

“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. 188 “...keeping the memories alive”

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Family Housing is not authorized here

Serving our Country

Doug’s Comments

“MAGPIE 31”

Blondes, Bombs and Bunkers – Part 3



MAGPIE 31
PART 3



BLONDES, BOMBS AND BUNKERS



21 SEPTEMBER 1969

Finally, the parties are coming together!

Readers of the earlier Magpie 31 article would be aware that, having tracked down Air Commodore (retired) John Whitehead, DSO¹, we arranged to meet when his wife and he were in Sydney in October last year (2018). Having exchanged contact details, we arranged a mutually suitable date and time and venue for us to meet.

¹ The Distinguished Service Order (DSO) is a military decoration of the United Kingdom, and formerly of other parts of the Commonwealth, awarded for meritorious or distinguished service by officers of the armed forces during wartime, typically in actual combat.

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In preparation for the get together, I compiled a series of photographs which I printed and placed in a folder to give to John. Some of these images have appeared in support of my earlier Magpie 31 article while others were relevant to John's career from flying Meteor twin-jet fighters in Korea to flying the Canberra bomber with 2 Squadron (2 Sqn) in Vietnam while he was the Commanding Officer (CO).

Delighted to be in this wonderful situation because of all the good things that are happening.

I must admit that I was like a "kid in a candy shop" thinking about the prospect of finally meeting the pilot of Magpie 31 (A84-236) when John and his navigator/bomb aimer, the late Squadron Leader Bruce Hunt, provided close air support (CAS) to my platoon on 21 September 1969. **To say that I was eagerly looking forward to the meeting would be a gross understatement.**

As the appointed rendezvous drew near, however, I began to feel some nervous trepidation about finally meeting the pilot of Magpie 31 some 44 years after the event. I need not have worried...



AIRCDRE (rtd) John Whitehead, DSO and LTCOL (rtd) Roger Lambert

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"...feeling as though I had known him for 40 odd years."

My wife, youngest daughter (she is an avid follower of all things 5 RAR(5th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment) and I spent a most enjoyable evening with John, his wife Adrienne and their second son Andrew at the apartments where they were staying. It was rather strange being greeted at the door by a person whom I'd never actually met but yet feeling as though I had known him for 40 odd years. We were afforded a very warm welcome and made to feel very much at home from the outset. There were some tears from Adrienne and they were genuinely interested in my personal account of the events of 21 September 1969. I guess it helps having been part of the ADF (Australian Defence Force) 'family' but one really felt comfortable in their company.

John is a really interesting gentleman to speak with and some of his recollections of his time in Korea and South Vietnam on active service were fascinating to hear. I think what made John relax somewhat was the fact he realized very early on that I had a very good knowledge of aircraft and aircraft types, and that he wasn't just speaking with a 'dumb grunt'.

Typically military, however, in that John couldn't help rub in the fact that their aircrew lifestyle at Phan Rang was diametrically opposed to that of the infantryman in country, He could get up in air-conditioned comfort, have a hot shower, breakfast of bacon and eggs, briefings, fly on ops — sweat like hell for a while, debrief, shower and change, get some paperwork out of the way back in the air-conditioned comfort of the office. All of that five or six times a week, every week, relentlessly. Then there were mortar/rocket attacks on the base almost every other week, but no mud and slush to speak of, etc. Discussing Phan Rang/Nui Dat lifestyles was interesting — good natured banter but typical inter-service rivalry.

I was amazed that John actually flew some 260 bombing missions plus some — training, test flights, ferry, and others during his time as CO of 2 Sqn. He had some interesting tales to tell including, on more than one occasion, having his Canberra hit by AK47 fire, or shrapnel from his own bombs on low-level missions.

Adrienne was especially interested in my perspective of the events of the day on 21 Sep 69, starting with my 'blonde encounter' and running through the day leading up to John in "Magpie 31" providing the CAS for my platoon. We even toasted "Magpie 31"

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Gloster Meteors, 77 Sqn, Korea, 1955



No. 77 Squadron
RAAF

With his 77 Squadron service, John said it was pretty uneventful. He did however prick his ears up when I referred to the "blue note" generated by the Meteor when 'doing a rate of knots'. John said it was a real 'buzz' to get that sound going during a high speed pass in the Meteor F.8. He couldn't be sure but he thought that the 'note' was generated by the spent cartridge ejection chutes that, as John put it, "acted like tin whistles under the aircraft."

John also told of the time when some 'big wig' at Command HQ decided that the RAAF would assist with the Australian Gliding Championships been held at Waikerie, South Australia. John was CO of Aircraft Research and Development Unit (ARDU) at the time when he was told that the RAAF would be providing Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation (CAC) Winjeels as tow aircraft for the championships, the 'big wig' stating that the Winjeel could easily tow a glider. John pointed out that that was possibly not the case because of potential cylinder head temperature problems with the extra drag and weight of the glider. The HQ insisted that the Winjeels would be used and John equally insisted that they couldn't — and won the day after his trials showed serious overheating problems. Required modifications were too costly. An insight into the measure of the man."

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CAC CA-25 Winjeel A85-439, RAAF Museum, Point Cook VIC

Incidentally, John did fly the Winjeel as a flying instructor during 1961/62 and was aware of its engine problems.

He's a fascinating man to listen to. He pointed out that the 77 Squadron Meteors came home from Korea on HMAS² Vengeance with wings removed late in 1954. Vengeance docked at Garden Island³, the Meteors were off-loaded onto barges and then towed up the Parramatta River where they were transferred to road transports and taken to the Aircraft Depot at Richmond for re-erection. John was temporarily based at Richmond and was the pilot as each Meteor was reassembled and test flown or as John put it "to make sure that the wings didn't fall off." After that 77 Squadron had a welcome-home parade down Bridge Street to Martin Place in Sydney, with a fly-past of its Meteors.

² Her or His Majesty's Australian Ship (HMAS) is a ship prefix used for commissioned units of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). This prefix is derived from HMS (Her/His Majesty's Ship), the prefix used by the Royal Navy of the United Kingdom, and can be equally applied to warships and shore bases (as Australia follows the British tradition of referring to naval establishments as ships or stone frigates).

³ Garden Island (known as Meandup to the local Noongar people) is a narrow island about 10 kilometres (6 mi) long and 1.5 kilometres (0.9 mi) wide, lying about 5 kilometres (3 mi) off the Western Australian coast, to which it is linked by an artificial causeway and bridge.

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(L-R) Adrienne and John Whitehead with Roger and Rhonda Lambert

“...a sense of overwhelming relief - a sense of mission accomplished.”

All in all, it was a great evening albeit a late one but one that 'my girls' and I thoroughly enjoyed. From my perspective, I've closed a small chapter in history. It's hard to describe but I felt a sense of overwhelming relief as we drove home — a sense of mission accomplished.

Doug's comments: *For Roger Lambert and John Whitehead the 'fog of war' has been lifted. It's taken nearly 50 years for it to lift, but if it wasn't for the tenacity of Bob Howe it would not have been possible and they would still be shrouded in fog.*

For the aircrews, Magpie 31 was just another mission, not unsimilar to all the previous missions

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*and those yet to come. They fly to the designated target area and dropped their bombs and returned to their home base and did the same thing the next day. They usually know what ground forces are being engaged and they get damage assessments from the Forward Air Controllers, but sometimes in the fog of war the human element is eliminated. For the troops on the ground it’s just another air strike that they’ve called in and as long as it was timely and the bombs hit the intended target that would be the end of it, except for this **one** mission. For the aircrews flying bombing missions can seem surreal because they seldom, if ever meet the ground pounders.*

Meeting face to face restores the human element. For the aircrew they were thankful that they could deliver the bombs in the precise location and return to their home base safely and the ground commander was thankful that the enemy was kept at bay and his troops were safe and mission accomplished. They were real people performing in a professional manner. The “Blond” still remains a mystery and probably always will.

Incoming, Incoming Part 2



By Bruce Gordon

My first incoming story⁴ was about rockets fired at Phan Rang. This one is about a mortar attack against us in January 1971.

⁴ Incoming, Incoming Part 1 was in Phan Rang Newsletter 187.

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Phan Rang is located on the SE coast of Vietnam from where we flew F-100's across Vietnam, Laos and into Cambodia.

I was assigned to the 612th Tactical Fighter Squadron and lived in this hooch. It was a decent barracks and it had a sand bag protection around it, so if I was in my bed I was protected by sand bags stacked up around the building so I didn't go anywhere when the sirens went off. I just laid in my bed and sometimes I would put on my flak jacket.



Back L-R: Capt. Joe Hodges, Lt. Col. “Crazy” Jack Pulliam, Capt. Ken Marcroft, Lt. Charlie Harr, Capt. Dave Hesp, Lt. Bill Bazar, Maj. Don Kenedlik, Maj. Ray Malacarne, Maj. Les Frazier, Maj. Fred Nordin, Lt. Steve McClain, Lt. Ron Sharek, Maj. “Doc” McGuire (Sq. Ft. Surgeon)

Front L-R: Lt. Pete Christensen, Maj. Bruce Gordon, Lt. Joe Smith, Maj. Dick Shrove, Col. “Bolo” Brunson, Col. Mack Bradshaw, Lt. Col. Don Johnson, Capt Harry Brown, Lt. ? maint. Officer, Capt Mike McGovern and Suzy the “Hootch” bartender.

Our barracks area was at the base of some low mountains which provided cover for the Viet Cong to launch rocket attacks or in this case a mortar attack.

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It had rained all day and had degenerated into a soggy wet night. Our Air Police had guard towers and bunkers around the base to protect us and to watch for enemy activity.

In the middle of the night the base warning siren sounded. I waited and I didn't hear anything and thought they were going to blow it all clear, but then the warning siren sounded again. Then I waited and there wasn't any 'all clear' and I couldn't hear any explosions, so I laid in my bunk and didn't do anything and then the sirens went off again. Finally after a long period they blew the 'all clear' and I went back to sleep.

Later in the afternoon we got the story. One of the Air Police guard posts on the perimeter had called in the middle of the night..."I'm under attack...I'm under attack". They blew the warning siren and nothing happened. They called him back and asked if he was sure he was under attack? He said, yes, I think I'm under attack! So they blew the siren again and still nothing happened. They called him again and asked if he was sure and he said "Yes, I'm sure someone is shooting at me"! So they blew the siren again and once again nothing happened. No one heard anything, so finally they blew the all clear and waited until the morning light to see what had happened.

A patrol went out and checked on the Air Police post and they found five mortar rounds stuck in the mud around the air policeman's position. He had been under attack alright, but all of the incoming rounds had been duds.

I heard that a rocket attack on Cam Ranh Bay, a base North of us there had been five out seven rockets fired in had been duds. I guess carrying those weapons down the Ho Chi Minh trail, exposed the weapons to a lot of bad weather and they had a lot of problem with duds. It must have been terribly frustrating for those Vietnamese to carry they weapons all the way down the Ho Chi Minh trail through all that mud and through the jungles and then have them fail to have them explode.

Their whole effort was wasted.

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F-100 Dogfight

F-100 DOGFIGHT

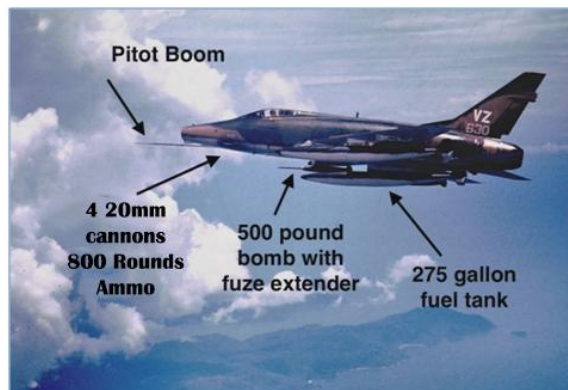
By Bruce Gordon

In 1969 I volunteered for combat in Vietnam. I left the F-106 in Korea and went to Luke AFB, Az., to check out in the F-100 Super Sabre.

First I’m going to tell you a little bit about the F-100 as a fighter and then I’m going to tell you about the fighter tactics I used in a practice dogfight against my instructor at Luke AFB.



I took this photo of my wingman as we climbed out from a combat mission in Vietnam. From the weapons he’s carrying we could tell that he was headed for targets in the low-land areas of Vietnam that were marshy and we were aiming at troops that were not dug in.



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The long pipe extending from the nose is a pitot boom. It's just a long pipe that measures the airspeed by the amount of air running through it and displays it on an instrument in the cockpit. We had four 20mm cannons with 800 rounds of ammo compared that to the F-4 that only had 640 rounds of ammo.

You can see 3-foot pipe extending from a 500 lb bomb, one of four that we carried. The pipe was called a fuse extender and would hit the ground first and explode three feet in the air so it didn't waste its energy throwing mud around. The large object underneath the wing is not a bomb, but a 275 gallon fuel tank. We carried two of these on almost every mission in Vietnam.

At Luke AFB, Az., where we learned to fly the F-100, learned to drop bombs, learned to strafe with those 4-20mm cannons that were mounted right under our feet so that when we fired those guns our feet would dance on the rudder pedals from the shock waves of the guns. We had 800 rounds of ammunition so we could do a lot of strafing.

Finally we went into aerial combat tactics. Aerial combat tactics started with two 2-seat F-100's, each with an instructor and a student and they taught the student how the aircraft would perform under maximum G conditions.

The next day we were to go up with one student against his instructor in a single seat F-100 and that's when it got interesting.

I walked into the briefing room and sat down with my instructor, he got out my folder and looked at it and said he sees that I had been an instructor in aerial combat tactics in the F-106. “Yes, sir”, I said. He asked if I thought I was pretty good. I said “Yes sir, I think I'm pretty good”. He then said “OK, we'll test that and forget all the formalities...we'll take off together and fly in formation out to the twin-buttes at 20,000 ft. then we'll turn in opposite directions and fly for one minute, then turn back on each other, still at 20,000 ft. and when we see each other and have each in sight we'll call **“Tallyho”** and then the fights on and may the best man win. Any questions?” I said “no sir.” He said “No questions...this will be fun!”

As I walked out to my plane I thought about the coming battle. The two airplanes were identical so there was no way to out-turn him or out-climb him or anything else. I would have to beat him psychologically.

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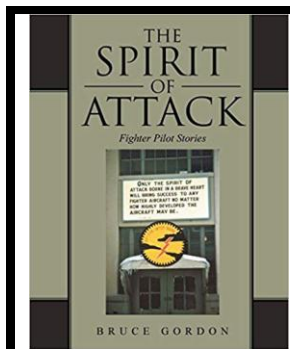
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Now I knew that most fighter pilots like to maintain their altitude if they can because altitude is always an advantage. So he would try to hold his altitude. What would happen if I went low and then would he still hold his altitude? How could I get that to play in my favor?

We went out to our planes, started our engines, taxied out, took off, flew up to 20,000 feet to the twin-Buttes. We split up and went up in different directions and then we turned in until we could see each other, then called “**Tallyho**” fights on!

We called “**fights on**” and I started descending rapidly and as I suspected, he did not. He decided to hold his altitude. He could hold his altitude and he came in and I started pulling up hard lighting my afterburner and he had more speed than I did because I’m starting to pull straight up and he light his afterburner to pull up, but at this point he realized that I’m now 90 degrees turned toward his tail. The battle has just begun and I already have him by 90 degrees. Now with his afterburner lit, he’s pulling up and sure he has more energy than I do and he’s going faster and I drop in behind him. No as I come down I’m on his tail and he dove toward the ground. He twisted and turned, but he couldn’t get away from me. I closed in and got some good gun-camera pictures of his tail.

We joined up together and flew back to Luke...we landed, taxied in, parked our planes, got out and walked into the briefing room. He didn’t say anything. He got out the exam sheet...looked at it, took out his pencil and wrote on it “Had the instructors ASS”. He dropped the paper and pencil and walked out. **It was one of my greatest days of my Air Force career.**



If you would like to obtain a copy of “The Spirit of Attack” by Bruce Gordon you can order it on Amazon by clicking [here](#) or you can purchase directly from the author at a much cheaper rate and also have it signed. To order your copy, simply send twenty dollars (includes postage) to Bruce Gordon, 105 Broadbill Ct., Georgetown, KY 40324.

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Distinguished Flying Cross challenge coin.

Picture by Buddy Cox

Phan Rang Today “Xanh, sạch, đẹp” ở Trung đoàn 937 "Green, clean, beautiful" in the 937 Regiment



The Women's Union Regiment 937 takes care of the flower garden on the unit's campus.

From the guard gate to the office, the unit was a straight concrete road edged with gold-painted, red banks. Each road is decorated with panels, slogans and traffic signs. The Regimental campus is like a beautifully planned park. Traditional artifacts such as A37, MiG-21, Su-22 aircraft are arranged in harmony, alternating with green grass, flower gardens and ornamental plants. The rows of pilots' houses are draped in fresh blue, before each row of houses is a vibrant campus of blooming flowers. Next to it is an octagonal house located on a lotus pond, structured in the style of a stilt house as a resting and entertainment place for the soldiers during the break and holidays. Many ancient trees are decorated with rattan lanterns with many colors and designs.

At the campus of 2 squadrons, officials and soldiers are taking care of flower gardens and ornamental plants. Around the icon of the Su-22 plane soaring into the sky is a brilliant campus of flowers: iridescent, periwinkle, purple sim, cacti and confetti ... Major Kim Tuyen - Politician of Squadron 1, “This year, our squadron is determined to build a beautiful campus. Due to the barren soil conditions and frequent water shortages, we focused on improving the soil with

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organic fertilizer from the units. The flower pots take advantage of broken aircraft tires, overlap, then paint repair and decoration to have color. Particularly bonsai plants are mainly wild flowers. The squadron assigned each group to look for drought-tolerant, sun-tolerant flowers to plant and care for themselves. Therefore, after the training time, the squadron's flower gardens are always looked after, carefully trimmed and trimmed. ”

Learn more we know, to have a bright, green, clean and beautiful space like today, the Regiment has made a major breakthrough. In 2019, the Regiment was assigned to build the "typical and typical" VMTD unit. The Party Committee, the commander of the Regiment determined that it must first change the face of the unit. In addition to changing the mindset of the soldiers and building a regular policy, building a bright, green, clean and beautiful environment is a focus. Therefore, the Regiment invested billions of dong and thousands of days of army work to plan and renew the internal road system; system of banners, slogans, posters and posters; paint, repair barracks, renew motorbike garages; building and expanding the regiment's campus, flower gardens and ornamental plants of agencies and units; supplement traditional artifacts ...

Lieutenant Colonel Cu Duc Huong - Regiment Commander, said: “From the above investment and a part of the unit's capital, the Regiment has made more than 6km of internal roads; barracks of units are painted and repaired; refresh all the system of boards, signs, ropes, panels, slogans; embellish 8 flower gardens, buy hundreds more flower pots and ornamental plants ”.

Lieutenant Colonel Le Hong Long - Regiment Political Commissar, added: “The highlight of the campus is the Artifact Display Area with the regimental aircraft used in training and fighting like A-37 aircraft. of "Decisive Winning Squadron" used to attack Tan Son Nhat airport of Saigon Confederation on April 28, 1975, aircraft MiG-21, Su-27, Su-22. The artifacts are annotated on the stage of use, achievements of individuals and units in that period. In order to look at the artifacts every time, the soldiers reviewed the glorious tradition of the Regiment. The biggest thing in building environmental landscape is to make officials and soldiers more responsible for building and sticking with the unit. ”

Building an environmental landscape "Bright, green, clean, beautiful" in the 937 Regiment has enhanced the spiritual life of the soldiers; At the same time, it actively contributes to the unit

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that accomplishes the target of building a "typical and typical" VMTD unit in 2019.

Family Housing is not authorized here

Phan Rang AB, Vietnam

(3 March 1971)

Family housing is not authorized here: bachelor housing is considered good, with wing commanders occupying individual house trailers, and squadron commanders and key staff officers living in two-man trailers and porta-camps.

Other staff officers occupy four-man "super hootches," and junior officers live in two story structures in on man cubicles. Flying people have organizational quarters called Singapore's - 18 man single floor billets with two men per room. All officer quarters are air conditioned.

Senior NCOs are assigned four-man buildings and also two quonset huts with individual rooms. There is a 30-day waiting period for these quarters. There are 80 two-man cubicles for EM and 80 VOQ spaces, also in two man rooms, normally occupied by transiting people. The housing officer reports that transient quarters are presently almost nonexistent.

Enlisted people and Singapore residents use community latrine and shower facilities, and there are enough to avoid standing in line.

There are no washers and dryers in the hootches, but these services are available at a nominal fee through the base laundry, commercial laundry or Viet hootch maids.

THANKS TO ALL FOR PROTECTING OUR



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.