Sgt. Hamilton was decorated for his meritorious achievement as a flight engineer while assigned to the 311th Tactical Airlift squadron at Phan Rang Air base, Viet Nam. On July 16, while participating in a passenger transport mission from Nha Trang Air base to Tan Son Nhut Air base, one of the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam personnel became unconscious. Sgt. Hamilton administered first aid and revived him. He continued emergency treatment until after landing and the arrival of medical assistance. Sgt. Hamilton is now at Loring with a unit of the Strategic Air command. (Park Forest South Star, Park Forest, Illinois, March 30, 1972) Note: This may be a repeat story, but from a different publication.

Airman 1.C. **Joseph A. Seherer**, a son of Mr. and Mrs. John M. Scherer, 91, John St., is on duty at Phan Rang Air Base Vietnam. Scherer, a jet engine mechanic, is a member of the Pacific Air Forces. Before his arrival in Vietnam, he was assigned to Ching Chuan Kang Air Base, Taiwan. He is a 1966 graduate of Portsmouth High School. (The Portsmouth Times, Portsmouth, Ohio, Wednesday, August 7, 1968)

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Air Force Major Wins War Medal - SPEARMAN - U. S. Air Force Maj. **Arnold L. Richardson**, the son of Mrs. Gladys Richardson of Spearman, was decorated with his second award of the Distinguished Flying Cross at Phan Rang Air Base, South Vietnam, prior to his return to the country Dec. 14. He earned the award for “extraordinary achievement as C-123 Provider pilot” His citation says that he disregarded intense hostile ground fire which damaged his aircraft to successfully deliver vital supplies to allied forces near Vinh Long and Binh Thuy. Maj. Richardson was commissioned through the aviation cadet program in 1943 and is a veteran of World War II. The 45-year-old major was member of the 309th Special Operations Squadron at Phan Rang and logged 961 sorties in the C-123. Presently stationed at Fanwood, N. J., M a j. Richardson plans to retire January 1st. He and his family arrived in Spearman December 20 and will return home to New Jersey Saturday morning. (Amarillo Daily News, Amarillo, Texas, December 27, 1968)

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.