

Phan Rang AB Newsletter

The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.
"Keeping the memories alive" Newsletter 215

In this issue:

Autobiographies of Phan Rang AB Personnel

- Michael Reed
- Gary Hall
- James Sullivan
- Ian Wheat
- James Kucipeck
- Harry Hoa Bach
- El Hoard
- Henry John Pirkkala Jr.
- Anton Frank Bautz
- Ken Swickard
- Christopher Boles
- James E. Mattison
- Arthur C. Bennett
- Howard Emerson Wright
- Robert Andrew Bright

Doug's Comments including Reunion Updates



In these autobiographies, we get a glimpse into the lives of airmen performing in sometimes mundane and sometimes heroic circumstances, but they all contributed to the successful war time mission of Phan Rang AB. Only those that have experienced war will really understand it and by reading these stories it will help give you a greater understanding of the American armed servicemen, their dedication to country and the close comradely experienced with our Australian allies.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

My recruiter thought I should go to the “General” Field since I had scored pretty high in it but I knew enough to recognize that they only guaranteed the “field” not the job I chose. I looked through the booklet and noticed that jobs in that the “General” field was just not what I thought I wanted to do. I didn’t want to work at a job inside a building somewhere for 4 years.

I looked through the Air Force booklet in the “Mechanical” Field and decided that Aircraft Maintenance, Jet Engine Mechanic, or Air Frame Repair looked more like what I wanted to do. Then I looked at what I thought the worst they could do to me in that field based on my ambitions and decided the best option was to choose the Mechanical Field.

I signed up for delay enlistment along with a couple of other guys I knew. We went to Columbus, Ohio, about 60 miles from home and took the oath of enlistment. The recruiter told me that it could be up to 180 days before I might hear from them and finally have to go. That was great with me as I thought “I’ll just have a lazy summer and play around for the summer doing a few mowing and misc. jobs to keep me in a “little cash”. I had already quit my job at a fast-food restaurant by then, and without a girlfriend, I had no commitments.

The summer wasn’t going that great though as my buddies had all gotten jobs or got married. One day, June 30, 1969 to be exact I was at a beach with my buddy who had also joined Air Force delay enlistment, watching the young girls in bikinis and contemplating what to do next. I made the statement that maybe I should just go to the recruiter and see if I could go any sooner?

That afternoon I went home and got a phone call. It was my recruiter. I hadn’t even talked to him yet. He said to come down because he had a packet for me from the Red Cross that contained things I would need when I went to Basic Training.

I never thought anything of it and it may be a good time to discuss my enlistment choices further with him.

As I sat down in his office he was talking on the phone and I heard him say something like “I understand” to the person on the phone and it sounded like he was talking to a newly signed up recruit. He hung up the phone and looked at me and asked if I would be willing to go sooner than the 180 days I might have. It kind of surprised me because I hadn’t expected that. Anyway,

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

I said “yes I was just thinking about talking to you about that”. I then asked, “How soon”? He just looked at me and said, “Tomorrow”. That surprised me also but I said, “I’ve got nothing else to do”. He seemed relieved and then stated that he was glad because he didn’t want to have to order me to go but he had to fill a quota for the next day and everyone else seemed to have an excuse not to go yet. As I said, he was a nice guy and seemed to care a lot about the recruits he signed up as I found out later.

I went home wondering how I was going to break it to my mom and dad. Dad would be okay with it. He was a WWII veteran and was in India and China in Armament with the Army Air Corp. Mom was a Registered Nurse and was a strong-minded woman. She would not be that happy about the sudden notice, but I knew she would be okay with it. She was a very loving mother of 5 kids but not overly emotional. I had three older siblings and I would be the first to leave for that long.

The next morning, July 1, 1969, she took a couple photos of my dad and I before he went to work at a local factory. She then drove me to the bus station for the trip to Fort Hayes in Columbus, Ohio.

A couple of weeks into Basic Training I was ordered to report to another building with a few other airmen to talk about career fields. As I arrived, I saw they were showing movies and I was told to sit down and watch until my name was called to be interviewed. I had just sat down when my name was called so I only saw about a minute of the film before I was called back to be interviewed.

The NCO that was interviewing me asked me what I thought about the movie they were showing and if I was interested. I then realized that I had started watching airmen handling bombs. I told him I had just arrived and didn’t see much of the movie. He told me to go back out and watch it. By the time I went back out to watch, I was told to return to my barracks. Needless to say, I soon got my Tech School orders for Lowry AFB, Denver, Colorado. “Munitions Maintenance” 461x0...

Toward the last “block” in Tech School, I had no idea where they would send me and I hadn’t volunteered for any overseas duty. The Instructor in that last class was a “buck” Sgt. Named Bailey, nicknamed “Beetle”. We asked him where he thought we would be assigned and he just

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

laughed and said “you’re in school to work with bombs. Where the hell do you think you’re going”?

The next thing I knew I had orders for APO San Francisco 96321. Still not knowing where that was, we went to the base library and looked it up; Phan Rang AB, Republic of Vietnam. After a 30 day leave at home, I flew to McCord AFB in Washington and headed for Vietnam on “Flying Tiger Airlines”.

I arrived at Cam Ranh Bay AB on January 15, 1970 and the warm humid air immediately hit me as the plane doors opened up. It had been eleven degrees when I left Ohio. We were told that the next transport to Phan Rang was the next day so we piled our duffel bags on the floor and signed up at a desk for a flight the next day.

After spending all night and most of the next day waiting for a flight, an announcement came over the intercom that there was ground transportation for about 4 guys. Not wanting to spend any more time in that hot building, I grabbed my bags and ran. It was a Security Police APC. They threw my bag on top and stuffed me small area in the rear with M16s all around me and said “keep your head down” and down the road we went.

At Phan Rang I was first assigned to the 435 MMS Squadron and then assigned to work at Red 5 on night shift which was munitions processing in a revetment close to the Control Tower where we loaded ammo cans for the F-100s and Shadow gunships then delivered them to the aircraft.

After a couple of months, a new building was finally finished at the Line Delivery holding area called RED 9 near the end for the light line and we moved there. After about a month I switched to day shift.

I asked my NCOIC about switching jobs to driving trucks and running a crane to deliver bombs. To my surprise he said OK and gave me a list of vehicles I needed on my AF Driver’s License. A Vietnamese guy at the motor pool just typed them onto the license even though I had no clue what some of these vehicles even were.

Before I got to start that job, my NCOIC had me train in “components” section of Line Delivery to replace a guy that was finished with his tour So I delivered fuses, arming vanes, delay

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

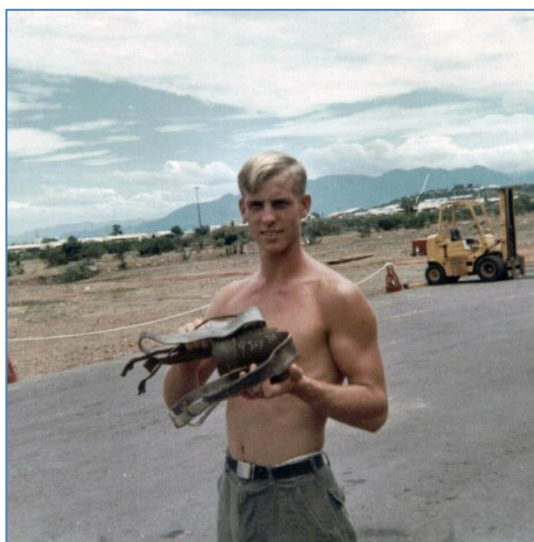
elements, bomb extenders and everything needed to makes bombs go “boom”.

I did that for about three months and found another guy, Bob Weidendorf, who wanted out of munitions processing also, so again I went to the NCIOC and asked to change and I would train Bob for “components”. He agreed. I always remained as a backup in components.

I actually had never driven an M52 5-ton truck before much less pulling a 40-foot trailer. I had to have somebody show me how to start and stop the truck and hook up the trailer. At least I was familiar with the flight line. But off I went with a load of bombs.

I also had to become familiar with the bomb dump and learned quickly to back that trailer between stacks of bombs and the crane that was going to load the trailer. It was real tricky for someone with no experience.

I finished my time at Line Delivery as a truck driver and working on a crane crew delivering bombs. At least in Tech School I got to operate a crane once.



Mike displaying the remains of a VC rocket.

My first scare from a rocket attack was a few days after arriving. My bunk area was on the second floor of the barracks in a crudely improvised room with ammo boxes for cupboards. I had my helmet and flak jacket on top of my locker and had just gotten back from taking a shower. I was in my underwear yet and the sirens went off and the loud speakers were announcing we were under attack. My instructions from the orientation were to put on my helmet and flak jacket, grab my gas mask and get quickly to the first floor of the protected area of the barracks.

The other guys with me yelled make your break and took off. While grabbing my gear from the top of my locker, my helmet fell and put a gash in the back of my ankle. The helmet then rolled across the floor and went under a bed. By the time I retrieved it the other guys were gone. Still in my underwear with my helmet, flak jacket

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

and gas mask, I arrived to safety. Everyone was snickering at the FNG standing there in combat gear in my underwear. I never grabbed my helmet again after that embarrassment.

I went to the beach a couple of times which was about 6 miles away. We rode on a “cattle car” which was a flatbed tractor trailer with a roof on it. Or sometimes a bus would make the run. We always had an armed escort each time. I got a bad sunburn the first time and the next time there were a lot of jelly fish so I stayed out of the water.

While at Red 9 Line delivery, we had several close calls from rocket attacks. One rocket hit about 25 feet from our building but hit in a ditch. Loud and scary but caused no damage except to our nerves. Being young and feeling invincible we got past that scare. We were lucky because we sometimes temporarily parked trucks at that location by the building to get new instructions when returning from the bomb dump with a fresh load of bombs. I have a photo of the ditch and of me holding the rocket remains with date marked on it. We never parked there again. They installed an old field phone on a pole further away from the building that wouldn't have done much good with several thousand pounds of bombs on the truck 50 more yards away, we just didn't stay there for long. We tried to get the trucks parked back in the parking revetments that pointed away from the buildings. I also had a rocket hit in the area close to the side of the road just before I got there with a fresh load on Napalm bombs and the guys ran out and yelled for me to get the hell out of there. I didn't see or hear anything but they couldn't believe I hadn't seen it. Several others hit close by and we had a few shrapnel holes on both ends of the building. I actually watched one rocket hit when I heard it and happened to be looking that direction. It hit about 200 yards away and close to the end of the flight line. Other times I heard rockets hit and a couple of them I only saw the smoke. We began to ask if they had painted a target on top of our building. We were in direct sight of “Charlie Mountain” and close to the flight line.

I was starting to get concerned about my luck when I heard a rocket hit beside a barracks down the road from my barracks on my day off. Then once, while at commanders call, a rocket came in and hit by the base BX just up the road from the base movie theater that we were meeting in. It blew out the back wall of the BX and killed an airman who was supposedly out processing to go home his last week there.

I got to go to Sydney Australia on R&R in October that year for 6 days but the plane broke down

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

at Darwin Australia and by the time they got the parts to repair it, we couldn't continue to Sydney because of rules in Australia about noise after 6pm I was told, so we lost one day of R&R. The Australian Air Force base put us up for the night and the airlines took us for a meal in downtown Darwin. I had been sleeping and just missed the bus so I and another guy caught a ride from an Australian Air Force Officer and got to the restaurant in time.

I had a great time in Sydney but most of what I remember about R&R was good looking girls at “The Whiskey A-Go-Go”. And the Go-Go dancers in the bird cages, Waitresses had clothes on that looked like they were straight out of Playboy magazine.

My DEROS was January 15 but I got an “early out” from Phan Rang the end of November and was given a new “dream sheet” of bases I would like to be sent to. I put down Lockbourne AFB, Columbus, Ohio which was about 50 miles from home. I got it, but I only got to stay for 6 months and finished my Air Force Time at Mountain Home AFB Idaho. I did meet my wife while stationed at Lockbourne AFB and married her a year later and we both spent my final year living in Boise, Idaho and commuting with another friend who worked in the bomb dump there also. Discharged June 30, 1973 as Staff Sgt.

I guess my best memories of Phan Rang AB were watching the Gunships fire tracers around the base at times. It was Peaceful looking from my view. You wouldn't know a war was going on at times until you heard or saw machine gun fire on perimeter. Also, the View from Nui Dat hill was fantastic at night. You could see most of the base perimeter lit up by “light all” units every 500 or so feet. I returned to my hometown of Zanesville, Ohio and became a Full Time Professional Firefighter and retired from there after 30 years' service.

I'm still married to the same girl and we have a son and daughter and two grandsons.



Gary Hall
35th Security Police Sq.

Gary Hall, 35th Security Police Squadron

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

I graduated high school in 1967 and knew I was going to be drafted right away so I joined the Air Force.

In basic training, I wanted to go to air traffic control training but due to the escalation of fighting in Vietnam I stayed at Lackland AFB and trained in security.

After finishing tech school, I got my orders for Kadena AB Okinawa. I started by guarding B-52's, KC135's, and the Black Bird SR71. After a short time there they asked if I was interested in K-9 training so I applied and was accepted. I was sent to Showa AS, Japan for training and to pick up my dog.

After my tour at Kadena AB, Okinawa, I was sent to Nha Trang, South Vietnam where I waited for a dog to come available. I was only there a short time when Ringo became available at Phan Rang and was sent there immediately. During my time at Phan Rang, I met many great guys. I was also scared out of my wits several times. There were several mortar and rocket attacks including one mortar attack that landed in the ammo dump. I spent the rest of my tour walking the wire at night with Ringo.

After my tour was up at Happy Valley, I was sent to McCoy AFB, Orlando Florida where I worked with our kennel master TSgt Rambo (and yes, that is his real name) in training some of the first pot sniffing dogs. I was honorably discharged in Aug 1971.

To this day, going to K-9 training was the best military decision I could have made. I met and worked with some truly wonderful people.

I'm also proud to say my granddaughter is currently at Lackland AFB going through security training. She also wants to be a dog handler.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 “...keeping the memories alive”



James (Sully) Sullivan 35th Security Police Sq.

James (Sully) Sullivan, 35th Security Police Squadron

Unforgettable Moments, Familiar Faces, Forgotten Names - In September of 1968 I had been in the United States Air Force for almost two years and married to my Mississippi Girl “Patricia Ann” for 14 months. It was in September of 1968 that I received orders for Vietnam. On October 22, 1968, after a month leave, I was aboard an airplane, soon to touch down at Cam Ranh Bay AB, on the way to my base assignment, Phan Rang AB. What a flight, 36 hours flight time and a couple of stops (Philippines was one) thought I’d never touch ground again. Not knowing what to expect everybody on the plane was trying to get a glimpse through the little windows to see fighter planes on a mission dropping a load of bombs or ground to air rockets trying to knock our plane out of the air. Who would have believed that it turned out no different than landing in any airport in the U.S. of A?

The rest of my service time consisted of three stages: 1) The six months stationed at Phan Rang AB, 2) The six months I spent assigned to CSD/MACV US Embassy in Saigon and 3) Life after “The Nam”

Stage 1: PHAN RANG AB

It only took three steps off the plane to know that whoever was in charge, back in the U.S., didn’t know it was a bad idea to send their troops into a war or conflict wearing dress blues, tie, long sleeve shirt , spit shined shoes and a change of underwear. So out into the 100 degree+ heat we went only to find out that it would be a three day wait before a C-130 would pick up the few of us bound for Phan Rang. Never been so miserable, hot and sweaty, smelly, sleep deprived and hungry in my life. If there were two things I expected in the military was order and coordination but it was worse in a place where it should have been the best, after all people’s lives were at stake. Our plane finally came in and we were flown to Phan Rang. The region was known to be a hunter’s paradise and utilized by many influential locals and others from around the world to seek exotic trophies. Looks like the good old USA donated thousands

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

of a new species. This was not a great thought at the time.

The first two weeks in country I was issued more appropriate clothing for the climate and attended “in country training”, where I was introduced to the MACV/ Rules of Engagement. The rules were simple, “Don’t shoot, unless shot at”. Somewhere, somebody sure messed up! We are Security Guards. You know, the guys who walk around the alert planes and stand at the base entrances saluting and giving directions, not dodging bullets and B-40 rockets. There was one item we weren’t issued and that was a weapon. I found that strange since they have been pounding in our heads even before leaving the states in AZR Training was breaking the weapon down, cleaning it and how to fire it. I was to later learn that all weapons were locked up in the armory until it was time for you to go on duty. They didn’t even let you clean them.

Now let’s just suppose that “Charlie” got through the perimeter and entered your hooch when you weren’t on duty, what do you do, the armory was far away? Well let’s see I could throw my 6” reel to reel AKAI tape recorder, my Canon movie camera or my wife’s framed picture at them. Oh Boy! This wasn’t a war nor a conflict it was suicide for this Airman 2nd/Class Security Policeman and others that walked around the base or sat in towers and bunkers along the base perimeter, sort of like ducks on a pond on a cold day with sleet falling so hard you can’t see. On top of that, I was put on Panther Flight, the night shift. It was also the VC’s/Charlie’s shift. The only good news was that PR had been very quiet, not too high on Charlie’s priority list. The one constant we’re all too familiar with is that, “Things Change”.

On my first duty night I was posted in a tower in the Bomb Dump. I don’t know what the area was called (“Echo” I think) but I did find out from the other guys on the posting truck that it was a very safe area, not right on the perimeter. Bomb Dump didn’t sound too safe to me, surrounded by napalm and all kinds of other explosives. One rocket or mortar round landing in the right place and all of us guarding the area, and some close, would be history. OK! I’m in the tower and after mid-night, trying to concentrate on the words of the guys on the truck on the way out “a very safe area” when I hear this strange sound coming from the sky above me and it ain’t no shooting star. It’s a 122mm rocket, no two, no three and some 80mm rockets making their way toward the flight line and barracks area. I believe that Charlie was just making sure I had remembered to bring along my Charmin or Phan Rang was moving up on their priority list. I could faintly hear someone on my radio asking for azimuth readings on the rocket and mortar muzzle blast from the Echo area. They kept calling different Echo positions to respond and I

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

thought that I had heard my name specifically, a number of times. The next thing I know there are these two headlights coming toward my tower and it comes to a screeching halt and somebody starts calling my name and shining a flashlight up into the tower. It was the area SAT Team, guess they didn't know that I had left that tower to find better protection in case one of those things was aimed at Echo Area. After I acknowledging I was ok and that had I fully intended to return to the tower, where my m-16, radio and helmet remained. The SAT leader chewed my butt then gave me slack for it being my first time on post and Charlie was chunking rounds right over my head. The SAT leader was a Staff Sergeant and he called me by rank and name and asked me where I was from? Mississippi, I replied. What part he asked? I was born in Vicksburg, I said. He said, "You wouldn't happen to have gone to a Junior college in Raymond and married a girl from that same school named Pat?" I said yes, how'd you know? He said his name and that he married a girl that lived across the dormitory hall from my, now, wife. Small world, HUH! Well that was the last of my running for cover but not the last opportunity to post in Echo or provide azimuth readings for our Heavy Weapons unit to fire them big 155mm Howitzers in Charlie's lap. When one of them babies goes off right behind you there ain't no hearing nothing for some time afterwards. That probably contributed to some of my hearing loss also. Let me say before I forget to give credit, I was so thankful for the Security Police Heavy Weapons Group and the part they played in protecting Phan Rang AFB. Their mortar pits, Howitzer's, mini-guns and Pink Eyes mounted on jeeps wore Charlie out, both outside and inside the base.

Over the following weeks and months there were many events still as clear as yesterday. I met many new people who are now my brothers, some I can still see their faces but names seem long forgotten. The few faces with names that I have been able to contact are now an integral part of my life after over 40 years. One of them, my hooch mate for a brief time, had key information that helped me unlock my most horrible night that bothered me all those years. Thanks Nat Nastasi! Nat was a few months behind me coming in country and was assigned to Panther Flight. I can still smell the care packages he received from home. You could smell Italian through the box and wrapping. The contents never lasted long enough. Nat and I have made contact a few times over the years and I still call him my friend and brother.

Some of those that keep fairly close in contact are SSgt Joe Kaupa (my CSC Squad Leader) who taught me how to dispatch and direct responding security forces, keep appropriate personnel advised of each situation in order to repel and inflict severe casualties on the infiltrating enemy.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

Airmen Vic Markle and Rick Hernandez were on Panther Flight also and through the day to day duties and volunteering for convoy duty together brought a special closeness that I didn't have with the others. There are some things I remember like it was yesterday, others, were very traumatic for a long time probably because I couldn't remember many of the details. Other names and faces that I remember are Col. Donald Reeves (Company Commander), SSgt Ward Shute, TSgt Wallace Hart, and Captain Garth Wright.

One of my brothers on Panther Flight (Vic Markle) had a friend (Sgt Kedrow) that worked in CSC who was soon to be ending his tour. In discussions with Vic I had told him that I had been the Complotter at my last base and he had mentioned it to Kedrow. I am not sure how long I had been on flight when I was asked if I would want to work in CSC, which I did.

K rations or C rations - were the evening meal except when that care package came from home. If anything made it out of the barracks, with all the chow hounds around waiting to share the homemade goodies, then you could sit on post and eat and dream of those hometown memories. If not then, Beef in Spicy Sauce was my favorite government rations. I can remember putting that can under the hood of the area SAT jeep to heat up while they drove around. Sterno stoves worked OK but it was as bad as lighting a cigarette out in the open. Charlie just loved it when we gave him a good target to aim at. Another reason I didn't like the stove was if you got distracted and forgot it was on bad things could happen. Like the night I was in a tower in some area and I decided to heat up a can of Hormel's Chili & Beans. I would set it on the stove unopened for just a short time to get it to warming up then take my government issued can opener (I think it was called a P38?) and open it to finish the warming process. This particular night the can was still unopened when the base started receiving incoming rounds. I threw on my flack jacket, helmet and got to the M60. The rounds were coming from straight out in front of my tower and other locations were calling in azimuths readings. While waiting for a call from Central Security Control (CSC) to give the area permission to fire on the muzzle flashes there was an explosion behind me and I was hit in the back. I had been hit and I fell back on to the floor not knowing how bad off I was. Lying on the floor of the tower my hand had fallen into a sticky hot substance that I at first thought was part of my body but it smelled of chili. Duh! That can of chili worked up a pressure that blew it wide open and splattered me. In the meantime, the Heavy Weapons mortar pits had sent the VC packing.

Then there was the night that one of the posts had called in movement inside the last string of

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

wire. CSC dispatched the area SAT and the two closet K-9 Handlers to that area. The SAT and the K-9 Handlers could hear noises but couldn't identify anything specific. The dogs however were alerting and could be heard over the base radios as transmissions were going back and forth from CSC to the SAT and K-9 Handlers. The Handlers were saying that their dogs were alerting toward a big overgrown area of trees, bushes and vines. The K-9 moved closer and the SAT sought cover, a sound came from the dark that sent the K-9 howling and the troops running. That sound was coming from a rock ape that had been named “Charlie”. Charlie had been more known to stay around the area where all the metal stuff, like pieces of blown up planes, old worn out vehicles, equipment and furniture was disposed off. Many nights you could hear a transmission over base radio that Charlie was throwing things around again and angry because he couldn't find a mate.

The weather! I had never been in a place where the temperatures were such an extreme difference from day to night. In the day it could be 110+ and then at night down to 70. The drop was so drastic that you felt like you were freezing at night. Panther Flight posted at night and slept during the day. Getting to post most nights was an ordeal, making sure you had enough clothing to keep comfortable and weapons and ammo in case the Charlie (the VC) got active. Sunrise never came fast enough. After the sun came up you could relax until day shift relief came. Next was a quick trip to “The Pit”, the watering hole where we would tell our stories of the night and drink beer until almost passing out. That was the only way to fall asleep quickly and stay asleep through the heat of the day. We had it better for than the Army and Marines, when it came to sleeping, we had barracks. They were two stories with screened sides but the dusty air blew right through and when you woke up there was usually a coat of dust mixed with sweat covering you. Thank God for the showers! That is if you had water.

There were some things that I couldn't understand, such as, having our combat boots shined and pressed fatigues for duty. Like, who was going to see us at night, the geckos, monkeys, rabbits, panthers, scorpions, snakes, the Re-up birds or Can't Do It birds? The gooks weren't worried about being fashionable. They only had on their underwear when they were trying to fire us up and the base.

We did have a laundry that would starch our fatigues but they used rice starch and boy did it stink to high heavens when you got sweaty. Then there were the MACV Rules of Engagement that I mentioned earlier. It is a good thing that some of the gooks were not crack shots or many

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

more American troops would have died or been wounded. If we had been allowed to fire on a known enemy retreating there would have been fewer of them to come back the next night. Being politically correct was not beneficial then and it still isn't today!

A bright spot was BREAKFAST! You could really get filled up on eggs (powdered), bacon & sausage, toast with SOS, oatmeal or any kind of cereal you wanted. Milk! Did we have milk? Yes, regular and chocolate. The one thing I was missing (being a Southern Boy) was GRITS. There was a girl that worked the mess hall from Georgia and I asked her one day why we didn't have grits on the menu and she said that they couldn't get them. I told her they were in the commissary so she said she would see what could be done. Not long after that at supper time she hollered at me that they were going to serve grits in the morning. Man, I just couldn't wait to slap a big pad of butter with salt and pepper on a plate full of grits. The next I was waiting for the doors to open and that Georgia girl gave me a big smile and a heaping plate full so I filled another plate full of eggs, bacon and toast then went to town on it. As I was eating I noticed that the other guys were putting their grits in a bowl, topping with sugar and milk. Just couldn't imagine! Come to find out they thought it was Cream of Wheat.

Oh Yeah! The movies! We had an outdoor screen, big like a drive-in but we had benches. On nights we had off we would fill ice chest full of beer and take a bunch of munchies and relax for a couple of hours. Sometimes that was interrupted when Charlie (not the Rock Ape) would start firing rockets over the big hill behinds us into the base revetment and flight line areas to stop the fighters from being able to get off the ground. There was a time during my tour that PR was delivering about 60% of the bombing missions up to the DMZ.

There was many a night in the states that I was posted in the B-52 alert area. I walked around those things so many times that I knew how many steps it took to walk completely around one, how may rivets held the wings together. I never appreciated that plane until the Nam. Many nights I'd be on post and hear the sound of big planes and lots of them in the distance. Within minutes I could see those B-52's fly into the moonlight heading north and about the time their sound couldn't be heard anymore the rumbling would begin and flashes of lights could be seen in the distant darkness. Them babies were dropping their load on reported VC movements and before you knew it they were passing in the moonlight heading south.

I had mentioned earlier that there were times we didn't have water. Our water supply was

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

drawn from a river off base and Charlie tried to keep it shut down. One night when I was in CSC Charlie tried to overrun the water well and almost succeeded. The water well was a post that was voluntary because it was off base and cut off from timely defensive efforts from the base. It was well fortified with Constantia wire, claymore mines, a big bunker that had a lot of fire power and was constructed with an underground area that could be sealed off from inside and was very difficult to penetrate with small arms but would be vulnerable to satchel charges, mortars and rockets. This particular night Charlie was not going to be denied and they brought everything they had to bare on the water wells. Mortars and rockets first, then sappers blew through the wire with bungalow torpedoes and they began to pour into the area. The post was manned with 4 maybe 5 brothers and they were doing all they could to prevent the well from being blown. The landline to CSC to the bunker rang and the Staff Sergeant on post was calling to say that they were being overrun and had abandoned the upper portion of the bunker, had closed the hatch to the underground enclosure and was requesting assistance. The only hope we had to help them was to get some helicopter gunships from Cam Ran Bay but they were tied up in other areas and would not be able to respond in time. This was relayed to the brothers at the water wells and that we were trying all we could to get them help. The Staff Sergeant on post was the same that I met on my first night on post. He began telling me all the things he wanted his wife to know. How much he loved her and the kids and a bunch of other last minute details. I began to cry with him and he asked me to pray with him that they would be rescued from a horrible end and he hung up. All the brothers out there felt that they were goners. As quick as the landline was off CSC was receiving transmissions from a gunship coming into the area. I don't think it was Spooky; it might have been the \$119 gunship that had mini-guns mounted on both sides and a few 20 mm cannons. We immediately got on the landline and told the brothers that help was on the way, to keep their heads down and let the gunship sweep the area. The end of that tale was the wells were not destroyed, the brothers were ok (just a few cuts, bruises and burns). After Panther flight was relieved that morning that Staff Sergeant came to me and said not to ever tell anyone about our landline conversation just a few short hours earlier.

There were many nights that we received mortar and rocket fire (without sapper ground attack) directed at the flight line and revetment areas where the planes were kept, the runways and sometimes the barracks area. On other nights there would be K-9's alerting along the fence line. Almost every night you could count on towers and bunkers reporting individuals walking outside the perimeter fence. One minute you'd see someone the next you didn't. You knew it

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

was Charlie messing with your head. The next time you saw him he could have an AK-47 rifle or a B-40 rocket launcher but unless they were taking hostile action against the base we were under the previously mentioned MACV, Rules of Engagement. These types of harassment proved to be Charlie testing our strengths and weaknesses for much bigger attacks in the future.

The first and largest of the 8+ assaults on Phan Rang, in my six months, came on the 26th of January 1969. At 0029 hours the Juliette Area reported individuals inside the perimeter fence and K-9 and handlers were dispatched. At 0038 hours it was confirmed that the base perimeter had been breached by a hostile force later identified as a North Vietnamese Army sapper squad combined with a mortar and rocket attack. It was the longest night of my life and for quite a large number of Security Police, Korean and Australian Army brothers. It was well into mid-morning before the last of the attacking force began retreating picking up their dead and wounded. Once they turned to retreat the MACV rules were in force and we could not fire on the retreating enemy even after leaving us with dead and wounded brothers and K-9 and destroyed planes, not to mention our lost innocence of such horrible but necessary actions. We had even received shrapnel through the walls of CSC as we were conducting base response to the attack. There were times we were under tables and desks for protection but this was minimal compared to what the troops were dealing with around the base. Sweeps of all areas were conducted by assigned groups of Security Police, Korean and Australian troops to secure the base and recover any dead or wounded. We were ordered to assemble in the guard mount area after we were relieved of post by the day shift. There, we were shown the mangled bodies of the enemy that had been left behind, a sight that will never be forgotten. All the nights of thinking this was the night that Charlie would make a big push to infiltrate the base and the questions we asked of ourselves; what would we do, how would we act, were we up to the task were answered. We Were! It was getting close to noon and that didn't leave a lot of time to go by The Pit for a few beers and get some sleep before the next night duty.

The one night that troubled me for the next 40+ years came somewhere between January 26th and the time I left for Saigon. I don't know the month or the day but this is what I had remembered for years... It was an unusual night because SSgt Kaupa wasn't in CSC which meant that I was the lead that night. The only other person that I remember being present was the duty officer (I seem to remember his name as Capt. White?) coming in from time to time. It was also the night that I was scheduled for a MARS call home. My wife was pregnant with our first

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

child so I was eager to talk with her. The duty officer came into the office so I could take time to receive the call. The call only lasted 10 to 15 minutes and I was back on duty and the duty officer left to make his post rounds. Sometime after his leaving I (CSC) received a transmission from a K9 handler that his dog was alerting and he was observing movement along the outside perimeter fence. I immediately put a call out to all in that area to respond with any confirmation of the reported movement. There was so much response that the transmissions were walking over each other. Many of the transmissions did not get through but it was evident that there were indeed individuals, how many was not clear, walking along the outside perimeter fence. All reports verified that they were armed. Whenever someone in that area tried to transmit you could hear k9 barking and people yelling. All the towers, bunkers and K9 handlers in that area were asking permission to fire on the individuals. There were procedures that we followed in CSC at times like these and first we checked our base map to see the Korean and Australian patrols that were deployed outside the perimeter fence. None had moved nor reported that they were returning to base using a direction that would have put them in that area. Secondly, the Heavy Weapons group would have been contacted to put up illumination over the area to better identify the individuals that at this point had not fired their weapons. All of this was occurring in a matter of minutes and decisions had to be made considering the enemy activity and harassment the base had been under since January 26th. In the midst of turmoil the duty officer had returned to CSC to help in the decision of what and when to do it. At face value there were no friendly's outside the base, these individuals were armed so the duty officer told me to tell all that had site of them to “Lite'em Up”.

The radio traffic got quiet and a transmission came in from a group of Australians coming to base saying not to fire on them. Not Good! What were they doing there and we not know. My guess had always been that when I was on the MARS call with my wife that some information took place that I didn't hear nor was it reflected on the base map when a posted unit moved their location. There were at least two in CSC during that MARS call the duty officer and the assistant complotter (Nat Nastasi) both of which were present when we were trying to figure out who these people were on the perimeter fence.

I'm not sure how long after this that I was awakened during the day time and told to dress in my dress blue's and report to base headquarters in two hours. My blues were somewhere in the bottom of my duffle bag, stored in the CQ building, since I arrived and had the stripes of an Airman 2/C not the Buck Sergeant that I became on Christmas Eve 2008. When I found the

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 “...keeping the memories alive”

duffle bag my blues were wadded in a ball and looked horrible. This was not going to be good. Even worse was to find out that I was giving testimony to the firing on the Australians (an International Incident). I told them exactly as I have written here. All I was told about the Australians was that there were seven wounded and most serious enough to be sent home. Remember, these are the memories I had over a 40+ year period without talking to anyone that might have known about the events I speak of. I find that your mind and memory get things mixed up over a period of time and it helps to have some that was around to keep things clear. It was a matter of hours or days, I don't remember, I was told that needed to pack some things because I would be going on a six month assignment to Saigon.

STAGE 2: CSD/MACV U.S. EMBASSY SAIGON

I boarded a C-130 on the Phan Rang tarmac bound for Tan Son Nhut AB and a meeting at 7th Air Force HQ. A Security Police jeep met me at the plane and drove me to the HQ office of the head of Security Police for all of 7th Air Force. He told me that I was one of the Airmen chosen from each of the Vietnam bases to work at the U S Embassy in support of Security for the Ambassador to Vietnam, Ellsworth Bunker. A TSgt drove me to the Embassy in Saigon to get my ID card and meet those I'd be working with on this new assignment. I was introduced to an SSgt (name?) that was in charge of 10 Security Police from different bases in South Vietnam. The ID card was for Consolidated Studies Division /Military Airlift Command Vietnam (CSD/MACV) and it allowed us authority to be out on the streets of Saigon after curfew and not be picked up. The SSgt drove me to the compound (villa) where most of the team stayed. A few others stayed in a hotel provided to the Embassy State Department employees. On the way to the compound the SSgt told me what the team was all about.

Some were assigned to patrol the State Department residences and check on the private guards that provided 24/7 security. There were two for day shift and two for night shift and they rotated the shifts monthly. A trusted local was assigned to each shift as an interpreter. I never felt real sure that what we were telling them or what they were telling us was being translated right. The only time that we wore uniforms was on patrol. Mostly, we were dressed in civilian clothes and for the most part the embassy personnel didn't know that we were Air Force NCO's.

There was always at least one of the team that spoke Vietnamese and was used in the interrogation of captured Viet Cong or North Vietnamese soldiers. We had access to weapons

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

within our villa compound that ranged from a revolver to a 50 cal, a closed van (no windows) except in the front cab, 2 jeeps and a ¾ ton. The van was detailed in the cargo section to transport prisoners from one location to another for interrogations by different state department groups and sometimes different U S military teams. There were times when prisoners were kept in our compound and because of this our compound had to be able to change locations quickly when it was discovered where the prisoners were being held.

Then there were others who were in charge of recruiting ex-South Vietnamese or honorably discharged soldiers. The recruits were trained in hand -to -hand combat and the use of Russian made weapons. This was all done at a large compound in Saigon where they were housed and fed during the six week training. At the end of each training cycle half of the guards were kept in Saigon to guard the State Department living quarters and the other half were sent to work with MACV advisors throughout Vietnam. Sometimes those that went to MACV were on what were called Black Pajama Parties. We never knew any specific operations they were on but did know that they were used by our military to carry out missions that were eventually blamed on the Viet Cong, thus the Black Pajamas. We did hear some stories but we wouldn't discuss them because there was no firsthand knowledge and to talk about them now would be senseless. I spent the last two months in Saigon as head of this training course.

We carried Embassy radios and were called on to escort State Department individuals to the Embassy (at all hours) for classified meetings and calls, even the Ambassador. The State Department people couldn't be out after curfew so our group provided transportation during curfew hours. Most of the time our group that were checking post were called on to provide this service, since they were traveling all around the city. We would pick them up in our jeeps and hide them under a tarp so the Con Son's (Vietnamese Police) couldn't tell we had someone with us. The Marine Embassy guards would escort them to the communications room and then back down to us for the return trip.

One Thursday a month we had what was called “The Cabbage Run”. We used our ¾ ton that was painted black with skull & crossbones on the ¾” steel plate welded to the front, a 50 cal mounted in the back and a closed van with siren, red lights and loud speaker. We used the siren and flashing lights to clear the people and traffic as we made our way to Bank Of America and then to the embassy. At the bank we picked up the old and worn Military Payment Certificate (MPC) and took it to the embassy roof top incinerator to burn it, the amount always

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

was over a million dollars. This was done to get it out of circulation and keep it out of the Black Market. The exchange for piasters to MPC could be as much as 10 to 1 ratio. A US greenback would bring a much higher exchange rate. We would be joined by one of the State Department folks and a briefcase with the makings for Bloody Mary's, sit back smoking and drinking while throwing money in the fire.

I was not long into this assignment when I read in the Stars & Stripes news of an EC-121 Constellation accident at Korat AFB, Thailand On April 25, 1969 with no crew surviving. My brother-in-law (William D. Stepp) was on the crew of this type aircraft and stationed at Korat. He left the states a month prior to my leaving for the Nam. It was within 24 hours that I received a call from the Red Cross to tell me they were connecting me with my wife (7 ½ months pregnant). She told me that her brother had been on that plane. Her parents and doctor were concerned that the stress could cause problems with the baby so they wanted me to come home. The 7th Air Force wouldn't let me go because he was not my immediate family. At the Embassy they couldn't believe that the circumstances didn't warrant a leave. So somebody, somehow produced a set of leave orders, escorted me to the base and put me on a plane for the states where I was at the side of my wife and unborn child for the funeral. It was a full 30 day leave and hard to leave again for the second time, especially since we had a child on the way.

One of my most favorite moments in Saigon was on July 20th when our team was able to sit in front of the black and white TV along with the two Vietnamese families that lived in the villa and the guards that manned the compound watching Neil Armstrong step on the moon. We had to explain to them what was happening. We took them outside and showed them the moon and said that that man on the TV was walking on the moon. They laughed and said we were “Dinky Dou”, that it was a movie, nobody could walk on the moon. That night it began to sink in, to just how suppressed these people really were.

Occasionally we were asked to meet the planes on the tarmac and escort upper echelon State Department through customs and on to the Embassy without them actually presenting themselves with their baggage to a customs agent. It didn't matter if they were male or female we had to take their passport and baggage and bribe our way through customs and security guards to get out of the base terminal. It wasn't easy or cheap especially when it was a female coming in. It was really exciting on April 31st for some of the guys to help escort President

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 “...keeping the memories alive”

Richard M. Nixon and his wife Pat from the terminal and on to the Embassy. I missed that one being at home for my brother’s funeral.

After Saigon I went back to Phan Rang to finish out my last 19 days in country. They said they wouldn’t put me back on flight duty; instead they gave me the keys to one on those APC’s (M-100?) to make the beach run each day. I think I performed that duty to the best of my ability.

Stage 3: Civilian life

How can I adequately cover 42 of the 45 years it took to realize that I, my family and many others have been affected by my time in the Vietnam? I returned home to my wife and a son (I’d not seen), he was 3 ½ months old. At the end of leave I reported to Craig AFB in Selma, Alabama. I believe it was around the beginning of December 1969 and would be saying goodbye to the Air Force in about 9 months. Our plans were to return home to Mississippi, enroll in college and get on about our lives close, to family and friends. The enrollment in college got me out a couple of months early and I was in classes by September 1970. I went back to college but didn’t earn a degree until 36 years later. Great plan but it didn’t quite work out the way we saw it at the time.

The next 40 or so years, following the Nam, I worked at a number of places, in a number of cities even quit work for two years and attended Bible School which lead to work in church ministries. In 1987 I returned to full time secular work for Entergy Nuclear in Jackson, MS where I worked for 21years and retired in Byram, MS.

As I mentioned, my brother-in-law was killed in 1969 while taking off from Korat AFB to do recon over the DMZ. His plane crashed on take-off and exploded killing the entire crew. We regularly attended the Memorial Day service to honor him and other fallen veterans. I had been successfully erasing my memories of Vietnam and all that happened, especially the night the Aussie’s were shot up. That incident was always lodged in my thoughts. It was at a Memorial Day service about 4 years ago that I sat listening to a representative from each branch of the service give honor to all veterans, deceased and survivors. In the middle of one of the speeches I became very emotional and began to cry for what seemed like no reason. As I sat there thinking why is this happening, the answer came rushing in. It all came down to the doubt, in my mind, that had been there since that Aussie incident. Had I made a good decision that night and has it affected things in my work and family over all these years? This became a question I

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

had to try and answer.

It wasn't many months later that I was visiting with an Air Force buddy, from pre-Nam days, that I was stationed with at Dow AFB, Bangor Maine. Pat and I were on our way to visit our granddaughter in upper state New York so we stopped in Middleport, NY to spend some time with him and his wife. This buddy was now the Director of Veterans Affairs for Niagara County in New York and had been working with veterans issues for years. I talked to him about what I had experienced that Memorial Day and some of the issues that had begun to show up in my body. He suggested that I contact the VA for help sorting these issues out through them. As soon as I got back to Mississippi I made an appointment with the Vietnam Veterans of America and began the dreaded process of working with the VA.

The VA guy I met with listened to me and talked me through some of the details of the night the Aussie's were shot outside the base perimeter and how I felt that it had hindered me physically and emotionally over the years. He encouraged me to try to contact some of my Vietnam brothers and see what they remembered from that night.

I registered with the VA and they told me to file a claim so I could get evaluated for any issues that I felt I needed help or financial compensation. Well you guys know the drill. It took them 1-½ years to set me up for evaluations and another 6 months to tell me that the only issues I had related to Vietnam was a loss of hearing in one ear.

The advice from the VA led me to try and connect with the brothers that I served with so I could share the memories, put names to faces, faces to names and ask questions that I didn't have answers for myself. It has been a rewarding but sometime frustrating journey to locate people that came from all over the United States and had spent maybe just a few months or weeks together. As I've made contact with some of these buddies, I find that during these months or weeks we spent together a special bond was formed and it has taken many of us over forty years to realize how important we are to each other. For example, Nat Nastasi was my hootchmate for just a couple of months but it was connecting with him that answered my questions about the night the Aussie's were fired on at the perimeter fence. Just one short phone call put an end to any doubts I had about what happened that night. Nat, if you ever read this, know that our talk that day was a bright light on a dark memory. Thanks Buddy!

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 “...keeping the memories alive”



Vic Markle, James Sullivan and Rich Hernandez

Let me say to **Joe Kaupa, Vic Markle** and **Rick Hernandez**, “Thanks Buddies, for being a lifeline and willing to connect and stay connected. And for those of you who have shut out this period in your life, I would encourage you to connect with some of your Nam buddies. They may be able to answer a question you may

have or maybe you could answer a question for them. Maybe together y’all could talk about unforgettable moments, put names to familiar faces and faces to long remembered names.



Ian Wheat
No. 2 Sq. (RAAF)

Ian Wheat, No. 2 Sq. (RAAF)

I was born in a small town called Ocean Grove, in the Australian state of Victoria, (Actually in Greelong 14 miles away as Ocean Grove did not have a hospital or full time doctor.

I was famous right then as this was the first time an ambulance had come to Ocean Grove. I grew up there, going through local primary school then to Queenscliff for junior high school.

We moved north to New South Wales (NSW) in 1964 where I finished school in year 10, and the beginning of 1965, I started in my 1st job as a junior clerk in the office of a psychiatric hospital, working for NSW health dept. I Left in January 1966, and Joined the Royal Australian Air Force.

I started off as a trainee motor mechanic, but I didn’t enjoy that and transferred to Airfield Defence Guard (ADG), doing another 12 weeks of very hard and physical training for that Job

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

which is basically life an infantry position. I spent nearly 2 years in our National capital Canberra, and then in November 1970 I was posted to 2 Sqn at Phan Rang AB.

I was informed by my mates that picked me up at the air movements (Air Terminal) on arrival, that I would be Lead scout on my 1st patrol in the morning. **"WELCOME TO VIETNAM"**.

There was a Rocket attack the first Sunday morning that I was in country, and I think it was about three days after my arrival. Pretty much routine for a while, going out on day patrols and night ambushes. I think the routine was day patrol, next day Quick response section and then night ambushes. And then maybe, if things were quiet, a day off to go to the beach.

I remember it wasn't very long after I arrived our Squadron Commanding Officer Wing commander Downing and his navigator were shot down by a SAM, but Luckily ejected safely and picked up two or three days later.

Six months of that routine only broken a little by about twenty days of injections after myself and another ADG were bitten by a puppy our group had as a pet. It was suspected of having rabies so we both had to have injections for the twenty days, then the results came back that the dog was negative to rabies anyway.

In June, 2 Sqn was returned to Australia. I was sent to Vung Tau, no.1 Operational Support Unit. No patrols outside the wire there, just sitting in towers day and night. The only high point was that we could go into the town and visit the bars and barber shops Lol. The Aussie Army at back beach had a nice recreational club and safe surf beach which was welcomed. Six months there and home and I was discharged 1972.

After my discharge, I went back to living with my parents for a time in Newcastle, NSW(New South Wales). I signed up for night school, to study meat inspection, a two year certificate course and that was about February 1972. I met my future wife on April fool's day that year.

While studying and going to night school I undertook jobs that would fit with the time I needed to study (and sleep) i.e. starting early and finishing early. I finished my Meat inspection with final examination end of 1973, got married in March 1974. Moved back to Melbourne in Victoria to start work with the Australian government as a meat inspector, A job I held for the

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 “...keeping the memories alive”

next 14 years in various locations around Australia.

My first child, a son, was born in Melbourne in may 1978. He is now 42 and working as a nurse in Darwin, Northern Territory. He is the father of two of my five Grandchildren, both girls. My next daughter came three years later who is now married with four children, three girls and one boy, my only grandson.

Still working in meat inspection I moved back to NSW, my preferred state, and left that job in 1990. Worked in another government job for another seven years, (getting divorced during that time) when I was retired due to various Vietnam related illnesses. I'm now happily single again, living alone, renovating my old house. Currently remodeling my bathroom. Life is fairly good to me.

I have two wonderful children, both successful. Six darling grandchildren, all growing up to be great citizens. Vietnam still haunts me occasionally, lost a few friends over there, many more since, but I try for the most part to keep it out of my mind. I'm now 72, still quite active, go to a gym three sessions a week. I have a little dog for company, a little English Staffy. Better company than most humans.



James Kucipeck
435th Munition Maint. Sq.

James Kucipeck, 435th Munitions Maintenance Squadron

As with my Phan Rang brothers, we all came of age during the turbulent 60's. My experience at that time of the mid-60s is probably much like theirs. I turned 19 in 1965 and had just graduated from high school and was looking forward to attending college but my grades were not up to par so I had to attend college summer school to bring my grammar and composition skills up to minimum college standards. I attended for about 3 weeks and decided that college wasn't for me and I dropped out.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

Left with no alternative but to find a job to support myself. My first real job was that of a day laborer at the local ski area doing menial jobs, grunt work for lack of a better word. It was the beginning of the school of hard knocks for me and would continue for many years. I soon tired of that job when I had to work through the Fall of '65, cold, windy, rain, and dirty, for low pay! A friend of mine talked about joining the Air Force and I thought that might be something that would interest me, so I contacted the recruiter and of course he was interested in me, a warm body. I took the ASFAB exam and found what skills that I had. At that point I was thinking about learning a trade and had an interest in working with my hands for which I had an aptitude. I took the required physical with what seemed like hundreds of other guys all standing around buck naked, peeing in a bottle and having a blood sample taken. Of course, I passed, why else would I be writing this autobiography. The next question was when to leave for the Air Force.

When I was asked that question, I answered as soon as possible! Well the first opening was the day before Thanksgiving, 1965. I jumped on it and was on my way to Albany, NY to get sworn in and leave for Lackland on Thanksgiving Day. I had never flown on an airplane before and had never left home before but was excited to do so. But I was given my first job, take a group of unruly teenagers with their records entrusted to me from Albany, NY to San Antonio, TX. We made it although I was a nervous wreck, not because I was frightened but about being responsible for these guys and their records.

My arrival was a rude awakening, it was Thanksgiving Day, tired and hungry, we arrived by bus from the San Antonio airport, and we, all sixty of us, were introduced to an Air Force Technical Instructor. My first thought was “what the hell did I get myself into”. We were taken into the chow hall and fed what was supposed to be a Thanksgiving dinner, not like mom made!

Basic training was basic training, enough said. However, during this time frame I had to take an exam to on language proficiency. I don't know why perhaps because I took French in school. Apparently, I had an aptitude for languages, and they told me that there was a possibility of attending a language school for Russian or Mandarin Chinese. Well nothing ever came of that as the Vietnam War was starting to escalate at that time. And because I also displayed a mechanical aptitude it was decided to send me to Munitions and Weapons tech school at Lowry AFB in Denver, CO certainly not the career field that I wanted.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

Prior to attending tech school, the Air Force determined “scientifically” which AFSC I would perform. It went like this; we were told to line up and walk forward to an instructor; as we approached the head of the line, he said Weapons to left Munitions to the right, I was selected for munitions. I was not disappointed because I really didn’t know much about either field. My tech school experience was very much standard like every other E1, class, exams, marching to and from class, and inspections. After 55 yrs. I am not sure the length of school, 8 or 10 weeks and I realize that many Air Force career fields were far longer. During tech school I was selected by the instructors to be class leader, I am not sure to this day why! Being class leader was like herding cats!

As tech school was coming to an end in 1966 it was time to be assigned to an Air Force base across the world. We were called into the “First Shirt’s” office to receive our assignments. We were told as class that we were all going overseas, Japan, France, the Philippines’, and North Africa. There was a “scientific” method to the assignments though, we got to choose the base by selecting a card, high card got first choice. I drew an Ace of Spades and chose Missawa, Japan, a three-year tour, I was all set, so I thought. A week or so later I was called back to see the First Shirt. He had bad news but was smiling and I thought, this can’t be good. Those of us who had chosen Missawa, Japan had an order change, we were now going PCS to Kunsan, Korea, the “Riviera of Korea” for a 13-month isolated tour! There was a silver lining for me though in that three members of my tech school class were going with me!

My first overseas assignment, Kunsan, was not a disappointment by any means. A small base 120 miles south of the DMZ, PACAF, supporting F100s and the ROKAF (Republic of Korea Air Force). I was assigned the 6175th Matron Sq. and worked in a secure office that controlled nuclear weapons. The other component of that squadron was conventional munitions. I worked in that office for 5 or 6 months in charge of manning the radio and general clerical duties. My first introduction to NCO supervisors was terrific, both cross-trainees into the munitions AFSC field. I learned so much from them in leadership and working with enlisted, and officer personnel. Towards of 5 or 6 months I requested to be transferred to the conventional side of the squadron as the Vietnam war was really escalating and I needed to get ready as I knew that I would be going there very shortly. Request granted, the boss agreed that was a good idea!

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

Finally, I was working in the field for which I was trained. Bomb assembly, practice of course, moving munitions, storing munitions. We moved munitions from an old Korean War bomb dump to modern facilities. Kunsan was a Japanese air base during WWII and became an American air base during the Korea War. During my time there we started to ship munitions to Southeast Asia. Towards the end of our tour it was time to fill out our “dream sheet”. It was April of 1967 and it was obvious to me with my career field at that point that returning stateside would be just a quick turn around and back overseas to Southeast Asia, so I volunteered to go to Vietnam. During that time many of the crew in the conventional bomb dump were being reassigned quickly to Thailand and Vietnam. Since I already had received orders for Phan Rang, I stayed for the full 13-month tour.

It is now June of 1967. My PCS to Phan Rang was rather a long round-a-bout trip via some different places and countries all compliments of the US Air Force. From Kunsan, to Osan, Korea; from Osan to Tachikawa, Japan; to Kadena, Okinawa; to Clark AB, Philippines; to Tan Son Nhut, RVN. What a hair-raising landing there in Saigon, I don't know at what altitude that we were flying but upon approach to the airport the pilot announced, “prepare for combat landing”! It seemed like just moments from the announcement I swear that we dove straight down and touched down, I was relieved to have survived that landing.

As a “newbie” to Vietnam I was treated to the oppressive heat experience when the plane door was opened, welcome to Vietnam! Along with the heat new troops were greeted to the smell of Vietnam that came drifting through the door. The odor didn't bother me as I had just come from a 13-month tour in Korea where the smell was about the same when it was hot. After deplaning I along with two buddies from Korea were directed to transient quarters overnight to catch a “hop” to Phan Rang the next day. During our first afternoon at Tan Son Nhut I was just fascinated by all that was going on, military personnel of all services and ranks, planes taking off and landing, “choppers” coming and going, and all manner of military vehicles, the hustle and bustle of an active combat base. The transient chow hall was an exciting experience, we in our 1505s sat among a sea of green jungle fatigues and a mix of enlisted and officers all talking loudly and trying to talk over the sounds of a combat base. I was soon to be a part of this mix! That night we were hit by mortar and rockets, certainly a rude awakening to put it mildly. Awoken abruptly we ran like hell to the nearby bunkers in what seemed like the middle of the day, with all the flares illuminating the night sky. Finally, all clear was sounded and we retreated to our bunks and whatever sleep we could manage.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

The next morning, we ate chow and walked over to the aerial port to try and catch a “hop” down to Phan Rang. Tan Son Nhut to Phan Rang is only about 160 air miles and short trip. We soon were aboard a C-123 with other military personnel. The flight down was short and uneventful. Finally, we arrived at Phan Rang mid-morning the 6th of June 1967. The base was different from that of Tan Son Nhut in that it was more organized in my view, F-100s and B-57, and Canberra’s coming and going on support missions all very new to us who came from a relatively quiet air base in Korea. An orderly came to pick us up from the 435th MMS to which we were assigned for the next year. Viewing the base for the first time from a bus with screen covering the windows was certainly a new experience. Phan Rang was hot, dry and dusty with very little or no vegetation, I would soon learn the reason, Agent Orange. We submitted our paperwork and assigned a bunk in an open bay barracks and told to report to the bomb dump after chow on the day shift truck.

The truck ride out to the bomb dump was a bit odd as that we (I arrived in Vietnam with three buddies from Korea) had become “newbies” again. I listened to the idle chatter which was more BS than any useful information. We received the usual new guy jokes but all in good fun. Some of the guys introduced themselves, some we knew from tech school or Korea. Pulling into the gate of the bomb dump we were met by a security guard and who asked for any flammables. Of course, there were none, they were hidden in their shoes. You could smoke in the break room!

My first introduction was to MSgt. Wall and a tour of the bomb dump, I was taken aback by its size and the amount of munitions available for support mission. My first assignment was to pick up dried napalm, which I think back on was an initiation rite. Well that was one hell of a lousy job, napalm in its normal composition is a thick sticky glutinous substance, when dried and in large pools it is more like scabs on the ground. I got fed up with that job rather quickly and went to MSgt. Wall and told him that we were all 5 levels and should be on the various crews and leave that menial task to the Vietnamese Nationals. He just smiled as if was just testing my mettle! He did not realize that we were all 5 levels as he didn’t read our records. Within a day we were assigned to various crews, napalm assembly, 2.75 rocket shop, 750 and 500 lbs. assembly crews, line delivery, day crew, night crew, etc. I was assigned to day shift, Mk 82, (500 lb. bomb) assembly crew. My new crew chief was A1C Mike Curran, who was to become a great influence on me. Also introduced to the airmen on the crew and to the Vietnamese crew.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

Working on this crew was real education that I carried for the rest of my life. Unlike most of guys at Phan Rang who worked near and with other G I's; I worked with a crew of 10 Vietnamese Nationals. That is not to say that there not any other airmen with whom I worked, but there were more VNs than airmen. While in Korea I worked with Korean Nationals but not in the same way. I worked with the VNs day after day and got to know them very well and had the opportunity know them as individuals rather than in the pejorative term “gook” they were to become friends!

When it was time for my crew chief Mike Curran to leave, I had the unexpected opportunity to become crew chief. It was now my job to run the crew of G I's and VN and support the demanding missions. We built 1000s upon 1000s of 500lb. bombs we also supported other crews when we got ahead on our work quotas. It was a real pleasure to work with “my crew” everyone new their respective jobs and there never seemed to be any personnel issues. However, I was promoted to an A1C and with that came a name change to, Buck Sergeant, but the crew chief assignment was short lived.

I was informed that there was to be a Staff Sergeant assigned to the MK 82 crew, my crew! I was a little dismayed to put it politely. I won't name names but let me tell you a little about him. He was a cross-trainee from another career field, we called them “retreads”. He was very introverted, hated the career field, hated being taken from his primary AFSC, hated being in Vietnam and didn't not know what he was doing. Now that didn't make for a good working relationship for a crew chief and crew. The crew still looked to me for direction even though he was now the crew chief. I did not go above his head and “bitch” but went to him and told him that things were not going well on the crew. I made a deal with him to run the crew on a day to day basis and he could take care of the paperwork and he agreed. That arrangement continued until I left the crew for a TDY to Phu Cat for 60 days.

The pace of supporting the mission became very routine except during the TET Offensive of 1968. Incoming and outgoing munitions during TET amounted 100s of tons per day. We were working 16 to 18 hours a day assembling munitions. Eating and sleeping only when conditions and time allowed. We were always on heightened alert. Short naps were what we called sleep! In thinking back 52 years it seems like all a blur, I can't really remember specifics. We operated as if we were robots. We knew the job and just did it very, very well, I am very proud of “my

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

crew”! Incidentally we worked without the Vietnamese during that time as they were not permitted on base during TET!

At the end of February there were a group of NCOs from Phu Cat to look over our Phan Rang bomb dump operation. Apparently, there was a manning issue and a lack of production to support their mission. Therefore, myself and a group of airmen from the 435th MMS were selected and sent to Phu Cat to support and straighten out their operation for 60 days. We flew from Phan Rang to Cam Ranh Bay to Qui Nhon and went by bus to Phu Cat. We basically brought our procedures and manpower to get Phu Cat bomb dump on task. Our brief stay there was relatively uneventful as far as I can recall. It was time to return to our home base.

Upon return to Phan Rang, my MK 82 crew was now being run by the NCO who didn't want to be there and incidentally, promoted to Tech Sergeant from his old AFSC. Obviously, I didn't return to that crew nor did I want to and was subsequently reassigned to be a RT forklift operator (Rough Terrain) unloading all incoming munitions and moving explosives around the bomb dump. I only had that job for about a month as the end of my tour in Vietnam was coming to an end as of June 1, 1968.

Once I had my order to leave Vietnam I was relieved of duty and reassigned to Hill AFB. I said my goodbyes to guys in the bomb dump and to the Vietnamese Nationals with whom I worked. I left Phan Rang on or about June 3, 1968 and flew to Cam Ranh Bay to catch the Freedom Bird home. I had now been gone from the “States” a total of 25 months between Korea and Vietnam. The arrival home is whole other story that maybe I will address some day.

In closing I must add that the Phan Rang experience changed my life forever. I worked and lived with some outstanding people. My supervising NCO's were outstanding, and I must recognize them, MSgt. Wall, SMSgt. Lanovara, and TSgt. Frye. They were great role models and great leaders and I learned a lot from them. I am glad that I went to Vietnam and did my part. It is one the benchmarks in my life. The lasting effects are great memories, and maybe not so great memories. I have been left with some lasting medical and psychological issues, namely neuropathy from Agent Orange and PTSD.

I took an “early out” of 9 months as I wanted to be a civilian again. I worked odd jobs for awhile and decided that they were all a dead end. I decided to go college on the G I Bill and received

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 “...keeping the memories alive”

several degrees, married, had three children and taught high school for 31 yrs.



Harold Hoa Bach
14th Special Operations Wg.

Harold Hoa Bach, Navigator, 14th Special Operations Wing

VNAF CAPTAIN HAROLD HOA BACH: Born November 18, 1943 at Kien An, Haiphong, North Vietnam. Moved to South Vietnam during immigration in 1954 after Geneva Accords divided Vietnam into two parts at parallel 17. North was Communist and South was Freedom. Graduated from high school in Saigon during 1963.

Drafted by government February 1968. Attended Reserve Officer Training at Dong De Training Base, Nha Trang. Graduated and served in the Army of Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) as platoon commander attending to daily operations around the border of Saigon.

Volunteered for Vietnam Air Force (VNAF) July 1969. Sent to United States of America for helicopter pilot training at Fort Wolters, Texas. Unsuccessful at pilot training, returned to Vietnam. Attended and successfully completed navigator training at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon. Assigned to 817th AC-47 “Spooky” Squadron at Tan Son Nhut for four months before being assigned to AC-119G “Shadow” Combat Aircrew Training Program with 14th Special Operations Wing at Phan Rang Air Base. Successfully completed navigator training on March 12, 1971 and assigned to 819th Squadron, 5th Division of VNAF. Flew many, many AC-119G combat missions in Vietnam and Cambodia.

Assigned to 18th Special Operations Squadron at DaNang for Special Operations School AC-119K “Stinger”. First Lieutenant Bach successfully completed AC-119K navigator training and instructor navigator training on February 15, 1973. Bach was also qualified as SEFE on the K-model by USAF Lt.Col. Philip A. Deering. Bach’s last rank in the VNAF was First Lieutenant but upon receipt of a memorandum, he ultimately attained the rank of Captain.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 “...keeping the memories alive”

The Republic of Vietnam fell on April 30, 1975 and Bach fled from Saigon and returned to the United States of America as a refugee at Camp Pendleton, California. In 1983, Bach became an American citizen and changed his name from HOA NGOC BACH to HAROLD HOA BACH.

Bach retired September 20, 2004 after 28 years of service at Toyota Company as Press Operator (2 years), Quality Assurance (2 years), Production Planner (10 years), CAD Specialist (14 years) for the Manufacturing Engineering Department.

The following was part of William Gericke’s autobiography in Phan Rang Newsletter 212, but I thought it was so significant I wanted to include it here:

The Americanization of Harold Bach

In spring 1971, the 17th Special Operations Squadron at Phan Rang began training Vietnamese Air Force members in the AC-119G aircraft and the Shadow mission. I was the instructor navigator assigned to one of the first VNAF crews to undergo training. One of my students was Lt. Hoa Ngoc Bach. Hoa spoke good English and had completed the VNAF navigator training course, so I trained him as the crew navigator.

Hoa was a bright student and was quick to exhibit leadership and initiative. On our third or fourth training mission, we received an urgent request from an ARVN unit that was being harassed by a VC unit. The unit was nearby and we were on the scene almost immediately. However, we quickly discovered that our ground contact spoke no English, or at least not enough to rely on him for target identification. Hoa instantly became the translator/communicator/coordinator. Through Hoa we located the friendly forces, got clearance to fire, and surprised the VC with our quick reaction.

I returned to RVN in the spring of 1972 during the VC/Chi Com invasion across the DMZ. I was delighted to reconnect with Hoa’s crew and fly a couple of missions with them. They were mostly the same folks we trained the previous spring. It was evident we did a good job training them. They flew the mission well and displayed good basic procedures. The most unusual part of those flights was the intercom communication. All conversation was in Vietnamese except for the Check List. I heard lots of Vietnamese chatter, then “Gear up!” or “Cruise Power.”

I returned to the U.S. not expecting to see Hoa again. However, after the fall of Saigon in April 1975, I received a telegram from Hoa. He and his new wife, Thu, were at the refugee camp in

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

Ontario, California. I too was newly married. My new bride and I decided not only to sponsor Hoa and Thu, but have them come to Fort Walton Beach and live with us until they could get settled.

They arrived without any luggage; it was either lost or stolen while at the camp. Hoa could only find menial jobs, but after six months they were able to rent an apartment. We bought them a VW bug and I found myself again being Hoa’s instructor as he learned to drive the VW. Fortunately, Hoa was a fast learner (he had been a teacher before entering the Vietnamese Air Force).

After nine months, Hoa, Thu, and two other couples relocated to “Little Saigon” - the Los Angeles area, where both Hoa and Thu found work. Hoa began as a laborer with Long Beach Fabricators, a company that assembled Toyota trucks. For two years he worked from about 0600 to 1400, went home, ate, napped, and then attended evening computer classes until 2200 hours. After completing his course work, his employer placed him in charge of inventory control. Hoa worked for the same company for 28 years. While working, the couple purchased a house in Long Beach and, over the years, served as sponsors to 21 family members coming to the U.S. It was my pleasure to welcome Hoa to America and my privilege to provide him a Lifetime Membership in the AC- 119 Gunship Association.



El Hoard
35th Security Police Sq.

El Hoard, 35th Security Police Squadron



El Hoard in Vietnam

I was born in 1947, in my maternal grandparents home during a 4H Club meeting in Bay, AR. Started 1st grade at 5 years old in a one room schoolhouse in Weona, AR. where grades 1 through 12 were taught by a single teacher all within the one room building. There was one outhouse that serviced both boys and girls, behind the schoolhouse, which has long been

The Phan Rang AB News No. 215

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

gone.

Spent my formative years, never going to the same school more than a year except for my Junior and Senior years, which is another story for another day. I graduated in 1965 and went to Memphis State University taking Premed courses, before getting caught up in the Vietnam war and joining the Air Force.

Went through basic training at Lackland AFB where just before graduation, we were quarantined when an airman in our barracks died from spinal meningitis causing all of us to be set back and having our post basic training orders changed to other MOS, mostly to Security which was badly needed due to the escalation in Nam.

Spent 18 months at Kadena AB on Okinawa in Security with my last 10 months as a K9 handler. When I rotated back to the US, I was sent to KI Sawyer AFB, a SAC base on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan as a base MP. I learned of a new group with specialized training being formed, applied for it and was accepted. Little did I know at the time what I was in for until I arrived at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, where we learned that we would be receiving Special Force Combat and jungle warfare training by Army Rangers and a cadre from the 1041 CSPS who we would be replacing in NAM.

On the rare occasions we had off, we partied at the Lemon Tree Lounge on Waikiki. The band was out of LA and was named, The Orange Colored Sky. We were a rough and crazy bunch, who were known to have a good time when we walked through the door. Apparently we developed a reputation as many years later, I ran into the band in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1985. The two guys that originally started the band together even recognized me from the club in Hawaii. He looked up and shouted, hey, that’s one of those Special Forces guys we played for in Waikiki. We had a great reunion.

After a tough 16 weeks of hard training and brainwashing, we were ready to leave directly for Vietnam, in our fueled up C-141. The flight was long, loud, and arduous. The aircraft was refueled in Okinawa, and a stop on Wake Island for engine issues, before landing at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. We were less than half the number of original trainees so we felt pretty special. I graduated and was assigned to the 822nd Combat Security Police Squadron in July, 1968.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

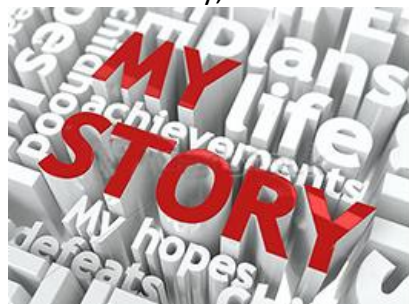
Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

Our original TDY 6 month assignment was extended to 9 months because of TET. We were replaced by the 823rd CSPA and sent to Seymour Johnson AFB in North Carolina to continue our training under the Army Rangers, afterwards which we were headed back to Vietnam for redeployment.

While home on leave, I was made aware that the Air Force had extended an early out program, so I reported to Seymour Johnson AFB a week early to take advantage of the program. Arrived on base at about 3:00 AM and was put in a temporary bunk where I was awake for calisthenics, and a 10 mile run in a rainstorm. After 3 years, 3 months, 13 days, and 1 minute, I was out of the AF and driving out the gate on my way to Hilton Head, SC and my new life.

I married the love of my life upon returning to Memphis that set a course for me in the stationery industry. I started selling office supplies, furniture, and equipment, to spending 23 years with ACCO World Corporation, a Fortune 500 and America’s largest manufacturer of stationery and office furniture company, where I ended up as the National Sales Manager responsible for their \$120 million Retail Sales Division. I traveled extensively across America and at times internationally. I retired in 2012 at 65 to spend more time with our two married children, and 4 grandsons.

My wife, Debbie and I celebrated 50 years on July 10, 2020 and look forward to spending more time with family, friends and our cabin on a bluff overlooking the beautiful Tennessee River.



John Pirkkala
352nd Tactical Fighter Sq.

Henry John Pirkkala Jr., Pilot, 352nd Tactical Fighter Squadron (Yellow Jackets)

Born New Castle, Pa. 11 September 1940. School: Union Township High, graduated in 1958. Entered Aviation Cadet as Navigator In December 1959. At Lackland AFB (pre flight basic training) Next went to Harlingen AFB, Texas. for Navigator training and commission. Graduated November 1960 as a 2nd Lt./navigator. Next assignment was at James Connely AFB, Waco Texas

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

for back seat F-89 training. Then on to Kingsley Field, Klamath Falls, Oregon in 1961, backseat F-101B voodoo ADC interceptor.

Entered pilot training, Laredo AFB, Texas in June 1966 and Graduated in 1967. Won the flying training trophy and the Distinguished Graduate Award, an honor bestowed on the top 10 percent of the class. Entered F-100 training in August 1967 at Cannon AFB, New Mexico.

On to Phan Rang AB, Vietnam, April 1968 assigned to the 352nd Tactical Fighter Squadron (Yellow Jackets), 35th Tactical Fighter Wing. After 25 missions I was put on alert status. At 50 missions I upgraded to element Lead and after 100 missions upgraded to full flight lead status which meant you could lead missions regardless of wingman experience. Won the local 35th Tactical Fighter Wing top gun in late 1968 or early 1969---based on BDA (bomb damage assessment).



I was almost killed five times out of 257 missions flown. Two were my fault, two were aircraft issues and one from battle damage. One mission Off alert I was on a practice lead with my boss, Elmer Slavey on my wing when we went in at Dac Lap at dusk which is Due west of Phan Rang next to Cambodia.

The VC/NVA were on a small mountain overlooking Dac Lap and were attacking the village. We dropped our bombs and napalm on them, but when I rolled in on them for strafe (20mm) that whole mountain opened up on me like something out of A WWII movie. I was ducking in the cockpit, tracers going by me Roman candles. I went down to the tree tops jerking left and right, and my wingman says “hey perk, they’re shooting at you” to which I replied “No shit GI”.

When he rolled in they opened up on him and I said, “Hey Elmer- they’re shooting at you too” to which he replied, “Christ I haven’t shot been at like that since North Vietnam” (Note: Elmer

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

was A Misty fast FAC serving out of Phu Cat before coming down to Phan Rang). We both made a second strafe with similar results and we were glad to get out of there. We checked each other out for battle damage on the way home and wrote up the aircraft. No way could we gotten out of there without being hit. Needless to say we closed the bar that night. Maintenance told us, neither plane was hit. **When it’s not your time—it’s not your time.**

Married my high school sweetheart Carol in 1962. I have two daughters Lisa and Sonja.



Anton Frank Bautz
18th Special Operations Sq

Anton "Tony" Frank Bautz, Pilot, 18th Special Operations Squadron

Novi Vrbas, Yugoslavia was my birthplace in 1931. I graduated from high school in Augustinerschule, Friedberg, Hessen, Germany in 1951. After arriving in the USA as a legal immigrant on September 5, 1951, I joined the USAF in January 1952 and eventually applied for Pilot Training. I became a U.S. Citizen in November 1953. After taking required aptitude and physical tests, I started Aviation Cadet Pilot Training in February 1954. I graduated in May 1955 at Goodfellow AFB, Texas as Pilot (Class 55N) and as Second Lieutenant Bautz, USAF.

In 1970, I was assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron as an aircraft commander and instructor pilot. I flew 137 combat missions, most of them at night, as well as several day missions over Cambodia. On most combat missions, we encountered 37mm AAA over Cambodia and heavy ground machine gun fire. Our aircraft occasionally ended up with several bullet holes, but no major damage. We also participated in TIC (troops-in-contact) missions in support of the U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps Units. We supported ARVN and other allies (Cambodian units) as well. Most of our combat missions consisted of armed reconnaissance (truck hunting) missions over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. Basically, most missions were exciting in the context of finding and destroying enemy military positions, vehicles, and material.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

The thing I remember most about my time with AC-119 gunships was that crew coordination and cooperation during combat missions was always outstanding. We developed close friendships based on mutual respect, reliance, and expertise among fellow crewmembers; some friendships developed during those years have lasted until present times. In retrospect I shall always recall my exposure to Vietnamese and Thai customs, foods, and visits to shrines. At Nakhon Phanom, several among us also visited Thai Grade Schools, taking the children some treats, and introducing them to the sights and sounds of Americans. We also had some squadron parties and got to know many of our fellow-airmen, as well as our Detachment Commanders. I often think back to our maintenance men who did an outstanding job in keeping our AC-119K Stinger Gunships in excellent flying shape.

The hardest part of my combat tour was being away from my wife and sons. Especially sad was the loneliness on Christmas Eve 1970. I am proud of having been part of the USAF Gunship Operations during the Vietnam War.

I graduated from Colorado State University with a BS degree in Electrical Engineering in 1965 and I graduated from Texas A&M University at College Station with a Master of Science OCN in 1974. I retired as Major from the USAF with twenty years active duty service at Bergstrom AFB, Austin, Texas on January 31, 1972. During those years, I accumulated approximately 5,900 flying hours.

My flying experience was mainly in C-119, C-123, C-47, C-124, U-3A, T-29, and AC-119 aircraft. However, during 1959, while flying test flights at Tinker AFB, I also got flying time in T-33, C-45, JC-97 and KC-135 aircraft. My wife, Renate, and I currently live in Willow Park, Texas.



Ken Swickard
35th USAF Dispensary

Ken Swickard, 35th USAF Dispensary

I was born in October of 1944 in Inglewood, CA, where what is now the main runway of Los

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

Angeles International Airport. I was the second of three off-springs with my sister, two years older, and my brother, six years younger. I always called him the accident. My folks always reminded me that he actually was the only one planned. The family moved to Paso Robles, CA. for a few years and in mid 1948 we moved to Yreka, CA which is about 22 miles south of the Oregon border on then U.S. Highway 99 (later to become Interstate 5). I had a great time growing up in small real communities as we moved around Northern California (Mt. Shasta, Hilt, Chico, and Yreka) following our father around from job location to job location.

One would know by my grades that I was not the brightest light bulb in the room (not a lack of intelligence, but rather a low motivation factor). I was, however, very mechanically inclined. That ability, along with getting over the fear of speaking in public, allowed me to have a very exciting life with a full pot of memories to feed off of. After high school (Yreka Union) and a year of Police Science at Shasta College in Redding, Ca. I joined the active duty Air Force on March 2, 1964 and spent 12 years there before leaving. After a few years, I joined the Air Force Reserves for 8 more. In the wisdom of the military they made the guy, who was deathly afraid of needles, a medic. I joined to see the world and my first permanent base was Kingsley Field AFB at Klamath Falls, Oregon, 80 miles from home in 1964. I retired from the 12th USAF Contingency Hospital (Reserves) at Travis AFB in 1988 as a Master Sgt. and am a Certified Biomedical Equipment Technician (Radiology Service).

I am with the same lovely bride that I married in 1969 and currently have two children (one married and one looking around), and 4 grand kids (one with a spouse) plus one Great Grand Daughter. (Isn't it a wonder that those children become adults, but you are a parent forever). I have had, and still am having, an interesting and full life. My active duty tour was from 1964 to 1976. After Basic at Lackland AFB and 90010 (medical Funnies) at Greenville AFB, Miss, I was assigned to one base in Oregon (Kingsley Field, AFB, 1964-1965) 7 bases in Alaska (PCA) 1966 - 1967, two bases in California (Travis in 1967 and Hamilton 1969-1970), one each in Ohio (Lockbourne, 1973-1974) and Texas (Sheppard 1972-1973 and 1974-1975). I was given an all expenses paid trip to Exotic Southeast Asia (Vietnam 1968) and was able to enjoy the fireworks of the Tet Celebration while stationed at Phan Rang AB. Since the Air Force must have decided that I had not moved around enough, in 1970 they gave me the opportunity to live in Avellino, Italy for two years playing doctor to 150 men and their 250 dependents while assigned as the site medic at Mt. Vergine AS which was on a mountain top looking down on Naples.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

When I returned from Italy in 1972, I left the clinical side of medicine and cross-trained into Biomedical Equipment Repair (BMET). I found the equipment to be far less demanding than the human patients. After I graduated with honors from that course in 1973 and assigned to Lockbourne AFB, the Air Force decided that all honor students would volunteer (involuntarily of course) to become Training Instructors. I, the kid who stuttered for half his life and was afraid to speak in public found myself back at Sheppard in 1974, building lesson plans, quantifying exams, and even enjoying it. I left the security of the military family, with the bride and two small children, and jumped into the Civilian World in late December of 1975. Three days after I left the military, I was offered the position of Director of Clinical Instrumentation at Marin General Hospital in Greenbrae, CA. (just north of San Francisco). In addition to my 4 years at Marin General, I spent 3.5 years as a reserve Sworn Police Officer for the City of Petaluma.

In 1979 I tried my own business in Biomedical Services in Redding Ca., but lost it during the Carter years of business killing high interest rates. I then worked for 3 years as a Clerk and Carrier for the US Postal Service. Wouldn't you know it, I ended up throwing the Yreka Box at the Redding MSO (Mail Sorting Office). Missing the Biomedical field, I joined the Air Force Reserves in mid 1980 as a BMET. Word got around of my abilities and I soon found myself working for Sutter Health Systems in Sacramento, Ca, and for 10 years I was the Radiology Service Supervisor. In early 1990, Sutter Health had me open and supervise a satellite office in Redding. We served all of the medical equipment needs of the surrounding rural communities. In 1994 Sutter Health had a RIF (Reduction in Force) and my position was eliminated along with 80 others. We (the Bride and I) moved to Nampa, Idaho from Redding in 94, and I took a position as a Computerized Tomography (CT) Field Service Engineer. My new employer (Elscent/Marconi/Philips) allowed me to spend six months in Haifa, Israel and six months in Eindhoven, The Netherlands, attending advanced service schools. I moved again, in 2000, back to Redding (Philips company transfer). My companies contract with Shasta Regional Medical Center expired in January of 2009, as did my position, and we (Bride and I) moved back to Boise, Idaho to be closer to family (Sister, brother, niece, son, daughter, and all four grandkids [with one great-grand]) now live in the Boise area).

I worked for Trinity Health Clinical Engineering as an Imaging Services Specialist at St. Alphonsus Health Systems in Boise/Nampa, Idaho and Ontario/Baker City, Oregon and retired from that position in January 2013. I joined the Idaho Mountain Search and Rescue Unit (IMSARU) in October of 2013 and have been very active with them since. I am a Certified

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 “...keeping the memories alive”

Search Technician as well as a Certified Apprentice ManTracker. I was the Director of Logistics for a year and have been the Public Relations Director for the last three years. My Bride and I love to archery hunt the amazing Wapiti (elk for you non-hunters), while we are not fishing or out rescuing someone, and have become dedicated Bronco Nation citizens. GO BOISE STATE!



Christopher Boles
600 Photo Sq.

Christopher Boles, Photographer, 600th Photo Squadron

A Photographers Journey - As told by Christopher Boles

At the age of my 7th birthday, I was given a gift of a Brownie 127 camera. You just aimed and pushed the little white button. Then you advanced the film and you were ready for the next frame. My first outing was to the new Disneyland in Anaheim. I was given one roll of color negative and 1 roll of black and white. Needless to say before the end of the day, I was out of film.

A few years pass and high school classes loomed on the horizon. I needed an elective and chose photography. My goal was to take better pictures. It was that decision that changed my life forever. Some would say it was God that chose my profession and avocation. The first two weeks were a struggle for me as I had no idea how to compensate for exposure by f/stops and shutter speeds. I made a strip of shutter speeds and one of f/stops. While playing with the strips, the light went on in the dark room. It was then that everything was double or half, and then in multiples of 2. Three stops in exposure ws either 8x more light or less light.

The photography instructor was very kind to me and let me borrow a school camera. We rolled our own film and processed the film in the school darkroom. We had 6 enlargers. I lived in the darkroom as it was fun to see the paper image come up as you rocked the trays.

I wound up being one of the school photographers for the school attending all of the pep

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

rallies, parades, basketball games and the other sports. Over the two years I perfected taking photos. After high school I took a night class at the local college. One night the instructor pulled me aside and said basically I was far more advanced than anyone there so you might want to consider another class.

From my work I started making payments on a Minolta SRT101 with a built in light meter. I bought a device to roll my own film into canisters. My parents were not happy with me when at night I monopolized the the bathroom processing my film. I bought a long lens and started taking pictures of girls bathing at the beach on color slide film. I was able to process Ansco color slide film and self mount them.

In 1967 I received my draft notice and had previously taken the test to see if could bet in. The recruiter said he was taking 3 that month of April 1968. I was the lucky number 3. I had heard from my best friend that enlisted before me that I could bring a “small” camera with me. I bought a Minolta 16mm film camera. Basically, it was almost a spy camera. In basic those that had the habit of smoking were allowed to have a small plastic pouch with elastic straps to carry their cigarettes around their ankle. I bought one and carried that little camera with me. I got caught by the TI and with some swift talking he allowed me to carry the camera and only use it at smoke breaks.

I took the by-pass test and passed. My orders were to go to Vandenberg AFB. I reported in June of 1968 to the 1369th Photo Squadron as my first duty station. It was there that I was teamed with a civilian photographer Mr. Tougas. He taught me things I never knew about films and photography. It was a great time to be at Vandenberg as they were launching a lot of missiles. By Christmas of 1968 I had been through all the classes for “flying status” and had my orders for Vietnam.

The day after Christmas I was on my way out of country to Vietnam. We landed at Clark AB and started jungle survival courses of water ejection, jungle survival snake school, and escape and evasion. It was like for me going to summer camp as a boy scout. The time there was fun. I met up with my roomie from basic training and met a friend by accident at the BX from my high school class.

We left Clark and landed at Ton Sun Nhut AB. Like they said the first thing you notice is the

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 “...keeping the memories alive”

humidity. We were shown our barracks bunk and where we were to report for work. What they didn't say was that all night the helicopters were flying over the barracks. I was not getting any sleep. After two days of that I told the NCOIC I wanted out of there and I didn't care where they sent me. That afternoon I was handed my transfer to Phan Rang AB. The next morning I was on a flight to “who knows where.” I expected to be dropped at a dirt air strip in the middle of nowhere. Instead we landed on a concrete runway.



Chris Boles

That is where I started my time at PRAB January 1969 assigned to the 600th Photo Squadron Detachment 5. I was not allowed to have a photo assignment when I got there so I lived in the darkroom printing someone else's negatives. We printed 25 copies of each press release. The night the VC attacked the base, with the rockets, mortar's and flares going up everywhere was something to remember. We were told to get our rifles and equipment to stand by for pick up. Then everything started to calm down and stand down.

The next morning 3 of the photographers went out with people and came back with lots of film to be processed.

Once the contact prints were made and delivered to the proper authorities we lived in the dark room for the next 3 weeks, 12 hour days printing, washing and drying stacks of prints of all the damage. We had stacks of prints all over the lab lined up against the walls. We ran out of paper and had to have an emergency run from Ton Son Nhut for more. Even then what we got was heat fogged and had to order again.

After I started taking photos I was on a regular call from the Information Office with TSgt Mahoney. He and I went all over on and off base taking press release photos to go with his stories. Later on I hooked up with SSgt. Mancer of Red Horse and the same thing happened. These guys would call up and pick me up and away we would go. One day the MSgt Dees said that I was getting to much work and the other photographers would be getting some of my assignments.

So I started to hunt for my own stories and photos. One self-assignment was to go out to the

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

end of the road to Dalat and photograph the asphalt crews. I would wander the flight light at night taking images and processing them. Then I found out that I could take my day off and hop on a C-123 and fly all over country. I would take my camera, load my pockets up with roll film and head off for the day.

One day we were flying formation with two other C-123's to do a troop movement for the ARVN. I asked to open the back ramp and once I was strapped in, I walked to the end of the ramp. The other planes came in behind. I went through two rolls of film before I realized it. When I got back I turned in the color slide film I used for processing. We had mixed results with the chemistry as sometimes the film came out and other times it just ...failed. I took my chances. After a couple of hours the lab tech came and got me and took me to the dark room. He pointed to several rolls of color film on the line and there was nothing there. It was just the clear backing that the emulsion was attached to. I asked him where are my images. He pointed to the floor and there was a pile of sticky goo on the floor. The emulsion hardener failed and all of my images were on the floor. All of those beautiful images were gone. From then on I sent my film off to Japan for processing. That is why I still have great looking slides to this day.

In June or July of 1969, I went with one of the fighter groups to town for a civic action project. One of the pilots Capt. Roland Stanley brought along his guitar to play for the kids. He was with a bunch of kids and they were admiring his moustache. I had one frame left on the last roll in the camera. I asked him to let the kids touch his moustache one more time. The kids reached in and I took the image. They had pulled his moustache and he gave a grimace. That photo was selected for the 7th AF News. As a result I was made the top photographer of the month for August 1969 for all of SEA. The photo went on to be on the cover of the AF Times in December 1969. The reason I know this is that I was standing in line at the BX at Vandenberg AFB after processing back in with some items. There was the news rack with the latest copy and my photo was on the cover. That will make your day!

One day an Army colonel walks in and says he was looking for a photographer to do a special assignment. The 4 of us were sitting there and no one said anything. I finally spoke up and said what is the assignment? The man was Colonel Fairy of the 2nd of the 1st army over on the other side of the base. He put a movie camera and a huge stack of 8mm film on the counter. He said he wanted to have the fire bases photographed from the air and the terrain from Phan Rang to Ban Me Thot. I said I would do it. He hand wrote me out a letter to show the helicopter pilots

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

and I could hop on a ride and go anytime. I was also promised a ride in a Cobra gunship (never happened). So on my day off I hopped on board and started filming. I sent the film via courier over to him for processing and editing.

On Thanksgiving day (another story for another time) I was invited to have dinner with the colonel and his staff. After we ate he presented to me a Montanard bow and a certificate with a pin making me an honorary member of the 2nd of the 1st Dragoons. That pin and certificate has been a highlight of my time there.

Then there was the time MSgt. Dees sat me down and said he had a special assignment for me. It would either make me famous or break me. MSgt. Shell from the Information office had come in and said that the presidents’ son in law would be getting an air medal. Of course we all chuckled a bit as we saw more combat than he did. It was going to be a big deal with a band, flags and Generals from all over for the ceremony. Dees’ picked me. He said to me, “I am choosing you as I know you can pull this off more than some of the others here.” I was told I would get 1 photo. The appointed day came and I was nervous as I must have checked my camera gear several times to make sure there were no screw ups. Msgt Shell picked me up and away we went. The event was a big deal as it had all the elements. When the general went down the reviewing stand I was go out and take the photo of the medal being pinned on. I took the photo and politely asked for two more just in case anyone blinked. The general looked at me and said you can take all you want. After 3 shots I left and headed back to the lab. There was the developer in the tank. I popped the lights and dropped the film into the can. After a few inutes of processing out came the roll, washed in water and alcohol dried it. Into the enlarger and we cranked out 25 wet prints that were put between paper towels and off to Ton Sun Nhut they were on a waiting C-123. They were on the news the next day.

Another interesting experience was when TSgt Mahoney came into the office and said he needed some photos of the interpreters that were flying on the Shadows. He had found a pilot and one of the interpreters for a photoshoot. We went out to the plane and that is where we posed them against the "Charlie Chaser" airplane art. Then we went inside and I posed the interpreter as if he was talking to someone, using off-camera flash to make it look like inside lighting.

I was privileged to fly on the first two missions of that airplane from Phan Rang. Again, it was

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

one of those opportunities that I did not take more photographs. It was black inside that plane at night with red lights. Any time that flash went off it was like daylight in there. As a result, I did not take a lot of pictures.

I left Phan Rang on December 16th 1969. After Christmas I reported back to Vandenberg AFB where I finished out my enlistment shooting missiles and launches. It was in Vietnam that I applied to Brooks Institute of Photography in Santa Barbara, CA. I had to wait for two years after I got out of the AF to start school, as the waiting list was that long. While at Brooks I took top honors in a major photo contest, and garnered one of the highest award in professional photography at the time. My image of a drilling rig on the Pacific coastline was one of 100 prints of over 10,000 images submitted, to travel the US as examples of professional photography.

After graduation I went to work at the Rockwell Science Center after working at Photomat labs processing film. At Rockwell they were on the cutting edge of research. That cell phone you have or that tablet, was where I got to see the prototype for the colored screen. My slides and prints were used in scientific journals and shows all over the world symposiums.

After 4 ½ years there, I burned out. It would be 14 years before I would ever touch another camera. It was when the new HP digital camera came out that I got excited and have never looked back. The fire was lit once again, as I have had my work in shows and published in magazines.

Some of you know that I have a 3 image panorama of Phan Rang AB taken from the side of Nui Dat mountain. It was shot on 6x7 roll film. The negatives were scanned and I put together a panorama of the base. I see that image every time I go into my garage thinking about what a great place it was and how it shaped me as a photographer. It is hard to image what I see in the photo, is all gone. It is truly a historical documentary photograph.

When so many of my fellow photographers cleared country, their images were confiscated. I have my negatives, slides, prints and newspapers that I saved as I sent them home in my personal box. Those will all be donated to the AF museum upon my passing. Doug Severt uploaded my images to Ancestry.com for the people to use to help with their family trees.

I do not shoot for an income now, only for me personal satisfaction, There is always another

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 “...keeping the memories alive”

award winning image out there, I just have to go find it.

As a footnote, in all of SEA there were only 2500 or less people that worked for the 600th and 601st Photo squadrons and about 120 photographers in the 8 years we were there. We lost 10 photographers on combat missions.



James E. Mattison
71st Special Operations Sq.

James E. Mattison, Gunner, 71st Special Operations Squadron

I was born in Glens Falls, NY, 11 November 1947. I joined the USAF in 1967, had basic military training at Lackland AFB, TX. and technical school at Lowry AFB, CO. My first assignment was Det. 1 29th FIS, Logan Field (Billings) MT., followed by in Command transfer to 5th FIS Minot AFB, ND., Jan 1968.

While at Minot, I volunteered for Program Palace Gun. I was selected for a position as Aerial Gunner (A46250) under Project Combat Hornet. Received Altitude Chamber training at Ellsworth AFB, SD, in the Fall of 1968.

I did a permanent change of assignment (PCA) to Combat Crew Training at Lockbourne AFB, OH. and during that training I was assigned to 71st Air Commando/Special Operations Squadron as an Aerial Gunner aboard AC-119G gunships.

December 1968, I deployed with the 71st Special Operations Squadron under DOD direction to Nha Trang AB, Republic of Vietnam. As part of the 2nd/main element of the deployment, I flew from Lockbourne AFB, OH via C-141 through Elmendorf, AK and Yokota AB, Japan, arriving in Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN.

After going through Customs, our group was herded out to the ramp to await our transport to Clark AB, Philippines for USAF Jungle Survival Training; AKA “Snake School”. Upon completion of

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 “...keeping the memories alive”

Snake School we rejoined the rest of our squadron; the 71st SOS at Nha Trang AB, RVN, attached to the 14th Special Operations Wing.



Jim Mattison at the Mini Gun on the AC-119.

As an A1C (E-3), I was an Aerial Gunner, part of an 8 man crew. Major Richard E Morgan was my Aircraft Commander and my fellow gunner was Sgt Greg Terral. From early January to early February, we flew regularly scheduled combat missions. These missions were designed to train us and evaluate the aircraft for Operational Readiness. We were given the Call Sign “Shadow”.

The missions we were assigned were varied in scope. At least once we were scheduled to fly up the Ashau Valley in search of an enemy mobile 37mm AAA gun. The gun was suspected to be hidden in a cave along the ridgelines of the Valley. The gun was taking a toll on America Fighters traversing the Valley on their way up North. Our night vision systems would be critical to finding the gun before it was able to inflict more damage. Our crew never did find the gun. I’m not sure if any other crew found it.

Another mission was called the *UFO Box*. It was a set of coordinates prescribing a “box” where suspected enemy air assets might be operating. Our Squadron had a nightly fragged *UFO Box* mission. One night, our crew found four separate air vehicles operating along a ridge. We waited for hours for permission to fire upon the targets as they went up and down the ridge, shuttling supplies or troops. We had to RTB (return to base) before the permission could be granted.

Once we were deemed Combat Ready, we were deployed as a crew to Phan Rang AB, RVN; arriving the first week of February 1969.

Prior to our crew’s arrival, our Squadron area had been struck by accurate enemy mortar rounds. Enemy rounds had impacted four of the six vacant 71st SOS revetments. Some of the rounds peppered our new Operations Building. Fortunately, we had all of our assigned gunships airborne on missions. If not, we would have lost three or four of our aircraft.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

From February to December 1969, I flew most of my 150 missions out of Phan Rang. We flew Armed Reconnaissance, Base Defense, and TIC Missions. We always had one Shadow on Alert for rapid response to situations calling for a gunship.

One the nights our crew was on alert, we were scrambled out. Our Alert Birds were always pre-flighted, cocked and ready for a scramble. As the old girl fired up her engines, me, Greg and our Illuminator Operator Don Brogan were in the gun bay making ready for taxi out.

The Aircraft Commander called out on intercom for us to **NOT STRAP IN**. Shortly thereafter, as we were taxiing out to the EOR, he called for us to go to **PRE TARGET CHECKLIST**. Doing so, Greg and I put our four miniguns into ready-to-fire condition. We were puzzled by the atypical commands. I returned a “Pre Target Checklist Complete” over the intercom. As we turned to line up for takeoff, the Aircraft Commander called for me to put two guns online, high rate of fire, guns hot (guns armed and ready for firing). I responded with **“two guns, high rate. Guns HOT”**. He responded by telling us to hang on tight and don’t sit down.

As the old girl clawed her way into the hot Phan Rang night sky. Once she gained some altitude the pilot rolled her into a steep left banking turn just beyond the end of the runway. As soon as the main landing gear were retracted and the gear doors closed; the two miniguns belched out their characteristic flames and two red tracer streams. The pilot must have had his finger on the trigger as he banked the lumbering brute.

We completed an orbit or two until we emptied the two miniguns. At that time, the pilot rolled out of the orbit and headed out to the bay. We looked out and observed a Security Forces Strike Team firing 50 cal rounds into the same area. We reloaded our two miniguns while we orbited the bay, awaiting further instructions.

With no further instructions, we returned to Alert Status with no further action that night.

March 1969

One night we responded to a call for assistance, which took us to Katum. Katum was a US Army Special Forces Camp near the Cambodian Border. As usual, the Camp was receiving heavy enemy fire and there was fear of an impending large scale attack. The North Vietnamese Army typically would probe the Camps throughout the night attempting to wear the US Green Berets

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

down. The probing attacks frequently were in advance of the larger attack. We arrived on the scene and were briefed by the Special Forces ground controller about the Camp's situation.

Sometime after we began firing into the enemy positions, we came under fire from an enemy AAA site. Our NOS operator quickly acquired the gun's position and we rolled in to an attack orbit. We fired into the enemy position until the gun was silenced. As we were attacking that AAA site, we began taking fire from another AAA site. That AAA site was also quickly acquired and subsequently neutralized.

Terry (my fellow gunner) and I were really straining to keep up with the minigun fire we were putting out during our attack orbits. Much to our dismay a third gun position opened fire on us and as we rolled in for our attack, we were hit with a broadside of AAA fire from outside our firing orbit.

Moments before we were hit, the pilot called back asking for another gun to be put online. I had just put my number one gun back online. Terry was fervently reloading one of his miniguns and he was between guns three and four. I bent down to check why number one wasn't firing and in my peripheral vision I saw Terry flying backwards towards the sidewall of the gun bay. He hit the wall and slumped down onto the ammunition boxes on the floor.

I came up on intercom, as my number one gun had sprung to life. I announced that Terry was down, and Don (our Illuminator Operator and Med Tech) was attending to him. I guessed that one of Terry's guns had blown up, as we had been getting bad ammunition lately.

I advised our Aircraft Commander (Major Richard Morgan) that Don was taking care of Terry. I also requested someone to come back to the gun bay and help box up the expended round casings. If I could get such help, I would be able to keep up with the reloads and we could stay on target.

Major Morgan declined to stay on target and called for a replacement gunship as we headed to the nearest base seeking medical attention for Terry. After a short ride, we landed at Tan Son Nhut Air Base (Saigon, now Ho Chi Minh City) where Terry was whisked away to the medical facility.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

While Terry and most of the crew went to the hospital, Flight Engineer Squire Riley and I inspected our damaged airplane. We were struck by around 25 rounds of .51cal armor-piercing rounds. The stream of enemy rounds struck the aircraft from the forward crew door all the way up into the aircraft's left vertical stabilizer. Squire and I spotted one of the entry holes and lined it up with damage at the top of the gun control panel. We determined that if I hadn't bent down to check my gun, I would have been mortally wounded by the enemy projectile. When Terry was reunited with the crew, he showed us his helmet that had a slice in the side you could pass your fingertips through. He had suffered some lacerations to his neck from the aircraft aluminum skin that splattered towards him when the projectile entered the gun bay.

Later, Terry was awarded the Purple Heart (I believe he was our unit's first Purple Heart). I was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for my actions during this battle.

Upon completion of my Vietnam tour, I was assigned to Misawa, Japan, 475th MMS. While there, during a Commanders Call, I was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with 7 Oak Leaf Clusters for my achievements as an Aerial Gunner.

I stayed at Misawa AB, Japan until my discharge date; opting to return to civilian life in Riverside, California.

1972

After about 1 ½ years, I found it advantageous to return to the USAF. I was able to keep my rank of SSgt. I was able to take a base of preference and I opted for Hamilton AFB, CA. There I worked on F-106's as a Weapons Load Team chief for the 84th FIS. Before the year was out, Hamilton was being phased out and the 84th FIS was moved to Castle AFB, CA.

I stayed at Castle with the 84th until October 1974; after which I was assigned to the 432nd MMS, Udorn RTAFB, Thailand. I supported 432nd Wing as MMS TODO.

Upon completion of the Thailand tour, I was lucky enough to return to Castle AFB, CA where my wife and new child were waiting. This time I was assigned to the 93rd MMS as a B-52 Weapons Load Team chief. January 1976 I was promoted to TSgt, my final rank attained. I decided to again depart the USAF at the end of 1976.

After the USAF, I stayed in Merced, CA, attending Merced College in the Computer Sciences

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 “...keeping the memories alive”

Division. While attending college, I joined the California Air National Guard at Fresno, CA to augment my GI Bill income. After college I moved to the San Francisco Bay Area, where I still reside.

After relocating, the commute from Northern California to Fresno had become untenable. I transferred from the 194th Fighter Interceptor Wing at Fresno to the 129th ARRS (USAFR) in Hayward, CA. I stayed with the 129th for about a year but the demands of my civilian career had overshadowed my obligations to the USAFR. I was unable to complete drills and summer camp as I was out of the state for months at a time. Unfortunately I had to resign from the USAFR, despite being newly certified as a left side Scanner on the unit's HC-130's.

Thus my military career came to an end.

I retired from a large international corporation as a field service technician; specializing in color imaging and production printing systems.

I still reside in Northern California, spending my retirement volunteering at Pacific Coast Air Museum in Santa Rosa, California.

I perform duties as a docent and aircraft crew chief. I currently crew four of the museum's static aircraft. My “baby” is our F-106. I also crew the T-37 Tweet, F-8 Crusader and SH-60 Seahawk. I am currently restoring our F-8 Crusader which sat in San Francisco on 19th Avenue as playground equipment.



Arthur C. Bennett
17th Special Operations Sq.

Arthur C. Bennett, Navigator, 17th Special Operations Squadron

Honolulu, Hawaii was my birthplace in 1932. I graduated from Hopewell High School in Hopewell, Virginia in 1950 and from Syracuse University at Syracuse, New York in 1954.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

I joined the USAF to carry on a family tradition. My father, grandfather, great grandfather, and my brother all served in the U.S. Army and my son served in the U.S. Navy. We truly are a military family.

My most exciting AC-119 mission occurred when we were supporting ground troops. Ground fire hit the left engine, causing it to catch fire. When we tried to put the fire out, the wrong fire bottle was used. The one used was supposed to be for the generators! We had to jettison all the superfluous equipment and flew very, very low to get back to Saigon. When we landed at Tan Son Nhut, all the tires on the left side blew. Believe me; I kissed the ground after we safely departed the aircraft!

The things that I will always remember about my time with AC-119 gunships are: Aussie steaks, kool-aid, the officers club, and of course, almost being shot down and flying home on one engine.

I separated from the Air Force in September 1978 at McGuire AFB, New Jersey. I currently live in Lake Grove, New York.



Howard Emerson Wright
18th Special Operations Sq.

Howard Emerson “Em” Wright, Pilot, 18th Special Operations Squadron

Howard “Em” Wright was born June 4, 1929 in Fort Madison, Iowa and passed away April 2, 2009. Em attended Fort Madison Public High in 1947, then on to Coe College, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa graduating June 1951 and commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant from their Air Force ROTC program. Howard also received a Masters Degree from Boston University. Em was Detachment Commander at Da Nang from the fall of 1969 through Jan 1970, then Wing Gunship Officer at Phan Rang until fall 1970.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

When asked Howard about his most memorable missions, his reply was, “One mission I remember was one night working the “trail” and we had truck traffic in our sights and were firing when the gunner in our left clamshell door came on the intercom and said “tracers break right” and almost simultaneously the gunner in the right clamshell door said “tracers break left”. I put the ship almost up on a wing and dropped about 500 feet. The tracers crossed above us. We decided that some radar had been brought further south than intel was aware of and left the area.”

Howard retired as a Colonel in 1981 at Wright-Patterson AFB after a full career with assignments in Missouri, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Germany, France, and Boston including several bases such as Griffiss AFB, Rome, NY; Pentagon; Kirtland AFB, New Mexico; Vietnam; Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio; and Andrews AFB, MD. His final position was Commander of the Foreign Technology Division at Wright- Patterson, retiring in 1981. He taught Air Force Junior ROTC at Edmond High School.

Howard’s awards include the Distinguished Flying Cross, Legion of Merit, and Bronze Star.

Jeremy sent us word that his time was short, and Jeff Baker got the chance to talk with Howard and reminisce a bit about their time in Stingers before he died. Howard, known as (and fondly called) “Grumps” by his kids, grandson and nephews, is survived by his wife Carol (Cay), daughters Debbie (Jeremy’s mother) and Becky, sons David and Paul, and twelve grand children, including Jeremy Westby.



Robert Andrew Bright
18th Special Operations Sq.

Robert Andrew Bright, Crew Chief, 18th Special Operations Squadron

I was born in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1950. I consider Fayetteville to be my home town but I graduated from Hope Mills High School in Hope Hills, North Carolina in 1968. I joined the Air Force at Fayetteville on 1 April 1969 before I got drafted by the Army.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 215 “...keeping the memories alive”

I was assigned to the 4415 Training Squadron for training at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio from July thru October 1970. I served at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam in the 18th Special Operations Squadron from November into December 1970 when I was transferred to Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai (NKP) Air Base, Thailand where I served until my DEROS in November 1971.

As a Stinger crew chief, I worked long hard hours; 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. It was our responsibility to keep the aircraft in top flight condition. We had to keep the aircraft flying. We maintenance troops had to beg, borrow, and steal to get parts to fix our aircraft. But it was worth it and very satisfying to get missions off on time in safe and sound aircraft that would bring our aircrews safely back to base. I will always remember the comradeship with my fellow crew chiefs and the maintenance troops.

I separated from the regular Air Force at Eglin AFB, Florida in August 1972. I was in the Air National Guard 13th Tactical Fighter Wing working on F-105s and F-4s from April 1978 to March 1984 at Andrews AFB, Maryland. Then from March 1984 to March 1987, I was assigned to the Air Force Reserves 403rd Weather Unit working on C-130s at Keesler AFB, Mississippi. I retired from the 145th Air National Guard Unit (C-130s) in North Carolina in October 1995. My entire military career was in maintenance. I currently live in Mount Pleasant, North Carolina.

Doug’s Comments: This edition is longer than most, but I think it’s important for the guys to tell their own stories in their own words, about the events in their lives that matter to them. If you are one of those that haven’t submitted your story for this newsletter, it isn’t too late because there will be another future issue with more of these great stories.

Reunion Update: We still haven’t finalized everything, but we are working on a group outing to the *Branson Belle*, which will include a fabulous lunch and show on Friday, 15 October on beautiful Table Rock Lake and an option for *Dolly Parton’s Dixie Stampede* on Thursday, 14 October. You can Google these venues for more information.

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.