Phan Rang AB Newsletter
The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.
"Keeping the memories alive" Newsletter 207

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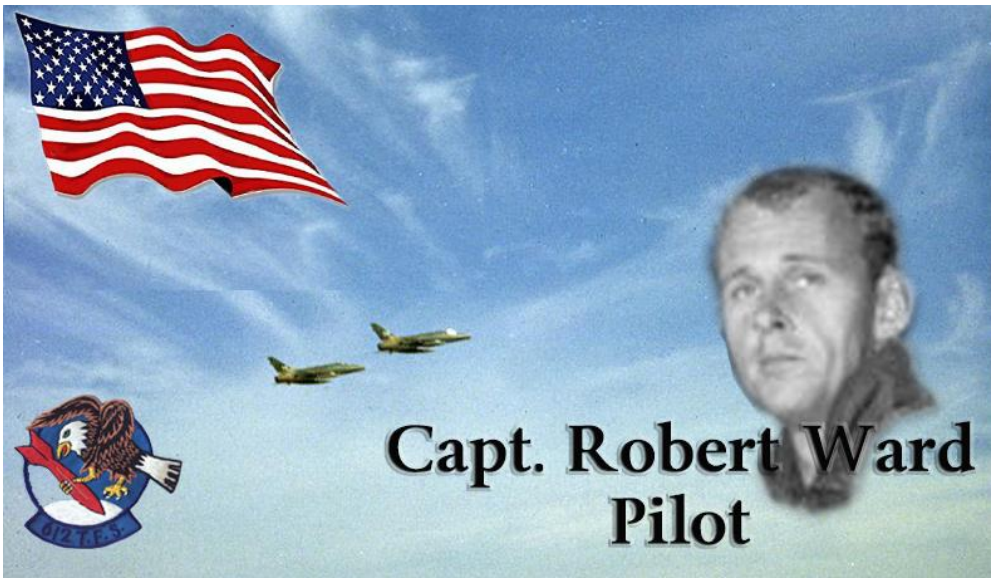


Capt. Robert Ward in his own words

I was born and raised in a little town in west-central Indiana. Went to Purdue University as a member of the Class of 1966, where I received my Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering. Upon graduating from Purdue, I went to USAF Officer Training School at Lackland AFB in San Antonio, Texas, receiving my commission in April 1967, and then on to pilot training at Williams AFB near Phoenix, Arizona. After the 53 week pilot training program, I received my wings in May 1968.

I left the Air Force on December 7, 1973 and moved to Mesa, Arizona (my wife's hometown). Her Dad was also an Army Air Corp/USAF pilot and went through the Army Air Cadet pilot

training program at Marana, AZ, and, at Luke AFB, AZ during World War 2. He met his wife while in pilot training in Arizona and I met his daughter about 27 years later while also in pilot training in Arizona, although we did not get married until I returned from Vietnam in early October 1970.

After leaving the Air Force in December 1973, my wife and I settled in Mesa, Arizona. At that time, I put my engineering degree to use and have been practicing civil engineering ever since. I have been self-employed since 1987, and as of August 2020, I am about 95-percent retired from my engineering practice, although I dabble a little bit in a side-business in digital photo restoration.

And, of course I enjoy flying combat flight simulations on my computer with the incredibly realistic software and hardware that is available to flight sim enthusiasts these days. Anyone who is interested, check-out Digital Combat Simulator (DCS). I am currently flying the F-5, F-16, F-18, and A-10 in DCS. Even though I am ex-Air Force, I had to see what it is like to take-off and land an F-18 on a carrier!

USAF Career

My first assignment out of pilot training was to an F-111 squadron (428th TFS) with the 474th Tactical Fighter Wing at Nellis AFB in Las Vegas. At that point in time, no new pilot graduates were being assigned to the "left" seat in the F-111, so I was in the frustrating position of flying "right" seat and running all the navigation and weapons delivery systems. Although my aircraft commander was very good about giving me a lot of stick time. The F-111 was a state-of-the art aircraft in 1968.

Photo of F-111 by Robert Ward. All color photos in this article were taken by Robert Ward.

The terrain following radar (TFR) on the F-111 was amazing, when it worked right. You could dial in the altitude above ground that you wanted to fly and adjust the ride to something like "soft, medium or hard", the difference being the "briskness" of the aircraft adjusting pitch as you went up a hill or down the other side. For example, on the "hard" setting, as you approached a hill, the aircraft delayed the pull-up point to a little closer to the hill than in the "soft" setting. This

resulted in a little higher positive G-load as the plane pulled up and a little more negative G-load as you descended down the back side of the hill. The "hard" setting kept you as close to the ground as possible as you went over hills, mountains, etc. – good for radar avoidance.

During my assignment to the F-111 program in June 1968 to early spring 1969, the aircraft was experiencing some "growing" problems, which led to the planes at Nellis being grounded for a significant amount of time. If I recall, the TFR system was having some issues, which led to one plane hitting a hillside during a night mission. Seems like one was also lost during landing when the plane pitched-up while over the runway threshold. I don't remember details on that crash. It might have been a center of gravity issue due to a fuel system management malfunction. It was a frustrating time for everyone while the planes were grounded.

On a little side note, the USAF Fighter Weapons School (USAF version of Navy Top Gun School) was, and still is, located at Nellis AFB. So, while I was there in the F-111 program, I made a friend with one of the F-4 back-seaters who was an instructor with the Fighter Weapons School. A lot of the pilot instructors flew with the backseat empty. I asked him if I could "fill" that backseat on a few missions and he said come on down and talk to the squadron commander. I did do that and the commander said "sure". I flew probably 5 or 6 missions with those guys before my F-111 squadron commander found out about it and said "no more". The F-4 instructor pilots gave me a lot of stick time, so it was a very fun experience.

F-100 Combat Tour In Vietnam

Less than a year after I was assigned to Nellis, I managed to secure an F-100 assignment to Southeast Asia. I had already completed my "sea survival" training while in the F-111 program. However, since I was in the Southeast Asia pipeline with the F-100 assignment, I also had to complete the land survival and POW training at Fairchild AFB in Washington, which I finished in late May 1969.

Being a young pilot who was coming from a "right-seat" position in the F-111, in addition to the minimal flying time I had in the F-111 due to the grounding issue, I was initially sent to the "T/AT-33 Familiarization Training Course" at Myrtle Beach AFB in South Carolina. I finished that training on June 23, 1969 and then headed to Luke AFB to begin the F-100 training program.

The first day that I got to climb into the Super Sabre was a real thrill. I had put a lot of effort into the ground school courses that we went through to learn the aircraft systems operation before we actually got to fly the plane. So, on that first flight, I felt well-prepared. I had absolutely no problems during my first flight in the F-100F (two-seat model with the instructor

in the rear seat). My instructor let me make the first touch & go landing, without doing a demo first. It was a great experience that day, as was the entire training program.

Robert Ward next to F-100 at Luke AFB, taken in the summer of 1969. Official USAF Photo.

ATTICA LEDGER TRIBUNE
December 1969

1/LT. ROBERT WARD was home recently to spend the Christmas holidays with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. William Ward, Jr. Lt. Ward returned home from Luke AFB, Arizona where he just finished training in the F-100 Super Sabre. The F-100 is a single seat, single engine fighter which has been used extensively for close air support in Vietnam. Lt. Ward will leave for Vietnam on Jan. 31 where he will be flying the F-100 with the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing at Phan Rang, South Vietnam.

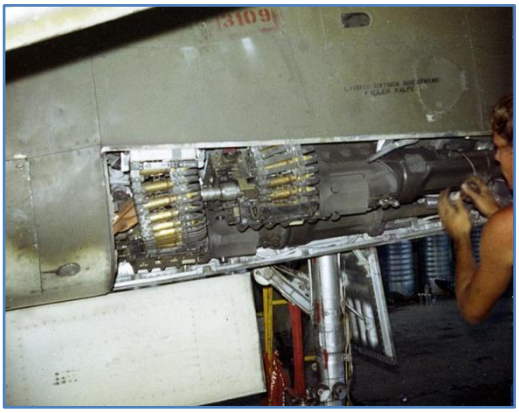
I graduated from the F-100 training program on December 8, 1969. My graduating class was not immediately deployed to Vietnam, i.e., we stayed at Luke for nearly two more months. Finally, on January 31, 1970, we boarded a commercial airliner at Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport and headed for Vietnam. However, we still had to stop at Clark AB in the Philippines and complete the jungle survival training course. I finished that survival training on February 9, 1970, and, within a day or two thereafter, we were on another plane headed to Vietnam. We landed at

Cam Ranh Bay Air Base and spent the first night there. The following day, we boarded another transport plane and made the short trip down to Phan Rang AB.

I was assigned to the 612th Tactical Fighter Squadron, which was part of the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing. During my tour at Phan Rang, I flew 165 combat missions, mostly in the south. However, I did make a few trips into Cambodia and southern Laos to hit supply routes. Our primary mission was close air support for the ground troops and striking enemy encampment and supply areas.

Our typical weapon loadouts were both "slick" and high-drag 750 & 500 lb. bombs, napalm, rockets, and occasional CBUs (cluster bombs). Of course, we always carried around 1,000 to 2,000 high incendiary rounds for the four 20mm cannons under the nose of the F-100.

Weapon crews loading napalm on the wing pylons.



Loading the high incendiary rounds for the four 20mm cannons.

We also dropped a lot of time-delay bombs on the supply routes coming down through Laos. These were like 8 to 12-hour time delay fuses. We would hit the supply routes in mid-to late afternoon. The bombs would bury themselves upon impact and then later that night, when the VC were transporting supplies under the cover of darkness, the bombs would detonate.

This is an in-flight photo of an F-100 with a load of 750-lb bombs with "fuse extenders" on the front-ends. These extenders cause the bomb to detonate about 3-ft above ground, throwing out a very lethal shrapnel pattern.

We were frequently called in to use 750-lb bombs with "fuse extenders" to clear jungle landing zones for helicopters. These things were very effective in cutting down the trees.

Depending on the mission, we delivered ordinance from both high and low altitude. When there were no friendlies close-by, we typically did 30 and 45-degree dive bombing. When the ground forces needed help, we would come in with low dive-angle, high drag bombs and napalm and get just a few hundred feet above the tree-tops. I seem to recall one incident where a pilot scrapped the trees on pullout. The F-100 tended to "mush" a little bit when you started your dive recovery, i.e., you kept on a downward trajectory for a little bit after you pulled the stick back. So, it was imperative to initiate the dive recovery before getting too low to the tree-tops.

I did not fly any missions that I would call unusual for the role that we were in. I do remember strafing a barbwire barrier at a Special Forces camp that was under attack by enemy forces. I also remember coming in on a target where the Forward Air Controller (FAC) advised us that the enemy forces may have radar-controlled, anti-aircraft guns (I think these would have been the ZPU Series guns). However, on that particular mission, I do not recall encountering any anti-aircraft fire.

On another mission, I remember pulling off the target after one low-level strafing pass and seeing what appeared to be "orange tennis balls" zipping by my right wing tip. The FAC saw the gun emplacement where the tracers were coming from and got my wingman and I vectored in on the location for our next pass and we saturated the target area with 20mm rounds, which seemed to neutralize the threat.

Having been a Range Officer on numerous occasions at state-side gunnery ranges, I can personally attest that a 20mm attack by a Century series fighter is a very impressive experience. While pulling Range Officer duty at England AFB (after returning from Vietnam), the range tower was located between strafing panels 2 & 3 (there were 4 panels total). The Range Officer tower was probably about a 1000-ft out in front of the strafing panels. When the F-100s rolled in they started firing around 2,000-ft out from the target. The 20mm rounds frequently went supersonic as they passed the range tower, followed about a second or two later by the deafening roar of an F-100 passing the tower at about 400 to 500-ft above the ground at 450 knots. That is a very impressive and intimidating scenario for any enemy troops that would be subject to such an attack.

Capt. Robert Ward poses with his Super Sabre on the 612th flight line at Phan Rang AB.

Phan Rang had F-100s on alert on a 24-hour basis. There were 8 concrete-reinforced alert hangars at the south end of the base. These hangars were just off the end of the runway. The alert pilots were quartered in another concrete hangar that was part of this complex. This complex included beds, a snack room, and an entertainment room to watch movies.

Alert pilots were rotated out of this facility on about an 8-hour cycle. Alert duty consisted of continuous duty for about 3 days. We would start off on an 8-hour day shift, then go to an 8-hour evening shift, and then to an 8-hour night shift. The idea being to get the pilots acclimated to the different sleep cycles. Alert missions were for unexpected problems that pop up on short notice. Quite often, alert missions were called in to help provide close-air

support when ground troops came under attack. Alert missions usually consisted of a 2-ship formation. Each 2-ship team had a specific call sign. Even though the 612th TFS had a call sign of "Tide", all alert pilots used a call-sign of "Blade". The alert "scramble" message would come down from Wing headquarters via speakers in the alert hanger where the pilots were staying. For example, we might hear "Scramble Blade 1, Scramble Blade 1". At that point, both pilots and ground crews would run to their assigned plane – if I recall, we had about 10-minutes to get airborne. So, the protocol was to run and jump in the plane. The crew chief would usually climb the ladder and help the pilot get buckled into his parachute.

When flying from the alert hangar, we would always use a "cartridge" start to get the engine spooled up. On non-alert missions, we would use an Auxiliary Power Unit (APU) to blow air through the turbines. Cartridge starts were quicker, thus they were the preferred choice for alert missions.

Once the engines were started, we would contact the tower for immediate clearance to taxi and takeoff. Alert missions were obviously given priority over any other aircraft that might be taxing to the runway. We had to make a quick stop before taking the active runway in order to let the ground crew arm our guns. Then it was onto the runway and off we went.

I do have one alert mission that sticks in my mind for some reason – not for any particular enemy danger, but just for the way the mission unfurled. I was on night alert duty as a flight leader of two F-100s. Things had been quiet all evening. I remember sitting in the pilot lounge and watching "The Graduate" (Dustin Hoffman) until around 1 AM. Started getting tired after that so I laid down on one of the cots. I was just about asleep when the scramble alarm went off around 2 or 3 AM. I jumped up and ran for my plane, got strapped in, cranked the engine via cartridge start, rolled out to the end of the runway and got immediate takeoff clearance. About a minute later I was flying through a pitch-black sky at about 400 knots and thinking "here I am about a half a world away from home, in the middle of the night, and enroute to some destination to unleash a barrage of destruction on some target". For some reason that evening has always stuck in my mind – 50 years later, I don't even remember what the target was. A lot of combat pilots can probably relate similar stories about night missions.

Another interesting story involves a somewhat "famous" pilot that was with the 612th while I was there. A lot of you may recognize his name: William John "Pete" Knight. He was a Lt. Col. when he was with my squadron. Prior to arriving in Vietnam, Pete was a test pilot and set several aviation records flying the North American X-15, an experimental "spaceplane". (**Note**: See companion article in this newsletter titled "Former Astronaut Trades X-15 for Phan Rang F-100.0

One late afternoon, I had finished my mission for the day and was sitting in the pilot's lounge with Pete and a couple other squadron pilots. I had just uncapped a bottle of beer and taken one or two sips when the phone rang. A pilot had been downed somewhere and a recovery operation was in progress to extract the pilot. Apparently, all the alert pilots had already been dispatched on other missions, so they called our squadron to ask for some help. Since I had barely drank any of my beer, I volunteered to go, as did Lt. Col. Knight. So, we drove down to the flight line and got a couple F-100s started up and took-off.

When we arrived at the recovery area, they already had several flights of fighters stacked in holding patterns above the location of the downed pilot. We were in a holding pattern for quite a long time, without having been called to deliver our ordinance. We were beginning to get low on fuel. They had brought in a C-130 tanker to top off the fighters. The C-130 had a fuel line and drogue basket extending back from each wing. When it was our turn, Pete and I refueled at the same time – I was on the left wing and he was on the right wing. After refueling, we continued to hold for a while longer and then were contacted to drop our ordinance on a specified location. I assume they finally got the downed pilot out of there, but it didn't happen while we were still in the air.

Attica Pilot Win DFC, 7 Air Medals

Air Force Capt. Robert L. Ward, son of Mr. and Mrs. William T. Ward Jr., Attica received the distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) and seven awards of the Air Medal for aerial achievement in Southeast Asia.

Capt. Ward, who served as an F-100 Super Sabre fighter-bomber pilot during his combat tour of duty, received the DFC for a mission flown in support of friendly units under attack by a large enemy force. Despite intensive ground fire, low clouds and rain showers, he delivered his ordnance with accuracy causing the enemy forces to break contact and retreat.

His air medals - he now holds eight - were for outstanding airmanship and courage on successful and important missions completed under hazardous conditions.

The Captain was honored at England AFB, La., where he serves with a unit of the Tactical Air Command.

He was commissioned in 1967 through Officer Training School at Lackland AFB, Texas. (Source: Attica Ledger Tribune)

I should probably make a few comments about the living conditions at Phan Rang. Each squadron had a barracks type building, commonly called a "hootch/hooch". Each of these buildings had a central lounging area (usually a bar area) located between two wings of living quarters. Field grade officers were usually assigned to one wing (with private rooms) while the second wing was reserved for Captains and Lieutenants, who usually bunked 2 to a room (bunkbeds). A lot of the guys had some pretty nice stereo equipment set up in their rooms. Seems like there were also 2 wall-mounted desks in each room. The lounge area was always well-stocked with beer and liquor and was where most guys hung out in the evenings. No TV reception that I can recall. I bought a bike ($25) while I was there and used that to get around the base.

The Officers' Club was located on top of a hill just south of the pilot's living quarters. We ate most of our meals up there, and, as far as I remember, the food was always good. We would occasionally have USO groups arrive at Phan Rang and they would put on shows at the Officer's Club.

We occasionally had rocket and mortar attacks on the base. One attack that I especially remember occurred early one morning, in fact, I think I was still lying in bed. I heard a loud, nearby explosion. So, most of the guys in the hooch ran outside and jumped inside the bomb shelter that was adjacent to each of the "hoochs". Shortly thereafter, we found out that the rocket/mortar had landed next to the exterior wall of the Officer's Club.

A Typical Day for a 612th TFS Pilot

In addition to our living quarters, each squadron had an Operations Building down near the flight line. Before each mission, we would go to the Operations Building and get our mission briefing, then grab our flight gear, jump in a van and get transported down to the flight line. Our ground crew greeted us at our airplane and accompanied the pilot on his pre-flight inspection of the plane. Then we climbed into the cockpit, got the engines started and checked-in with our wingman on the radio. Next, we contact Ground Control for taxi clearance to the runway. Upon reaching the runway, weapons crews would arm our guns, make a final check of our ordinance and give us a "thumbs up". We then contact the tower for clearance onto the active runway. Once lined up on the runway, we hit the brakes, run the engine up and make a final check of all engine gauges, and then light the afterburner and take off. Once airborne, we would be handed over to a regional control center who would sometimes give us vectors to our target area, so as to avoid any "hot" artillery corridors.

Ward Involved In Strafing Run

U.S. Air Force Captain Robert L. Ward, son of Mr. and Mrs. William T. Ward of 119 Sherry Lane, Attica, Ind., and fellow F-100 Super Sabre pilots recently bombed and strafed a heavily defended enemy complex southeast of Song Be, Vietnam.

The captain and his wingman, holding aloft while two other Super Sabre pilots completed their attack, could see numerous flashes from small arms and automatic weapons spewing from the dense jungle. The forward air controller (FAC) directing the strikes reported that an allied helicopter working the area had taken seven hits from enemy ground fire.

They also noticed heavy fire directed at the FAC when he flew low and slow over the jungle canopy to mark the target with smoke rockets.

Despite the intense ground fire, the fighter-bomber pilots destroyed 45 fighting positions, 17 bunkers, two fortifications and two tunnel entraces as well as inflicting numerous casualties.

Captain Ward is assigned at Phan Rang Air Base to a tectical fighter unit of the Pacific Air Forces, headquarters for air operations in Southeast Asia, the Far East and Pacific area.

The captain was commissioned in 1967 through Officer Training School, Lackland, AFB, Texas.

A 1962 graduate of Attica High School, he received a B.S. degree in civil engineering in 196'7 from Purdue University. He is a member of Phi Delta Theta.
(Source: Attica Ledger Tribune)

Upon reaching the target, we would almost always be working with a FAC, who was usually airborne, but sometimes on the ground with friendly forces. The FAC would either mark the target with a smoke rocket, or, direct us to the target area via prominent ground features. Once we had the target identified, we would flip on the arming switches for our ordinance and get clearance from the FAC to roll in on the target. The FAC would need to visually see us rolling in and then give us clearance for a "hot" pass. The preferred method for ordinance delivery was to fly a curvilinear approach, especially for low-altitude drops. The idea being to avoid flying in a straight line for any length of time to make it more difficult for enemy gunners to track the plane.

Once all ordinance had been expended, we would usually get a damage assessment from the FAC. After that, we would say goodbye and head for home.

We always carried gun camera film and also had an aft-looking belly camera to record the bomb release and impact. On one mission, I was doing low-altitude napalm drops. One of the napalm tanks detonated a split second after it came off my wing pylon– it may have taken a hit from small arms fire, or, had some malfunctio with the ignition fuse. Anyway, I did not know this had happened until the FAC got on the radio with me. I got the whole sequence (in color) from my

belly camera. I took that film back to the States with me and had it digitized and then included it in a movie that I made of ordinance deliveries that I made in Vietnam. It is about a 23-minute movie that is posted on Vimeo at:

https://vimeo.com/bobward/f-100-combat-film-captiain-bob-ward-vietnam-1970

Returning To the States

Most of the pilots in the 612th TFS were rotated out of Phan Rang and deployed back to the States in late September 1970. Several pilots from the 614th and 352nd squadrons were also sent back at that time. We flew our F-100s from Phan Rang up to Tuy Hoa AB and stayed there for about a week before starting that long trip back across the Pacific.

I thought this was going to be a really fun experience flying a single seat fighter from Vietnam to the U.S. However, some of the older pilots in the squadron were not that excited about doing this. I don't remember their reasons, but I think I found out once we got started, i.e., flying straight and level for 6 to 8 hours a day gets really boring, and, the "drowsy feeling" starts creeping into the picture, which is not a good scenario for a single seat airplane.

Our return route was:

Day 1: Tuy Hoa to Guam

Day 2: Guam to Hawaii

Day 3: Rest in Hawaii

Day 4: Hawaii to Clovis AFB in New Mexico

Day 5: Clovis AFB to England AFB at Alexandria, LA

We had to do aerial refueling on all the over-water legs of the trip. So, we would always be tagging along with KC-135 tankers. Plus, the F-100 did not have any inertial navigation systems to guide us on our way. All we had was a compass and TACAN. But there are no TACAN stations out across the Pacific. So, the tankers did all the navigating.

Of course, you can expect there might be a few mechanical problems on such a long trip. On the first leg to Guam, my primary hydraulic system gauge went to zero pressure about 3-hours after departing Tuy Hoa. I didn't know if it was a gauge malfunction or the real deal. I would not know for sure until I tried to lower the landing gear. Upon reaching Andersen AFB at Guam, I went to the back of the line for landing. Once everyone else was on the ground, except for my

wingman, I tried to lower the landing gear via the landing gear lever. My wingman verified that the gear did not deploy. Fortunately, the F-100 had an emergency back-up system for such failures, I believe it was just highly compressed air. So, I actuated the emergency system and my wingman confirmed that my gear blew down. However, we did not know what might happen upon landing when the weight of the plane was placed on the gear.

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A welcome sight, not only for the load of fuel that would get us to our next rendezvous point, but all we had to navigate was a compass and TACAN. There are no TACAN stations out across the Pacific, so, the tankers did all the navigating. Both of these pictures Bob took from the cockpit of his F-100.

My wingman went ahead and landed and they then deployed the fire trucks along the runway for me. So, I lined up on final approach and could only hope that the pressure would hold on touchdown. It did, I had a normal touch-down and taxied to the parking ramp. The following morning, my crew chief said they had to work all night to fix the problem. Apparently there had been a rupture of a hydraulic line, or some other component in the hydraulic system. He said

the entire engine compartment was covered with hydraulic fluid. "Hats off" to the maintenance crew, they got it fixed and I launched for Hawaii at daybreak the following morning.

We did not fly with the tankers all the way back. We had gaps where the initial group of tankers had to turn back to their base. They would give us a compass bearing before they left so that we could head in the general direction of where the next group of incoming tankers was to rendezvous with us. As stated previously, the F-100 did not have inertial navigation; all we had was a radio and magnetic compass and TACAN. So, it was a little uncomfortable for those periods when we were flying on "good faith" towards the incoming tankers. If I recall correctly, we also used our radio compass to make these intercepts. The incoming tankers would contact us on the radio, at which time our radio compass would point to the direction of the incoming radio signal. So, we just turned to follow that signal until we made visual contact. If we had failed to make the intercept (or had they had mechanical problems and had to turn back), we could have possibly run out of gas and had to ditch over open water.

We made all the tanker intercepts and eventually found our way to our new home at England AFB in Alexandria, LA. I only had one other minor mishap on the last leg of that trip when my radio transmitter failed within a minute after taking off from Clovis AFB. Not a big issue, I could still receive transmissions, so I just transferred the flight lead to my wingman.

Once we were all settled in at England AFB, I was assigned to the 68th TFS and continued to fly the F-100 for about another year or so. At the end of that period, the F-100s were being transferred to the Air National Guard. So, the 68th TFS was eventually closed down and some new squadrons of A-7s were brought to England AFB.

As a quick side-note, going back to the F-100 flight across the Pacific, I had only been at England AFB for maybe 4 or 5 months when I was tasked to join a small group of pilots to travel to Europe to ferry some more F-100s back to the States. We were supposed to pick up the planes in England, but something happened and they were not ready when we got there. So, they loaded us on a C-130 and flew us down to Torrejon AB at Madrid, Spain. The flight from Spain to the U.S. was around 8 to 8.5-hours if I remember correctly, again tagging along with a KC-135 tanker.

When the F-100s were phased out at England AFB, I still had about 2-years left on my military obligation, so I was re-assigned to an operational A-37 squadron, still at England AFB, I think it was the "6th Special Operations Squadron". At one point there was talk that our A-37 squadron was going to be deployed to Vietnam, but the war started winding down before that happened. I cannot remember the details, but the 6th SOTS shut-down after about 8 or 9 months and I was

re-assigned to the 427th Special Operations Training Squadron, where I became an instructor pilot for South Vietnamese students and some USAF Air National Guard students.

In closing, I will relate an interesting story about the F-100 (tail number 55-2949) that I was assigned to while at Phan Rang AB. Many years after leaving the Air Force, someone asked me if I knew where this plane ended up. This really piqued my interest, so I went on a quest to find out where #949 might be.

I contacted some USAF departments and found that this plane finished service with the 163rd Tactical Fighter Squadron, 122nd Tactical Fighter Group, with the Fort Wayne, Indiana Air National Guard. After finishing its service life with the Air National Guard, it was sent to the Air force "bone-yard" at Tucson, AZ. It arrived at AMARG (Aerospace Maintenance & Regeneration Group) in Tucson on November 20, 1978.

I continued my search and in December of 2013, I contacted Gene McCormick with the 82nd Aerial Targets Squadron at Tyndall AFB, Florida. He was 80 years old and about to retire from the drone conversion program. He flew A-1 Sky Raiders in Vietnam in 1968.

Gene had the records for 55-2949, my F-100 in Vietnam. After being retrieved from the Air Force long-term storage facility in Tucson (the "boneyard"), she went through the drone conversion program that was done by Sperry Corp in Litchfield Park, AZ, Production No. AF-146.

She was then flown down to Tyndall AFB, Florida and made one unmanned flight on October 19, 1984, when she was shot down by an AIM-7F missile fired by an F-15 from the 18th Tactical Fighter Wing. The AIM-7F, which entered service in 1976, had a dual-stage rocket motor for longer range, solid-state electronics for greatly improved reliability, and a larger warhead.

Gene said she died a hero and is resting at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico.

Conclusion

As stated previously, my USAF career ended on "Pearl Harbor Day", December 7, 1973. I am proud to have served my country and to have been given the trust and responsibility to operate military aircraft, both in combat and peacetime, for nearly 7 years. I am also privileged to have served with all the fine military personnel who keep our country safe. **As a pilot, I also want to express my thanks to the huge group of multi-talented support personnel that it takes to get our planes in the air and to keep them flying – we could not do it without them.**

Former Astronaut Trades X-15 for Phan Rang F-100

(Seventh Air Force News)
By SSgt. Douglas L. Christy

PHAN RANG—Only a special breed of man can pursue the depths of space or the seas, or pilot a winged aircraft to outer s pace.

Such a man is Lt. Col. William J. Knight, a veteran aviator who has flown the X-15 aircraft to 54 miles above the earth's surface to earn his astronaut's wings. He is now flying a different kind of mission in the Republic of Vietnam.

He now flies an F-100 Supersabre of the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing, and also works as chief of the operations branch in the office of the deputy commander for operations.

"I had never flown in an aircraft before joining the Air Force," Colonel Knight commented. "I thought the T-6, my first training aircraft, was about the biggest and most complicated plane I had ever seen."

In the following 18 years he has been in the Air Force, the colonel set an X-15 speed record of 4,534 miles per hour. The feat earned him the Octave Chanute Award for notable contribution to the aerospace sciences by an engineering pilot.

Those events occurred during the three years and 16 missions he was a test pilot in the X-15 program at Edwards AFB, Calif. Shortly after leaving the program, he came to Vietnam.

Test piloting was nothing new by the time he joined the X-15 program in 1965. He had previously attended the eight-month Experimental Test Pilot School at Edwards AFB in September 1968.

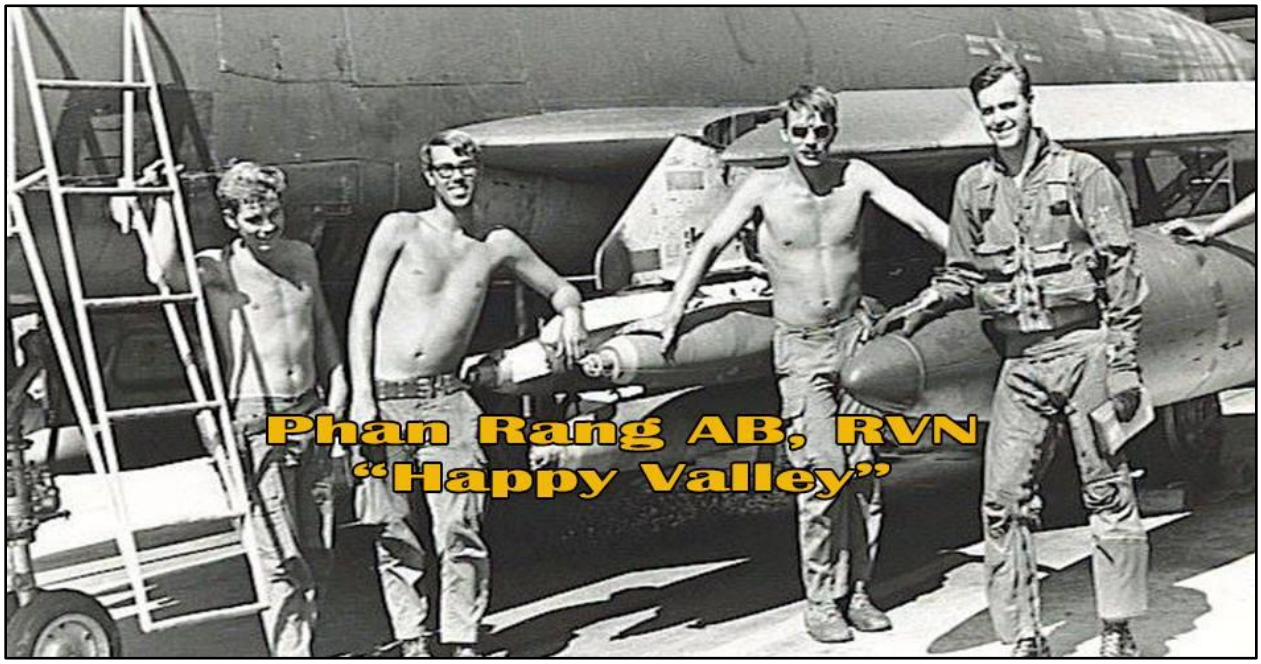
"This kind of flying was to evaluate new aircraft or test modifications on already proven planes," Colonel Knight said. "I worked on the DynaSoar Program in search of better ways of recovering space capsules. Also, flew various types of test flights in all the century series aircraft, plus numerous other projects."

While with the various programs, Colonel Knight flew 450 hours in the F-100 on evaluation, chase and practice flights. Following the X-15 program he attended jungle survival school and a refresher course in flying the Supersabre before coming to Vietnam.

Besides the Octave Chanute Award, he has earned the Harmon International Trophy for outstanding achievement in international aeronautics and the Aerospace Primas Award. He

also won the 1954 Allison Trophy Race.

"Despite the differences between combat and experimental flying," he said, "they both have common bond — challenge. That is the factor which makes men climb mountains and fly to the foot of eternity." (Thank you Bruce Muller for supplying this story.)



From left to right: Mike Minck, Dennis Barber, Ron Panamaroff and Maj. Fred Nordin, 612th TFS, 1970-71. Photo by Lynn Hart.

FROM SUPER SABRES TO BOOKIE BIRDS

John Anthony Ward

Talented and Versatile Pilot

John is sitting in his office in his favorite chair. This photo and all of the photos accompanying this story are by John Anthony Ward.

I began my Air Force service at Moody AFB for pilot training after graduating from Northern Illinois University in 1967, where I grew up, in DeKalb, IL.

My first assignment was in C-141's at Charleston AFB. (Feb., 1968) After a year my turn came up for Vietnam, (the famous "Palace Cobra" list) When asked what type of aircraft I wanted to fly

over there, I told them I was a non-volunteer, and they said yeah, but what do you want to fly when you go? I didn't want to shoot anybody so I chose cargo aircraft.

So, C-123 school at Lockbourne AFB, and on to Phan Rang and the 310th Tactical Airlift Squadron (1970 - 1971). Since I had prior flight experience I was in the Aircraft Commander program for upgrade. That year of flight experience was fun, at times tragic when aircrews and aircraft were lost, anxious during monsoon season, thrilling when the adrenaline was flowing, and rewarding when accomplishing things like, being able to haul troops soaking, wet waiting in driving rain, for a ride out of An Khe to Cam Ranh to catch the Freedom Bird home. (Which we did, two days in a row with weather right down at minimums)

My last assignment after that year was to Travis AFB, Cal., back in the C-141A until separation in January, 1973.

As luck would have it, the day after separation I was called by North Central Airlines for a pilot class of 10, beginning in March. (The only offer I had, of all the airlines I applied to.) So my career path began, in the right seat of the Convair 580, right seat on DC-9's, left seat on all DC-9's (-10, -30, -50, and -80's), then 757, and finally DC-10 out of Honolulu until retirement in 2002, and living in San Francisco.

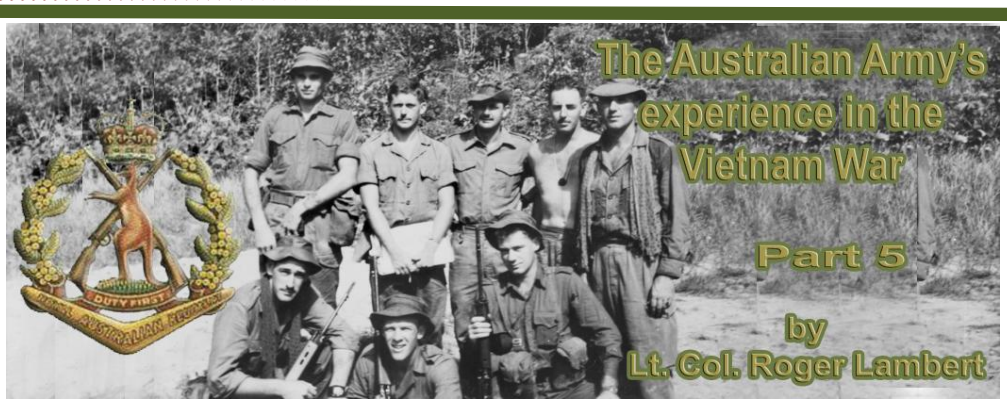
I moved to Santa Fe in 2005 to present. Total flight time around 25 to 30 thousand hours.(stopped counting after a while)

Photography has been a hobby, off and on over the years, and your group has given me an opportunity to dredge up my photos and memories of that formative period of my life. I am happy for the positive feedback from all.

Doug's comments: John is no stranger to the readers of the Phan Rang Newsletter because he has contributed numerous photos and "*A Memorial to Dwaine Mattox and the crew of C-123K 55-4527*" in Newsletter 196. Dwaine Mattox crewed with John for a period of time riding in the right seat. The only survivor of that fateful Provider crash was the loadmaster, Bob Agrifoglio. Bob passed away a few years ago and I just received word from his widow Marie that she is moving to England, but will always remain in touch with her Phan Rang family. Marie is a great advocate for veterans and if anyone would like to contact her just let me know. I'm sure she would love it.

John always had a camera with him in Vietnam and because of that he's managed to capture the essence of a small slice of life in Vietnam through his pictures which would do justice to National Geographic or Life Magazine. He probably transited every air base and airstrip in

Vietnam capable of handling the Provider and when he wasn’t guiding his airship he was observing life and he’s captured life as many have never seen it. This collage represents just a fraction of those photos.



Remembering the Cups, Canteen, Troops for the Use Of …

By Lt. Col. Roger Lambert

Cup Canteen

What a useful piece of equipment this was in country.

The plastic water bottle (canteen) carried vital water supplies which fitted neatly into the canteen carrier. The cloth carrier could be attached to one's pistol belt using the attached clips or suspended from the belt itself using the hooks.

I preferred the latter method of attachment where I could suspend a water bottle at the sides of each bum cheek. For me, it was comfortable and importantly, allowed ready access to my trouser map pockets.

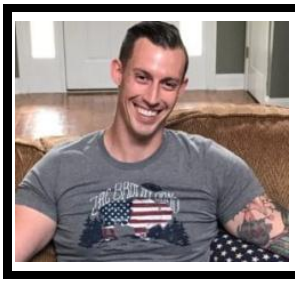
Plastic water bottle canteen

The Cups Canteen could be used for cooking a hot meal, boiling water for a brew (tea or coffee) and boiling water for shaving. One very quickly learnt to acquire a second Cups Canteen as food and shaving water with lather residue don't mix; one canteen was strictly for cooking and brews, and the other strictly for shaving.

I always carried two water bottles on my basic webbing. During the dry season, I carried an extra three water bottles attached to the light weight Special Forces A Frame that I used as my back pack.

Article by Lieutenant Colonel (retired) R.A. Lambert; Platoon Commander, 9 Platoon, C Company, 5th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment 1969-70

'Nesting 'Shadows', awaiting Nightfall'
photo by Bob Howe



"...war is ruthless, indiscriminate and final. There are no second chances, looking backs or better next times."

Johnny 'Joey' Jones

I love stuff like this. (*Mike is referring to Ron Deyhle's article in Phan Rang Newsletter 206 titled "The Great Hurrah, or, How a Fighter Pilot Can Make It Better.")* If I was younger and wanted to write a book that would be a best seller, I would interview fighter pilots, and pilots in general, to get their all-time hairiest stories, and maybe their all-time most fun stories, and publish them. Although not active now, at one time I was a QB taking their monthly publication that had some really good stuff. One story was about a T-38 instructor at Laughlin. His student was one of those who had finished everything except the hours to be flown requirement, which meant the IP could get stick time. The hot subject in the O Club at the time was power off loops in the Talon. IP Big Rog took off with his student watching. Big Rog thought he knew how to loop the bird with power off. He forgot the most important thing, a dive to gain max airspeed before entering the maneuver. He fell into an inverted flat spin at the top and fought it all he could to no avail; he lost both engines and went through the lowest altitude he could before ejection. Finally, he gave the order to eject to his student and then punched out. Just as he left the bird, the student saw an engine increasing in RPM. He righted the airplane, stayed with it through spool up and scorched some cactus before he got a positive climb rate again. Without a rear canopy, he circled back, saw his IP safely on the ground then headed back to base using his solo call sign in his call up. They were confused. They could tell on their chart that the flight did not start as a solo. In crisply spoken words the student added that he was formerly flight such and such, indicating a dual flight. Huh, what the hell?" When he rolled out in front of the tower with no rear canopy the controllers nearly soiled their pants. The IP was forced to leave the service and the student was punished for disobeying an order. He was allowed to graduate but he got a crummy assignment, served his time and got out because he was basically ruined. Me? I thought he deserved a medal for having more brains than his IP, plus he save a very valuable airplane. They punished a hero, IMO. **He proved he had the most valuable thing of all for a pilot: he could remain calm under the worst of circumstances.** That is rare. Even Chuck Yeager choked up once when he got into a flat spin in the X-1. This guy was as cool as a winter cucumber all the way. **Mike Moore** *(Note: Mike Moore has some very exiting stories to tell which will be coming up in the next couple of issues of the Phan Rang Newsletter.)*

Doug, I discovered your article about the C-123/F-105 collision a few nights ago and wanted to

make contact with you. You close the article with the comment that you just became aware of this accident and it has become a bit of an obsession for you. I too recently learned about the accident, and I discovered your write-up through a subsequent Google search. The gentleman who told me the story is Jack Dole, who retired from the Air Force and later retired from an airline career. I'm happy to say that he is in his early eighties, healthy, and doing very well!

I'm going to pass the copy of your article that I printed to Jack. I'll suggest he drop you an e-mail if you're interested.
Sincerely,
Ken Snyder

Doug's Comments: In the last issue of this newsletter 206 in the article "*The ALCE and Aerial Port Guys that made it Happen*" I failed to list Jim Erixson as an Aerial Port Coordinator that performed some duties with the ALCE. The list wasn't meant to be a comprehensive list of everyone that performed that duty, but only those that did during my time in-country. I hope that you enjoyed this newsletter. If you have a story to tell or haven't yet submitted your autobiography, please write it down and send to me so that your unique experiences can be saved for posterity. This newsletter was composed and all graphics by Douglas Severt unless otherwise stated. To see a list of all previous newsletters click here. To unsubscribe to Phan Rang News, mailto: dougsevert@cox.net and put 'unsubscribe' in subject line.