

Phan Rang AB Newsletter

The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.
"Keeping the memories alive" Newsletter 214

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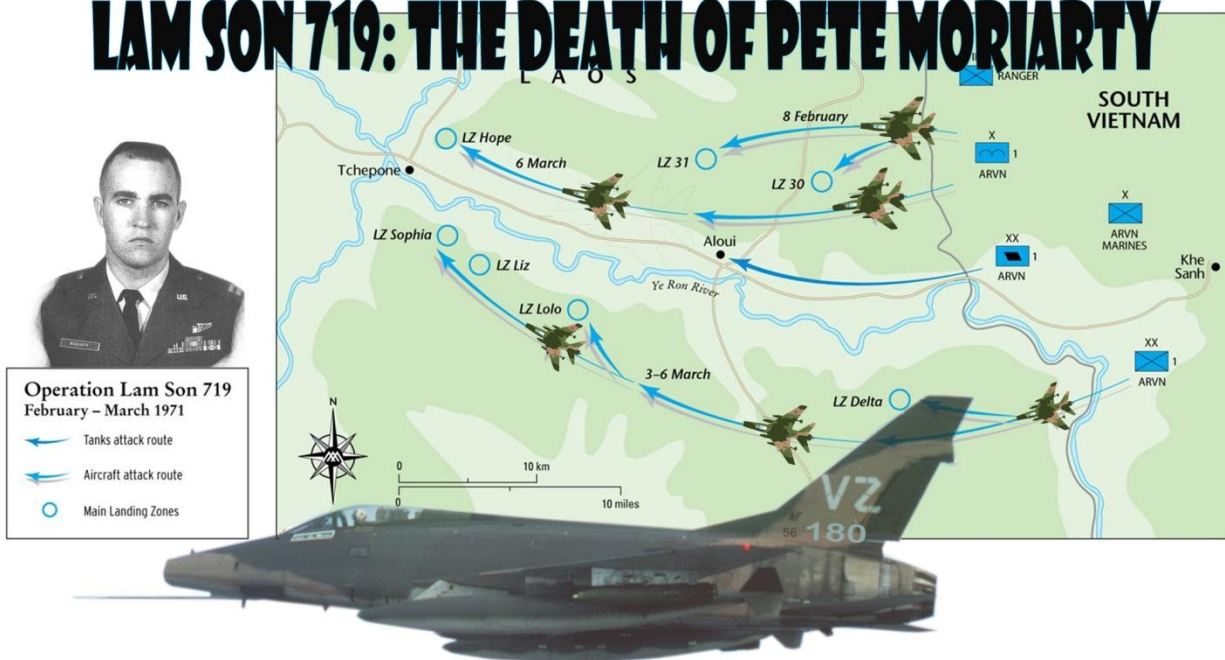
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LAM SON 719: THE DEATH OF PETE MORIARTY



By Ron Deyhle

The great Mance Lipscomb sang, "Whatcha' gonna do when death creeps in your room?" I will probably pull the covers over my head and hope it goes away, or try to negotiate. But I hope I can be as brave as Captain Peter Gibney Moriarty on 22 March 1971.

1971. Vietnamization was in full swing. President Nixon wanted all combat roles slowly turned over to ARVN forces. "Well," Nixon thought, "let's see how it is working out." So the top secret battle plan, *Lam Son 719*, was formulated. Unfortunately, it was driven by military policy, not good planning. As Winston Churchill said, "Never, never believe any war will be smooth and

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easy, or that anyone who embarks on the strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter. The statesman who yields to war’s fever must realize that once the signal is given, he is no longer the master of policy, but the slave of the unforeseeable and uncontrollable events.”

The plan was for ARVN troops to invade Laos at the narrow panhandle part of Vietnam along Route 9. They would penetrate to Tchepone, Laos, sever the Ho Chi Minh trail and stop NVA infiltration. U.S. troops were no longer permitted on ground outside of South Vietnam, but air power was permitted. This was an all-South Vietnamese effort. Nixon wanted to see how the ARVN troops would do, sort of like South Florida Junior College playing Alabama in football. The ARVN troop levels were lower than the number battle planners thought would be necessary. Despite being top secret, spies had informed Hanoi of the operation. Hanoi began to pour troops in. The NVA had 20,000 men in the area. It was no surprise! The Chief Studies and Observation Group (SOG) told General Abrams to “stay out of there”. But it is hard to stop an elephant when he starts running! The terrain, with high ground along Route 9 and Tchepone, favored defenders. The NVA moved defensive armament in, 130-200 antiaircraft guns, troops, LZ watchers, and unknown to planners, tanks! The invasion started on February 8, 1971. Because of inability to face military realities, poor planning and poor execution, the campaign was a disaster. U.S. planners estimated it would take 60,000 troops. ARVN committed only half that number.

The passage of Cooper-Church Amendment on 29 December 1970 prohibited U.S. ground forces and advisors from entering Laos. The U.S. provided massive air support, B-52 Arc Light strikes, fast mover fighters, massive helicopter support and artillery.



ARVN soldiers desperate to escape, hanging on the skids of a helicopter.

Right away there was trouble. Route 9 was in poor condition and only tracked vehicles could get through. Immediately, air helicopter use for troop transport was needed. Quickly, supporting helicopters began taking fire from elevated positions. Tank battles began. The ARVN reached Tchepone but soon started a retreat after a “victory,” but failed to secure the battlefield. Historical speculation is that President Thieu had ordered his commanders, that when casualties reached 3,000, they should withdraw and declare victory. The U.S. expected them to remain in Laos and establish a

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defensive barrier. Then came the retreat, a rout, a turkey shoot. As LBJ once said, “I feel like a hitchhiker caught in a hailstorm. I can’t run, I can’t hide, and I can’t make it stop.” ARVN lost 60% of their tanks, half its APCs, 54 105 mm and 28 155 mm Howitzers. The ARVN abandoned their armored brigade three miles from the border. The troops made a run for South Vietnam. We have all seen the television newscast of helicopters picking up ARVN soldiers and some hanging on the skids in terror to escape.

This was the setting on 22 March 1971

An armored division trapped on route 9. 1,700 AFVN troops in danger of annihilation by Russian T-54 tanks bearing down on them. Route 9 was littered with damaged vehicle and high banks compromising escape.

At 1430 hours, a FAC, Lt. **Jerry Funderburk**, OV-10, spotted ten Russian T-54 tanks eight kilometers west of the stranded convoy. The tanks were moving fast, 30 mph. The FAC called for airstrike aircraft. Funderburk fired rockets to slow down the tanks until help arrived. Like John Wayne arriving with the cavalry, here comes **Hal Cochran** (Lead) and Pete Moriarty (wing) in F-100s. A problem! They were carrying high drag 500 pound bombs and napalm. (High drags and un-finned napalm needs to be dropped low altitude.)

There was great concern by Funderburk, due to the risk of intense ground fire and danger with high drag deliveries. But it was the last chance for the ARVN troops if help did not arrive. Seventh Air Force approved the drop. The FAC again warned flight lead Cochran of the danger of high drag ordinance. Hal Cochran responded with the same bravery of General Anthony McAuliffe who, when proffered surrender in the battle of the bulge replied, “nuts.” Cochran simply said, “Just mark the target FAC.” At this point the tanks were 1,000 meters from the scurrying army. Lead rolled in from the south, perpendicular to the queue of tanks that were moving east along Route 9. His napalm canister flew over the top of the lead tank and hit the jungle at 12. A miss! Funderburk clears two, in hot. Captain Peter Gibney Moriarty with devotion to duty started his attack. Call sign Blade 82 AC 3180.

Captain Pete Moriarty, born 7/15/41, Newington, Connecticut. Lee Howard and **Jim Kilpatrick** provide Pete’s background. Pete was a catholic man of faith, and a dedicated family man. He was married with two small children, a boy and a girl. After pilot school, Pete flew C-130s, then was assigned as a T-37 instructor at Moody Air Force Base, Georgia. He was the training officer for Kilpatrick’s pilot class. Pete was up for Major, and needed a combat tour ticket for his career.

He arrived at the 615th TFS (F-100) in late January, 1971. Kilpatrick states that Pete spent most evenings talking to his kids and wife on the MARS phone service. I remember him as a very quiet, subdued guy, but very friendly. On that fateful day, he had only been in-country less than

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60 days. Unfortunately, less than 60 missions is not enough time to develop combat experience and the curvilinear target approach technique.

Pete, #2, rolled in from the south to north with the same identical flight path as Lead. He passed 200 feet below the FAC, and Jerry Funderburk watched it unfold. There was a curve in Route 9 to the west, so all nine tanks had Pete in their sights. All with 12.7 mm DShk heavy machine guns firing. There was no wing flash of condensation showing an attempted pullout. No ordinance came off the aircraft, and there was no radio transmission. Pete’s aircraft flew into the ground at 12 o’clock, exploded and burned. Funderburk believes he was hit and killed in the cockpit on final. The FAC told Hal Cochran that his wingman had been shot down. After a pause, he told Funderburk in a gruff voice, to “mark the tank.” Cochran rolled in and knocked out the lead tank. He made one last pass and damaged the last tank in the line. Now forward movement and retreat for the tanks was blocked. Wing Commanded **Cregg P. Nolan** and Lt. **Ben Lang** were next in the attack. They knocked out more tanks. I flew two mission on Route 9 that day with Scott Madsen. I was ready to roll in and I could see Pete’s plane burning with 20 Mike Mike rounds exploding in the fire. The AAA and small arms fire was absolutely withering. I had never seen so much coming up at us. The rounds had condensation when coming up in the humid air, and were easily seen. I felt like a Kewpie Doll in the carnival shooting gallery, or a worm in an apple waiting for that bite. I remembered my air force training at Luke Air Force Base; if the enemy is in range, so are you. As I watched it unfold, the FAC told me the tanks were “balling the jack down the road.” (I learned years later that was a railroad term to move rapidly.) I took a breath, and Scott and I rolled in. We also knocked out a tank that day. There were fighters stacked, waiting to go in. Soon the tanks were no more. As fast as it started, it was all over. 1,700 ARVN troops saved.

As you might expect, it was a big medal day. Pete Moriarty earned posthumously the Silver Star. Hal Cochran was put in for the Medal of Honor, and grounded. Colonel Nolan and Ben Lang (at Colonel Nolan’s direction) received the Silver Star. Jerry Funderburk was awarded the Air Force Cross. Scott Madsen and I got an “atta boy!” As Ian Fleming says in his book *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, “Medals are so often badges of good luck.” But Pete and Hal were the real deal. What courage to fly final and bottom out at 500 feet with nine tanks blazing away at you!

Also, true heroes were the helicopter crews. I have always believed Sikorsky’s description of helicopter, “According to the laws of aerodynamics, a bumble bee can’t fly either. But a bumble bee doesn’t know anything about aerodynamics, so it goes ahead and flies anyway ... as does the helicopter.” These guys were fantastic. What losses. What courage. What a bar to set for everyone.

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The Air Force being what it is, second guessed Hal Cochran. They considered an Article 15 for his allowing an inexperienced wingman to attack with high drags. They then decided to just let it go, and downgrade his Medal of Honor to the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC).

So, was everybody happy? Nixon declared it a victory with accolades for the ARVN troops. Those of us there knew what it was, a royal cluster f...! It was the largest conventional battle of the war. The costs were tremendous. Helicopter losses according to the U.S. Army Center for Military History,* 197 helicopters destroyed, 618 damaged, 219 Americans killed, 1,149 wounded and 38 missing in action. The U.S. tactical aircraft flew 8,000 sorties and dropped 20,000 tons of ordinance. B-52s flew 1,358 sorties and dropped 32,000 tons of ordnance. Seven U.S. fixed wing aircraft were shot down with loss of five aviators. South Vietnamese casualties were 9,800 with 209 missing. NVA had 19,360 killed and an unknown number wounded. Was it worth the loss of all this, the flower of American youth? A few of us survived, sort of.

Pete Moriarty's body was never recovered. He was declared KIA on 23 May 1972, over a year after his shoot down. He is still listed as Active Pursuit by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA). Maybe someday his crash site will be excavated. His memorial headstone is at Arlington National Cemetery. Fred Tomlins informed me that Pete's wife remarried in 1972 to a field grade officer at Moody AFB. She is reported to have had one more child. I could not find information on Pete's children. Pete has one nephew in the Phoenix area.

Hal Cochran got the DFC and went stateside in A-7s at Davis-Monthan AFB. He left the active military for the Colorado ANG, flying A-7s. He was killed in a night mission on the range.

Colonel Nolan did not get his star.

Ben Lang has the dubious distinction of being killed in the last F-100 lost in SEA, #242 F-100 loss on 28 April 1971.

Scott Madsen flew F-105s stateside, left the military, was an oil rig wildcatter, and then became president of the Dr. Phil Show (his wife was Dr. Phil's sister).

Jerry Funderburk flew OV-10s, was an IP in T-37s, F-4s and A-10s. He truly deserved the Air Force Cross. He ran the whole show and was instrumental in saving 1,700 ARVN troops. The Air Force doesn't always appreciate strong personalities. He retired as an O-4 and then became an airline captain.

Lee Howard came back to A-7s, then left the service to run the family ranch in Montana. Fred Tomlins was flight test at Moody AFC, left the military and had a career with the Forest Service in Oregon.

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I could not accept success and survival, so General Buzz Baxter convinced me to go back, so— back to NKP and A1H Skyraiders with Hobo call signs. And that tour is a story for another day ... maybe, maybe not. Finis

Thanks to **Lee Howard**, **Jerry Funderburk**, **Jim Kilpatrick** and **Fred Tomlins** for their assistance, and to **Ella Nye** and **Linda Howard** for editing.

*Reports of losses of Vietnamese troops in Lam Son 719 vary widely, depending on the source.

Lam Son 719 was the largest conventional land battle of the war, but few have heard of it, or remember it. I recommend two excellent books: *Into Laos, The Story of Dewey Canyon II/Lam Son 719* by Keith William Nolan, 1986, and *Invasion of Laos 1971, Lam Son 719* by Robert D. Sander, 2014.

Keep the air speed up. — **Ron Deyhle**

Someone once said, “War Is Hell.”

Editors Comments: This is the third story by Ron Deyhle detailing the lives of Phan Rang greats who never had a chance to tell their own story. Ron writes about these guys in a very personal way, because he personally associated with some of them, and those that he didn’t he searches out details from friends and families and really makes his stories come to life because he does such an excellent job of digging up little tidbits from the past that makes these “fighter-Jocks” come alive again. I guess that’s what you might expect from a recently retired Doctor, who started out life as a Hun driver at Phan Rang and now in his spare time is detailing the lives of those lost at Phan Rang, so that they will always be a part of us.



Ron’s first article was in *Phan Rang Newsletter 194* where he details the life of **Clive Jeffs**, who was his personal friend in “We Lost Our Blue-eyed Boy”. In *Phan Rang Newsletter 206* he tells the story of **Chip Taylor**, a story about not doing everything by the book. The way he writes, you feel like you are right there beside the runway, watching history being made. I wonder what his next project is going to be?

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Additional references to the characters and events appearing in the story. In *Phan Rang Newsletter 66* there is a story of **Lee Howard** reuniting with his Phan Rang Crew Chief **Charlie Cafarella**. In *Phan Rang Newsletter 199* the 35th TFW recorded a bonanza month and a lot of that was attributed to 1st. Lt. **Lee R. Howard**. The article also looks at Lee’s family and career.

Benjamin Gaines Lang In *Phan Rang Newsletter 155* “Casualty List for Phan Rang AB Assigned Personnel”, Ben perished when his F-100D 55-3550 approximated 18 nautical miles South of Phan Rang AB on 28 April 1971.

Phan Rang Newsletter 158 “Operation Lam Son 719 - The Loss of 1Lt. Peter Moriarty” with First Lieutenant **Charles Harr** discussing his encounter with Peter on that fateful day. Charles was flying overhead and 1Lt Peter Moriarty was flying his Super Sabre low, attacking a column of North Vietnamese tanks near the town of Tchepone when he was shot down. The FAC immediately put Lieutenant Harr in on the lead and trailing tanks to box them in.

Then there is this...

First In ... First Out:

Lee Howard Entertains 615th TFS Bobcats From Many Days Gone By

By Lee Howard and Medley Gatewood

(Note: Lee Howard is a Montana Rancher and Medley Gatewood is the Publisher of the Super Sabre Society’s Journal, the Intake.)

This is a story within a story ... or maybe even within another story. And I have carte blanche from Lee to “handle it however I prefer.” It started as a simple story when (at exactly 2/4/2011 9:16 PM) Lee sent us a beautiful picture of himself and three of his pals (from back in the last days of the Hun in Vietnam) taken at Lee’s beautiful ranch in Montana in August of 2010 at a “mini” reunion. The picture came with five short paragraphs about the attendees and the then-present state of their lives. I admired the picture and photographic skill of the photog (who was unnamed), put Lee’s email with the picture and story in my “Photo References” email folder and ... there it all sat until recently (8/11/2020 7:39 AM to be exact!) when Lee remarked in an email exchange about a totally different story possibility.

He said: “A number of years ago, I submitted a pic of four of us from the 615th at Phan Rang here at the ranch, post-SEA obviously. It was Jim Kilpatrick, Charlie Sublett, Ron Chadwick and me sitting on the back of an old Ford pickup with a little notation of the meanderings of each, since SEA. At the time, I thought it was worthwhile. If you’ve still got it and elect not to

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use it fine—if not, and you might be interested, let me know. I may be able to find it again. Lee.”

Uh-oh; so much for our policy for incoming potential Intake stuff, “First In ... First Out!” I wouldn’t have bet anything on finding Lee’s “number of years ago submission,” and I was ASTOUNDED when at my first search try, using only the name “Kilpatrick” Lee’s ancient 2/4/2011 email popped up, with all the other story stuff, including the picture and the meandering of the four pals, as he had put in the email’s contents! Would you believe! So, this has been a story within Lee’s recent request about “where’s my story?” And now, it’s off to my “handling” of Lee’s real story about a great picture and the back-then notations about four pals circa 2010. A third story would be appreciated if we can get Lee to do it, even if it would just be “little notations” that update the “now” situations of all four of the pals in the 2010 picture! Press on Lee!

Original Picture and “Notations?”

Medley: I won't try to write for you. I'll send bits of info and you can handle it however you prefer. The attached photo shows, left to right: Howard, Sublett, Chadwick, Kilpatrick. Charlie, Wick, and I are sure that Kilpatrick has a plastic surgeon and a hairdresser on retainer. He looks about 40!!!



Montana in August of 2010 at a “mini” reunion.

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Ron Chadwick and his wife Barb, Charlie Sublett and his daughter Libby, and Jim Kilpatrick and his wife Beverly were guests at the Montana ranch of Lee and Linda Howard in Aug of 2010. All the guys were members of the 615th TFS Bobcats in Phan Rang, '70-'71. We were all involved in the final re-deployment of Huns across the Pacific. We ferried the last of the Huns home from a long and costly war.

Chadwick separated from the USAF, flew for GM for a short time, flew for Eastern until their demise, and flew a short stint for Pan Am when they reemerged (and shortly thereafter submerged again). Ron has owned and operated a landscaping firm in New Jersey since. He recently retired and is in the process of moving his family and his Pitts to Scottsdale. He competes in advanced aerobatic competition with his Pitts.

Sublett separated from the USAF as well and graduated from Law School. He's practiced law in Tulsa, Oklahoma since. He also flew Thuds, F-4s, and F-16s for the Tinker AFB Reserves until his retirement as a Lt Col and Sqn CC. Since his retirement, he's become involved in light aviation. He currently owns a Bonanza and a YAK 52, which incidentally, he flew to Montana for the reunion.

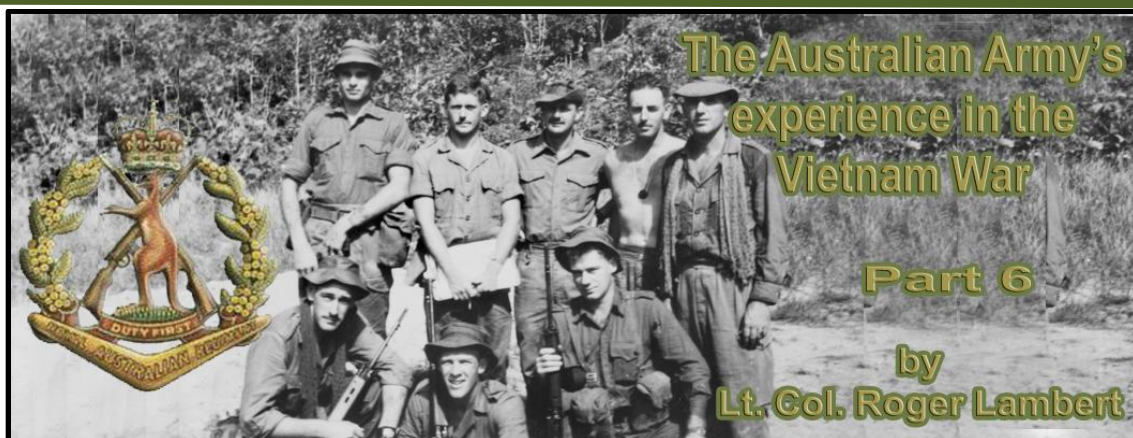
Kilpatrick separated as well shortly after SEA and was hired by American Airlines, retiring with over 30 years' service. Jim also was a Guard and Reserve bum for some time flying the Hun and eventually working with Sublett in the Thud at Tinker. He is currently flying the Eclipse for a Part 135 time share operation. After the Montana trip, Jim was so impressed by Sublett's YAK that he went back home to North Carolina and purchased one.

Howard returned from SEA, flew the A-7D at DM and separated in '73, returning to the family ranch and did all of his aviating in a Super Cub. After retiring in 2000, he was hired by Big Sky Airlines and flew the Metroliner until the age 60 deal caught up with him. He's currently flying a T-bird out of Bozeman for a guy who just happens to own an F-86 and four Hun F-models. So far, we haven't robbed enough banks to put gas in the Hun! The Super Cub still serves as transportation from the ranch to Bozeman. That's All Folks? Lee Howard

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CHRISTMAS 1969 – NUI DAT

(or How I learned to love the war and stop worrying – for a day)

With military precision (well, what else would you expect from the Tigers), plans were put in place for the traditional start to Christmas Day, Thursday 25 December 1969. At the appointed hour (something like zero dark 30 hours as I recall), the officers of C Company assembled at “Yarralumla” for a final briefing before proceeding to the company kitchen. “Yarralumla”, for those of us whose memories are fading (like mine), was the name of the Officer Commanding Charlie Company’s ‘hootchie’ (I guess by comparison to our humble sand-bagged abodes, the OC’s digs probably did resemble the Governor General’s official residence in some ways!)

Aluminium cooking pots containing coffee were decanted for ease of handling (handy things those hot-boxes with their inner containers) and armed with a suitable quantity of rum, we proceeded to our respective lines to serve up the Coffee Royale to our troops. I suspect that our diggers were very pleased to see us on two counts:

1. Their officers were serving them instead of vice versa; and
2. We were serving alcohol in the lines.

Now of course we all know that no self-respecting Aussie digger would disobey Standing or Routine Orders and consume alcohol in the lines. Not in such a professional outfit as Charlie Company. Those buried “Trunks, Metal, Troops for the Use Of” were only there to store goffas and to prevent chocolate from melting in the tropical heat. Right? Yeah right!

With the Coffee Royale duly served, the officers retired to “Yarralumla” to finalise plans for the rest of Christmas Day including the Army tradition of serving lunch to our troops. This was the first misjudgement of the day. No, not the planning but rather gathering in the OC’s ante room.

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One Captain David Wilkins produced a bottle of rum that he'd been sent from Australia. It was white rum. Not to my individual taste but, heck, beggars can't be choosers. David proceeded to extol the virtues of this fine Australian rum as healthy portions were poured into our “Cups, Canteen, Troops for the Use Of”. Cheers, Happy Christmas and all that and down the hatch. Bottoms up.

What the heck is going on here? My lips have gone numb, my eyes are watering and now I can't feel my tongue! There's an acute burning sensation in my throat that's proceeding down my windpipe! There's a gurgling in my stomach that would do a volcano about to erupt proud! I'm now getting concerned about how quickly this rum is going about its business dissolving my intestines and what was going to happen by the time it hit the outlet valve of my bowels (or what was left of them).

“Another?” asked David. By now the initial impact of the first healthy dose of Inner Circle had settled. Either that or I was so severely injured by that first hit, the equivalent of a napalm strike, my body and mind had no idea what was going on and that same foreign voice that seemed to come from me says “Yes, please.” Idiot! Who said that?! I'm bloody well possessed!!



Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) rum

I didn't dare light a cigarette while the top was off that bottle for fear that there would be an instant detonation and the entire officer group of Charlie Company would be incinerated. Come to think of it, had we sprayed this stuff over the jungle and lit it up with WP, we could have obliterated the entire Province and have been home by New Year's Day!

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Holy Dooley! Now my legs have developed an inability to keep me upright, so it's a case of get into the “Chairs, Canvas, Folding, Troops for the Use Of” lest I end up a heap on the floor and having to leopard crawl my way around! “What the hell is that?” some guttural, almost spectre-like voice that didn't seem to be my own croaked.

David proceeded to extol the virtues of CSR Inner Circle Rum. Man, that stuff was 100 Proof if it was a day. Fair dinkum, I reckon if a Huey ran out of fuel, you could pour this in the tank and the turbine would happily run as it would on *Aviation Turpentine*. But I don't think you could put it in the trusty Zippo though as one spark and it would probably blow your head off.

And so started Christmas Day in Nui Dat, 1969.

So how was Christmas Day so far? Well, let's say that the digger's lunch, with us serving, went off very well and things seemed to be going pretty much according to plan. A good feed, good company and perhaps a wee bit too much grog – a great Army tradition. But heck, I wasn't feeling any pain. The CSR anaesthetic was seeing to that. Now there's another thought – the Doc could have used Inner Circle during minor surgical operations, and one would not feel any pain.



Christmas lunch, Nui Dat (AWM)

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Did the day get any better? Well, things started to go downhill somewhat when a Half-Ton Trailer appeared in the company lines. Not just any trailer – this one was full of beer. How on earth did that thing get here and where did it come from?

Hang on – that’s a US Army jeep (or Mutt as they referred to them). Where the heck did that come from?



US Army ‘Mutt’ and half ton trailer

“What do you mean you swapped it for a Slouch Hat complete with puggaree and badge?” There’s that guttural, foreign voice again but the diggers are looking at me.

“Take the bloody thing back” say the voice. “Ah, but Skipper” rings out the chorus.

“Don’t argue. Just take the thing back where you got it or you’re all on a fizzer!” That voice – who’s saying these words and why are they looking at me?

“And where did that trailer come from?” I am possessed; that trailer is full of cold beer and this voice keeps telling them to get rid of it. Pull yourself together man. There’s sure to be a logical explanation and after all, it is more beer.

“We brought it up from “X” Company, boss” says the chorus. Smart cookies these diggers. Don’t let one bloke be the spokesman and take the wrap, but all speak up together and it’s most unlikely everyone will be placed on an A4 - one for all and all for one.

“X” Company, you say” says the foreign voice seemingly coming from me. “That’s OK then. Just stash the beer and get rid of the evidence ...er ... trailer.” Did I say that?

And so, Christmas Day 1969 in Nui Dat passed without further incident. Well, almost. The trailer with the beer had been missed, reported stolen and the “Sheriff” and his trusty band of RP’s were on the trail. The OC hauled we platoon commanders in and demanded to know what we knew of the missing trailer.

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I swore blind that my boys didn't do it and would never do such a thing. In hindsight, how good was it that I was still affected by that dreaded CSR Inner Circle? I could have used the defence that I was possessed by the 'spirit' and that it was not me doing the talking.

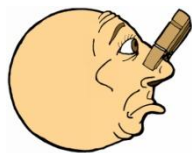
To the best of my knowledge, at the end of the day, the US Army inventory had the correct tally of jeeps and the missing trailer mysteriously turned up with its rightful owners – albeit empty. I swear that I have no idea what happened to the contents although Southwark is not to my taste either ...

Some years later, as I thought back on my introduction to CSR Inner Circle Rum and Christmas Day 1969, a chill ran down my spine when I hypothesised what might have happened if D445 and whomever else was in the Province at the time had decided to launch an attack on Nui Dat that day. Nah! Had they even contemplated an assault and had they got through the wire and perimeter defences, the alcohol fumes and the frequent belching and farting would have completely disoriented them if not repelled them. 'Chemical warfare' would have saved the day!

Then of course we had our secret weapon to employ – CSR Inner Circle Rum. Thanks, David. To this day I still reckon that, among other things such as soldiering, the Army taught me how to drink and smoke – well, I've got to blame somebody.

PS. “X” Company is designed to protect the innocent after all these years. Let's just say it was one of ours 'down the hill'.

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



Way back when (October 2018) Roger found out who the Magpie crew was that provided air support for his platoon in 1969 and he met Air Commander John Whitehead, (rtd) and other members of the crew, he remembers John's little dig to him. It went something like this...one day in their discussion that after a mission, you guys could go back to Phan Rang, have a shower, and eat and sleep in air-conditioned comfort. Talk about rubbing it in ... after a four or six week operation, one quickly learnt to dump one's greens at the entrance to our 'air-condition' tents and go off and have a shower (with hot water if we were lucky). **Returning to the tent, one could smell the odours**

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emanating from the greens from six feet away!

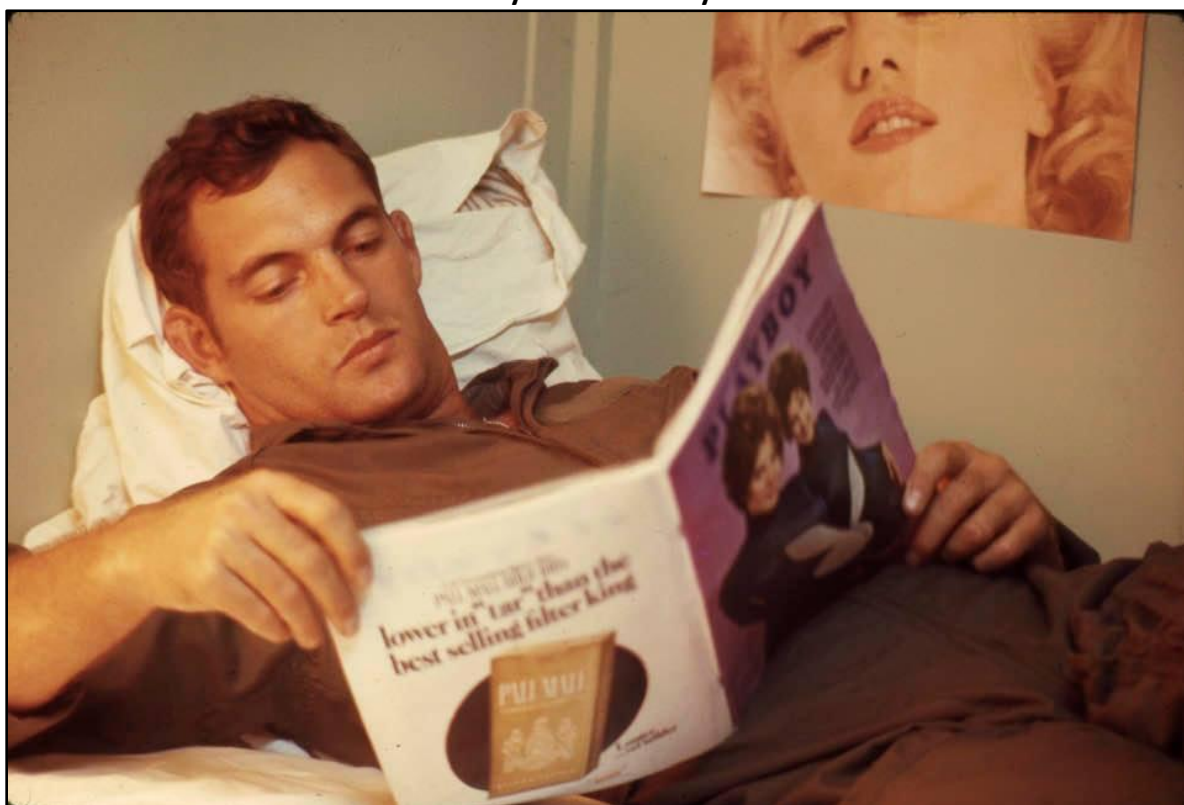
At least we didn't have to wash our greens as we had a laundry service that looked after that aspect. I still remember my laundry number - "PC109". We were all allocated a number so that the greens came back to the correct owner. PC109? We inherited the 'PC' from 1 RAR who we took over from in country. The PC stood for Pony Charlie - Pony after 1 RAR's pony mascot and Charlie for C (Charlie) Company ...

Roger concluded that there was one thing in their favour..."**We must have smelled like the jungle and so we blended into the environment quite well.**"

(Note: The story of Roger meeting up the Magpie crew is covered, starting in Phan Rang Newsletter 186 and continues through 188.)

Capt. Stan Fleener studying his, umm, flight manual. Phan Rang, 1971.

Photo by John Anthony Ward



“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

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(The astounding story of cousins from two nations meeting up in Saigon)



By Wing Commander Bob Howe, RAAF (Retd)

The United States of America and Australia have a lot in common and two special features are that they have, for a long time, welcomed migrants from other nations, as well as working together as free nations in wartime - Bob Howe

In 1947 in the high mountains of the Himalayas, residents were forced by the confrontation of India and Pakistan over partition, to migrate. One side of the Disney family moved to the USA, the other to Australia. Diana, who migrated to Australia at a very young age, became an Australian citizen¹ and later married Bob Howe who served with the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). One of Diana's cousins, **Bob Disney**, who migrated to the USA, joined up with the U.S. Army.

¹ Phan Rang Newsletter 213, page 8 has a picture of the bride, Diana Disney and groom, Bob Howe exiting the chapel and being saluted by the Guard of Honour.

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Bob's meet up in Saigon



Bob Howe and Bob Disney meet in Saigon, the first of two Vietnam reunions.

1969 found both Bobs on active service in Vietnam, the Aussie Bob flying was with No. 2 Squadron, RAAF from Phan Rang Air base and American Bob employed as an aide to Brigadier-General Wallace L. Clement, U.S. Army, Commander Military Assistance Command Training Directorate – MACT - in Saigon.

And so it was on 5 February 1970 that they first met in Saigon when Aussie Bob took the opportunity, with a rare pause in 2 Squadron's daily bombing commitments, to celebrate the Tet New Year holiday with the South Vietnamese. He flew down from Phan Rang in a RAAF C-7 Caribou transport aircraft on its routine series of hops around South Vietnam and stayed overnight at the Bachelor Officers Quarters (BOQ) at Tan

Son Nhut.

The following day, Tet 69, they both admired the traditional appearance of lovely Vietnamese girls dressed in their new finery, looking very glamorous in their elegant ao dais, and being photographed by their families. They also sat at the Continental Palace Hotel in downtown Saigon partaking of non-alcoholic drinks until Aussie Bob headed back to Tan Son Nhut to

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return to Phan Rang in a US Army Beech King Air U-21A.

Phan Rang AB, the site of the second reunion on Anzac Day 1970

The next time the two cousins met was on Anzac Day 1970, when Major Disney flew up to Phan Rang with his boss, arriving in the afternoon in their Beech U-21 King Air transport. They joined Aussie Bob in attending an all-ranks barbecue during the evening, then adjourned to the Officers Club for a show afterwards and even witnessed the Aussies square dancing!

The next day, General Clement accompanied Pilot Officer Barry Carpenter and Aussie Bob on a 2 hour 10 minutes Magpie mission to IV Corps to operate with a VNAF FAC. This worked out very well, resulting in a good drop of 6 x M-117 750lb bombs on the VC base camp target from 1,500' bombing altitude in Canberra A84-241. Major Disney also flew on a Magpie mission with another crew.



Pilot John Kennedy and his navigator “Stumpy” Palmer (with champagne glasses in their hands) , look a little soaked as squadron personnel , together with BG Clement, gather around for a communal picture.

At last, Aussie Bob’s tour of duty was over with his final (260th) bombing mission flown in the morning of 11 May 1970 with Pilot Officer Mike Birks in Canberra A84-234. They attacked a VC

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bunker complex in III Corps, not far from Aussie ground troops, using 6 x M-117 750lbbers. There being a water shortage on Phan Rang air base at the time, instead of receiving the usual blast of water from the fire truck after his final mission, Bob was farewelled with a few buckets of water tipped over him by his fellow No. 2 Squadron aircrew.



Arriving back at the base, Bob was farewelled with a few buckets of water tipped over him by his fellow No. 2 Squadron aircrew.



Interestingly, the nose cone of the same Canberra A84-234 in which Bob flew his last mission, where he as the bomb-aimer used to peer through in order to drop his bombs, now resides in the Australian War Memorial in the city after which the bomber was named. Aussie Bob has already shown it to his grand children and exclaimed “that’s me up there”.

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The Last Farewell

After completing his last mission, Aussie Bob took little time to pack and say goodbye, catching a USAF C-130 bound for Tan Son Nhut in the afternoon, and he reached Saigon later that evening after a much-delayed trip down from Phan Rang. Cousin Bob, driving his General’s car, met him at the airport. The VC also decided to give Bob an appropriate farewell with a number of rockets fired into downtown Saigon that night.

After a day relaxing and joining his American cousin for dinner at the Massachusetts Bachelor Officers’ Quarters (BOQ), the following day he boarded a Qantas Boeing 707 headed back home to Australia. And US cousin Bob was there to say goodbye as they concluded a unique reunion.



US Bob and Aussie Bob, both cousins pose for a goodbye photo beside the Qantas B-707 that was taking Aussie Bob back to Australia which concluded a somewhat unique relationship occasioned by the Vietnam War.

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Doug’s Comments: It may seem strange, but I’ve been doing these newsletters for so long that these stories really seem to draw us closer together and my hope is that it has the same effect on you. Honoring our fallen seems to get more poignant and meaningful with each story from Ron Deyhle. I’m so grateful that he has taken the time to do all the research and write his stories with so much wit that they just envelope you and makes the guys a real human and not just a statistic. Then there is my Aussie friend Bob Howe who can always pull a story out of his hat and sometimes I wonder if he didn’t practice magic in his spare time, but I’m so thankful for all the wonderful stories that he’s shared with us and I know many of you have enjoyed them as well. Actually I would never have been able to do this newsletter for so many years without the help of so many people. The next issue of the Phan Rang Newsletter is going to contain biographies/autobiographies so if you have a story to tell, please write it down and send to me. 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 and put ‘unsubscribe’ in subject line.