

# Phan Rang AB Newsletter

The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.  
"Keeping the memories alive" Newsletter 210

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## AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF PHAN RANG AB PERSONNEL



## **“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN**

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### **Troy B. Adams 14th Field Maintenance Sq.**

#### **Troy B. Adams, 14<sup>th</sup> Field Maintenance Squadron**

Reedley, California was my birthplace in 1940. I attended Pacific Grove High School where I received my diploma through GED. I also attended Bangor Community College, Bangor, Maine. I enlisted in USAF while living in Pacific Grove, CA because I wanted to travel the world (and I did). I was later assigned to the 14th Field Maintenance Squadron at Phan Rang from February through November 1970 as a Doppler and Forward Looking Radar Technician.

Although I was not a flight-crew member, there were still some rather “exciting” experiences on the ground. My squadron was housed in a group of Quonset huts situated between “Charlie Mountain” and the flight line at Phan Rang. The VC were always firing missiles toward the flight line but they usually ended up falling around our Quonset huts. My closest call was the day I was all alone, taking a shower in the outdoor latrine when a rocket just cleared the top of the latrine and landed about 50 feet behind me (my back was to the wall). Hearing the explosion and the debris hitting the wall behind me caused me to be momentarily “numbed” by the concussion; I thought I had been hit. However, as my feelings returned I realized I had escaped injury. That was close enough for me.

The things I will always remember about my time with AC- 119 gunships? Nothing really “exciting”, however, I did take my oath of “re-enlistment” on the flight line at Phan Rang with the gunships in the background, while a friend of mine captured the event on my movie camera.

Upon returning to the U.S., I was assigned to Shaw AFB where I worked on RF-4Cs. I later changed career fields and ended up working as a Site Developer with Civil Engineering and finally retired at Ellsworth AFB, South Dakota and moved to Ellsworth, Maine.

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**Robert Barry**  
**35th Security Police Sq.**

### **Robert Barry, 35<sup>th</sup> Security Police Squadron**

My name is Bob Barry. I was stationed at Phan Rang from December 28, 1967, until August 24th, 1969, for 18 months. I was with the 35th SPS K9 unit, and my K9 was Fred A611. After I left Vietnam, I went back to DMAFB Tucson and then spent 20 years working for the Pima County Sheriff's Department. I trained the K9 unit dogs and was also a handler in that unit as well as SWAT, patrol, and the detectives. After I retired from the Sheriff's Department, I became a Criminal Investigator for the Arizona Dept. of Corrections, and after 17 years there, I worked and retired from the Tucson Unified School District as a School Safety Officer, after 42 years in law enforcement. I am now totally retired and still in close contact with handlers I served with at Phan Rang and my Law Enforcement Brothers. I currently live in Mesa, Arizona, with my wife, Lorraine.



**Mario Alfaro**  
**17th Special Operations Sq.**

### **Mario Alfaro, 17<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron**

I went into the military in 1953 because I was a very rowdy young man. The judge said, “Don’t come here no more, Mario,” so I joined the Air Force. I’m glad I did; it really straightened me out. In 1968 I was stationed in Panama awaiting new orders and when they came in, they said, “Going to Vietnam.” I went to Hamilton AFB where I qualified with the guns. I had 30 days leave coming. I worked for Major Richardson and he received orders to Vietnam also and I said, “Well, we will probably never see each other.” When I reported in at Nha Trang, they asked me what kind of plane and engines I worked with. They said, “You’re going to this new outfit of one nineteen’s.”

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I said, “Is that plane still flying?” and they said, “Yep, it’s still flying.” When I got there I was directed to a tent out by the runway. That’s where the maintenance officer was.”

When I entered the tent, who did I run into but Major Richardson! He left from Panama 30 days before me. He said, “I’m sure glad you’re here. I need somebody to go to Phan Rang. Stick around here for two days and learn the system. Then catch a hop to Phan Rang.” So that’s what I did. That’s how I wound up with the 71<sup>st</sup> SOS reserve outfit that ferried the planes over there.

I went to work at 7 P.M. starting that night and I worked until 7A.M. the following morning. I did that for a year.

When we got hit, we really got hit! I remember we were running away from this revetment. There was a plane in it and we were thinking “if it gets hit, it is full of gas.” We went running into the next revetment, tripped over a wire and went rolling. My buddy said to me, “Sgt Alfaro, are you scared?” I said, “Yes, I’m scared. Do you know how to pray?” He said “No.” So I said, “Follow me,” and we said our prayers. Were we scared, “really” scared?

But I have to tell you, while we were there I worked 6 months with the reserves and 6 months with the regulars. I had more fun with the reserves than the regulars. The reserves were like a close-knit family. One night we were getting hit so bad Col. Womb says, “Sgt. Alfaro, I need you and two single people to come launch us.”

I said jokingly, “I’m married.”

He said, “I don’t care. You’re coming”

So I turned around and said, “Two single people get in the truck with me.”

I got in the truck. The whole crew was there. I said, “Get out. Only the single ones can go.” But they said, “Well, we’re going with you.” We all launched that plane under fire! That crew was close. They knew what to do and they got in there and did it. No complaints-just got the job done. I retired as a Master Sgt. in 1975.

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A few years ago, I was California when the phone rang and the voice said, “Are you MSgt Alfaro?” I said, “Yes”. “You have a picture of aircraft 138?” “Yes.” “Well, you’re on one side and I’m on the other. We have a reunion once a year and I’d like you to come with us.” I said, “OK,” and I’ve been going ever since. I enjoy it every time I go.



**Robert J. Allen**  
**17th Special Operations Sq.**

**Robert J. Allen, 17<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron**

**Chronology of Air Force Career**

**Active Duty.....11 Feb 54 - 15 Feb 58**  
**Reserved Duty ..... 15 Jan 59 - 28 Oct 62**  
**Active Duty .....28 Oct 62 - 27 Oct 63**  
**Reserved Duty ..... 27 Oct 63 - 8 Sep 68**  
**Active Duty..... 8 Sep 68 - 31 July 82**  
**Retired.....31 Jul 82**  
**Commissioned (Second Lieutenant).....16 May 55**  
**Promoted (First Lieutenant).....16 Nov 56**  
**Promoted (Captain).....1 Jul 62**  
**Promoted (Major).....2 Dec 67**  
**Promoted (Lieutenant Colonel).....15 May 76**

Graduate USAF Pilot Training Class 55-N (Flew PA-18, T-6G, T-28A and T-33A aircraft; flew B-29 in “advanced pilot training”).

Flew KC-97E/G and C-45H Lake Charles AFB, Louisiana (1955 – 1958) (Co-pilot)

Flew C-119G/J Willow Grove Air Reserve Facility, Pennsylvania (1959 – 1968) (Aircraft Commander/ Instructor Pilot/ Chief, Standardization and Evaluation)

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Flew AC-119G Lockbourne AFB, Ohio (1968) (Student) Nha Trang, Phan Rang and Tuy Hoa, Vietnam (1969) (Aircraft Commander/Instructor Pilot)

Flew AC-119G/K Lockbourne AFB, Ohio and Hurlburt Field, Florida (1969 – 1972) (Instructor Pilot/ Standardization and Evaluation Flight Examiner/Chief Pilot) Logged over 5,000 hours in various models of the C-119, 678 hours of which were in combat. Over 6,000 total hours of flying time.

After leaving the cockpit in 1972, served as Airfield Manager/Director, Operations and Training at Wiesbaden AB, Germany (1973 – 1976), Rickenbacker AFB, Ohio (1976 – 1980), and Grissom AFB, Indiana (1980 – 1982).

Completed Air Command and Staff College and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces.

Between first and second active duty tours, attended and graduated from Ursinus College, Collegeville, Pennsylvania (1958 – 1962) with a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics and Education degree; while at Rickenbacker AFB, attended and was graduated from the Graduate School of Administration, Capital University, Bexley, Ohio (1978 – 1981) with a Master of Public Administration degree.

After retirement from active duty, worked at the Defense Construction Supply Center (DCSC), Whitehall, Ohio (1983 – 1996) as a Logistics Management Specialist in charge of disaster and emergency planning and operation of the Center Command and Control facility.

In June 1971, I married G. Georgianna Vorhies Bundy.

### **Stories**

In the 210 missions that I flew throughout Southeast Asia, in South Vietnam, Laos, a small portion of North Vietnam when my navigator got a little “mixed up”, and other places to the west, most were relatively routine, although my crew and I probably did not think so at the time!

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I recall a mission early in my tour that took us to patrolling “the trail” in Laos. Because of where we were flying, our guns were to be loaded strictly with “ball” ammunition – no “tracers”. We located several trucks moving along and we rolled in to “hit” the lead and tail vehicles, essentially stopping the convoy. With the front vehicle in the NOS and clearance to fire, we all were amazed when a steady stream of red tracers left the aircraft, headed for the target. Almost immediately, several weapons of varying sizes began returning fire.

On a mission near Dak To, troops on the ground reported taking fire from a hillside, but as soon as we entered the area all got quiet. After flying around for a little while, we

left the area, flew south for about 20 miles, turned out our lights, and reentered the target area. Thinking that we had left, the enemy resumed firing, and were doing so just in time for the sensor operator to pinpoint his position. We immediately fired upon the location and subsequently witnessed several large explosions.

Late in my tour, we were called in for a TIC (troops in contact) situation west of Chu Lai. As we entered the “firing geometry,” several enemy guns opened fire immediately below us. The aircraft took several small caliber “hits” and the DASC (Direct Air Support Center) directed that we depart the target area. Instead, a call was made for fighter support and we subsequently directed an attack on the gun locations. After the flight of F-4s did their thing, no resistance was experienced and the attack on the fire support base was broken.

On a mission in III Corps, we were called in to relieve another gunship that was just about “fired out.” A fire support base was under attack and all manner of air support was called in. A C-130 “Basketball” was overhead dropping flares, a young trooper on the ground was doing a superb job of directing where to put the ordnance, and a flight of four Army helicopters arrived on the scene. The flight lead (Blue Max Lead) gave the impression that he thought he was going to single-handedly win the war, but first he needed to know the location of ALL friendly forces! The trooper, who had a propensity for vulgarity and who was busy with other transmissions, simply told Blue Max to “shut the Hell up, hold high and dry, and let Shadow do his job.” By the time that our ammunition supply was nearly expended, the attack was broken and all was quiet.

All this happened some 37 years ago. ‘Tis a little difficult to remember back some four decades.

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The funniest thing about the last tale is that years later my wife and I were at a party and the host was proud to tell everybody in attendance that he had a tape he wanted to play. The tape was a recording of a mission in III Corps and of his crew and how they supported a TIC. He went to great lengths to build up “his crew’s” exploits. He played the tape and all were awestruck as they listened to how “Shadow 62,” his crew, had gone about its business. Then the tape was over and everybody was talking about the mission. I simply asked when he had been on a gunship, for “I was the aircraft commander on Shadow 62 that night, and I don’t remember you ever being on my crew!” Reluctantly, he had to admit that he had gotten the tape from a friend.



**Mike Maynard Nobach**  
**17th Special Operations Sq.**

### **Mike Maynard Nobach, 17<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron**

I was born in Lansing, Michigan 1949. I grew up in Fowler and graduated from Fowler High School in 1967. I attended Lansing Community College in 1967-68. I joined the Air Force on June 19, 1968 in Detroit to fly, see the world, and to beat the draft.

I served as an aerial gunner on AC-119K Stinger gunships at Phan Rang in October 1969, Da Nang in November, Phan Rang in December, and at Da Nang from January to October 1970. Lots of bag draggin’ at the beginning of my tour!

When we started flying missions into Laos in 1969, it was very dark. When I left in October 1970, the whole country was on fire. Gunships worked the Ho Chi Minh Trail every night, shooting everything from fuel depots to elephants carrying supplies. I remember the F-4s supporting us with napalm drops and the B-52s dropping their payloads. We flew very low while providing close air support for friendly troops. I remember the large surface to air weapons fired at us and exploding outside our windows. I flew 150 combat missions and each one had its own story.



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From Lockbourne AFB, Ohio to Southeast Asia, there were many training flights. Once in Southeast Asia, especially flying out of Da Nang, every mission was unique. Flying with the 18th SOS commander’s crew was always eventful. While at Da Nang, we used the commander’s jeep to drive to South China Beach on a regular basis and made trips to Freedom Hill to visit the marines. I remember the great food and comradeship through the entire program. The people involved in the gunship program always seemed to have an everlasting bond. There were many good times and plenty of hair-raising experiences. I separated from the Air Force on June 18, 1972 at Grand Forks, North Dakota. I currently live at St. Johns, Michigan.



**Ray Edward Mechstroth**  
**17th Special Operations Sq.**

### **Ray Edward Mechstroth, 17<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron**

I was born in New Bremen, Ohio on April 5, 1941 and graduated from New Bremen High School in May 1958. I entered the USAF on 13 August 1958 at Columbus, Ohio because I wanted to make the Air Force a career, taking after a cousin, a career aircraft mechanic, who I always looked up to. I retired from the Air Force in 1981 at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska at the rank of Senior Master Sergeant.

I was first assigned to the 71st SOS, then the 17th SOS at Nha Trang, then Phan Rang as an Illuminator Operator Instructor, and then as IO Stan-Eval. All Shadow gunship missions were exciting but some were more rewarding than others, especially the ones in which we were able to help long range patrols from being overrun. When you know there are only 5 or 6 guys down there and they have to whisper when they transmit over the radio for your support and you hear the next day that they all survived because of your firing around them; now, that makes you feel good.

On one mission we were firing around a platoon of Army guys who were in a night defense position. We required them to turn on strobe lights at each end of their position to verify they

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were in a straight line. Their leader wanted our fire brought closer, so we had them accept responsibility and to again confirm their formation. We fired where they requested and hit some friendlies. When they yelled for us to stop firing, they found out that they were actually in an arc formation rather than a straight line. The next morning our aircraft commander and the navigators were called in to TOC and confronted by an Army Colonel, and he was hot! But when he was told that we had it on tape, he only had to hear a little and he said we were cleared. It still made us feel bad but when the guys on the ground say to shoot, what can you do?

The thing I remember about my time in AC-119 gunships is the great crewmembers that I flew with and the downright good and experienced people of the reserve unit. It was a long year, but a most rewarding year of combat duty.



**Robert La Rosa**  
**17th Special Operations Sq.**

### **Robert La Rosa, 17<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron**

I was born a “city boy” in Brooklyn, New York on March 12, 1940. My father, James La Rosa, was born in Siracusa, Sicily Italy. My mother, Blanche Fedorski- La Rosa, was born in East Orange, New Jersey. As a young boy growing up in an area called Flatbush in Brooklyn, I always yearned to be away from the city. Every chance I got, I would escape from city life to a friend’s home in the beautiful and scenic Catskill Mountains in upstate New York State. There I learned to hunt small game and deer. All that time, I had a longing to live in the Western United States.

I attended and graduated from Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn, NY. When I entered high school, I was placed on the high school Varsity Rifle Team because of my prior experiences with shooting firearms. Shooting .22 caliber target rifles, I competed in many rifle shooting competitions through my high school years, winning numerous awards. I also accomplished all of the National Rifle Association’s .22 caliber target rifle qualification steps up to and including The Distinguished Rifleman Award.

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During High School, I joined the U.S. Navy Reserves. Later on, after a stint on active duty, I transferred from the U.S. Navy Reserves to the U.S. Air Force and went on active duty with the Air Force (AF) on May 7, 1958. I first attended and graduated from the Air Force Aircraft Munitions and Weapons Technical Training School and then completed and graduated from the Aircraft Nuclear Weapons School. Both schools were at Lowry AFB outside Denver, Colorado. Because I graduated second in my class in these schools, I was given the choice of my next assignment. WOW! At that time, the Strategic Air Command (SAC) was considered the elite command! The best of the best. So I chose an assignment in SAC to McCoy AFB at Orlando, Florida where I worked on the Air Force’s first all jet bombers, the B-47A and then the B-52. During my time in SAC, I was stationed in Okinawa and later in New Hampshire.

After four years in SAC, I changed commands. I was stationed in Germany, England, and Las Vegas, Nevada, assigned to the F-111 project. However, like many others who had joined the Air Force, I wanted to be an aircrew member and fly. My chance came at last in 1970. I volunteered and was accepted to the Air Force fixed-wing gunship program as an Aerial Gunner (AG). At last, I not only had a chance to fly in the Air Force, but a chance to fly in combat as well!

I completed the AF altitude chamber testing at George AFB in Victorville, California. Then, it was off to the USAF world-wide survival and POW training school in Fairchild AFB at Spokane, Washington. Then onto Lockbourne AFB in Columbus, Ohio for AC-119K Gunship training as an Aerial Gunner and my Air Force Wings at last. I was going to finally fly after years of waiting. After completing more than three months of Combat Crew Training at gunship flight school by early December 1970, I was off to the Philippines to Clark AFB to complete Jungle Survival training.

My first gunship assignment was at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam as an AG on the AC-119K Stinger gunship. On my first night at Phan Rang, laughingly called “Happy Valley”, I went to the outdoor theater to watch a movie. Shortly after I sat down, I heard a tremendously loud noise come screaming over my head. Just then, I heard someone loudly yell, “In-coming!” As we all dove to the ground and took cover, one thought immediately flashed through my mind, “Welcome to the war and combat!” Well, a Republic of Korea (ROK) Marine artillery unit was stationed somewhere at one end of the base and they had started shelling some Viet Cong troops located on the opposite outside perimeter of Phan Rang AB. However, they forgot to tell the American Air Force they were going to start firing artillery shells over the top of the

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base!

Not long after arriving at Phan Rang, I was transferred to a forward operating base further north in Vietnam called Da Nang. It didn't take long for this place to heat up either. DaNang Air Base was not only the home of our flight detachment of 18th SOS AC-119K Stingers; it was the home for many other combat forces of the USAF, US Army, US Marines and South Vietnamese units. Da Nang was strategically located on the South China Sea coast. Night and day, the base was almost constantly under attack by Viet Cong 122-millimeter (mm) rocket fire. These rockets did tremendous damage to aircraft and structures at DaNang while causing the loss of many lives of troops stationed at the base. Hence, Da Nang was nicknamed “Rocket City.” Stinger gunships at DaNang were predominately used to fly interdiction missions along the infamous and heavily defended Ho Chi Minh Trail, attacking North Vietnam Army (NVA) trucks hauling war materials southward to Viet Cong and NVA troops to use against American and South Vietnamese forces.

Our second and best-liked missions flown were called “TICs” for Troops-In-Contact. Supporting ground troops who were in dire straits, Stinger aircrews were known to squeeze every ounce of fuel from fuel tanks just to stay on target a few minutes longer so the troops on the ground might survive! Many Stinger gunship crews landed back at base after supporting a TIC with almost no remaining fuel.

I flew combat missions during four major campaigns in the Vietnam War. The first was called Commando Hunt V in which we flew in support of South Vietnamese ground forces severing the Ho Chi Minh Trail on Route 9 in Laos during Operation Lam Son 719. I'll never forget one mission on the night of February 19, 1971. The triple A (Anti-Aircraft Artillery) fire was so intense that you could almost walk on it! A convoy of trucks was spotted by one of our onboard sensor operators. Our gunship nosed over on its left side and we started attacking the convoy, firing our 20mm cannons at the enemy truck convoy while weaving in and out of the intense ground fire. When it was all said and done, our Stinger crew had successfully destroyed sixteen enemy trucks! All of our crew members received the Distinguished Flying Cross, (my first DFC) and the Vietnamese Gallantry Cross with Palm; a Unit award for our crew's participation during Lam Son 719.

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Many combat missions later, and on the first day of another campaign called Commando Hunt VI, I flew on the mission that almost cost me my life! On the evening of May 15, 1971 at Da Nang AB, my crew and I readied our Stinger gunship for a mission over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. Our radio call sign was Stinger 03. Little did we know, this was to be the most memorable and dangerous mission we would ever fly together as a crew! Since Stinger gunships flew at a low altitude and in very heavily defended areas at slow speeds, Stingers usually flew nighttime missions, but not always. Our crew had already been briefed on the area and target locations that we would be attacking. We had also been advised during the weather briefing that there would be a full moon shining brightly over our Laotian target area. Not a good way to start a combat mission!

Flying a mission with a full moon on a cloudless night was the one thing all Stinger crews feared the most. Our gunship would be silhouetted against the moon as we made each firing orbit over the target area and enemy gunners would have no trouble seeing us.

Stinger 03 took off from Da Nang heading towards Laos. We “Crossed the Fence”, flying over the South Vietnam/Laos border. All crewmembers pulled down their face shields on their ballistic flight helmets to protect their faces and eyes from flying shrapnel should the aircraft take a hit. In the case of us three gunners, we also needed the visor protection in the event that one of the aircraft’s six guns exploded while firing. Arriving over the target area, the pilot banked the gunship into a 30 degree left orbit. I switched on a 20mm Vulcan cannon to the firing mode. Another gunner and I both placed empty 20mm ammo cans on the floor behind the firing gun. Gunners always sat on overturned empty ammo cans behind the guns to fix the gun in case the gun jammed and to also reload the gun with ammo. Shortly after, we went into an orbit, firing the 20mm cannon. The gun jammed and the two of us were unable to fix it. I turned off the gun’s firing switch and notified the pilot over intercom that we’re moving to the rear 20 mm cannon. The two of us gunners carefully walked back to the rear gun and I switched it to firing mode. The gun worked fine and started blazing away at our target. Approximately twenty-five seconds later, exactly where my fellow-gunner and I had been seated behind the jammed 20mm gun, WHAM!, what seemed to be the loudest bang I ever heard in my life went off inside the compartment of the aircraft. The aircraft abruptly shook back and forth in the night sky. Shrapnel flew wildly throughout the gun compartment. The next thing I remember was gallons of volatile aviation fuel, spraying everyone in the compartment with the flammable fuel.

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We'd been hit!! Our Gunship had just been struck by two very accurate .57mm Anti-Aircraft Artillery rounds. The first one exploded, blowing a hole in the outer skin of the belly of the gunship. The second round exploded as it passed through the floor of the cargo compartment (gun deck). Shrapnel from this round continued upwards severing the co-pilot's rudder cable and cutting open the aircraft's cross-feed fuel valve and hydraulic system line. Battle damaged and still flying over heavily defended enemy territory and targets that we had just attacked, Stinger 03 was in big trouble to say the least.

One good thing that we had going for us was an F-4 Phantom Fighter/Bomber flying along with us as an escort. If we had to bail out, the Phantom could provide some firing cover and would know where we went down. Everybody onboard Stinger 03 started doing what they could to keep the badly damaged gunship in the air as the pilot tried to exit the target area without taking another hit. The pilot and co-pilot fire-walled the engines, trying to maintain altitude while heading eastward toward Da Nang. In the cargo compartment, we three aerial gunners and the illuminator operator started throwing all live ammo, spent brass cartridges, empty ammo cans, and anything else we could throw overboard to lighten the weight of the crippled aircraft.

Ahead was a mountain range to cross over on the way to home base. By this time we had all strapped on our chest parachutes for what looked like a possible bailout. Past the mountains, our next problem was that the main landing gear and the nose gear would not come down and lock in place. Remember the hydraulic system was shot up. The Flight Engineer and I started hand pumping the nose gear first and then the one main landing gear down into place. The other main gear was down but not locked in place. Finally that gear locked in place as we flew out over the South China Sea towards DaNang. We made a straight- in approach to DaNang. The pilot used the air brakes to stop the aircraft. As soon as the plane came to a full stop, everyone aboard set a land speed record for exiting a gunship! For this mission I was awarded my second Distinguished Flying Cross.

I went on to fly many more combat missions out of Da Nang. In September 1971, I was transferred to Nakhon Phanom (NKP) RTAFB, Thailand and again flew many more Stinger combat missions. While stationed at NKP, I participated in a campaign called Commando Hunt VII. I rotated back to the states in January 1972. For my missions flown on Stinger Gunships, I



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Christmas I was on my way to the Air Force for basic training at Lackland AFB, TX.

I started my new career as a Propeller Specialist and was sent to Sheppard AFB, TX. At technical school I learned three propeller systems, Curtiss Electric, Aero Products and Hamilton Standard. After graduation my first assignment was the 777<sup>th</sup> Squadron at Pope AFB, NC on C-130E models in August 1969.

In January, 1970 my first TDY was to Mildenhall AFB England for 70 days. Upon returning back to Pope AFB a short time later I received orders For Udorn AFB, Thailand, to work on AC-130 Spectre. I was sent to Dyess AFB, TX for a three week FTD school. In my third week I was told my assignment was cancelled and I was sent back to Pope, AFB. One month later I received my new assignment for Phan Rang AB, RVN.

On July 29, 1970 I was on my way to McChord AFB, Washington waiting for my Flying Tiger ride with stops at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, Yakota AB, Japan and a one night layover in Cam Ranh Bay, RVN.

The next morning a C-123 took me to Phan Rang and I started my new journey. I was assigned to the 14th FMS Propeller shop working on the 17th SOS and 18th SOS Shadow's and Stinger's along with EC-47 and O-2 Skymaster FAC birds. I also was assigned to be an Augmentee for the first 30 days. I received extra M-16 and grenade launcher training with the Koreans.

I think we took two rocket attacks in those 30 days and I went to the perimeter towers twice. It was pretty exciting since I was supposed to be a Propeller specialist.

During the month of October, 1970 I was scheduled for flying status to fly around Vietnam and pick up spare parts for any shop that needed them. Flying in the Shadows and Stingers was a great experience. The last ten days of October I was sent to Tan Son Nhut to help out with some propeller problems. By December, 1970 I was told that my new job assignment was at Nakon Phanom (NKP) AB Thailand.

I was assigned to the 18<sup>th</sup> SOS as the Stinger Propeller Specialist and also lending a hand on A-1E Skyraiders and OV-10 Broncos. My tour ended July 29, 1971 and my new assignment was Norton AFB, CA working on C-118's and T-29's. On December 7, 1972 I was discharged from the



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Air Force.

After being out for several years, C-130's came to Youngstown, Ohio Air Reserve Base and my next Air Force career started as a Air Reserve Technician. The next 28 years my jobs included Propeller and Engine Shop Supervisor on the T-56 Allison engines and 54H60-91 Hamilton Standard Propellers. My last six years I was the Quality Assurance Superintendant and retired as a Chief Master Sergeant with 34 years.

I have been married to my wife Linda for 49 years. We have two daughters and four grandchildren. We now reside in Venice, Florida.



**Robert D. Farmer**  
**17th Special Operations Sq.**

### **Robert D. Farmer, Maintenance, 17<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron**

I was born in New London, Huron County, Ohio on May 1, 1950. I enlisted in the United States Air Force at Bangor, Maine in November 1968 and served until my discharge in February 1972 as a Sergeant (E-4).

In 1968, the Draft was going strong and I thought it would be better to enlist than to be drafted. After boot camp, I went to Sheppard AFB, Texas for Aircraft Mechanic Technical School. My first duty assignment after tech school was to Lockbourne AFB, Ohio with the 4408th CCTS where I worked on C-123s. I decided to volunteer for a worldwide tour and was sent to Vietnam. I arrived in Vietnam February 1970 and was assigned to the 17<sup>th</sup> SOS at Phan Rang AB to work on AC-119G gunships. After five months at Phan Rang, I volunteered to go to the FOB at Tan Son Nhut AB, where I spent my last seven months in Vietnam.

While I was at Tan Son Nhut, I volunteered to return to Vietnam as a Flight Mechanic on the C-7A Caribou. So after my 30-day leave in the States, I went to Hurlbert Air Field where I worked on A-1E Sky Raiders for a short time before beginning training as a Flight Mechanic. I went to

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Tyndall AFB, Florida for physiological training in the altitude chamber and ejection seat. From there, I went to Dyes AFB, Texas for air crew training, followed by survival training at Fairchild AFB, Washington. Jungle survival school at Clark AFB, Philippines was the final training before entering Vietnam for my second tour of duty in September 1971. I was assigned to the 457<sup>th</sup> TAS at Cam Ranh Bay AB. I flew as a flight mechanic/load master on the C-7A Caribou through 1972. U. S. Troop withdrawals sent me back to the States early. When I returned stateside, I was discharged from the Air Force at Travis AFB, California. Civilian again! I have many fond memories of my service and wouldn't change a thing, except for maybe staying in for twenty years.



**David L. Voisey**  
**17<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Sq.**

### **David L. Voisey, Gunner, 17<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron**

I was born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1949. After graduation from McClure Senior High School in 1967, I was faced with the reality of the Selective Service Draft in early 1968, so I enlisted in the U. S. Air Force at St. Louis. The main reason I selected the USAF was because my favorite uncle was career Air Force.

In November 1968, I was flown via commercial airliner from St. Louis Lambert International Airport to San Antonio, Texas for basic training at Lackland AFB. After completing basic, I was sent to Tech School at Lowry AFB, Colorado for weapons specialist training. While in class one day, I, along with some other trainees, were taken from class to view a “Classified” program on gunships and afterward, asked to volunteer. I volunteered! That was the beginning of many TDYs for me.

From Lowry, I reported to England AFB, Louisiana as a weapons specialist, 46230, until I received orders to become an aerial gunner assigned to the 17<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron in Vietnam. Then I was sent TDY to Sheppard AFB, Texas for physiological training which included the Altitude Chamber and from Sheppard, I was sent to Fairchild AFB, Washington for survival

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training. After survival school, I reported for AC-119 gunship training at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio. Then it was off to the Philippines for jungle survival training at Clark AFB. In June 1970, I reported for duty with the 17th SOS at Phan Rang, Republic of Vietnam.

I served as an aerial gunner on AC-119G Shadow gunships, flying out of Phan Rang, Tan Son Nhut, Phu Cat, and DaNang. My most exciting missions were flown out of DaNang when we were flying two missions per night into Laos. We'd refuel and reload at Ubon, Thailand. They were vital missions of long hours and hard work supporting friendly ground troops under enemy attack. All the missions I flew over Cambodia were exciting for one reason or another. There were a few missions that made me wonder, especially when we landed with only one engine. While always remembering the thrill of flying combat missions, I will never forget the importance of those missions in supporting friendly ground forces. I earned the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with eight Oak Leaf Clusters during my tour of Vietnam.

I departed Vietnam in June 1971 and was assigned to Hurlburt Field, Florida until May 1973 when I decided to separate from the service to re-enter civilian life.

From 1973 to 1987, I worked for the St. Louis County Police Department, attaining the rank of Sergeant before taking an early retirement to change careers. During my career as a police officer, I served in the Patrol Division, Tactical Unit, and 911 Call Center. During my time in the Patrol Division, I was a helicopter pilot and held a Commercial Rating, accumulating approximately 1500 hours. From 1974 to 1980, I attended classes through Northeast Missouri State University, graduating with a BS Degree. From 1987 to present, I have been employed by various companies as a HR & Safety Director/Manager in the trucking industry. My area of specialization is motor carrier safety and hazardous materials transportation by highway. My current employer is AIRGAS Southwest located in Houston, Texas where my wonderful wife, Mary and I call home.

### **Gunner Story**

Upon entering Vietnam in June 1970, I was teamed up with Michael Smith, an experienced gunner. Michael had six months flight experience as “Bravo” gunner. I came on board as his “Bravo” gunner and he was a great mentor. He taught me, among other things, that the pilot should never have to be without a loaded operational gun. He taught me fast loading

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techniques. This was important as our pilot, Major Charlie Meier, could fire extremely long bursts. According to Mike, he had witnessed Major Meier go through four guns, one at a time, in one bursts. Therefore, it was important to load fast and keep the guns online.

Mike also taught me to carry spare parts on missions, including barrels. During several missions with Mike, guns broke and even exploded. He showed me how to remove, repair, reinstall and get the gun back online.

On one mission, my #1 gun blew up. It necessitated removing the gun from the pod, tearing it down, and replacing the bolts. We were reportedly taking ground fire so all the interior lights were off. I grabbed an empty 7.62 ammo can and used it as a make-shift workbench. After placing the gun on top of an “open” ammo can, I started to rebuild the gun.

During the process, I grabbed the drive motor and started to turn the gun over. The motor slipped out of my grease covered glove and pinned the tip of my right hand ring finger between the open lip of the ammo can and the drive motor. That REALLY hurt! I completed the repairs and reinstalled the gun and put it back in service.

On the flight back to Phan Rang, the injured finger started to throb. My pilot advised me to go to the dispensary. At the dispensary, there was an enlisted medic on duty, no doctors were on duty at that early hour. He examined the finger and said I’d probably lose the nail if he didn’t relieve the pressure. Even then, I’d probably lose the nail anyway. Up until now, the injured finger just throbbed with pain.

So the medic said, “Do you have a cigarette lighter?” I responded, “Yes”, and handed him my cigarette lighter. He picked up a paperclip, unfolded it and heated the paperclip with the flame from the lighter. Then he grabbed my hand and laid it flat on the table and with the hot end of the paperclip, bored a hole through my fingernail until blood shot out of the nail. The cure was worse than the injury on this one! Then, to add insult to injury, he removed me from flight status, (DNIF), for an indefinite time. I remember I had to return to the dispensary several times to plead with the flight surgeon to put me back on flight status. I did get an earlier than expected release to get back to flying combat missions.



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and flew C-130s at Pope AFB, NC, before returning to Andrews AFB to fly the VC-137 (B-707) as aircraft commander on Special Air Missions.

My last assignment was a three-year tour in logistics. I separated from the Air Force in 1989 and flew as a Captain on the B-727 with Delta Air Lines until 2003. My awards and decorations included the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with eight devices. I've been married to Marti Floyd for 36 years. We have two daughters, Kristen and Kerrie.

### **Unforgettable Flight**

In May 1971, I was an instructor pilot with the 17th SOS at Phan Rang AB. Our task was to train the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) to take over the gunship mission and operations. My instructor crew included: Major Jim Rash, navigator; TSgt. Gentry, flight engineer; SSgt. Mike Drzyzga (**Note:** *See Mike's story that follows in this issue.*), gunner; and the illuminator operator whose name I can't remember.

There is one flight I will never forget because I lost an engine on the takeoff roll just as I rotated. The flight manual called for rotating at the minimum-control airspeed of 113 knots. Fortunately, I had accelerated to single-engine-climb speed (125 knots) before rotating. It was a technique I learned from the “old heads” that flew the C-119 in their younger days. The higher rotation speed provided a margin of safety and made good sense to me and a lot of other pilots.

At about ten feet above the runway, TSgt Gentry yelled, “There goes number two.” We had the worst thing we could have on takeoff in the AC-119G - a runaway prop. That meant we lost all ability to control the propeller pitch. The prop was providing no power and was instead acting as a big speed brake. I quickly pulled the nose up a little more to get some altitude, pulled the number two throttle to idle, and let the airspeed settle at 115 knots, just above minimum-control airspeed. I was glad I rotated at that higher airspeed because we were able to climb to 300 feet on one engine.

Had I rotated at 113, we never would have been able to climb and probably would have been trying to fly the plane from an altitude of 20 feet. With the prop screaming at 3500 rpm, there was nothing we could do other than try landing as soon as possible. I started a slow right turn to get over the sea. I knew we had an 1100-foot hill to miss, but I couldn't see it. I missed it by

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making a wide, shallow turn. When we were on a downwind and safely over the water, I instructed the VNAF pilot to fly the plane so I could complete the emergency checklist.

At that point things started going sour. TSgt. Gentry had opened the cowl flaps to avoid overheating the engine cylinder heads. Overheating could cause the engine to lose power. However, opening the cowl flaps also put more drag on the plane, meaning we needed more power to maintain our 115-knot airspeed. However, the VNAF pilot had not advanced the throttle to overcome the increased drag. The airspeed had quickly dropped to 110 knots and we were descending at a rate of 50 feet per minute. In theory, we were three knots below controllable flying speed. Fortunately, we were carrying only a partial load of ammo. The lower weight gave us a slight safety pad. Nevertheless, I was close to simultaneously running out of the big three: airspeed, altitude, and ideas.

We were close to the runway, but low and slow as we turned onto base leg. I thought about taking over flying the aircraft, but decided that trying to transfer aircraft control and having the VNAF pilot assume copilot duties would be too risky. I just had to remember to tell him what to do because he wasn't doing anything unless he was told to.

Gear-down timing was critical. Once we lowered the gear the aircraft was going in only one direction - down. I lowered the gear, hoping it would lock before we touched down. It did.

We turned off the runway onto the high-speed taxiway and stopped. A crazy thing then happened. The Pedro rescue chopper came down abruptly beside our left wing with a cloud of dust. He had been following us and we had turned directly in his flight path. He had to quickly drop his fire bottle and set the chopper down to avoid hitting us. I remember thinking how strange it would be to just make it back only to have a rescue chopper come through the wing. Then I heard, “Nice going Dick!” The chopper pilot was Mike Nelson, a good friend and next door neighbor from my last stateside assignment.

I had not said a word to the pilot because I was exhausted. When I finally caught my breath, I asked why he hadn't pushed the power up when the airspeed started decreasing. He replied that the book limited the use of run maximum power to five minutes. I replied, a bit sarcastically, that if we were about to crash, it probably would be a real good idea to run max power longer than five minutes. The Vietnamese resisted deviating from the flight manual. If

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the manual said something, that’s what they were going to do, no matter what.

We then went to another plane and flew the scheduled training mission. At the debriefing, we discussed what had happened. The guys in back said that they were ready to toss out the ammo and flare launcher if needed. We even had a laugh about some things, like the VNAF navigator getting up to preflight the NOS while the cockpit crew was struggling to keep the plane flying 300 feet above the ground. We had survived a severe emergency of the kind one would only expect to see in a flight simulator.

The following day was beautiful. At midmorning I got Buckwheat, our hooch dog, and walked up the hill located in the middle of the base. I looked down at the runway, retraced our flight path, and thought, “Damn Bucky, that was close.” That’s when I got scared. That night we were back at it, flying a training mission.

In my 35 years of flying, I never had an emergency as serious as the one on that dark night in May 1971. I owe my life to the older guys who flew the C-119 when they were lieutenants and shared their knowledge and techniques on flying that bird.



**Larry D. Middleton**  
**17th Special Operations Sq.**

### **Larry D. Middleton, Weapons Maint., 17<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron**

Renton, Washington was my birthplace in 1948. After graduating from Renton High School in 1966, I eventually received a draft board notice to report for my physical. Thereafter, I decided to join the Navy or the Air Force. The Navy recruiter irritated me so much with his negative attitude and statements about the U.S. Air Force that I knew the USAF was for me. I enlisted on 14 February 1967 at Seattle, Washington.

From January thru October 1969, I was assigned to support the 71<sup>st</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron at Phan Rang Air Base, RVN as a weapons specialist. One night in the



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spring or summer of 1969 at Phan Rang, we started receiving heavy rocket and mortar fire. This was not uncommon, except in this instance, the base siren blew in a series of blasts that indicated that we were under direct attack and to get our weapons. We knew that things were a lot more serious than usual. Our primary mission was to scramble our planes. As Airman Phillips Wheatley and I ran onto the flight line, a visibly scared young Air Policeman lowered his gun at us and yelled, “HALT, WHO GOES THERE?” After yelling back a few obscenities at him and reassuring him that we were not VC, he let us pass. We got our planes airborne as a rocket flew overhead and landed directly in the cockpit of an F-100 in an adjoining revetment. It was amazing and reassuring to see our planes firing and dropping flares while working the base perimeter. They quickly silenced the night.

I’ll always remember the teamwork that was so automatic. Everybody knew how important our aircraft were and it was up to us to keep each plane working to its fullest potential. It didn’t matter if you were the aircraft crew chief, electrician, or an engine or weapons specialist. Whatever your duty, you knew that with our planes in the air, lives were being saved on the ground. Even though I was not on a flight crew, part of me was on each mission when I loaded ammo, flares, or repaired and maintained the guns.

The memories of people and events have become lifelong, free time playing cards, music, and having a few beers while always thinking of our family back home; watching as the flares and tracers from our planes fired around the perimeter as our base was under attack by rockets and mortars. Watching the absolutely “crazy” Aussies playing their drinking games, one of which they called “faggot race;” the vision of these guys lining up and then racing with a flaming, rolled up piece of newspaper sticking out their rears---all to win a beer!

I remember the few times I got to go off base at Phan Rang, one time with the above mentioned tough, crazy Aussies. As we walked down a muddy road entering a nearby village, we noticed a small group of begging, muddy, naked kids about 4 to 5 years old. I will always remember the one, out of place, mixed race little blonde girl with her hands out. The sight immediately brought tears to the eyes of one of these “tough” Aussies as he hugged her and handed her some money. It just brought things into perspective how the effects of war has no boundaries.

I separated from the USAF on 15 December 1970 at Travis AFB, California. It was a privilege and



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good backfires. The folks who did the weight reduction engineering and procedures for the AC-119K ferry and combat weight loads may not have thought it all the way through because they took out the body/wing heaters for a cold weather ferry mission. I shivered all the way to our next stop, Adak AB/Naval Air Station in the Aleutian Islands.

During the time of Lord Nelson and the Battle of Trafalgar, the British navy was still using “press gangs” who lived in poor conditions and ate bad food. When we landed at Adak, I realized that our Navy’s treatment of its enlisted personal was not too far removed from those days. It took many threats from our pilot to get the enlisted crew into better quarters. After some beans (and other things that we did not recognize) for breakfast, we were on our way south to Midway Island.

After departing Adak, we steadily flew through bad and icing weather. As IO, I kept a very good eye on the Benson fuel bladders in the cargo deck. After a while, I noticed that the fuel flow was a lot higher than it should be. I mentioned to the engineer that maybe he should manually lean the engines a tad more. For this I received a nasty look from the pilot. I returned to the cargo section and started to fit a butt boat (small dingy) to my parachute harness. On returning to the cockpit, the flight engineer asked what he should do about the fuel flow. I said “Don’t worry about it, Bobby. I will talk to you about it in the rescue boat.” If I remember correctly, we landed with about twenty minutes of fuel at Midway.

Not much to say about Midway Island. If you are a bird watcher, you would have had a good time. I don’t remember too much about our time there or our departure. It seems that we were there for only one or two days.

Our next stop was Wake Island. Enroute the engineer was leaning the port engine when it backfired once. My first thoughts were that he had pulled the mixture back too far and it got his attention. It was not long before it backfired again. The backfires began to occur about every ten to twenty minutes. We pulled the power off that engine and just let it carry its own weight. I remember telling the rest of the crew that it was acting like a rotating valve seat and would probably require a cylinder change at Wake Island. We arrived late in the evening and did not start to trouble shoot the aircraft until the next morning. The contract workers came out but did not have an S-1 compression tester or much of anything else. Someone finally found some old “lollypop” cylinder compression checkers that proved to be absolutely useless. We thought

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about going on to Guam and hope the problem did not return. I did not like the thought of that idea. After the third maintenance run on the engine, it seized up. Seizures always happen when the oil is shut off to an R-3350 engine. We were there for several more days while we waited for an engine change. Many “interesting” things happened to different crew members while we were there. Most of the happenings were influenced by spending too much time at Drifters Reef.

The next leg of the journey was to Anderson AFB, Guam Island. The new engine was holding up but that did not give me much comfort as it was overhauled by a company that had produced some really bad engines. The Navy used the same engine on their P2Vs and they would not let their crews fly over water until the engine had at least twenty five hours on it. Enroute to Guam, there is a lot of long, dull ocean under you. This will cause some crew members to nod off. I had checked the Benson tanks and returned to the flight deck to find most of the crew checking their eyelids for leaks. I sat down in the jump seat, reached behind me to the aft side of the cockpit bulkhead, grabbed a handful of control cables, and gave a sharp pull. The aircraft shuddered all over and the autopilot automatically disengaged. When everyone “came to”, their eyes were bugged out like a “stepped on” frog. A few minutes later, they reset the autopilot and continued on as if nothing had happened. In about twenty minutes, we were back to step one --everyone doing the nod. I thought this would be a good time for a repeat performance and it worked successfully a second time. Since we were only about an hour out from Guam, they kept the autopilot turned off. Upon landing, the pilot wrote up the autopilot. I talked to the autopilot maintenance person and asked that he just CND (can not duplicate) the squawk (write-up). He said “NO” so I had to tell him the whole story. He thought it was a really good prank and signed off the squawk as some kind of adjustment.

Clark AB, Philippines was the next stop in our journey halfway around the world in the slowest and noisiest aircraft ever made. We were at Clark for several days for some radio installations before going on to Vietnam. I do not know how so many men survived all the combat tours between the Oasis, Pop’s Place and the Nepa Hut. When the radio modifications were finished, we headed to Phan Rang AB, RVN. Even after all of the things that occurred along the way, I think we were the third AC-119K to arrive in country.

I would not do that trip again for a million dollars, but the memories are worth more than a million bucks to me now. I flew with some of the greatest men in the world. Some are gone



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Scared to death is what I was at Da Nang when I was headed to Hong Kong on leave from NKP. It was on the third night of my four night stay at Da Nang while waiting for my orders. I was in the barracks with my old Da Nang buddies, Dick Henderson and Jeff Ilston, when the VC launched a rocket attack and ground assault on the base. Sirens went off and everybody in the barracks quickly left for battle stations at assigned Squadron locations, leaving me alone in the barracks. Automatic weapons were firing everywhere as rockets continued impacting the area. I had no place to go, so I got under the bunk and pulled the mattress over me. I felt utterly helpless with no weapon or survival equipment. Surviving the attack, I caught a Marine C-130 (strapped to the cargo compartment floor) to Tan Son Nhut for my flight to Hong Kong on Cathay Pacific Airlines. I'll never forget the wet wash cloths provided by the Cathay stewardess. After checking in at the R&R center in Hong Kong, the first thing I did was rent a motorcycle and tour the city which was high on the taboo list of things to do.

I will always remember owning a Honda 90 motorcycle at Da Nang. I helped build five Honda 90s from parts kits ordered from Japan. I'll always remember my roommates at Da Nang, Dick Henderson and Jeff Ilston. Dick was also my roommate at NKP.

My TDY to Tan Son Nhut Air Base (TSN) from December '70 to January '71 was exciting. Flying missions in Cambodia, including daylight missions with Major Bautz were special. We didn't need an interpreter onboard to speak to the French-speaking ground commanders. Bautz could speak French. I also flew with fellow-Aggie, Major Jerry Jones, on a number of missions.

My “Sa-wa-dee” (final) flight at NKP ended without taking off for Barrel Roll. After our original sortie was cancelled, the crew was put on ground hold and we sat alert for three hours. Daylight was fast approaching and the mission was finally scrubbed for good. Fire trucks showed up at the aircraft. I departed the aircraft and took off like the trackman I once was. Nobody caught me to hose me down. And to this day, I regret that I didn't get hosed.



**John William Morrow**  
**17th Special Operations Sq.**

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### **John William Morrow, Gunner, 17<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron**

I was born in Hammond, Indiana in 1944. I attended Harrison High School in Chicago, but dropped out and earned my GED at age 17. Then I joined the Air Force on 13 March 1961 in Chicago because I needed a job.

In Vietnam, I served in the 17<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron as an aerial gunner at Phan Rang in October and November, 1970 and then at Tan Son Nhut ‘C’ Flight from November 1970 to September 1971.

I’ll never forget a Shadow mission over the Tonle Sap (Big Cambodian Lake) in which an OV-10 FAC very nearly hit our gunship. It was unbelievable how close we came to colliding in mid-air. I remember our pilot jerking the aircraft into a hard left bank, standing the gunship on its left wing tip to avoid getting hit. Immediately, we started a rapid loss in altitude and simultaneously we lost all communications aboard the aircraft. There was no intercom. As we’re diving toward the lake, I put on my parachute not knowing what else to do. Finally, the pilot gained control and pulled the aircraft out of the dive about one thousand feet above the lake. At level flight, Flight Engineer Garry Gourley came back to the gun compartment, motioning that things were going to be okay. It was a good thing that Garry showed up. I was ready to bailout.

What caused our communications to fail? When our pilot jerked the aircraft to avoid hitting the OV-10, an ammo link loosened and caught in the inverter box which caused the left generator to fail, thus causing loss of communication power. The whole incident was wild and scary.

I always remember the many Troops-in-Contact missions in Cambodia. The satisfaction of breaking up enemy attacks on friendly troops was well worth the risk.

In April 1980, I earned my Associate Degree from Community College of the Air Force at Lakenheath, England. I retired from the United States Air Force at Holloman AFB, New Mexico on 1 March 1992 as a Chief Master Sergeant.

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### **William H. Woolard 17th Special Operations Sq.**

#### **William “Bill” H. Woolard, Navigator, 17<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron**

William Haynie “Bill” Woolard - Navigator, born on September 6, 1928 in Newnan, Cowetta County, Georgia, I started school in Miami, Florida in 1933, continuing elementary education in West Palm Beach and graduating from Sylvester High School, Georgia in May 1945. After attending North Georgia College in Dahlonega for 3 quarters, I joined the U.S. Army Infantry reporting at Fort Bragg, North Carolina in July 1946 and then volunteered for the U.S. Army Air Corps. I was on active duty when the Air Corps became a separate branch of service, the U.S. Air Force in 1947.

After separating from the USAF with an honorable discharge in 1949, I entered the University of Georgia and attended graduation ceremonies in June 1952. I had completed graduation requirements in March and entered active duty as a second lieutenant in April at Robins AFB, GA with the 1005th IG SIG. I had already received my officer’s commission in the USAF Reserve in 1951.

With no foreseeable openings available for pilot training, I applied for navigator school and attended Navigator training with the 3605th AOTG at Ellington AFB, TX, Class 56-16C from August 1955 to October 1956 and then Radar/Bombardier Navigator training at the Mather, AFB, CA from October ’56 to May ’57. My first assigned was to Pinecastle AFB, FL (later named McCoy AFB) as a B-47 crewmember. In 1959, I completed B-52 CCTS at Castle AFB, CA and was assigned to the 336th BOMRON (SAC) at Turner AFB, GA as a B-52 Radar/Bombardier Navigator.

In 1962, I was transferred to the 28<sup>th</sup> BOMRON and a later model B-52 at Homestead AFB, FL. In August 1966, I was assigned to the 636th CSG HQ, 13th AF (PACAF) at Clark AB, and Philippine Islands as Group Chief Navigator C-47s, C-54s, C-118s, T-39s and Asst Flt. Ops Officer. The 636th provided R&R flights from Vietnam and operated Base Operations. It was a very interesting and fulfilling assignment, especially being instrumental in helping U.S. troops in Vietnam get a break



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and some R & R.

When my tour was up at Clark, P.I., I thought I was going to War College at Maxwell AFB, AL. Boy, was I wrong! I received orders to the 71st Special Operations Squadron, Nha Trang, RVN, flying AC-119s. I reported to Clinton County AF; Wilmington, Ohio to learn how to use the E-10 computer, sextant, and loran set, all of which I had been using extensively for the past two years. Then I went to Lockbourne AFB in Columbus for combat crew flight training in the AC-119G. I volunteered to ferry one of the airplanes from St. Augustine, FL to Nha Trang, RVN. I, the Navigator, was crewed with Maj. Richard E. Morgan, Pilot; Capt. William R. Casey, Co-Pilot; SSgt. Squires Riley, Flight Engineer, and SSgt. Paul Goen, Crew Chief. We departed on December 26, 1968 in aircraft number 52- 5942 and arrived at Nha Trang on January 20, 1969. We kept breaking down all along the way and sometimes had to wait for parts. Upon arrival, I was sent to Jungle Survival School (my second time) at Clark AB, P.I.

I served as Chief Navigator of the 71<sup>st</sup> SOS (later re- designated the 17<sup>th</sup> SOS) from Feb. '69 to Oct. '69. Most of the reserve troops of the 71st SOS (formerly 434th TAW) departed RVN for the states in June '69. I left RVN in October '69 due to my time in country while stationed at Clark. I was assigned to the 58<sup>th</sup> MAS at Robins AFB, GA flying C-141s. I retired from the USAF on December 1, 1970.

The following are some stories about flying AC-119 Shadow gunships in Southeast Asia. After my return to Nha Trang from a week at “Snake School” in the Philippines, I flew a couple of flights out of Nha Trang and Da Nang into Laos along the border of North Vietnam. I was then assigned to Crew #7 and we were sent to Phan Rang AB, RVN. The crew consisted of Lt. Col. William E. Long, Pilot and Detachment Commander; Lt. Col. Mathew (Mat) A. Boonstra, Co-Pilot; Lt. Col. William (Bill) H. Woolard (me), Navigator; Capt Michael R. Kiely, Navigator; SSgt Richard L. Hupp, FE; SSgt Leonard Swallom, IO; SSgt Richard Williams, AG; and Sgt James Tringle, AB.

Some of the most rewarding memories from flying Shadows was the association with the men from the original 71st SOS (434th TAW) troops. There were lots of really good men in the 71st and 17th and I thought very highly of all of them. Also, the “Thank You Shadow” and “God Bless You Shadow” radio calls that we received from the ground troops who we supported. I certainly did not envy our ground forces in the least.

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On one occasion, an American and South Vietnamese patrol had gotten shot up pretty badly and had no water. We managed to stop the VC from attacking them and then we took all the water bottles (baby bottles) we had on board and dropped them to the patrols. We received the following message from them: “We don’t know what you look like or where you’re from, but we surely hope God will bless you.”

Another time, we were scrambled to defend an artillery outpost north of Saigon near Tay Ninh City. We encountered five enemy .51 caliber machine gun positions surrounding the outpost and numerous VC in the area. I asked Col Long to drop down to a lower altitude and had the illuminator (white light) turned on momentarily to draw fire so I could get an exact pin point position on the VC .51 calibers. Even though we drew tremendous small arms fire and fire from the .51 caliber, we were able to pin point all five VC gun positions and destroy them and many of the VC foot soldiers. This saved the artillery outpost to continue their mission.

I also remember several occasions when our air base at Phan Rang came under attack from mortars and rockets. We Shadows would scramble to get in the air to attack those attacking us. Sometimes, Col Long got the airplane engines started and was taxiing down the taxiway before me and other crewmembers were onboard the gunship. We had to run to catch up to the aircraft to be pulled onboard by fellow crewmembers. We were successful in breaking up mortar and rocket attacks on Phan Rang.

Before I left Vietnam and the 17th SOS, we had lost only one aircraft. I am not sure of all the names of the crewmembers, but my good friend and standout basketball player from Duke University, Major Bernard Knapic, was the pilot on that ill-fated flight. He had been sent from Phan Rang to Tan Son Nhut AB to help out with C Flight. His gunship crashed shortly after takeoff and he and most of his crew were killed. *(An AC-119G 52-5907 gunship, radio call sign Shadow 76, crashed as it was taking off from Tan Son Nhut when an engine failed and caught fire. With all its armament and ammunition together with a full fuel load the single-engined performance of the AC-119G was insufficient to enable it to stay airborne. Six of the 10 crew were killed in the accident. SSgt Bradford was a photographer with the 600th Photo Squadron. Names of the crewmembers: Lt Col Bernard Richard Knapic (KWF), Maj Moses Lopes Alves (KWF), Maj Jerome James Rice (KWF), Capt John Hooper Hathaway (KWF), SSgt Abraham Lincoln Moore (KWF), SSgt Ellsworth Smith Bradford (KWF) and 4 crew, names unknown*



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and I trained together at Lockbourne and alternated positions as table navigator and Night Observation Scope operator on our gunship crew.

My most memorable missions were flown defending Special Forces at Dak Seang and Dak Pek in the Highlands Campaign during the North Vietnamese Spring Offensive in April 1970. Both camps were being overrun. Shadow and Stinger aircrews provided suppressive fire and assisted in night supply drops. We flew back-to-back sorties for more than two weeks. On one mission, our ground contact at Dak Seang asked us to fire directly on his position. We asked him to repeat the unusual request. He responded with, “Roger that. All are indoors and the shutters are down and shut!” They were in hand-to-hand combat. Daylight was breaking when we received the request to fire on their position. In the twilight it was possible to see the North Vietnamese Army as they attacked through the perimeter defenses. Major Meier, our pilot, gave the order to hose- down the compound and primary bunker. After several minutes, we received a "well done" call from the ground commander. We had suppressed the threat.

An unusual situation occurred during a night flight over Cambodia. We were directed to fire on a suspected NVA position about eight or nine clicks from a friendly encampment. I was on the NOS. On the first pass at the target area I spotted a circle of armored vehicles with personnel moving about seemingly unconcerned with our presence. I asked if the target included tanks or any other kind of heavy vehicles. They did not. So we flew back to the encampment where we were redirected to the same location. There I confirmed that the suspected NVA were actually “friendlies” that were feeling secure under the watchful eye of Shadow!

My last mission at Phan Rang on December 3, 1970 was a hair-raiser. We lost the number one engine on take-off just as we broke ground. Capt. Slagle, our pilot, aborted and got the aircraft safely stopped on the runway.



**Dale E. Cartee**  
**14th Special Operations Wg.**

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### **Dale E. Cartee, Navigator, 14<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Wing**

I was born in 1933 in Baxter Springs, Kansas. I grew up in Buhl, Idaho and graduated from Buhl High School, June 1951. The Korean War started while I was in high school. I earned my B. S. Ag. Ed at the University of Idaho in June 1955 and was commissioned through the ROTC program. I entered active duty in November 1955. In 1969, after completing an MS at San Diego State College, I received orders to the 18th SOS at Phan Rang AB. From there I was sent PCA to DaNang AB where Larry Juday, Doug Frost, Mal Morrison and I joined Mike Newmeyer’s crew. Jim Curran replaced Mike as A/C after Mike rotated home. I served as the Navigator on the crew until I was reassigned to the 14th SOW Headquarters Standardization Section at Phan Rang in October 1970. There, I had the honor of flying with the crews of both the 17th SOS and the 18th SOS at all the forward operating locations in Vietnam and Thailand. In the K model, the Nav and FLIR flew behind the blackout curtain. As an evaluator, I flew in the jump seat and got to see all of those tracers the rest of you called out over the trails.

We had an exciting moment one night with John Hodgson (Ops Officer) flying in the right seat as IP. We were coming in for landing at Da Nang when John and I saw something moving on the approach end of the runway. As I was pushing the intercom button to say, “Go Around,” John was pushing the throttles full forward. We cleared the tail of a Navy fighter by about 10 feet. The Navy plane had no landing or anti-collision lights on. He had taxied onto the active runway without tower clearance and obviously didn’t look up final where we were coming with all lights on. We had a few heartfelt words with the Navy Ops Officer. Things I will always remember about my time with AC-119 gunships include the coldest winter of my life while training at Lockbourne AFB, OH, the good friends I served with at Da Nang, and the mission when we thought we were firing at trucks only to discover they were actually elephants. I will also not forget the close support missions (3 the same night) for a Ranger company down by the Cambodia border when they had us firing within 10 meters of their perimeter.

After Vietnam, I was assigned as a Radar Navigator in B-52s with the 96th Bomb Wing (SAC) at Dyess AFB, TX. In February 1972, the Wing deployed to Guam and during the next 18 months I flew 143 combat missions over North and South Vietnam from Guam and U Tapao, Thailand. Upon returning to Dyess I became the Current Operations Officer for the 96<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing, then Commanded the 96th Avionics Maintenance Squadron (the best job I ever had in the Air Force). A year later I became the Dyess AFB Mobility officer. I retired in July 1980, as a Lt. Col. with 25 years service and 4,935 hours of flying time in USAF aircraft.

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I then went to work in the Trust Department of First National Bank of Abilene where I managed the real property held in trusts and estates as well as oil and gas properties. I retired as a Vice President and Trust Officer in June 1998. In retirement, I stay busy traveling, playing golf and serving non-profit organizations in Abilene as a volunteer. I am currently a member of the Board of Directors of the 12th Armored Division Memorial Museum Foundation, and the Board of Directors of the United Way of Abilene, where I will serve as the Chairman of the Board for the coming year.



**Michael J. Drzyzga Jr.**  
**17th Special Operations Sq.**

### **Michael J. Drzyzga Jr., Gunner, 17<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron**

Born in Irvington, NJ on May 13, 1948. In April 1968, I was working full-time in a pharmaceutical business in New Jersey while taking night classes at Seton Hall University, pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry. Unable to carry 12 credit hours in night courses, the dear draft board changed my draft status from 2-S (student deferment) to 1-A. Since I possessed a serious enthusiasm for flying and a severe aversion to running through the jungle, I enlisted in the Air Force. On May 7, 1968, six days before my 20th birthday, I unhesitatingly headed to Amarillo Air Force Base (AFB), Texas for basic training.

With a high mechanical aptitude test score, I was assigned a 462 career (weapons mechanic) and subsequently reported to Lowry AFB, Denver, Colorado for Technical School. Any thoughts of ever flying vanished from my mind. My first permanent assignment was with the 33<sup>rd</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing at Eglin AFB, Florida. In late 1968, the 40th Tactical Fighter Squadron (TFS) received the first F-4E Phantoms fitted with a 20mm Vulcan nose gun. As the number three man on a weapons load crew, I loved the flight line work... being in and about the Phantoms was better than being a draftee in the Army and better than working in the dreaded hot, greasy, smelly Gun Shop.

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Three occurrences would then change my course: First, a black-painted C-119 with jet-pods and guns appeared at Eglin’s Armament Development Test Center. It would circle (later I learned the correct term –“orbit”) over Eglin. I was awe-struck at this Korean War-era armed cargo plane. Second, I met an ex-Shadow Aerial Gunner (AG) who joined the 40th TFS after his tour of duty with the 17th SOS at Phan Rang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam. And the AG was wearing Stripes and Wings! Third occurrence, which made my heart pound to high heaven, was reading the posted announcement in the weapons flight line hootch about Project “Palace Gun”. Good Lord, I saw the chance to fly and the possibility of Stripes on my sleeves and Wings on my chest. I volunteered!!

I completed training at Lockbourne AFB from February to April 1970 and Physiological Training back at Eglin AFB. After a month’s leave home in New Jersey, I headed for Survival School at Fairchild AFB, then jungle survival training at Clark AFB, Philippines.

On June 7, 1970, I arrived at Phan Rang “Happy Valley” via Tan Son Nhut Airport, Saigon. Shadow 61 and Shadow 62 where what I usually considered my crews – although we did switch crews as needed, at what seemed a random manner. Although stationed at Phan Rang, I experienced some interesting missions while TDY to Da Nang in December ’70 where we supported some I Corps fire camps, and while TDY to Phu Cat AB in February 1971 where I logged many combat missions over- the-fence. One mission was a back to back (double-shooter), or turn-around mission. Our Shadow was closer to Thailand than Vietnam, so we landed at Ubon Royal Thai AB for full regeneration of fuel and ammo before flying another mission back at the same target area.

During my tour of duty, I did get out of Vietnam twice other than by flying combat missions over-the-fence. I was able to enjoy a week of R&R in Taiwan and a three-day visit to Hong Kong thanks to and via a C-47 resupply mission.

In June 1971 when my DEROS arrived, I received orders for Hurlbert Field (Eglin Aux. 9) and the non-flying duty of the Gun Shop – ugh! My last of four years in the USAF would be swabbing gun barrels. I did write a letter to the Special Operations Wing commander, convincing him that my proficiency as an AC-130 gun mechanic would be improved with insight obtained from a gunfire mission. So one sunny day, I donned the flight gear and spent almost five hours aboard Spectre over a Florida water gunnery range. That brought back good memories.

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Project Palace Chase provided me a last chance to fly again. I was accepted for development of the AU-24 Helio Stallion. Many ex-Nam ex-fliers were rejoined to make a single-engine, high-wing, tail-dragger into a multi-purpose attack aircraft. We were trained on Eglin’s TAC area by EC-121 crews on the techniques of dropping and listening to strings of sensors. We spent 4.5 hours on UH-1Ns learning the art of using a spindle mounted mini-gun. The Stallions were equipped with left-side mounted 20mm Vulcan cannons with three-barrels. Additionally, we dropped 500 lb. hard bombs. What a great experience! I almost extended my enlistment to deploy back to SEA, but the Project was to remain stateside for development and I separated from the USAF without much fanfare on May 7, 1972 (six days away from my 24th birthday).

I returned to New Jersey and the pharmacy business. I completed my B.S. in Chemistry at Seton Hall (Go Pirates!) and subsequently earned my Masters in Science degree in Radiation Science at Rutgers University. I worked as a Health Physicist (radiation protection), eventually becoming a Radiation Safety Officer (believe it or not, a US Navy term from the nuclear Navy). When people ask me if I am concerned about the risks of working with radioactive materials, I think back to my experiences in the Air Force and reply with a combat veteran’s look, “Risk is all relative.” Memories of Vietnam: The following three experiences have been retold so often that they have become war stories in their own right. Although the facts are as true as memory allows, the stories can be validated by fellow Shadows.

### **Cobra in the Hootch**

One day in September or October 1970, the inside of the enlisted quarters was pretty normal for midday. It was dark and cool; only a few cubical lamps lit from those airmen awake and listening to their new hi-tech Japanese sound systems purchased either via PACEX or obtained from a Hong Kong resupply mission. There was the ever-present low rumble of the wall-mounted air conditioners. Outside was typical Phan Rang weather – cloudy, hot and humid like it could rain any minute. Most of the flying crews, me included, were sound asleep. Suddenly, one airman heading down the middle aisle (most likely returning from the Phan Rang Post Office to catch the day’s mail) was “spit at” from something behind the metal personal lockers. With a very loud and somewhat high-pitch yell, he flipped on the very bright overhead fluorescent lights and alerted everyone to this still unclear situation. As we awoke and slipped on our combat boots, we realized that we were not armed and there was a snake in the hootch.



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What to do??? A short-timer, I believe AG Staff Sergeant Goodson, who after returning from an overnight stay in Thailand, owned a fully functional cross-bow and arrows that hung displayed on his cubical wall. He loaded up, as two other airmen pulled the lockers apart while I was still fumbling with one of my cameras, as usual. The coiled Cobra raised its puffed head to strike, but within two seconds of striking out, the venomous serpent was impaled by one accurately aimed arrow against the cubical plywood wall. It was definitely a Kodak moment! The moral of the story is “Never Walk Barefoot in a Shadow Hootch.”

### **Runaway Prop on Take-off**

After flying for nearly ten months as a Shadow Gunship Aerial Gunner in 1971, “Vietnamization” of the war was accelerating. We learned at Phan Rang that some of the airmen ending their tours would not be replaced. I was chosen to be certified as an instructor and join a crew to begin training Vietnamese C-119 and/or AC-47 crews to fly Shadow gunships. I was very confident in my flying skills. I had experienced many interesting, awesome, tiring, funny and sad times during my tour of duty. I was extremely happy to have never experienced an engine failure on take-off because every Shadow crewmember knew about the fatal crashes that claimed the lives of Shadow crewmembers at Tan Son Nhut. At Lockbourne, I had picked-up on the riddle “What is black and green, smoldering in a rice paddy, and full of crispy critters?” Damn those riddles!! Our current crew training standards and lowered take-off weights should prevent such a recurrence. Nevertheless, I said a prayer from the moment of the Pilot’s call for “gear-up” to the Copilot’s reply “gear up...gear is up and locked.”

Training the Vietnamese crews was challenging because the enlisted men spoke very little English. They fondly learned the expression, “Monkey see, Monkey do.” We showed them all the tricks and shortcuts that made a great working Shadow crew. During pre-flight for a routine training mission, Shadow Operations called us with a request to “top-off” for support of a hot target area. Trusting the best weather service known to man at the time, we fueled and loaded ammo to the maximum safe limit. We expedited the taxi to the end of the runway, smoothly completed the engine run up tests, and set Shadow’s nose on the runway centerline. We accelerated quickly and rotated normally as I, as usual, recited my prayer at “gear up”. I learned to feel (in-the-seat of my Nomex flight suit) for the clunk of the landing gear locking in the wheel wells. At that moment, before the Vietnamese Copilot could say, “greer up,” a stomach-sickening yaw of the gunship occurred as Shadow’s No. 2 propeller ran away, out of control. The

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unusual new sound was weird and instantly foreboding. Oh God, not with less than a month to DEROS, I thought.

The Vietnamese student pilot followed his reflex experience from the C-119 Flight Manual and dropped the nose a bit to maintain airspeed. I knew that the procedures for runaway props had been rewritten by Shadow gunship pilots and that the current procedure was to attain best air speed to control a runaway prop, which in our case we needed NO additional airspeed. With a slight struggle on the flight deck, instructor pilot, Captain Dick Howze took control of the gunship and managed to nurse the Shadow around the mountain just north of the runway to head back toward the air base. We slowly lost altitude pushing Shadow while circumventing the mountain in what seemed like an eternity. All the while, the IO prepped the flare launcher for ejection and I had the ammo cans ready to throw out the door if the call came to make Shadow lighter. I unconsciously calculated the weight loss if we ejected students onboard.

Captain Howze called for “gear down” at 250 feet over the threshold. The landing gear lowered with three green lights showing down and locked. We safely landed. After departing the gunship we Shadow instructors huddled together as Student crewmembers huddled to discuss our aborted mission. The instructor crew agreed to board another Shadow gunship and proceed to the target area while the students decided otherwise. So did we fly again that night? I cannot recall going back out, but Dick Howze says we convinced the students to fly, and we did fly. Such is my memory of 36 years ago.

### **A FNFLCP (Friendly New First Lt. Co-Pilot)**

At the beginning of a routine Shadow 61 mission out of Phan Rang heading over the mountains to a near-border SEL (suspected enemy location), AC Major Golden told everyone that he intended to provide our new co-pilot, 1st Lt. Newell Lee, some “stick time” for his pilot’s log. As the intercom conversation waned and the ever-present roar of the two R-3350s, just a few feet away from me, became too melodic on the flight to the target area, “Goldie” as we called the Major, quite deliberately asked Lieutenant Lee if he would “take control of 61 for awhile.” Normally, a two-second transition, Goldie deliberately slowed the transition by making a few trim adjustments. That delay was more than enough for the Aerial Gunner #2, the IO Bill Kitt and me to grab two full ammo boxes and “tip- toe” to the forward bulkhead. When Lee said, “I’ve got the aircraft”, the three of us pranksters slowly walked to the rear of the cargo deck. As

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a new flier, I was amazed that you can actually feel Shadow slump a bit and the increased drag reducing airspeed. Goldie calmly said, “I’ve got it back” and he retrimmed 61. “OK, you got it Copilot” and Lee replied “For sure.” The three Shadow pranksters slowly walked forward toward the front bulkhead. Shadow 61 began to pitch forward slightly and the airspeed and altitude picked-up. This time Goldie (fully aware of the cargo crew shenanigans) more sharply said, “I’ve got it!” Lee was beside himself. I think he tried a few weak explanations over the intercom. It was so hilarious, I almost pissed in my Nomex flight suit. I can image what it looked like if viewed from the outside as Shadow porpoised through the night sky. Even with the engines roaring, the four of us (NOS included) laughed so hard you could almost hear us. Lee finally figured out that it was not his inability to fly Shadow but it was his inability to see that he was the butt of a joke on new pilots just reporting for flight combat duty in-country. The fun abruptly ended when the Table NAV said, “We’re here; time to descend to firing altitude!” No Kodak moments on this one; only a sweet memory to carry with me for a very long time.



**Donald D. Fraker**  
**17th Special Operations Sq.**

### **Donald D. Fraker, Pilot, 17<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron**

I was born in my Grandparent’s home in Julesburg Sedgwick County Colorado May 30 1932. I graduated from the University of Northern Colorado at Greeley and was commissioned through the ROTC program on June 1 1954. Following Primary Pilot Training in T-34s and T-28s, I trained in B-25s at Vance AFB, Enid, OK, where I received the class award for obtaining the highest grade on my instrument flight check. Upon completing B-29 heavy aircraft transition, I accumulated 2400 hours in six years flying KC-97 tankers. I then left active duty and returned to Colorado for a position with the National Guard. There was little flying time in the Guard, so in May 1964, at my wife’s suggestion, I went back on active duty. I flew C-124s out of Hill AFB, UT for three years, logging more than 2050 hours. The mission included monthly flights to SEA that counted for combat pay and Air Medals. In my follow-on assignment, I flew C-118 AirEvac missions from Clark AB, Philippines. We spent a week or two each month in Vietnam moving wounded people from the field hospitals to hospitals that could take them to bigger hospitals in

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Japan or return to the U.S. By the end of this tour I had another 1400 flying hours and lots of time in Vietnam. Even so, my next assignment was to Vietnam to fly AC119s.

Then I served as Chief of Military Training of the Student Group at Keesler AFB, MS. The Group included 37 squadrons and 13,000 students. After two years, I was assigned to Southern Command in Panama as the Chief of Plans for the Canal. They closed the Southern Command in 1976. Then I was sent to the C-141 Wing at McGuire AFB NJ. After learning I would not be flying, I took terminal leave and arranged my retirement. I served on active duty for over 21 years, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel at Lowry AFB CO on September 29, 1976. My awards and decorations included the Distinguished Flying Cross, two Meritorious Service medals, sixteen Air Medals, and a Medal of Honor from the Vietnamese Air Force.

### **AC-119 Shadow Vietnam Tour July 4, 1970 - June 16, 1971**

One of my closest friends, with whom I spent 6 1/2 years flying KC-97's, went to AC-119 Gunships when he left SAC. We talked on the phone about how that was. His response was “Moose, it is a great mission”. Well after two years hauling our wounded troops in, around, and out of Vietnam, I told him I wanted to defend our troops.

At that time I had 5900 hours flying time (all prop time). I was a “shoo in for Shadows.” So I brought my family back to CONUS and went to Clinton County Air Patch and started the transition. I had no problem with any of the checkout process. After the transition, I was sent to Columbus AFB OH to learn to shoot, and to handle the eight man crew plus instructors.

On July 1, 1970, I was on my way back to Clark and the jungle survival school. The Negritos had no problem rounding up snakes for us to see and learn about. Of course we all remember you could not hide from them as they could smell us even buried under a foot of sh-\_\_\_. From there we went to Tan Son Nhut and the 17th SOS where we all served some time. I was told they were hot for my body because of my multi engine experience.

After my in-country checkout, and a dozen missions, I was up-graded to IP. Six missions later I was given my Flight Examiner check ride. From then on all of you who were there had me looking over your shoulder at one time or another.

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Col Teal was riding with me early on and we were down south, firing at canal movers. We were at 1500' as I recall and “pow” the canopy over the engineer’s head shattered and Plexiglas spewed all over the cockpit. The engineer called out “I’m hit”. Lo and behold he was wounded by the flying Plexiglas. A quick check was made to make sure everyone and everything was OK. I was ready to resume shooting but Col Teal states that if your aircraft was hit, you were to “return to base” RTB. After landing we found the AK-47 round that tumbled into the cockpit providing one Purple Heart for the engineer. My first nickname was Cowkiller. I was giving a Wing Staff Colonel a firing ride and an opportunity to see how good we were. We were running canals in Cambodia. The NOS spotted a mover on the canal. Moonbeam was called and we were cleared to expend. The Col didn’t do too badly. He didn’t hurt anything and soon the NOS called out cease fire; it was a water buffalo.

I was grounded three different times for too many flying hours in a month or too many missions in a week. I loved being at Tan Son Nhut. You could fly all night, come back to the hooch and pile your sweaty flight suit and undies on the floor and wake up later and find them all washed and ready for the night’s mission. Tough war.

When we were supporting Cambodia so heavily, we were flying around the clock. You all remember, we were not in Cambodia at that time; we were just “over it”. I had 600 hours, just over it. On one mission, it was just getting light ‘0 dark 30’ and the ground was dark which made it hard to make out targets. We got into a firefight. That was the morning I helped to train the Cong with their nine level 51 cal. capabilities. The tracers were coming up past the nose so close I felt like I could reach out and catch them. The crew was not happy with me as I always said, “If I got ammo, I fire out”. It was getting pretty intense; the crew said “Let’s break and run.” They were so noisy that I turned off the intercom switch. Finally the Navigator banged my head and told me we had taken a hit. Second time, I started listening to what was going on and they told me a fuel cell was leaking fuel. We watched it for a few minutes and it quit. I broke out of the firing circle and we RTB. I called in the hit and reported all was OK. The Wing CO wanted me in his office immediately on landing. We checked for a leak and found no evidence of a leak. We were on the ground for 1 ½ hours before it started to leak again. After my telling the CO the story, he returned me to work. Sure do thank the people that put the tank sealer in.

There was another mission I would share. I was giving a young Captain (AC) a check ride and we were called in by a Ground Commander (GC) to help him from being overrun by the VC. All was

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going OK until we got into a shootout and the AC could not push the trigger. The ground commander said to shoot on his position and kill everyone. He said he would rather we do it than be captured by the VC. We were getting a lot of ground fire and it was getting pretty hot. I ordered the pilot to shoot. He did not.

About that time “ka-pow”, the cockpit filled with smoke and in a quiet moment I asked if everyone was OK. The copilot did not answer. I could see he was turning white. Again I said “Copilot are you OK?” We could not hear him. Finally I reached over the console and grabbed his helmet and turned his head toward me. He was very green by this time and I repeated “Are you OK?” He just shook his head “Yes”. We found out after a bit the 51 cal. round that came into the cockpit severed his intercom wire. He could hear but he couldn’t talk or be heard. He was so relieved that he wasn’t dead. The round had come up through the nose wheel and glanced off the bell crank counter-weight that aided the nose wheel to move up and down. The 51 cal. projectile hit the inside of the armor plate and ricocheted back to the copilot’s knee, injuring him. Third hit and “Another purple heart”.

After the smoke cleared and we restored order in the cockpit, I told the Captain to fire out. He refused to shoot. I reached up from my jump seat and jerked his butt out of the seat. I got in and started firing two guns on line and hollering for more. We were being effective for the GC and then we went bingo bullets (all fired out) so we held for a few minutes until the next Shadow could come in and replace us. Bernie Smith fondly nicknamed me “Magnet Ass.” After we landed, we were walking around the airplane. I said, “I just wonder what would have happened if the round had not hit that bell crank.” After some eyeballing and estimating, we decided that round would have cut me in half.

Next, I was selected to go to Phan Rang to train the Vietnamese crews to fly our gunship. That was an experience. The VNAF were good pilots and crew. They had just never flown a gunship. There was lots of ground school and classroom work. The biggest challenge was they had never flown nights. Their air war was from dawn to dark for them.

My first student was the Squadron Commander. He was savvy. He had lots of flying time and know how. He picked up the tactics quickly and had a lot of training to do with his other people. His second-in-command was also good. The CO’s copilot was a brand new graduate of our flying schools in the U.S. Once again, a challenge one dark night we were near Pleiku. You know the

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spot, 280 radial 60 miles. We were called in to support the Vietnamese ground forces in trouble, (TIC) troops in contact. Major Duc was in the seat and it was under cast. He asked me to take the seat as he could not talk with the ground commander and shoot. I knew this was a hot spot from our Intel brief. I got in the seat and took charge of the situation. The French interpreter had been killed so we were working strictly with the South Vietnam forces. We were in the firing circle and “boom,” explosions were happening on the ground. I took a quick survey around the cockpit and the young copilot had turned off the guard channel and there was an air strike going on through us. We did not hear the “arty report on Guard”. I had a very deep and serious debrief with the copilot when we got home.

I mentioned before these people were good but had a lot of adjusting to do. They did not like to fly all night. One example was my young copilot who fell asleep while we were in a firefight and I was firing out. I was good and was able unknowingly to handle it all by myself.

Another highlight was the VNAF (friends) wanted to give us a party for helping them. We received an OK and made plans. The Wing CO was invited and Major Duc wanted me to get clearance from him to invite “The Air Marshall for Vietnam” as a guest; he was none other the Nguyen Cao Ky! We had a wonderful meal of the local fare and many other things as well.

Some 19 years later, I attended a guest speaker function at my alma mater (UNC) and guess who the feature speaker was? None other than Nguyen Cao Ky. He was still preaching that we deserted them and left them to be overrun by the Viet Cong. He appreciated me coming up and introducing myself. He remembered the party at Phan Rang and autographed the book the aircrews had given me over 19 years previously.

I kept a diary of all my missions, time and rounds expended during my tour. I had flown 239 missions, in 937.4 hours and expended or supervised the firing of 1,750,000 rounds of 7.62 ammo.

The question is always asked, “Were we effective?” One of the ways to answer that question was to explain it this way. We were taught that the miniguns were capable of putting an ammo round in every square inch in a football field in a two minute standard rate turn circle. Our mission was to destroy the enemy’s desire to fight. In doing that, many lives were destroyed. We always asked for the number of KBA (killed by air). Sometimes we were given estimates at

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the end of our time over target. During daylight hours you could see what and who you were firing on. You could see bodies if the area was clear. On one mission we were cleared to sink a passenger boat on a river and we could see the river run red from the blood of those we shot. The bad guys would take over boats because they knew we would not shoot friendlies. Our orders were approved to shoot on that target. I would pray for God’s forgiveness as I was shooting or clearing the pilot to shoot. I’m happy that only God knows how many lives we took.

I was with Marty Noonan giving him a firing ride on my last mission (fini flight). As did we all, I got the hose down by the troops that were there. I have the fondest of memories of those days.

**Doug’s Comments:** I hope that you enjoyed this newsletter. If you have a story to tell, 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:mailto:[dougsevert@cox.net](mailto:dougsevert@cox.net) and put ‘unsubscribe’ in subject line.